Awareness and Wisdom

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 56:16

Sally was talking about mindfulness and wisdom, Satipaññā, the other night, and then last night James was speaking about the steadiness of awareness that's imbued with relaxation, interest, and—what was the third one? Very good. That awareness imbued with those three things. I think he said something right at the end of his talk about how just with the steadiness of that, there's nothing else you have to do. Everything happens by itself. So I wanted to pick up from that.

Coming out of something Sayadaw U Tejaniya, one of my teachers, has been emphasizing recently: he talks a lot about reminding us that the beginning as well as the ending of the whole circle of the path is right view, right understanding. When we understand correctly, that leads to how we think, our intentions, our attitude of mind. Those are the first and second steps of the Eightfold Path.

The way he talks about beginning our practice with right intention is basically giving some information about why we're doing what we're doing, or the way I say it, how it works. What I hope to do now is just talk a little bit about why the steadiness of awareness that's not colored by confusion, by distortions, why that is the key to everything happening by itself—and what do we mean by everything happening by itself, anyway. In other words, some background on why we're doing what we're doing, what the point is. When we understand a little bit, whatever technique we're doing, we can meet it with right attitude, with appropriate attitude.

Our tendency can be to focus on: I'm doing this technique, I'm doing that technique, I'm looking for this experience, I'm looking for that experience. We can do any technique very sincerely, with enormous effort or willpower, commitment, with a lot of good qualities, but also colored with our confusions, the distortions, because we haven't really seen behind what's the purpose, how to practice.

Of course, when we say everything happens by itself, or ask what's the point of practice, I'm sure you would all know that the Buddha talked about what he taught as suffering and the end of suffering. That's really the point: to deliver our minds, our hearts, from the confusion that generates what we experience as suffering, as disharmony, as pain in our hearts, in our minds.

What I personally love is the elegance and the simplicity of the way the Buddha described his awakening, his understanding, the simplicity of the essence of his teaching. I realize the teachings are very complicated, so I'm probably doing a disservice, but there's a certain elegance of simplicity that has been serving me enormously in the last few years in my own practice. That's what I said in the beginning: the beginning and the ending and the whole of our path is contained in the sense of right view.

What I love about right view in terms of that translation is that I think of it as a literal translation. Right view is not about buying into a different set of beliefs from the set of beliefs we have now, although it can sound like that when you read the suttas at times. You know, you should understand, you should know that there's impermanence. But that's not a belief system. It's a perception, an accurate view of things as they are, which is very different from a belief.

The elegance of right view is this: what frees us from the confusion, from the conflict, from the disharmony, the whole thrust of our practice, is simply to recognize in any moment—and in more and more moments—things as they actually are right now. The thrust of our practice is not about fixing samsara.

There's a quotation from the Tibetan tradition: the essence of samsara is trying to correct. How much of your time today, in even little things, was the quality in the mind trying to correct? Trying to correct your practice, your breath, your attention, other people, the food, the sounds, our memories, our future plans—trying to correct. When we don't get it that that is actually just a movement of wanting, that that's the source of our suffering in the moment—it's not the answer to it, it's the cause of it.

When we think of samsara as trying to correct, we see that right view is recognizing accurately things as they are. There's a phrase in Pali, yathā bhūta. It appears in one of the kinds of insights you can have, called yathā bhūta ñāṇa dassana, which is usually translated as knowledge and vision of things as they are. But as I've often said, friends have told me a better, more accurate translation of yathā bhūta, in terms of the grammar, is "things as they have come to be" in this moment.

I love that because it has that sense of movement and no separate thing-ness. Things as they have come to be in this moment. What I get from that is like recognizing accurately all the conditions that have come together to create things as they have come to be in this moment. There's no separation there, is there?

If you pick any experience you had today and start trying to draw in, remember, all the conditions that made that experience possible, there's nowhere to stop, is there? You know, like Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching about holding up a sheet of paper and how on the sheet of paper you see the world. Because there's the trees, and there's the sun, and there's the rain, and there's the soil, and there's the people who cut down the trees, and the people who fed, who grew the food that was shipped to the people who cut down the trees, and the people who shipped it and built the trucks, and the stars in the sky and the Big Bang. You just can't keep anything out.

