Perception, Papañca, and Sakkāya-diṭṭhi

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 57:51

Tonight I want to talk about perception, saññā, and papañca, and the concoction of sense of self—deconstructing that, exploring that.

I love talking about perception because it's fun to talk about, and it's arising in every moment, so it's really at the core of the whole construction of sense of self. I hope this isn't too wonky of a talk, but I can only get down in there. This is one way of talking about sakkāya-diṭṭhi.

So let's talk about the personality view, the sense of self, and how with anattā, the big anattā understanding is that there is no intrinsic separate self. Yet, of course, in our experience, personality view, identity view, sense of self is certainly something that we experience in an ongoing way. This isn't a whole anattā talk—it's more about perception—but perception fuels the false sense of self.

A lot of times when we bring up anattā or not-self, people's minds just kind of turn off. Like, "Oh god, I'm just waiting for the big insight when the self that's here goes away." It's here, here, here, but when the insight finally comes it'll be gone, right? You're waiting for that, and it turns into this big deal when it was never here in the first place. So stop waiting for some mind-blowing insight.

Instead, and this is where it really gets interesting, with the simplicity of steady awareness, we can begin to get interested and recognize how in a moment the sense of self arises, how it's concocted, how it's constructed from the building blocks of the five aggregates—saññā, perception, being one of them. Unexamined, it seems really real. With steady awareness, we just start to see it deconstruct and go. This can just be interesting to watch. Instead of waiting until it all blows out and it's gone forever—which, like I said, don't hold your breath—we can see it coming and going, coming and going, and actually, you can stop taking the sense of self personally. That's really very freeing.

Ramana Maharshi says the ego—or I'm going to say sense of self—is like a ghost caused by the play of shadows. If you examine closely, the ghost vanishes. The ghost was never there. So it is with the sense of separate self. So long as one does not examine it closely, it continues to give trouble. But when one searches for it, it is found not to exist.

The Buddha's way of talking about the five aggregates—and this isn't a five aggregate talk either, it's a saññā talk, but that's one of the five aggregates, and they're all linked up—is through a very well-known sutta where he talks about consciousness as a magic show, the whole thing like a magic show. Form is like a mass of foam, just empty foam. Vedanā, feeling tone, is just an airy bubble. Perception is like a mirage. Saṅkhāras, mental formations, are like a banana tree—you know, the banana tree trunk is just leaves,

there's no core there, there's no there there if you take it apart. Consciousness is a magic show, a juggler's trick entire.

I really feel like the whole sense of self is like that, like a magic show. When we don't explore it—he goes on to describe how if you come to a crossroads and there's a magician doing tricks and you're looking at it, you go, "Wow, that's amazing, it's so wonderful." Then if you go behind the curtain and you see how it's done, you go, "Oh, okay." And then you come out and watch it again and everyone else is going, "Wow, how wonderful!" And you're like, no big deal. You just do this and this and that's how it happens. So that's what he's comparing this to. It's a magic show.

How does saññā, perception, contribute? How does it do its job? How does it contribute to this magic show when there's not recognition, not mindfulness?

As I said, all of the five aggregates, perception included, arise in every mind moment of consciousness. Perception is described as the quality in any mind moment of recognition, of discernment. So if I ring the bell and you hear it—the recognition of bell. Obviously it's based on memory and has to do with whatever our previous experiences have been. So it's a concept. It's extremely useful. No one's saying we're going to get through life without perception. It's really how we construct our world. One perception can immediately give the whole sense of the world.

When you hear the bell, even if you were somewhat spaced out or not fully aware of it, everything kind of jumps into place. You know it's the bell, you know it's time for a talk, you know you're here at IMS, you know where you're supposed to go. You came in here, you knew you were you, which was your zafu, who sits up here and who sits down there. You're quiet, I talk—we know the whole thing. The whole world arises with perception. Extremely useful.

The thing is, as our perception is informed and flavored by all of our life experiences, without real awareness we don't tend to question it. We think, "Well, that's how it is. It's describing reality." But it isn't the same for everybody.

