The Way Things Have Come to Be

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 51:01

If you remember last night when James suggested that you just take a moment to reflect on your motivation, your intention for being here, I thought I'd share mine in a simple way.

I'm here, as best I can, to share and represent the Buddha's teachings as I've come to understand them in my own experience. But not so that you have a good time or a bad time. Not so that you get to have a new fantastic experience. Not to help you achieve a particular goal or any experience whatsoever. Rather, my hope is that whatever we can do to support your practice—and practice isn't just sitting, isn't just walking, it's every moment of every day exploring how our minds work—might help you come to understand more deeply, to trust more radically, the fact that freedom isn't about changing or getting something. Freedom and peace are available in our hearts and minds when, in any particular moment of consciousness, we recognize reality accurately.

Meditation isn't about changing reality. It's not about changing your idea of yourself. It might do that, but that's not going to free you. It's not about setting up the idea that you will every day let go of one thing you're clinging to, and by the end of a month you'll be thirty percent—oh, it's February—twenty-eight percent more free from clinging than you were before. If we could just think of an idea of what we need to do, how we need to look, what we need to think—if thinking would get us there, we'd be there. And we are there, because it's not there, it's here. But thinking doesn't help us see that.

My deep intention, my motivation, is to support all of us to keep recognizing in any moment things as they have come to be in this moment. There's a phrase in Pali, *yathā bhūta*, translated most accurately as "things as they have come to be in this moment"—meaning they could not be any other way. They've come to be this way in this moment through an intricate and, to a complete extent, untraceable series of conditions, all interrelated and connected. In this moment, things could not be otherwise because this is how they are.

Freedom comes not from changing how this moment is, not from making *yathā bhūta* look different, but from a moment when consciousness is clear of confusion, of distortion, of seeing and understanding inaccurately—and then acting on that and compounding that. When there's clear seeing and wisdom, the heart and mind is free. Seeing things how they are frees us from the confusion of clinging, from the distortion of ill will and fear, from the deeply, deeply compelling but unfortunately completely wrong idea that "I am"—I am, and I am somehow the center of the universe. Each of us is the center of our own little universe, somehow acting with intention. Taking that delusion into our meditation, we could sit here and meditate with a lot of sincerity and a lot of energy and a lot of ideas and a lot of technique and a lot of

good experiences. But as long as I am doing it in order to get something, we're just continuing the pattern. And we can't stop that pattern by deciding to. God knows.

So my deepest intention is just, in any moment, to do what we can to support you to keep rediscovering—because you must know it already or you wouldn't be here—to keep rediscovering that deep trust and faith in radical presence, radical awareness, a radical acceptance with awareness, with presence, of whatever is arising in this moment.

One of the names, in some forms of practice, for one of the deeper insights is called *yathā bhūta ñāṇa dassana*, which means "knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be in this moment," of phenomena as it is in reality, as Anālayo describes it.

In a way, to me, that's a huge relief. We're not here to try and create something or make ourselves better or somehow finally get to the fourth jhāna. You can write that off your little list of things. You get there, you don't get there—it's over anyway, sometime. But knowledge and vision of things as they are? Well, they already are. It's nature. You don't, and in fact can't, create it. We don't have to. Wisdom arises as a natural effect of the cause of the steadiness of clear mindfulness. We don't even create wisdom.

So take a huge breath and relax. As one of my teachers said, our only job is to take care of awareness. Take care of our awareness. What awareness is noticing.

Not up to us. We keep trying to make it up to us. "This isn't good enough. That should be better." Right there, right there is the cause of all our suffering.

Well, it could be a long night, folks. But that's really what we're here for. And all the forms of practice, the techniques that we practice—they're useful, and there are many different ones. There's basic mindfulness at the six sense doors. There's cultivating mindfulness by beginning with a particular base experience, a more neutral experience such as the breath, in order to develop a steadiness of attention so that we can actually notice: one, that there is a mind; two, that it's working; three, how it's working.

To begin with, even when we've been meditating a while, when we first sit down—or for someone who's never really meditated—you don't really have a clue what it means to watch the mind. I was just sitting in on a lot of interviews with a teacher of mine in Burma, group interviews. He was talking to all different people—all people who spoke English, but from all over the world, all who had done a lot of meditation before. Each one was different; I don't mean to clump them. But it was really interesting to see how for many people who had done quite some practice—for some people over twenty years, and for some people newer than that—when they came in and talked about being lost in thought, he'd say, "Well, could you be aware of that?" And they'd say, "Yes." And he'd say, "Fine, that's watching the mind."

