# Right View: Making Friends With Awareness

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 57:50

It's a kind of famous saying, a reflection on the Buddha's teachings, that to follow the Buddha's teachings is to go against the stream—to need to swim against the stream. And that means both of the common culture and society (and obviously all the different cultures, since his culture was very different from ours), but also against the stream of our mental habits, the stream of our views, and the stream of the flow of the habits and views of our culture. So that's a very famous saying.

When Steve talked about right view last night, one of the things he said was that Sāriputta said one of the two things essential for the arising of right view is to hear the voice of another—to hear right view. You're saying that kind of goes against our sense of "we can figure it out ourselves, we're smart." But I think it's speaking to this sense that we're so immersed in the habits, in the flow of the habits of our mind, that we don't even know it, don't even know how to look out of it.

This is one of the many brilliant delineations the Buddha came to. I mean, how he figured all this stuff out—really beyond genius.

In terms of how we think about things, there's perception. The six sense things are happening over and over; we've talked about that. And perception is just that recognition: seeing is happening, or "that's a plant." Simple recognition. It's automatic. It happens based on memory. What we perceive, we think about. So that leads to our thoughts, how we think about things. Those thoughts describe us, describe our world, describe how we think about things. And then the thought, the *citta*, strengthens into *diṭṭhi*, into view.

So right view, *sammādiṭṭhi*, and there's also wrong view, inaccurate view, *micchādiṭṭhi*. What we perceive, we think about. But how we think about things constructs our world. And then that becomes the view. It's not that we know we have a view—it's how we know the world is. It's not even something we're aware of. It's just how it is. And we'll talk more about this as we go on.

Our perceptions, as some of you are starting to recognize, are colored by our conditioning. Or as we're saying, even if you're just aversive or angry in a moment, it colors the perception, how you see someone. And if we're not aware of that, it colors—that goes on to inaccurate thinking, into inaccurate *diṭṭhi*, view of our world. So just to put out that as a possibility: things and the world may not be exactly how we think it is. And then on top of that, we don't even really know how we think it is, because it's often not something we look at.

So a little example, a story. I used to use this in a talk, and it came up in the staff dining room the other

day—I was telling this story.

I spend a fair amount of time in Burma. The majority of the people in Burma are Buddhist. And where I've been spending time, and where I was when this happened, was in a monastery meditation center, hanging out with nuns and monks, mostly Burmese people, but also some Western friends, one of whom is a nun who's been a nun in Burma off and on for twenty years, speaks Burmese, and so is really in that culture. In that really committed Buddhist culture, with all the Buddhist teachings and the Buddhist worldview—which includes all the different realms of existence, different lifetimes—there's a lot of faith, and that's just part of the worldview.

We had taken a lot of photographs, and we were looking at the photographs from one specific event where there were several of us and a lot of Burmese people, and it was a *dāna* offering of some food that was going on. In my friend's camera, two or three of the photos showed, on some of us and in between some of us, these round—perfectly round—balls of light, you could say. But perfectly round. And they're strange looking. And I was like, "Geez, I wonder what that is."

So my friend, the one who's been in Burma for 20 years, looks at it and says, "That's devas." Devas are celestial beings. She wasn't like, "It could be" or whatever. Now you laugh, because we think that's totally ridiculous. That's the way we think. But all the other Burmese people looked and said, "Yeah, that's devas."

So another friend, who's also spent a lot of time there but has a scientific background—she's actually a PhD scientist—looked at it and said, "That's not devas. There's moisture in the lens, and it does this, and it refracts the light," and this and that. We weren't having an argument, but that's just the worldview. It's what it is. So okay, maybe something in the camera. I went that way myself. And since then, the times I've shown people back here, it's really funny to see the different things people say.

Later I looked in my camera at the photos from the same time and place, and there were those same perfectly round things of light, which I've since seen in other photos in other places. The most recent one was when I was meeting with this very amazing Sayadaw up in Sagaing, who's 98. He's just a being of light and love and laughter—an amazing guy. There's a photo of me sitting next to him, and there was one of these big balls of light in between. I thought, "Okay, that could be a deva. That one could be a deva."

My point is, does our mind want to go to who's right and who's wrong and what is it really? My point is: who knows? Who knows? And this "who knows"—this willingness to be fresh and present with an openness of not having to know, to recognize in the perception that we don't know—that's bringing in a quality of fresh, awake awareness.

