Exploring The Experience Of Taṇhā (Craving)

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 59:17

Last night when Jill spoke about the cycles of practice, purification and purity, it reminded me of this quotation from Nyoshul Ken Rinpoche, who was a wonderful Dzogchen Lama. He said, "The main purpose of these Dharma teachings is to find out what is the nature of the non-deluded mind, as well as how the deluded mind works."

I love that because it's like both things are what's going on. I find that's kind of like all the noble truths. What's the nature of the non-deluded mind? The third and the fourth. As well as how the deluded mind works—one and two. Meditation practices work to uncover our innate wisdom purity by recognizing the obscurations for the changing, insubstantial appearances they are, thus revealing what has always been available.

I've always loved that quotation. I feel like it describes the whole breadth of our practice. Everything that goes on in our practice fits in one of those categories. Sometimes we're talking about and seeing the nature of the non-deluded mind, and other times we're exploring, investigating, learning about the nature of how the deluded mind works. So that's the level I'm talking about tonight—how the deluded mind works. But exploring it, bringing sati-pañña, mindfulness and wisdom, bringing interest to the experience of these obscurations that he's talking about—exploring it with mindfulness and wisdom is what reveals the reality and lets these obscurations dissolve. Not hating them, not trying to get rid of them.

What I want to talk about tonight is the second noble truth: taṇhā, craving, thirst. The Buddha taught: "This is the noble truth of the origin of dukkha. It is this craving"—the word in Pali is taṇhā, and I'll get to that because it's quite specific—"which produces renewal of being, repeated existence, and is bound up with delight and lust, and seeks pleasure now here and now there. Namely, craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence, for becoming, and craving for non-becoming, non-existence."

I love that teaching because I think it really encapsulates part of our entrancement with craving—because it is bound up with delight and lust and seeks pleasure now here and now there. Oh yes, let's look here, let's look there. What's the problem with that? That's how to live a life! So the three kinds are craving for sense pleasures, craving for becoming or states, and craving for non-existence or non-becoming. Some teachers describe craving as not just greed, not just the clinging, but also the pushing away, the aversion—both sides of that on this level of the second noble truth. Tonight I'm going to be talking about exploring it as taṇhā, as thirst, as craving, as clinging.

I see this talk as an invitation to us to really get interested and bring our wisdom mind, to bring mindfulness and dhammavicaya—investigation of states, which is the beginning of wisdom—to bring this

into the experience of craving and clinging whenever we notice it. Just as you might bring it to calm, as you might bring it to an interesting sound. Really no difference. And that's how we really start to see its nature.

I want to first talk a bit about language. Taṇhā, thirst—this word used in Pali as the cause of dukkha in the second noble truth—we translate it as craving or clinging. When we're talking in general in English, we speak about it as desire, as wanting. This is a very broad word in English, and it covers a range of states of heart and mind. Taṇhā, quite specific, translated as thirst, is kind of the closest to it. To me, anyway, this has been really important and helpful.

Often I hear people talk about skillful desires and unskillful desires. Using the word "desire" or "wanting" in English, they might describe a skillful desire to cultivate the Dhamma or to take care of your family, and an unskillful one—well, you know, make up the list. But to me, this completely misses the point and it's incredibly confusing, because the quality of taṇhā, of thirst in the mind, is not about the object itself. It's the state that's arising, the mental state arising in the mind and heart in a moment. That's the obscuration that limits, that distorts perception, that limits the range of mind, that disrupts, that hides peace. But as long as we focus on the object, we don't really get that. We keep looking out. And then we get really confused.

So let me go into the language a little bit. Thirst is this very specific yearning, leaning in, wanting. And it strengthens. I read somewhere in a commentary that craving is like a thief going into a house and leaning in for something. When they grasp it and take hold of it, that's clinging, that's grasping. So craving into grasping happens pretty quick. When we're talking about attachment, that's grasping—but it starts with the thirst.

Sometimes people say, "Well, what's wrong with wanting to take care of your family? What's evil about wanting to go on a vacation or wanting to have a nice meal or wanting enlightenment?"

And that's where we get all confused. It's as if, well, if we don't have thirst, tanha, how can we do anything? We would just sit around without wanting or aversion. You might laugh, but I can't tell you how many people have asked that question, as if craving were the only motivation for action. It may seem like it sometimes, but it really isn't.