And that was something they could not relate to, couldn't accept. That watching the mind includes learning to see how the mind works all the time—not only watching the mind when it's doing what we want it to do, and the rest of the time trying to cut that out with ill will, with "this isn't happening."

Watching the mind with interest, not to change it, but just to see how it works. Actually, it's so much more fun than trying to make something else happen. And as I said, through the steadiness of mindfulness, just watching what the mind's doing moment after moment after moment, wisdom naturally arises.

We're doing all kinds of techniques. Maybe you're doing samatha practice, loving-kindness practice, just cultivating loving-kindness. Some people may be cultivating a more focused attention on the breath or on loving-kindness. All of these are very useful techniques, but not an end in themselves. And our habit of mind is so much to make whatever we do an end in itself. I mean, that's just what we know. We do something to get a result. Why else would we do it? It doesn't even make sense otherwise.

So when we talk about what we want to cultivate—being fully present with total interest and attention, complete acceptance for whatever happens, for no other reason than to be present—it just doesn't really fit our learning. But that is what we're cultivating.

And the reason it seems, and let's face it, at times is, so difficult to recognize yathā bhūta—to just be at ease in things as they are and recognize accurately—I know, I make it sound like la la la, that's all we have to do. And everyone here has spent a lot of time trying to do that, and at times succeeding. And then when it goes away, really thinking, "What did I do wrong?" And you're here for another two weeks, twenty-eight days, two months to beat your head against the wall of trying to just totally relax into how things already are. I know it's difficult.

And the reason—at first, when I began to hear the Buddhist teachings or read about them, and they talk about the need to purify the mind, or the torments, the kilesas—greed, hatred, delusion, confusion—as being the sources of our suffering, I thought, well, it sounds good. I didn't really have an argument. But over the years, I have come so much to absolutely know in my own experience, and to have a very strong respect for the power of these habits in the mind, in the heart. The power to arise—they're just inertia.

You know inertia: how a body at rest tends to stay at rest, a body in motion tends to stay in motion. It seems to work the same way with qualities, with factors in the mind. So when you're feeling in an open, loving place and somebody comes into your vision, even if it's someone you don't like that much, you tend to feel more loving toward them. The moment of loving—kusala, wholesome mind state—it's easier for the next moment to be like that, isn't it? When you're generous and you give something to someone and they're so happy on seeing it, then they feel happy and you feel happy and it just keeps rolling on. Inertia.

Well, I started with the pleasant, with the wholesome, didn't I? It happens to work very strongly with the difficult states of mind, the difficult factors in consciousness—with greed, with hatred, with confusion. When there's confusion in the mind, it clouds how we see things. It clouds our decision-making. And so what we do and what we say is a little more confused, and it leads to more confusion, right?

When you're angry and you look at the person you're angry with, what tends to happen? Do you feel the anger go away? No—you look at them and think, "That stupid jerk. How could they do that?" And then

perhaps, "I shouldn't be angry. I shouldn't be angry, you stupid jerk." You look back at them, back and forth, and the whole thing is just turning into a volcano. It's not you doing that. That's just the nature, the inertia, the momentum of that state of mind.

And these states are also very subtle. We're so familiar with the worldview, moment to moment, that is colored by gross or subtle forms of wanting, of ill will or aversion, of confusion, that really, very often, we don't even know it's there in the mind. You may say, "Speak for yourself." So I'm speaking for myself—very often I don't recognize it's in the mind, even when I'm looking for it. But I just want to offer that to you as a very worthwhile exploration during this retreat.

And it isn't personal. It's just nature. It's not you having a lot of ill will and therefore there's something wrong with you. That thought is just another movement of the ill will, isn't it?

So what we're doing here, really exploring, taking this time to look inward—a month, two months—it's so important, not just for our own greater peace and well-being, but for everyone we come in contact with. I think James also said that. And I know, teaching the three-month course at IMS most falls, Joseph was saying in his introduction about how privileged we are to have this opportunity. And we are incredibly privileged to be able to be here for this amount of time, to be here in such a—frankly—luxurious situation. I just came out of ten weeks in Burma. Believe me, this is luxurious.