But mostly we're in "I know, this is what it is," and we don't even realize that it's our perceptions coloring how we think, coloring our worldview. Someone with a completely different—not even completely different, but somewhat different—culture and somewhat different conditioning could have a different world. We run into this all the time, but this is just a good example.

So awareness practice, as we're doing here, in those moments of awareness—just bare awareness of whatever's happening without interpretation—isn't comfortable for us, is it? It's a stepping outside of our comfortable, often unquestioned worldview and self-view. And even though we're giving a lot of information, bottom line, we don't want you to just swallow what we say, because that snaps awareness shut just in the same way as our other views do. It's really this sense of looking fresh in each moment. That's the quality of awareness, moment-to-moment awareness, that we're hoping to practice, to cultivate, to get more familiar with here.

No explanation is final. And even though—and I'll talk about how being caught in our explanations is part of what keeps us in confusion and suffering—stepping outside of it, or just opening up to not knowing, is often rather uncomfortable. We like to know. Like someone said today, they don't like chaos. We want to know how things should be, even if it means we're doing it all wrong. At least we know we're doing it all wrong, and there's some comfort in that. Better than "I don't know, right or wrong. There's no right or wrong. Whatever I'm doing, that's not—that can't be. There's a right. There's a wrong. I want to know what it is."

So this sense of stepping outside of this way of being can be exhilarating. It opens us to this "who knows," this being willing to meet each moment as an unknown. But it's also one of the reasons retreats are sometimes rather uncomfortable. Because as we continue to open to awareness of each moment, we can't just keep falling back into our old habits. We will fall back into them, but we'll notice it. And sometimes they stop feeling quite so comfortable. They start feeling a little constricting, a little bit narrow.

Or we can't find them again. We want them. Someone was saying in a group today, they watched their mind when the pattern stopped—the mind going and searching for an old pattern of worry. At least that's familiar. Watch our minds do this stuff. This is great stuff to see.

So this sense of the opening, this willingness to just let awareness meet this moment with "who knows," not having to have every explanation. And if the mind does make an explanation, notice that's what it's doing without necessarily having to believe it.

This is why right view is something it's helpful for us to get another angle on—because we don't even know the views of the world, the descriptions of the world and of ourselves that we're believing, that we're buying, that are in the background of our mind, running our decisions sometimes.

In this shift into steady awareness, into not just holding to a view, mindfulness is really the heart of it all. It's still a question to me, even though I'm going to speak as if I know—but it's still a question—this simple moment-to-moment awareness. Not easy, right? We see it gets complex. But when you're actually just there, when there's just awareness of hearing, it's so simple we can't stand it, really. It's like, "That can't be anything. How can this do anything? How can it possibly be—" And we're gone. We don't even give it half a chance. We're gone, because that's the habit.

How is it so powerful? How is awareness not in itself transformative, but how does it set the conditions to open into transformative wisdom, into seeing differently? I can't answer it all now, but just offering some thoughts.

Do you know the way the Buddha talked about suffering and freedom from suffering—dukkha? He said, often, that's what he was teaching: suffering and freedom from suffering. The freedom he's talking about, and that our steadiness of awareness and the wisdom it opens into reveals, isn't a freedom of somehow rearranging all the external and internal aspects of experience so everything's nice. It just isn't. That doesn't really sound so great. And even though I might nod and say yes, notice how many times the mind gets caught up in real struggle because this thing happening shouldn't be happening, and if it weren't happening I would be happy, things would be okay, practice would be possible. Maybe there could be freedom, but not with this in the world—a little thing or a big thing.

What the Buddha is saying, and this is more radical and speaks to the right view Steve was talking about, is that the suffering from which he teaches freedom arises because of our misperception of the way things are, moment to moment. Not one big misperception—moment to moment, in subtle little things. That misperception leads to inaccuracy. We understand ourselves and the world wrongly some of the time. And based on that is how we respond, how we think about ourselves, how we try to make ourselves happy. So we respond in ways—basically with clinging, aversion, with delusion—that are trying to get rid of what we perceive as the cause of our suffering. Because our perception is inaccurate, it doesn't work.

