Majjhima Nikāya Two: Purifying the Subtle Suffering Habits of Mind

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 58:46

I want to continue the second part of the talk I began last week, exploring how all aspects of our life and path—everything the Buddha taught—is in service of the steadfast deliverance of heart, the unshakable deliverance of mind.

Another way we can understand this is that all these different teachings offer various ways of helping us purify the habits of mind, shifting from being caught in greed, confusion, and hatred toward the wholesome, toward wisdom.

You may remember that I spoke about the three levels of kilesas. I discussed the transgressive ones and how cultivating the heart of generosity, cultivating sīla and non-harming behavior, are really powerful liberation practices for shifting habits in all different aspects of life.

The second level, the obsessive kilesas, is mitigated by the collectedness of mind, by concentration. Guy spoke about this last night, so I don't need to say too much about it. But there's this sense that when all the energy of the mind—which has been running here and there, often falling into habits of confusion and greed without recognizing it—becomes more collected, coming together in a wholesome way, then as that gets really strong, it becomes like a protection from the kilesas. They don't get in. There's a sense of purity, which is one of the reasons concentration can be so pleasant. It's the peace and ease of a mind that isn't being tormented by kilesas in that moment. That's important to appreciate.

Anyone who has experienced this happiness, this sukha of the concentrated mind, can recognize that it exists because the mind is free from kilesas at that time. Appreciating what that feels like—that peace, that happiness of a heart that's not tormented—is valuable. But it's very conditioned. As anyone knows, when the collectedness begins to disintegrate, you find out that the kilesas aren't uprooted. They were held at bay. That's useful, but often we've thought they were uprooted and we're disappointed to find them coming back. We don't know what we did wrong.

Sometimes, as the collectedness disintegrates, a kilesa comes flying up really strong just at that moment, and you get a bad mix. The concentration isn't completely gone, and as Tejaniya likes to say, samādhi magnifies—we see everything so much more clearly. Meanwhile, the kilesas exaggerate, making everything seem out of proportion. You put those two together and it's a difficult combination. When things become so intense on retreat, that's often what's going on. In that moment, you didn't do something wrong, but it can be overwhelming and certainly surprising when it happens like that. Understanding the

power of the collected mind and heart to keep away the obsessive kilesas is very important. That thinking, thinking, thinking about something just isn't arising. Many of you have described experiencing this during retreat.

What I want to talk about for the rest of this talk is the third level, called the latent kilesas. This is the one that really surprises us and keeps surprising us. It's described as the underlying potential or possibility for these tormenting mental factors to arise given appropriate conditions. It's basically like a seed, although it's not really sitting there—kilesas aren't just sitting there waiting. They're arising and passing due to conditions; it's just that certain conditions may come more frequently sometimes.

The metaphor goes like this: if a seed lies dormant for years and then gets water, sunlight, and the right kind of soil, it sprouts. The latent torments are like that—the potential for them to arise exists. Though I should emphasize it's just a metaphor, because the kilesas aren't really there as fixed entities waiting.

This is why the commitment, the interest in using all the different aspects of our life to see how this works and to cultivate the wholesome—all these different ways of purifying the heart and mind, not just through deep meditation retreats—is so important. It's not only on retreats that these latent kilesas come popping up, as we know very well.

Annie offered a beautiful response this morning when asking about how we can see a certain level clearly, have a real insight into dispassion, for example. Does it stay like that? The answer, of course, is no. The insight comes and we really understand. But every moment of consciousness is a new moment.

The mind is always arising, consciousness and the different mental factors always arising and changing. So even moments of deep insight, when we're really recognizing on what feels like a cellular level—for example, that there's nothing to want, and feeling the peace of that—or really, the mind is just turning away from some old habit that brought us suffering, and that's so clear, we can't imagine going back to it... and then, you know, it comes up again.

Once you've been through this like a hundred million times, you start to understand this is just how it is. It's not something I'm doing wrong. Getting all reactive to it is both useless, inappropriate, and brings a lot more suffering. We start to see: oh, this is how it is. This is how things are. This is where we're talking about the latent underlying tendencies.

