Purifying Habits of Our Mind: Dāna and Sīla

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:03:37

Around this time you might be wondering how we can possibly keep having more things to say. But we do, and we will.

I want to move in a direction from what Guy was speaking about last night—the Third Noble Truth, in case you forgot—the remainderless cessation, the relinquishment of craving, of clinging, as the Buddha described it: this unshakable deliverance of mind. This is one of my favorite quotations, and I think he read it: "That unshakable deliverance of the heart—that indeed is the essence of the holy life. That is its goal." Just to remember: this unshakable deliverance of mind and heart.

It stands to reason that if this is the essence of the holy life, of the Buddha's teaching, then everything he taught was in service of helping us purify the heart and mind. It's the pure heart, the pure mind that can recognize Nibbāna in a moment—the complete relinquishment, or even these momentary moments of freedom. All of his teachings are to help us purify in this way.

From the Dalai Lama: "When the mind, the heart, is completely free of negative emotions and tendencies—we could say kilesa—it understands and knows all phenomena. It is only because there are obscuring veils between the mind and its object that we are unable to know all things. When these veils have been removed, no new power is needed. Seeing or recognizing and being aware is the nature of the mind, the heart itself. As long as the mind exists, it has the ability to know. But this ability does not reveal itself until all obscurations have been removed. This is what it means to realize enlightenment."

What I want to talk about tonight is this: in terms of utter relinquishment, but also moment-to-moment freedom, recognizing that the whole range of the Buddha's teachings—all the activities of our life—can be in service of recognizing when there's kilesa, and of cultivating qualities that purify the heart and mind. This isn't only accessible in the very subtle levels of meditation. Everything he taught serves this purpose.

Remember, Guy mentioned the sense of momentary freedom. The way Ajahn Buddhadasa speaks about that—he has this great talk called "Nibbāna for Everyone." He was talking to Thai lay people quite some time ago (he's no longer with us), because there had come to be a sense that Nibbāna was just meant for when you were dead, or it was just for some other people. And he's saying no, Nibbāna is for everyone.

Just this little part: he's saying we look further to the fact that kilesas are also saṅkhāra dhamma—compounded phenomena. In other words, kilesas are things that have birth and death. So when the kilesas occur, the causal conditions are present. And when the causal conditions that bring about the kilesas cease, they simply become extinct, just dissolve. Just as Guy was saying—the sense of the

coolness of Nibbāna, the flame just blows out. The kilesa in that moment ceases to exist.

Although this extinction is temporary—in other words, the coolness takes place temporarily—the phenomenon has the real sense of Nibbāna, even though it is not the lasting one. Hence, temporary Nibbāna does occur for those of us who unavoidably have some impurities left. Should there be any of us with one or two impurities rolling around?

This is really what I'm basing this talk on, and what the Buddha's teaching is based on: the whole aspect of practice is not only meditation, bhāvanā. Often when the teachings would be talked about, it's called dāna-sīla-bhāvanā—the three pillars: generosity, virtue or non-harming behavior, and meditation. All of those are part of the path.

When I was first introduced to this practice in India many years ago, doing ten-day retreats with Goenka, of course it was a meditation retreat, so it was really about meditation—although he talked about dāna and sīla, generosity and virtue, a lot. But the meditation was what we were doing, and that's where the fascination was.

When we came back to this country, the Westerners who brought it back were taking Buddhist meditation out of the context of Buddhist cultures—the Theravāda out of the context of the cultures in Sri Lanka, in Thailand, in Burma. The meditation aspect was emphasized more, because it's really what's interesting, and where the real subtlety comes, where we can truly recognize how the mind works and what freedom is.

The teachers would talk about the importance of generosity, the importance of sīla. I'm not saying this was the teachers' view, just how I heard it—but I know I'm not the only one. It was kind of like: that stuff was good, that was nice, and you needed to have some sīla, some generosity, so you could meditate and really get there, right?

There's the famous saying of Munindraji, one of Joseph's teachers. When he came over, he said, "You know, you guys here—you're like you're in a boat rowing as hard as you can, but you forgot to untie it from the dock." You've got to pay attention to dāna and sīla. These are really important aspects.

More and more over the years, I've come to deeply appreciate—not that we've got to do that to prepare the mind—but that these aspects of the path are aspects of transforming consciousness. They're ways of living that are part of our path of liberation. All aspects of the path, everything the Buddha taught—he didn't teach something extra just because it would make you feel good. Everything is, as he said, the essence of the path: freeing the heart and mind from the habit of kilesa—of greed, of hatred and aversion, of delusion.