Things as they have come to be in this moment cannot be any different, and in the next moment won't be the same. That quality of all-inclusive everything, but no separate lasting entity-thingness—you get a sense of that. And we all have moments where we recognize that the perception of that is accurate. In that moment of accurate perception, any thought of "it's all about me," or clinging to the moment, or hating them, just doesn't arise. It's not in that moment, "Oh, this isn't good enough, this as they've come to be, how am I going to fix it?" Because we see there's no way it can be different, and whatever we do is just

part of the next moment, part of the whole big picture.

So when there's this right view, in any moment—and in many moments we all have it—the sources of our confusion, of our suffering, that trying to correct just doesn't arise. And we get a tiny little window into the potential, into the possibility for a greater life, a sense of the peace and ease that's possible. The peace and ease that's a natural condition, really, of mind and body, when we're not caught up, when the mind is not caught up in trying to correct or trying to make what we perceive as reality fit what we're holding as how it should be.

Because we don't know we're doing that. That's our problem. If we knew we were doing that, that would be one thing. But we don't know, and that's where we get caught. And that's where awareness comes in.

The Buddha's teaching, as is often said, goes against the stream—against the stream of the mores and beliefs of the culture, against the stream of our own habits of mind that we don't even recognize as habits of mind. They're so familiar. Or we recognize them, but not quite without identification.

But it's not about taking up another view, another explanation. Views can be useful. Explanations help us. Everything I'm saying tonight, all these words and concepts, hopefully one line of it will be helpful if in a moment it helps us drop a holding and just see more clearly. But then if we take that and say, "Yes, this is how it always is," and try to graft it onto the next moment, it's all frozen solid again. No explanation is final.

Where the teachings go against the stream, where it gets tricky, where our practice and where the teachings of freedom, of non-suffering, are so radical, is that it's a stepping outside of the system of beliefs and views altogether. And that can be a scary place—just not holding to any view. Not "I'm right and you're wrong," "you're right and I'm wrong," "can we find a middle ground?" All that is useful in our relative world. But to have that quality, that pure awareness—and I'll describe what I mean by pure in a moment—that's just present for what's arising without any distortion, that gets us confused again, that gets us in conflict with how things are. That's rare. It feels wonderful when it happens, but it's rare and not quite easy to talk about.

Mostly, on the deepest level, the most subtle level—and the subtle levels are the ones that really get us—are the views or the explanations of reality, the way we think we perceive things, which leads to how we think about things, which leads to our actions and our choices. We don't get it, that it's a view. We just think that's how it is.

To me, that's one of the interesting things about traveling, being in different cultures. It's also one of the things about all the different cultures within our own country here. When you don't realize that different cultures look at things in different ways and have different belief systems, and when we first go into another culture without realizing that, there's often this kind of friction. It can also be really interesting. But we start to see, "Oh, I thought that's just the way people should behave. No, that's just this particular

cultural group."

I've used this example before, but since I just got back from Burma, I thought of it again. Burma is an essentially Buddhist country, and I've been spending a lot of time talking to nuns and monks and people who are particularly Buddhist, which is tons and tons of people in that country. They have a very strong faith, not only in Buddhist practice, but in the Buddhist teaching and in the whole cosmological description that's in the suttas. It's all taken very literally. One time, a few years ago, I was with some friends and we were visiting nuns and doing a lot of different things, taking a lot of photographs.

And in one of the photographs—we were in a room down in a monastery in the Delta, distributing a lot of food at this place, with many people present—in one of the sets of pictures, there were these kind of round, exactly round, strange light-shaped images on several of the people and in between them. They were scattered all over the picture, just in certain pictures.

What was interesting was to see the interpretation that different ones of us came up with out of our culture, out of our conditioning. When we first saw them, one of my friends—a Swiss woman who's been a nun there for about nineteen years and is kind of half Burmese—she looked and said, "Wow, look at that. That's devas"—celestial beings—"all over the room, all over the picture."

