# Trusting Awareness or Yathābhūta (Reprise)

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:02:22

In the way that we have been presenting the formal practice, it's quite obvious that the central factor, the essence, is really awareness or mindfulness. So I want to talk a little bit about that—really the radical nature of trusting, truly trusting awareness, mindfulness. Basically, shifting our refuge from our normal habits of mind, including in the meditation, to really trust the transformative power of steady awareness.

We go on about awareness, and it's not a thing. It's not some state we're trying to get to and stay at. It's really an activity, moment to moment. And that's all there is—moment to moment. I love that. Whenever you find yourself trying to create a state of mind, and somewhere in the back there's the unspoken belief that then it'll be like that forever—no, impossible. But also, what's great about it is when you find your mind filled with self-judging, or you see how much greed is coming up, or you say, "Oh, I'm hopeless, I'll never be concentrated," whatever your deal is—it's only this moment. No matter how unbearable it is, it's only this moment. That's amazing.

So when we try to think about what the potential of freedom from craving might be, you don't have to jump to the arhat never experiencing it again. Try opening to the possibility of a moment right now of pure awareness, total presence that's free from craving. It's totally within all of our experiences, many times a day. We tend to overlook it because it's quieter than the obnoxious habits that we tend to put our trust in.

This awareness that's a moment-to-moment activity—it's like it's so nothing, right? We do overlook it. And so often, the tendency is to have in the background a sense that when we talk about this total non-judging presence, accepting what's arising in the moment, there's a quality of passivity, of non-doing, that has a little bit of a negative connotation. How can this nothing that's completely non-interfering transform anything? How can we trust that?

One thing that I love about the Buddha's teaching, the way he talked about what really frees our heart and mind and what liberation is—as Andrea was saying last night—it's not about adopting a new, an old, or any set of beliefs. It's very simple and elegant. Yes, there are dense, endless books, and it can be extremely dense and complicated too. But the way I like to look at it—and maybe just because I'm too simple—is that the essence, the heart of freedom, begins and ends with right view.

Right view—sometimes we say wise understanding, but right view. As Joseph was saying the other day, he was giving a talk somewhere and talking about right view, and somebody asked about wise understanding. He said, "Let me just be obnoxious for a minute. I didn't say wise understanding. I said right view." I love that because I think, for me, it's very literal.

When the Buddha is talking about what's so simple, what's so elegant, what frees—in a moment and more and more—our heart and mind from the habits of believing the stories, of clinging, of aversion, of me, me, me, me, me, what frees us in a moment from believing that is accurate recognition of things as they are. The freedom of the Buddha isn't about getting to another world. It's about waking up into this one, actually recognizing what the heck is going on in our mind, in our body, instead of just making it all up because we don't recognize accurately.

So right view, the beginning and end of the path—it's so beautiful. What frees our heart from clinging in a moment is recognizing accurately the way things are. And when we recognize that, clinging doesn't make any sense, because it doesn't work. Clinging to what?

Recognizing the self and the world as it is in any moment—how we recognize an experience, how we think about it, how we respond. It's obvious, very simple, how seeing accurately can change that.

Here's a very simple example: a sound occurring in the hall. A similar sound arises over and over at irregular but steady intervals, and you hate it. Then the sound comes. It's unpleasant. You may or may not recognize the unpleasant. But it's a human sound, which always bugs us more than if it was just some random external sound. So we can be aware there's a sound, there's the annoyance—we can be aware of the annoyance or not. But basically, we're really buying into the belief that sound should not be happening. Doesn't that person know better? Or even if they're coughing or burping or swallowing—which, by the way, at some point everyone starts going crazy with their swallowing. Just do it now and get it over with. Don't worry about it. You swallow, we're all swallowing. It's okay.

But you see what I mean when there's that sense of "the sound is really bothering me, it's messing up my concentration, they shouldn't be doing it." Or even if I can think, "They can't help it, but it's messing up my concentration. It's messing up my practice. How can I..." You know the whole deal.

That leads to—that's already action, the action of thinking about it. What to do? Should I move? Should I write a note? Should I leave them one of those metta notes on their cushion? Should I write a note to the manager? Should I complain to my teacher? Should I beat myself up for not being compassionate? Should I sit in my room from now on? And then it takes up your whole day.

You get a sense that we're really taking refuge in, believing the story about how it's messing up my concentration—as if my concentration mattered in the first place, as if that's what it's about. That it's that sound, that that person can't help it, and on and on and on. That's such a simple example. Multiply that by how many sense experiences do we have in a normal day. Multiply that by everybody in the normal world not even stopping to look at their minds. I mean, it's amazing the world isn't in worse shape than it is. It would be possible to get in worse shape than it is. It's amazing it's not.