There's another word—and there are many words; I'm not a Pali scholar—but there's another word in Pali: chanda. Chanda is ethically neutral, you could say. Whereas thirst, tanha, is never skillful—there's no such thing as "skillful tanha," it's one of the distortions—chanda is ethically neutral. This quality can be like a desire to do, an excitement, a willingness, an energy to do something.

So it could be dhamma chanda—the excitement, the interest, the willingness to practice the Dhamma. Dhamma chanda, enthusiasm for the Dhamma, is totally wholesome. Chanda can serve as a motivation for doing neutral things one needs to do, like taking care of the family. And it can also be unwholesome,

unskillful. It can be the excitement of sense pleasures.

Actually, when we talk about the hindrances, the first hindrance is quite specific. It isn't lobha, greed. It's kama chanda, which is the excitement of sense pleasures. Kama is sense pleasures; chanda is this excitement, this enthusiasm for sense pleasures. That's the first hindrance, and that's definitely not skillful.

So just to give you a sense, chanda is another motivation, a mental quality that motivates action. And the intention—that moment of intention in the mind, the mental factor that gives rise to action before any action—is accompanied by and fed by various mental states present in the cetana. We could do something out of greed. We could do the same thing out of compassion. We could do it out of a neutral chanda, taking care of the family, all kinds of things.

So you get a sense of what I mean. When we say, "Well, what's wrong? It's a good desire to want X, Y, and Z," we're really missing the boat. The point is to look inside and see what's going on here. Let's explore the quality when it arises in the heart and mind, in the body.

This is the invitation to us: to bring in the potential to get interested, rather than fearing or hating or not wanting to see. Craving, thirst, lobha as the overarching kilesa when it arises—when we recognize a moment of this thirst, this craving or pushing away, we turn the attention back. We explore: what is its nature? How does it arise? How does it behave? How do we behave when we're under the thrall of craving? Just to keep watching, to keep noticing. Why and how do we get so seduced, so enchanted? Or are we actually seduced or enchanted? This is really the invitation to us—to explore this.

And as we do, just bearing in mind, we're only exploring. We're not saying we hate craving and we're going to stop it with an act of will. Because first, that doesn't work. And second, that would mostly come from aversion: "I'm not craving anymore!"

When we think of renunciation, of giving up the things craved, in my mind we tend to have, just superficially, a backwards notion of craving and renunciation. Our idea, as it's described in the way the Buddha articulates the Second Noble Truth, is that we think of craving as accompanied by delight. We take refuge in craving, finding pleasure now here, now there. This is where we...

habitually go for refuge when we're not happy or when we're looking for happiness. Without realizing it, we just go. Let's get this next good thing. Let's get this next nice thing. And we're looking for the thing and not noticing that little movement of wanting. I want this, I want this. It doesn't have to be so strong it blows your head apart, but sometimes it does.

Upadhyaya said once—and I'm going to say it, Jack Kornfield hates it when I say this, but Upadhyaya said, and I think it's great—he said, "Lust cracks the brain." When you're really feeling it, when you're really driven by it, that's how it is. And I mean lust for anything, not just sexual lust. "I've got to have that last piece of chocolate cake or I'll die." It cracks the brain.

But without recognizing that, without turning around and looking, this is our refuge for pleasure. And yet this is what leads us into complications, confusion, and suffering.

Renunciation sounds like penance—dry, dusty, non-joy, punishment. Something like, "I have to give up this thing I love and I'm going to be miserable." But renunciation isn't about the objects. It's about renouncing the greed that keeps us bound to samsara. When it's wisdom that renounces, not an act of will—when wisdom sees clearly and just puts it down—ah. The simplicity is joy. It's peace. It's ease. The renunciation is a movement of the motivation, not external. The greed, the craving has gone. So you don't miss the thing because you don't want it anymore. It's peace. It's really a whole different thing.

Let me offer some thoughts about exploring this. Coming back again to any object that we want—to use the English word—what's wrong with wanting to experience the sunset? What's wrong with wanting to have dinner, or take a walk, or have enlightenment, or have another piece of chocolate cake? What's wrong with any of that? And as long as we stay in that kind of rational mode—what's wrong with the chocolate cake? Nothing. What's wrong with the sunset?—we're missing it. And that's our habit.

So when you just feel it, turn around and see, because it might not be craving. It might be just a sense of the sitting's over, you walk outside with a sense of ease and presence and appreciate the sunset. You go out and tonight there are clouds. There isn't a sunset. You don't beat your head against the wall. You don't say the day is ruined. "Oh, okay, it's like this now." You come in.