Until we really start to trust that, it can certainly bring up a lot of dismay, discouragement. And then, of course, that inevitably is followed by doubt. Doubt that I did something wrong, doubt about what's the point of this practice—I've been doing this and this stuff is still coming up, it's hopeless. That kind of skeptical doubt. Not the doubt where, after retreat is over and you're not in that intense space, you might want to really reflect—especially if the practice is new to you—you might want to reflect and say, "Does this seem helpful? Does this seem appropriate?" Of course we do that. But that's not skeptical doubt. That's different. The skeptical doubt is just this: oh no, this is happening, it can't be right, everything's wrong,

everything's bad. We've talked about that a lot.

So we start to go through this and see how it works, see how we can access mindfulness in different ways, in different conditions, and see that these latent kilesas can spring up—sometimes more frequently than others—but that mindfulness can be remembered, that the wisdom, the insights that were there, maybe they're not always right there in the perception, but they're accessible in a way. Sometimes we can remember our way into them. I think Guy talked about that. Sometimes it's not even conscious, but it's like—I like to say cellularly or something—you know, you're really caught in greed, but there's something that knows: oh, caught feels like this. It's a little bit different.

So I want to talk about these in terms of a particular sutta from the Majjhima Nikāya that I really like. I think it's considered one of the more important suttas. It's the second one, called "All the Āsavas." Āsava is the word that's usually translated as "taints," like stains. I think Guy used that the other night. There's not a great word for it. But it's basically referring to the underlying latent, this latent level of kilesa—the taints.

Guy mentioned what they are. They're talking about three very specific ones: the potential for sense desire to arise; for bhava, for becoming—this sense of grasping, becoming a particular self in a moment; and the third is for ignorance, avijjā. These are the most subtle underlying tendencies.

This sutta, called "All the Āsavas," is where the Buddha talks about seven different ways or seven different methods for bringing wise attention to the arising of these—I'm going to use āsava just because I don't like the word taints—the arising of one of these āsavas when it's present, and then the wise attention to see what kind of attention, what we pay attention to and how we pay attention, what's feeding and strengthening the āsava and what's starving it. You'll recognize that from the wise effort—the way they describe it, you know, what feeds and what starves.

What's really interesting is that wise attention is at the core of each of these, but these seven different ways... and this isn't like, okay, the first one is insight through wise attention, and then there are six others. It's not like he's saying, okay, you losers, if you can't do the insight, here are these six other ways. All of them, he's saying, are for really uprooting these tendencies and coming to the complete end of suffering.

And you'll hear—that's why I said there's a lot to cover going through all of these—these are ways we live our life. They're not just about retreat aspects, but they're all appropriate to retreat. It's really about how we live our life. And that's why I find this really very useful.

I've been returning to this sutta over and over again for many years.

I'm not going to read the whole thing, but I'll keep referring to it. The Buddha talks about how these asavas can be exhausted. "Exhausted" means come to an end, so that's code for complete awakening. He says this happens "in one who knows and sees, not in one who does not know and see." Here he's using "see" to

mean understand.

What is wise attention and unwise attention? When one attends unwisely, both unarisen asavas arise and arisen ones increase. This is that formula. When one attends wisely, unarisen asavas do not arise and arisen ones are abandoned. So we're familiar with this. This is wise attention.

Then he goes through the seven. I'll take each one in turn.

The first is abandoned by seeing, which means abandoned by insight. Here he's really talking about wise attention. He says that a person who is unskilled does not understand what dhammas are fit for attention and what dhammas are not fit for attention. And so they don't attend to the things that are fit, and they attend to what's unfit. And then we attend in a way that is unwise.

To put it in my own language: it's noticing that if we're paying attention to something and the asavas—the sense desire—keep getting stronger and stronger, there's something about the object itself, but more likely it's the way we're paying attention that's increasing that tendency. With wise attention, reflecting wisely, we're always noticing how we're paying attention and what's the effect, what's the result.

It's not that the fitness is inherent in the object. When we say sense desire arises from giving attention to something beautiful, our tendency can be to think, "Well, I should never look at the beautiful because then desire will arise." You know how then we go into aversion, which if you're noticing, is also a taint. But it's not about the object—it's how we pay attention.