Recognizing accurately—this is the power of simple mindfulness. I know it can drive people crazy. They come in with whatever story and I go, "Okay, so are you just noticing hearing?" "That doesn't help." "Are

you noticing irritation?" "Yes, I'm really aware there's irritation." Yes, we know you're aware. Are you really aware? Aware means not owning, not judging, not hating, not clinging—just noticing. Irritation is like this.

You think, "Yeah, thank you very much. I came here for that." But you try it, because ultimately you've tried everything else that's socially acceptable. So you're sitting here, there's 35 more minutes, try the damn mindfulness—or run out screaming. You just bring awareness to hearing. Just hearing. You come to: "Ah, that's a sound. Oh, that thought—they shouldn't be doing that. Ah, it's irritation." It doesn't necessarily change that pattern, but it takes all the heat out of it because you're seeing accurately. Just this series of things.

And then what often can happen, through just being with the experience without jumping over to the story, is an even more accurate recognition of something you couldn't see before. Say, for example, if it's about another person—suddenly, "Oh, that must be really uncomfortable for them, whatever it is that's going on." Say they have a cold and they're sniffing. "Oh. That must be really uncomfortable." And compassion just naturally arises. Not because it should, because then you'd be a better person. It's just the actual understanding, which isn't accessible when we're lost in the reactivity. It comes by itself. It's not "I should sit here, I should look, I should get to how can I be compassionate—metta, metta, metta." Sometimes that works, but that's not what I'm talking about. Just being with what is. It's like, "Oh, okay, it's not a problem."

Very simple, but this goes on all the time. This recognizing accurately affects the way we think about something, the stories we tell, the views we have, the actions we take here and in the world.

There's a phrase in Pali—it's one of the lists of different kinds of insights with different names. There's one level that's called yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana, which is a pretty so-called powerful level of insight. It's often translated as "knowledge and vision of things as they really are." Ñāṇa-dassana means knowledge and vision; yathā-bhūta is often translated as "things as they really are." But as Gil Fronsdal pointed out to me—he's quite a Pali scholar—a more accurate translation of yathā-bhūta would be "things as they have come to be in this moment."

I'm adding "in this moment" to that translation. And I think that is so perfect. *Yatā bhūta*—things as they have come to be in this moment. Recognizing that it's only for this moment, that it's nothing we can hold on to. Now I know—just in this moment. This requires a total open-hearted presence, free from agenda, assumption, liking, disliking, or "what does it mean about me?" It's that recognition of things as they have come to be in this moment.

This phrase gives us a sense of the complexity of all the causes and conditions that come together to create this moment just as it is. It can't be any other way. And the next moment, the causes have changed and it's different already. This ineffable, unholdable essence—things as they have come to be in this moment. Recognizing that in a moment is the doorway to freedom in that moment. Because there's nothing to hold,

and you can't even label "things as they have come to be in this moment."

What causes and conditions had to come together for you to be sitting here? If you start calling all of them up, you'll never come to an end. You can start with your health. You can start with having the financial resources, the family that supported you, the fact that there is a center here, the fact that you have an interest, the fact that we're not at war in this moment, in this place, in this country. The fact that thirty-five years ago people went to India and came back and someone donated money to open this place. The fact that you've had enough to eat for most of your life. The fact that farmers were growing the food. It goes on and on forever.

How do we think we can somehow control and hold on to all of this? And why on earth do we think—which we do—that it's all about me in this moment, when me sitting here is the momentary, constantly changing result of everything coming together?

I just love this: *yatā bhūta ñāna dassana*—knowledge, recognizing things as they have come to be accurately, just for this moment—is the really elegant doorway the Buddha talks about into freedom.

And so in this particular way of practice, we're emphasizing the awareness, the steadiness of cultivating this mindfulness, this awareness—whether it's precise, whether it's broad—that allows by itself for many, many moments of recognizing *yatā bhūta*. We don't have to figure it out in advance. You can't. And that's what's so crazy: we try to think, "How will we get it so the next moment's clearer? How can we control this moment so we know how it'll be in the next moment or the next sitting or the next day?" And anything can happen in any moment. So our only real viable option, if we could trust it, is to just surrender into total presence without resistance, without clinging. Easier said than done, I know—to just being here right now. So that's what we're practicing, because it is easier said than done.

The Buddha often would talk about this, and the suttas say: this is dhamma, visible here and now. As André said last Sunday when he quoted the invitation, "You too, come and see this dhamma, visible here and now." At one point the Buddha asked, "To what extent is this dhamma visible here and now?" And he answered: to the extent that greed, that hatred—which includes aversion, resistance, fear, sadness, all the negativity—and delusion, confusion, are not present in the mind-heart, in the *citta*, in a moment, are not coloring the mind that's noticing what's happening.