To care, to have the interest—there are many people with opportunity but without interest—and to have the peace, the safety, enough food, hot water, enough health. It doesn't mean you're perfectly healthy, but you have enough health to be here. All these factors—family support, whatever it is—incredibly privileged.

And that doesn't mean it's some esoteric mind game, something to do only because you're bored with the rest of your life. Really, of course I've spent my life with this, so I'm biased. But in my opinion, there's nothing more important we can do for the good of ourselves, for the good of the world.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with that most famous couplet in the Dhammapada, one of the teachings of the Buddha. It's really what the Dhammapada opens with: that with our mind we make the world. When we speak and act with an impure mind—and impure does mean when the consciousness, the mind, is clouded by greed, by ill will, by confusion—and we don't know it, we don't recognize it, so it colors our perception, it colors our decision making. When we speak or act in that way, suffering follows us. In the same way, with our mind we make the world, and when we speak or act with a pure mind, happiness follows us. I'm sure many of you are aware of that.

It's not just some esoteric, subtle thing. Really, look at this world. Look at this world. It's inhabited by six billion people, more or less like us inside, different external circumstances—and it's a mess in many ways. And there are beautiful things. But look.

This summer, I spent some time in Munich, and I had time one weekend to go out to Dachau, which I'd

never had time to do before—one of the concentration camps during World War II. And somehow it was a very... this is going to sound strange. I want to say uplifting experience. That's not right, but it was grounding. It really brought me back, more clearly than ever, to what I understand to be of truth and value in this world. And that was just by seeing how horrible things can get. I don't want to put it all on Dachau, on Germany. Pick your place. But it's set up as a museum, and it happens to have really lovely grounds.

And in one of the buildings that remains, the museum part, they have large poster boards describing all different aspects of the camp from every perspective. They would describe something about the different countries and groups of people incarcerated there. They would have a poster describing, say, the Roma. But they would always include at least a photo of one real person and the name of that person. So it made it real. And likewise, if they were talking about the guards or the people who worked there or someone who kept the trains running—whatever the different aspects were—they would have a whole story and photos, but always a picture of some one person and a name.

When I reflected on it later, I thought that was the most brilliant thing. Because for me, watching people's reactions—of course it's very intense—but people were really present with it and really touched. It wasn't just something like, "Oh, how horrible," and move on to the next thing. And it wasn't like, "I can't stand this," and running out. It really brought people, all different kinds of people, fully there. I was watching them as they went through, and also myself. This sense of: this is the human condition in its most horrible form.

And again, it's not limited to Germany in World War II. But to see that the forces of hatred and fear and greed and denial and confusion and violence—they operate in the mind of normal people. So many people were involved on all aspects. There was no way to walk out and say a few monsters made this happen, or one group of people made this happen. Even though it's another culture and another generation, there are plenty of examples from this culture and this generation. Think about Guantánamo. We can say, "Well, I'm not involved." And maybe I'm not, particularly. But just thinking about how things happen in the minds of ordinary people, not monsters. The little decisions we make, the small choices—we don't know where any choice is going to lead.

The ignorance in terms of not knowing, which is out of our control. I'm sure in the beginning of Hitler's regime, no one could have had a clue which way it would go. And you make your decisions based on the best you can. But how much do we not know when our decisions are influenced by fear, influenced by greed, influenced by denial? "Well, I'll do the best I can for me and everyone else. I can't take care of that." Whatever it is. How do I know how I would act in such a situation? I really have no clue. I certainly know how I'd like to act, but that's a thought. That's a hope. I don't know unless I'm in that situation.

And somehow, they say it wasn't exactly uplifting, but it was like: yes, this is why I practice. This is why I spend my life sharing this—just to help people get interested enough to keep looking at our minds and our

hearts. To see that freedom from fear is not going to come from the external situation. Momentarily perhaps, but we don't know what's going to change. Freedom from fear and freedom from ill will, freedom from delusion—that's available, and only available, in the peace of our own heart and mind that recognizes accurately. Because when we recognize accurately, clinging just doesn't arise. It doesn't make sense.

And when we recognize accurately, fear may arise, we may act from fear. But we know what we're doing. That makes a big difference. And sometimes as we know what we're doing, we're able to make another choice. Sometimes we're not. And we notice that we're not, and we meet that with compassion. That's our practice. But if I go into a situation with the idea, "I will never act from fear," that's completely disconnected from what's really going on.