There's a simple example I really liked. I was visiting Sally a few years ago, and I said, "Oh, I'm a little chilly. Could you hand me the blue blanket on the back of your couch?" She looked at the couch and said, "What blue blanket?" I said, "That one there." She said, "Oh, you mean the green one?" And then I really looked. "No, no, it's blue." She said, "No, it's green." We could have gone further with it, but the thing is, I really tried. I said, "Oh, really, green?" Couldn't see it as green. She couldn't really see it as blue.

That's not life-threatening, but there's this sense—doesn't the mind kind of wonder, "But which one is right?" As if there's an accurate, exact thing out there. It's blue or it's green, or you have to find aquamarine because that's the right perception. Rather than recognizing perception as a conditioned phenomenon like everything else. When we're not recognizing this, we can so easily assume that's what's really going on.

Blue-green—conditioned by whatever our past conditioning is. But it's so easy to hold on to our perception as right, to really get into struggle about it, or fear when our perceptions are threatened. And so often the perception that arises is actually inaccurate when it's distorted by kilesa. If there's aversion flavoring the perception, the citta, the consciousness in that moment, or greed flavoring it, or delusion—that distorts perception. We don't recognize accurately at all. And if we don't recognize the kilesas are there, we don't know we're not recognizing accurately.

Sometimes with steady attention this is seen through immediately. A simple example: I was at a meditation center in Burma some years ago, walking down this path. There was a big Bodhi tree growing there, with a circular path around it. I was walking down the path, and I saw a Burmese nun walking around the tree, circumambulating it—which is a thing you do—with her hands in añjali. I thought, "Oh, how nice, the faith," this lovely feeling. I kept walking, got closer, and she was texting on her phone. That was just funny. The perception—you see through it right away.

That was delusion. I just didn't have all the information. How much of the time we don't have all the information, there's delusion, not seeing clearly. But believe me, the mind just jumps in and there's some kind of perception. It's rare that we say, "You know, I really don't exactly know what's happening here. I don't really know what that person's motivation was when they did this really stupid thing. I really don't know. I'll just stay open." Moha, delusion, jumps in and makes a story.

And then—this is the concoction part—pretty much most of the time, it doesn't just stop with perception. Even that little story about the nun was not a big deal, but I didn't just see, "Oh, walking around the tree." There was a sense of it being pleasant, a sense of "Oh, the faith of the nuns, isn't that inspiring," and a whole little world bubble got created in the two seconds it took me to walk up to the tree. Then that whole world bubble got deflated. But I thought it was funny, so that was okay, it was over.

But when there's greed or aversion really flavoring it, and the story's gone a lot further, it's a whole other thing. That's papañca—the mind that proliferates based on perception.

So this example—and I use this example a lot, I'm using it again by request of a particular person here from other years—but it works very well. How perception can explode into a whole story and suffering based on inaccuracy.

It was her first retreat. It was in another country, in a rental facility—a big house that was used for summer camp for kids. So it wasn't really well constructed. The room being used for the sitting meditation was on what we would call the second floor, and the room used for walking meditation was right underneath it on the first floor. But not so well constructed as here—one of these old wooden houses where every time anybody walked anywhere you could hear it creak, creak, creak, creak.

So she was sitting during the structured time, the sitting period, trying to be with the breath. Finally, on her first retreat, she had a moment of feeling the breath—a moment of feeling like she was doing it right.

And suddenly she heard this creak, creak, creak. It was loud and it really messed up her concentration. She thought, "Well, somebody's walking downstairs." You can hear how that creaking happens with walking. And immediately the thought arose: "This is the sitting period. You're supposed to be sitting in the sitting period, not walking. This is wrong. That shouldn't be happening. How can that person be so insensitive? And besides, it's ruining my meditation." Really annoyed.

The mind was spinning, but it was her first retreat. She wasn't a manager or anything, so she didn't have the nerve to go downstairs and give that person what for—but she would have liked to. There was nothing else to do, though, but try to feel her breath again. So she came back, tried to feel the breath, and at some point managed to connect again. The story went into the background as she really connected with the breath, just feeling it.