Then my other friend looked at it. She's also a nun, but she's been a scientist. She had a PhD in biology, a real scientist. She said, "Devas? Don't give me devas. It's clearly just a little bit of moisture in the lens and refraction of the light"—and then the whole scientific explanation.

Then I got home and looked in my camera, which was different. And in that same grouping of people taken at the same time, there were also those little light things. Who knows? Who knows? And that's the place of seeing—well, who knows what's true? Not holding to a view. But we didn't even know there was a view.

This time when I was just back there, the scientist friend had been to Tiruvannamalai a couple of years later, which is where Ramana Maharshi's ashram was. One night, one of the full moon nights, people from all over India come to do pradakshina, to walk around the mountain. It's considered very sacred. She said literally two million people show up on buses to walk around this mountain that night. It was unbelievable. She took a million pictures, and she sent me one. And there were these—I'm thinking of them as devas now too, I don't know what—all over the place. It was nighttime, and they were all over that picture.

So this year, I was just there again, and we were taking some other photographs. And this time, she's just going, "Oh yeah, look at the devas in that picture. Oh yeah, there's devas between you, Carol, and that other guy."

And the views change. We know they're views. That's fine. That's just to give an example.

The space of the purity of awareness is like, "Well, who knows?" It can be interesting to take up this perspective, interesting to take up that. They're both fine, but we don't have to land somewhere. We don't have to land in a knowing, in a certainty, because once we do, that leads to our thoughts and how we define the world and ourselves. Useful when we know that's what we're doing, but when we don't—that's exactly the process that hides yathābhūta.

In a moment when the citta, the mind, the moment of consciousness, awareness, knowing what's happening—that simple knowing, you could call it the mind. When there's a sound and there's an ear that works, and there's that consciousness, that simple knowing of sound, you don't have to think about that. It's not particularly mindful. It's just that if you're conscious, there's a knowing of sound. That's a moment you could call mind.

And that comes together with all different qualities, mental states, emotions that might be present in that moment as well, that color that knowing. So if you're feeling, for example, really irritated right now, or super sensitive, and I clap my hands—there might be an unpleasant sound. You could just notice it's unpleasant, or you could go off into a world of story. But just how you perceive it is colored by the qualities in the mind.

You might have quite an equanimous mind. You might be in one of these states just filled with love, and everything you hear is beautiful, and all the people here are glowing, and the night outside is incredible. And that seems like our accurate perception.

The perception is colored by what's happening in our mind. We can be aware of that, and that's fine. That's just part of how the mind works, how being human works. It's not a problem.

Where it becomes a problem, where it contributes to and keeps us caught in confusion, is when we don't recognize that this is happening—and when the qualities that are present and coloring the mind are our old friends: greed, hatred, confusion, the so-called defilements, the *kilesas*. I actually prefer that word. "Defilements" has such a puritanical, Victorian quality to it. It gets quite negative, and as soon as something becomes negative, we're in aversion. Aversion is aversion, but it isn't the right response. It's not helpful.

So how do we recognize accurately and thus respond appropriately? In any moment when the attention is really present and collected and not distorted by greed or hatred or confusion. And the Buddha spoke about this. He described that as freedom.

Someone was asking the Buddha, "It is said, Master Gautama, that Nibbana is directly visible. In what way is Nibbana directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see?" In other words, immediate—right here and now.

And he says, "When, Brahman, a person is impassioned with greed, depraved through hatred, bewildered through delusion, overwhelmed and infatuated, then he may plan for his own harm, for the harm of

others, or the harm of both. He experiences in his mind suffering and grief. But when lust, hatred, and delusion are not present, he does not experience in his mind suffering and grief. In this way, Brahman, is Nibbana directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, to be personally experienced by the wise."

The common definition or explanation of an *arhat*, a completely awakened person, is one in whom greed, hatred, and delusion are not arising in the mind. But we don't have to jump to that. I mean, don't put it out of your mind entirely, but any moment that greed, confusion, aversion, and bewilderment are not present, are not coloring our awareness, and we're awake—not just zoned out but really awake—that's a moment of what we could call pure awareness, pure mindfulness if you're paying attention. And in that moment, accurate recognition can arise.

