Mindfulness with Right View

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:00:15

Sometimes years ago when I was traveling by airplane in Myanmar, between cities, before it was more open, the domestic airlines were rather unreliable. Often they would just leave fifteen minutes early. You'd just miss the plane because they felt like leaving early.

Just coming in, I was sitting here for a moment or two. As I was walking in and seeing some people doing walking meditation outside and in here and sitting—as many retreats as I've taught or sat, which is quite a few—it still really touches my heart. It's not every moment, but when I was walking in here, it really touched my heart: the sincerity of all of your practice and what it takes to come here. Just the sincerity of intention to give six weeks or three months of your life to this, let's face it, really kind of strange activity in the normal world. It takes such dedication and commitment to hang with it. So I just really had a moment of appreciating that.

I think I can speak for all of us when I say that when we offer these Dhamma talks in the evening, it's really with the simple intention, the wish that something we say may be helpful, supportive in your practice—to help invite you into really opening your heart and mind into this moment, to explore and understand the Dhamma, your own heart and mind, more deeply.

So here we are, a few days in, maybe two or three, beginning to settle in, finding some sense of ease or just finding your space, beginning to find your rhythm. It was nice for all of us, I think, to start meeting with people today. We start to feel some sense of connection as there's just this sea of people. And also maybe you're starting to see—which is normal, what happens—that already three days in, maybe it's not going exactly the way you thought it ought to go. Maybe something's coming up that wasn't in the game plan. Might be something lovely, might be something difficult, might be something unbelievably boring. But it might be that you're just settling in and starting to work with the instructions, the technique, the skills, and that's great, that's wonderful, that's what we're here to do.

I just want to remind us of the context within which we're hopefully doing all this, of which the Buddha taught. I find for myself that it can be a little bit easy to get thrown when things aren't happening according to our memory of the past retreat or what we thought. Or we can be really engaged in trying to get the instructions, the technique right, trying to get it to work correctly, trying to do it right, whatever it is.

Just to remind us: all of the Buddha's teachings, the heart of his teachings—it's not about how to meditate well. That's not the end point. The instructions he gave are in support of, as he said again and again, helping us understand how we suffer and to free our hearts and minds from confusion, from suffering.

That's really the deep motivation of his offering, his sharing all those years of his life, and the motivation of all the people who've carried the Buddha's teachings through all these centuries.

Hopefully we can keep remembering this, because I know at times I can certainly forget and get caught up in the minutiae of either the technique or fighting or trying to make something happen or trying to figure out what it all means. But to remember to connect for yourself with that deep inner motivation, the sense that the context of all the Buddha's teachings is to really free our hearts and minds from the habits, the confusion that keeps us re-emerging and spinning into suffering.

He said sometimes—I like this quotation—he says, "Do not settle for anything less, not even wholesome states of mind." I know I can find in myself, when there's been a struggle and somehow it gets cooled out, I come out of retreat and think, "Yeah, there's not so much aversion going on. There's more equanimity, there's more loving-kindness. This is really pretty okay. Good enough." He's saying no, don't settle for good enough.

This isn't to make us miserable. When we think about the potential, when we take refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha—the potential of each of us as human beings—when using these techniques, all the different Vipassana techniques (and there are many; we can just offer some), they're all in service of activating the quality of wisdom, of clear seeing, of accurate recognition in our heart and mind. When the mind is meeting this moment of life with clarity, without confusion, that's a moment when suffering is not created. That's really the depth of what he's offering and what we're doing here.

So saying not to settle for less, don't settle just for wholesome states of mind—that's not to put down wholesome states of mind. We like wholesome states of mind. Wholesome states are good. We choose wholesome over unwholesome, usually, except when we don't, and that's why we're here practicing. But it's meant to be, and I experience it this way myself, actually a huge inspiration, a strength. It gives confidence, the sense that this is our potential as human beings: to really understand how suffering is created in a moment in our heart and mind, and how suffering ceases in a moment in our heart and mind, and to really at some point come to the end of that.

That can give us the confidence, the strength to hang with it when it's not going the way we thought it ought to go or the way we think it should, to hang with it when it gets a little bit tough. And you're here for six weeks minimum or three months. If it doesn't get tough—

Something's wrong. There's no way it's just pleasant, pleasant, pleasant. Life just isn't like that.