But if you go out thinking, "This is the best part of the day," and there's no sunset—that's a clue. A clue that there might have been thirst. We need clues like this.

And at that point, not to start berating or judging yourself. It's, "Oh, great"—turn around and notice. Bring your wise attention. What does it feel like in the mind, in the body? What's the experience that we could be calling thirst, or craving, or wanting? What does the state feel like in the heart, in the mind?

Bring *satipaññā* to it—mindfulness and wisdom—just the same as you would any mental state. Don't make it somehow more different. It's coming and going. It may come a lot, but it goes as often as it comes. Absolutely, as often as it comes, it goes. So you can really notice that.

Some of the things I notice about it—and not only me, and you might or might not—so these are ideas I'm throwing out, but look and see for yourself. That's really the thing.

When there's craving, this thirst, or grasping in the mind, we don't recognize accurately. I think we've said that before. The Buddha says that about *dosa*, ill will, aversion, and clinging, and delusion—we don't recognize accurately. The perception is distorted. We can't see clearly. We can get a kind of tunnel vision. We just don't really see what's happening, and our mind gets narrowed. Our field of awareness can go from just peaceful and fine to narrow, focused, and "me and other" very, very quickly, very strongly.

I can feel physically almost like the mind and the body are leaning forward, or if it's the craving of

pushing away, pushing away. But I can feel a tightness. You may not—I'm not saying—but really looking to see what it is and noticing that sense of contraction, of narrowing, of not seeing clearly so we don't recognize the object clearly. We think whatever we're wanting...

The Tibetans have a saying that wanting puts feathers on the object, you know, kind of makes it all pretty. Have you ever noticed that when there's wanting? The thing wanted—it seems like it's so nice, whether it's a person or a piece of fruit or a vacation or whatever. It looks so pretty. When you first get into a relationship with someone, everything looks so... they're so nice. A friend of mine was saying years ago, she'd been with her husband for a while, and I asked, "Well, how is it now?" She said, "It's good, it's okay, but the love eyes have fallen off." She didn't mean they didn't love each other, but the perception—everything's beautiful, everything's nice—that craving piece wasn't there.

So, starting to explore that. Tejaniya describes how craving and also aversion distort perception. I like the way he puts it. He says *pañña*, or wisdom, recognizes the natural characteristics—the three characteristics—of any object, including craving. So when something's met with wisdom, any object that can be known through mind or any of the five other physical senses, when met with mindfulness and wisdom without the distortions of greed, hatred, and delusion, that is how the three characteristics—the impermanent aspect, the not-self aspect, the unreliable, unsatisfactory aspect we've spoken about—start to reveal themselves. Because that's an aspect of any object when met with wisdom. That's why, in terms of the steadiness of awareness leading to wisdom, we don't have to have a special object for that to happen. Wisdom reveals the natural characteristics of the object.

Delusion—any of the three roots of suffering—covers up these natural characteristics. That's what Annie was talking about with the *vipallāsas*, the distortions of perception. Delusion covers up the natural characteristics, but it does not cover up the object. So we still see that piece of chocolate cake without recognizing its inherent unreliability—that it's going to be gone really soon, and we may not feel as good after it's gone as we think we're going to feel, especially if it's our second or third piece.

I heard Andrea Fella saying once how you can't rely on your mind. She said your mind will say, "Have another piece of cake. It's good for you. You'll be happy." So you have another piece, and then your mind goes, "I wouldn't have done that if I were you."

Delusion covers up these characteristics. We see permanence. We see beauty where there's not. We see satisfaction where there won't be. But the object we still see, and that's where we get confused. When the insights come and wisdom's there, those scales drop off.

So seeing how wanting, how craving, limits the mind, limits the perception, narrows our field, and leads us to all kinds of actions based on misperception...

The Buddha said that greed, hatred, and delusion—we're talking here about the taṇhā, the craving—may be understood as a maker of measurement in that it imposes limitations upon the range and depth of the

mind, of the citta. It narrows everything into this object and what we want.

Let me give you a story as an example. A friend today was asking for one of my "top ten" old moldy stories. This isn't one of those, but it's of the same vintage—one I normally would have retired by now, but it really fits here. It fits perfectly for seeing how craving distorts, how it limits, how it gets us involved in all kinds of activities based on wanting.

This may have been thirty years ago. I was teaching in Yucca Valley in the desert of Southern California with friends. We used to teach there every year; I really liked it there. One afternoon during what was then a three-week retreat, it was quite hot. Another friend who was teaching with me and I were sitting and talking, and someone had come to visit us—I have no memory who, but someone from outside, not one of the meditators. We were sitting, having a perfectly friendly, nice conversation.

