Ongoing Awareness and Resolute Aspiration

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:04:11

So tonight we're both going to speak about different things that come into our minds about awareness in daily life—or basically a life of practice—which is, of course, as Steve talked about last night, a vast topic.

I'm just going to say a few simple things about this particular style of watching our mind, of noticing experience that we've been talking about and trying to give you time to explore these days.

I found—and I think I've said this to some people—after sitting with Sayadaw U Tejaniya for a while and practicing in this way, I was really surprised to find the effect it had in carrying into my daily life without a lot of trying, without any big ideas. Just how quite naturally this quality of interest in watching my mind arose without judgment. And that's what's so key.

Not watching my mind thinking, "I've got to be mindful, I've got to be good," because then right away you feel oppressed as soon as you think about it, right? The mind's not going to be so great when you watch it. We know that now. So if I think, "Oh, I've got to watch my mind," and when I see it, it's like, "Oh, it's all full of all this gunk—forget it, it's useless, there's no point in practice, why did I even do it?" It's hard to keep practice up if we have some model like that.

But this simplicity of just watching what the mind is doing with an interest to learn, and with this trust that wisdom naturally arises through the steadiness of awareness—I was really surprised and very heartened to find what an effect it's had in my life and how easy it is to access. It's really become quite natural. It's not such a leap.

If you've been practicing mindfulness Buddhist meditation for a long time, it's nothing you don't know. It's almost like you just have to stop trying so hard. Stop trying to be mindful in your daily life and then getting upset when you can't because things are so busy—so then you just screw the whole thing. It's really something much more interesting and less stressful.

But there are two things. I think the two key things are that it has to matter to us—we have to want to pay attention. And then there's the sense of relaxed remembering without judging.

I want to read you something from Tejaniya, a question and answer. Someone was asking him, "Can you give us some advice on how to practice outside the retreat center?"

So he says: "How do you want to live in the world out there?" You know, as if out there different things are happening—same mind. Did you notice that? Do you think you had a different mind here?

"If you really want to continue the practice, the mind will find a way. Only when there's a measure of true appreciating of the value of awareness, of mindfulness, will the mind be prepared to make a consistent effort in daily life. No matter how many techniques you know, unless the mind has the true interest, the true desire to practice in the world, you won't be able to apply any of those techniques out there. A mind that has understood the benefits of practice will find time and skillful ways to apply what has been learned on retreat. People who are really interested in the quality of their minds will watch that quality all the time. If you can clearly see for yourself the vast difference between the quality of the mind when it is aware and the quality when it is not aware—if you can see that for yourself—you will naturally want to be aware more and more often."

To me this is both so obvious but so really right on. Instead of all this "try this, try that," it puts it squarely back on us. We have to be interested enough. You can tell someone ten million little tricks of how to be aware, how to remember to be mindful, but it has to be that we notice the difference in our life, in our mind, just when we're aware. That's all. That's the first most important thing. And no one can give us that. That really comes from noticing for ourselves.

He goes on to say: "I really want to encourage people to think for themselves. You have all been practicing for some time. You have the basic tools. So you just have to understand the benefits of it."

So the motivation to pay attention really comes from within. If your heart is not in it, you never really give your best. You never fully develop your inner potential.

That's the first most important piece. But do you hear even that as I read it? I'm projecting—I don't know what's in any of your minds—but I'm wondering: if we hear even that and bring in this tendency of comparing and self-judging, did anyone think when I said "if your heart's not really in it, you'll never reach your full potential"...

Did anyone think, "Yeah, that's true. That's why I've never reached my full potential—because my heart's not really in it, and I'm hopeless"? You see, there's that possibility. But we don't want to develop that tendency; we know how to do something different.

As the Buddha said, what the mind frequently thinks about and ponders upon, that will become the natural inclination of the mind. So you've all had a chance to see in these nine days some of the natural inclinations of your mind. Scary, isn't it? But what we're doing is shifting the natural inclination toward appreciation of the simple awareness of what's happening.

My point is that we have to really care. The inner motivation has to come from us. But what also makes that possible is that we're interested in seeing how the mind works—not to judge it.