Okay, you don't have to raise your hand, but just think: how many of you really believe, if you look secretly in your heart and mind, that waking up means it does get pleasant, pleasant, pleasant? All this unpleasant stuff—that's because you're doing something wrong, right? If you really got it down, all these difficult mental states, these unpleasant sights and sounds and physical sensations, not to mention unpleasant other people—that would all cease. Because enlightenment, freedom from suffering, means

everything we don't like goes away. It sounds silly when I say it out loud, doesn't it? But just check in your mind. Next time your mind is going, "This can't be right, I can't do it," just check what's the idea back there. "No, this shouldn't be happening. If I could really meditate, this wouldn't be happening. This can't be part of Buddha Dharma."

So anyway, the sense of the potential to free our heart and mind can serve as a huge support, a refuge. In whatever way it works for you at different times when you're finding it difficult, take time to just reconnect. Go inside, see what's motivating you, what keeps you going. Just remembering that's really the heart of what the Buddha was teaching.

So what does that mean practically? Understanding how suffering is created in a moment, how it goes away in a moment. What's he talking about in terms of suffering, which we know?

First, to say that in my understanding—my limited understanding—everything the Buddha shared, which as you know is tomes and tomes of teachings, was to free our hearts and minds, not so that we think we have to embrace and memorize a new philosophy. It's not about just taking in more information and then saying, "Okay, now I'm a Buddhist and I believe X, Y, and Z." Because that doesn't help us at all. The information can be useful, I'll get to that, but that's not what he's sharing. He's not saying, "You've got to believe this."

There's a very well-known phrase, maybe you've heard it many times, from the Buddha: *Ehipassiko*. It's an invitation. He's saying, "You too, come and see." He's offering all these different ways of describing how he experiences being in a human mind and body, how he experiences suffering arising, how he experiences suffering ceasing—so many different ways. But he's just offering that as a piece of information inviting you to turn around and look at your own mind and body experience moment to moment to moment. And see if it's so. See if it's true.

That's what Thich Nhat Hanh means when he talks about the miracle of mindfulness. Maybe you've heard him say that. It really is a miracle—this simple quality that Guy spoke about last night and that we will be speaking about in different ways, probably mentioning it once or twice the rest of the six weeks at least. This quality of simple, total presence with what's arising, but what's actually arising now—not our ideas about it, not our memories about it, not what we think about it, not what we wish it was, not our assessment. Just simplicity of what's happening now, which isn't so easy to do.

The power of that to cut through the confusion, the distortions of perception we don't even know are operating, and allow for accurate recognition, for clear seeing—the power of this simple quality of heart-mind is amazing. It doesn't make rational sense, really, so forget trying to figure it out. You'll save yourself a lot of grief.

One definition I like—not of mindfulness, but of Vipassana meditation—comes from Sayadaw Tejaniya. He says, "Vipassana meditation is experiencing the mind and the body directly from moment to

moment"—and that's mindfulness—"with the right understanding, with wise understanding, with right view." That's the quality that comes in with mindfulness. When Guy said last night that mindfulness can have a quality of wisdom, that's what we mean: the quality of total presence of awareness, of knowing what's happening without being distorted by the overlay of our ideas about it. And this is so much not the way we live our life. It's just somehow not the way most of us have been conditioned.

So, when the Buddha was talking about suffering—the suffering that we can come to understand, the suffering that clear seeing can free our hearts and minds from—what was he talking about? He says it's not externals. If you look at the tales we can read about the Buddha's life after he was awakened, and for some reason it took me years to kind of notice this: he woke up, the peaceful one, free from suffering, into the same world. When he got up from that Bodhi tree, he was still there in Bodh Gaya in India, needing to walk around barefoot and eat and figure out what to do with his life, dealing with the heat and the bugs. And there was still...

war and violence and oppression and hunger and racism and unfairness and injustice and beauty and his family—the whole deal. None of the externals changed.

And not only that, he was still walking around in a body that had headaches and backaches sometimes, had to go eat every day, had to go out every morning, walk around in the village with the alms bowl and get some food. Not always so easy. He just goes, you know, it's nice. Who knows? Some days the Buddha got a lot of food. But it's even said that what he died from was some food that was given to him that was unknowingly tainted, poisoned, and he died from that. But we're all going to die from something.

When you look at that, I think there's that secret mind back there imagining that when you wake up, everything's going to be nicer externally. No. So what was the suffering he was freed from? What was the difference?