I want to talk a little about these three—not so we hate them, but so we recognize them. Because really, our *bhāvanā* practice, the meditation practice, is about the work of the mind. It's to really learn to recognize accurately how the mind is working. It's to learn to recognize how we recognize *yatā bhūta*, and how we can know when we're not. How we can know when our judgment, when our *citta*—that moment of consciousness that comes together with whatever mental factors are present—when that *citta* is colored by wanting, colored by aversion, colored by confusion or delusion, and there's not recognition of that—that's when we don't recognize accurately.

But in the moment we recognize, for example, "Here's craving"—that's a moment of recognizing accurately again. Craving simply becomes the next object of recognition. So it's about learning to get interested in exploring this.

The Buddha talks about this all the time. I know you're all familiar with these, but just to remind us very simply: wanting, clinging, desire, aversion, hatred, fear, confusion, delusion, "me, me, me"—the recognition is all we need to do. But when we don't recognize, these are such deeply ingrained habits that arise so naturally and spontaneously in our minds, in our hearts, in response to any sense perception, any sense contact. They're so familiar that we often don't recognize them, because it's just... familiar. We think, "Yeah, it is right—that person is making a noise and that noise is messing up my meditation, and that is the problem in this sitting. Anyone would agree with that."

So it's really learning to see where the suffering is. Because suffering begins, arises, in our heart and mind in a moment. It's abandoned, it vanishes, in our heart and mind in a moment. I love that. I keep emphasizing "in that moment" because it makes it all workable. You don't have to do it forever. This moment—it's workable.

So learning how these habits obscure our clarity. The Buddha also said that greed, hatred, and confusion—or delusion—are makers of measurement. Makers of measurement in our heart, in our mind. And you can actually feel that: the kind of constriction, the limitation of our heart, the sense of me and other, distance and separation and neediness. That arises when we're taking refuge in greed, hatred, and confusion, when we're believing in them.

So just very simply, when there's wanting in the mind and we don't notice it—or we notice it but we're believing it—this is how it turns all our attention outwards towards the thing wanted.

My brother used to have a hunting hound dog, a very sweet dog. But these dogs are bred so that their sense of smell is incredibly sensitive. And this poor dog, he was like a slave to his nose, to smelling. He would come into the house every time and we would have to hide all the wastebaskets, all the garbage cans. Whenever I would go to visit, I would have to zip up my suitcase because anything that had anything to do with food, or had any scent of human being or animal on it—like if you had a dirty shirt—he would smell it. He couldn't keep his nose out. He'd go in the room, go in the suitcase, go through everything, pull out that dirty shirt because it had animal smell on it.

He would come in the house and just couldn't go lie down. He had to follow his nose around. The poor dog. He'd go outside and have to run around the whole yard smelling everywhere an animal had been. And it just seems to me like a great image for craving. The next thing, the next thing, the next thing. It's going to do it. It's going to satisfy. And it never ends. Then he'd just flop down exhausted and sleep for about ten hours. I never saw a dog sleep so much. Usually dogs are up early, but this dog was sleeping late. Nine in the morning, you're like, come on, get up and go for a walk.

So I'm joking, but you see how it does this to us. We're looking outward, going to the next thing. And when this thing doesn't satisfy, craving has this seductive promise: oh, but the next one will.

In fact, I was talking to someone the other day about how you can even, by not noticing the craving, think that the craving itself is a kind of pleasure. The Buddha says in one of the places where he's talking about the second noble truth—as Andrea mentioned, the cause of suffering is taṇhā, often translated as craving, though closer to thirst—he says, "craving accompanied by delight, searching now here and now there." And that's what we do. Oh yeah, wanting—how great. What's our problem?

But then some daydream comes up and you say, oh, that would be so nice if I could go do that. I'll plan it. And then you spend about twenty minutes cultivating craving, cultivating wanting, really thinking you're having a nice time. Then you wake up and here you are sitting on your pillow. There's twenty more minutes. There's peanut butter and rice cakes for tea. What good did that do you? Oh, but it was so nice. It was so pleasant.

That's taking refuge in craving. We do. I could go into much more, but I just want to touch on these briefly.

*Dosa — aversion.* Dosa *is the Pali word that covers aversion, fear, resistance, all of those states. I like to use* dosa *personally rather than the specifics because it gives the breadth of it, but it also helps me not go into the specific stories. I really find that helpful if the* dosa* you're getting caught in is a kind of self-judgment or self-worthlessness. Because otherwise you go, "Self-worthless, judging. I'm judging again. Can I stop judging? Oh, that's so aversive. It's hopeless. I'm so aversive."

Just *dosa* in the mind. It's not all about you. You're not the only person here with *dosa* arising in the mind. It's the human condition. Just as craving comes up, so does aversion.

In the same way, when aversion, when resistance or fear is present in the *citta*, in the mind, as a response to an immediate experience happening here and now, and we don't recognize it — we're seeing through it again — it shrinks our world.