I want to talk a bit about all of this tonight, and probably into my next talk as well. Starting to see that all these different ways can help us cultivate, can help us transform the habits of our consciousness. Because different aspects of our experience are available at different times, depending on the conditions. Here,

when you're deep in a retreat, there are times when that subtlety Guy was talking about last night is really available, and you can really appreciate it. But even on retreat, is that available to you all the time?

And you think, well, okay, now I've just got to slump along because nothing really good is happening, but I've got to slump along until I can get there and see the gap. That's really wasting the opportunity—not understanding that every moment offers us a chance to really see what's going on in the heart and mind and to work on transforming our habits of consciousness.

It's no secret, I don't think, by this time, how these kalesa habits operate so often beneath the level of conscious awareness. You know how they just suddenly pop up when you really think, "I'm done with that one. Things are going fine, things are going well." And all of a sudden it just comes roaring up. You've seen through this thing, but suddenly greed or aversion or whatever just reemerges. That can trigger doubt if we don't really understand how subtle and deep the habits of the kalesas are. If we start to understand that and recognize all these different ways that we can really be purifying these habits, then we don't get into doubt. We just see, "Okay, what's up now? What's available?"

Mingyur Rinpoche describes meditative awareness—because sati, mindfulness, is the thread that runs through all the different aspects: dana, sila, bhavana. Nothing's really possible without mindfulness, without recognizing. He describes meditative awareness as becoming cognizant of, or knowing, the quality of the mind—not just the phenomenon, the object that's perceived by the mind, but really becoming more and more tuned in to the quality that's present in the mind that's aware in any particular moment. That's really the level we're working on with all these different ways of purifying and shifting the habits.

One model I want to refer to tonight and next week involves three levels of kalesa, or of purification, that come up in our experience. The first, in terms of kalesa, is called the torments, or the kalesa of transgression. This deals with actions and speech—when the kalesa is so strong, it comes up so strong or so unseen that it gives rise to intention and motivation that leads to action or speech. On this level, we're working with dana and sila to counter and purify this level of kalesa of transgression.

The second level is called the obsessive. I think you all have a sense of what that means—obsessive kalesa. Maybe you're not acting it out, but again and again, in the mind, in the mind, you just can't put it down. Maybe you don't even recognize it, but that is where collectedness of mind is what really begins to protect and purify, on this level of obsessive kalesa.

The third level that's talked about is called the latent—the underlying potential for kalesa to arise given the appropriate conditions. That's when you're minding your own business and everything's copacetic, and suddenly, out of seemingly nowhere, zoom, it comes up. They say it's like a seed that has the potential to sprout if it's given water and sunshine and all the appropriate conditions. The Buddha says this level—this latent level of greed, hatred, delusion—is abandoned not by acts, but by wisely seeing, by wise attention, by wisdom. I'm going to talk about that one next week.

Tonight I'll start by talking about this first level of transgressive torments, and about dana and sila, and see how far we get.

So, starting to talk about generosity—not just as a nice thing, a good thing, what we should do for people less fortunate, which is how I was brought up. That's not bad, but it's a certain distancing kind of a thing. Instead, I'm thinking about dana as a transformer of consciousness, a transformer of the habits of heart and mind. With all of these things, our interest is really in the quality in the heart and mind, more than the outer appearance. It always comes down to intention.

Generosity, dana, as I'm sure you're aware, is something the Buddha talked about a lot. Usually when he first began talking to lay people, generosity would be the first thing he would discuss, and then go on to sila. In a way, he laid it down as the foundational quality of the whole sasana, the whole system he set up of nuns and monks and lay people living together and supporting one another. It's this really ennobling quality of the heart on our path of awakening.

Many times when the Buddha would be meeting either one person or a whole group of people, with his all-seeing mind he could recognize someone who he thought could be ready to hear the true Dhamma. But he would begin by talking about dana, talking about sila. Not as "this is what you should do," but because when the heart and mind tune into the quality of generosity, it brightens the heart, brightens the mind, uplifts, and brings the happiness of the wholesome. It's really interesting—even just thinking about generosity can do that, whether one's own or another's. Not trying to, but just noticing, is really quite powerful.

