A Wise Person is Known by Her Actions

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:01:10

A few talks ago, when I was talking about generosity, I began by describing an incident with the Buddha when a man with leprosy was hanging around the edge of his teachings. The Buddha saw he was the one person whose mind could hear the Dhamma, and he gave graduated teachings—which he gives in many different places—to brighten the mind, to make it more purified, malleable, and receptive. The first of those teachings was generosity. Tonight I want to talk about the second of those teachings: virtue, or *sīla*, non-harming conduct.

Of course, we've talked about this all along, but I want to point to it again. When we have a habit of acting, speaking, and even thinking in ways that don't bring harm to ourselves or others, that brings us some kind of happiness. Probably we could all agree on that—it's not rocket science. But what I want to talk about is the way we explore our actions, really understanding, really turning our attention to working with *sīla*, which is a whole lifelong process. Instead of just going out and blaming ourselves because we did something stupid or harmful, what I want to emphasize is how the practice of attention to our motivations and our actions *is* the practice of wakefulness. It's the practice of mindfulness and wisdom. Just as the practice of generosity is also a practice of awakening, of non-clinging.

Sīla is not an isolated or lesser practice. Often on retreats we take the precepts and talk about how virtue and non-harming conduct are necessary as a base—a basis of non-remorse so we can get on to the "real stuff" and have some good meditative states and make progress in our practice. But I'd like to put forward that if we would just be interested, really committed to exploring our actions and speech and why we do what we do and what the effect is, wisdom would arise naturally of itself. This practice of itself is a practice of purifying the heart and mind. And purifying the heart and mind is really the abandoning of *kil esa*, which is what allows wisdom and awakening to arise in any moment. Working with *sīla* is a wonderful practice. It's not separate from our awakening, not separate from our life, not separate from how we act.

There are many different suttas that I really like to refer to. In one, just the first line, the Buddha says: "Monks, a fool is characterized by his or her actions. A wise person is characterized by his or her actions. It is through the activities of one's life that one's discernment shines. Through the activities of one's life that one's wisdom shines."

I think that's so beautiful. We can really start to trust and value for ourselves that our natural wisdom, and the wisdom that develops naturally through our willingness to be mindful of our actions, will naturally manifest in how we act in the world. This is so important. I'm not talking about it in some

grandiose way—I'm talking moment to moment. Our thoughts, our speech, our actions as an avenue of awakening. As the Buddha said, this is really how our wisdom shows up: how we act. It's not a little thing. The training in this is the training of awakening our mind.

Let me clarify what we've spoken of before in terms of action. "Action" is the translation of the Pali word *k amma*, the Sanskrit word *karma*. *Kamma* just means action. And the Buddha said that *cetanā*—the word in Pali that we translate as "intention"—is central to understanding this.

When we talk about intention, as Sally did last night so beautifully, really movingly, about our wider intention, our aspiration, our purpose in life—intention is one of those words in English that can apply to a range of mental experience, like love or desire. The broader aspiration, the purpose, as the second step of the Eightfold Path—that is, in Pali, *sammā-saṅkappa*. It's not *sammā-cetanā*. *Cetanā* is a very specific Pali word also translated as intention. It refers to the mental factor of intention, or sometimes motivation.

When I'm saying intention tonight, I mean *cetanā*. *Cetanā* is that moment, a movement in the mind, that gathering of mental energy, the collecting of mental energy that leads to speech or action. When we talked about noticing intention as an instruction in the retreat, we mentioned that maybe there's a little intention before you move your arm, before you open your eye—just a little "about-to" movement, as Joseph likes to call it. That's the mental action we're calling intention, *cetanā*. In terms of how the Buddha described it, it arises as the immediate cause of every action of body, speech, or mind. Are we going to see it all the time? No way. Don't even try. But it's just part of the cause-and-effect process. Ethically neutral, of course—just this little movement. But as it arises in a moment of consciousness, a moment of mind (*citta*), it arises together with other mental factors, just as we've talked about with other things.