Let me read you this passage I really like. It speaks simply about the hindrances, about sense desire, which is also one of the hindrances, something we can relate to. A way that we pay attention unwisely: you could be really focused on an attractive object, but the unwise attention is that the focus is really attending to the gratification, to the beautiful aspect and the sense of personal gratification in that.

Say you're thinking about something—you smell something for lunch. You smell lasagna and you really like lasagna. And so you keep smelling, but really smelling. "It's so nice." And we just, subtly, keep doing that. With wise attention, reflecting wisely, as the Buddha says, you'll start to notice that the desire, the sense desire, is getting stronger and stronger. Then we can see, "Oh, that's unwise attention." Some of the other methods are ways we can work with that. When you've noticed it, though, I'll just say simply: we come back to mindfulness of smelling, or if you're too caught, we divert the attention to something neutral.

Ill will. We've talked about this as well. It grows. It's cultivated when the attention is unwise. We're focusing on an unpleasant object, but the attention keeps getting drawn into—this is from the sutta—the repugnant aspect. There's someone that's bugging you and you just keep looking at the thing that bugs you, the thing that bugs you, the thing that bugs you. That's unwise attention. It's not saying there's something wrong with what you're looking at. But we're seeing that the way we're paying attention is feeding the asava.

With wise attention, we notice that tendency in the mind.

We say, okay, let's shift. Let's stop doing that. And if you can't quite tell in the moment how the attention is unwise, then shift to something else, something neutral. You get a sense then how that works.

So when we're paying attention in the wrong way, the old habits are so strong, they just come shooting up. So that's one way.

The second way of unwise attention—and this feeds sense desire—but unwise attention, this is from the sutta, that feeds bhava, is when there's a sense, maybe in a deep meditative state, where again the attention is subtly on the gratification. And if there's gratification, there's also the sense of self. That's kind of me getting a little stronger in that moment. And so that bhava, that sense of becoming—it's also bhavatanha, it's a kind of craving. And that can also be, doesn't only have to be with beautiful meditation states.

The Buddha gives examples of how we attend unwisely, just how we're thinking about stuff in relationship to me. I won't read this all, but how one attends unwisely: thinking about some experience, well, how was I in the past? Was I in the past? What was I? How was I? Having been what in the past, what will I be in the future? Or will I not be in the future? Or how will I be in the future? Or what shall the future happen? And on and on, as you get totally caught in a thicket of views. Basically, as I say, that's all about me. We think we're paying attention, but we're really caught into this sense of becoming, becoming, becoming.

And the third unwise attention is how delusion, moha, comes. This is when one is attending to any mundane thing, any object whatsoever, through any of the vipalasas, the perversions of perception. So again, Guy was talking about that last night. We're not seeing through wise attention through the lens of the Four Noble Truths. Unwise is recognizing, thinking something's permanent, or perceiving it as permanent, perceiving it as giving us some kind of reliability, seeing it as self or belonging to self.

So you can see those unwise attentions happen a lot. And certainly this is on the level of our deep meditation, where we're really starting to be able to see these subtleties of wise and unwise attention. I'm not going to go into it more because I want to just mention the other ones. But this is something we've talked about, and I think you can really understand.

Seeing how subtle it is, I hope it can not be discouraging, but rather feed faith that every time there's wise attention, that's shifting the habit. You know, you don't get a big neon light: "Habit shifting! Habit shifting!" But each time it is shifting something. So that's the insight, the first one. And you can see how that can really purify.

As we know, on retreat or off retreat, that's not always available to us. So these are some of the other things the Buddha's saying. And he has a list, but he's not saying one's better than the other, just depending on circumstances.

So the second one is what can be abandoned by restraining. And this is restraint at the sense doors. Let me just read the beginning of what he says:

"What can be abandoned by restraint? Here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, abides with the eye faculty restrained, the ear, nose, tongue, body, mind. While asavas in fever of defilement might arise in a bhikkhu who abides with the eye faculty unrestrained, there are no asavas or fever of defilement in one when they abide with the senses restrained."