At one point, this person mentioned they had just driven through Joshua Tree, a nearby town, and there was a new little restaurant. They'd had a milkshake there, and it was really incredibly good.

My friend and I were sitting there. We didn't say anything. We just looked at each other. We knew we had about an hour before the next sitting. And without saying a word, both of us—our energy and interest in the conversation with this third person—ended. Really ended. Without being completely rude, we ended the conversation and ran to the car, heading to Joshua Tree.

As I remember, we got there—it was only five minutes or so—at about five past three, and the place had closed at three.

So we're like, *ugh*.

But this is where craving really takes over. It had already taken over; it had already narrowed everything. What had been a perfectly pleasant, peaceful afternoon became driven by a goal.

Notice this—this is one of the things I notice about craving: it feels enlivening. It feels really natural. "Oh, great, I have a mission!" Have you noticed that? "Now I have a mission." Well, sometimes the mission is compassion, but a lot of times it's just greed.

You're having a quiet afternoon at home. "Oh, I could go to the store and buy that thing. Oh good, I've got something to do." Notice that. Or notice when you're just sitting and it's all peaceful, and then: "Let me check the tennis scores." There's not even a tennis match happening that you care about, but let me just check. Just for something to do. Something to want. It gives a feeling of being alive. This is one of the seductions.

So that was already going on. Anyway, the place was closed. So we said, "Well, let's turn around and drive past the center and back into Yucca Valley. Maybe there's something there."

We had both been coming here for many years. We knew very well there was nothing there. We knew,

but still. So we're driving. I was driving. He was looking. As we get into Yucca Valley, and our time's getting short because we have to be back for a sitting, he looks over and goes, "Oh, great, yogurt cafe. Go over there. Go over there." And I looked. Where? He pointed. It said "Urgent Care."

This is a true story. You're laughing because you can recognize. This is what craving does.

Lungpho Dan, who was a Thai forest monk, a disciple of Ajahn Mun, gave a sweet reinterpretation of the Four Noble Truths. He says, "The mind that goes out in order to satisfy its moods is the cause of suffering"—the Second Noble Truth. "The result that comes from the mind going out in order to satisfy its moods is dukkha"—the First Noble Truth. The mind going out to satisfy its moods is the cause of suffering. The result that comes from all the hoo-ha of running around to get your milkshake is the unreliable, the dukkha. "The mind seeing the mind clearly is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha"—the Fourth Truth. "The result of the mind seeing the mind clearly is the cessation of suffering"—the Third Truth.

That's what we're doing here with our practice: seeing the body and the mind clearly, moment after moment. And in a lot of moments, there's beauty—the wholesome states, the seven factors of awakening, and so forth. In a lot of other moments, there's craving or aversion. The moment of mindfulness that can lead to wisdom can meet them both equally, really being present. Because as we've said, mindfulness that isn't distorted by kilesa feeds the wholesome. Mindfulness that's really present with kilesa—present with the clinging, the wanting—but where the mindfulness itself isn't distorted by wanting, that's not feeding the craving. It's starving it.

That doesn't make it go away. And this is where we can get confused—we think mindfulness is the agent that dissolves. It's not. It's wisdom. It's wisdom that sees through the kilesas, that really stops feeding them their causes, and they dissolve. But steady mindfulness is the condition that allows wisdom to arise.

The Buddha spoke about these areas where cravings strengthen, and I want to go into this a little bit. He talks about four areas of clinging. There are these four types: clinging to sensual pleasures, which we've talked about a lot; clinging to views; clinging to rules and observances; and clinging to sakkāya-diṭṭhi, personality view. These are four really common moment-to-moment experiences that we get caught up in clinging to.

The first one, sense pleasures, I'm not going to talk about much because we've really mentioned it quite a bit under the hindrances. But even though we're quite aware of how seductive the movement into clinging to pleasant sense experience can be, we still can sometimes not recognize when that's happening. We don't quite see, as I was saying before, how we can fall into that kind of unaware taking refuge in sense pleasure for happiness, for ease, for peace.

When we talk about renouncing, we often talk about renouncing the pleasant sense objects. And that's certainly a path of simplifying, so there's less things to want. We may be able to notice—I'm saying wanting. I should be saying thirst, or craving.

Notice it more. But again, it's about what's going on in the heart-mind.