And as she was present again, feeling the breath, she noticed that as she breathed out—she happened to be leaning with her back against the wall—her back hit the wall, and *that* was making the creaking sound. Completely from her breathing hitting the wall. It was like, "Oh my god, how could that be?"

The minute she saw that, of course, this whole concoction—this whole story, the anger, the aversion, and everything that came with it—at that moment it vanishes. This is, in a way, the nature of insight. Steady awareness, when it recognizes accurately what's happening, allows the reactivity based on aversion and self-story and greed to drop away, because it doesn't make any sense given what's really happening in that moment. That nature of insight is not something you think your way into, but that's what happens when there's reality, when we really see it clearly.

I want to use that story to refer to the different steps of it, describing how perception and papañca work to create this whole, enmeshed sense of self.

So, one thing: as I said, it doesn't just stop at perception. This is the well-known description of the Buddha of what's called papañca—proliferation of thought and emotion based on perception, inaccurate perception:

"Dependent on the eye and forms, or the ear and sounds, dependent on sense contact with any of the six sense doors, there's sense contact. With sense contact as condition, feeling tone—vedanā—arises. This just happens. What one feels, that one perceives. So there's vedanā, saññā—they're happening quickly. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates, one complicates with associations, with memories. And with these proliferations as the source, the mind, the heart is beset. The mind, the heart is assailed with mental perceptions and notions and thoughts about the past and the future and the present, and we suffer."

That's the classic description of papañca.

So this example from my friend—the whole thought arising from that perception that somebody's walking, and all the story about how this shouldn't be happening, and what can I do, and it's ruining my

meditation—all of that is papañca being fueled by aversion, not recognized.

What one feels, one perceives. This is how the concoction of suffering and sense of self happens so quickly. It's again from—well, this isn't from the Buddha, this is Sariputta. But he is considered, when he speaks pieces of wisdom, equal to the Buddha. So we don't say, "Well, only Sariputta said it."

He knew.

So Sariputta says, "Feeling, perception, and consciousness, friend, these qualities are joined. They come together. You cannot disjoin them. It is not possible, having separated the one from the other." As I'm doing now—I'm talking about vedana arising and that leading to perception—but it's not possible to really delineate the difference among them. For what one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one cognizes.

In other words, it's all happening so quickly. The feeling tone, the perception, and the cognizing is the knowing of that. So if that moment is distorted by aversion, by greed, by delusion, it's happening so quick—boom—off in a whole world in just a second.

This is what Guy was talking about last night regarding the suffering born of craving. Craving being either the movement toward or the movement away from. We've talked about before, in some of the other talks, how the feeling tone—being perceived as pleasant or unpleasant or neutral—is so habitual for our minds. When there's not the clear, non-deluded recognition of "this is unpleasant" or "this is pleasant being perceived that way," the habit is so strong to feed into unpleasant, boom. The perception's unpleasant and off into a whole world, like my friend here. Or if it's pleasant, off into a whole world of greed.

And without the tool of steady mindfulness—because this is happening every mind moment, so quickly—what we wake up noticing is the sense of me involved in this particular concoction of self. Of sitting here trying to meditate and having it ruined by this thoughtless person walking downstairs. That's what's happening. That's the mind bubble that's been created.

If you wanted to, I'm breaking it down, kind of deconstructing. It happens so fast, but there's sitting, there's the hearing. The hearing is perceived, and that just happens effortlessly. Hearing arises and there's a knowing of it. Nothing one has to do—she wasn't planning. But whether the hearing itself was unpleasant, or whether the fact that it pulled her away from the breath and was perceived as a distraction was unpleasant, either way there was an unpleasant feeling tone. The perception immediately coming of someone walking, and then the whole world of me suffering in aversion. Just like that.

The real poignancy of how suffering is born of craving—this guy described it. On the many ways it manifests, this is one: when the craving, in whichever form—for it or against—is flavoring, is distorting the perception and is fueling the papañca. When that's in the perception and unrecognized, it has the effect that perception is not accurate. We misperceive. We don't recognize reality the way that it is.

And that's so poignant, because we're thinking the craving is what's going to make us happy, and it's the very thing that is obstructing just the simple recognition of reality as it is.