Take that unpleasant sound in the hall. Doesn't it seem like some little nothing when you're not really caught up in it? But when you're married to that sound with aversion, doesn't it just take over the world? It's *so* loud.

The swallowing thing — it can happen where you start noticing your swallowing. "My God, everybody in the hall is hearing me swallow. It's humiliating." I'm really not making this up. This happens to almost everyone.

I remember one time years ago I was sitting here. I'd been living here. I knew this place. Somehow I got into this sensitive space, and the radiators used to make this popping sound. It just got so loud. I felt like it was machine gun fire going on. It was unbearable. And I was convinced — it leads to action — I was convinced there was something really wrong. The maintenance guys, I knew them. They're very different

ones from now. I knew them. I knew they didn't know what to do. Even if something went wrong, they wouldn't know how to fix it.

So I was really running around — don't you do this — I was running around down in the boiler room, trying to see what was wrong with the furnaces because they were making this unbearable sound that was taking over the world. It was no different from how it had always been for five years. It was just my mind.

But aversion takes over and it limits everything. That became my whole experience — how to fix this sound. Enormous suffering.

I'm making silly examples, but you can extrapolate, right?

Or the example Thich Nhat Hanh always gives, which I love: if you have a rough tooth or a tooth that hurts, can you keep your tongue away from it? How much have you been trying? Oh, God. And all the thoughts. What about all your other teeth? Do you notice them?

They don't hurt. They're fine. No. Before it was rough, did you notice them? No. But now this tooth has taken over the world. That's what we do. That's what happens when we don't see.

Aversion in the mind shrinks the consciousness, narrows it, and leads us to actions not based on yathā bhūta—things as they are. Recognizing things as they are doesn't necessarily mean the aversion or the clinging goes away. It means recognizing that's what's happening. "Ah, this is aversion." Being able to hear the sound of the radio. "Oh, it sounds really unpleasant. I don't like it. Here's this thought." That's all happening. Fine. Awareness can be with all of that. That's the radical nature of awareness. We're not saying it has to change everything. We're saying it's able to include, to be totally present with anything. Just letting it be like it is, but with total presence. And total presence doesn't mean, "If I do this for a minute, then it'll get better." It just means yathā bhūta—things that have come to be in this moment is the place, the only place, that suffering arises and that freedom is recognizable. It's the only place. As long as we're resisting or limiting or looking to some other moment, then that's the one thing we can't recognize—how things actually have come to be now. Where's the suffering? Where's the freedom? It's only right here, right now.

And the third hindrance is delusion, confusion, which is of course often harder to recognize because—well, that's its nature. But the obvious aspect of delusion is when you just don't have a clue what's going on. And that, okay, that's great. At least we wake up from that daydream of twenty minutes and think, "Oh yeah, right, I wasn't aware at all." And now I am—appreciating that moment of awareness.

But the underneath, the more pervasive—I don't want to say it's subtle; it's not really subtle—the most pervasive refuge, the most pervasive entrancement of this area of delusion, is the sense of it being all about me. The sense of ownership. The sense of either "this is me," "this is mine," "what does it mean about me"—this sense of measurement.

Sogyal Rinpoche gave a great example. He said in Tibet, when they're setting out the footprint, the foundation to build a house, they just start from a point in the middle and they have a rope to make the diameter. So they just stretch the rope in all directions from that center point. And he said—I don't know if this makes sense, but I like it—he said the sense of me is like that. Everything begins from that, not an idea, but from that felt sense of me now. And then everything is kind of related back to that or out from that or compared to that. Not everything, but many things.

So for example, James or someone gave the simple example of dropping a fork in the dining room and it makes a clatter. It doesn't immediately trigger, "What does that say about me? Everybody's going to be looking at me." You know, just fork, whatever. But often—me.

Or Joseph has a great story, which I'm sure he wouldn't mind my telling since he tells it, where he was in line on retreat, waiting for a meal, like the second person in line. A lot of people had lined up. And the first person reached for one of those big pots, lifted the lid off, and dropped it—just made a heck of a racket all over the floor.

You can imagine, right, with everyone just standing there bored, waiting for the meal. I know you're really aware doing standing meditation, but maybe there's a little expectation. And Joseph said his first thought when he heard this clanging noise was, "It wasn't me."

This sense of self is our most pervasive experience, the most familiar, the most—well, we don't question it because, obviously, it's about me. I mean, if we followed it through thinking-wise, we wouldn't really say that, but we don't. So it feels so real that we may not recognize that it's there, and we see everything through it.

Back to sitting there: there's that noise, it's wrecking my concentration. Do you see how that relationship to "me" and "my concentration" works? How I feel about the noise, about the concentration, some idea I have of how it should be compared to the past, compared to the future—but it's basically all about me getting something I want. All the time. Not all the time. Much of the time.