I'm going to paraphrase what Nisargadatta said: we pay attention out of interest, not to judge. And that is what makes the whole motivation possible—the willingness to just watch how our mind is working all through our life. It's really fascinating. And it's completely accessible because, as you've seen, it doesn't

require a super deep level of samādhi. Someone was saying today, when we were talking, about noticing all these subtle, quick movements of mind—you can't keep up with that in daily life. No. But we can keep up with noticing when there's aversion, for example. We're just noticing something has come in, the mind has somehow contracted. You can notice that. And just get interested.

If we feel that because we've been practicing, or we're on a spiritual path, or our ideal is to cultivate compassion—which is true, these are good ideals—but then we use that to judge every time negativity or defilement or greed arises in the mind, what are we doing? We're using a beautiful ideal to cultivate aversion.

This is really where, when Ajahn Chah is talking about not looking down on the defilements, he means don't dismiss them. But of course, as we've said, it's not just about noticing defilements, but about getting interested, seeing why we do what we do, and trusting that if we're willing to see the messy, painful stuff along with the beautiful stuff—the more we're willing to just observe—wisdom shows us that acting from anger and feeding anger in our minds, or greed, wisdom shows us the suffering of that. We don't have to beat ourselves up about it as well. In fact, that doesn't work.

I want to give an example of this—just simple, how natural it is. This is a little example from my life; I don't know if it even makes any difference. But anyway, I was driving around here, on these country roads, driving back from Amherst. It's a long two-lane road, and there wasn't much traffic—not like driving in the cities, completely different. I was driving along, no one in front of me. Then a car pulled out in front and went ahead. Now, they didn't cut me off. It wasn't like a pull-out where I had to put on the brakes, but it was a little bit close—just enough that I noticed aversion came up in my mind. "Why did they have to? Couldn't they have waited? There was no one behind me. People always do that." So I noticed aversion in my mind. That's all.

And then I noticed as he turned—again, I felt another little surge of aversion. "This guy, he's just turning!" And I noticed that and I laughed.

And I thought, if I was driving in the city, this kind of stuff is happening every two seconds. And if you're just not noticing—and I wasn't doing any big examining—if I just wasn't noticing that aversion, it would keep piling on itself. And that's how you get to road rage in no time, really.

So just to see how simply noticing what's happening—that's all, not saying it shouldn't be happening—can really lead to a shift in understanding. And it really gives us a lot more space. So that's just a very simple example.

That's the motivation, the non-judging, that interest doing the work. And it really does just get so interesting. This already comes from the wisdom of understanding that it's just nature. It's just *kilesa* doing their job. It's just delusion doing its job, wisdom doing its job, the body doing its job. Don't take it all so personally. And then again, it gets much more interesting.

And then there's this quality of steadiness, of persistence—remembering whenever you remember throughout the day, but not with some huge focusing effort. That's another thing. I know how to be mindful in my movements. I can go incredibly, incredibly slowly, but even not slowly, there's always this feeling like I'm doing something. It's like, "Okay, now get mindful." Do you know what I mean? Just a little—sometimes it's subtle, sometimes not so subtle—but there's something more I have to do to be mindful. It can be a subtly oppressive kind of feeling.

But in this way, as soon as you think, as soon as you remember yourself, you're here. You don't have to get *more* mindful. As soon as you think, "Oh, my body"—you're here. That level of remembering is really natural and easy. It is not stressful. It's not demanding.

After a while, it's not that you're always there. Sure, you space out, you notice you're thinking. It's just no big deal. But after a while, it just becomes more and more the natural habit. We still space out, but before you know it, you're noticing the body, you're noticing what the mind's doing. You're not trying to change it. Trusting wisdom to change it.

So if I was thinking, "Oh, if I see anger in my mind, if I see greed in my mind—oh no, I have to do something," then I'm back in struggle. But if I'm willing to notice it, if I'm trusting awareness enough and trusting the wisdom that's developed in my own understanding through my own experience, and also the external informational wisdom—I can trust that if there's ill will or if there's craving, I may say something stupid, but I'm not going to act out of control. We have some sense of wisdom and some sense of trust in the wisdom of awareness.