Until we stop running like this and just sit and look—that's what we're doing, just stop and look at the mind and see how it works—with, from time to time, this fresh open awareness. Sometimes it's not fresh open awareness, but we notice that too, and then that's another moment of fresh open awareness.

One of the things I love about the translation of sammā in right view is that, in my mind, I hear it literally: right view as accurate recognition, accurate seeing. Seeing not just visual, but recognizing any moment of experience accurately, the way it is. That's what leads to freedom. I think it's so elegant, so beautiful. The Buddha's not saying get another world, fix everything, change everything, and you'll find freedom. It's: recognize how our mind and body works accurately. And the delusion that comes in the way we respond to life will fall away, even in a moment, because it doesn't make any sense. When we really see, in a moment, how craving for something that's over is causing suffering—when we see, not "Oh, I should" or "It's bad" or "They said this," but when we actually see: "Oh, wow, look at that."

It makes no sense. It's gone. It's gone. That's a moment of freedom.

I think it's so elegant that recognizing accurately—and mindfulness is what steadiness of awareness is—what makes this possible is what opens us to the wisdom that brings us to the end of confusion and suffering. Even just for a moment, moment to moment. Don't wait for it all to go away and dismiss everything else. Notice the little moments.

There's one phrase in Pali that I like a lot, that I talk about often. In some teachings, there are levels of different kinds of insights, and they're given names. You don't need to know them; it doesn't matter here at all. But one of them is called *yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*, which is often translated as "knowledge and vision of things as they are." *Yathā-bhūta*—often translated as "things as they are." But as I've been told by two good friends who are Pali scholars, the more accurate translation, the more accurate verbal tense, is "things as they have come to be."

Do you get the difference? Things as they have come to be. Don't think about it too much if it doesn't land immediately—just let it settle.

In this moment, it's a sense of the movement of things, that there is no ever-separate one thing. "Things as they are" is like: boom, this is a separate thing. But "things as they have come to be"—there is no separate thing. To me, it brings in the sense that this moment, as it's arising in each of our unique experiences, is coming to be as the effect of so many previous causes and conditions.

If each of you, in your mind, starts to enumerate—what are some of the causes and conditions that came together for me to be in this moment, sitting on this zabuton?—you'll never stop coming up with things. It goes back to your birth. It goes back to your parents' birth. It goes back to the Big Bang, the beginning of the universe. It goes to the farmers that grow the food. All the conditions coming together. How can you extract anything out and say, "This is how it is"?

So "things as they have come to be" gives the sense, to me, of the intricacy, the interconnectedness, the living aspect of life. And then this moment is already a new moment, coming to be with the last moment as one of the causes and conditions. It gives just this sense of—not like nowhere to rest, but there's no way you can pull it out and say, "This is me," or "This is that." It's the interconnectedness, the movement that we call life. Things as they have come to be.

What allows for that accurate recognition? Okay, you know now, right? Intelligent awareness, moment to moment, just meeting whatever's arising in this moment. Not trying to figure it out or recognize it accurately, but just that open totality of presence. Whatever arises, received in awareness. Maybe we know, "Oh, that's a deva." Maybe we know, "I have no clue what that is." Maybe, "Oh, that's my opinion—it's not a deva. My opinion is like this." And then the next moment arises, whatever arises in that moment.

So it should be so simple, right? It's not, is it?

Why don't we recognize accurately? Steve is going to talk tomorrow, I think, about the *kleshas*, the torments of mind, the difficult mental qualities that basically distort our perception—as well as causing us suffering when we experience them. So I've just mentioned them, but that's one of the big things.

There's a quotation from the Buddha talking about nirvana. *Nibbāna* is the word in Pali. One of the synonyms is "the unconditioned," or "the unborn"—the moment of recognition. It's not a place or a thing,

but freedom from conditioned experience, freedom from suffering. The Buddha often says, "This nibbāna, this dhamma—visible here and now."

Someone asked the Buddha, "To what extent is it visible here and now?" Not in another world, not in another body, not in another experience. And the Buddha says, "To the extent that greed, that hatred, that delusion, ignorance, confusion are not present in the citta." The citta is the mind, the heart, the consciousness. They're not present in a moment. To that extent, nirvana, freedom, is visible here and now.