This sense of me-ness can be noticed just like anything else. It's not something to hate. It's something to recognize, to get interested in, to notice how when that's in the citta, in the moment of recognition—and we don't recognize it—there'll be maybe not huge recognizable suffering, but some little sense of it being a little bit off. Sometimes it's big, noticeable suffering, but sometimes it's just a little bit off, because it's a maker of limitation, a maker of separation.

And so it's very important to recognize in our practice that these are habits of all of our hearts and minds that we've practiced a lot. It's not personal. The sense of me-ness is not personal. It's just a habit of mind in response to all the six sense door contacts happening over and over—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, sensations in the body, moods, emotions.

We spend, as Tejaniya was saying—it's so obvious—all day long, on or off retreat, it doesn't matter, it's the

same mind. These sixth sense experiences are happening every second. There's a seeing, a hearing, a smelling, a tasting, a thought, a mood, an emotion, over and over and over and over. And when there's not quite awareness, when we're just going through our daily life, the habit that is so familiar, that we take such refuge in, is simply: I like this, I don't like that. We may not even say that, but it's pleasant or unpleasant. Oh yeah, this is good. This isn't good. That's not worth paying attention to. This is good. This is not worth paying attention to. Over and over and over.

And then from that, we think, we make up our stories, and we act. So it's incredibly familiar. It feels so normal that sometimes—say, for example, when it's not present—we think, "But this is weird. What's wrong?" Like Andrea's story last night about "Where's the anger? Where's the anger?" This is unfamiliar. This is too weird. She didn't say that—she was happy there was no anger, it sounded like. But we go, "Oh, where's the self-judgment? There must be something wrong. Where's that sense of me? Oh my God, how can I function without a sense of me?" And it came back pretty quick, didn't it? God forbid it should not be there for very long.

So all day long. But it's not personal. It's just nature. And that's really important to remember, to hold in your heart and your memory, because we want to explore when these are present—when we see aversion coming up a lot and going away a lot, when we see wanting and desire coming up. If we're interested in seeing how it's working: "Oh, that's desire. It feels like this." Notice the thoughts. Notice how it narrows the mind. Get interested in all of that. That's the scientific experiment.

How has it come to be in this moment? Desire is just another condition that's arising, yathabhuta, as it's come to be in this moment. We don't need to be afraid of it. We can explore it. We can bring full attention to wanting, to aversion, to self-judgment, to just that sense of me. None of it's personal. And it's not that we want to bring aversion to these habits. That's just doing the same thing. And isn't that what we do? "Oh yes, these are bad."

So it's really about purifying the mind. And then the next time you go out of here you think, "Oh my God, purifying the mind—all I see is greed and aversion. And since I've come here, I only see more. It's hopeless. It's hopeless. So I'm going to do some really strong concentration practice so I can get rid of this greed and aversion." That's the same habit, right? I trust you recognize that that's the same habit of mind. That's how we know how to act.

That's why working with effort is so delicate, so tricky. Because we can put in enormous effort to achieve some state, to get concentrated, to be mindful every moment, to walk slow, to do whatever—and if that effort is being fed moment to moment by "by gum, I'm going to get rid of this," it's the same old thing. Practicing for fulfillment of me. Practicing to get rid of the unpleasant and get more pleasant. That's what we've learned as the way to peace. But it isn't the way to peace. And yet it's so deep in there.

The way to peace is that yathabhuta ñāṇadassana—recognizing accurately things as they have come to be in this moment, with total presence and interest, and not even wanting wisdom out of it. Just that

willingness, that radical trust in moment-to-moment awareness, no matter what's arising. Because awareness doesn't care. Awareness isn't stained or damaged or tired out or exhausted. "Oh, there's so much difficult stuff coming up, so the awareness is going to get too frayed at the edges. I need to give it a break." We might get frayed at the edges—that's true. It may be that the energy of awareness isn't strong enough and we're getting lost in the fear or the aversion. Sure, that can happen, because that's our habit.

And when we recognize that, that's when we talk about using skillful means to back out a little bit. If you're forcing the sitting, go and do some walking. Go outside and open up the senses. But it's not the awareness that is having a problem. It's that these habits of mind—of wanting, of aversion, of "it's all about me"—have just gotten really strong again. And that's nature. That's natural. That's going to happen.

What we really keep learning to trust is that at some point, at any point, the awareness comes back again. It doesn't matter if you're sitting, if you're walking, if you're going to the toilet, if you're taking a walk outside. At any moment, just that willingness to radically trust awareness. "Okay, I can't be aware now. I'm so distraught. I'm so distressed. I'm walking up and down. I'll go walk in the woods. I'll do whatever." You're doing that—and there's a smidgen of awareness still there, you know, moment to moment. You're not just hanging it up, getting in your car, and going home. There's a smidgen of awareness, and that's enough. All of a sudden you feel your feet. "Oh, okay, that's what's happening." All of a sudden you realize, "I'm completely lost in this story." But that's awareness.