For example, just this morning before I came up here, I was having breakfast and reading the headlines on the BBC, which is never a very uplifting experience. I was reading the headlines and I could notice my consciousness, my heart, getting heavy, more contracted, just from reading. And then at the end of whatever news, it's like everything's reported: this was said on Twitter, that was said on Twitter. It's just like everybody on Twitter is out there putting down everybody else who has a different point of view. I'm thinking, "And this is the news?" So-and-so said this, and so-and-so said that, and they think this. It's like one giant papañca that's taking over the world.

It's really kind of shocking.

So after ten minutes of that, I was feeling heavy and contracted. I just needed to look at my notes for the talk. I wasn't even trying to think about it—I was just looking at the dāna section. I hadn't decided which stories to use, so I was just picking them out. Five minutes, that's all I did, just looking. And when I put it down, the whole tenor of my consciousness had completely shifted. I was feeling really happy, really appreciative, just from reading little stories—which I already knew—of other people's generosity. It just touches that place of generosity and wholesomeness in one's own mind stream. And it's really like an uplift.

So happy, but not like the happy of "Oh, I feel happy, I feel so good, this is pleasant." Yes, that's true, but that's incidental really. The happiness is that the mind is bright, the heart is energized, because it's the happiness of that coolness of a moment of no kilesa. That heaviness is just gone. And there's the happiness of generosity, of non-clinging, of appreciating, of connecting—it brightens the heart and mind. It's really quite remarkable.

Because if you were to go out and try to feel happy, try to feel good, that's a different thing. But to see the power of this is really very strong.

Generosity has a motivation and intention in the heart-mind. Obviously, it's transforming—in a moment of generosity—the habit of greed or holding on or needing something. But it also, interestingly, in that moment is transforming the kilesa of ill-will. There's a saying—I didn't understand it for a long time, but it's kind of commentarial—if you're feeling really not good about someone or annoyed with them, give them a gift. And I thought, "What's that about?" But it's assuming you give a gift not in a spirit of "Here, take this and be happy," you know—but that you're actually really giving it from the heart of generosity. And you can't be generous without it cutting through the sense of separation, without the sense of me and others dissolving. It's like, "Oh, please take this." And it really cuts through ill-will and that sense of separation, the separate fearful self. It's a very interesting quality.

So again, it's not so much about what's given or what you should do, but this motivation in the heart and mind.

Another aspect of it is that when we're really consciously tuning in—the mindfulness—you might notice greed, and you might consciously tune into generosity. And there are like three different moments of happiness about it, or three different ways we experience the happiness of the pure heart and mind.

One is in the moment of motivation, where you really just take the moment to tune in. "Yes, I have this time or this thing I want to give"—whatever it is—and tuning into that motivation of offering. And that really brightens and uplifts the heart and mind.

The second is in the actual doing of it, either the giving or the sharing of your time or whatever it is, the actual doing of it—assuming all of this, we're doing it consciously, doing it with awareness.

And third is in reflecting afterwards, wise reflection on that act of generosity. This is something I'll read a sutta about later, but we often don't do this. To think, even at times of small generous actions that you've done, when you're having a hard time, is a way to really transform the consciousness. It's something we often don't do. We have such an idea that it's just being egotistical—"I'm so great." But if it is egotistical, if you're thinking "I'm so great," it won't have the effect of brightening the heart and mind. You'll be able to tell. But sometimes just to look and think, "Oh yeah, there was that time..." And you're remembering it in a feeling way, in a motivational way. You can just remember that moment of sharing, that mutuality. And again, the wholesomeness of it just arises. It's what you could say is kamma vipāka. Vipāka is like the

result of a moment of kamma, a moment of action, a moment of intention. So the kammic result of wholesome action—it comes up in memory.

Have you noticed this sometimes here on retreat? Perhaps you've noticed it in the other direction as well—you're having all these memories of the unwholesome things you did in your life, and waves of remorse arise. I know many people experience this. That's also a kind of vipaka. But there can be times when a memory might come up of some wholesome act of generosity you performed. And you can just feel and appreciate that. Let that in. That's a wholesome moment too.

As I said, when I grew up, the sense of generosity as being good and appropriate was always there. Certainly, I find in many ways this culture here in America is a very generous culture. A lot of people offer a great deal of time and money and support in many ways. But what I never understood—and this might have just been my loss from how I grew up—is that generosity was always more outwardly directed toward the result of what you give, which reflects our focus on the object, on the phenomenon.