Ajahn Pasano, a monk in the Ajahn Chah Thai Forest tradition for many years and now the abbot of a monastery in Northern California, says about that quotation: "Thus our own direct experience is where we can recognize whether or not we're creating suffering by following lust, hatred, and delusion. In our own direct experience, we can also experience the absence of suffering and the peace that comes when these qualities—this following of greed, hatred, and delusion—are abandoned." We're talking in a moment, not forever, in a moment. This is direct perception of the results that come from putting the teachings into practice. It's what has inspired the followers of the Buddha to continue to practice and train in accordance with his teachings.

I share this not so that we become followers of the Buddha, but because it's our own direct perception, our own direct experience that's brought about, that's made possible through the steadiness of non-interpretive open awareness. Our own direct experience of both how suffering is created and how it feels when it is released, when we're not following that. This is possible, and not some esoteric attainment forty-five years from now. It's possible in any moment. What's so amazing is that in the next moment we completely forget about it and go running around after whatever it is. But then we can notice that again. So our own direct experience, yata bhuta, accurate recognition of things as they have come to be in this moment.

Back to our consideration of wrong view, the downstream way of the world, often called samsara—the sense of this ongoing search for pleasure and avoidance of unhappiness, thinking that somehow that's going to make us happy. I want to read from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, a quite amazing Tibetan teacher. It's possibly challenging. I personally find it quite inspiring, but it may be challenging.

It's a long quote, and I won't read all of it, but he talks about three fundamental attitudes in the Buddhist teaching corresponding to three paths or three aspects of our practice, which can be practiced as an integrated whole. I'm just talking about the first one tonight, but I'll name all three. They're renunciation, compassion, and pure perception.

Renunciation—what he's talking about might be different from what you think, which is giving up everything nice and going into a monastery. What he's describing here is the strong wish to free oneself, not only from life's immediate sorrows, which of course we all have, but from the seemingly unending sufferings of samsara. Samsara being this cycle of conditioned existence, the cycle of the endless quest for gratification, approval, profit, and status. He's defining renunciation as a kind of heartfelt weariness and

disillusionment that comes with seeing the endlessness of this cycle, this quest for pleasure, gratification, approval, profit. That's what he's calling renunciation. Not that we give up things, but we see. And this is yata bhuta. We're seeing in a clear way: what I thought, what we thought was actually the way to live, the way to happiness, is actually an endless cycle that keeps us spinning in suffering and wanting and confusion.

And then of course—and I'll talk about this another time—when we see that for ourselves, naturally compassion arises, both for ourselves, but also when we see others caught in that same confusion, there's a natural compassion of heart. And the pure perception is really seeing that every sentient being has the essence of Buddhahood, the essence of awakening, the pure perception, seeing primordial purity in that way.

So in talking tonight about going against the stream, we're starting to see, starting to open to the futility, the weariness of samsara. And that's not something that's really current in the culture; it's not the messages we get. And it's often not what we want to look at.

Now, do you feel all inspired and uplifted? I know I did, but you may not. You may think, "What do you mean?" And then we think, "I can't want anything, I can't have anything. What are you telling me, I have to go sit in a room?"

Our mind goes into all this kind of reactivity. Maybe yours didn't, but some people's does, sometimes.

But let me give you a funny, slightly embarrassing example of samsara. Because samsara, the way it seduces us, isn't that we're aware of suffering all the time. It seduces us with the promise of happiness. And we get caught in it because we think it actually is happiness, that it's increasing our happiness. It keeps us looking to the next thing for happiness. And in that looking to the next thing, the awareness of how things are arising right in this moment—we don't notice. We overlook. And that delusion keeps us spinning.

So I think I've told this before, but last summer I noticed this really big time in my own experience. I happen to be a big fan of professional tennis. I love to watch professional tennis, men's professional tennis. God knows why—I don't play it. But anyway, I love to watch it. And as with many people, if you have a sport, you'll have particular players that are your favorites. So of course I have one: Roger Federer, who last year, when I noticed this, was on a big upswing. It was coming up time to Wimbledon, which is one of the biggest tournaments of the year. So I was watching the whole thing. But for some reason, my awareness of the whole process kicked in a little more strongly than usual.