Sogyal Rinpoche, just describing how we get so lost so quickly: "We get into so much suffering and confusion by letting ourselves get lost in whatever happens. You project one thought, then the second thought believes the first. Then a third, fourth, and fifth thoughts are projected. The first thought is by this time already a reality. By the time the tenth one comes, it believes the fifth one has always been an actuality."

And this is fast. You notice how fast—I'm hoping you notice how fast thoughts come. How solid our thought bubbles, our world bubbles get. And how much of the time is there "me" sitting in the center of it? Not really me, okay, but the sakkāya-diṭṭhi, the sense of me. That's often what fuels it.

And it doesn't matter how fast and how far that thought bubble has gone. So back to the house again—my friend noticing it. Whether it was three seconds that she was lost in this aversive story (I think it was longer than that), whether it was forty-five minutes, it really doesn't matter. The time when the attention was brought back to the simplicity of present moment awareness—just dropping all the stories, just being with the sensation of breathing, without preconception, just with that open-hearted "okay, what's happening?"—just being with it. And then the perception, not being distorted at that point, is open to recognize more accurately.

Oh, that's what's happening. Breathe out, there's the sound, and everything drops away. The suffering drops away. That whole bubble, however long it had lasted, doesn't matter. In the moment of the purity of awareness, of citta without being distorted, that one moment of clear seeing—all the rest vanishes in that moment. You don't have to slowly talk your way out of it. It vanishes in the light of direct perception, which I think is very encouraging to all of us. That's why we say you could have been lost for an hour, but the moment the awareness comes back, it's here, just as clear and good as ever.

So the Dalai Lama says all of our difficulties stem from mistaken perception. That's why there is so much emphasis on direct experience or true knowledge. You may have noticed that's what we're going on about all the time—direct experience or true knowledge. All of our difficulties stem from mistaken perception. With this direct connection, the magic show falls apart. And this is not an act of will. It's not by rationalizing about it, thinking about it.

If you notice, you can be really caught in a story or in a sense of self, and you're telling yourself all the things we've learned: "But I know this is impermanent, I know there's identification here, I know this is unpleasant, I know this is just a creation." But that's just on the intellectual level. That might serve to get us to meet the experience again, but it doesn't cut through it. The moment of direct connection, awareness, the simplicity of awareness and total presence—reality reveals itself. Boom.

So this is Thich Nhat Hanh: "Understanding wisdom does not arise as the result of thinking. It is the result

of the long process of conscious awareness. Sometimes wisdom or understanding can be translated into thoughts, but often thoughts are too rigid and limited to carry much understanding."

Our thinking mind doesn't believe that, because that's what the thinking mind does—it thinks. It puts all the eggs into that basket of thinking, and it can't think its way out of that. But let it think. Thinking is very useful. We don't hate thinking; it's useful when we know how to use it and not have it run us. So just beginning to have more and more trust in this quality of simple awareness that cuts through all the confusion—all the confusion and sense of self that comes from mistaken perception, fed by pleasant-unpleasant vedana not being recognized, and boom, boom, boom.

As the Buddha said, this is just a very deep habit of our minds. All of our minds. I'm pretty sure all of us here, you know? It's not something you are doing because you're so hopeless. It's not something that's happening more to you because you can't meditate. That's sakaya-ditti. That's personality view arising out of an unpleasant experience.

So when a moment of consciousness is flavored or distorted by greed, hatred, or confusion—the hallucinations, the vipallasas of perception—we just can't recognize accurately. The Buddha talked about it a lot in relationship to perceiving what is in constant change as being permanent, perceiving what is unsatisfactory or dukkha as being satisfactory and happiness producing, perceiving what is no sense of separate lasting self as being me or mine, and perceiving what is not beautiful as beautiful.

Here I'm just talking about the vipallasa of perceiving any experience as me or mine, how fast that comes from this distortion of perception. We just can't recognize accurately.

Again, the Buddha: "When one dwells with a mind obsessed and oppressed by ill will, and does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen ill will, on that occasion one neither knows nor recognizes as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both." The same applies when the mind is impassioned by lust or bewildered by delusion, by confusion.