Completely lost in this story, and I recognize I'm completely lost in this story—that's awareness. Anything awareness can notice.

What we're doing here really, what I hope I'm talking about anyway, is learning to shift where we go for refuge. Learning to shift what we trust, consciously. And it's radical. It's really hard—and for me too, often—to trust awareness.

Sometimes it's not so hard for me now when it's something really difficult, because I know there's no other way out. The more I think about it and worry and try to fix it, the worse it gets. But if I'm really in grief or really upset, okay, just be with it. Just totally be with it. I know that's fine.

Where it's harder for me now to trust awareness is when it's just like, "Oh, la la, thinking about this." I'm walking up and down, I'm thinking, "Oh, it's a la la la." No, that can't be awareness. Awareness means it's sharp. It's clear. It's quiet. It's connected. Awareness can't be awareness with not a lot of energy. There can't be awareness if the mind is cloudy. How could there possibly be awareness if you're sleepy? There could only be awareness if I'm really focused and concentrated.

Awareness is so much more pliable, available, all-inclusive than that. So if you ever find your mind in any way saying awareness can't be here—as soon as you have that thought, there's awareness. It doesn't have to change what's happening. And that's the thing. That's the radical trust. It brings us more into what's happening. We may not like to be more into what's happening, so then we jump back off on the aversion

train.

But really, the shift of refuges—it gets to be more and more reliable. Fulfilling is not exactly the right word, but it's the closest word I can come to. Like I said, when I'm in a lot of grief or sadness or sorrow and the mind's doing its thinking, I know: just totally feel it. Sorrow's like this. Thoughts are like this. These are the situations in the world, not going to change. It's totally okay. It's still sad, and the situation's still what it is, and it can't be changed, and my body's doing what it's doing.

Awareness doesn't necessarily change what's happening, but it lets us be fully present with what's happening, and the suffering is gone. The unpleasantness might not be gone, but the suffering of the mind that's in contention with reality is gone. And that's a peace that's very different from pleasant experience. It can be pleasant—you can be fully present just as much with joy as with sorrow. But it's not dependent on pleasant or unpleasant, or liking or disliking it. It certainly doesn't have to mean anything about me.

So what we're doing here is practicing moment after moment after moment, just learning to recognize this simple mindfulness, this simple awareness—to recognize it, learn to trust it, learn to surrender into it.

The kilesas—kilesas is the Pali word for these so-called greed, hatred, confusion, these obstructions of clear seeing of heart and mind—the kilesas are a lot louder than awareness. We're more used to them, but they also call for attention. They're clanging and banging and carrying on. Awareness is just kind of, "Oh yeah, clanging and banging and carrying on. That's fine."

You're probably thinking, "So what? What is that?" The shift from all the energy and attention that goes into the object, that goes into trying to fix everything—and even our mood can be the object—the interest, the attention, the identification (that's not the right word, but it feels like that)—shifts into just being the awareness. And whatever's going on, after a while the awareness just gets so much more interesting in that moment than what's happening.

And this isn't just a meditation and retreat thing.

This is really in our life. Ajahn Sumedho used to like to say, "Awareness is the point that includes." Point, because it's just right now, just right here, an arising experience right now, not a thing. But it includes everything right now without preference, without being stained or harmed or damaged in any way.

So it's really quite radical. It's really quite radical, learning to trust this. How can the steadiness of awareness be so transformative? How can it lead to wisdom? It seems so nebulous. I'm saying, okay, the kilesas are clanging and banging, and you just be aware—clanging and banging. It's like, okay, so what good does that do?

But I think Andrea's story last night about the anger is a really great and very accessible example. When she talked about the first anger and the thought, "Okay, maybe I can just pay attention to the anger rather than going with it"—that was a kind of awareness that had no conceptual overlay. She didn't have a lot of

experience, so she wasn't trying to make the awareness be a certain way. She didn't have some idea of what's going to happen if she paid attention. She was like, "I give up. There's nothing else to do. So let's just be with the anger."

That quality of simplicity, of innocence you could say, beginner's mind—just to begin to see that anger, dosa, is taking over. Same for greed, same for "me, me, me"—it's a quality arising in the mind at that moment. It isn't everything. Awareness can notice that too. So that makes it simply another arising mental experience, another thing that can be recognized. And that's very different from the sense of "this is who I am."

So just the noticing—she said, "Oh, okay, well, that's different." And then she didn't even know how it happened, but suddenly she could go back to work on the computer. The energy going into the awareness—often, the energy comes out of the kilesa at that moment. Not always. If you do it wanting that to happen, it doesn't work. Like we say, it knows. But really, it's because it's not mindfulness. It's not pure awareness. The citta is not pure. The awareness is colored with wanting. "I'll be aware so that..." Oh, that's wanting. It isn't bad. We just want to turn around and recognize what's actually happening. That's all. What's actually happening.