And of course, I'm not in a Buddha's mind. I can only say what I can understand from his teachings and my experience. But really understanding that the suffering he speaks about, the root causes of suffering—and you've heard many times—the *kilesas*, the torments of mind, the root causes being habits. Mental states, mental qualities that are habits. Not the essence of our being, but habits of confusion that lead to clinging, to greed, that lead to hatred, to aversion.

These habits of mind arise when we don't recognize what's occurring in this moment accurately. They arise in response to, in reaction to, whatever particular experiences are going on. And when we respond or relate to an experience with one of these distortions in our consciousness, when we don't recognize accurately, our response may be a little bit off and it can kind of escalate. Have you ever had that when you're having an argument and you each keep misunderstanding the other person and it just keeps spinning out of control? It's sort of like that.

What changes is the suffering that arises from misperceiving experience and then just kind of goes off into

orbit with all our reactions and responses. That suffering, when there's accurate recognition—oh, it's like this now—that other stuff doesn't arise. It's really quite amazing.

So our job, or one of our jobs, is with this *ehipassiko*, with this interest, this willingness to watch moment to moment what's going on in our mind and body here. That's what this is—a laboratory. Same mind and body we have outside of here, but all the extra distractions are gone so we can see the habits, how the mind and body works. We start to see what are the causes of suffering, what are the causes of the cessation of it.

As Mingyur Rinpoche says, we can start to recognize this interplay of cause and effect in our mind, in our experience, how cause and effect conditions our mind and shapes our experience. If we want to be happy, we must figure out which causes and conditions lead to well-being. Similarly, if we do not have a clear understanding of the conditions that create suffering, how could we possibly expect to free ourselves from it?

What the teachings are saying is that it's perfectly natural—we do all want to be happy. But without even quite recognizing when the confusion is present, when the misperception is going on, we don't really deeply see or understand what are the causes of happiness and suffering. So with all the good will, the good intentions in the world of trying to make ourselves happy and others happy, it keeps not quite doing it, right? I mean, if it really did it, you wouldn't be here. But sometimes it does it.

Years ago I studied—way back, a long time, another eon—when I was in college, I studied behavior modification. And they said the thing that keeps behaviors going the longest is when it's rewarded in an intermittent way. So if it's always rewarded, if every time we misperceive and think this is going to make me happy and it always makes you happy, and then suddenly it stops, then it stays stopped, then we learn it doesn't work. But if it works once in a while—you get the thing, it makes you happy, that craving really worked for you, it made you happy—never mind the next seven thousand two hundred and thirty-five times it doesn't. The next time, it makes you happy again. And so we keep thinking, oh, that's what happiness is. Because we haven't cultivated this quality of moment to moment to moment interest, loving, kind attention.

Mindfulness isn't to change anything. It's not to create a different experience. It's to be as present, to really surrender into this moment just as it is.

Physical experience, mental experience—and just see, it's like this now.

So we're not creating a new reality. Far more simple. When we talk about right view, the right understanding—I like the translation of *sammā diṭṭhi* as "right view." It works in English for my mind because I think of it as very literal: right view, accurate view, accurate recognition of this moment of experience, free from the distortions. And then the suffering reactions drop away.

So I've been using this simple example all summer. Those of you who heard me this summer, you're going

to hear it again. I have a young nephew, and it's been fun watching how kids learn, because he's the first nephew in my family at my age. It's really fun to watch.

So this example—you know, he's only three. You know wooden blocks, right? One of those things where there's a big tray with different shapes: triangle, circle, square. The kid has the blocks in each of those shapes, and you put the right block into the right hole. In the beginning, he'll see me or his parents put the triangle in the triangle, but he just sees block going in hole, looks like fun, but doesn't get the shapes. So he tries to put the triangle in the circle and the square in the triangle, and it doesn't work. And it moves into little kid frustration, right? Big frustration.

Of course, you can't enunciate too much at that age, but I could imagine taking this simple example into stuff we do, like: "What's the matter with this? There's a secret they're not telling me." Or: "I can't do it right. What's the matter with me? They can do it right, but I can't. There's something wrong." Or: "This whole game is completely messed up." All the frustration, all the stuff that comes from it. And the more he can't do it, the more frustrated. I've had friends who say about their computers, "You just want to take it up and throw it out the window." Many of us have felt like that sometimes. Well, a little kid might do that—pick up the wooden thing and throw it against the wall.