And so seeing this—this is really the edge that we all face, all the time, in our lives.

We just don't know when we're going to find ourselves in a world-changing situation or when it's just in our own little particular circumstance.

There's a book I read years ago by a man named Khassan Baiev, a Chechen who was working in Russia as a surgeon during the 1990s when Russia and Chechnya descended into a really violent and cruel civil war. Of course, I wasn't there. I don't know who was the aggressor—reading his book, because he's Chechen, it sounds as though Russia was, and everything I've read suggests that, but I don't know. Anyway, he came back from Russia to be a surgeon in Chechnya during the war, in Krasny. The book is about how he was the only surgeon there for a few years in this horrific conflict. He was treating anyone who would come to the hospital—either side, Chechen rebels or Russian soldiers, high brass or ordinary people. And so, of course, both sides distrusted him. He was attacked by both sides. He actually ended up having to leave the country, quite damaged. He was kidnapped by Chechen rebels because he was helping Russians, was badly wounded, and had to flee to save his life. He came to Boston.

One thing he said in the book stayed with me: you're in a situation you've never been in before. He said, "I was never in a war. I never held a gun. I was never near people who had guns. You don't know how you'll behave. You don't know." His point was that he had this oath as a surgeon to help people, and that's what saved him—that he could always align himself with that oath. That sense of commitment to goodness was so strong.

So I'm hoping—although hope isn't very reliable—that the depth of all of our continuing commitment to simple awareness, our willingness to be present with our mind, with our heart, with our surroundings, moment to moment to moment, not to get something out of it but simply because this is life—only here will we open to the truth, only here is peace—that this commitment and its natural results will serve us. Magically, there seems to be a greater access to compassion, a sense of—my mind isn't working too well—I want to say intimacy, but more the sense of being able to exchange oneself for another. That's what compassion is: you can feel someone else's pain as well as your own because we're not limited by "me"

and "the world out there." This is the natural effect of wisdom.

So my hope is that through our continued, ongoing, moment-to-moment presence—just in little moments, our willingness to be present, our willingness to have confidence in awareness rather than in our habits, our willingness to let this moment of life be as it is and be present with it—that strength, that faith, that understanding will show up in the choices we make, in our relationships, in the way we choose to live our lives.

Yes, we're privileged to be here, but this isn't some esoteric game that only well-to-do people can play. This is the heart of life.

I was just in Burma for a while, practicing some, and I spent all ten weeks there in different monasteries. It's such an interesting country because it's so filled with Buddhist practice—so filled. Men and women, lay and ordained, just everywhere you go. Nunneries popping up, monasteries everywhere. I'm not saying everyone in the nunnery or monastery is a being of light—they're people. But besides that, there's great generosity, incredible goodness of heart. And yet there is such—I want to say evil, but—the government is so harsh, disconnected, uncaring, selfish, cruel, oppressive. There's no way to live in that country without somehow having to accommodate that, unless you're willing to go to jail. That's just how it works. It's really such a place of paradox. So much goodness. And it's one of a few countries where Theravada Buddhism has been really held and shared and taught. It's very much alive there.

It's wonderful, and at the same time, each particular teacher has his—maybe her, but mostly his—own way of teaching. You go from one meditation center to another. I have a friend who was a monk there for about thirteen years. He was a character, but this is relatively true: he'd spend a year or two at one monastery, then decide he didn't want to be there anymore and would move to another—something foreigners can do much more easily than the Burmese. He said every time he'd go to a new one, they'd say, "Oh, you were at that one? Well, everything you learned there is wrong, because *this* is the way to do it." And it's just subtleties of technique, little differences that to someone in the bigger world would seem trivial—come on, get over it. But no, these are huge holdings, and ill will, and "I'm right and you're wrong." It's the human mind. It's everywhere. Great beauty.

And still, what creeps in is our confusion, our sense of self, our wanting, our aversion. These habits of mind are so insidious, so familiar. So it's not to hate them, but a lot of our practice is simply this: let's learn how it works. Let's get really interested in it. We don't have to stop it—just get interested in it. That already changes the equation.

Let me give you an example. Last night when James asked you about your aspiration—what's your aspiration?—I'm not going to ask you what it is, but did you think of something? And maybe you didn't, and that's okay too. I'm just using this as an example.