So it's not just like, okay, free ride. It doesn't matter what you do. Go out and steal and run amok. As long as you're paying attention, it's all okay. I'm not saying that.

If you pay attention, you can trust the wisdom that sees, "I don't want to create more suffering for myself or others." That's what's so trustworthy. We're so tight. We're so afraid we're going to do these horrible things. But if we trust paying attention, we trust the tenderness of the mind and heart that's open to seeing things as they are. We trust that metta and compassion for yourself and others are more accessible. Compassion when you see your mind running in these same old habits, same old habits.

Anybody had that this retreat? Did you have compassion for it at all? At all? Even a second? Yeah. Okay. It's a start.

It's painful, isn't it? Look at the world. Running, running, running. It's the same old habit since the beginning of recorded history, as far as I can tell. So here we have a chance. This is the only place we can work—in our own heart, in our own mind. We can only do it with interest, with kindness, with compassion. We can't do it with getting out the whip. Remember yourself. Get interested in your mind. And then watch why we do what we do. Just watch it.

Did you read the very first page in this book? I just read the last section of it because I think it's great

about the defilements. It goes through mind, speech, and body. So I'll just do body: Have you ever knocked really hard on someone's door, or refused to enter a room simply because someone you dislike was in there, or jumped a queue, or used the shampoo someone left in the bathroom, or made a private call using your employer's phone line, or done any similar actions? I always think, if you've done anything where you think, "No one's going to see me, so it's okay if I do this"—all sort of unthinkingly? All these actions are motivated by defilements. Just be aware of it.

So my point is not, "Ugh." My point is noticing what's in our mind, because what's feeding the qualities in the mind, the factors in the mind, are what give rise to speech, are what give rise to action. And the heart of action, the seed of karma, the seed of wholesome or unwholesome action is not in the result. That's out of our control. The conditions externally are out of our control. The seed of action is in the intention, the motivation, what's originating it in our mind and heart. That's the only thing we can really notice, pay attention to.

So here again, it's not to set up an ideal, because then you're just feeding aversion. But notice when there's ill will in my mind, and I think there's a lot of ill will in my mind, but still this person needs to—you know, they really need to be set straight. They really do need, for the good of all beings, to know what's right. And I'll say it in a nice way. And you really may mean that. So there's ill will, there's delusion, and maybe a little piece of trying to do the right thing. We just can't tell. That's the thing.

Knowing when there's kilesa, when there's defilement in the mind, the wisest thing we can do is nothing. Because we can't see straight. We just can't see straight. Sometimes you have to do something anyway, for sure. But at least, if you don't have to, wait. Let the confusion clear.

But the seed is in the intention. So you're thinking, "Okay, I'll say it in a nice way, and it's a useful thing to say." And maybe it is a useful thing to say. And maybe you say it in such a way that they don't pick up that you're really filled with ill will. Small chance, but maybe. Maybe they're really deluded and it doesn't come through. But even if all of that works out, and it's useful, the fact that you were filled with ill will while doing it—that's the seed of that action. That's feeding the tendency of ill will in your own mind. You're suffering from that, even if you don't think so.

This is the great message of Buddhism: if you don't know you're suffering, you are suffering. That's why it's such a popular teaching! But really, the seed is in the intention. This is why watching our mind and seeing how intentions change is so powerful. It's really how we change ourselves. We don't do it—wisdom does it. This is how we change how we relate to other people, how we change how we are in the world.

It may seem like it's just some small thing. I remember, I think I was talking about this the first night, how I went from saying this isn't just some esoteric mind game for privileged people, and I jumped from that to Dachau. I make these leaps, but it's true. So just watching your mind as you go out and binge on three packages of M&Ms or something—that's not the end of the world. Stupid maybe, but not the end of the world. Watch yourself do it instead of turning off. Watch what goes on in your mind with interest. That's

all. What's motivating doing it? How is it while I'm doing it? How is it after I'm doing it? So that we learn from everything. Everything becomes something to learn from.

