Bringing Mindfulness/Wisdom to Our Actions

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:01:34

By this point in the retreat, for some of you—or perhaps all of you—it may feel like we're offering a lot of information, a different talk every night. I know from conversations and from my own experience that sometimes the talks land beautifully, and other times it feels like enough already. Too much information, depending on what's happening in your particular practice at the moment. So I just want to normalize that.

Different ones of us have different ways of processing information. The way we as teachers talk and access things may come from approaches that speak to you, or they may not—we're all different. Sometimes what we're offering may land and be really helpful. Other times it feels like too much, or whatever's going on in your practice isn't quite in alignment. That's natural. Just don't twist yourself into a pretzel trying to make best use of every single talk. This isn't an apology for my talk, but there is a lot of information in it. Take what's useful, but don't twist yourself up. We can't all be in the same place at the same time.

One aspect I really value about the Buddhist teachings as they've come down to us is their all-inclusive nature. Even with—not even though—the absolute commitment to full awakening, to liberation, to purifying the heart-mind and the habits of greed, aversion, and delusion, which is really the heart of the practice, that commitment or value isn't reserved just for really deep meditation. That value shoots through all aspects of our life in the way the Buddha taught.

His teaching includes all aspects. It's not that we have to just hang out in the mundane and schlep through it as best we can, waiting until there's enough wisdom to open into a moment of freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion. You already know that's not true. But the times we're in the mundane aren't second best either. It's so easy for our minds to think that—as soon as we've made it "okay, but it's not really it," something feels missing. So I want to talk tonight about the more mundane aspect of the teaching and how that also relates to purifying the habits of mind.

Probably many of you are quite familiar with at least the end of this quotation from Padmasambhava: "The view is recognizing nibbāna as the most important thing. However, do not let your actions slip in the direction of the view. If they do, you will fall into the evil views of demons, prattling on about how goodness is empty, evil is empty. But do not let your views slip in the direction of action either, or you will be caught in materialism and ideology."

So what do we do? You don't land on anything. Here's the famous part: "That is why my view is higher than the sky, but my attention to actions and their effects is finer than grains of barley flour." It's not one

or the other.

I'll add just one more thing from Nāgārjuna because it amuses me. Nāgārjuna said, "It is sad to see those who mistakenly believe in material concrete reality, but far more pitiful are those who believe in emptiness." It's the *believing in* aspect, folks.

So I want to talk about the action side tonight—different ways from the Buddha's teachings that we can relate to actions, and how that way of relating is itself the practice of purifying, of shifting these habits toward clear seeing, leading to nibbāna.

The Buddha was very clear that the awakened heart-mind manifests in our actions. I read this often: "Bhikkhus, a fool is characterized by their actions. A wise person is characterized by their actions. It is through the activities of one's life that one's discernment shines, that one's wisdom shines."

He's not neglecting this aspect in any way, just in terms of importance. In the long descriptions in the suttas of Right View, the first step of the Eightfold Path...

There's mundane and supermundane right view—that's a whole huge discussion in itself. But I just want to touch on this one aspect of mundane right view that's included in the Buddha's teaching. One of the definitions of right view is understanding the ten wholesome actions and the ten unwholesome actions.

When a noble disciple—it's not just the actions themselves, which I'll mention and they're fairly obvious—but what makes it right view is when the noble disciple understands the wholesome and the root of the wholesome in the mind, when a noble disciple understands the unwholesome and the root of the unwholesome in the mind. So the ten wholesome actions arise from understanding the root of the wholesome that leads to them. Refraining from the unwholesome, which are just the reverse, comes not only because one shouldn't do it, but really from understanding the wisdom of the roots of the unwholesome—which are, guess what? Greed, hatred, and confusion.

So the wholesome actions: three of body—not killing living beings, not taking what is not given, not causing sexual harm. Sound familiar? But it's understanding the wholesome roots that matters.

Four of speech: abstaining from false speech, from lying, from malicious speech, from harsh speech. Malicious speech also means using speech as a way to divide people—like when two people get together and talk badly about a third person. Even if it's true, that's not the point. It's malicious, and the root of doing that is unwholesome. So understanding the wholesome root of refraining from false speech, malicious speech, harsh speech, and idle gossip—which we've talked about before. That's the hardest one, right? We've mentioned the word, and I have to say I just love it: *samphappalāpa*. That's the word for idle gossip and useless speech.

But you know, if we really cut that out, isn't it a relief not to be just blabbing all this garbage all the time? I mean, our mind's bad enough, but usually we share this junk in our mind with other beings out of all the

love in our heart. Isn't it nice not to do that? Thank God.