What I didn't understand, really until I spent a lot of time in Thailand and Burma practicing in meditation centers and monasteries, just being there in a culture that deeply values generosity, was the joyful, contagious aspect of tuning into this quality of generosity—both in the offering and in the receiving. I really didn't grow up understanding or experiencing that at all.

But to really see how wholesome goodness, the wholesome qualities of heart and mind, are truly contagious. So too are the kilesas, of course. But in some ways, as I mentioned, just this morning reading a few stories, the whole mind really transformed in that moment without planning it. Because goodness kind of touches goodness. It lets it come up and manifest. It's really in some ways more our truest nature—truly transformed consciousness.

I want to share that the Buddha in a way set up his whole sasana so that generosity was the foundation. This is from the Buddha:

"Bhikkhus, Brahmins and householders are very helpful for you. They provide you with the requisites of robes, alms food, lodgings, and medicines in times of sickness." Those are the four requisites that bhikkhus and nuns can accept from lay people. "And you, bhikkhus, are very helpful to Brahmins and householders as you teach them the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end, with the correct meaning and wording. And you proclaim the spiritual life in its fulfillment and complete purity. Thus, this spiritual life is lived with mutual support for the purpose of crossing the flood and making a complete end of suffering."

There's a way that this practice of going out every day for alms food—monks in particular aren't allowed to keep food overnight—means you can't completely isolate yourself from lay people. This mutual aspect of generosity is really at the core of supporting each other to cross the flood. I love that this is there.

Even today in Thailand and Burma, even if in some of the monasteries or meditation centers where I stay

there's cooking—where the food is offered but cooked on site—even so, the monks will go out every morning on alms round with their bowls. Even in very poor areas, very poor neighborhoods, not everyone participates, but people know they're coming. There's always a little novice running ahead ringing a bell in Burma so people know they're coming.

I've watched, I've gone along and observed. People come running out—and a lot of people don't—but the ones who want to, they come running out, sometimes with their little children, and they stand there. What they can offer might be a spoonful of rice, or two spoonfuls of rice. Often it's just that. But there's this sense of appreciation and respect on both sides. The monks don't acknowledge it personally. It's not like a personal gift. It's an offering to the whole Sangha, to keep it going. But there's this sense of such deep appreciation.

One time, years ago, after a big cyclone in Burma had really destroyed a great deal of people's homes and much of the rice crop, people in the area around this meditation center where I often stay really didn't have—they had much less than usual, and usual isn't very much. But then some group had offered a lot of money for what's called a rice dana. Each household would come and receive a big fifty-pound bag of rice to take home. A friend of ours, a monk from Mexico, was staying there. So the next morning, he said, when they went out on alms round—

So every day when they'd go out on alms round, there were the usual families that would come and offer. You kind of knew who was going to be there.

But this next day, after the rice dana, so many more people were out there offering—people who hadn't been able to before. And the first thing they wanted to do was simply offer a little bit of rice back to the Sangha.

This sense of mutuality is profound. My mind can go, "Well, big deal, three spoonfuls of rice." I mean, it's so pathetic that my mind could even go that way, rather than just appreciating how this generosity—both the giving and the receiving—is in that moment really purifying habits. It's bringing real happiness to people on both sides, just to be able to offer like that.

I want to share a few little things that I like, because maybe hearing about generosity can bring this kind of happiness to our heart and mind. And recognizing it's not the happiness that comes because it's about you—just the hearing itself. And if it doesn't bring that happiness, you say, "So what?" Just notice that.

I cut this out years and years ago from the New York Times. This man, Matt Dawson, was at the time 78 years old and still working for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit. He'd been working for them for 59 years, driving a forklift and doing as much overtime as he possibly could just so he could give most of it away. He said he had donated more than a million dollars to schools and charities since 1994. He said, "I get joy, happiness out of this. I can go home and sleep good."

He only got as far as seventh grade in Shreveport, Louisiana, came to Detroit in 1940 and started working.

And he said, "No matter how much you make or how little you make, you've got to save a little of that. I was raised like that, to help others. I have more than enough for myself."

More than enough didn't include vacations. He drove an old Ford Escort, had a one-bedroom apartment in not a very nice section of Detroit. "It's a big house, a big car—that doesn't excite me." And he earned about $100,000 a year.