And I saw this whole process. No one's making me watch tennis. I do it because it's supposed to be really enjoyable, right? So when I'm watching and he's playing, I'm a nervous wreck—which is ridiculous. I don't know the guy. What do I care? Just watch it. It's just perception of seeing and some idea. But really, it is not an enjoyable experience. But I think it is. I'm doing this for pleasure. And my friends who have been

around me when I'm watching can attest to that. I was telling this story with Joseph, and he said, "Oh, really? She's not fun to be around when he's playing, if he's losing."

So I was watching this. And of course, in a sport like that, the ultimate happiness is when your person wins, right? At Wimbledon, he happened to win it. And it made him number one in the world again—all these firsts, all these big things, like the best it could possibly be. He won the thing. He got back to number one. He'd won it more than anyone else. There was nothing that could have been better. So that should be the ultimate of happiness. I was watching that.

How long does it last? How long does it last? A day.

Because then the Olympics are coming up. And it all starts over again. It all starts over again. And whatever happens there, when that's over, it all starts over again. And then it changes. And now he's not even playing so much. And his back hurts. And he's not number one anymore. And he hasn't won anything since then. And I said, *ah*.

This is actually a good example of samsara. Because when you don't pay attention to what's actually going on moment to moment, you keep getting caught up in it. Wimbledon's over—oh, isn't that great?—and then two days later I'm on the computer checking out what's going to happen in the Olympics. And I was in Switzerland or somewhere. I'm always somewhere else during the Olympics, trying to get the computer to work. I was with my friend in a restaurant, and she had her little cell phone. She said, "Look, Carol, it's Switzerland, so it's good to like Roger here." Everybody's always pulling it out and showing me.

And I thought, you know, the whole process—there aren't many moments of real pleasure in it. There are some moments of real pleasure, and that's what keeps you going. But none of that has anything to do with freedom. Do you get a sense of how samsara works? It's a little bit funny, a little bit obvious, but underneath, because we don't really look, we take it for granted.

In many ways—in gross ways like that, in very subtle ways—we don't have this weariness with samsara, with this endless quest for gratification. One of the effects is that it keeps us moving: okay, now it's not good, but some new thing comes up. We may not even notice the wanting, or the sense that this isn't okay, this outside thing isn't okay. And that's a mistake, because stuff's supposed to be better. So how can we fix it? How can we make it work? It didn't work this time, but then there'll be the next time. It's this endless quest. And when it's satisfied, a new one comes up, because nothing lasts.

I think it was Chögyam Trungpa who had a wonderful phrase for samsara: the urge to correct. So just notice in your mind—even when things are as good as they can be, how long does it last? And then there's the urge to get it a little bit better, a little bit better. It keeps our attention focused outward on the object: it's a good object, it's a bad object, how can I make it better? Keeping focused outward.

What we want to do—what we're doing here—is turning the awareness, the attention around, and just noticing the process. When I started noticing the process, I mean, I could have told you about it, but

actually *feeling* it—like when Steve was talking about awareness, you're feeling how it feels. Feel that urge to correct, to get it better, to get it again. "Oh, this isn't good, but the next one will be." We won't really look at that. Just feel that onward leading, the endlessness of it. Not with judgment, but to look and see: oh, maybe there is another way.

This is what can open us to some sense of commitment, of trust, of faith—to just say, okay, let me bring this open awareness to things as they are, not assuming I know how things are. It's a shift of perception that allows us to look. It's steady awareness that allows us to see this process.

And what he's calling the weariness with it, a kind of renunciation—it isn't a kind of aversion, and it's not an act of will. True renunciation is an inner quality of mind and heart that's wholesome, that's peaceful, that's joyful. It's not like throwing something away out of fear and aversion, because that *is* fear and aversion. That's not renunciation. That's not wholesomeness.

So when I saw all that about tennis, I can't say I renounced tennis—that wouldn't be true. I was just watching it this afternoon. But it wasn't Roger, so it was just very interesting. And that's also interesting to see. I was watching the skill, watching what goes on. Okay, that's fun. And then they say, "Well, it's going to be a tiebreak, but we're running out of time on the TV because we have to put on the big basketball game." And they stopped it. That was it. Boom.

I was really okay with that. Okay, that's the sign—I was okay with it. That's what renunciation is. It's the not holding on. It doesn't mean you have to give up everything.