So four of body, and the three wholesome actions of mind: non-covetousness—not wanting other people's things or things that other people have, so it's a form of non-greed but more specific—non-ill will, and right view. Of course, that covers everything.

The Buddha is saying here, in terms of right view on the mundane level when we're living our normal life, understanding these wholesome roots that lead to these wholesome actions—that's right view. That's the first step of the Eightfold Path. So actions and understanding what leads to them is so important. It's part of how we use all aspects of our life from this deepest motivation of recognizing the truth, of abandoning confusion and greed.

Speaking about action, then, we need to be very clear about what the Buddha means when he talks about action—which we've discussed before, so I'll just highlight it. First, the word in Pāli that simply means action is *kamma*, or *karma* in Sanskrit, which we tend to think means this whole big thing, but specifically it just means action—*kamma*.

As the Buddha said: "Action is intention, I tell you. Intending, one does action by way of body, speech, and mind."

So the intention—that's the heart of the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of an action in the way that the Buddha is talking about it, in the way that he's referring to the wholesome and unwholesome roots. We've talked about intention in terms of our practice, just that *cetanā*, that little about-to moment. But that's arising, of course, as part of conditioned arising, as everything is. So in this form, the intention that's the seed of the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness in the action is the quality in the mind-heart that gives rise to that moment, that *cetanā*. You could say the motivation, a little bit bigger. But understanding, really, that all action springs from the mind.

The Buddha in the Dhammapada: "All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a corrupted or impure mind, and suffering follows, as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox. All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind."

Speak or act with a peaceful mind, and happiness follows like your shadow that never leaves you. Just cause and effect, not an act of will.

And so, as we've been emphasizing the whole time now, the practice is really about tuning in more and more to what's going on in the mind—particularly in terms of what leads to speech and action. As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche says, actions are the servants of the mind. We can use actions to help us reflect back and see what's going on in the mind.

As you know, our tendency is to think an action is wholesome or not by how it looks, by what the results are. But in terms of how the Buddha describes it, that's not it at all. For example, we could do an

action—giving something that seems really generous, really kind—and the internal motivation could be many different things, couldn't it? So it's not our job to just do the generous thing. It's to really be looking and seeing.

You could give with this open-hearted quality, just wanting to offer the happiness of generosity. Or it could be, "Maybe it would make me look good." It could be, "I should, it's the right thing to do"—so there's a little generosity and a little bit not, but that's okay. It's mixed, and you can see it. Or it could be, "Maybe if I give them this, then they'll owe me," and you want them to owe you. So it's actually not a wholesome action at all. You get the sense. There are examples like that with everything.

This isn't about judging. It's about getting more and more in the habit of tuning in, noticing what's motivating this action, this speech, even thoughts—but that's harder to see, so don't worry about it. We can just see from actions and speech.

And as we've all noticed, how often when we're not mindful or aware, or we're taken by surprise, our old friends and habits frequently arise as the motivation for speech and action. You know our friends—they're friends: greed, hatred, and confusion. But they do arise. Someone quoted Ajahn Chah saying something about seventy-five or eighty percent of our practice is just being aware of craving arising and not being able to do anything about it. But we are doing something—we're being aware of it. That's what we can do.

Because a lot of people are seeing this. Mindfulness is getting more steady, the mind is getting more collected. And some people think, "I'm seeing craving all the time. What's the matter with me?" Nothing's the matter with you. You're getting more aware. This is what's driving the bus half the time—craving and aversion. So seeing it is already the first step of wisdom, or the second and the third.

We're learning to recognize how when we're not aware, habits are strong. We use them. Someone gave the example: if we're driving on the highway and go to shift lanes, there are actually many small actions required to do that. If you were being super mindful—first I look in the rear view mirror, seeing, seeing; then I look at the side mirror, seeing, seeing; then I check the blind spot—I mean, seventeen cars have passed by this time! We can't do it that way. So we do it instinctively, and a lot of that is habit.

So habit is just a natural thing. It also comes up when we're comfortable and not paying attention, or in moments of stress. We can begin by not taking it personally, but simply seeing how frequently the habit can come springing up and we don't know why. Have you ever had the experience where you have a clear, wholesome intention—something like, "I'm going to go into the dining room and just take a very moderate amount of food and eat it with awareness"? Very clear. You're not kidding yourself. But then you sit down and you've got this pile, and you think, "How did that happen?" You're legitimately puzzled. "How did that happen? I had this clear intention"—which you did, many moments ago. But cetanā is arising every single moment. The mind moments are changing. Sometimes we can be aware that greed came up and we acted on it, so there's awareness seeing how it worked. Other times, not. "How did that

happen?"