What is the power of the steadiness of mindfulness? We can just pay attention in this moment, and that's wonderful. But where's the insight? Where's the wisdom?

The steadiness of mindfulness with those qualities James spoke about—which are ways of pointing to non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion—means that through that steadiness, the mindfulness, the awareness, the pure awareness begins to get its own momentum.

Have you noticed that in the couple of days you've been here? Not that you're mindful every moment, of course not, but does it get a little easier? Are there times when you're walking and you're zoned out, off somewhere in your thoughts, and then suddenly you're really feeling your feet? Or you're eating and feeling the taste, and then you're gone somewhere, and then suddenly you're back? And you didn't have to beat yourself up. You didn't have to go through a whole thing. Attention is just back again. Awareness is back again. Does that ever happen?

Notice that. And don't think, "Oh wow, that's amazing! I didn't do it. I should try harder." No, you shouldn't try harder. You should trust that. Because it starts to happen more and more by itself. And the steadiness of this so-called pure awareness is actually the condition that allows wisdom to arise.

This is something I love. Sayadaw U Tejaniya talks about it a lot, and I've come to understand it more than I used to. It's not my job to figure out what wisdom should arise and try to see it and try to make it happen. That's like reading, and that's another view. Even the Buddha Dharma is a view if you're holding onto it as an idea. "Now I need to see impermanence. Let the wisdom of impermanence arise now." Have you ever tried that? Does it work? "I see things are changing."

The bell rang. Okay, it's changing, it's changing. But we're still looking out. We're still looking at the object. We're still looking at what's happening. And what's happening is changing in every moment.

The radical nature of this practice is that, in a way, as someone was saying, we turn around—and that's just a figure of speech. There's not really a here and there. It just seems like that. We notice the quality of the mind that's observing. Over and over and over. And in the big picture, that's all that matters.

So it's not about getting impermanence stuck into the mind. It's not about achieving some experience of no-self. It's turning around and simply seeing: what's the quality of the mind that's observing? Is there wanting? Is there steadiness? Is there boredom? Just seeing without judging, without taking it personally, just looking and seeing and trusting.

And it really happens. There's a growing momentum where the—well, I'm going to use the word purity just because I can't think of a better word. I hope it doesn't trigger you too much—where the purity becomes more and more natural. And in that, the wisdom will come by itself. We don't have to create it. And in fact, we can't. It's like a huge load off. You don't have to try so hard. You don't have to chalk up some kind of chart of how much wisdom you have relative to your last retreat, or relative to the person who asked that question. They sound like they've got a lot of wisdom and I don't have that much, and I used to know this and now I've forgotten it. That's all just ideas, concepts, stuff.

And you think, well, my experience is so mundane. Lifting, moving, placing. Where's the lights? Where's the explosions of unity? Where's the rapid arising and passing away? It's just lifting, moving, placing. Tightness, burning, itching. For God's sake, could something happen? The breath—okay, there's a new sensation in the breath. Big deal. I want something big, because then wisdom will come.

And the amazing thing is, wisdom's not about the object. It doesn't matter. Because everything, every phenomenal experience, is part of impermanence, is part of unreliability. Experience is not me, not self, has no intrinsic separate reality. Everything—including the experience of aversion in the mind, or greed in the heart, or bewilderment, or delusion. Those can be recognized with awareness just like anything else. And they're just as good an object to clarify the pure awareness as an incredibly stoned, blissed-out experience. Maybe better, because you can get lost in the incredibly stoned, blissed-out experience. "I'm not identifying. Oh no, I know it's going to change. I know. I know." And you don't come back because now you've really got it. It's just a little more subtle.

James doesn't agree. That's the difference between a greed type and an aversive type. We see things clearly and they just get a little... I'm going to pay for that, don't worry. But you might as well know what goes on behind the scenes.

So this sense of wisdom arising—we never know how or where, but it's possible at any time, anywhere, with any experience, because it arises from the quality of the pure mind-heart in any moment. And so when we say this practice is about moment-to-moment presence and acceptance of whatever's happening, that's right. It's not that what's happening is good or bad or whatever. The acceptance is that purity of citta, purity of mind, purity of heart that will allow accurate recognition, right view, to arise.