So all of that reactivity, that's clear suffering. And then you keep doing it, and one day, maybe it seems like a mistake at first, the triangle goes in the triangle. It's like, *wow*. The square goes in the square. It's like, *wo w, that's great*. He doesn't really see how. But then it twigs, you know? This is just normal learning. All of a sudden, the perception clears. It's like, "Oh, I see this shape. I see that shape. They go together." And it's just so simple and obvious it isn't even fun anymore—but it also isn't frustrating anymore.

So you see how when you see clearly, all that reactivity just vanishes. We don't have to make it go away. We don't have to overcome it. It's not arising in that moment. And don't think because it's not arising in the moment, it's really sitting there, a quagmire pool deep in your heart of frustration and negativity. No. When the seeds are planted, they can come out again until we're completely free. But it's really, when it's not there, it's not there. Be really mindful of that too, really experience. In a moment, everything's only this moment. Moments of frustration, but also moments of the cessation of frustration.

So you get a sense of what I mean with accurate recognition. When we talk about insight—insight, insight meditation—to me that's a really good metaphor for how insight works. Insight isn't about getting more information. Insight doesn't have to be that you have this amazing, light-filled experience and everything's blown out. Sometimes it happens, and it'll go away again. But insight is the moments that the *kleshas*—the greed, hatred, delusion, the torments—aren't clouding perception. There's clear awareness, and wisdom can come.

It's like, *ah, it's like this now.* Aha. And something is understood. Something is known, to use the language that Guy was reading from the sutta—it's known in that way. Not intellectually, but cellularly. *Ah, right, the square goes in the square.* It's just laws of nature. You don't fight it anymore; it's like trying to fight

gravity. It's just the law of nature, it's how it is.

So insight isn't like, "Oh, now we're going to see something that didn't exist before." It's that in a moment, the consciousness clears and we see more accurately: *Oh, this is how it is. This is how it's always been.* We just didn't see it clearly before.

When we talk about the steadiness, the collectedness of attention and the steadiness of mindfulness—I think I mentioned it last night as well—with steady awareness, part of what we start to see through is the characteristics of all phenomena: of being impermanent, of being unsatisfactory, that there's no lasting happiness, of being not me or mine, that there's no inherent self-sense.

It's not that now things are permanent and if you have an insight into impermanence then everything starts changing. Right? You know that, right? But we don't really know that. Because we act often as if things are permanent. We certainly—well, maybe you don't, but I certainly act many times as if there's definitely a solid Carol, or this is Carol's, or this is Carol. It just feels so obvious.

So it's not that that stuff changes, but we recognize more accurately the way things are, and then the suffering, confused reactions—they just don't arise. When you see something's really just ephemeral and falling apart, in that moment, when you really are getting it in your gut, clinging to it for happiness doesn't arise because it's so clearly confused and a source of suffering. But when we know it intellectually yet haven't really got it in our gut, we say, "Oh, I shouldn't cling to this because I know it's going to go away"—but that doesn't really do us a lot of good, does it?

I want to give a simple example of why we can't think our way into accurate recognition—into seeing, "This is how things are now, this is the way things have come to be." That's one very classic phrase in the Buddhist teaching: *yatha bhuta*, things as they have come to be in this moment. I love that because it gives a sense of not-steady-state. In English, "this is how it is" gives a sense of stability, doesn't it? This is how it is. This is Carol, a solid, steady thing.

But "things as they have come to be in this moment"—to me, it brings all the different conditions, innumerable conditions. If you start trying to enumerate all the conditions you can even think of that came together for you to be sitting here now, you really can't ever stop. It goes all the way back to the Big Bang. Really.

But just this moment is just how it is. And with all those conditions, this particular moment couldn't possibly be different. How could it be different? Because it's like this now. But now this next moment's already a different moment. So there is no steady state at all.

But that's so often not how we perceive. And I can't, with an act of will, decide, "Okay, now I'm going to really recognize accurately that everything's shifting, everything's impermanent." I can think that, but that level of insight perception where, *oh yeah, it's a triangle*—and all the confused reactions just fall away—you can't think your way into that, even when we know.

That's why we have this steady practice. That's the miracle of steady mindfulness. It's setting up the conditions for reality to reveal itself. It's not for me to sit down and decide, "Now I'm going to be mindful, mindful, mindful of breath, breath, hearing, hearing, now I'm seeing impermanence, seeing impermanence, going to see impermanence." It's not that. It's just to be really present, moment to moment. And reality is how it is. It reveals itself—if we would quit trying to put our ideas on it so hard.

But we can't do that with an act of will.