Once someone asked Sayadaw U Tejaniya a similar question, and he said, "Weak wisdom, strong kilesa." The wisdom is there, but then we lose the mindfulness and the habit takes over. This isn't meant to scare us, but to wake us up—to not take it personally, but to see why the steadiness of mindfulness is so important, why the lack of steady awareness gets us in trouble. We can see this in life too. Even though we try to be good, when we're under stress, when something unexpected happens and we're not quite present, old habits can spring up in not very helpful ways. Crimes and such could be committed.

There's a line from Dr. King: "The ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy." I offer that not as a view about how we should be, but as an observation about the ultimate measure of how the qualities of heart and mind, how the wisdom, is coming and being purified. There will be times when, in moments of stress or comfort, the unwholesome doesn't arise and the wholesome does arise. You've noticed that at least once, right? It does happen. Let it in. You think, "Where did that come from? That wasn't me. I was the greedy one who took too much food. I'm not the one who said, 'Okay, that's enough now,' and just put it down." You're not either of them, of course. But noticing how, through steady attention, the habits are starting to shift—that's our practice. Attention to motivation as we go through the day.

From Sayadaw U Tejaniya: "When we're not mindful, we're not aware. So many of our intentions, thoughts, speech, and actions may be governed by, ruled by the defilements—the torments of greed, hatred, and delusion. It's mostly delusion because everything is on automatic. Delusion is boss." Back to the street gang again—delusion is boss. "However, when we train our mind to notice what we are doing first, then what we are doing next, we're training our minds to see that detail. When I see the mind's intentions in this way, then it's possible to consciously choose whether to act or not act in a given situation. One can choose to do what is skillful and leads to ease. In that way, one avoids acting out of pure habit that always does the same thing, even when it causes suffering."

So the practice is simple, nothing new. I'm just highlighting it from a different angle. Going through the day sometimes, not when there's something big calling attention, but when you're thinking, "What should I pay attention to now? Nothing's happening"—you might notice just intentions for little actions.

Just notice your intention to look. Notice your intention when you walk into the dining room. Do you go to the food first, or do you go to save a place? I think you're not allowed to, right? But you find some secret way to do that. Do you go and try to save a place, or do you figure out how to sit there until everyone's eaten so you can have the place? Whatever it is, notice why you're doing what you're doing. Do you go for a walk? Where? When you get up and walk out of here, do you turn left or right?

Little stuff. You say, "Oh, I'm just following the Dhamma," but somehow left leads to the tea stall, and you're making some tea. "Oh, I'm just following the Dhamma, just turned left." Nobody else is in there looking. You don't have to be good for somebody. We want to understand what's going on to free our

hearts and minds from confusion. So don't be afraid to see this stuff. It doesn't mean you're a hopeless loser. It just means you're human. And this is what we have to work with, to understand.

Just noticing these little choices—it kind of gets to be fun. When I get up, which shoe do I put on first? I mean, you could go nuts with it, okay. But just starting to notice when something comes from habit, and then you can bring awareness in and see.

The Buddha spoke to wise intention in the second step of the Eightfold Path—sammā saṅkappa, another word translated variously as wise thought or wise intention. We've spoken of it before. But he defines what becomes wise intention rather than unwise—greed, hatred, confusion. As Greg mentioned when he talked about the sutta on the two types of thought, wise intention transforms through wisdom, through our practice.

The intention of greed naturally transforms from lobha to renunciation, and even then to generosity. Not as a should—yes, we can practice these things—but starting to see with steady mindfulness and wisdom, I'm sure you've seen moments when greed started and then there was a natural renunciation, renouncing the craving that was leading you into it. Whether it's a big thing or a little thing, it's not about the object. It's renouncing the craving. Wisdom just puts it down sometimes. Notice that. It's worth noticing. It's happening naturally, this transformation to wise intention, sammā saṅkappa.

Hatred naturally transforms—in the Theravāda, to non-hatred, but you could say mettā, friendliness. And cruelty transforms to compassion. So these are the three wise intentions. Delusion transforms through wisdom, not through action.

Noticing when the kilesas are driving the bus is important, but also notice that through our steady practice—and that's lots of moments where you're just mindful, nothing special going on, but mindfulness in that moment being present, wise mindfulness, not distorted by greed or aversion—you're not having some big insight moment, but many, many moments where the wholesome is being fed rather than the unwholesome habits being fed through inattention and mere habit.