Tejaniya—I just remembered something funny. Someone was saying to him, "Oh, after you became a monk, after you had lived a full life, such a renunciation, living so simply." And he won't put up with that kind of romanticizing. He just said, "Hey, you can be a monk or a nun, and maybe there's only two or three things that you're able to want, but you can have the same degree of clinging to just those two or three things as you had to everything else in your life." You can get rid of the objects, but if you don't look at the clinging, it can still be going on. Or you can get rid of the objects and just sit there wanting what you don't have.

So turning around and looking, renouncing the desire, the attachment that keeps one bound to samsara—that's what it's about. That's where the freedom comes in.

In terms of exploring craving and how it works, Bhikkhu Bodhi—well, the Buddha talks about this, but Bhikkhu Bodhi describes it as three movements in the unfolding process of insight around craving. It applies to everything, but we'll start with sense desires. It's the gratification, the danger, and the escape—three unfolding aspects of exploration, of wisdom, really bringing sati-paññā, mindfulness and wisdom, to the experience.

Next time you notice some real wanting coming up about any sense desire, explore this. And it could be as simple as wanting to look at somebody. I mean, really simple. That's a sense desire—seeing. Have you had that experience where someone's walking past and you just want to look so badly? You can't stand not to look. Have you had that experience? Sometimes you really can't not look. And then you look. And did that make you happy?

My guess, based on some extensive experience, is that more often than not it led into māna, conceit. "Oh, that one—they're better than me." Or "Oh, that one, look at them. Oh no, I'm doing much better than I thought." Or we just say, "Oh, look at that. They had nice socks." And then, "Oh, look at the bees! Look at the bees."

It's rare that you look and go, "Oh yes, craving... yes, pleasant... yes—it's gone, gone."

So that's a little side effect. But noticing the gratification—in that seeing there wasn't so much gratification. So maybe pick something where there is some gratification, because there is. Of course we appreciate the beautiful. We've talked about this before, so I'm not going to beat it to death, but we're aware of that. And I love that the Buddha recognized this. Of course there's gratification. Of course there's sense pleasure, or we wouldn't crave it. We wouldn't get attached. He's very clear about it.

And the danger—of course, we've talked about that too. The danger being the impermanent, unreliable aspect. That's one danger, the danger he talks about. You can't count on it.

I'm adding another danger. Not exactly danger, but it's really delusion—that when we're in the thrall of

clinging, we don't recognize the natural peace and ease of mind and heart. We can't. The clinging is what blocks it. We're clinging, we're wanting because we want to be happy, and the clinging itself is blocking it. Recognizing that—that's really the poignant nature of clinging.

So I'm putting that under danger. It keeps us looking in the wrong direction for the peace and ease that's available when we're really awake and aware and present and just fully here in the moment.

Why are there moments when there's a sense—you're just mindful, you're just walking, nothing special, and it's not like a big neon sign going off—but it's just so... fulfilling isn't even the right word, but I think you know it. It's just so nice. What is it? It's the heart-mind that's really present and not clinging and not aversive and not needing anything else to make this moment complete.

That's available anytime there's wisdom and awareness in the mind and we're not lost in clinging. Clinging can be an object that mindfulness wisdom recognizes, the same as recognizing a foot lifting.

It's possible. So I'm saying this so you don't become afraid of or aversive to recognizing clinging or aversion. Just recognizing it—the mind that's clearly recognizing in that moment of mindfulness—the mindfulness itself isn't clinging. It's recognizing. When it is clinging, that's when we're all caught up and we don't know.

So the gratification, the danger, and the escape. But back to the danger—another danger. There's a really addictive quality. Delusory, but also addictive. It reminds me of the way certain things work. My brother used to have a hound dog. It was just a pet, but hound dogs are a certain kind of dog that's really bred for hunting. Of course, this poor dog lived in downtown Atlanta. It didn't get to hunt. But its nose, its sense of scent, was so highly developed that when he let it out in the backyard, it would just be running around the border with its nose to the ground, smelling everything that any animal had left there, completely driven. And in the house too—if anyone new came in, or if they left any piece of food or any kind of dirty clothes anywhere he could get into, his nose would just take him right there. And you could see it wasn't like he was a bad dog. It was just that pulling, that pulling of the nose. It just ruled him.

And it feels like that to me with wanting. Yes, what could I want? What's the next thing? What could I want? It keeps us leaning into samsara. I think maybe someone has said there's a Tibetan description of samsara as the urge to correct something. Let's just get it a little better, a little better, a little better—and that's endless. A little better, a little better. Well, this is good, but if you just did that, it could be a little better. And we keep believing it, even when we know. We keep believing it.