Here's a simple example I like of how all the conditions in our life affect our perception—how we perceive something, whether we like it or don't like it, even if we want to perceive it differently intellectually.

There's a musician I really appreciate, a classical cellist named Yo-Yo Ma. Perhaps you've heard of him—he's very well known in the European classical style of music and lives in Boston. I really appreciate his music, but even more I appreciate what I've seen of his being, because he seems very open, very inclusive, meeting each new experience with this sense of open wonder and interest, which to me personifies mindfulness. Like, "Wow, what's this?"

Quite some years ago, he organized a group he calls the Silk Road Project. Some of you probably know about it. The Silk Road, of course, is that whole area of the world from the Middle East through Turkey and Central Asia through to China—what used to be the trade routes from the Middle Ages between Europe and China. What he did in organizing this was getting musicians together from all these different countries: musicians who play instruments, who compose, who sing, bringing them together to play.

But it's not as if they say, "Okay, now here's a Mongolian piece of music, and we'll all play this Mongolian piece. Now here's a North African piece, we'll play that. And now here's a European classical piece, we'll play that." It's not that at all, not that sense of separation. Rather, they get the musicians together in different groupings, and someone writes a piece specifically for those particular musicians. You might have someone from Central Asia, from Turkey, from Mongolia, from North Africa—they may all be together. Someone writes a piece for them, and they'll be playing the different instruments from different places, different vocalizing like Mongolian overtone singing, different tones, different scales, working it together, making something completely new.

I love the idea. I think it's so far out. I keep buying the CDs. I really, really want to appreciate and enjoy listening to it. And I don't. I keep trying. My mind loves that he's doing this, that these people are working together, making something new. But the conditioning of the kind of music that this particular mind-consciousness enjoys hearing isn't that. The different tones, the different rhythms—it's like, "Oh." So every few months I try again.

It's not that it's good or bad or that you should or shouldn't enjoy something. I'm just giving this as an example of how the conditioning of our lives affects our perceptions—what we find pleasant, what we find unpleasant. And we can't just change it because we want to.

Something like that is just interesting to see. But on the level of these really basic habits of perception—not recognizing impermanence, or the unsatisfactoriness that arises because things go away, or perceiving a sense of solid self where there isn't one—that's so deeply ingrained. We've practiced it so much that it doesn't even feel familiar; it just feels like the way things are. We don't even recognize when those particular misperceptions are operating. Certainly not when we're just going around in daily life, if we haven't developed the habit of bringing mindfulness to our body and mind.

But if we keep bringing mindfulness to our moment-to-moment experience here, we'll start to see it. And the thing is, when we start to see these things, not to think, "Oh no, here's sense of self again! When am I going to get rid of it?" No, no. I mean, you can think that if you want, but it's not helpful. Instead, you think, "Wow, yeah, look at that. That's how sense of self arises in a moment. This is the effect it has." Mindfulness, awareness, can notice that as well as anything else.

There's nothing in our experience that need be outside the field, the realm of mindful awareness. If you find yourself saying, "I can't be mindful because this is happening," let that be a clue. "Wow, this feels like this." Don't do anything about it, but widen the field of mindfulness. "Oh, this is happening. It's like this now," to use Ajahn Sumedho's language.

So insight doesn't come through an act of will, but through the long process of steady awareness.

I want to talk a little bit then, in terms of wrong view—the misperception—just in a light way, to say a few words about what is in some way the core one: the sense of wrong view called *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, translated as personality view, sense of self. This is a perception that arises in many moments of presence, one that takes any particular experience that's occurring as being me or mine.

When we talk about our moment-to-moment experience here, breaking it down the way the Buddha talked about it at the most simple, elemental level—and I think someone may have talked about this already—there are six sense experiences: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching with the body, and all mental experience. As your awareness begins to get a little more steady, you notice that's what's happening all day long. There's a thought, mental experience. There's seeing. There's hearing. There's sensation in the body, sensation of breathing. There's hearing, seeing, a thought, an emotion. All these six sense experiences are just arising and passing, arising and passing all day long. Have you noticed that? There's no time all day long that they're not happening. There's always something awareness and mindfulness can notice. If you ever attempt to come in and say nothing's happening, we're not going to let you get away with that. There's always something going on.