When the Buddha talks about what's skillful or unskillful *kamma*, first he says—and this is from the Buddha—"*Cetanā*, intention, I tell you, is *kamma*. Intending, one does *kamma* by way of body, speech, and intellect."

This is what's so brilliant, so workable for us about the Buddha's teaching: he's saying the seed of action, when he's talking about *kamma*, about skillful or unskillful—where he's looking for the heart of the action is in this moment of intention. What makes it skillful or unskillful, wholesome or unwholesome, is the qualities, the mental qualities arising along with it.

We cannot tell from looking at an action what the intention is of someone else, although we think we really know. Actually, we know we don't even know what our own intentions are half the time, never mind somebody else. But the seed of it being in the intention means the same act from the outside could arise from very different intentions.

A simple example: if you have some supportive feedback you want to give a friend, there could be so many intentions behind that. It could really be out of love for this person—they're doing something you can see is unwholesome, unskillful, and you know they don't really want to be doing it, and it's causing

unskillful ripples, hurting people's feelings. I had this experience recently with a friend. I really thought about it for three weeks before I told her, a friend I was with in Burma for a while. I was very aware of my intention before speaking—speaking's a tough one. I really waited. I got in touch with my *mettā* and my caring for her and the sense of honesty. I picked the right time, we were both settled, and I communicated in what I thought was a really good way. She heard it well and was appreciative. I thought, that's a wholesome speech and a wholesome reception. I really did what the Buddha describes: reflect on the intention, the motivation for speaking.

But that's maybe one in a million. It's so easy to fool ourselves and say, "I want to give you this feedback for your own good," but it's really because they're bugging us and we want them to stop. So there's aversion, or a sense of "you'd be so much better off if you'd listen to me"—all those kinds of things. It could be straight-out hostility, couched as "let me tell you this for your own good," and you can feel the hostility coming at you. Someone comes in and says, "I want to give you some feedback. Can I give you some feedback?" No, no.

All of it could be the same words. Another way is you can really get in touch with your intention—as far as you can tell, it's really a *mettā*-caring intention—but you don't look at the bigger picture. You don't choose an appropriate time. You go in and say, "I've really got to tell you this right now." There's this sense of urgency, and you don't notice that the person is really stressed out, has had a horrible day, is at the end of their tether, can't take another thing. And you want to give them this helpful feedback. So there's a certain delusion in that intention.

Of course it's complex, so we're not going to get it right. But just starting to see how intention is the seed of wholesome or unwholesome action—we tend to judge by the effects of our actions, which are most out of our control. With my friend, I did really the best I could, but I had no control over her reaction. Knowing her, I thought she'd want to know, but I could have been totally wrong. Or I could have thought it was a good time, not knowing what she'd been doing all day, what state of mind she was in, whether she'd just gotten bad news five minutes before. There's all kinds of stuff we can't know.

Being able to tune into the intention—that's a place we can actually see for ourselves. It's not in our control, but it's in our awareness. It's actually going to be affected by the quality of our mind, our consciousness. The more wholesome acts we do, that affects the consciousness. We get more wholesome consciousness. The more wholesome consciousness, the more wholesome acts we do. You can't really separate the two.

Even when we can't see clearly our intentions, even with the best will in the world, when a moment of consciousness is colored by *kilesa* and we don't realize it, we're just not going to see clearly. That's just how it is. But our willingness to keep looking, to keep reflecting—before, during, and after an action—that willingness to bring mindfulness and wisdom right to the point of intention, to the point of action, and to the point of effect, is going to continue to deeply cultivate our awareness. It's going to allow for natural

wisdom to grow, and it's going to be a source of deepening happiness in our lives, in the world, certainly for the people around us who know us.