That's why you don't notice anything happening, and then suddenly someone goes by and the old feelings of judging and ill will arise, and suddenly the mind goes, "Oh, but they're doing the best they can," and the whole thing drops. I remember the first time that happened to me—I really thought, who's in my mind doing that? But it happens. Let it in. This is the second step of the Eightfold Path, sammā saṅkappa, those three qualities. We've talked about them in detail, so I'm not going to say more, but we've explored renunciation or generosity, friendliness or mettā, non-hatred, compassion, non-cruelty.

Notice them. Notice how this naturally occurs. You can see it. It's all part of the whole path, purifying these habits of mind.

Now shifting to another way, the Buddha talks about how we see in our practice these habits, how we're transforming. Because everything is really about the heart of the practice—this pure citta, this pure

heart-mind. That's what sees nibbana, that's what recognizes the truth. And all these different ways are just to say you don't have to wait until something fantastic is happening. These are all ways the Buddha gives for bringing in this awareness, bringing in this understanding. And they're all just as good as each other.

So first, let me talk about what's called the three rounds of kilesa. This is something I heard Sayadaw U Pandita talk about frequently. I liked it. These are kind of three levels of how kilesa manifests in our experience. One is called the transgressive level, one is the obsessive level, and one is the latent underlying level. Don't get discouraged. This is just a way to look at our experience.

The transgressive is just what it sounds like. When the power of the kilesa—aversion, greed, delusion—is so strong in that moment, remember it's only moments in our mind, that it leads to actions of speech and body motivated by ill will, motivated by greed, motivated by cruelty. Of course that happens in little ways, but transgressive really means in a big way. And it's protected by sila. The quality that we cultivate that protects our heart and mind from the transgressive kilesa is said to be sila.

So we're talking about gross transgression here. We're not talking about a tiny little moment where greed arises and you act on it—"Oh my God, I've transgressed!" We're talking about the serious ones. Sila does protect us from that. We get really angry, but we come up against, "Oh, don't say it." That's the sense of sila protecting us, and protecting others from the torment and from spreading the torment.

Mingyur Rinpoche puts it beautifully: our behavior, how we relate to the world around us, even in very difficult situations, becomes the most reliable means of protecting our mind and heart from anxiety and frustration, from remorse. So this is really talking about this level of kilesa that leads to truly transgressive actions. We're all familiar with it. It happens to all of us sometimes, but we're beginning to tune into that.

The second level is the obsessive torments, with which I have no doubt we are all very familiar. Obsessive is the spinning, tormenting thoughts—whether they're thoughts of self-judging or revenge or greed or worry or fear or whatever. The suffering is pretty obvious, right? But we tend to get lost in the story often and not recognize: this is just greed spinning, spinning, spinning. This is ill will spinning, spinning, spinning. The obsessive defilements.

We're protected from this level by collectedness of mind-heart, by samadhi. It can be the samadhi of one-pointed samatha, but it doesn't have to be. The collectedness that develops through the steadiness of our mindfulness practice, through khanika samadhi—on changing objects but with steady awareness—that collectedness of mind. Sayadaw U Pandita would talk about this a lot, that unification. It's a protection. When the mind is so collected, it's almost like there isn't room. The kilesas just don't have room. The mind's present, present, present. And in a moment of samma sati with this collectedness, the kilesas aren't there.

So whatever level of concentration, whatever level of collectedness—one of the reasons that collectedness

is so pleasant is because we're experiencing that purity of heart and mind without kilesa. And it's lovely. Sometimes people say, "Oh, I had no idea what it feels like to just be with a peaceful heart and mind." This is not the same as temporary nibbana that Guy was talking about, because it's a constructed state. Collectedness of mind is a constructed state. But you're tasting what it feels like, recognizing how really lovely and peaceful it is when kilesas aren't running the show, driving the bus.

The absence of torments, the absence of clinging mind. It's a constructed state, and of course it goes away. That's okay. Sometimes people notice, if there's been a period of time where the mind's been more collected—whether on changing objects or whatever, doesn't matter—and it's been that kind of peaceful time without a lot of kilesa, or not much at all...

And then, you know, it changes. The collectedness goes away. The mind starts thinking. Stuff starts happening. And sometimes it's like a rebound effect, right? The kilesas were off, they weren't around, but they're waiting for the party to come. The walls went down and the parents went away, and boom, here they come. That doesn't mean you did something wrong. It's simply cause and effect.

