Investigating Craving

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:00:04

I've come to really love the Buddha's teachings and this practice because I find that what he says and where it can take us is really so profound.

One of the Buddha's more profound and bold statements, at least as far as we can tell from what we can read, is that the sublime truth has been discerned by the Tathagata—how he referred to himself. Namely, liberation of heart-mind, this word *citta*, through non-clinging. Liberation through non-clinging. "It's been discovered by me." Quite a bold statement.

So what I want to talk about tonight is actually an invitation to use mindfulness awareness to explore what's the problem with clinging anyway. A lot of times we may hear a statement like this—liberation through non-clinging—and where does one's mind go with that? I know some people can think of liberation as meaning we're going somehow to achieve some amazing state of mind or heart, a steady state that you get to hang out in. And I guess non-clinging is there, clinging isn't there, and we're free. But it's not about a state at all. There is nothing static. There is nothing steady state. One way you could think of liberation through non-clinging is just non-clinging as a moment-to-moment activity of mind, of heart. That's all there is anyway.

This whole exploration we're doing of mindfulness wisdom is really using this quality of mind, this quality of awareness uncolored by confusion, to explore and understand how the mind works. How does it work to create suffering? How does it work to allow freedom and wisdom to arise? And what's so far out is both of those trajectories are lawful.

One way that the freedom of heart and mind is described, or when the Buddha describes the path of awakening, is that it begins and ends with right view. *Sammā diṭṭhi* is the word in Pali. Right view, wise view. "Right" is actually a little bit more accurate translation than "wise." We like "wise" because we don't like right and wrong, being told what to do, black and white. Wise is nice. But as I think I said the first night, I like "right view" because "view" is actually more literal. Right view could be described as seeing or recognizing things as they actually are. Things being all the objects of our experience—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, all the activities of mind—recognizing also with mind things as they actually are.

What allows for, in a moment, the arising of the heart-mind of wisdom, which is a mind without clinging, isn't getting to some esoteric, far-out, blissful state. More likely, that'll give rise to clinging. Rather, it's when in a moment, this moment's experience is recognized really accurately without distortion. Clinging makes no sense. It's not that we have to get out a pickaxe and dig all the moments of clinging out of our

mind—forget about it, that's not going to happen. We can understand how clinging works, just like we can understand how to run a recorder. It's lawful. We can get interested in it. We can discover the true nature of how clinging works in a moment, just like anything else. And in exploring that—exploring clinging with wise view, with right view, with mindfulness wisdom—that can be a moment giving rise to insight, just like anything else. Clinging is a perfectly valid object of investigation, of awareness, to wake up from.

So it may sound kind of simplistic, seeing things as they are. Another way of describing that—I mean, there's many, many ways, I'm just being very simple here—is recognizing things as they are, being that it's all lawful process of cause and effect, that everything that's happening is a process. There is no static, self-existing entity anywhere.

One of my favorite Pali expressions the last couple of years is *yathā bhūta*, which is often translated as "things as they are." And there's a phrase for one of the high levels of insight, *yathā bhūta ñāṇa dassana*, which is often translated as "knowledge and vision of things as they are," seeing things as they are. But I've been told by good friends who are Pali scholars that a more accurate translation is "things as they have come to be" in this moment. And I love that because "things as they are"—we're back in static and things, right? Things as they are, boom, it's all solid. "Things as they have come to be" gives to me the sense of the infinite causes and conditions that have come together to be as it is in this moment. And now in this moment, new causes have come.

Things as they have come to be in this moment becomes a cause and condition for things as they have come to be in the next moment. There's no way you can pull anything out as a self-existing entity—including, guess who? Each of us.

So the causes and conditions, the process of things as they have come to be in this moment, that we are all here sitting together in this room—infinite, isn't it? Just start thinking about even the causes and conditions that you know about, never mind the ones we don't know about. The ones you know about that allowed just you to get here. And where can you ever stop? You start by getting time off from work, by having enough money, by having your health, by having read something about it somewhere, by having enough interest to come, by having family that supports you and a way to get here. And that this place is even here—how did this place even get here? Well, you heard in detail from Grove the other day. But then that's just you.

But then how did you even get here? You have to go back to all the food you've been eating and the clothes you've been wearing and all the things that happened to you in your life. That time you slipped on the ice but didn't fall through. You survived that illness. Your parents were both alive and made you—and if your parents hadn't been alive, you wouldn't be here. You can't stop anywhere. And that's just you. Then it's all of us—infinite. There's no way we can know all the causes and conditions.

But things as they have come to be in this moment, seeing with right view that it's this process, and it's a lawful process—so it's not that we have to understand or know every single cause and condition, but

getting it, that causes and conditions have their lawful effect, and beginning to see accurately is what actually opens the heart and mind from the habits of clinging and aversion and confusion.