So this renunciation, it's not aversion. It's not depression. It's not "the whole world is disgusting and I'll give it all up." It's not that. But it's the sense of stepping outside of our normal way of looking at things, with an openness to explore, to recognize more accurately, without an expectation of what that means. And that's when we can begin to discover how suffering is created, how freedom arises—not when we think we know.

And as we've said ten million times, of course, the key, the place where we can put our commitment, is the willingness to wake up into awareness. Moment after moment after moment. We can't create wisdom. We can't say, "Now I'm going to see things as they are and become free from kilesa." It doesn't work. I'm sure you've tried—we've all tried. But we can wake up and notice, "Oh, now wanting is happening, and awareness of wanting is like this." And then the next moment, and then the next moment. That's what we can do.

Again, that makes it sound simple, doesn't it? That's our job, to make it sound simple. We know it's not.

So I just want to mention perhaps two ways that it gets so complicated. Not for you to hold on to—and I think you're going to recognize both of these; we've talked about them already. But just to plant a little seed of inquiry for when it starts to feel complicated or stressed or dissonant.

As Steve has said—maybe I said it, I don't know who said what—all we experience is six things, right? Over and over and over. So just think back for a moment to this day. How many times have the six sense experiences come? It's constant, endless. You couldn't count even just how many thoughts you've had, and that's only one of the six sense doors. So that's what's happening all day long, whether we like it or not.

Now, that's not a problem. But how does it get so complicated? Instead of just seeing, hearing, thinking, smelling, tasting, seeing, hearing, thinking—how does it get so tangled?

One way, of course, is through the habits of mind that we don't see, habits that feed into and emerge from this samsaric round, this assumption that getting the pleasant is going to make us happy. This is really the habit that our mind practices most of our life when we're not aware.

A sight, a sound, a smell, a taste comes. And without even recognizing it, there's pleasant, unpleasant, or neither one. We don't notice that. But in a subtle way or a gross way, we like it or we don't like it, or we don't pay any attention to it because it doesn't seem worth our attention.

And this can be big—"I really don't like that sound, it's driving me crazy"—or it can be some little sound we don't even notice. Or some little nice sound we're not aware of. We just feel a kind of "hmm," leaning toward it slightly. Or leaning away from it. Or ignoring it completely and looking for something more interesting to attend to. Over and over, all of these senses, all of these thoughts.

Even when they're neither pleasant nor unpleasant, we lean toward the pleasant. And what we perceive, we think about and use to describe our world. So it reinforces the sometimes unrecognized, unacknowledged view. It fuels this view that happiness, peace, rightness, goodness, ease in life—all of it has to do with pleasant, nice experience. And when something's unpleasant or difficult? What am I doing wrong? What are they doing wrong? How can I fix this?

And it doesn't mean we never do anything—I'm not saying that. But the underlying view that fuels samsara is: unpleasant means something's wrong. There's something I should be able to do to get things better. The urge to correct, the urge to correct.

Or we don't even notice it. In our daily life there's so much going on that we don't even notice what we don't notice, because there's just so much coming in. And I don't even have to mention how with all the media the attention span has gotten down to two and a half seconds or whatever it is. As soon as something's a little bit neutral, we're bored. And then boredom becomes a problem. But it's just another mental state. Here, we notice it. It doesn't have to be a problem.

What we're practicing—and all of us are really good at this—is in this subtle way reacting to almost every sense experience that's coming through, even when it's very subtle. And the third way we get involved: we lean toward the pleasant, lean away from the unpleasant, and then construct a whole story about what it means about me, or to me. How can I fit into this? What is this doing to me? And we don't even notice that either. It's just another layer of thoughts. It becomes part of the fabric.

Remember Steve was talking about how we take all these various experiences and through thought weave the fabric of who we think we are? Not noticing that that's changing. The story of who we think we are is changing all the time. Again, we may not notice that.

So this is just a habit. Deeply ingrained to the point that we don't necessarily notice it until we start moment-to-moment awareness. And it seems so normal that we accept it. Like when I talked about pain this morning and I said, well, when pain comes up, of course we want it to go away. There's aversion. Of course there's aversion. That's normal—and it is normal. But don't we think in some way, "Of course I have aversion to pain. Who the heck wants pain? That's the way things are."