I'll say it again: I just love the elegance of this—that freedom comes from simply recognizing accurately, not from making yourself different.

When that accurate recognition, that moment of wisdom is present, these deep habits—the deeply

ingrained habits of clinging, of greed, of aversion, of fear, of trying to correct, the delusion that it's all about me—incredibly deep habits, yes. But they are only our habits. It's not like we have to get rid of them one by one. Because in the light of recognizing accurately, in that moment they don't arise. They don't make any sense in terms of how things really are.

We cling to them—we don't even know we're clinging to aversion, to wanting, to bewilderment—because in our twisted way, that's our refuge. We think that's the source of happiness. We think that trying to correct is going to make things better. And in a relative way, sometimes we do make things better, and sometimes we don't, because so much is out of our control. But they're deeply ingrained habits that in a way we take refuge in without recognizing.

Before I talk about those habits more, I want to say something important. Even as we talk about getting caught in habits of wanting, habits of aversion or self-judgment, habits of "it's all about me"—we must recognize that it isn't personal. You see how deep the habit is? "Oh, look how much greed there is in my mind. It's my fault." Right there, it's met with aversion and selfing. It's all about me. And that just feels right.

You think, "Yes, the Buddha—the freedom he talks about is freedom from clinging. Look how much clinging I have. Therefore, I need to get rid of this clinging to become free." Very sincere, very dedicated, a lot of faith, and not recognizing, not turning around and looking at how even clinging is just another habit that doesn't have to be a problem when it's seen with the pure mind.

I'll read this from Ajahn Sumedho. You know this book, *The Island*? It's a great book that Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro put together—a compilation of references in the suttas to enlightenment, to awakening. It's wonderful.

This is from Ajahn Sumedho's introduction. He's talking about how the island is used as a metaphor for awakening:

"The only way to go beyond thinking and emotional habit is through awareness of them, through awareness of thought, through awareness of emotion. The island that you cannot go beyond is the metaphor for this state of being awake and aware, as opposed to the concept of becoming awake and aware."

That's what we're practicing—just being awake and aware. Aware of what? It doesn't matter. Being awake and aware.

He goes on: "In meditation classes, people often start with a basic delusion that they never challenge: the idea that 'I'm someone who grasps and has a lot of desires, and I have to practice in order to get rid of these desires and to stop grasping and clinging to things. I shouldn't cling to anything.' That's often the position people start from. So we practice from this basis, and sometimes the result—actually, he says many times—the result is disillusionment and disappointment, because our practice is based on the

grasping of an idea. Eventually, we realize that no matter how much we try to get rid of desire and not grasp anything, no matter what we do, we end up feeling disappointed because the basic delusion has never been recognized. The delusion that I'm someone who grasps and I have to change it."

"This is why the metaphor of the island that you cannot go beyond is so very powerful. Because it points to the principle of an awareness that you can't get beyond. It's very simple, very direct, and you cannot conceive it. You have to trust it."

I'll say that again: you cannot conceive it. You can't conceptualize about it, describe it and hold it. You have to trust it. You have to trust the simple ability that we all have to be fully present and fully awake, and begin to recognize that the grasping and the ideas we have taken on about ourselves, about the world around us, about our thoughts and perceptions and feelings—these are just habits.

My thinking mind doesn't like that. "You can't conceive it, you just have to trust." But what strengthens our trust, our confidence—and Sumedho uses that language a lot, confidence in this pure awareness—is simply manifesting it, recognizing it over and over and over again.

So you have—I'm not a mathematician, some people would be able to figure out how many seconds you've got from now until the end of the month. I don't know, but it's a lot. That many potential moments. A ton of moments go by when you're lost in some fantasy or filled with greed and you don't see it. But in the moment when you recognize, "Oh, greed is like this"—

It doesn't matter how many other moments there were. In that moment of recognizing what's happening, that's the moment of pure awareness. It's always available. It's always possible.