When we're in a situation that's really busy, when there's a lot going on, we think, "Well, I can't possibly be mindful." But we can still blip in in little ways and learn from what's going on.

Here's another example from Sayadaw U Tejaniya about this, just to give a sense of how we don't have to be so precisely mindful when we have the right attitude. It comes into all aspects of our life. So someone is saying, "I need a job that doesn't put me under any pressure or stress, then I could be mindful." You want to say, "Yeah, good luck with that." But that's not what Tejaniya said. He says, "Yes, when there's a lot of pressure, a lot of stress, practicing paying attention becomes more difficult. It just does. That's how it is. But we can try to learn from the difficulties. So try to learn from the difficulties at your workplace. What makes the mind agitated?" We're just watching cause and effect. What triggers the agitation? Why do you lose mindfulness? When do you lose mindfulness? Why does the mind become eager? Why does the mind want to make something happen? Is it necessary to hurry? How does it feel when you hurry? Investigating this way will help you deal more skillfully with difficult situations. And as you notice this, it will prevent unwholesome mind states from taking over so much.

So this again is coming back to this real trust in the awareness, rather than the idea that we have to control all the mind states, which, as we know, isn't possible. But it is possible to just keep feeding the interest.

Someone wrote in one of the questions the other night, asking something to the effect of how can you be aware in daily life without kind of withdrawing—because you have to withdraw to practice. And of course, I think you get a sense of what I'm saying: it just really becomes natural and easy to be present with yourself while you're in relation, while you're doing things. It's a practice, but it's not about doing some extra heavy mindfulness.

There's one way I like that Tejaniya was talking about his practice in daily life. As Steve said the other night, he did a great deal of his practice as a layman. He was running his father's business through a big clothing stall in the market—a very busy life, regular life in downtown Yangon. But he said he was just by this time so interested in watching his mind. This would be after he'd worked through that depression.

He said, you know, nobody else has to know what you're doing. You don't have to make a big deal—"Oh, I'll come with you, but I'm watching my mind." He called it secret mission, like you're a secret agent. So he said he'd go with his friends to the kickboxing match, but he'd just be sitting there with them watching the thing while watching his mind. How was his mind reacting to what he was seeing, to the friends or whatever? That was just much more interesting. So he didn't say, "I can't go with you, I have to go home and meditate." He was just present when he was working in the clothing stall. Customers would come and he would be aware of how he felt, the emotions that arose when he saw someone coming. If they were aggressive, he'd be aware of the reactions that came up in him, how he responded. Just in a very global

but very interested way.

I love that. Secret mission. So we can all take up secret mission.

Really, it's true that once you're interested—and that's our trick, to keep refinding your interest, keep refinding your inspiration, and that's why we always talk about sangha and such, and we can talk about that more tomorrow morning—but once you find your interest, you can really trust that being present with awareness doesn't take a million techniques. There are many more techniques you can learn and you can use them in daily life, and doing sitting every day helps. It definitely helps. We can talk more about specifics tomorrow too.

But the main thing is: find your interest, find your motivation, and then really trust the secret mission level of interest and awareness in your mind. There's no way you can say, "I can't do it, I don't know enough, my practice isn't strong enough, my dharma isn't deep enough." None of that.

I think you've seen here in the moments that you're just present with what is—that's all there is to do. And wisdom will arise by itself. You don't have to already know it all. If we already knew it all, we wouldn't have to do this. But actually, there's not an "all" to know. The less we know, the better off we are, because then we can just surrender into what's happening right now.

So I guess that's the best I can explain right now how I have felt this has really been accessible in daily life. I hope it's of some benefit to you.

Franz recently reminded me of an old Taoist sage's wisdom. It goes: Some people make things happen. Some people watch what's happening. And some people at the end of their life ask, "What happened?"

It's your choice. Each one of us has a choice as to how we are going to approach what's happening. So often we find ourselves quite carried along in the stream of events of our life, feeling more like a bubble on a stream than a pebble at the bottom. And yet when it comes to dharma practice, we can see even from our efforts here that yes, we have to make an effort. We have to be here. We have to attempt to be aware, to remember to be aware. But we've all overshot and tried too hard. And we've probably seen the other end of the spectrum where we really have cruised, tried too little.