The Buddha even asked, what's the problem with clinging? When we don't recognize it, we can't see accurately. We can't recognize things as they are. The Buddha talks about this Dhamma—remember, the Dhamma means laws of nature, the way things are. This Dhamma is visible here and now. That's something monks chant: *ehipassiko*, come and see, visible here and now. And someone asked him, well, to what extent is this Dhamma visible here and now? And he said, to the extent that greed, hatred—which is a form of aversion—and confusion, delusion, are not present in the citta, not present in the psyche. Remember, moment to moment, not steady state.

Just to the extent that greed, hatred, and confusion are not present in the mind, to use that word simply, in a moment—that is what allows for accurate recognition. A moment of awareness that isn't distorted by looking for something specifically, wanting this to happen, that isn't distorted by saying this shouldn't be happening, get out of here, or by complete confusion, fogginess, or it's all about me. When those things are there, we can't recognize accurately.

But many, many moments—what we've been talking about as mindful awareness, awareness with mindfulness—what we mean by that is just a moment of pure mind, of pure citta, I would call it, when there's not greed, hatred, or confusion coloring it. And there are many moments of that, more than we might realize. We're not looking for that. In fact, mostly we're forgetting to notice what's going on in the mind, the awareness, at all.

This is how one of my teachers describes it. It's experiential—this isn't Abhidhamma language, but it's an experiential way of describing what we're doing here in meditation that I find personally very helpful. She says one way of describing our experience of meditation is this: in any moment of experience—whatever's happening, as I keep saying, all it can be is at the sixth sense, the physical seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing with the body, or any mental experience—whatever's happening, any experience has two aspects, the way she talks about it.

One aspect is the object. She uses this word a lot. The object would be the sight, the sound, the smell, the thought, the mood, the emotion—whatever we're aware of, that's the object. The other aspect of the experience is the mind knowing it. These things arise together. You can't separate them. It's just a way of saying two sides of a coin. They arise together, but they have different natures, so to speak.

Whatever object is arising—the sight, the sound of my voice, seeing, a mood that comes up, a pain in your knee, whatever—the nature of that object, in terms of this way of meditating, is simply to be known. Whatever's arising that can be known, it's an object. And the awareness, the mind, has the function of knowing. It sounds simple, but it's actually quite transformative if you keep paying attention in this way.

They arise together, and when it starts to be that any object can be known, our tendency in life—because

this is not just in meditation, in life, you know, whatever's happening can be known—our tendency is to get so involved with the object, whatever it is that's happening, with the experience, if you don't want to use the word object.

And often when we talk about meditation, we go, "Well, what was happening?" We ask you what's happening. That's already saying, "Tell me what experiences are arising." And we get involved in this knee pain or this back pain or this mood or this thought, and we like it, we don't like it. We get so involved in the experience that's happening that we forget often, even when we're being mindful, we forget to notice the knowing part, the aware part, the mind that's knowing. And so we can think we're being really mindful, really focusing on whatever experience is happening, but not noticing the mind that's aware or what's going on in that mind that's aware.

And so when we're aware—like, I hope God doesn't mind, I will use as an example his story from last night. He doesn't know I'm going to use this. His story from last night of when he got really angry at that guy when he was doing walking meditation. And as he said, he thought he was really mindful. He was walking down to that spot. He saw the guy. He's aware of stepping, stepping, stepping. He was aware of his thoughts. But the stepping was the object. The thoughts were the object. Seeing the guy was the object. Aware, aware, aware. Completely not noticing the other half of the equation—the mind that's knowing, and what mental qualities are arising in that mind. Aversion. Aversion.

And when he did—"Oh, this is aversion"—right? In that moment of noticing aversion, aversion itself becomes the next object, the next experience. And then it's fine. Because awareness doesn't care. It really doesn't care what the object of the experience is. When awareness is not tainted, not distorted, in just a moment. Remember, it's all moment to moment. We don't have to hold on to anything.

So a guy's walking, his awareness is filled with aversion, aversion, aversion, which we think we're clear-seeing when there's aversion. And then suddenly the awareness recognized the aversion. And in that moment, in that moment, was no longer colored by the—oh, aversion's like this. I say that I use that a lot. Aversion's like this. And in that moment of pure mind, pure citta, that's fine. That's a moment of clear seeing. That's a moment of yathā-bhūta, recognizing things as they have come to be in this moment.

And aversion is just as great an object of awareness as a state of bliss, as a subtle, subtle sense of breath, as a gross sense of confusion and nothing's clear, or a really, really subtle experience. Because we're always focusing on the object, but the objects aren't what wake up. The objects aren't where wisdom comes. It's from that clarity, that purity of mind, the steadiness of awareness that isn't colored by greed, by aversion, by confusion—that allows the clear seeing. And it's lawful.