So another little story. I was talking with a very wise friend who's well aware of everything I'm saying and more. This person has a habit of having a couple of cookies every day after lunch—certain kinds of cookies, only certain kinds. Of course, we all like what we like. And we were joking around about clinging. He said, "It's not clinging. There's no suffering in that. There's no danger in that." And I said, "Well, what about when you don't get a cookie?" He goes, "Oh, I'll always get a cookie."

That's what we think. I don't have to look at it too closely because it's all going to come around. I can always get another one.

The escape? The escape isn't getting rid of all the cookies in the world. The escape is the steady mindfulness that allows for the clear seeing of what's going on—having to have that cookie. If there's a day I get up and I can just feel that wanting, the driven quality of needing the cookie, and there's no cookie, and I can just be with it—steady mindfulness, mindfulness, mindfulness—at some point the wisdom can arise: Oh, look at that. The suffering is the wanting. It's not not having the cookie. It's the wanting.

And at that point, the escape is really when that wisdom just dissolves the wanting. The wanting dissolves, not as an act of will. I can refrain from eating the cookie as an act of will. But I can't make the clinging to it, the idea of it, go away as an act of will. By really tuning into the wanting—feel it, be with it, watch it—often, often it dissolves from the wisdom. Oh, that doesn't make sense. And either the wanting dissolves or it stops arising, because it doesn't make sense in the light of wisdom.

And this is a huge relief. It's really something we can trust because it doesn't mean you have to be incredibly on top of everything, figuring it all out. You just have to keep being mindful morning, noon, and night, really interested in everything that's coming up—the beautiful and the difficult. Reality reveals itself. This is the escape: the dissolution or the putting down of the clinging.

So the next time you notice you're caught in wanting—not just a passing moment that came and went, but you're really caught in it—like wanting to look at somebody or something that's not huge, not the biggest thing in your life, but some little one that comes up here. I heard several people today, I must say, discussing where they like to sit at lunch. And it sounded like they all like to sit in the same place. I'm hoping that's not true, but that's how it sounded.

Okay, that's a good place to just look at the clinging. If it's coming up—it may not, but when it is—or you're walking and you want to look, or go have tea, anything like that where you can really feel the thirst arising, the wanting, the world narrowing. Instead of just the walking, it's all about the milkshake. It's all about the tea. It's all about that place at the picnic table.

So just stand there or sit there with awareness, gentle awareness, and let the wanting do its thing. Let it run itself out. See how it feels in the body. See how it acts in the mind. See what goes on. See if you're going to die from it. Probably not.

And at some point, I promise, at some point—whether wisdom comes in or not—it will go away. It might come back again, but it will go away because everything goes away. Keep paying attention. Turn back and see. Stay with it until it's gone, and then notice what's happening in the mind and heart. Unless another wanting arose in a split second, if there's some space, some quiet, you might notice the peace. The ease, the peace that comes when the mind and heart is awake and present and free from clinging.

Ah, this is the peace we wanted in the first place. All this hoo-ha—we think it's making us happy, but it's just trying to get rid of the wanting. And here that peace is available twenty-four seven.

So it's really worth exploring, turning around. The peace is right here.

The Buddha, talking to some nuns, praising one for her mindfulness, said: "Her mind remains firmly established in mindfulness, and thus her mind is unbounded. She knows in truth that liberation of the heart, that liberation by wisdom."

So even just for a moment—maybe it's not completely unbounded—but notice the difference between that tunnel vision on looking at something, or the seat, or whatever it is, and the peace of presence without any reference point. Unbounded because there's no reference point of anything, of me and other. It's just thisness, wakefulness. Just notice that.

Anandamayi Ma—she was from a different tradition, an Indian saint—she was laughing once when people were saying, "Oh, you're such a great renunciate." She said, using different language of course: "It's you who are the renunciates, renouncing the great joy of divine presence."

Yes, I'll pick wanting over the great joy of divine presence any day. And we do, again and again and again.

Now, in terms of this exploring when wanting comes up, sure, there are times—plenty of them—when you're mindful and present, but the wanting is just so strong you can't not follow it. Have you seen that happen? And again, we're not talking about big harmful things—hopefully the precepts hold—but just minding your own business.