He says "on that occasion" because the mind moments are constantly arising and changing—thank the good Lord, or it would really be awful. Imagine being oppressed by ill will and that's it, from now till the end of eternity. Well, it feels like that, doesn't it? Or as Tejaniya would say, that's how the kilesa is doing its job. When you're caught in a strong mental state, its job is to say, "Yeah, and you're going to feel like this for the rest of your life." Every thought that comes up is colored by that ill will.

You imagine your vacation, but because of the ill will, it's like, "Oh, it's probably just going to be hurricane season. It's probably going to be too expensive. I'm probably going to break my leg. My partner and I will probably have a fight. Why should we even go?" Then when the mind is impassioned by lust, it'll be, "So great! In fact, I'm leaving the retreat now to go on that vacation because it's going to be so fantastic!" We can't recognize accurately. We can't tell our own good or the good of another or the good of either.

But when we can recognize that one of these qualities is circling around in there, coloring the perception,

we can remember, "Oh yeah, I can't recognize accurately." You can't push through it, but you can know. And it's been such a gift to me to really understand that when I see there's ill will in the mind, aversion or doubt or confusion, I think, "Oh, I have to figure out what's the right thing to do now." Don't you? When your practice isn't going right, you think, "Well, I've got to figure out what to do." And you forget to notice that all the thoughts are coming through a perception that's distorted by aversion, because you've already decided it's not going right. Probably it's unpleasant. It's usually unpleasant when it's not going right—rarely is it really pleasant when it's not going right. And so it's unpleasant, there's probably a little bit of aversion, there's the whole idea that comes up of "I can't do it," and so on, and then we decide what we should do to fix it.

You come in and talk to one of us: "I've decided I'm going to do this. I've got to get more concentrated. I've got to get less concentrated. I've got to get more precise. I've got to get less precise." And we go, "What's in the back of your mind there?" You go, "What do you mean?" "Maybe there's some aversion." "Oh, right. Aversion."

I mean, it's the same thing for me. I say, "I'm looking for craving. I can tell everything's tight. I'm looking for craving. I can't see it. The mind's balanced. The mind's clear. I'm just going to—oh, wow. Oh my gosh. Totally filled with craving. Distorting every perception for the last half hour. Duh. Okay."

But I do know, once you recognize, you don't know what exactly is happening, but you know: I can't trust this. Whatever the mind says, it can't assess accurately. So just relax back into the steadiness, the long process of conscious awareness, without trying to come to any conclusion about your practice, about yourself, about what it means, about good or bad. Just the long process of conscious awareness. Can we take refuge in that?

It's an amazing thing. You just quit trying to do it right and say, "Well, am I sitting and walking?" "Yeah, but not right." "Continuous?" "No, there was that moment I spaced out." "Are you going into town for pizza?" "No." "Are you more or less sitting and walking?" "Okay, that's it." Sooner or later awareness will come back because there's really nothing else to do. We set it up that way. That's why there aren't TVs up here like in the airport. You've got to come back to awareness because it's the only show in town. Then it gets interesting again. Thank God, it gets interesting.

Okay, that was a sidetrack.

So these vipallāsas, these distortions of perception—taking any experience as being me or mine—is really how sakkāya-diṭṭhi comes up, and the perceiving of it in that way. But it's also not just this. We can see that process here, and this is very subtle. But in the grosser or wider way, in the world, the whole sense of perception being informed by our history, by our past, by the media, by our culture—and not recognizing that it's a selective perception, and that other people's is different—is really how we get into all this struggle, all this conflict, all this "I'm better, you're wrong," and all the pain and the racism and the homophobia and implicit bias based on perception that is fed from our conditioning.

You know those tests they have for implicit bias about all different kinds of subjects?

I don't know if you've ever taken one. They come on the computer and show an image alongside different words – it could be about gender, nationality, race, or anything else. The image appears with words, and you have a set of words to match, but you have to match them really quickly, going with the first thing that comes up. The screen moves so fast you don't have time to think about the way you ought to respond – the way I think as a good person I would respond – because it goes so quickly and keeps speeding up.