But really seeing and tasting, appreciating that sense of the peace of pure mind—it can also at times give a sense of faith, a sense of confidence. A feeling of, "Oh, you know, this really is a path of purity. There really is something to this." They're not just talking blah, blah, blah about how greed is bad, aversion is bad. You really kind of get it. It gives us confidence, a willingness to do the work, a sense of the path being onward leading.

But then when the collectedness changes or falls apart, don't land in owning that. Don't think that because kilesas arise again, you blew it. Don't own any of it. Just see the cause and effect. That recognition, rather than being "bad, bad, bad, here they are again," can actually serve as motivation. These guys really do create suffering in my mind. Let's explore what's going on. Let's remember how we pay attention and what we pay attention to. We can really see what supports feeding the kilesas, what supports starving them, what supports feeding the wholesome.

So that leads us into my next topic. The third of the three rounds of kilesa is what's called latent or underlying torments. Okay, don't get depressed. This is like the potential for the torment to arise given the appropriate conditions. It's not that they're sitting there—I know it sounds like they're sitting there waiting to come. Even though we say they're gone, they're gone, they're not sitting there. But now you might think I'm saying they are sitting there waiting. It's not like that. But they do give the example of a seed that, if it's watered and has earth and all the appropriate conditions—hello—greed pops up, ill will pops up. Of course, one of the appropriate conditions is lack of awareness, lack of mindfulness.

So this is, again, not meant to discourage us. In a way, I find this—well, I say encouraging, but it's realistic. Rather than having all these unrealistic ideas that after a couple of three-month retreats, it's all gone, all the kilesas are gone, and then when that doesn't happen feeling really discouraged—that's just unrealistic. The reality is seeing how subtle these habits are, but also recognizing that we have the tools and the

wisdom and the understanding to continue to explore, to continue to make choices that feed the wholesome and starve the unwholesome.

So given the appropriate conditions, you can notice how they sort of come up when we least expect it. Little things. I remember one yogi told me—not at this retreat, a long time ago—but something similar. They were walking through the dining room. There was a bowl of Halloween candy or something. They were walking through, quite aware, having no intention of taking the candy. They were really aware, but just when they got to the candy, their hand reached out and grabbed it. And they said, "Who's doing this?" Up until that moment they were aware, and then after, but it's like someone else came in. Just a little moment where it springs up. In funny little moments like that, you can notice.

Just in the blink of an eye. But we can see how when we're not paying attention, these tendencies can spring up.

I'll share an example from summer. I was on a retreat in Switzerland, a self-retreat at a place where I teach often and visit frequently. I'd been sitting for a couple of weeks. I was in a pretty balanced, spacious state, paying attention. Nothing much was going on. I was out walking down the road in a more wide, open kind of awareness, not particularly concentrated, but the mind was fine and balanced, not in kilesa.

A person walked toward me. Generally there, people are out hiking and everyone just says hello, you say hello back, and that's it. Very friendly, but that's all. But this person came up to me holding a pamphlet like this, out toward me. I didn't know what it was. The latent kilesa came up. For some reason—I look back and see I associated it, unrecognized in my mind, with something from my childhood. I hope I don't offend anyone, but this is what I associated it with: people would come around with the Watchtower, these religious tracts, banging on your door and trying to force it on you. I wouldn't want it.

So that came up, and I said something in English. I could have said something in German, but I said, "No, I don't speak German." Boom, and I walked away. Total aversion. It just came up like that.

And then as I walked away: what was that about? The whole mind and body was stirred up from the aversion for a long time. It leaves like an ash afterwards. As I reflected on it, I had no clue. The poor woman was probably—could it have been a map, just asking me for directions? I mean, something. I'm sure it was something quite innocuous. But this just comes springing up.

When that happens, beating oneself up doesn't help. But seeing it—it's kind of like, "Wow, look at that. Look how suddenly this can come." Bring awareness in right away. See what's going on. It's really interesting.

So latent greed, hatred, and delusion are not abandoned by sīla or by collectedness of mind, but by wisdom—by paññā, by wisely seeing. So we're back to our steady mindfulness practice. Can't get away from it. It's there for all of it. But this is where we really start to see through.

And as I said before, notice when you have moments where in the past—like that example for me of aversion coming up, which would tend to arise because I don't like to be intruded on—it just doesn't. Notice the times it would come up and it simply doesn't.

Someone gave me an example: a friend seeing how the habit of seeing leads to comparing, leads to judgment, leads to aversion to the whole mess. A friend told me this, but half of you here could have that experience. Me too. It gets so annoying. And then another time, seeing came up, comparing came up, and then suddenly: oh, everything's in constant flux. There's nothing to compare. And the whole thing just dropped away.