Just as in meditation, when we're paying attention to our actions, consciousness can still be colored by *kile sa* that we don't recognize. Here's a list I really like, from the Vinaya—not from the suttas, but from the book of the monks' rules. These are the four *agati*, the four wrong or unhelpful courses of behavior or prejudice, which are abandoned with wise seeing.

First, *chandāgati*: prejudice caused by love or desire, partiality. When we have partiality toward someone, we don't see clearly; we can act or make choices based on not being able to see the whole situation clearly, our own acts or another's.

Second, *dosāgati*: prejudice caused by hatred or enmity.

Third, *mohāgati*: prejudice caused by delusion—just not knowing what we're doing, just "sounds like a good idea, let's do it," or just not having all the information.

Fourth, *bhayāgati*: prejudice caused by fear. We can relate to how we could do all kinds of things from fear. Even little fears can get magnified. Just walking and hearing a dog bark—without even realizing it, fear comes and I turn and walk the other way. That's not horribly unskillful, but the intention is just delusion and fear, not paying attention to what I'm doing. It doesn't hurt anything in terms of outer action, but in terms of really noticing what's coloring my *citta*, my mind stream right now—that's interesting to see. Because then when I can notice the fear, I have a choice. Do I want to keep walking straight? Do I want to turn around? In the big picture, it doesn't make a difference. But these are good places to play with it, where it doesn't really matter.

When there's a decision about how to help a friend and helping brings up fear—how to be with someone who's really sick, for example—I've noticed that being with someone in a lot of pain or suffering is where compassion is so beautiful and where compassion is difficult: when it brings up fear in us. Or aversion. It's just hard to be there. We can come up with all kinds of rationales: "I really want to help, but I have my family to take care of. I have to go to work. I'm too tired." Tune into the motivation. "I feel a fear right there." Okay, fear's happening.

Just as in our practice sitting here, we bring that same quality of awareness, mindfulness, wisdom—not "I should do this, I should move through the fear, I should be the perfect person." No. Just bring the mindfulness to the fear. "Oh, fear is like this. These are the actions that start to come up from fear." You do it or you don't do it, you keep paying attention.

This is where the Buddha is so brilliant—we really learn what causes affliction or suffering to ourselves and others, what doesn't. In the silly fear example of turning around when a dog barks, that's not causing affliction to anybody else. The dog certainly doesn't care. It doesn't seem to cause affliction to me externally. But if I'm paying attention to my mind and I notice, "I ran from fear," and I notice that's the

moment where fear was basically driving the bus—if I don't recognize that, it's feeding fear. Not that I hate myself for it, but I really see how that's helping the reaction of fear get stronger. In that moment of contraction and fear and turning away, my senses shut down, the mind is contracted—it's subtle, but it is a kind of suffering, of separation being fed, being strengthened by my inattention.

If I pay attention while I turn around from the fear—just the same thing we've been saying here, exactly the same process—recognizing and feeling the fear as I turn around. "Fear is like this." In that moment, mindfulness is what's being cultivated. In that moment, acceptance, clear seeing. There's no "okay, you've got to turn around and face the dog." Maybe I will, maybe I won't. Maybe it doesn't really matter. But what does matter is that quality of being willing to use the motivations, why I'm doing what I'm doing, as a path of awakening. Without a "should," we keep exploring.

There's a sutta where the Buddha is giving advice to his son Rāhula, the seven-year-old. He talks about honesty first, but this part about reflecting on actions is what I want to share. The whole point is the quality of care and attention we bring, the attitude we bring to these reflections.

The Buddha says: "What do you think, Rāhula? What is the purpose of a mirror?"

"For the purpose of reflection, venerable sir."

"So too, Rāhula, an action with the body should be done after reflection. An action by speech should be done after reflection. An action by mind should be done after reflection."

Then he breaks it down: "When you wish to do an action with the body, you should reflect upon that action in this way: Would this action that I wish to do lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or the affliction of both?" Notice he's saying "my own affliction" too—not just the affliction of others. Really looking and seeing: what's the motivation, and as best I can tell, what would be the effect? Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, painful results?