I remember years ago, someone was telling me they were walking past the food tables. I guess after breakfast or sometime, the meal was over and there was a bowl of fruit there. They weren't aware of really wanting the fruit. But as they walked by, their hand just shot out and grabbed an orange. "Whoa, that's not me! Bionic arm or something, nothing to do with me."

So sometimes it's like that. But other times we can see it clearly—that wanting to look, you know. You just can't bear it, so you look.

Okay, bring awareness along with you when that happens. Don't think, "Oh, I blew it, so why bother paying attention." No, bring awareness along with you. Still notice, as Sayadaw U Tejaniya says, notice how wanting does its job. Notice how craving is doing its job. Its job is to lead you by the nose like a hound dog. Notice what the effect is. Keep on paying attention.

Like when I was giving the example of looking—if you keep paying attention, you do it and... nothing. It becomes pretty obvious that it's not really very supportive of anything other than distractibility and more anxiety in the mind. Sooner or later, the penny drops, if there's steady attention. If there's not, if we stop paying attention when it's not going how we want, we don't get the chance to see. That's why steady attention and natural awareness reveals the truth.

All right. Well, talking about attachment to views and attachment to sakkāya-diṭṭhi—each of which is a whole dhamma talk. So I'm not going to go deeply into them. I'm just going to mention two lines about each.

Views—this is huge. Attachment to views. What do we mean? What does the Buddha mean by views? It's really thought. A thought of "this is how it is" and attachment to it. So he describes it as thinking, "This alone is true, everything else is false." Unfortunately, our views don't quite come that clearly stated—but that's how we feel. And of course we have views and opinions. It's not saying don't have them, same as it's not saying don't appreciate sense pleasures. It's the attachment that's the issue.

I don't think I have to go very far to illustrate how this plays out in the world—with politics, with property, with religion, with all kinds of views. The suffering, the anger, the hatred that comes from attachment to views.

I just want to briefly mention what we can explore here on retreat: attachment to views about how practice should be, how *your* practice should be. I'd be really surprised if there was someone here who didn't have some views like that. But often they hide from us. We're not really recognizing that we have a view. And you'll be in some feeling of dis-ease or discomfort, in struggle with what's going on. You come in and report to the interview teacher what's happening and how bad it is. And we're like, "Well, that's just what's happening. What's the problem?" But you feel it should be like this, it should be like that. That's a view.

The breath should be like this. How often I should be with the breath. Choiceless awareness is really the higher practice. Choiceless attention is for lazy people.

And really being with the breath is the appropriate practice. How it was in that last sitting—that was it. I finally got it. And now it's not happening, so it's all gone to hell.

But often these views aren't really... we don't quite recognize them, but we're actually in conflict because we're attached to them. A lot of the self-judgment that Jill spoke about can arise from something unpleasant that's happening, but often it arises from a view that there's attachment to—we really believe it's true without recognizing it. And sometimes they can be changing. You see through one: "Oh, I get it. That was just a view." And now I know how it is. I watch the mind do that all the time.

Once I was practicing in Burma and I was doing walking meditation. It was fine. Everything was fine. And I just started to notice a little dis-ease. Something not quite right. I stopped and said, "Okay, what's the thought in the background there?" I just got quiet and opened the awareness to see. And it came up. It comes up because: "Oh, it should be better." That was the view I was attached to. That's a hopeless one—"it should be better," whatever that means. And I was suffering from it because of the conflict with what was actually going on.

So I just want to mention this—to tune into views. There's perception, and immediately there's a thought

about what that person's doing or what it means or what's happening, and right away there's a view and an attachment to it. You can see this is a huge topic, but I just want to bring it up to start tuning in. When you're feeling a sense of struggle with experience but you think you're present, just check: is there some idea that I'm really believing about how it's supposed to be in practice right now? Seeing it, bringing it into the light of day, the light of awareness, is really helpful.

Sakkāya diṭṭhi means personality view. And it's really—again, this is a huge talk, I'll only just mention—it's taking in a moment, because it arises and passes moment to moment like everything. In a moment, it's taking any aspect of experience—seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, sense experience, any of the mental factors—taking it as me or mine. It's really a grasping, a sense of craving, leaning into, and then grasping. Whether it's "my hearing," "my aversion," "my sensation," just the whole sense of me, all the thoughts that we have.

I think Jill talked about it a lot last night, describing ourselves. But thoughts can come and go and just be empty. When there's clinging to them—"Yeah, that's really true"—and you say, "I really am such an angry person," clinging to those thoughts and not noticing the others... that's sakkāya diṭṭhi.