Again, I mentioned this a bit—by restraint we really don't mean hating all sense experience, okay? The optimum sense of restraint is restraint at the sense doors: bringing satipañña, mindfulness and wisdom, to meet what's happening as close to the sense contact as possible. And so reflecting wisely, and he always says this, reflecting wisely...

One brings in restraint through this wise reflection.

So the first level of restraint is quite simple—take the eye door or the ear door. Not just wildly looking around at everything. I think we've all recognized how this works here, how the seclusion of retreat is really supportive. Dining room practice, of course, is particularly good for this. Just going in and noticing how when you're really unrestrained, when you're not being mindful of seeing and you're just looking all around, the judgments and the *papañca* and the stories start. They begin feeding on themselves and you get really far really fast.

Pretty much the *papañca* is usually fed by *āsavas*, by *kilesas*. But restraining this doesn't mean becoming afraid to look, afraid to hear, not wanting to taste because if you taste something pleasant you'll be lost. It's not that at all, because that would just be cultivating aversion.

Rather, it's really about simplifying—just being present with the pleasant taste and not trying to have ten million options. You go to the buffet and think, "This could be good, that could be good, let me try every single thing in the little bowl for the salad because each of those could be good." You can just watch that wanting and simply let it go. Simplify. Restraint in this way means you don't have to follow every sense desire. You can notice it and just simplify and be present.

So these are two ways of restraint. Keep it simple. Otherwise, it's a bit like—I've sometimes had the sense of cravings just looking for something to land on. Sense desire just looking for something to land on. I call it mail order catalog mind. You used to get these mail order catalogs. You don't want anything, but you're looking through it anyway. And then after a while you realize you're looking for something to want, just because it's there. Restraint means closing the catalog, putting it down. You don't need to do that.

So it's not about judging from the outside which things are good and which things are bad. Again, it's always with wise reflection, wise attention. Look and see: is the sense desire habit being fed right in this moment as you're looking around all over the place? Maybe it's not. Maybe there's a lot of mindfulness wisdom and you're really seeing how seeing arises, how perception and thought arise, and it's not creating

more *āsava*. Then fine. It's not like it's always one way. It's really bringing in this wise attention and seeing what's feeding the wholesome, what's feeding the unwholesome. Out of compassion for yourself—not out of trying to get it right, but out of really seeing—this is another way to begin to purify these suffering habits.

It's not that we don't pay attention to pleasant sense experience, all six of them. Pleasant experience can be very helpful to brighten the heart and mind. But just knowing the difference—as Thích Nhất Hạnh says, when we're obsessed with sense pleasures, we suffer. When there's the happiness of a peaceful mind that really brightens us, there's no complication, no suffering. That's supportive and onward leading. We can really tell the difference more and more. Not making yourself bad or good, but just bringing in this wise attention in terms of restraint at the sense doors.

You can also restrain so much that you're feeding aversion and fear. That's also not wise attention. So just exploring this.

On the most simple level, as Ajahn Chah said, when the nose smells an odor, let it be. Leave it at the nose. Or another time he said, sound doesn't bother us—we go out and disturb the sound. So just exploring this.

This is obviously something we can do a lot in our daily life. It isn't just about being on retreat. And it's not incredibly subtle—it's quite accessible.

So that's abandoned by restraining.

The next one, and I like this one a lot, is abandoned by using.

How are *āsavas* abandoned by using? Here, a bhikkhu reflecting wisely—this is talking about a monk, but this would be the same for us—uses a robe, uses clothes, for protection from cold, for protection from heat, for protection from contact with insects, wind, burning, and so forth, and for the purposes of concealing what disturbs conscience. That's put very tidily.

Reflecting wisely, one uses food neither for amusement nor for vanity nor for making yourself look good or for embellishment, but for the endurance and continuance of this body, for ending the discomfort of hunger, and for supporting us in our life, in our holy life. "Thus shall I terminate old feelings"—old, unpleasant, difficult feelings of hunger—"without arousing new ones," without arousing greed, "and blameless shall I live in comfort and health."