That's an example, in a moment, of wisdom suddenly seeing what's happening and the latent kilesa just dropping. That's a moment. That moment doesn't last the whole rest of your life. That's a moment.

But notice that. Notice how wisdom, which comes from clear seeing, really can dissolve even in the moment these deepest habits.

So he's so practical. I want to go to one other sutta of the Buddha's that I like very much because he's giving different examples of ways to work with wise attention to feed the wholesome and starve the latent underlying tendencies.

This sutta is the second one in the Majjhima Nikaya, called the Sabbāsava Sutta, or "All the Āsavas." Āsava is a word that's sometimes translated as "taints." I don't like that. We can think of it as the latent tendencies. The latent tendencies here that he's talking about, the āsavas, are very specific: sense desire, becoming, and ignorance—the most subtle ones underlying everything.

In this sutta, he's talking about wise attention, how wise attention in various situations can really show us how we pay attention. If we pay attention to how we pay attention, as you've been saying, we can see how it either is feeding and strengthening these underlying tendencies, the kilesas, or starving them. This is like bringing this quality of wisdom into all different actions of our life. I like it because it's so practical. It really shows the Buddha's practical side. I could talk for hours about each of them, so I can only go through quickly.

But he says to introduce it, "Thus have I heard, for I shall expound to you a discourse on the restraint of the āsavas. Listen and heed what I say." He's talking about when one attends unwisely, both unarisen kilesas arise and arisen ones increase. When one attends wisely, both unarisen āsavas do not arise and arisen ones are abandoned.

So he's talking about attending wisely, and then he gives examples of different situations. The first one is what you would expect, that taints can be abandoned by insight, by seeing clearly. But how he's describing wise attention here is paying attention—he said unwise attention is paying attention to that which is not worth paying attention to, which is most of our thoughts. He gives examples of attending unwisely to: Was I in past time or wasn't I in past time? How was I? How will I be in the future? What is happening now?

But I would say, because I'm going to make these quite simple, actually Sally was talking about this this morning in the Q&A with, I think it was the really vicious judging that goes on in the mind. The way one attends unwisely, and we all do it, is by being present but giving the attention to the content, to the meanness of it. Is it true that I can't do it right? No, it's not true. And this shouldn't be happening because I shouldn't be having kilesas. I'm giving attention to that. Unwise attention. Notice that as the attention is given to that content, are the kilesas increasing or no? This is how we tell what's wise attention.

So as we're giving attention to that—I'm so bad—aversion is growing, growing, growing. Unwise attention. He's just being practical. And we say this over and over: give the attention to something that's more concrete. Okay, feeling the unpleasant aspect, being with that. It's unpleasant, but you can see the kilesas are not increasing. Mindfulness is increasing. It's not always so clear cut, but this is the way it works.

So wise attention, you see, is what's worth attention, what helps to support clear seeing. What's feeding the kilesas, that's not wise attention. In terms of thought, that's the example I want to give for that.

The others are more concrete experiences in our life. And this I love—you might not think the Buddha would mention them all. The second one is taints that can be abandoned by restraining. "A bhikkhu reflecting wisely abides with the eye faculty restrained. While taints and fever of defilement might arise in a bhikkhu who is abiding with the eye faculty unrestrained, there are no taints in one who abides with the eye faculty restrained."

What do we mean by that? It doesn't mean going around blindfolded. There was once a friend of ours who was on staff, and he decided to go around for three days here blindfolded. That's not really the same thing.

This is a very simple example of eye faculty restraint. And it's not that this is a "should." Don't make a list of shoulds—"I can't look around." That's not wise attention. It's seeing and learning from wise attention, from mindfulness, what's creating more suffering.

A simple example: eye faculty restrained while walking. Someone's passing. There's this huge desire to look. You're aware of it. You keep looking, and what happens? There's no way that was a supportive thing to do. Either judging comes up—of them, of you, of you for judging them. Either way, there's comparing, there's *māna*, or you just judge yourself for looking. Either way, you've gotten lost in thought, and before, you were quite present.

Eye faculty restraining—I don't need to look. Not out of some harsh "should," because that's just more aversion, but out of clear seeing what's actually supportive, what's not feeding the *kilesas*. And so you do it, and you pay attention, and it's like, ah—there's a sense of ease and peace rather than feeding the craving by looking. Otherwise you feed that craving, and then you feed the next craving, because we just get in the habit of feeding craving.

But this is something to explore. Again, not from "should" or "you're bad," because that's aversion, but from really seeing what wise attention is, what starves the *kilesas*.