I can't tell you how many moments in a row you have to have. It's not that. Seven million trillion moments of pure citta without any greed, and boom, you're enlightened. Sorry, you know, it's not so straightforward. But it's lawful.

So insight is not like, "Well, we put in our time, we put in our effort, and we hope to God that sometime"—well, I can't, there's no God—but somehow some magical moment will occur and we'll be free. It's lawful. It's lawful. And all we have to do is take care of our awareness, not try to figure it all out.

All we have is this moment. This moment is all there is right now. What's happening? And what's the quality of the awareness that's meeting it?

He says this regarding ill will, but it's the same for craving, the same for confusion. When one dwells with a mind oppressed by ill will—or oppressed by craving, you could say—and does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen ill will or craving, on that occasion one neither knows nor sees as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both.

I love this teaching because he's saying we don't see clearly, but he's also pointing to what clear seeing actually is. It manifests in seeing the good for oneself and for others. You can see he's not making this into something subtle and esoteric—"I just see this for myself and then I'm separated from the world." It's seeing what's good for ourselves, what's good for others.

So this quality of knowing, whatever the object is—what I want to suggest is that we can take that quality of the knowing, and when it's not colored by greed, by aversion, by confusion, we recognize things accurately. And when we're recognizing accurately, craving doesn't make any sense. What we can also recognize accurately is craving itself.

A retreat, as Guy said last night, is where things are more simple. When it's not quite so complex, it gives us the space and the time, and the mind's a little bit quieter. Yes, it is, believe it or not. It gives us the time and the space to actually explore the nature of craving, to see if it's true or not. Don't just believe what I say. Don't believe what the Buddha says. Take the quality of clear seeing and look for yourself. Is it really true? What's the problem with craving? Is it increasing suffering? Is it keeping me lost in confusion? Start to look and see.

Now, when I first start talking about craving, I want to clarify what that means. Often—and maybe many of you already have a lot of experience, so perhaps you don't have this reaction—but often people find quite some reaction arising in their mind when you talk about craving, about the heart and mind liberation of non-clinging. They start to think of non-clinging, and again, we're focused on the object. Well, what's wrong with wanting to enjoy the beauty of nature? What's wrong with wanting to take care of my family? What's wrong with wanting enlightenment? What's wrong with wanting ice cream—or fill in the blanks for yourself.

The other extreme one can go to—and sometimes it's subtle, we don't realize we're going there—is to think, "Well, I know that when it's pleasant, the habit of mind is to lean into it, to want, to hold on to it. So if wanting is bad..." We've already gone to bad and good, which isn't what he's saying. He's saying it causes suffering, not that it's bad and good. "If it's bad, and if freedom, enlightenment means no clinging, then a

good way to not cling is to never get close to anything pleasant. And if I start enjoying something pleasant, then I'm in trouble."

I'm not putting forward either of these as useful or helpful, but it's often what we do. In a beautiful place like this, it's a great spot to explore the subtleties of this. Because we're not saying craving and wanting is suffering, it's bad, therefore we should avoid all beauty, all pleasantness. That's impossible. Every experience that comes has a flavor in the way our mind experiences it—being somewhat pleasant or a little bit unpleasant or kind of neutral. That's not in our control. It arises moment to moment with the mind. It's one of the factors that arises in the mind, this perceiving of pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. It just keeps going like that.

Like I said, we wouldn't have any suffering if everything was pleasant. Although, I wonder—actually, I think there still would be, because it would still all be impermanent. It would just be cling, cling, cling, cling. But it's pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. Awakening, freedom from clinging, doesn't change that. Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. If we think we're getting to some enlightened place where it's pleasant, pleasant, pleasant—forget about it. Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral—and a lot faster than I'm saying it. How many thoughts have you had? How many sensations arise in your body? How many sounds? How many sights?

All of them are pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. We mostly don't notice it. When we don't notice it, that's when the mind leans into the pleasant.

So the point is, it's not about setting up an environment where there's never any pleasant—you can't do it. But it's also not about setting up an environment where every moment of pleasure can be fulfilled. Because although a lot of us in this Western culture have far more access to try and do that than in many other places, it doesn't make us happier. It makes it harder to see through the suffering of craving.

Now I want to talk about what's wrong with wanting to take care of your family, what's wrong with wanting enlightenment. I want to talk about what this word *craving* means. It's very specific, as with many of the words the Buddha uses. He uses this word craving as a translation of a Pali word, *tanha*, which is more literally translated as thirst.