The first recipient of his donations was the United Negro College Fund, which got $50,000. Since then, $180,000 more. He gave $200,000 to Louisiana State University, $20,000 to the NAACP, $112,000 to churches in Detroit and Louisiana—and on and on. Amazing, isn't it? It just makes him happy to do this.

Here's a note I got a few years ago from a woman who's been on retreat here. She said, "I have been on the verge of quitting a job I no longer need, wondering if or how this job serves me. I've decided to keep the job for five or six more months and give all the earnings away to causes that I love." This cause—donating to some nuns in Burma—was the first of many. "Thank you for the chance to offer this money," she wrote, "because this gift brings me great joy and opens a whole new chapter of work as dana to the world."

That's the sense of it. It's not "I'm doing such a great thing." It's "Thank you for the opportunity." That's something they say in Burma a lot—"opportunity for dana." It's a very common phrase. "Oh, there's an opportunity for dana." Do we think like that? Do you think like that? "Wow, here's an opportunity for dana." But in Burma, that's a very common phrase and expression.

Another story. This is a nun I've known for quite a few years. She had a small nunnery near Shwe Oo Min, another poor nunnery, just barely pulling it together. When we first met her, there was no electricity, and a friend of ours donated a few hundred dollars to get electricity connected. So a few years ago, she came to the meditation center. Some friends were staying because generous people offer money that we take in and distribute to different nunneries and schools. She knew this—I mean, everybody knows everything that's happening.

So she came, and we knew her for a while. We'd never—you know, she's nice enough, seemed a little bit depressed. Nothing, didn't really seem to have any kind of special spark, you could say.

But anyway, she came and she said, "I really want to start a school—a school for the really young children, grades one through four." There was a nunnery school that a lot of the poor kids go to, kids who can't afford all the hidden fees in the government school. But it's about a forty-minute walk. So all the little nuns and all the other poor kids walk up there. But in the rainy season, it's just a sea of mud, and they really can't make it.

So she said, "I want to start this school for these little kids."

And we're like, "Really?"

And she said, "You know, I just—I can't sleep. I just want to find support so I can do this. My mind is so

urgent. I can't sleep well. I can't eat well. I just want to start this school."

So we're like, "Okay, well..." We did have some funds—we could offer some money, a few thousand dollars.

Then the next year we came back, and it was amazing what you can do with not that much money. She's built just kind of a lean-to, just a shelter. She already had 130 little kids.

You've got to realize what that means. It means not only does she have to build that, invite the kids, but also hire teachers and pay regular teachers—all on donations. So it's not just the donation to start it; it's money she has to keep raising to pay teachers every month to keep it going.

Also, because there's only a tiny bit of land—there were twenty-four nuns in this nunnery—they'd had to tear down one of the buildings they lived in. They had a building to eat, buildings to live in, and they tore down one of them and were all crowded into this other little building to eat and live so that all this space could be for the school.

So she—wow.

But the really interesting thing was when she came to talk, she looked radiant. She looked so happy. She looked like a completely different person in her mind. And she said, "You know, even though now I must work really hard to raise the money every month for the teachers and to keep building new buildings—and then you need toilets, you have these kids there all day, you've got to build a bunch of toilets, and then you have to build a water tank and make your well deeper..." I mean, it just keeps going. All of this has to be donated money. Plus, never mind their food and all.

She said, "But now I feel so happy. I'm sleeping well. The energy to this school—my mind is calm and happy. I'll be so happy if I can just do this for the rest of my life."

That was a few years ago. She's still doing it. Sometimes she looks really tired. It really is a lot of work. It's not like la, la, la—it's an incredible amount of work. It's an incredible responsibility, because when there's a nunnery, the head nun really is the one who carries all the weight. But this sense of inner calm and happiness, this radiance that comes from it—it was really palpable. Just seeing that, this quality of generosity.

Okay, one last little story. Again, it's from Burma. Some years ago, before the country was so-called open and before they had regular money changing—now you can change your money in a normal way, you can actually go to a money changer place. But before, it was a trip and a half. It was all so-called black market, but that's what everybody did.

Because we'd bring in donations, we'd have a fair amount of money. And at that time, a thousand kyat note was about equal to a dollar, and sometimes you could only get five hundred kyat notes. So if you were changing ten thousand dollars, you would literally have a pile like this—it was crazy. And then you'd

have to contact the money changers and have them come. You'd have to meet them somewhere.