From my experience, it seems that the whole path of practice is trying to find the middle—that place between trying too hard and not trying at all, not trying enough.

I want to speak about one of the paramis that I introduced last night. It's not one of the usual or familiar ones, but rather one of the more obscure and rarely mentioned. I want to introduce it by telling a story.

It's said that hundreds of thousands of eons ago—like a long time—there was an ascetic named Sumedha living in what is now present-day India. He had so perfected his practices of austerities and concentration that it is said if he had heard a single word of teaching from a Buddha, he would have become fully enlightened. That's how clear his mind was. That's how much integrity he had in his life. How prepared

his mind was for right view.

One day on his alms round, he went to town and saw that everyone was in a big hubbub. He realized something was happening and inquired what was going on. He was told that the Buddha of that day, Dipankara Buddha, was coming to town, and the village people were preparing. He got excited and wanted to see the Buddha, so he went to the side of the road where the Buddha would be coming and prepared a section of the pathway.

When Dipankara Buddha came towards him on his trip into town and the ascetic saw him, he saw the essence of the Buddha—the radiance, the purity, the serenity, the steadiness, the compassion, the clarity, the wisdom. In his clear mind, appreciating what he saw, what he knew of the Buddha, he made a vow that one day he too wanted to be a Buddha in order to help other beings free themselves from suffering.

Dipankara Buddha, having the mind that he did, noticed that this ascetic on the side of the road had just made a vow. He checked out the vow, checked out the karmic record of the ascetic, and realized that he had all the requisites for awakening—that if he did indeed undertake the additional practices to become a Buddha, he would one day become a Buddha. So he acknowledged to that ascetic that he knew of his vow, and he confirmed to him that one day in the future he would become a Buddha.

The ascetic Sumedha did not at that time receive the Buddha's teaching. But for the next hundreds of lifetimes, he took birth in all of the realms known to Buddhas, in order to meet the conditions that would challenge him to perfect the paramis—all those qualities that I spoke about last night. To perfect the paramis to such a degree that he could become a Buddha, he willingly undertook hundreds of lifetimes being challenged to practice generosity and renunciation, developing energy and patience and loving-kindness and truthfulness.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, there was a prince born in India, Prince Siddhartha, who, as the story goes—and you probably know—at age twenty-nine left the palace, undertook six years of austerities and practice, and became the Buddha upon realizing the truth. He became the Buddha of our day and age, Gautama Buddha.

As a Buddha, after his awakening, he taught what he had realized for forty-five years. He taught men and women, monks and nuns, royalty, peasants, beggars—the whole spectrum. And those teachings have been carried down for more than 2,500 years to arrive in Burma and Thailand and Sri Lanka and the US and Europe today.

One of the conditions giving rise to this event, that makes this retreat possible and explains why we're here, is the vow of that ascetic Sumedha in ancient history. Without that vow, and without our Buddha, we wouldn't be here doing this. That is a condition we don't know of, we don't see, we're not aware of it, it's not in our memory—and yet we can see that it's true.

That vow was extraordinarily powerful, and it has had consequences for the ascetic, the Buddha, and

everyone who has heard the Buddha's teachings since then, even in our lives. How did such a vow become so powerful?

We too, today, in this retreat and in our lives, have had inspirations, aspirations. Maybe we have made vows, have had wishes, have had interest in doing something—whether it's baking bread, writing a book, raising a family, learning how to drive a car, speaking a foreign language. It all takes a decision and following through.

Now we've been practicing. We have heard the Buddha's teachings and we have learned about awareness. Even in the short time that we've been here, for those of you who are new to practice and maybe doing your first retreat, you can see that in seven or eight days, this kind of practice really is powerful. It really shows you something about yourself that you can't find or get anywhere else.