It's not, "Oh, I can recognize accurately when this greed is gone, so I just have to get rid of the greed, and then maybe I can see clearly—but it's so hopeless." No. "Oh, self-judgment is like this."

As we're learning to trust, I often talk about it like a Tai Chi move. All our interest and focus is on the self-judgment, or on the idea. Maybe we don't even notice the self-judgment, and our interest is on the thing we're doing wrong. We don't even recognize the self-judgment. It's all in the object, in the experience. So you go, "Ah, self-judgment is like this." You still know it's self-judgment, but without trying, without making it a big thing, in a subtle way the interest, the energy, is really about the awareness—the quality of mind that's aware in that moment.

Notice that. Notice, without getting into a lot of thinking—I mean, I have to use words to talk—but when you're really caught up in something and suddenly you see it, it just feels like such a relief, even though the thing's still going on sometimes. Don't think about it, but let yourself really feel, with awareness, the quality of that mind-heart that's in relief. Feel what that's like.

We need to learn to recognize the moments when awareness is present and pure. It's not big lights going off. It's just, "Ah." Recognize what it feels like when there's not wanting, when there's not aversion, when

there's not bewilderment in the mind, when it's not all about me.

Bewilderment is one aspect of delusion—you're just like, "Duh, I don't know what's going on." That one's even a little easier to recognize. Another kind of confusion is when our perception is completely wrong or partially wrong due to the confusion in our mind. That's a little harder to recognize, but we can. But the hardest to recognize... I forgot. I had it there, but then I sidetracked. That's a sign of the first kind—duh, I don't know what's going on.

Well, I know it has something to do with "it's all about me." That kind of delusion is really harder to see because it's so subtle—the delusion of just having a little sense of self-referencing.

In the moment when it's just the pure mind, there can be attention, awareness, there might be love, there might be concentration—there can be any wholesome qualities—but there's not the self-referencing, there's not aversion, and there's not greed. It's not always big lights going off, and mostly it's not. It's just—as one of my friends said—squeaky clean. Like windows that are squeaky clean. It's just what it is.

There are many, many moments like that, which we often don't notice because our attention tends to turn toward what's happening. It's such a habit to evaluate our practice, our life, ourselves, each other, by what's happening or how we look. This is the radical nature of the freedom the Buddha is talking about: it's just not about what's happening.

It's so hard to trust. I sit up here and talk about it, but it's hard for me to trust it too—when I really don't like what's happening, when it's really uncomfortable or scary. But then that moment: "Oh, scary feels like this." It doesn't have to change. The movement is from the identification, the me-ing, the making of that scariness into a thing in itself. Instead of that, we see yathā bhūta—in this moment, things as they have come to be. The habit of this mind, this particular configuration—it all comes to be. Scariness is like this, and then the next thing arises.

It's a constant, endless coming together and changing and going apart. Coming together and changing and going apart. I'm not somehow separate, outside of that, watching it. We are that.

When the shift isn't about making what happens better, but into the "Ah, like this. It's like this. It's like this"—to have confidence in that ability to be aware, as Ajahn Sumedho talks about it. And to see when we start wanting: "Oh, but I want it. Maybe I'm not doing it quite good enough." "Oh, wanting is like this."

It's radical. There are no exceptions. No exceptions. And that's really hard.

Last year when I was practicing for some weeks, I could often see it like that. But then there'd be a moment where I was just spacing out all over the place, walking up and down, thinking about this and that. I was noticing wanting and aversion. I could see the sense of self. I was just spacing out.

I really ought to be putting in a little more effort, you know, just a little. I mean, I want to *do* something, for God's sake. I can't just walk up and down and wait for wisdom to come.

And it's true, there are skillful means. It's true. So to trust so completely—and then see that thought arise, "I should put in a little more effort"—oh, that's the delusion of me. *I* put in effort and *I* will get a better result. That's not actually so subtle, but it felt subtle in the moment. But trusting this understanding is hard. Trying to be—not trying—*being* that radical.

But there needs to be, for that level of radical trust, some momentum with the mindfulness. To just walk up and down and actually not know what the heck's going on—I mean, to really not know—there's not mindfulness. You're just lost in greed and hatred. "Oh, it's okay. Wisdom will come when it comes. La, la, la." I mean, there is a reason we have techniques and practice, and why we're talking about this.