And so the perception that's down there in our unconscious gets highlighted. It's really fascinating, and I think really important for all of us to see: this is how it works. It works in these bigger ways in the world, and it's also working moment to moment to moment, every moment of our life, in terms of this concocting of a story, a sense of self, a personality view – sakkāya-diṭṭhi.

Anaïs Nin, the French writer, said, "We see the world not as it is, but as we are." That's a great example of how perception feeds our whole description of the world. And once we identify with a perception, once we hold on to it without realizing we're clinging to it, something happens. I call it selective perception. There's a description of what's happening, and without even recognizing that we're doing it, the mind tends to just notice the perceptions that feed that particular view, that are in alignment with it. We can completely ignore other perceptions that don't fit in. We don't even know we're doing it.

A simple story someone told me at a retreat at Spirit Rock recently illustrates this beautifully. She was laughing about it – I had talked about perception and she came to me saying, "Wow, this is a great story." She had woken up in the morning, lying in her bed, and she could hear this gentle rain falling. She thought, "Ah, just a lovely gentle rain. It's so nice, so peaceful." She was really appreciating it, just lying there in bed listening to the rain.

And this is where, with any sense contact, the whole sense of personality view can come up. So she's lying there listening to the rain, and the sense of how cozy and nice it is in bed, how she can just lie there, how peaceful it is – memories of childhood and all the rest of it, right?

Then she got up, getting dressed to go to the meditation hall early, thinking she'd just walk over in the rain since you have to go outside there. As she's getting dressed and can see outside her window, she's going, "It must not be raining too hard because people aren't using umbrellas or raincoats. I guess they're just very hardened." So she goes out thinking, "It's so lovely, the cool morning. The rain is so fine, I'm hardly noticing it."

Until she got to the meditation hall and realized it wasn't raining. It hadn't been raining. Whatever sound she'd heard that she was perceiving as rain, she had no clue what it actually was. She said, "I could just go into don't-know." But she had, for I don't know how long – even seeing everybody walking around without raincoats or umbrellas, even walking outside herself – she was going on about the rain and how nice it was. It took her until she'd been outside for some minutes before she really got it: it's not raining.

She thought it was great, and it is great – this is how strong perception can be. This is really where the sense of personality view gets constructed in a moment. But this is what we can see: how it gets constructed, concocted out of vedanā, out of saññā, and out of the papañca. It arises in a moment, can get really strong, but then dissolves again. And it's really gone.

Really noticing how this happens is important, because it can be very strong. Any sense experience can give rise to this "taken as me" – the whole story of me, suffering or happy, all the memories that fit with that particular story. The sense of me is really strong. It comes up all the time.

But in retreat, and sometime about now for many people, you could have – I'm just making this up, this isn't anybody's story – say, a particular experience of being cold. Feeling cold, like my body doesn't do well with cold, and it tends to shrink. Being cold and feeling kind of tight, then noticing aversion, then feeling I can't really practice well, and what's the matter with this body, and a whole story starts. All the memories come up that feed that particular story of me – someone who doesn't fit in, someone whose body doesn't deal with the cold.

Someone whose body doesn't deal with the heat. Someone whose body doesn't deal with anything. Someone who has aversion to something as simple as cold. And all the times in my life when I haven't been there—the whole litany unfolds.

And then, the next day it's hot. Like, "Oh my god, so hot. I can't deal with the heat." Or maybe you like the heat. You go, "Oh, I can relax. There's no aversion. Everything's flowing. It's going so well. Warm, pleasant awareness, steady awareness. Wow, I'm really such a good yogi." And all the stories come—you remember all the insights you've had, all the times it was so pleasant. And then more pleasant things come, and more pleasant comes, and the mindfulness starts to drop away and you're back on the beach in Bali.

But right now, in Bali, they're waiting for the volcano to blow. So, "Oh no, I'm in Bali and the volcano's going..." It just keeps going, going, going. And then suddenly, "Oh, what's happening now?" Stepping. And that whole bubble of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is gone.