Now, if there are thoughts, sights, sounds, sensations, we're not taking each sight, each sound as me or mine. That would be—I hope you're not, because it would be unbearable, wouldn't it? I mean, how many sights and sounds and thoughts and physical sensations have you experienced today? Can you even come close to a number? I'd say millions, who knows? If every single one of them was me or mine, can you imagine? You'd just be tossed around—oh, that sound is me, I don't like it, oh, this sound, no, this sound.

Well, we do that with enough stuff. I don't know how we get through life, really.

And you see this here when you're just walking. If you're doing walking meditation outside, there are many sights and sounds that come and go. You're more or less aware of them, and they're just coming and going, no big deal. And suddenly one sound arises, or one sensation arises, and somehow the attention and energy of mind isolates it, fixates on it, even if just for a second. Not the fixation of clear recognition and mindfulness, but fixation with a kind of gripping: "Oh, this sound isn't okay." It's already gone into "my hearing isn't happy with this sound," or a sensation.

It's easier to see this with sensation. When you start to get quiet, you'll notice there are lots of sensations, just little bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop coming and going all day. And suddenly there's one that's really like, "This is my knee," you know, or whatever it is. That sense of privileging a particular perception, a particular experience, as being me or mine.

Of course, we don't announce it. We don't get a big neon sign that says "*Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* rising, *sakkāya-diṭṭh i* rising, watch out." We don't, because it just feels normal. So we go, "This sensation—this isn't okay."

Let me take something more—not pain, but say, earlier today when I was down at my place looking at this talk, and suddenly it just felt so hot and humid. Normally I like the heat, but it was just so hot. So I was sitting there. I wasn't noting because I was thinking about this, but I was aware of hot, heat. And then all of a sudden, "Oh my God, it's so hot." You get a sense of the difference? By that time, it wasn't just the attention identifying with the heat. It had already, in that amount of time, gone from heat to unpleasant to "it shouldn't be this way" to "it's affecting me" to "I don't like it" to "what can I do?" Really fast, there's a whole story going on—the reaction, the heat, what can I do? And then when I walked in here, "Oh, it's so cool in here. How nice." If I'd remembered it was air-conditioned, maybe I would have thought, "I need to go up to the hall, it's air-conditioned."

We want to do something, we want to fix it. But it's not that you can't do something about it. The suffering that was going on—it was the same heat that it was the moment before the attention glommed onto it as "my body feeling uncomfortable." The same heat. The suffering wasn't the heat. The suffering is all those reactions that come when there's a moment of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, taking anything as being me or mine. It goes on all the time. The attention gets glued to the object, and then the whole series of reactions happens in no time.

Don't waste time judging this. This is fascinating. Just to see this is the habit of how our human minds work.

When we say *ehi passiko*—come and see for yourself—don't believe anything I say, and don't dismiss it either. Look and see. And when we see sakkāya-diṭṭhi rising like that, that's great. Awareness can notice, "Oh yes, sense of self is like this." Keep the steady awareness going and notice the effects of it. What are some of the effects? You keep noticing. Because the more there's accurate recognition through

mindfulness, that's when wisdom can come in and the reactions that cause suffering start to drop away.

You can often do it like the example I'm giving. I whipped it up a little bit—I wasn't really in horrible, terrible, suicidal suffering. It was just, "Ugh." But then I could see that happening because my mind had been quite fine a minute before. I could ask myself, "Do you really want to get all whipped up about this?" Sometimes you can really notice that and recognize, "Yes, this is aversion. No, heat is like this." Just come back to the heat, don't feed the aversion. It's fine. Sometimes it's much bigger and we can't do that. But we can keep the mindfulness going to see what's really bringing happiness, what's bringing suffering.

Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche says we want happiness, but the causes of happiness—understanding selflessness, loving-kindness, compassion—we don't always give so much attention to these qualities. Instead, the habit of our mind is to get more involved in the suffering, in the difficult states of heart and mind. We get more involved in the reactions. It's more what we're used to. It's more what feels real. Almost like it's so habitual we take refuge in the wanting, in the aversion, in the sense of self, just because it feels like home. As we know, home isn't always comfortable, but it's home.

So start to explore this as you go through the days. Just see. It's just hearing, seeing, touching—and all of a sudden, "me." Notice the effect.

Lama Drimé describes it beautifully. He says when we're just being present with things as they are, it's all nature. We aren't separate from nature. There's whatever's arising due to causes and conditions—the sound, the sight, the sensation, the bird singing—it's all arising, and we are part of it all. But as soon as that sense of self, that fixation on a particular experience comes up and isn't seen, everything starts to solidify. When we hold to a certain experience as "me," he says we go from the vastness of things as they are to getting locked into the narrow bandwidth of "me, human being, separate from everything else." Just feel that sense of narrowness.