So living in comfort and health, eating, and also how you deal with medicine, how you deal with where you live—

But in general, spreading it out is really looking at how we use, how we relate to all the requisites of our life. And of course, it's really interesting in terms of the whole environmental aspect of our planet now. But we're not talking about having a view and saying you should do this, you shouldn't do that, and everybody else should do that as well, because that's attachment to view. We're talking about really

looking for ourselves: How am I relating to buying new clothes? How do I decide what to wear today? How do I decide what to eat, or how much I eat? Not from an idea of should, but really watching—in this moment, is the way I'm using feeding greed, or feeding bhava, feeding becoming, feeding a sense of self?

It's really interesting. We're all different, so there's no right answer. But looking and seeing, you know? Using what we need and not needing more brings a real sense of contentment and peace in ourselves. It's an aspect of simplicity, an aspect of—I don't want to say renunciation, but it's similar. As Guy said last night, the renunciation is on a different level, but it comes out of the ease of non-clinging, not needing to become.

So I was thinking about this. There are ten million examples, but I was thinking about the eight precepts, and it's not at all that everyone should take them. It's not appropriate for everyone. But one of the ways it's interesting—if it's appropriate for one's body or if one is just interested in doing it, and some people have mentioned this to me in interviews—is taking the eighth precept, which of course involves not eating after midday. And then seeing: maybe all the fears about what was going to happen, or how it would be if I don't eat, don't manifest. Instead, a couple of people have told me they discover, "Wow, all the stuff that went on in going to get that food, a tea, and I wasn't even hungry. I don't even miss it. In fact, it's a pleasure." I call it—this is totally me, okay?—the hell realm of the dining room, in the middle of everything. Like, oh my God, just not to have to go there. It's so wonderful.

But really seeing—it's just a place to explore. Some people find that they don't eat and they have a real idea they don't want to, and it's really bad for their body. They actually need to eat, not even particularly wanting the food or feeling hungry, but they actually need to eat for health reasons. That's also important. It's not always about not eating. It may be about eating. You're eating for health, for comfort, for the sustaining of the body, for living at ease.

I have the same thing. Every night I just go and have half a rice cake or half an apple with peanut butter. And I do it without thinking about, "Oh, should I have this this time or should I have that?" All of that just feeds the wanting. But my body gets a little weak without it. So I just take this, take that, go eat it, finished. Some nights it's pleasant, some nights it's not. Some nights you're doing it really out of wisdom, clear seeing—this is what's needed.

It can be really interesting to see how we relate to things. I remember one retreat a long, long time ago. I had one particular dress with me. And I started to notice—you know, on retreat you have what you have, you just wear whatever you brought. It was a long retreat, and whenever I put on this one dress, it really generated something. I really liked it. And the room I was staying in had this full-length mirror, so every time I'd go by, I'd look at the dress. And then I started to see how this wanting to look at the dress, wanting to wear it—not noticing that this was unwise attention—was really feeding something. Then wanting something else, and something else, and sense desire would get stronger, and then bhava tanha would get stronger, because then I'd think about... I guess I thought I looked good in it, or I wouldn't have liked it.

You don't like things you think you look horrible in. Anyway, just to see how all that happened. How am I relating to this?

And then I remember when I was a nun in Thailand for about a year. There's something really so nice—you just wear white there. You have three outfits, that's it. You wear one, you wash one. It's drying, you wear the other one.

And there's nothing to think about, about it. It's what you need. It's more than what you need in the heat—much more than what you need, as Bhante was saying—but you've got no choice. All this extra kind of wanting and meaning around something as simple as what you wear wasn't there. And that's such a relief.

I remember when I came back and was on staff here after that. I was standing one morning looking in the closet, having to decide what to wear. And it was so unpleasant. I was also caught in it—the wanting. What should I wear? Should I wear this? Should I wear that? Oh my God. It was so nice just to have three outfits and not even think about it.

But you notice I didn't stick with that, did I? It's possible I could just— When my mother was getting— now I'm going out there— the last few years of my mother's life, she had progressive dementia. But she was always, up until almost the end, very ladylike somehow. She took good care of herself, always looked really nice. So we called it "the uniform," my brother and sister and I. She always had a pair of black pants and a nice blouse—just a bunch of the same ones, because with dementia, it's really hard to make choices. She could just put on the same thing. We called it the uniform.