The difficult part is for us to know, "Okay, there's enough momentum to trust," and then to see when we're really lost, "Okay, let me bring in a little bit of technique." But understanding that the technique is simply to help us re-recognize the quality of pure awareness—not to get to some state that makes us feel more fulfilled, that justifies our sense of self. "Now my practice is okay, and now I can relax."

Have you ever noticed that? I noticed with myself years ago when I was practicing in a certain very concentrated way. I'd get to a certain point—I had the idea that I can't concentrate, so that's the belief I'd operate from. I'd get to a certain point where pīti, or rapture, can have certain physical effects. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. But it would get to this one where the floor seems to be rolling. So I'd get there, where the floor is rolling, and then my mind would relax. "Okay, I'm doing it good." And then the mind would relax. And the relaxed mind was actually what let wisdom come. The reason it relaxed wasn't so skillful, but anyway, it relaxed and quit wanting and quit doubting. And then the awareness just gets stronger and stronger. So we can learn to trust without having to do it in an unskillful way.

So again, knowing that the habit of these kilesas arising is, as Tejaniya always says, it's just nature. It's not personal. He says things like, "Aversion is doing its job. Wanting is doing its job. Mettā is doing its job. Mindfulness is doing its job." They're all just different factors of nature doing their job. So if we can begin to meet it that way, then we can explore how these qualities, when they're in our mind, color our mind, how they color our perception and our decisions, how they cause suffering—just with awareness, as a scientific kind of exploration to see: Is it true?

I mean, I totally believe this, but is it true that we can't really trust any perception or thought or views that are guided by, that are led by, greed, hatred, or delusion?

For me, I know as much as I know that that's true. And so when I'm believing something or thinking—even in my daily life, "This is what I need to do" and "How do I need to relate to this person?" and there's some kind of problem—I look back at the mind and go, "Ah, there's a lot of fear." What I know then is I just can't trust the perceptions and the thoughts and the conclusions I'm drawing. I don't have to take that personally. It isn't personal. That's how fear works in the mind. It colors perception, it colors conclusions. You can't trust it.

And that's the moment of awareness. Okay, that's awareness. It's not like you have to figure it all out. We just learn to keep moving. That Tai Chi move from lost in the subject, lost in the experience, to just noticing what's happening.

I'll give you an example.

I wrote this down from last time I was practicing, just to see, for example, how aversion can color perception without our recognizing it. It's the same with greed, and the same with "it's all about me."

There's some resistance in the mind to something or other, unrecognized, and you'll notice that can lead to thoughts—either "I'm not doing this right," or "this place stinks," or "if only I had different food," or "my experience isn't good." It can go to "I'm no good, I'm worthless," or "you're no good," or "nothing's any good." It can change to anger or disappointment, whatever the habits of your mind. At some point you recognize, "Oh, okay, that's self-judgment." But you don't quite recognize the *dosa*, the aversion—that mental factor of negativity called hatred. You don't quite see it.

I was noticing this while sitting in some beautiful place in Switzerland. There was this little subtle aversion still arising moment to moment in the mind, and it would color my perceptions. I'd look out over the scenery, which that morning had been so peaceful and sunlit, and this time it was like, "Oh, it's so melancholy. It looks so sad." The scenery went from peaceful to sad. Scenery isn't sad—it just is what it is.

Or you look out at animals, and when there's love in the mind, you say, "Oh, the deer are so filled with love, they're such beautiful beings." And then there's aversion in the mind, and you go, "Oh, the poor deer, that coyote's going to eat him. Life is suffering in the animal realm." You look at the turkeys and they're regal, or they look really stupid, or they're just... whatever. And that's our perception at the time.

I'm making simple examples, but from this, we can go into really all kinds of decisions about our life. It's scary, actually, if you want to look at it. And this is the way the world functions.