The Dalai Lama speaks to this in a book I was using a lot this summer called *The Book of Joy*, which captures a series of conversations between him and Archbishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa. You all know who Archbishop Tutu is? Both are Nobel Peace Prize winners, and Archbishop Tutu chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Council after apartheid ended in South Africa.

In these conversations about dharma, about joy, the Dalai Lama says the paradox is that although the drive behind excessive self-focus—and I'm translating "excessive self-focus" as the mind just fixating on something as "me" or "mine"—is to seek greater happiness for yourself, it ends up doing exactly the opposite. You become disconnected and alienated from others when you focus too much on yourself. With too much self-focus, when it's all about me or mine—and at times it's like that for all of us—our vision becomes narrow. And with this, even a small problem appears out of proportion and unbearable.

Have you ever noticed that? That's a big thing that comes up on retreat. Some little thing is just so unbearable, so exaggerated. That's okay. We have a term for it here—we call it "yogi mind." When

suddenly there's wanting or aversion that's so strong and so important that it takes over your world for a while.

We call it yogi mind. It's exaggeration. Someone bursts into the office and says, "I've gotta have Tom's toothpaste or I'm just gonna die," with that kind of energy. So this narrowness that comes.

And then Bishop Tutu, what he adds to that—he comes soon to the concept that we have at home in South Africa, the concept of Ubuntu. The concept is that a person is a person through other persons. You realize that in a very real sense, we're part of a profound complementarity. I could not speak as I am speaking without having learned it from other human beings. I learned to be a human being from other human beings. We belong in this delicate network. It is actually quite profound. Unfortunately, in our world, we tend not to recognize we're part of this network until times of great disaster.

He gives examples about how that can happen. I was just listening today to the news on the radio. They were giving examples of these horrific hurricanes that happened in the last couple of weeks. And of course, you can hear all kinds of stories about horrible things—violence and looting and all—but you also hear uplifting stories. I just heard one today that's exactly what he was talking about. I thought I'd share it because it's just sweet. But why does it have to wait, he said, till times of great suffering to feel, to recognize that we're all part of this network, not just me and you?

So this is in St. Thomas, in the Virgin Islands, where ninety percent of the homes were damaged or destroyed. Ninety percent. Unbelievable. And this story is about a small nursing home where only twelve elderly people live. All but three of them were not able to get out of bed, were not able to walk. So when the hurricane was hitting, in the rooms the ceilings were being blown down, the walls were being blown down, glass was shattering, flying into the rooms, and they couldn't get up by themselves. The few people working there—one of the nurses said, "We were just trying to hold the door shut so it doesn't blow in. There were just the three of us to try and move everyone."

But right next door to this nursing home was an institution, a lockdown institution for adolescent boys—young men who had either committed crimes or were in trouble, like a pre-jail kind of thing. They were in this place next door, locked down. But I guess they opened it up. And several of those young boys, seen as criminals or whatever, they came over and in the dark with no electricity, they moved all the elderly people into the dining room where they could all be there together. And then they stayed with them in the dark all night because there was no electricity, protecting them because the windows had shattered, glass was flying everywhere, the wind was flying everywhere. So these young guys stayed with these elderly people and protected them all night.

They were talking to the woman who was running the nursing home, and also the person running the lockdown facility. They were both so moved, so touched. And we are too when we re-recognize—it's like re-recognizing what's already been true—that we're not so separate.

So in little ways here, it's not about that, but in little ways just watching how the sense of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* comes up, and when it comes, notice that sense of separation or just the sense of suffering, if it's there. Notice when it's not there. We don't have to wait for a disaster. We can really watch, moment to moment to moment, because the truth reveals itself.

That's what I love about the Dharma. It's not that we have to figure it all out in our mind and then do the right thing and make that happen. We can't. If you could give that up, you would do yourself so much good. And just trust, moment to moment to moment, simple awareness. That's what I love. The wisdom arises through the steadiness of awareness, and the way things are—*yathā bhūta*—it reveals itself. We actually don't know how it is, so we can't think our way into it. We just really trust again and again the simplicity and honesty of moment to moment: What's happening now?

"I'm so confused."

Oh, confusion is like this.

You think, "What? I came here to say confusion is like this? I don't think so. I came here to get really clear."