Noticing, noticing how *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* can arise from any sense contact. *Vedanā*—pleasant, unpleasant—the perception of what it is, and then all the thoughts and associations and the memories of past and the thoughts about future and the assessments about the present. That's *papañca*. That's the arising of a sense of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*.

Notice, as Ajahn Sumedho describes it: so then the self arises. Just can be from hearing a sound of rain, or a feeling of cold, or a sense of "my breath is too rough." It could be anything. "So then the self arises. I start thinking about myself, my feelings, my memories, my past, my fears, my desires, and the whole world arises around Ajahn Sumedho."

You notice that? Sometimes we don't—we just think that *is* the world, that's how it is. When we look at it, we go, "Am I really the center of everything?" Well, it sure feels like it. "It takes off into orbit, my views, my

feelings and my opinions. I can get caught in that world, that view of me that arises in consciousness. But if I recognize that, then my refuge starts to no longer be in being a person. Then it can vanish. The world of Ajahn Sumedho ends. That doesn't mean Ajahn Sumedho dies and the world ends or that I'm unconscious. In Buddhadharma, the world is the world that gets created in consciousness. That's why we can be living in different worlds. The world of Ajahn Sumedho is not going to be the same as the world you create. But that world arises and ceases. Both of the worlds arise and cease. And that which is aware of the world arising and ceasing can transcend the world."

So this is really what we can notice: how the birth and death of the story of self, the sense of self, happens hundreds of times in a day. Really noticing how there can just be sense perception occurring, and it can just be what it is in the light of awareness, and then suddenly it can coalesce into the story of me, and then back again. You can call it—I'm using something Ajahn Buddhadasa said about something else—but I call it volunteering for suffering.

A good example: once I was on a retreat, sitting very peacefully, and I had a little cough. So I cough, cough, and then I felt a tickle in my chest. Tickle, tickle, cough, cough. Other things are happening. Tickle, tickle, cough, cough. Suddenly the thought comes up, "Oh my god, I've got bronchitis." So that thought—I'd had bronchitis previously. So that was a memory. I'd been really sick. Not like the day before, but a long time ago.

But that thought came up. So that was a perception: "This is bronchitis." It came up, and it was unpleasant. It came up with fear and aversion. And everything just coalesced into this: "Oh my God, I've got bronchitis. What am I going to do? I'm on retreat. I can't go to the doctor." Volunteering for suffering.

And then I went back to practice. Well, you can't see clearly when the mind is filled with aversion. Should I leave the retreat? Should I go to the doctor? Okay, what's happening now? Cough, cough. Tickle, tickle. That's all that was happening. That's all that was happening.

And then I could see the mind go back and forth between just being present with that and—boom—the whole balloon of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* and my past and bronchitis and what to do. And then it would go away again with steady attention. That's what I call volunteering for suffering. I could watch the mind get a little bit bored with this tickle, tickle, cough, cough, hearing, hearing. It's like, "Okay, I'll suffer. Oh my God, I've got bronchitis."

So the world arises—of Carol—and then that world ceases, that particular world of Carol.

Now, on the retreat I was on, I was seeing this happen: the world of Carol coming and going, all these different worlds, these different thought trains. And I had, previous to the retreat, watched a movie. I don't know if any of you have had this unfortunate experience of having to re-watch some movie that you had the misfortune to watch before you came on retreat. Once, on my first three-month retreat, I had to relive every episode of a sitcom that I'd watched as a younger person. Every episode. Another one would

start, and I'd go, "Please, God, no." It would start—Dick Van Dyke—it would start again, and I'd go, "Oh no, please." It's all in there, as Joseph would say.

But anyway, I had watched this movie, so it would be running in my mind. It was some suspense movie—Harrison Ford, the good guy being chased, innocent and wrongly accused. So it would be the Carol story, whatever it was, and then there'd be *The Fugitive* for a while.

And then, when I stopped being resistant, I was just noticing: seeing and thinking and sensation and pleasant and unpleasant. It was exactly the same. There was a thought and an image and a perception and a pleasant and unpleasant. One was the Harrison Ford movie and one was the Carol movie. But neither one had—in that sense of just perception, just what was happening—any more reality. Because the Carol movie was made up, like the bronchitis. That wasn't really an accurate description of what was happening.