The question for you is: has it impacted you enough to aspire to a life of awareness? Do you see the possibility, do you see the value of awareness in your life? And if you do, the subsequent question is: what can I do about it? Because now we have the clarity of mind to see, to value, to aspire, and then to wonder.

One of the paramis, one of the forces of purity residing as a potential in our mind, is the power of resoluteness. In the Pali language, it's called adhiṭṭhāna—determination or resoluteness. If we make the resolve to live a life of awareness, no one can stop you. Nothing can stop you. But that's if you properly understand what a resolve, what the power of a resolute mind, truly is.

So I want to speak about this parami, this parami of resoluteness or adhitana.

Because the Bodhisattva made the resolve—or the ascetic made the resolve and became a Bodhisattva—and fulfilled that resolve over hundreds of lifetimes to become a Buddha.

Resolve or resoluteness involves both understanding, inspiration, aspiration, energy, faith, effort, patience, equanimity—in fact, all the other paramis. A firm and clear and decisive resolve is possible because of the other paramis. They're all interdependent, we could say.

But right resolve sometimes, or determination sometimes, seems to imply a tight, contracted, gritting your teeth, hunching your shoulders, clenching your fists, scowling your face, pushiness. And that's not balanced in any way. That's not really required for determination or resolution.

Because right resolve, as I said, or right determination, or a firm clarity about the direction we're going in life—it's like a commitment. You make a commitment when you get married. Some people make a commitment when they join AA. It's not a one-time thing. It's not like you say, "I'm married, that's it. I can relax for the rest of the journey." And we all know that. But it's a commitment that's valid, that works, as long as you invest in it. And as soon as you stop investing in it, it's not there. It has no permanency beyond the current investment.

And the same with resoluteness. It takes a continuity of remembering. Remembering is awareness.

Remember? In talking about awareness, awareness is remembering, presence of mind. Adhitana is a mindfulness practice. Resoluteness is a mindfulness practice. Remembering where you're going. And in any moment, what right resolve means is remembering the direction you aspire to.

It's not about accomplishing anything. It's not about grabbing, reaching, hurrying, rushing, getting frustrated, disappointed, and judging. It's only about remembering the direction you've chosen to go and realigning yourself with it in this moment. It doesn't take any more effort than that. It just takes the persistent continuity of doing that in every moment.

So when you find yourself impatient or frustrated, disappointed, judgmental, critical, distracted, multitasking, or any of the other impediments to a resolute mind—and you notice that—you let go. You remember, you realign, and you meet the moment.

The importance of resoluteness in our life is that it reaffirms our aspiration. It gives us strength and stability of mind. And it really guides our life toward the values we have seen and appreciated and selected in our clearest moments. We're not always clear. We're not always able to affirm it or confirm it or re-experience it. And so we want to take our clearest experience of what we aspire to, to remember that, to make the resolve, and to work to fulfill it.

So what prevents us from making this resolve to follow our interests, to be aware, to wake up, to see the way things are, to free the mind from its habits? All of the usual defilements, all of the usual hindrances come to interfere. You might say sometimes our resolve is contaminated by doubt. Doubt is that wavering mind—yes, maybe, but no—multitasking dispersion of energy.

After I'd done one two-week retreat, I came here on staff a few months later when it first opened, or soon after it first opened. One of the first days I was on staff, I was in the attic of the Catskills Wing over there with another staff person, Rodney Smith, and we were insulating the ceiling in order to keep it warmer during the winter. And we were having a discussion about Nibbana, of which we knew nothing.

Rodney reminded me a couple of years ago that at that time I said to him with utter and absolute conviction, "I have no doubt that in this lifetime I will realize the Dhamma."

I didn't know what I was saying. I didn't know what was going to be involved. But that doesn't prevent or interfere with the clarity and the commitment to the direction you're going.

It, in fact, is a statement of willingness to endure, to put up with, to face whatever comes, no matter what. And I felt that. I knew that, even though I didn't know how hard it was going to be.

So the clarity of the direction and the faith in your understanding of it, your commitment to it, is not dependent on knowing the terrain. It's dependent on knowing your heart and really seeing and acknowledging what you see in your heart as being of value—to you, to others—and what you really see as the best possible for you. It's our choice. No one else can make it for us.