Just little things. You smell something pleasant. Something's cooking for lunch. The mind goes, "Pizza." I know nothing about lunch—I'm not saying there's pizza. I'm just saying one smells something. The mind goes, "Pizza." Off into all kinds of *papañca* about it.

What's the unwise attention? There's nothing wrong with smelling it or thinking "pizza." Wise attention, restraint of the sense door, would be: that's enough. But then we smell it again, smell it again. It's like unwise attention to the pleasant aspect, the gratification—"Pizza, ah, the pizza!"—or off into thought. That's unwise attention. We think it's pleasant, but notice what's being fed: more wanting, more wanting. And you can't have pizza, so you go off into some story about the next time you go to Italy, and you remember that best pizza you ever had in that little place in front of the post office in that little town up in Umbria. That's a true memory—best pizza I ever had. And I'm off, you know, off in Italy there.

And it seems pleasant, until I say, "Oh, what's happening now?" Well, I'm sitting here and my bum hurts. And having fed the *kilesas*, the mind's a little bit more uneasy when it comes back. You kind of disrupt the continuity of presence.

So not judging, but noticing this and trusting wisdom to incline toward the wholesome. That's taints abandoned by restraining.

The third—and I could go on for fifteen minutes about each—the third I like as well: wise attention to the attitude with which we use things, with which we use requisites. How can taints be abandoned by using?

Reflecting wisely, a bhikkhu uses robes for protection from cold, for protection from heat, for protection from gadflies, and only for the purpose of concealing what disturbs conscience. In other words, use alms food for a good purpose, but not for amusement, not to feed craving, not to feed ill will.

I found this really so interesting when I started paying attention to it in my life. How do we relate to our clothes, for example? I like clothes and pay attention to clothes, but I remember a year when I was a nun, and by the end of that year, just having three same outfits that you simply change—it's so much more peaceful.

But it's not about the outer form. You can get totally into having the right outfit and the right kind of material, this top that's better than that top, wearing it so you look good. It's not about the external. It's about how we relate. How do we relate to food here? Do we eat what we need and then just put it down? Or do we relate to it out of fear or out of need? Again, it's not bad or good. It's seeing what serves, what's strengthening in the mind.

For me, I remember being on retreat and thinking, "Oh, I might be hungry later." So I would save a couple of rice cakes or a banana or something. I never ate it. It would sit there and rot on those shelves back there. And what was being fed until I started noticing this was feeding the greed, feeding the fear, and feeding a sense of complication—because I somehow had to deal with that stuff I'd saved and then didn't want, so I saved something else.

Then when the time came, I would say, "Just take what I need, and if I'm hungry later, so what?" A little bit of hungry. We're not in starvation station here. A little bit hungry—it's just sensations. And there's food the next morning. It's so simple. So I'm going to just start coming late. What if one of the dishes has run out? There's two other dishes. There's plenty of food. Just that shifting of the relationship, seeing, "Okay, I didn't get what I wanted, but the mind and heart is at peace"—versus making sure I get what I want, feeding the craving, relating to the requisites in a way that feeds fear.

It's fun, really, to explore this, something we might not have thought of. And the Buddha is saying, why attention here? This is helping to abandon these subtle underlying tendencies that are at the deepest root of our suffering. He's not just saying this is something good to do in the meantime. This is really how we relate to actions in our life to free our heart and mind.

The next one is called "enduring" in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation. I would say patience, which is pretty obvious. We've talked about that a lot. But I like the way he describes it: "Here, a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, bears cold, heat, hunger, thirst, and contact with gadflies, with flies, with wind, with burning and creeping things." They're sitting outside under trees. "They endure ill-spoken, unwelcome words. And arisen bodily feelings that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing, and menacing to life." He's not messing around.

What I would say is that reflecting wisely, one bears things that are here and can't be changed. He's not saying everything. He's not saying make yourself a doormat. But difficult stuff that happens, unpleasant feelings in the body, a lot of noise going on, the person in the next room makes noise, you don't like the heating in here, the windows are closed and you want them open, the windows are open and you want them closed—endless, right? We all have great stories of cultivating patience from practice in Asia. Endless stories about that.

But it's really true. It's not about patience just so you don't have to suffer. The cultivation of patience is really about seeing that you can be in a difficult situation and the kilesa doesn't come up. It's really quite remarkable. But you don't get there by wishing. You have to be there and see the suffering that comes.

So, okay, quick story. Noise in Burma—that's always a good one. When they have weddings in villages around monasteries, and every meditation center has villages all around, just right outside, like across the street here. When there's going to be a wedding, they rent these speakers—gigantic speakers—and play music, loud music, so the whole village can share in the joy, twenty-four seven, all night.