So say, for example, one's aspiration came up as, "I'm really here to free my mind from greed and

confusion." Or you really got in touch with: "My deepest commitment in this life is to live a life of compassion." Whatever it was, I'm sure whatever your aspiration was, it was an uplifting thought. And it was a thought, right? It's a thought. It might come together with a feeling, some qualities in the consciousness.

Now, sometimes people will ask: How is having an aspiration like "I'm here on this retreat to cultivate wisdom" or "I'm here to cultivate compassion"—how is that different from wanting? How is it different from thinking, "I want to be more compassionate"? And then we say the freedom the Buddha taught is the heart and mind that's free of clinging. And if I want to be more compassionate, that's clinging. We're back in paradox land, which, of course, the practice always is.

And so this is an example—I hope this makes sense—of how when the kilesas are there, it distorts. What makes it an aspiration or craving isn't the thought itself. It's not the object of attention, that thought "I want to cultivate more compassion." That's just a thought. In itself, it's just that—a thought. It could be completely empty. "I want to cultivate compassion. I wonder what's for lunch." It could have no energy behind it.

As an aspiration, it would come together in a moment of consciousness. Consciousness is just the quality of mind, a natural quality that knows what's happening. It knows hearing or seeing or thinking, tasting, smelling, touch—the six sense doors. Consciousness is simply that knowing that this is happening. Consciousness is going on all the time without our interference. It's nothing we do intentionally.

And so in a moment of consciousness, that moment of mind consciousness arises, and along with it—you could say in it, but it's just arising and passing—comes together with different mental factors, different qualities of mind. Greed, confusion, hatred, ill will—those are mental factors. Loving-kindness is a mental factor. Wisdom is a mental factor. Sati, mindfulness, awareness, is a mental factor. Calm is a mental factor. Faith is a mental factor. You see what I mean?

So a thought comes: "Oh, I wonder what's for lunch." And there's just equanimity, no to-ing or fro-ing about it. "I want to cultivate compassion"—it could just be equanimity, no connection. But as an aspiration, it will come together with qualities of faith. It brightens the mind. There comes some energy, some interest, some willingness to do. And you can feel that.

So it's like learning to recognize what's going on in the mind, in the mind that's knowing what's happening. "Oh, I really want to cultivate compassion."

You feel there's some energy. The mind is more open, brighter. You feel encouraged. There's more willingness to do something. You can tell—you don't have to check whether this is wholesome or not wholesome, whether this is a torment or something useful. You know. You can feel that it's not just that it feels good; feeling good isn't really too reliable. But you can feel that it's giving you energy, that it's onward-leading. "Let me really look at this next moment of fear." You can feel that.

And if you can't feel it, explore. It's possible to feel.

The next moment or the next day, you're sitting and feeling very, very sluggish. Your back hurts. The sitting's just been five minutes, and you want to throw something up here at the bell to make it ring. You think, "I'm never going to make it through twenty-six more days." And then you think, "Cultivate—I want to cultivate more compassion." And look at you, cultivate more compassion! It's hopeless. How can I cultivate anything? And you go off into the whole thing: "There's no way I can cultivate compassion in this rigid, dukkha-filled, sluggish mind, all the years I've been practicing," on and on and on.

In that moment, is that functioning as aspiration? It's not really inspiring you, is it? Inspire—get bigger. This is more like, "Oh God, shoot myself. Compassion, never mind. Compassion for myself would be to get up, walk out the door, and go home. That would be compassion." No, it wouldn't be.

So it's the same thought, but completely different mental factors in the consciousness. Qualities of ill will, aversion to your physical experience. You feel lousy, you feel tired, your back's hurting. You're not really recognizing it's unpleasant—there's aversion to that. The thought comes up, "I want things to be different. I want to cultivate compassion. I'm sitting here with my back hurting." That ill will, the inertia—it gets stronger and stronger. You think, "Oh well, then this isn't really an aspiration. It's just clinging. And clinging to wanting to be compassionate when in fact I'm sitting here like a slug with my back hurting—it's just clinging. So what's the use?"

But it's not the object. It's not the thought that makes it an aspiration or makes it clinging. It's what's happening in the mind that's noticing. That's where freedom arises, and that's where suffering arises—moment to moment. And thank God it's moment to moment, because in the next moment it can be different. We're not stuck with anything.