Do you remember, was it last year when there was that big oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico off Louisiana? It went on for so long when that thing blew up. I remember in the news at the time feeling, "Oh gosh, what a weird world." One of the criticisms of Obama was that he wasn't angry enough. People wanted him to be really angry—come on the news and... I don't know what they wanted. I thought, "Wow, is that what we want? Someone making decisions that affect the country and the world to be blinded by anger and hatred? Is that really our idea of what a good leader should do?" That scared me.

But that's what people want. We think that's strength. Because the *kilesas* are so common, we're so used to them. In one way, as I said, they're our refuge. We think they're going to make us happy—anger, wanting, fixing, "it's all about me." It just feels that way. So somehow we've got to arrange the whole world to make it okay for me, which doesn't work for more than a fraction of a second, if that.

And the *kilesas*, in my experience, they're louder. They're more obvious than, say, a moment of pure

awareness, of pure mind, a moment of pure mindfulness. There may be lights, but often it's just that squeaky clean quality—there's no wanting, there's no aversion, it's just the is-ness of things. It's not making a big noise. Easy not to notice. Easy not to trust.

The *kilesas* come and they're screaming in your mind—wanting, aversion, "that's wrong!" Whether we believe them or whether we fight against them—which is just fighting fire with fire—it's easy to keep looking in that direction.

So really my whole point tonight is just keep remembering to look back and notice the moments of pure awareness. Many, many moments without greed, hatred, or delusion. Then notice when there is wanting, when you are trying to push something away, when you are thinking it's all about me or taking experience personally. And notice not that there's something wrong with you, not that that's personal, but explore it. See if it's true that that leads to more suffering and confusion. Don't believe me—look and see if it's true.

See if it's true that when you're caught in it, and you can say, "Oh, wanting is like this," you can get a little flavor of the freedom that comes when we are not glued to experience, to wanting, aversion, and delusion by identification. "Ah, wanting's like this."

The freedom to be fully awake, fully present without fearing any experience whatsoever is an amazing place to be—because it's so normal. It's really the potential for all of us.

So let's see, there was something I wanted to read.

This is from Maha Bua, who just died recently. He was a really powerful Thai meditation master, a forest monk, kind of like a brother lineage with Ajahn Chah. I remember years ago when I was in Thailand, a lot of the foreign monks were afraid of him because even though he was way out in the forest, they were afraid that he could read their minds, even when they were in Bangkok. And you know what? He probably could. He was a pretty powerful guy.

If you've read some of his books, he talks about sitting every night through the night without moving, to the point that if there was any pain worse than death, death could not bring any more pain than this. He sounded like the toughest guy. I'm giving you that background because then to me it's surprising what he writes.

He's writing about *yathā bhūta ñāṇa dassana*—things as they have come to be. He says:

"Then the mind knows and sees things as they are, within and without, through and through, and then it stays put with purity. If you were to say that it stays put, it stays put with purity. Whatever it thinks, it simply thinks. The body is simply a body. Feelings, labels, thought formations, cognizance are each simply passing conditions that we use until their time is up. When they no longer have the strength to keep going, then we let them go in line with their reality. But as for the utterly true nature of our purity, there is no

problem at all."

Then this is the surprising part: "Those who have reached full release from conventional realities of every sort don't assume themselves to be more special or worse than anyone else. For this reason they don't demean even the tiniest of creatures. They regard them all as friends in suffering, birth, aging, illness and death, because the Dhamma is something tender and gentle. Any mind in which Dhamma is found is completely gentle and can sympathize with every grain of sand, with living beings of every sort. There is nothing rigid or unyielding about it. Only the defilements are rigid and unyielding, haughty and vain. Once there's Dhamma, there are none of these things. There's only the unvarying gentleness and tenderness of mercy and benevolence for the world at all times."

And then I'll read you one different description from Dipa Ma, who was a very realized little tiny Indian lady. She said:

"There's so much sameness in ordinary life. We are always experiencing everything through the same set of lenses. Once greed, hatred, and delusion are gone, you see everything fresh and new all the time. Every moment is new. Life was dull before. Now every day, every moment is full of taste and zest."

We only have to start with this moment. It's like this, always available.

So let's just sit quietly with taste and zest.

Thank you.

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