If on reflection that's obvious—and what's surprising is how often it might be obvious if we really reflect—he says, "Of course, definitely you should not do that action."

But if you reflect and know this action you wish to do would not lead to your affliction or the affliction of others or both—it's a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results—then you may do it.

Here's the interesting part. He says: "Also while you are doing the action with the body"—and the same with speech, the same with thinking—"while you're doing the action, reflect upon it in this same way. Is this action I am doing leading to my own suffering? Is it leading to the suffering of others? Is it leading to the suffering of both? Is it unwholesome for myself, for others?" If you see it's having painful consequences, then you should suspend that action. You should just stop. But if not, continue.

And after you've finished an action, again reflect on it. Did that action lead to my own affliction? The

affliction of others? The affliction of both? Was it unwholesome? Unwholesome results? If so, really tune into that, see what the effect is. The Buddha, talking to a monk, says to go and confess it in the bi-weekly meetings they have. For us, it would be to really reveal it, lay it open to your heart. If you're confused about something, talk to a teacher or wise companions in the holy life, and then undertake restraint for the future.

So: with body, with speech, with mind, reflect before, during, and after.

This is the important thing, though: it's not just if it's unwholesome. Also notice if it's wholesome. Notice what's the effect during it. What's the effect after it? When you reflect, if you know this action that you did did not lead to your affliction or the affliction of others or both—it was a wholesome bodily action, speech action, or mind action with pleasant consequences, wholesome results—then you can abide happy and glad, training day and night in wholesome states.

That's what I really want to emphasize: *sīla* is not just about looking at how bad we are and trying not to be bad. It's actually tuning in—just as with generosity—to the happiness of heart, the gladness of heart, when we act in a way that doesn't cause ourselves or others suffering. Training day and night in wholesome states.

Even just restraining, refraining consciously from an unwholesome action—that is a wholesome action. I bet we often don't realize it. "Oh yeah, I better not do that. Oh, I was about to do that. I'm so dumb. I'm so greedy." But we don't do it. Could we actually appreciate the wholesomeness of not doing it before we jump into beating ourselves up for having thought about doing it? We could actually move into the joy, the happiness, the wholesomeness of refraining from affliction.

This is the way the Buddha talks about it: really noticing how our willingness to do this over and over is actually the same practice of mindfulness and wisdom at the point of contact with awareness that we're going to do something or want to do something—a thought, a motivation, an intention. That's the same mindfulness and wisdom we're cultivating in our meditation here. It's no different. That willingness to just meet what's happening and to explore with interest—not with judging, not thinking "this is a list of what's good, this is a list of what's bad." That's not the way it works. It's that willingness with beginner's mind to see: what's the effect of this action of speech, of body, of mind? What are the causes that bring me to do it? How does it seem when I'm doing it? What's the effect when I'm done, both for myself and for others?

And it's equal: not harming yourself or not harming others. I know I've said that three times already, and I'm going to say it again, because non-harming includes you. It's not just about everyone else in the world, but you. That's where we start.

When we do see the cause and effect, when we've done something and see it was unwholesome, it caused some affliction to ourselves or others—the way the Buddha says to abandon it is interesting. He doesn't say, "When you realize you've done an unwholesome action, grovel, hate yourself, really go over and over

and think about what a bad person you are and get filled with guilt and remorse." No, he doesn't say that.

He gives an example about someone telling lies. He says to Rāhula that speaking untruth is almost the most unskillful thing we can do. So lying is really not a good thing. But if someone sees, "There are lies that I have told to a greater or lesser extent"—if someone's reviewing this in their mind, "that was not right, that was not good"—that's a neutral way of saying it. But if you become guilty, remorseful, with a negative self-judging tinge, if you get lost in guilt for that reason, that unwholesome deed will not be undone.