In English, we tend to use the word want or the word desire, and it covers quite a wide range, doesn't it? This word *tanha*, thirst, is talking about not the object that's wanted. Remember, this is just what my teacher was talking about. We go to the object: "What's wrong with wanting enlightenment?" It's got nothing to do with enlightenment. It's got to do with the quality. It's a mental factor, a mental quality of *ta nha* that we experience in the mind, in the heart, in the psyche. And that quality, when it arises in relationship to any object—thirst is a pretty good translation. It's that quality of *gotta have it*, right? That gotta-have-it can arise in relationship to anything.

Now, there are other words in Pali and there are other experiences that we might say in English as want.

Like I said, "I want to take care of my family." "I want to eat." "I want something really good to eat." It changes. There's a word *chanda* in Pali, which kind of means willingness to do. It can be interest, excitement, energy to do. And there are other ways that "I want to take care of my family" might manifest. It could be a kind of compassion. It could be a sense of "this is something really important in my life, I need to do it." It's a quality that's called *adhitthana*, determination, which is a wholesome quality.

But *tanha* is very specific. It's this quality of thirst. Explore for yourself—you can kind of feel it. It's almost like it narrows your vision. It's like the sense of clinging. And very quickly, it moves from *tanha* to the next link, *upadana*, which is translated as clinging or grasping. It's like "I want this," and the mind just kind of fastens around it. And then we start making choices based on that.

So here—because it's not about the object—take an example: see how it comes up for you tomorrow, say when it's time for lunch. Now, there can be a sense that you're hungry, the body's hungry. You feel hunger. That doesn't have to be *tanha*. You feel hunger. There's a sense it's time to go eat. And we would say in English, "I want to go eat." But notice not the food, but the quality in the mind. The mind is aware of what you're doing. "I want to go eat." But you're present. You go eat. That's not *tanha*.

Now you're sitting here, and you can have the same feelings of hunger—or you don't even have feelings of hunger—but the image of pizza comes up in your mind. You think, "I really want pizza. I'm really hungry. I really need pizza." That's already into grasping, right? Can you feel the difference?

Then notice, maybe you're not going to get pizza, but you smell something at lunch. You're walking up to lunch, thinking, "When's the bell going to ring? I hear them banging around in there. I smell that garlic. It's time." You're walking to lunch. What's the quality in your mind, in your heart as you're walking?

When there's tanha, you can feel it like you're being led by the nose. My brother used to have a hunting hound dog, and to me, that dog epitomized—it's like a metaphor for how craving works in our mind. Really sweet dog, but bred so finely to smell things. It wasn't a bloodhound, but it had that kind of really fine scent. And the poor dog was in thrall to the scent, to the nose. If you let it out in the backyard, his nose was on the ground, and he would just have to run around the sides, into all the bushes, and smell everything—anywhere a possum had been, or a squirrel, or whatever. He just had to. He couldn't just go out and lie down in the sun. He had to smell everything. Every time he came new into the house, any new smell of food or a new person or dirty clothes or dirty tissue—anything with human or animal smells—he had to go smell it. It was painful to watch.

And I thought, this is what craving does. You get that idea of pizza in your mind, and we don't turn around and look at the craving. But can you see the difference?

This is one of my own particular bugaboos. Often I hear people talk about—teachers too—having good desire and unwholesome desire. I think that's very confusing, because they'll say, "Well, good desire—desire for awakening, or to care for your family, or desire to practice—is good. But desire to eat

pizza and just get lost in craving is bad." That's pointing to the object. It's got nothing to do with the object. Craving as a quality of heart and mind is what brings us into confusion and gets in the way of seeing clearly. It's got nothing to do with what the object is.

So I could have the thought of freedom from clinging. What I just read—the Buddha said, "I've discovered liberation through non-clinging." I could hear that in a way that's uplifting. Yes, that's inspirational. That's possible. And it brings energy. And then I could say in English, "I want to be free," but it's not that craving.

I could also—and I certainly have, and I bet some of you have too—sit there and go, "When in God's name am I going to be free from clinging? How can I ever be enlightened?" Right? That's craving. That's grasping. It's not about the enlightenment; it's the quality in the mind.

The moment of mind is the seed of freedom. It's the seed of suffering—what's arising in the heart and mind right now. And so taking that attitude of interest, we can really begin to explore how craving acts when it's arising.

The way I was just describing it—watching how you're walking in to lunch when there's craving or when there's not—that's how we bring interest, wisdom, clear seeing, *satipaññ*a, mindfulness-wisdom, into our practice. We don't say, "Oh, I hate this. Craving's bad." We tend to do that. "Oh no, I've seen so much clinging since I got here. It's just hopeless."

It's not personal. It's just a lawful process of nature. It's the habit of minds—not just yours, all of ours—that when there's not much awareness and when something pleasant comes up, and often it's a pleasant thought, the tendency of mind is to go into it, to lean into it, and clinging arises, wanting arises.