But there have been plenty of times since that resoluteness when my efforts and my determination were impeded, obstructed by laziness. Because sometimes you just don't have energy, or you don't think you do. Sometimes you don't know how much energy is required to meet the conditions you're facing. As I've said, sometimes we apply too much and exhaust ourselves. Sometimes we apply too little and we're overwhelmed. It takes a lot of experience to really feel confident in a willingness to meet the present moment with whatever energy it requires.

And I think this is one of the great fears we have when we leave a retreat, which is so protected and so singularly pointing to awareness and awareness practice. When we enter the mainstream of our life with all of its distractions and all of its requirements and all of our obligations, we just feel like it's exhausting. Well, it's exhausting to even think about it, let alone to do it. And we feel like, where am I ever going to get the energy to practice?

But as Carol said, if you have the interest to watch your mind, there isn't anything you do in your busy life where your mind isn't there. Everything you do, your mind is already there. And what this awareness practice asks of us is to know the mind. It's only that much energy.

So as we continue with our practice, we really clarify what our aspiration is, what the direction is, and we grow an understanding of just how to do that, how much energy is required and how to meet the moment.

I'm reminded of a story that Joseph tells about one of his teachers, Dipa Ma. Now, Dipa Ma, as probably many of you know, was an Indian Bengali woman who was just an extraordinary yogi, both in developing tranquility and concentration, as well as in developing liberating insight. Just extraordinary. And she was the most loving and gentle and kind being. She came to the States two or three times and taught here and stayed over in the house across the street.

And one time she said to Joseph, who had studied with her some, "Joseph, you should sit for three days." And Joseph thought, sure, three-day retreat. I can do a three-day retreat. But she didn't mean that. She meant, "Joseph, you should sit down and not get up for three days." And then she said, "Don't be lazy."

She could do that. She could sit down and maintain her mind for three days until she got up. And so she knew. She wasn't just speaking hypothetically. She was saying, it takes energy. It takes willingness.

But sometimes we let the fear of discomfort hold us back. And believe me, comfort is not a goal worthy of your efforts. We know there's going to be some discomfort—some discomfort of the body, some discomfort of the mind—and we must have the courage to meet that discomfort in order to stay aligned with our aspiration to be awake, to really meet the moment, to see what is going on, to see the mind in all of its range of possibilities.

If you live in the comfort zone of your life all the time, you don't grow. Imagine you go to first grade, you learn your lessons—or at least eighty percent of the lessons—you get your summer break, and you come back in the fall to the first grade again. And you go through your lessons and you learn ninety percent of

the remaining twenty, and most of the time you're bored. Summer break, and you come back the third year into the first grade again. If you keep going over the same turf in your life, in your practice, in your commitment, you don't grow.

But what the path of practice involves is growing in capacity, growing in awareness, growing in commitment, growing in energy, growing in understanding, growing in patience, growing in equanimity. And these only happen when we bump up against the challenges, the rough edges, the peaks and troughs of life and meet them. Then we strengthen the mind.

Often our aspiration and our determination, our resoluteness, is besieged by attachment. We have so many interests. We have so much to do. We have so many fantasies. We have so much distraction that we forget where we want to go.

We forget the direction that we have valued in our clearest moments. And so it is awareness that reminds us, that remembers. And it is letting go, or the practice of renunciation, that releases that which does not support our highest aspiration.

Now oftentimes we think, "Oh, letting go is really painful. Renunciation, letting go—I don't want to let go of what I'm hanging on to." But we have let go of so much in our life already, and it hasn't been painful at all. Do you remember that doll, that bike, that ball, that sport, that stamp collection, coin collection—whatever it was that you had when you were a young kid that was the source of your happiness and activity for days on end? Where is it now? Well, it may be in the attic or it may be in the cellar, but it's not in your heart. Somehow your heart has let go of that, because it no longer serves your purpose. It no longer serves your aspiration. It no longer makes you happy. It no longer is of value to you. And we let go of all kinds of things unknowingly.