So you notice I didn't go that way. So we look at these things. And I do look at it. Some days I just grab something and put it on. And some days there's an "oh, and this and this and that." This is where we bring in our attention. We notice: how do we use things? Give awareness to that. And this is what can bring in, at times, just a simple sense of contentment—not using more than we need, using things not out of aversion but for the comfort, the ease, the continuance of this body and for your support in your life and in your practice. Attention to how we use things.

The next one is āsavas abandoned by patience—or the word used is sometimes "enduring" or "tolerating." I prefer "patience." I find it more helpful. Patience is one of the pāramīs. It's a really powerful force in our mind, something that we can develop whenever there are difficulties, on or off retreat.

"Here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, bears cold, heat, hunger, thirst, contact with flies and wind, burning and creeping things"—remember, they're sitting outside in the woods—"and bodily feelings that are painful, disagreeable. And while pains and fever of defilement might arise in one who was not patient, there is no defilement arising in one who is patient."

So what does that mean? We've all been working with this the whole retreat, right? Being with difficult aspects, whether external or internal. And we all know there are times we're not patient. I don't like

"enduring" because that has a little tinge of disconnection—"This annoying sound is going to... I'll just endure it." But we kind of pull down, pull away, shut down, and wait for it to go away. That's not patience. Patience is really, as Suzuki Roshi would call it, the long-enduring mind, the heart—the sense of really just being present without reaction. Equanimity.

The Buddha said to his son Rāhula, "Develop a mind that is like the earth. For when you develop a mind or meditation that is like the earth, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain." And he says all kinds of stuff is thrown on the earth—beautiful stuff, ugly stuff, disgusting stuff. The earth is not horrified, humiliated, or disgusted because of that.

And he goes through all the different elements, giving the same advice for each one, including space. But this sense of "it's like this now" — the long-enduring mind is a big aspect of practice.

We have tons of stories about practice in Asia in terms of patience because the conditions are just so different. There's a lot that happens where you have no control whatsoever. And if you want to keep being there, you have to either develop patience or you just go nuts.

The thing about these stories that's energizing isn't like, "I'm so great, I made it through this as some kind of warrior." Sometimes you feel like that. But it's more that as we learn patience, something can really be with us. The heart, the mind, it truly relaxes, accepts what's happening without being so aversive, without being so caught up in it. And we can find we can really be at peace in the same circumstances that were causing us so much distress before.

Just little, simple examples. I'll go back to when I was a nun in Thailand. It was really hot in the hot season, and I had to stay in my kuti, which has a tin roof. I remember when I'd see the sun coming up in the morning — and you have three layers of clothes, long sleeves and underwear and long sleeves and a robe over, like Bhante has, and they're usually polyester — I'd see the sun coming up and my heart would just sink. "Oh gosh, will I make it through another day?" This is when I remember Ajahn Sumedho's line: "I can't bear it another minute, sweating through my robes." And then I'd find that I could.

Or one of the places I stayed at that time, quite some years ago — a Western woman being a meichi there, a nun, there weren't very many in the country. In a lot of the wats, the meditation centers there, they're also like parks. People use them like you would use a synagogue or a church here. So on weekends, a lot of people come, sometimes in buses, to hear a Dhamma talk, to take the eight precepts, to walk around in the beautiful surroundings.

I'd be doing my walking path and I'd turn around and someone would be right there with a camera in my face, taking my picture. You can imagine. Or they'd come up to my kuti and just stand in the door and stare in. "Oh, what's she doing?" "She's meditating." I didn't understand Thai, but I could tell that's kind of what they were saying.

So first it's like, "How can I stop this? They can't be doing this!" All the usual stuff. But you have to

surrender. What are you going to do? You have to surrender to it. And then really finding that it's possible. It wouldn't be your optimum conditions, but it's possible to find the sense of patience.

Again, it's really bringing wise attention. What was fueling the kilesas? My sense of how it should be and how I could fix it and what I could do — that was fueling maha dosa and unhappiness and becoming. The patience allows the way to a peaceful mind and heart in that moment. And so that's really what we work with a lot of the time.

There's a saying from Patrul Rinpoche, who was a great Tibetan teacher. He talks about the parami of patience and describes three types of transcendent patience. I just want to name them because there's one retreat where those three would just keep coming through my mind and really inspire and support me.