But in the next moment, just like Guy with the aversion, awareness can arise. And instead of hating the clinging—that's just jumping from clinging to aversion. As one of my teachers says, aversion is really thwarted craving. You don't get this, so you're aversive. That's not any better, not helpful.

But to bring that moment of mindfulness: "Ah, clinging. It's like this." And to really explore—how does it feel? How does it act? What's the effect in my mind? What's the effect in my choices? Really, just to see moment to moment to moment, and it's that steadiness of awareness that is the condition for wisdom, for insight to arise. That steadiness of awareness on any object.

Just take care of the awareness. You don't need a better object. Craving is a great object, really, to explore. And it gets fascinating when you don't take it personally. Because it's amazing, unbelievable—the power of craving itself in our minds at times. Have you ever seen that? Have you noticed that? And not just in our few little minds, at least we're looking at it, but the power of craving in the world.

So to explore it, the habit—it's so seductive. Have you ever noticed a time when... just to explore it when it comes up here in little things. That's what's so great about a retreat. Walking meditation I find a particularly good time, sometimes, to explore when wanting comes up. So you're walking along. See the

difference between when you're present with just what's happening and then when wanting comes up.

Okay, it might be the example of food. One that often comes up is just the desire—someone's starting to walk past and there's this craving to look at the other person. Have you noticed that yet? I don't know if you've been here long enough. But sometimes on a retreat, especially inside when they're more like in the same room, the craving to look at the person walking by can be so strong. It's unbelievable.

And so you say to yourself, "I'm not going to look. I'm just going to be with the craving and see what gives rise to it. What's the effect of it?" And sometimes it's so strong, you can't not look. You can't. The craving is just so strong. We can't be with it. The mindfulness isn't strong enough. The craving is stronger. So we look.

Not that it matters. And then we look and go, "Well, that really did us a world of good, didn't it?" Because what comes from the looking? Some judging, right? They're better, they're worse, or all these ideas about them, or ideas about you, or why, or your ideas because you looked, or whatever. Then you just get lost in thought and you're thinking, "Oh my God." And then you come back and you're restless and bored. "Why should I bother walking anymore anyway? It's almost over." No, it's not. "But it's over now. I'm out of here," right?

Keep paying attention. Even if you can't not look, keep paying attention. It's not as if the craving has won, so give up. Never. Just take care of your awareness.

Again, my teacher Tejani was saying—he's very funny—he said, so you're watching craving, you're watching how your whole world shrinks as soon as craving comes into the mind. You're walking totally at peace and that craving for whatever the heck—craving to think about something, craving to go running, craving to have pizza, craving to stop walking, whatever—everything else is just not very enjoyable. It was beautiful before, but who cares now? You just want to go do this other thing. The whole world has shrunk. Notice that. Keep noticing. That's all.

And then you can't not do it, so you do it. You stop walking, you go in, you have the tea, you wait for the peace that comes—because the seductive message of craving is "just follow me and everything will be so nice." So you go, but you're not noticing what's going on. You're waiting for the peace to come. And there's a subtle moment of peace, but it's not about the tea or looking at the person. You don't even notice the peace because too much other stuff came too quickly. But if you come in and have tea, there might be a moment of peace—but it's not the tea. It's because the craving stopped. Oh, so briefly, but it stopped. And if you keep paying attention, you'll notice that.

That's what's so fascinating—that the peace and ease is not about getting what we want. It's about that moment of no craving. And that moment of no craving is available a whole lot more when we're willing to just stop and look at the craving.

So what my teacher says is that we tend to think, "Oh, I failed," so we stop paying attention when we're

acting on it. But if you keep paying attention, he says, okay, so you did the thing, craving got its way. But you were paying attention, so you also got your way—because there was a steadiness of awareness even when acting on the craving, and so wisdom is coming from that. Just take care of your awareness.

So just noticing different ways the craving comes up. Now when I start to see it come up in my experience, I don't go, "Oh no, craving." Well, I might. But mostly it's like, "Great. It's a chance to explore it again." Because believe me, it's going to keep coming.

There's a reason when the Buddha taught his Four Noble Truths and the second truth being the cause of our confusion, our suffering, he picked taṇhā. Out of all experience, what could he pick as the cause of suffering? Taṇhā. So I'm not just picking this for the heck of it as one to look at. It's really very central to our confusion, to our dis-ease, to our sense of unsatisfiedness. And what's so seductive about craving is it's telling us it's the thing that's going to bring us satisfaction, but it's actually the thing that increases dissatisfaction.