But when we come to Dharma practice and we see the path ahead, we see the direction we're going, I would invite you to do a kind of look through the attics of your life and see what it is that you've been holding onto—plans and goals and friends, behaviors, beliefs, intentions—that no longer serve your highest aspiration. We have them, but once we get clear that awareness and the value of awareness in our life is the direction we want to go, then we can let go of a lot that doesn't support it. And yet we have to look. We have to really take a review, kind of clean out the closets and intentionally let go of what no longer is supportive.

Sometimes we're impatient, sometimes we hurry, sometimes we don't believe it's possible—hanging on to an old self-image that just feels inferior or incapable.

There was a time I was practicing with Sayadaw U Pandita in Burma. I was practicing concentration practices at the time, which is not Vipassana practice, but concentration practice. And one of the goals, one of the tools for developing concentration, is to develop this quality of mind—the *adhitthana*, the resoluteness of mind. The understanding is that resoluteness is a mental muscle which, when identified

and exercised properly, gets stronger, so that it can be used as needed in your life.

The challenge, as Sayadaw was instructing me, is to make the resolution to attain certain meditative experiences quickly, for a certain length of time, and to come out of them. You learn to guide the mind through clear resoluteness. So I was going along doing the preliminary steps, and then one day Sayadaw says to me, "Now I want you to make the resolve to do X, Y, Z."

When I heard that, I just burst out laughing. I said, "Well, that's ridiculous. I don't even believe it's possible, and certainly not for me."

And he said, "That's okay. You don't have to believe it. Just try it. Just make the resolve and forget it."

I was so skeptical and so disbelieving that I almost didn't even give it a try. But he's my teacher—do what he says. I went to my room, sat down, and almost half-heartedly said, "Okay, may the mind attain XYZ."

Instantly, in a split second, the mind was there. I could not believe it.

And I realized then that, indeed, resoluteness of mind is not a personal attribute. It is a capacity of mind that can be developed. And when developed, it is available for use. Not just for me, but for any mind that makes the effort to train this capacity, to develop this mental muscle of resoluteness. If we don't exercise it, it won't grow. If we do exercise it, it will. And it can be a powerful support in our effort to just be awake, to just be aware moment to moment, day by day, in any activity, whatever we're doing. If you make that resolve, and you practice sincerely, the resolve will come to support you.

There is so much that could be said about resolve, but I think you begin to see that these paramis are the vehicle for our awakening. They are the foundation, the support.

They prepare the mind for that liberating knowledge we gain, that wisdom we gain through clear insight. Resoluteness is involved. Equanimity is required. Continuity, persistent energy, and sustained interest. They're all a package, really. And they are possibilities for us every day.

There isn't a day that goes by where we aren't called upon—if we recognize the opportunity—to be a little more patient, a little more energetic, a little more truthful, a little more understanding, a little more accepting, a little more generous. And that's all that's required: just a little more. A little more, practiced many times over, really adds up.

As I mentioned, on a retreat like this—nine days, even though the conditions are very special, we're in seclusion with a singularity of purpose, all of the teaching has been directed towards developing awareness and all of the mental muscles that support it—we can see in seven, eight, nine days that it really makes a difference in our life, in our mind.

I invite you to consider making the resolve to sustain your awareness for the rest of your life. Let's just make the resolve. That's all. Which means that you're willing to realign yourself when you notice that

you're off, when you notice that you're not aware. You simply make an effort to arouse the awareness to meet that moment.

What did you call it? A stealth mission? A secret mission? I call it anonymous arahant. Nobody needs to know you're practicing. And yet if you practice in this way, day by day, no one can stop you. And the goal only appears moment to moment to moment to moment. You don't have to grit your teeth. You don't have to sweat. You don't have to clench your fist. You just have to remember: this is the direction I've chosen to go.

So let's sit for a moment and let the words quiet down.

These are the four resolves, the Buddha said: the resolve for wisdom, the resolve for truth, the resolve for generosity, and the resolve for peace. One should not neglect wisdom, one should preserve the truth, one should cultivate generosity, and one should train in peace.

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