And that steadiness of noticing—this is another thing I love—wisdom arises by itself from the clear seeing that's possible through the noticing. We don't have to create the wisdom.

So again, that example she gave with cutting the apple and just seeing so deeply the thought arising and about to go off into the anger—and the wisdom, the wisdom is another factor in the mind that rose and really made the decision not to go there. And the aversion just was abandoned in that moment. There was wisdom. You really get it from that example. It was not an act of will. It's not a sense of willpower. "I need to look. I need the wisdom that understands why I shouldn't be averse, and then aversion will stop."

How many of us have tried that a million times? "I get it. Greed causes me suffering. I really see it. So I'm going to stop having greed arise as of now."

It doesn't work because that's willpower. It's more *wanting*. But through moment-to-moment seeing, there will be moments when you think, "Oh, look at that food. There should be greed." And it doesn't come. It doesn't come. Wisdom is saying, "Okay, that's okay. You'll get the banana or you won't. Either way, tomorrow, it won't matter." It's gone.

So learning to trust that through the steadiness of awareness, the wisdom, the clear seeing—when we recognize accurately the greed, the aversion, the sense that it's all about me—these things can just kind of *poof* away. They'll come back again in another moment, but that's why it's okay that it's all moments.

But if I'm trying to make it happen, to meet some insight that I've read about in all the Buddha's teachings—those teachings can inform us to pay attention, but if we're trying to make this moment match some idea, you get it? That's not total surrender. How is this moment? What is happening right now? That

radical surrender into awareness is very, very powerful.

So it's really that the purification of these habits of mind, the purification of the heart and mind, allows greed, hatred, and delusion to begin arising less frequently. All the different kinds of practices and all the aspects of the path the Buddha talked about—I think all have in common that in one way or another, they're working at helping us recognize the suffering of greed, hatred, and delusion to begin with, when it's present in our heart and mind, and moving to shift those habits.

Generosity, non-harming behavior, sīla, really focused samatha practice where we get deeply concentrated on one thing until the mind becomes completely absorbed—that is a kind of purification in those moments where the mind is so focused that there's no space for greed, hatred, or confusion to arise. That's why really deep samatha practice is so pleasant. You actually experience this. You see how nice it is when the heart and mind isn't colored by greed, by aversion, by clinging.

But that's not only available in samatha practice. And that's not what we're doing here. There are millions of kinds of practices. Vipassanā practice, which uses enough steadiness of mind to notice the changing sense experiences over and over and over and over, including the mind—that's what we're cultivating in the way that we're teaching here. There are many different forms of that, but it's also, as I've been saying, through the steadiness of awareness, recognizing these habits of mind without aversion, without hating them, without identification, trusting the awareness over and over.

And it's in the way that we actually pay attention in this practice—it's the way we meet the moment—that the purification is happening.

So as I've been saying, in the moment of awareness when greed is arising, there can be, "Oh, wow, that's greed, really greedy right now." Or there can be a habit of, "Well, that's greed, and what can I do to stop it, and I shouldn't be greedy, and let me think about renunciation, or maybe if I do some method, maybe I can push it away." But that's not what we mean by purifying the mind. That's still a lot of willpower.

Notice greed. Awareness that isn't colored. "Oh, greed is like this. Greed is like this." Whether the greed goes away or not, that moment of awareness—the energy has shifted. That moment of awareness is not greedy. That moment of awareness is not aversive. And it's also not about me. "Oh, greed is like this."

So the cultivation of moment after moment after moment of this simple, pure awareness *is* the purification of our heart and mind. It is the practice. Not so much focusing on the object, but getting interested in the quality of the heart, the mind that's paying attention itself. Getting interested in that is always available.

It's sort of like a Tai Chi move. Ajahn Sumedho has a line that I use all the time because it's been so helpful. Say we're lost in anger, lost in self-judging. And sometimes we think we're being mindful—"Well, self-judging, self-judging, this story and this story"—but there's a kind of pushing. There's still judging the self-judging. The Tai Chi move, the movement into awareness, the way that Sumedho languages it helps

me a lot: "Oh, self-judging is like this."

Deep despair. Your heart's bleeding. Oh, heart bleeding is like this.

Just that little shift. It's not to change the experience, but to change the interest into the awareness. It's subtle, but it's really powerful. And over the steadiness of cultivating and trusting that, the transformation is profound. Not the transformation of our outer life—that's what I was saying when I mentioned that the Tibetans say this urge to correct is samsara. It's not about correcting. Can it be so radical, our trust in awareness, that we give up our willful trying to correct and instead trust that through the presence—that open-hearted presence with whatever's arising—awareness can be with anything?