There's something the Buddha talks about that Bhikkhu Bodhi describes as three movements in the unfolding process of insight. It's a way to explore anything, but here we want to use craving and grasping—which is to, with our steadiness of awareness, notice the whole process with craving of gratification, danger, and escape. I like those three because, again, the Buddha is so pragmatic. Often people think he's saying, "Well, nothing is worth clinging to." He does say that. And so then, because we don't understand that, we jump to him saying that means everything's bad.

Everything's crap. Nothing's worth clinging to. The world is just dull and gray. And who wants to live like that anyway? And what about passion? And what about beauty? And what about—and then we're gone.

But he's saying there *is* gratification. Notice it. Be aware of it. See what it is. And when he talks about craving moving into grasping, he speaks of several areas. One, of course, is sense desire, which I spoke about last night. That's an obvious one—sense pleasures, experiencing the gratification.

Again, being here with the beauty. It's great to see. What is the gratification? Explore that for yourself. When you go outside and there are beautiful sights, experience the pleasure of it. When there's a concept of something about nature and you're having a thought about it, or a memory, or some idea, and it's a pleasant thought, there's gratification in that. When you feel a sense of just the appreciation of the beauty and it's not clinging, but a wholesome kind of joy, there's gratification and appreciation in that.

So noticing that, just with the steadiness of awareness—that's not the same as clinging. But mostly, when we're not aware, it moves so quickly into clinging. Mostly we don't notice that, but if you're paying attention, you'll see the difference. Because as soon as the wanting, the clinging comes in, as I said before, the whole thing narrows.

I don't know if you've seen this. Sometimes when I go outside and I'm just not thinking about it, but just being there, not trying to see beauty. Do you ever go out and try to see how beautiful it is? Isn't it different

from when you just walk out? It just hits you. Or you're just being there, kind of quiet, and just a smell of the freshness comes through, and it's just so lovely. It's just a moment of pure loveliness. The mind isn't colored with wanting anything. It's just a moment of pure pleasure. That's the gratification.

What's the danger of that? Because there is gratification with sense desire. The danger is, of course, that we come to rely on that gratification. That gratification—not just a sense of pure beauty of the smell and then gone. That's fine. There's no danger in that. That's gone. That's gratification with wisdom. But mostly, the next step is either, "That's so nice. How can I get more?" And the relying on the gratification for our sense of self, really—for a sense of feeling okay with ourselves, or just for a sense of, "I need more pleasure, that's the only way I can bear it in this world." It comes very quickly.

If I go out and look at the beauty, then, "Oh, I want to see more." And if I walk here, maybe I'll see this tree. And if I walk here, maybe I'll smell that smell. And I saw those little goslings yesterday—maybe I can go see them again. And what about the robin? And it's different from just the appreciation. There's that taṇhā, that craving, that pulling. And the beauty isn't gratifying, actually, then. It's like, it's not enough. I need more. I need more.

I need more.

And the danger of gratification is also that none of these experiences last more than a fraction of a second. So if we're relying on the pleasure to be okay—or even on the most subtle level, the gratification feeds the sense of me, "I'm the one being gratified"—not that that's bad, it's just not accurate. Just notice that.

So the danger is the gratification and the seduction of the craving itself. Because even the Buddha, when he described the second noble truth, said it is "just this craving accompanied by delight, which seeks pleasure now here and now there." That's the way he described it. It's so seductive. The craving seems to be accompanied by delight when we're not really looking at it. And so it's saying, "Yes, this gratification is really the best it's ever going to be. This is as good as it gets. So let's have some more. This is delight. This is happiness."

But when you haven't looked—like we were talking about before—when you look at the craving itself and see that when the craving ends, the peace is there, then we know this story of seduction is not true. That's the danger of it. But mostly we forget to turn back and look at the mind, and instead we go, "Yeah, that's right. That'll make me happy." And the more often that gratification can be fulfilled, we forget how brief it is because we lean into the next one.

A little story: a very wise friend of mine who totally knows everything I'm saying—and knows it better than me—we were sitting talking, and this person really likes cookies. They have a routine they like to follow. Every day after lunch, a little bit of milk and two cookies. Good cookies. So we're in one place together, and this person is having their cookies. We got talking about craving, just this subject, and I said, "Okay, so... this is craving."

The person says, "No, it's not suffering, though. What do you mean there's craving?"

I said, "There's craving. You want the cookie, you get the cookie, the cookie's fine, the craving's gone. There's no suffering there."

They said, "Yeah, but what happens when you don't get the cookie?"

The person says, "I'll always get a cookie."

That's the seduction of craving. "I'll always get a cookie."

And if we don't get a cookie, rather than rest in that, it's "Oh no, oh no, now what?" The mind makes up something else to want. It's almost like we're afraid to turn around and look and see that peace is already here.