Have you noticed that? No matter how long you spend hating yourself for something you did yesterday or a minute ago or last year, it doesn't undo it.

So reflecting thus—and this is where it sounds easier than it is—he abandons right then the telling of lies and in the future refrains from telling lies. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that unskillful deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that unskillful deed.

Take it as a teaching, not as if we see it once and it's over. But he's saying: really, you look and you see with mindfulness wisdom, with this attitude that's really interested in how the mind is working. What were the intentions? Why did I do it? What was the effect? How did that work for me? How did that work for others? We can only see in this way if we're interested—and that interest is the quality of pure mindfulness, of awareness not colored by self-hatred, by wanting, not trying to make it look better than it was or worse than it was.

In that moment of reflecting, what we're doing is purifying the mind, just in the paying attention. Even before we've gotten to "maybe lying is not such a good thing," just in the looking we're cultivating mindfulness and wisdom, cultivating that quality of awareness that can be with anything. When we say awareness doesn't care, it means it just wants to see how it is. It doesn't have a presupposition about whether this is wholesome or not. It's looking to see what's really the effect.

When we're looking in that way, that's how, when we're doing something unskillful, we'll only abandon it first when we really get it for ourselves that it was causing us harm, causing another harm. As I'm sure you know by now, usually one time isn't quite enough to really get it. Would that it were, but it's not. But it does start to sink in when we're continuing to meet what's happening with this attitude of interest and non-judging.

We do get to know—and you all know this from being here—we know it and then we don't know it the next day. But we really do get to know deeply and personally for ourselves the afflictive aspects of so-called unskillful action. And that's what's meant by unskillful—not that there's a list of things, you do them you're good, you don't do them you're bad, and we don't have to think about it anymore. That's better than nothing, I suppose. But that's not the way this deep understanding of suffering grows.

As that deep understanding grows through paying attention, through really feeling it, a lot of you are in that phase now where you notice so much more clearly when you speak or act or even think in an

unskillful way, colored by *kilesa*—but you keep doing it. You're feeling the suffering of it so much more than you did before. When someone asked this morning about just wanting to go back to delusion, I can understand that. As we begin to wake up and become much more sensitive to what we're doing and why we're doing it and the effects—just in ourselves, never mind others—it's so painful. But somehow the attachment that keeps us doing it might still be there, and we keep experiencing the pain so much more deeply. Parts of us say, "Let me not have to see this anymore."

But I'm sure you know now, it's too late. It's way too late for all of you to go back to delusion, because it's not the safe refuge. I see my mind wanting to say, "Please, I don't want to see anymore." But then it sees that, and it's just another passing moment.

It's difficult. That's why compassion is so key for us. There are times when we're so much more sensitively tuned in to the painful effect of even our unwholesome thoughts. We're so sensitive. And here on retreat, it's so magnified. Stuff we're in agony over that we did that was unskillful—that other people wouldn't have noticed here. You go out in the world and tell someone, "Oh my God, I just pushed in front of this person in line because I really wanted that particular muffin. And I just feel so terrible. I know they knew it. And I can see them flinch." It's a huge thing, and you're really suffering from it. And the other person maybe is too—they come in and say, "I just feel so disrespected. They just pushed in front of me. It's like I don't even exist. And now I'm filled with hate for them. And I feel horrible."

You try to tell someone outside: "I feel so remorseful because I stepped in line in front of somebody and took a muffin." They're like, "Excuse me? Have you read the newspapers recently?" But we really are this sensitive. This really is how the mind and heart begin to understand deeply, and the wisdom—because we can't create wisdom, wisdom arises naturally.

I'll tell you one experience. A few years ago, when we had our former president, the last president, and he was doing something I didn't approve of—some big thing he'd done—I was just walking up and down on the country road near where I live. I could see annoyance, I could see anger, but I really got into the anger in a way I don't often do. I was just filled with this rage, but the kind of rage that's righteous indignation, that has a certain sweetness if you don't look carefully. "Yeah, right, the jerk, how could he?" It was building and building and building. And all my thoughts were right, of course, and everyone I knew would totally agree with me.