The first is patience when wronged, when somebody treats you wrong. The second is the patience to bear hardships for the Dhamma — which we're all doing, patience to bear hardships for the Dhamma. And the third is the patience to face the profound truth without getting too lost in fear. It says "without fear," but fear will come. It's not abandoning facing the profound truth because of fear.

And at different times, that would just give me a little energy to keep going. Not that you should be perfectly patient, but it just gives a little energy to keep going.

The next one I find really interesting because it's kind of like the matching pair with patience. Because sometimes we think the Buddha is being very—or we can get very idealistic: "I should be able to be with anything." Have you ever had that thought? Usually when you're not able to be with something, right? "But I should be able to be with anything, and that was what the Buddha was saying."

But this next one is the asavas abandoned by avoiding. Avoiding what's too intense. He gives examples: a bhikkhu reflecting wisely avoids a savage elephant, a savage bull, a savage dog, a snake, a stump—okay, a stump, you don't trip over a stump—a bramble patch, a cliff, a cesspool, a sewer, frequenting or hanging out with unwise friends, evil companions.

I love this. Because he's not saying just be with anything. It's reflecting wisely. We look and see what is fueling, what is feeding the growth of the asavas—of sense desire, of becoming, of ignorance, self, self, self, confusion.

And so, okay, maybe we don't have savage elephants here, and the dogs that bark are always behind the fence. We have savage mosquitoes, but you can't avoid them too much. But often here, what is really intense, what we need to avoid, is when something too intense and too strong is coming up inside of us. And we've talked about this a lot, where what's coming up—the energy of the kilesa, of the trauma, or the fear, or even greed—is so strong. We're trying to be mindful, but the mindfulness energy just is nowhere near as strong as this really difficult thing.

And you know how we keep saying: then the wise attention sees that even in trying to be mindful, the

kilesa is just growing and growing. That's when—I mentioned this a couple of times ago—Thich Nhat Hanh says, go look at the herbs at night. We say, sometimes that doesn't do it. Sometimes it's got to be a lot. So then we have to completely move away. Completely avoid.

There's no right or wrong in this, but it's really looking and seeing what supports. What supports coming back into a balance of heart and mind—not continuing to do what we think we should do if it's actually fueling the kilesas. So not to hold on to a view, but to use wise attention. And this is all mindfulness-based, to see what's really going on. It's very practical.

Therefore, that's why we're not doing this in Times Square. That's why we say, please give up your cell phones. It just makes it so much harder for no good reason. That's why so much of the time we're telling people, take your attention away from what's happening. Sometimes you even need to stop doing formal meditation altogether and just spend a couple of days taking walks, being quiet, drinking tea. Because that's actually more supportive of our ongoing freedom of heart and mind.

It's not always about doing formal practice. It's looking at all these different ways. What's feeding the kilesa? What's feeding the wholesome mind? In all these different areas of our life.

So sometimes the avoidance itself is difficult, because what I've discovered for myself is sometimes the thing I need to avoid isn't unpleasant. I've noticed if I'm really too comfortable, that can feed the sloth and torpor of just, "Ah, I just don't want to be with this difficult thing." And it can also feed sense desire. I'm not saying to create real unpleasant suffering, but I've just noticed in myself that too much comfort is actually not helpful, and I would avoid it. I think in some ways, the Eight Precepts' high and luxurious bed piece is along those lines. If you're just too comfortable, we just kind of start lolling around.

Looking and seeing and avoiding doesn't mean it's just what we prefer not to be with. If you're avoiding something and the avoidance is actually feeding aversion, you notice that as well. Okay, maybe avoidance isn't the thing. Maybe patience is the thing. What's helping to support the kilesa diminishing or not arising?

This isn't to make you crazy that you've got to go through it all, but it's really just to see there's all these different means, all these different methods, and the Buddha is offering all of them.

Okay, just two more and I'll say them quickly. The next one he calls removing. We've mentioned this as well. A bhikkhu reflecting wisely does not endure an arisen thought of sense desire or ill will or cruelty. She abandons it, does away with it. So again, we know this means what we've talked about as determination, as the sword of wisdom.