Huang Po, who was a Chinese Zen teacher, said, "This pure mind shines forever with the radiance of its own perfection." Just in a moment. "This one mind is the Buddha, the awakened one. And there is no distinction between Buddhas and ordinary beings, except that ordinary beings are attached to forms, attached to experience, attached to objects, and thus seek for Buddhahood outside of themselves. By this very seeking, they lose it." By this very seeking.

To me, the most poignant aspect of craving, of grasping, is that the promise it's giving us is happiness and ease and peace. And that happiness, that ease, that peace is already available in this pure mind, this pure moment of wakeful presence, of awareness that's not colored. It doesn't matter what object is coming. We turn around and look. But the craving, the grasping itself is what hides that.

And craving isn't a pleasant experience. So our deep habit of only wanting to go to the pleasant works against turning around and just sitting or walking or standing with the craving itself.

So play with it. I promise you, craving won't kill you. It won't. And pick a little one, okay? Don't pick the biggest one in your life. And sooner or later, you'll just be able to stand there with it or sit there with it and get interested in it and see what thoughts feed it and what it feels like in the body and what sensations arise and what thoughts make it stronger and what thoughts make it weaker. Notice when it's gone how it feels. Notice how it comes back again.

It will go because everything goes. It's never even steady for one moment. As Rilke said, no feeling is final. Craving comes and goes, comes and goes, comes and goes. There's no need to be afraid of it.

Sometimes it'll run us, but often it won't. Awareness is much stronger than craving. And when we start to taste that peace of the craving, we can just really play with it. No, I don't have to act on this necessarily. Just because craving's here, I don't have to act on it. Sometimes we will—okay, just keep on paying attention.

So one other aspect of grasping I want to talk about. The Buddha talks about sense pleasures, and that's an

easy one to see. The next one is views. And the third one is the particular view of personality or sense of self.

Views are really fascinating to explore. A view is simply an idea, a thought, or a way of seeing the world that we may not even recognize we have. The grasping is basically what you'd call believing. "Yeah, this is true. This is how it is."

Now, at least you can see how painful it is even when we know it's a view. Take politics. I mean, we're not going to talk about politics, but just take it as an example. Even when we absolutely know—right, we know that we're right and those other guys are completely misguided morons. We know that. We know we're right. We may not even quite be able to get there to say it's a view. But maybe you could see that they believe something completely different. Both of those are views. It's not about right or wrong.

Of course we have opinions. Of course we have views. Of course we're going to vote. It's not that we don't hold these things, but it's this sense of "this is right and you're wrong" that leads to—well, the political situation you have in this country and not only this country right now, where opposing sides can hardly talk to each other. There's not an openness to explore when there's attachment to a view, when there's grasping. Just as with sense pleasure, when we're grasping, our awareness snaps shut. We see what we expect to see. We see what we're looking for.

The view in our mind—it's easy enough to see when it's politics. And you see how much suffering there is in that, right? I imagine you can see that. But in many, many ways, this view is happening.

A view will color how we perceive an object, and then how we perceive it—perception is just how we identify something—will lead to how we think about it. How we think about it will become our description of the world and our actions and reactions in our mind.

I'll give you a very simple example that I like. It's funny when you can see through the attachment to the view right away.

I was sitting in Burma, I think last year, on a retreat at a meditation center. One day I was walking up a little path toward a Bodhi tree—which is the kind of tree that the Buddha sat under when he was enlightened in India in Bodh Gaya. So there's a Bodhi tree, not too old, a young one, in a kind of cement well, and you can walk around it. I was walking up the path toward it, doing walking meditation, seeing and just being aware. And there was a Burmese nun walking around it with her hands held together.

Right away, my perception was—and you don't even think, "Oh, this is my perception," you think this is what's happening—"Oh, she's walking around it with devotion, with an air of faith and devotion to the Bodhi tree." So that was my perception. And immediately the thought that came from it was, "Oh, that's so lovely, that expression of faith." And the next thought that came was, "It's just a damn tree. I mean, what are you walking around holding your hands like that for? It's just a tree. It's not even the one the Buddha sat under."

And this was all in like two seconds.

So I'd gone from faith to judgment and aversion in an instant. And then I got up closer. She was walking around texting on her cell phone.

Quick reset of the perception.

It totally cracked me up. But then I realized that whole worldview, my first perception, was entirely built up on my assumptions about the faith of Burmese nuns. I know a lot of Burmese nuns, so I know something about their devotion, but in this case, that worldview simply wasn't true. Then I went the whole other way with my judgments.

So you get a sense of how this works. This is a time when noticing the thoughts working in the back of the mind—particularly attachment to views—can be really useful. It's something that comes up constantly in meditation, not only here but in life.