So this one time at Shwe Oo Min, U Tejaniya had told us in the morning—and it was unbelievable, the racket—he said, with glee, "There's four different weddings going on at the same time." And he's like, "This is great practice for you guys." And it was true. He meant it.

So it went on. There's no way to get away from it. It goes all night. There's no way to get away from it. Either deal or go crazy, right? And so it takes a while, but at some point you're really seeing: this is how it

is. This is how it is. And I remember something Ajahn Sumedho said about something else: "I can't bear it another moment. And then I found that I could." That's what happened. And then I found that I could.

You really have to start again next time, but really, before midnight, my mind was quite equanimous with it. It took a while, okay. Just to have that experience that it's not essential that there's kilesa, that we can't blame it on the object, that it's really possible. We all have that chance here. And it's not just to prove you can sit with it. It's really, again, as the Buddha said, it's to abandon taints and fever of defilement. We're really doing it for liberation, not just to get through a bad day.

The next method, and this might surprise you, is abandoning by avoiding. I like this one because he's being really practical. He's not saying you should be able to be patient and present with every single thing. We're paying attention to what feeds kilesa, what starves it, what feeds wisdom, what starves it. And some things are to be avoided—okay, different things than we would avoid.

Here, a bhikkhu reflecting wisely avoids a savage elephant. We don't have to think too much about that. Maybe Greg does, but avoid a savage elephant, a savage bull, or a savage dog, or a snake, or a stump. You don't just walk into a stump. A sewer, a cesspit. It's like you're not an idiot.

You avoid wandering to unsuitable resorts, hanging out with unsuitable, unwholesome people. He's being quite realistic, not idealistic. So it's not, "I should be able to be with anything." For example, we say be with piercing experiences, but say you're sitting in a way that's damaging your knee—not just that it hurts, but you're damaging it. Well, for the love of God, change position. Don't keep sitting that way, but do it not out of aversion, but out of not feeding kilesa.

There's a reason the retreats are set up like this and we don't have CNN running in all the corners like in the airports. There's a reason we say put down your phone.

We're avoiding what's going to really stir up the mind and feed kilesa, to support us being able to see clearly. In life, we can't avoid all of that, but we can make many more choices to avoid what feeds kilesa than perhaps we do. And when it comes from this sense of wholesomeness, seeing what supports peace of mind—not avoiding out of fear, but out of seeing what really supports—it's quite interesting. The Buddha was really not being idealistic.

The next one is abandoned by removing. This is really more adhiṭṭhāna—removing unskillful thoughts with resolution. It's not that you push them away or hate them. But when we get into, say, a vipassana romance thought, again and again and again, at some point we go, "That's enough." And we have to do that again and again. We say, "No, I'm just not going to go there. Just not going to go there." Resolution, adhiṭṭhāna, coming from wisdom—seeing that going into that is just feeding craving. We can't always do that, because it has to be without aversion, but having that intention, knowing it's possible to abandon that thought, to remove that tendency.

And the last one, which I don't have to elaborate on because we already have, is cultivating the seven

factors of awakening. Mindfulness, dhamma vicaya—investigation of dhamma, that brightness of mind—energy, pīti, rapture or interest, samādhi, tranquility, and equanimity, as Guy talked about them. Cultivating all of these, using all these aspects of our life, really looking and seeing how we're paying attention. What's feeding the wholesome? What's starving the kilesa? What's feeding the kilesa and starving the wholesome? So that everything we do becomes a source of potential wisdom, a source of really learning, a source of inclining the mind and heart toward wisdom and freedom. Nothing is outside of our practice.

I'll end with one quotation from the Buddha:

"Abandon what is unskillful, bhikkhus. It is possible to abandon what is unskillful. If it were not possible, I would not tell you to do so. If this abandoning of what is unskillful were conducive to harm and pain, I would not say to you, abandon what is unskillful. But because this is conducive to benefit and pleasure, I say to you, abandon what is unskillful."

And then he says the same thing about developing what is skillful: "It is possible to develop what is skillful, or I would not tell you to do so."

It helps to remember that it is possible for all of us.

Thank you for your long, enduring attention. Let's just sit for a moment.

Another way this goes together—the Dalai Lama says, "Every morning I practice to calm and quiet my mind, and then the rest of the day I use that to serve humanity." Wisdom and action are part of the same thing.

So just noticing why you get up or not, whether you walk or have tea, just noticing what's going on in the mind with interest.

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