We'd meet at a friend's place, and they'd come with all these stacks of money, and you'd negotiate. Sometimes it felt like a sleazy drug deal, except that this is what everyone did.

So this particular time, we were just doing the transaction and talking. They were kind of young guys, and it really felt more like that than usual—like a sleazy drug deal. Then we left, and our friend, a woman who owns a B&B who had been the intermediary, later gave us the money and said, "Oh, and here's another $400."

We said, "What's that from?" She didn't want to say, but we pressed her.

As we'd been changing the money and the guys were doing their thing with their computers, we were just talking back and forth amongst ourselves about how we could use this to build toilets here, support the nuns there. We were just chatting, but they were listening.

So after we left, they went to our friend, the intermediary, and said, "What they're doing—this is great. We want to offer $400." They didn't want thanks. They didn't even want to be known. They were doing it anonymously, just this sense of wanting to offer from people you would never expect it from. And that sense of the happiness of it—it's really a lovely thing.

Another aspect that I want to acknowledge is the sense of mutuality, not just the offering. It's not just about money; it's about time, it's about a smile, it's about whatever. But also the same openness to receiving—with dignity. The offering with dignity and the receiving with dignity, and not wanting to shut it down or say, "Oh no, no, no, you keep that for yourself, you need it more."

Sometimes in a place where I feel like I have so much more and someone wants to offer, the sense is to say, "No, no, I don't want to take that." But that's not the spirit of generosity at all. It creates a block in the whole thing.

Another simple example: some nuns we were visiting wanted to invite a few of us to a meal, to a lunch. So we go, and they make this huge spread. I have photos of a table with like twenty-five different little plates of curries and fruits and this and that on it. And we know this is more than that whole nunnery has to eat for a week. We're well aware of that. And there's a sense of, "Don't do this. This is crazy. Take this food and eat it. We don't want it."

But then you realize—no, there's so much happiness and dignity in being able to offer. To receive with appreciation and dignity keeps the whole cycle going, the whole circle going. The sense of "no, not me" is really a sense of self. It's not the purity of heart and mind. So exploring that more and more too.

This is from Ajahn Pasanno, but he's commenting on a sutta of the Buddha:

"When one is generous and delights in giving, in offering, the heart tends to be satisfied and joyous. This

supports development of virtue, as a heart that is satisfied and contented easily inclines to restraint and composure. With this composure, together with the lack of remorse that virtue affords, the heart is easily settled and focused. So the meditation progresses more smoothly; the mind, the heart naturally brightens, making it suitable for seeing things as they truly are."

It's really the whole essence of the practice, right? So it is important to recognize this tendency—that wholesome qualities foster further wholesome qualities—so that we nurture the appropriate causes for the results that we are seeking.

In times when the conditions, on retreat or off retreat—and you really get it, this isn't just about retreat—when subtlety of attention isn't available, attention to actions and generosity is always available. And it's not just to be good. It's really the act that we can do to purify the heart and mind. And it's the pure heart that recognizes Nibbāna in whatever aspect, on or off retreat. So this is really what we're doing.

All right, we have a little time. I just want to say this quickly and then talk a little bit about virtue. Once when U Pandita was here teaching, a Nepalese sayadaw was here with him—U Jānapanika.

He gave a lovely talk on dana, on generosity, and out of that talk came seven aspects of the practice of offering, of giving. I just want to quickly mention them—not that you have to remember and clock through all of them, but just to bring them up.

So first, when we're giving—and again, it doesn't have to be things, it can be time, it can be caring, whatever it is—we begin by really giving mindful attention to the motivation, to the volition, really purifying before we give. The Tibetans would say it's like the generous act of the bodhisattvas: "With this act, may all beings be free from suffering." That's a great purification. But even just, as I said, not throwing the gift casually—"Oh yeah, here, have some rice"—but really purifying, tuning in, bringing mindfulness to the motivation.

And then, in whatever one is giving—time, service, money—recognize if there's any clinging, if we're really holding on, and see if you can abandon that. Abandon it not by thinking "this should go away," but by tuning into the happiness of the giving. Then in that moment, the clinging isn't there. You really can feel that.

The third aspect is something Upandita said that's not appropriate here on retreat. But if possible, giving and receiving directly, face to face. That's something built into the way it works in the nunneries and monasteries in Thailand and Burma. There's something really beautiful about it, even though it's a formal ritual.