When you're starting to feel frustrated about your practice, for example, whatever that means, you might just look. It's a helpful time to notice what thoughts might be working in the background. Thoughts about what good practice should look like, or what's supposed to be happening. "After three days, I should be past this by now. This shouldn't be happening."

Well, *yathā bhūta*—things as they have come to be—this should be happening. Why? Because it is happening. Because it's happening, it should be happening, and it could not be otherwise. The next moment, how that moment of happening is met, is a new moment.

When we can bring mindfulness and awareness to what's occurring without getting caught in the reaction, without attachment to the view—"I think it should be like this, but it's like this"—okay. When we meet it with that freshness of awareness that isn't colored by attachment to a view, then there's the possibility to see accurately.

Do you see how when there's a view we're attached to and we don't even know it, there's not the space to see clearly? Often that view is a kind of self-judgment. Most self-judgment comes out of some view, and you can look and see how it got planted there. But it's arising in the moment: "I'm not good enough. I can't do it. This is happening and it shouldn't be happening because I'm no good."

This is a time when it's useful to just stop for a minute and ask, "What thought is going on back there?" Sometimes when I do that and I notice, I'll call up the thought, and it will be something like, "My experience should be better than this by now." And I think, "That's inane. I can't be believing that. That's a stupid thought."

But "stupid" has nothing to do with it. Knowing intellectually that it's not true has nothing to do with it. What matters is looking at it clearly and recognizing: "Oh, in this moment, I'm really believing that. I believe it should be clearer than it is." Once you see the view, the attachment can be broken.

So again, it's just another form of craving, another form of clinging. And when that clinging is there, this is the danger: it blinds us to seeing clearly.

What's the escape? This is what's so wonderful, and it's just what I've been saying. The escape isn't sitting down and figuring it all out. The escape is that Tai Chi move—from believing, from being absorbed in the object (the object at this point being the view, or not liking what's happening, or thinking this should be different, or "I love this, I need this")—moving from the object to the awareness itself.

Oh! I think I can't do this. I think I'm no good. I think it should be like this. I think all nuns have beautiful faith—whatever it is.

As soon as we move from involvement with the object—liking, disliking, getting lost in wanting—to looking at the wanting itself, that's the escape. It's not that we have to give up all pleasant objects.

It's not that we have to give up all views. It's not that we even have to give up the sense of self. The sense of self is also another view that arises based on clinging.

I can only touch on this briefly, but just look and see. Any sensation that comes in the body—aren't there times when there's just a little sensation, a little ping, it comes and goes? There's no big whoop. It's not suffering, pleasant, unpleasant. It's just what it is. There's no particular sense of self about that.

Then another sensation comes and there's a click: "Oh my God, this sensation in my knee—it means I can't... it's going to be like this forever." That is, of course, aversion and clinging, wanting it different. But notice how the sense of "me" got really strong. That's what's called personality view.

Any particular sense experience—a sight, a sound, a smell, a taste—often it's thought. The thought that "this shouldn't be happening, it's happening because I can't do it." It's just a thought. But the clinging to it, in that moment of clinging, it becomes "me." And that's the moment of the arising of the sense of self.

As Ajahn Buddhadasa said, the sense of self is simply an experience, a passing experience that arises whenever there's grasping or clinging in the mind. That's all.

The escape? Just turn around and notice the clinging. Notice the sense of self. It's just an experience that comes and goes like anything. The escape isn't to uproot it all. The escape is to take our interest out of rooting around in the experience and instead take care of the awareness. "Oh, wanting it different is like this. Attachment to this memory is like this. 'I can't possibly do this practice, it's hopeless'—thought is like this."

We get more and more interested in taking our stand in the awareness. And that lets us see how craving works, how clinging works. You don't have to figure it all out. You don't have to believe anything I said. You don't have to remember any of it. Just get interested in noticing. When craving arises, what's the object of the craving? What's the experience in the heart and mind? Stay with it. Notice how it behaves. Notice as it passes.

And keep noticing the state of calm, the state of peace, the state of ease—and the state of dis-ease because we don't like calm and peace and we want something a little more intense and we've got to get something going. Watch it. Over and over: the gratification, the danger, and the escape.

Someone today was talking about calm. Calm is the way into peace. Notice how often we don't like it. We think it's uncomfortable, it's unfamiliar. That's okay. Get used to it. Notice craving. Craving stops. It loses its seductive story, and we start to notice more and more how it blasts away the peace. You don't have to stop it. You just have to open to the awareness.

I'll close with a short quotation from Dipa Ma, since Guy mentioned her last night, with her amazing mind. She's little—

She was about four feet tall—an amazing little lady. She said, "There is so much sameness in ordinary life. We're always experiencing everything through the same set of lenses. But once greed, hatred, and confusion 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."

Taste and zest. That's what craving promises, but it can't really deliver. Awareness can.

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