So when I saw that, it was really cool. We really can just not always jump into the *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, which feels so real and so accurate. We can notice how it comes, how we suffer, how it goes. The pleasant ones we suffer from too, because there's still that sense of me, that *vipallāsa*, that hallucination of perception that's in the way of recognizing—as Ajahn Amaro likes to say—the peace and ease that is the natural peace and ease of mind and body when it's not distorted, when it's not troubled by identification with *kilesa*.

So, starting from perception and the *vedanā* that can fuel it, just noticing when the whole world of you—or Adam Sameera, or Harrison Ford, or whoever it is—arises, and when it dissolves again. The magic show goes away. And then keep on with the steady awareness, because we can see not only the coming and going, but then when the magic show goes, we can notice just moments of calm, of peace and ease, of no big anything going on.

As Ajahn Buddhadasa likes to talk about, these moments of—he calls them moments of emptiness—empty of sense of self, empty of personality view. Put it that way: it's just not arising.

And Ajahn Buddhadasa says normally we don't notice these moments, because the habit of our mind and our interest is to get so involved with whatever particular sense object is arising. We get involved with the experience and with all the concoctions, all the creations that come out of it. Then we're fighting against: "No, I'm really not a worthless person because I stubbed my toe and I tripped and that just proves what a klutz I am." And then, and then, and then. That was just a moment. We notice that go away again.

We normally don't notice when it's gone, because we're so entranced by the concoctions and the interpretations. But when it goes again, stay present. There are sometimes just moments of space, or calmness, or simplicity, in between the next arising of sense of self.

And what many people have noticed—you'll see this often—when we're not so used to that spaciousness, it's not interesting. Here's again the sense of neutral, neither pleasant nor unpleasant vedana, giving rise to a perception that's distorted by moha, by confusion, by not seeing clearly. "Oh, nothing's happening."

Do you ever find yourself waiting for the next interesting thing to occur? Just check it out if you notice it. Does the interesting thing that finally occurs, even when it's unpleasant, have anything to do with some kind of sakkāya-diṭṭhi? You know, like just being here—Buddhadasa talks about generating a contentment with this emptiness of self, generating a contentment with just the simplicity of non-concocting, of non-papañca.

It's like... nothing. Waiting. Nothing's happening, but I'm waiting for the next thing. And even a suffering sense of self is preferable to just this moment of simplicity. Just simplicity.

The Buddha said the end of papañca is the end of conflict. The end of papañca—just in a moment, don't think end forever, but just in a moment. Like my friend when she was just with the breath, the end of papañca was just: this is what's happening. Oh, that's that sound. Same sound, maybe still unpleasant. No conflict. That's what's happening. Just this sense of steady, moment-to-moment presence with whatever's arising, just as it is.

So simple, we can't stand it. Because we're not there—we're not there. As T.S. Eliot says, it's "a condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything." The everything it costs is simply the concoction, in a moment, of the me-story. And when it's really that present, that simple, it really is the end of conflict in a moment, the end of confusion, just in a moment.

And I'm sure you know the Bahiya story. I'm not going to tell the whole story, but just this teaching—I decided at the last minute to share it.

Bahiya is so urgent to get a teaching that he's grabbing the Buddha on his way to alms round, saying, "Please, just give me something." So the Buddha gives him this pith instruction. This is it, all you need to know, three lines:

"So, Bahiya, you should train yourself in this way: In reference to what is seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to what is heard, there is only what is heard. In reference to the sensed—like the physical sense—only what is sensed. In reference to the cognized, what is known by the mind, only what is cognized. That is how you should train yourself."

There's another sutta where the Buddha says that when he's seeing or hearing or whatever, he does not conceive of another thing to be heard. There's just the hearing. He does not conceive of someone who is hearing. He does not conceive of another thing that's unheard that could be heard. He's not conceiving of anything. There's just the hearing.

So he goes on to Bahiya: "When for you there will only be the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bahiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor there nor in between. This, just this, is the end of dukkha."

Just for a moment. There's no you. There's just what's happening. A condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything.

Thank you for listening.

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