You go to a nunnery and offer, say, a pile of money—these huge piles that look much more impressive than they actually are. But there's a real form to it. They get a tray. You put it on the tray. You hold it. They hold it. You hold it together. And then you chant. They chant a blessing. You chant together. And then often all the nuns or monks will come and chant a whole gratitude metta sutta. It's really very beautiful

and touching—even the little nunlets. There's a sense of really appreciating in both directions. It's so different from writing a check and mailing it off.

Here, of course, I can't go down to Amnesty International and meet somebody and say, "Please, take my check." That's just how it works in our context. But doing that face-to-face really has a power—not on retreat, not writing each other notes, but when it's appropriate.

The fourth is that when you're giving, again with mindfulness, really being focused on the giving. Of course, mindfulness is the thread through all of this—just knowing what we're doing as we're doing it.

Fifth, after giving, continuing to be mindful of the motivation, of the intention. Sometimes doubt comes up: "Oh, should I have really given that? Maybe I could use it in ten years." Then just bringing in mindfulness, re-clarifying the intention.

The sixth is interesting: clear comprehension of the broader context of giving. Giving a gift that, as well as you can tell, is appropriate. I don't want to go into the whole story, but if, say, you're giving something to someone who's an addict and your gift is just going to take them deeper into trouble, that might not be the gift to give. You can't always tell, but if you can, see what's appropriate.

And seventh, receiving in that same mindful, open, connected way. This sense of self and other is really cut through with generosity.

So the second aspect of these kilesas of transgression is sila, non-harming behavior. You're much more familiar with this. But to really see how the precepts work—they're kind of like guidelines. If the kilesas, the wanting or the ill will, come up really strongly and are about to drive us, sometimes just the intellectual idea of the precept will help us bounce back and not act on it, hopefully. But again, the precepts are meant to be guidelines to tune us into the motivation, the quality in the mind and heart.

So obeying the precepts while hating them and not really looking at motivation—I mean, it's better than hurting people. It's better than nothing. But that's not truly purifying in this way of working with the kilesas of transgression. We need to really look and see. And there's something I think we don't always realize.

You know, we see the sense of greed coming up really strongly, and you just—I don't know—you want to take some shampoo that you know isn't yours, and you think, well, no one will care. But you manage not to do it. You restrain yourself. That restraint is a wholesome action.

For me, I would always tend to focus on, "Well, I wanted to do it, I'm so bad, I shouldn't have had that wanting." But noticing that moment of restraint, that moment of abandoning that strength of wanting—maybe there's still wanting in the mind, but that level of transgression wasn't strong enough; you didn't act on it. Same with ill will. When you bite off hurting somebody, when you manage to keep your mouth shut when something really unpleasant is about to come out—all the different ways.

This quality of restraint is actually working to transform the habits of consciousness on this level. So we're still going to notice greed and ill will; it's not getting rid of them. But it is weakening them.

And maybe, hopefully, you've noticed—probably many of us have a commitment to living with the five lay precepts in our life anyway. But even here on retreat, taking them, and as the mind gets more subtle, I bet there are times when you've really noticed this coming up. The ill will or the greed and the wanting to act on it seems more obvious. And the sense of restraint maybe arises more easily. Or it comes up and you just know you're not going to act on it.

There's a real happiness that can come as you begin to have more confidence in the habit of sīla, of virtue, in your heart and mind—that you can learn to trust that more. Not that you're always going to be perfect, but that you can really rely on it. It really is a lovely, lovely quality, and it is truly transforming consciousness.

Just a simple example. I use this a lot, but it was a funny story. I was with a friend at Spirit Rock. It wasn't on retreat. And we're in the bookstore—if you've been to Spirit Rock, you know this bookstore, this Maha bookstore. There's so much stuff in it you can buy. I'm glad we don't have something like that here.

Anyway, we went in, this friend and I, and I wanted a particular little statue that I didn't see in the bookstore. But she sometimes volunteered there, so she knew where there were these closets somewhere else just filled with statues. She took me there, knew how to open it with the secret magnet opening. So we're opening it and it's just shelf after shelf after shelf of all these statues. We're piling through, looking for this one particular Tārā that I wanted. Which is fine—there's nothing wrong with this.