Sayadaw U Pandita, who's a very fierce teacher, said something to me once when something difficult was going on. I can't remember what it was, but he said, "You don't need to be afraid. Awareness can be with anything." It really can. At some moments it can, but then again, it can. And so just that subtle Tai Chi move: "Oh, this is unbearable. This pain is like this." Not to correct, but to trust that through steady awareness, when we recognize accurately, wisdom arises, and we can respond in a much more appropriate way. It's not about not responding in life, as has been said, but it's about not responding when we're trying to fix it, fix it, fix it—rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. That's not really the place where our attention is most useful.

We're very privileged to be able to sit here and look at these relatively subtle movements of our mind and heart over and over, all day long. It doesn't need to be a lot of effort, but it's that interest. Let interest do the work.

It may often seem like this doesn't have much relevance in our life. But learning to really see how our minds work, to understand, to recognize when we're coming from habit in our responses, and knowing that we don't have to be afraid of seeing that—the seeing of it with awareness is what makes the change. This is how the world works. This is how all our minds are working. It may seem like really small, insignificant things here, but it's what we take into our life.

I've used this example a few times over the last couple of years. Last summer, I was in Germany for several weeks, and at one point I visited Dachau, which I'd managed never to go to before. It's a museum now; it was one of the concentration camps. It is what it is, but it had a very interesting effect on me in terms of deepening my faith, deepening my trust in just what we're doing here—in the absolute essential necessity of it, for my own life and for the world.

The sense I got from the way the museum was set up, which I thought was really well done—I mean, of course it's horrific—and it's not just Dachau. Pick so many places in the world even now where one group of people is being so unbelievably horrific to another group of people. Our individual lives, smaller groups—there's so much hatred and fear and discrimination and economic bullying and racial and gender discrimination. It's endless. And in many places there's so much violence.

I'm not saying this is just about Dachau. But the way it was set up, there would be different large posters with examples of different aspects of the whole thing: the people who were there as prisoners, the people who were there as guards, the people who worked there, the people in the village, how people got there—just everybody. They'd have a broad story, like doctors doing experiments, but then they'd also have pictures, photos of an individual for each category—maybe a doctor, maybe a person who was an inmate, maybe someone who ran the trains, maybe someone who was a guard, someone who was from the Roma community who got interned, someone who was gay who got interned, Jewish people. There'd be the broadness but also the individuality: a photo, a name, and a little bit of a story.

That made it both vast and personal. And what was so clear to me—this is obvious, it's not rocket science—is that it's not like a few weird, horrible people. It's mostly relatively normal people caught up in something, and each person is confronted with something they don't know, have never been in before.

You have no idea in 1932 or something what's going to be going on in 1941. So you're confronted in whichever place you are with little decisions that we have to make. And if we don't understand how our heart and mind work, if we don't understand when we're seeing inaccurately, then we'll make a decision.

We might think, "I would never do something like that. I would never be part of mass hatred of another group. I would never consciously do something to harm another, or to take food when there's not enough food to go around, to take for my family and not for them." We can say all these nice things, just like you can say, "From now on, I'm giving up craving." But it doesn't work. We have to understand. It's for all of us—we make a decision based as best we can, but it might be from fear, from protecting our family, or just a knee-jerk reaction of hostility without realizing it because it's so familiar. And then that leads to another decision, and another, and another, all over the world.

It's the same mind that gets us here rushing to the head of the line because there might not be enough bananas for breakfast. Elbowing the person—I know you don't do this—but elbowing the person out of the way. Okay, it's not a big deal, but here's the thing: it's not that we think "I will never do that," but rather that we learn with love, with kindness, with interest. We understand when these tendencies are arising in our mind, how they function, how they color our experience, how we can be free even within them.

This is not dissociated from life, from what's going on in the world. I really have felt—I felt it before anyway, obviously; I spend my life doing this—but I feel more, I don't know, more committed than ever that this is where we can start. This is a whole life practice. It takes enormous courage and commitment and faith, as Andrea was talking about. And it's radical beyond anything our mind can understand in terms of transforming not the externals, but how we recognize ourselves in the world and others, how we meet ourselves in the world and others. And that transformation is going to affect everyone we come in contact with because we're not separate.

*Yathābhūta ñāṇadassana*—seeing how things have come to be in this moment. Each moment affects the next moment. Each moment of trusting and awareness makes it a little more easy for the next moment.

Each moment of clear seeing, of clear recognition, has an effect. It's one of the conditions leading into the next moment.

I just want to end with something Dipa Ma said. Dipa Ma was this really amazing, tiny Indian woman who was quite realized. She said one time: "There's so much sameness, sameness in ordinary life. We are always experiencing everything through the same set of lenses. But once greed, hatred, and delusion are not present, you see everything fresh and new all the time. Every moment is new. Life was dull before. Now every day, every moment is full of taste and zest."

Just a little carrot. But then put it down and recognize that this moment is fresh and new and full of taste and zest.

So let's just sit quietly for a moment.

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