So you're sitting there sluggish, your back hurts, and you're kind of clinging to wanting to be compassionate. "I'm filled with ill will. It's hopeless." And suddenly you go, "Wow, look at that aversion. That's really interesting. Look at how aversion functions in the mind. It's even got me hating the idea of compassion. Isn't that interesting?"

In that moment, you see how the whole thing has shifted. And the shift is not that your back stops hurting. You're not really more compassionate. You still have only five minutes—maybe five minutes and ten seconds—into the sitting. But the mind has changed from not recognizing the ill will to mindfulness. "Oh, ill will is like this. Aversion is like this." You're interested in it.

That's our path. The interest—let interest do the work. Not thinking, "What do I have to do to get to compassion?"

Just what's happening now. Really being here with what's happening now. That's *yathabhuta*. Oh, aversion has this effect in the mind.

And then, you know, it goes back to aversion. You can kind of watch the whole thing, not with self-hatred, but with fascination. Oh, this is how the mind works. This is how it gets caught in aversion. This is how it takes it all personally. And then you go off on how great you are watching it all. And then when you wake up, you're in a whole other movie, a whole other me, a whole other self. Maybe we recognize that, maybe we don't.

But tomorrow, or even today when you go to bed—I know somebody said don't analyze your sitting. That's true, because it doesn't help; it's over. But also, the practice is not just about sitting. Everything we do is just to help us get in the habit, the interest, of just watching how the mind's working. Sitting, walking, eating, doing your *yogi* job—it doesn't matter. What's going on in the mind? Notice when there's peace. Notice when there's suffering. When there's suffering, notice what qualities are there. I guarantee you there'll be some kind of craving, some kind of hatred, or some kind of delusion. Delusion, of course, is very hard to see.

But even delusion—it is hard to see, but we can start to see it. One of my teachers says something I find really interesting. He says what's happening in the mind at a particular moment in consciousness determines how we see reality, how we recognize things. So the mind, the consciousness that's colored by *kilesa*—by greed, hatred, confusion—and not recognizing it, that's seeing through *kilesa*, and it can only see concept. Concept would be: "My back is killing me, this is useless." Can only see concept. The thoughts about things.

The mind that is pure in a moment—pure meaning just free from being colored by those *kilesas*—can see things as they actually are. And there are lots of different levels of this, but as they actually are in this example would be: "Oh, there's the thought, 'I'm not able to cultivate compassion.' I recognize the pain, the unpleasant sensation in my body. I recognize the thoughts about 'this is useless' as a thought. I recognize the ill will, the aversion, as aversion." It's recognizing what's happening rather than believing the whole story that's created as a concept: "I can't do this."

Of course, there are more levels of that. So that was just a long example of how grossly and subtly greed and confusion and ill will can come in and color experience.

And if, even in that example I just gave, our mind ever so subtly goes, "Oh, that second way—when you're saying, 'Oh, this isn't really craving, it really is an aspiration, I really can't do it'—that's wrong. The first way, when the mind isn't colored, that's right"—we're already back in. We're already back in making differentiation. It should be like this and it shouldn't be like that. And as soon as we're saying "this shouldn't be," the *citta*, the consciousness, isn't pure. We can't recognize accurately. As soon as we're saying "this is better than that," we can't recognize accurately. But as soon as we recognize, "Oh, the mind is saying this is better than that"—oh, that's how it is. Fine. Fine.

So we just kind of get a respect for how subtly these habits creep in. But also, I find it really energizing and encouraging that the seeing of them is just the other side of the coin. You don't have to get rid of anything.

You just kind of shift.

That Tai Chi Wu that Ajahn Sumedho always talks about—oh, thinking this is better than that feels like this. Being filled with aversion for compassion feels like this. Oh, aversion in the mind. That's all you have to see. The whole story, that whole concept, that can go. Aversion in the mind feels like this. That's all we have to see. It's really not so difficult.

What is difficult is trusting. Trusting over and over that it's that simple. Because for me, the thing that slips in the most is that deeply ingrained sense that I should be doing something. That things are a mess in the mind right now.