So I was doing that, really caught in it, until suddenly—and this is just thank God for the habit of mindfulness and wisdom, because it just arose by itself—suddenly just mindfulness. "Wow. Anger feels like this." And it felt terrible. It was just like on fire with rage, burning, one angry thought feeding the next angry thought, my energy getting stronger. I saw I was about to have to go off and do something, and if anyone had come up and talked to me just then, I would have snapped their head off. Whatever it was, the anger would have just gone over. If it was someone who agreed with me, we would have gotten together and bad-mouthed the president. But if not, if someone just got in my way a little bit, I could see the

hostility starting to grow.

The mindfulness just felt that—not with a "should" or "you're bad" or anything—just felt how that felt, what the effect was on the mind stream, how it was going to affect my speech and action. And just right then, wisdom came by itself. The wisdom just comes from the steadiness of seeing. "Wow. Nothing's worth it." I mean, I wasn't doing anything helpful. That anger wasn't helping the situation in any way. And it was so clear at that moment that nothing is worth feeding anger like that in my mind or adding that anger to the world.

And just then, the anger went away. It doesn't mean it never came back, and it doesn't mean we don't act. But acting from that anger wouldn't have been in any way helpful. I remember it because it was such a strong, clear seeing, and the wisdom was completely nothing to do with me. It just arose from the mindfulness, from the awareness noticing anger and feeling it. And that arose from the habit of awareness for so many years.

The wisdom—I love it—it's just so wonderful to see that it's not something we have to remember and call up: "Oh yeah, anger, suffering, yeah that's right, it's not good, I think I'll try not to do it." It's just right there. When there's awareness, it's just right there. That's what we can really learn to trust, and that's what we're cultivating. And in that restraining from the anger—well, that just happened effortlessly. But there's still an intention to abandon anger, and knowing that's a wholesome action. Not doing harm is a wholesome action. Really appreciate that. You don't have to go out and be Mother Teresa. Refraining is wisdom.

Sally mentioned last night, in talking about the second step of the Eightfold Path—wise intention, or wise aspiration, usually translated as "right thought"—there's a sutta where the Buddha is using this same type of mindfulness wisdom, just reflecting, exploring with interest his types of thought and the effects of his thought. That's how he came up with this sense of wise thought and unwise thought. I like it because it brings the same quality of exploration, rather than just saying "this is bad, this is good." He's looking and seeing what's the effect. Skillful and unskillful are really determined by effect. And we're only going to learn that for ourselves.

He's talking about when he was practicing, before he became awakened, before he became a Buddha—which I always find interesting. He says: "The thought occurred to me"—he never says "I thought," it's always "the thought occurred to me," which gives the sense of how thoughts just arise—"why don't I just keep on dividing my thinking into two sorts?" So he decided whenever he had thinking with sense desire, thinking filled with ill will, or thinking filled with harmfulness, he would look at that as one type. And thinking with renunciation, with non-ill will or *mettā,* and with harmlessness, as another type.

"As I remained heedful, ardent, and resolute"—and I want you to hear this: he's not the Buddha yet, but he's no slouch. He's practicing. He's heedful, ardent, and resolute. I imagine his heedful, ardent, and resolute is pretty serious—"thinking imbued with sensuality arose. I discerned: thinking imbued with

sensuality has arisen." And he looked at how it affected him. He said: "It leads to my own affliction or the affliction of others. It obstructs wisdom. It obstructs clear seeing. It promotes vexation. It does not lead to liberation."

"And as I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, this thinking subsided. As I noticed that it leads to the affliction of myself or others, it subsided. As I noticed that it obstructs clear seeing, that it promotes vexation, does not lead to liberation, it subsided."