I talked a little bit about that when I spoke about impermanence last week, about my friend who everyone was telling she's an aversive person. That's sakkāya diṭṭhi, yes. "Those aversive thoughts are who I am. That's me." Assuming that there's any kind of unchanging, steady-state entity here, rather than seeing that yes, there are arising thoughts and feelings and sensations, changing and arising and changing in every moment. So when she sat down and looked, that's what she saw—not a big ball of solid aversion, "this is who I am, unchanging."

Even the body. When you sit and feel sensations coming and going, coming and going... "this is my knee"—it's very different. Get a feeling for the difference when there's just thoughts coming and going, and suddenly it's like, "That memory when I was in Girl Scout camp—now that's me." And you get a whole sense of me and an idea through your whole life, but it's just a thought that's coming up now, and there's grasping at it. Sakkāya diṭṭhi. Coming and going.

This is incredibly brief for something that's very complex, but I'll just put it out. Explore it. Play with it. It's another thing to investigate when we're feeling stuck. And for us, a lot of time here, it will be with thoughts, with memories, with descriptions of ourselves. "I'm an angry person." "I can't meditate." Or "I should be more with the breath."

"Or I don't have any concentration." Or take your pick: "I'm hopeless"—all the stuff Jill was saying. Or, as I was saying to someone today, "I'm going to be the next Dalai Lama." That's the other side of it. "It's going so good. This is really how it's going to be." That's the same thing—sakkāya-diṭṭhi. It just doesn't matter what the story is. It's that grasping, the holding to it.

Watch. It's really fun to watch when you bring in mindfulness and wisdom and see it's a process arising

and passing, and it isn't personal. As soon as we're clinging, it feels personal. "What do you mean it isn't personal? It's me, right?" But then watching the process come and go, how can that be me?

There's just a seeing, and it's pleasant or unpleasant. And there's a thought: "Look at how they're walking. They're walking so well, and I can't even put one foot in front of the other without getting lost in thought. And it's the third week. Why don't I just hang it up?" Notice that. What triggered it? Just seeing and unpleasant. Then you remember all the thoughts of how useless you've been in all these years of meditation and before, back to kindergarten, everything bad. Sakkāya-diṭṭhi.

And then you forget about it, right? Because you get lost in another thought. And then you wake up and, "Oh, it's so nice. I feel the grass. I feel the wetness, the breeze. I'm so present. It's so lovely. I'm so awake and aware. It's amazing. I am going to be the next Dalai Lama." Sakkāya-diṭṭhi.

And we're thinking it's the same me. Where's the same me there? It's changing completely—again and again and again. Really fun to explore. The me who needs that seat in the dining room where I can't possibly enjoy my lunch. The me that thinks, "If I just sit in this proper way and tilt my head like that and hold my hands like this, I'll have that great sitting like I had before." This is attachment to rites and rituals, by the way—how to make it be a certain way.

So I'm afraid I'm going to stop here because otherwise it will be too much time. But these areas of grasping, just explore them. I'm just dropping it into explorer mode.

I want to read one thing from the Buddha about clinging. "Agitation through clinging"—I love this:

"How, bhikkhus, is there agitation through clinging? Here, the uninstructed worldling"—that's the puthujjana—"who is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form."

He gives those four ways of identification. That form of ours changes and alters, right? You're feeling good and then you get a headache. The form changes and alters.

With the change and alteration of form, her consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of form. Agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form remain obsessing her mind. Because her mind is obsessed, she is frightened, distressed, and anxious, and through clinging becomes agitated.

Can you relate to that at all? I hope so. We're doing this all the time.

Regarding feeling—vedanā—as self, perception as self, any volitional formation, any mental action as self, or consciousness, the knowing itself as self. And when any of those change and alter, when we're regarding it as a self, we become preoccupied with the change. Agitation and a whole constellation of mental states, born of preoccupation, remains obsessing the mind. And we get all involved in what's the change and how can we fix it.

Turn around and notice the clinging. Instead of getting into the whole story of what can I do—oh, clinging is like this. Clinging feels like this. And I find for myself, even just coming into "clinging feels like this" already, the peace of steady mindfulness and wisdom starts to be palpably available. Clinging is like this. You don't have to fix it. Just really be with it.

And just moment after moment, there's the opportunity to rediscover the nature of the non-deluded mind, to re-recognize, as Ajahn Amaro says, the peace and ease that is the natural peace and ease of mind and body when it's not obscured by craving, clinging, confusion.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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