I bet today you had a few moments where your mind was not too collected—a little bit of so-called wandering mind. And I imagine, unless you're really a very free being, that once in a while you had a little judgment about that. Even if you say, "I know, it's just natural, the mind wanders," somewhere back there lurks the thought: "But I didn't come here for twenty-eight days with a wandering mind. I know better than this." Somewhere back there: "Okay, I came here to do open awareness, but the mind's all over the place. I can't trust this open awareness junk. I'm going back to the breath, and I'm not leaving that sucker until I can stay there for two hours without moving." It just slips in.

It's so hard to trust that the steadiness of awareness is the condition that allows wisdom to arise—not our pushing, not our trying to control, not our trying to create. It's hard to trust because, you know, it's all about me. And if I'm not trying to create, and if it's really okay to just sit here with these stupid thoughts going all over the place, falling asleep out of my chair, and then I get up and slam the door and think, "How embarrassing—and I'm a meditation teacher!" Then, you know, it's just hard to trust because it keeps coming down to somehow it's all about me.

But it's not. It's not.

And yathā bhūta, things as they have come to be in this moment, doesn't mean only really far-out things as they have come to be in this moment. It doesn't mean only great meditative insights as they have come to be in this moment. The truth reveals itself. Wisdom can arise when there's mindfulness, this presence of mind, awareness of even the silliest things, of the most mundane moments. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. People have great insights while peeing. When Sally talked about Ānanda's mind opening as he laid down to sleep—it's really because he stopped trying. And we're talking on his level, where the level of trying is so subtle. I mean, I look for it and I can't find it. But you feel the tension; you know it's there.

So we're challenged really, again and again, sometimes by what happens. A lot of unpleasant, unacceptable, difficult things arise in our practice, in our minds and bodies. Sure, that's the first noble truth. Not only on meditation retreat, but we're just more here, more present, more noticing it. Sure. And a lot of beautiful, pleasant, wonderful things arise in our minds and bodies on meditation retreats too.

But how to trust? Yathā bhūta is equally present in whatever's arising now. So to trust that enough—just

the simplicity of present moment awareness, that radical acceptance, that willingness to be here with interest, not with judgment, for whatever—and have the trust that wisdom arises by itself. Our trying to create wisdom is actually the thing that gets in the way, right? Because that's craving, that's wanting.

So it's a conundrum. It really is a paradox. If you're here, you're dedicated, you're working really hard. Believe me, I know how hard it is. It goes against all our habits. In Burma, the wake-up time is three-thirty in the morning. People who know me think, "You get up at three-thirty in the morning?" But you just do it.

It's just what's happening. And then you don't eat. Lunch is at 10.30 in the morning. That's it for the day. It makes for a long afternoon, I want to tell you. And there's no dharma talk. So about 3 in the afternoon—the first two weeks, after that the mind clicks in—but those first two weeks, 3 in the afternoon, I'm walking up and down. I had this one walking spot I loved. I always would get there and I just noticed my mind, about the second week. It wasn't big suffering. I mean, it was really there, but it was just kind of subtle stuff. Just something—God, *anything*, you know. A cat goes by. Wow. Look at that cat. How fascinating. Just something to happen, please, instead of walking up and down and up and down, just being with, noticing what the mind's knowing and not doing anything. Not even trying to get concentrated, just being present.

It's long. It goes against our habits. Just okay, keep doing it. Now I'm really wanting something to happen—fine, you know. I know what it's like.

All of that, just to keep rediscovering the fact that when we can fully inhabit with interest, really in a way with love, but without resistance, and with awareness, with wakefulness, totality—this present moment—take care of our awareness. That's our job. And that's only our job. Wisdom will do its job.

Yathā bhūta—we will see. We do, moment to moment, we do recognize accurately things as they have come to be. And just for a moment recognizing that, there isn't clinging, because clinging doesn't make sense when we see how things are constantly changing, not about me, nothing to rely on. Oh, yeah, right. What's there to cling to? And that's peaceful. That brings a kind of ease.

And then the next moment—the next moment, mind you—the mind is going, "Yeah, but maybe the juice today will be that kind I like." In four hours, that little cup of juice, maybe, you know. And there's clinging again. All right, clinging is like this. Clinging is like this. Not "I shouldn't be clinging. I had a moment of freedom and now I'm clinging. Oh my God, it's all over." No. Clinging is like this.

Can we trust that much and be that simple? That's really my aspiration, my wish for all of us here on this retreat.

I think that's enough. Thank you.

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