Isn't that interesting? He's just really noticing with clear mindfulness what's arising and how it's acting and what the effect is. He's not saying "I hate it." Later he talks about rooting out, abandoning, dispelling. But the first way it's talked about is: as I noticed it, and as I noticed it led to my vexation, it subsided. That's like what I was talking about with that anger example. As the awareness—and it's not a person, not "I noticed, I'm so great"—it's just mindfulness wisdom, a mental factor arising, seeing clearly that this sense desire thinking is leading to my own vexation. And seeing that, just steady with mindfulness wisdom, for that moment it subsides.

Try it. You've been doing that the whole time. But start really having faith, confidence in the power of mindfulness and wisdom and the willingness to just be honest, to bring this honest interest into seeing what's going on in our mind, what's the motivation for doing this.

And then the same thing for thinking filled with ill will or harmfulness. Just when you notice it leads to vexation, to affliction of yourself or others, doesn't lead to freedom—it subsided.

And then, this is that famous line we always use, from this sutta: "Whatever a person keeps pursuing with his thinking and pondering, that becomes the inclination of his awareness." We just notice that. If you keep pursuing thinking imbued with sensuality, abandoning thinking filled with renunciation, then the mind becomes bent toward thinking about sensuality. Just what we've noticed.

So when you're bringing mindfulness—even mindfulness of sense desire, mindfulness of thinking filled with ill will, mindfulness of thinking filled with harmfulness—what the mind is being bent toward is the mindfulness, is the awareness, not the ill will. When we jump on it and go, "Yeah, I am so bad for thinking about ill will and I do need to do something to stop it"—that's pursuing thinking imbued with ill will. Mindfulness of it just watches the cause and effect: "Oh yes, this does cause me suffering. Let's see how that works." That's really very powerful.

Then he went on to notice: "Thinking imbued with renunciation has arisen in me." And looking at it, he discerned it does not lead to his own affliction or the affliction of others. It fosters wisdom, clear seeing. It promotes lack of vexation, more ease, contentment, leads to freedom. "If I were to think and ponder in line with that for even a day, for even a night, even for a day and a night, I do not envision any danger that would come from it—except that thinking and pondering a long time would tire the body."

Have you noticed that? Even wholesome thoughts—you ponder a day and a night, it tires the body. When

the body is tired, the mind is disturbed. And a disturbed mind is far from concentration. So he's also noticing the effect on the body. "So I steadied my mind, settled, unified and concentrated it. Why is that? So my mind would not be disturbed."

You get a sense of the difference. He's not hating the thoughts. But he's still, even with wholesome thoughts, really following it out: "A day and night I can think about renunciation. No problem. But the body gets tired. The mind's a little bit disturbed. It would be more helpful to steady the mind and drop the thoughts." But it's not because the thoughts are unwholesome.

So just this willingness to keep exploring and to see what leads to contentment, to ease, to happiness, what leads to suffering—and really to see for ourselves over and over and over. And to really get that it works both ways: wholesome states of mind obviously breed wholesome actions. When *mettā* is what's in the mind, that's going to be the motivation for action. But it works the other way too: cultivating wholesome actions also supports the arising of wholesome states.

Hence the usefulness of having the precepts. When we know we're not in a wholesome state of mind and we don't know what to do, and there's this precept—"don't take what's not given"—and we don't do it, even if the motivation isn't really that sensitivity of wisdom, just in the refraining from taking what is not given, there's a wholesomeness. It is that freedom from remorse. Later, even though it wasn't a totally pure motivation, you can reflect, "I didn't take that thing." And a sense of contentment, a sense of ease, a sense of freedom from remorse can arise from that reflection.

It's really important that we can reflect on our non-harming conduct as a source of happiness, as a source of brightness in the mind.

There is a list the Buddha gives, from the Discourse on Right View. He's talking about Right View—the beginning of the path—and he

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