Oh, wanting is like this. That's happening. Oh, sensation of breathing. Tightness. So what? The breath was like this before. I get it. Let's have a new breath. Let's have something to... Ah, that's wanting. Wanting is like this. Again. Again. Again.

Just this moment. All there is, is this moment. Sati, mindfulness of just what is occurring in that simplicity, in that moment, is a stepping out of sakkāya-diṭṭhi. It's a stepping out of reactivity, a stepping out of misperception, and just being present with this moment. You don't have to make a big story—just being present with things as they are.

Sometimes we think—this is something Ajahn Sumedho says. He's an American man who's been a monk in the Thai forest tradition for forty or fifty years. I find him quite inspiring. In terms of talking about this sakkāya-diṭṭhi, this personality view, he discusses noticing this tendency to fixate on an experience, a sense of self. Often we think we shouldn't talk about this stuff or look at this stuff until we've been practicing for quite some time because it's so difficult, so subtle. And it makes people crazy.

But he says—and this I really believe, which is why I'm bringing it up—just to look at it lightly. He says, "Why should I practice for twenty years from delusion? Why should I spend twenty years practicing from that motivation of achieving something for me, which is so confused?" We can start practicing, we can start to recognize sakkāya-diṭṭhi now. A lot of the time we won't, but sometimes we can. It's just another arising experience, a way that the mental factor of clinging or aversion relates to a particular experience. Notice how it behaves. Notice when it's gone. And even with sakkāya-diṭṭhi—don't take it personally. It's just a habit of mind.

We all have personalities. And guess what? I kept waiting to get a new personality. We don't really get a

new personality. Maybe it kind of gets a little mellower around the edges or something, but we don't get a new one.

So this is our meditation. This is the work of our meditation. All the techniques and the tools are to help us cultivate the simplicity of present moment mindfulness. But the steadiness, the clarity, is really where the power comes. So that's why we say—and when Guy was talking about the connecting and sustaining—that's just in one moment. But it's that sense... let me put it in completely different language, in case you didn't like that language. Or maybe you don't like my language, then ignore my language and listen to Guy. That's why there's all different ones of us; we all speak differently.

Thinking of connecting, think of it as just completely relaxing with presence into the experience. It's like this now. And the sustaining is just being there with interest and noticing how it changes, if it changes, how it behaves. That's it. Sustaining is just keeping the attention with what's happening. It's not trying to sustain the experience—that's not seeing impermanence. Sometimes people say, "I'm trying to sustain this sensation, but then something else arises." I go, "Yeah, hello, that's what's happening. That's what's happening."

What we cultivate as we expand the instructions over these days is the moment to moment to moment steadiness of mindful awareness. Even if the objects are changing, the collectedness and the steadiness get stronger and stronger and stronger. And it's this steadiness, this continuity, that reveals the confused habits of mind. If we're just mindful here for a minute, then we space out, then we're mindful here—

I mean, we do that now because we're just learning. It takes setting up the conditions for the steadiness to come. But if we don't understand why we are going on about this steadiness, this persistence—if we don't understand why—then we think, "Okay, that was a good sitting. I deserve a holiday now. I'm going to go do whatever, not pay attention, and then I'll come back and I'll walk and I'll really walk and I'll really do it. Okay, that was good. I put in my effort. Now I'm going to take a little holiday."

And you can do that. It's tiring. It's not so satisfying. More satisfying is the steady relaxing into this moment. This moment. As Guy said last night, you put your fingers together—how much effort does that take? Not much. But this moment. This moment. This moment.

And again, the beauty of the way things are, the Dhamma, the laws of nature, is that the truth reveals itself when we're able and willing to be steady with our kind and loving attention. Not to make it be a certain way, but simply to see: oh, it's like this now. It's like this now. It's like this now.

So this is really our practice.

I want to end with two Burmese sayings. First is from Sayadaw U Tejaniya: "As mindfulness is remembered more and more frequently, gradually it develops its own momentum." We don't have to keep remembering—it starts to do itself. We come to appreciate the moments of awareness. We come to appreciate them more than our entrancements with the reactions of mind to whatever is arising. Steady

mindfulness is the condition for wisdom and insight to arise.

And from Sayadaw U Pandita, the same thing in a different way: "When mindfulness is persistently and repeatedly activated, wisdom arises. There will be insight into the true nature of body and mind."

So that's our practice. But it all boils down to only one moment—not the whole day, only right now.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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