It's not always possible. So it's not done with aversion, but when with wisely reflecting, and there are times we can really do this. We've talked about it. We see that this particular line of thought is leading to nothing but more wanting, more fear, more agitation about the future. It's often agitation about the future, agitation about the past. And oftentimes we can go, "No, not now." That determination from

skillfulness, not from aversion, not from pushing away. If it's pushing away, then just divert your attention to something else. But sometimes we can really say, "Not now."

When I talked a couple of weeks ago about having this autoimmune disease and seeing how the papañca and the future and the worrying was taking over so much—I really saw how with mindfulness wisdom, when it was present, and there'd be some unpleasant sensation in my body, the mind would go, "Oh no, how's this going to be next week, next year?" And I could say, "You know, not now. I really don't know. I don't know that. Let's just be present." And it was amazing. That could really happen. When there's enough mindfulness, wisdom, and you really see, "I don't need to do that now"—that's removing. That's abandoning. Let's think of it as abandoning.

If you're trying to abandon and the whole thing's just getting more and more ramped up, then you know it's not being done with wise attention, it's being done with wanting or aversion. So then you choose something else. Then it's usually really taking your attention away from that object altogether and moving to something completely neutral. Redirect the attention.

This is a place where the four brahmavihāras can be useful. You know, where we talk about sometimes substituting a thought—say you're annoyed at somebody and you substitute a mettā thought. Now, we all know half the time that doesn't work. You're saying mettā filled with aversion, right? And you can notice that with your wise attention and go, "Okay, the words are mettā. What's being fed is aversion." Shift to something neutral. You just look and see.

But sometimes, and the more we practice, it can surprise you. Someone was telling me the other day that it really works. Someone was bugging them and they just switched to muditā. And they were like, "Oh my goodness. It really happened." It's not even so much that you have to feel such a great thing, but first you're choosing a wholesome thought. So even if you don't feel the muditā, but you're not feeling the envy, that's already good. That's already good. Instead of, "Oh, no, no, I wish I had that"—"Oh, may your happiness continue." Even just flat, it's not feeding the kilesa.

So this is the place that you can explore in terms of abandoning these unwholesome thoughts that are really fueling the āsavas—you can explore using the phrases of the brahmavihāras, and sometimes you find that the phrase actually brings in something real, that you actually mean it, not expecting to.

And the last one, which is of course a whole talk in itself—don't worry, I'm not going to give it—is developing, because John already gave it: developing the seven factors of awakening. A bhikkhu reflecting wisely develops the seven factors of awakening.

So I'm just going to name them all. John spoke of them all. And they develop naturally through our meditation, but they also, even in daily life at times, we can tune in—like mindfulness, we can always remember mindfulness. So the factors are mindfulness; investigation of dhamma, this interest in what's occurring, not thinking about; energy, viriya, not shrinking back from the difficult; pīti, this kind of joyful

interest Guy spoke about last night; tranquility, again Guy talked about last night.

Samādhi, collectedness, and equanimity. So those are the seven factors.

And as the Buddha said—this is actually in his Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta—mindfulness of breathing, repeatedly developed and cultivated, fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness. The four foundations of mindfulness, developed and repeatedly practiced, perfect the seven factors of enlightenment. The seven factors of enlightenment, developed and repeatedly practiced, fulfill true knowledge and deliverance.

So these are the seven ways he's talking about. All of them are different ways of how to live, how to really look and get interested—out of love for yourself and all beings—to see what's fueling the kilesas, the āsavas, and what's not, in this moment. And there's always some way that's available.

I'll end with a short quotation from Dipa Ma, who apparently had one of the more pure mind-hearts that we know of. I mean, you never really know another person's, but she says:

"There is so much sameness in ordinary life. We are always experiencing everything through the same set of lenses. When greed, hatred, and delusion are gone, you see everything fresh and new all the time. Every moment is new. Life was dull before. Now every day, every moment is full of taste and zest."

Zest is kind of like perky happiness.

So even in moments free from kilesa—and hopefully, as hard as it is, those moments give us the faith, as Annie said today, to keep on the path in all the aspects of our life.

Thank you for listening.

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