But we each, at the same moment, pulled out a different one. It's a Mañjuśrī one, which has this little sword. And both of us, we just barely touched it and the sword broke. Each of us at the same time. So we're holding it with this broken sword and we just kind of looked at each other. We didn't say anything. And then we said, "Oh, well, I guess we have to go tell Marianne we broke this. We'll have to pay for it."

But later we both saw how in our minds, just for a fraction of a second, the thought went through: we could put it back and no one will ever know. No one would have ever known. We both had that thought, and it was so clear in both of our minds that that was going nowhere. That was never even an option.

And we both could feel—not like, "I'm so great," that's not the happiness of purity—but this sense of: Wow, it's so lovely to have confidence in just knowing I'm not going to steal. You can kind of trust the heart and mind. You can really see that, can feel the purity of that.

So we did. We went off and told our friend—she's a good friend who runs the bookstore. We felt like two bad little girls going to the kindergarten teacher. She didn't care. "Ah, we glue it on. We sell it half price. It happens all the time." Just so you know, check it out if you're buying something. If it's half price, check carefully. Don't tell Marianne I said that.

But there's real appreciation in this.

And another thing that really supports sila is restraint at the sense doors. There are two ways of understanding this.

One form of restraint is the sense of keeping things more simple here. Not restraint in the sense of avoiding everything that may elicit greed or aversion, because that's impossible. And that's not purifying—that's avoiding completely. But we make it simpler here, and there's a support in that. That's restraint at the sense doors. When your mind is all over the place, sometimes it's helpful when you're walking not to look around constantly. Just keep it simple. When you're sitting in the hall, don't be checking out what everybody else is doing, because you can see it just leads to greed, just leads to aversion. Restraint at the sense doors.

But another level of restraint at the sense doors isn't so much about not looking at all. Rather, you bring, as Buddhadasa says, satipañña—mindfulness and wisdom—right at the point of sense contact. So there's seeing. "Oh, that looks so good. Maybe that juice looks really good. Let me go have some juice. Nobody's looking. Nobody will see." What's happening? Seeing. Just come right back to seeing. Mindfulness and wisdom at the sense doors. There's seeing, it's pleasant, there's wanting. You're just right there with it. You don't have to go off into all the papañca, the proliferation, the moving away from mindfulness, which tends to lead into acting out of kilesa without recognizing it.

So this restraint, the satipañña at the sense doors, is what we've been talking about in terms of mindfulness. It's not hating experience. It's just knowing it for what it is. Because as we move into the world, we're not going to go through life never seeing things we want, never hearing things that elicit ill will. Stuff is going to happen. God knows, right? It happens here. So this sense of restraint at the sense doors really supports sila, really supports not acting out of kilesa.

And again, noticing, really bringing mindfulness and wisdom to the feeling, the appreciation of the wholesomeness. Recognizing, as Ajahn Buddhadasa says, those moments of coolness when the heart and mind is free of kilesa—not waiting until you can get concentrated enough to have a really subtle sitting. If that's not happening, cultivating qualities of dana, qualities of sila, of virtue, is always available. It's not like second best either. Everything, all aspects of our life, all aspects of the teaching are in support of purifying the habits of heart and mind to recognize things as they really are.

I just want to end with this sutta from the Buddha about really wise reflection, just on this part of it. This is a lay person asking, "You teach all these deep teachings, but what about clans people like us who are living at home? We can't practice like you." So the Buddha gives six reflections, but these two are the main ones:

"There's the case where you recollect your own virtues. They are unbroken, unspotted, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, conducive of concentration. At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is

recollecting virtue, her mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. Her mind heads straight, based on virtue. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones has a sense of the goal, a sense of the Dhamma, experiences joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated."

"Then furthermore, there's the case where you recollect your own generosity: 'It is a great gain for me that among people overcome with possessiveness, I live at home, my awareness cleansed of the stain of possessiveness, freely generous, open-handed, delighting in being magnanimous, responsive to requests, delighting in the distribution of alms.'"

And the same thing—at any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting generosity, her mind is not overcome with greed, hatred, or confusion.

This is not just about feeling good—this is the transformation of the habits, the transformation of consciousness.

And the same pattern unfolds: one has a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma, and the same progression follows.

And then at the end, the Buddha said, "So, Mahanama, you should develop this recollection of generosity, or this recollection of virtue, while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children."

In other words, anytime it's available to us. No aspect of our life is outside of this quality that can really transform our consciousness to the pure heart and mind which sees Nibbana.

So let's just sit quietly for a moment.

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