To even open to the possibility of freedom from suffering doesn't mean freedom from pain. It doesn't mean we're looking for pain either, don't get me wrong. But it's a whole different paradigm. And that's one of the ways it gets so complicated.

This keeps our attention, our sense of focus, involved in whatever the object is. This experience, this sound, this thought about myself, this emotion, this perception of how this person's looking at me and the way it makes me feel—all the objects. The energy, the meaning is all given to the object. We're involved in reacting to it or liking it or trying to fix it. The meaning of the world, the meaning of ourselves is largely, when unexamined, derived from relationship to object.

And so that keeps our attention turned out. We're trying to make the objects better. And of course, we bring that into meditation, because that's how the mind is working. So if the meditation—and it's whatever particular one you made up in your mind, which could change—if it's more spacious, it's better. If it's calmer, it's better. If it feels better, it's better. But it keeps us looking that way. That keeps us spinning in samsara.

Until we just stop. And what shifts is we're no longer perceiving experience as separate: this is bad, let's get a better one. Hopping from experience to experience without the steadiness of awareness that just allows for the whole series of events, cause and effect. We start to see how things come together to create this experience, how they fall apart, what causes create sleepiness, what causes create aversion. You just explore it.

But when we're focused on objects, relating to objects, it's like we're each living in our separate little bubble of me and my ideas and how each thing relates to me. And the little bubbles kind of bump up against each other sometimes, but we're all separate and our experiences are separate. And it's just not like that.

So the shift—

into yata-bhuta is when we start to notice the wider, deeper, more inclusive view of experience. Not just focusing on the object, but we shift to the process.

Andrew Olendzki, who used to be the director of the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies and is now the senior scholar there, a Pali scholar, wrote something once that I really like. He said, "As sati, as mindfulness grows, our mental attention, our mental capacity gradually shifts from the objects of attention to the process of being aware." That's exactly what we're talking about here.

This shift involves, requires, an attitude of letting go of the object, abandoning attachment to the object. It doesn't mean you push the object away—just abandoning that attachment, that involvement with the object. The mind is a dynamic process. When the mind is stuck on what has arisen, it is rigid and limited. But the mind that is letting go moment after moment keeps opening to the emerging flow, keeps opening to things as they have come to be in this moment.

Do you get a sense of that a little bit? And then watch how the mind turns it into, "Okay, this is now what I have to do." That's just what our mind does. You just notice that.

So that's really the shift—the shift from involvement and object and meaning to the process of awareness itself. To me, that's like the paradigm shift. This is my language, but it's true for me. I really feel like it's a shifting of refuge—refuge from samsara, refuge from trying to correct, from trying to get it okay—to taking refuge in loving awareness. And you really do start to love awareness. Whatever's arising, you go, "Oh, that's wanting." It's like this, and there's the feeling of the awareness of the wanting. It doesn't matter what's happening in that moment. It really doesn't. This isn't an intellectual thing, but it's a moment of... it's not complete freedom, it's not liberation, but it's such a sense of difference. "Oh, okay, it's craving. It's like this." There's the awareness. And the interest is in that awareness and the process of awareness.

So that's why we're always harping on it—because we mostly don't even notice it or recognize it. It's just so normal and no big deal. Here we simply want to recognize it, like the foreground-background shift from object to the process of awareness. And the more we start to take refuge there, to trust that shift, the sense of the awareness gets steadier and steadier. And that's when accurate recognition, right view, can start to arise of itself.

So that's really the best way I can describe the power of intelligent awareness to truly transform our understanding of the world and the way we live in it, and actually lead to freedom.

One other way—not a little thing, but the same thing in terms of objects arising so often—another way it gets complicated is this: so much of what is happening, there's still the leaning into it, the leaning out, the ignoring it. So much of what's happening is just so ordinary. What the texts refer to as neither pleasant nor unpleasant. When you're walking from here to the dining room, seeing is occurring every moment. But other than a particular object that we might glom onto, we don't often notice seeing, seeing, seeing. It's just so ordinary. There are sensations in the body or whatever. It's just repetitive, happening over and over—hearing, hearing, seeing, seeing, feeling the breath, feeling sensations—just because there's so much happening in every moment, as you're all aware.

I'm not saying we should try to catch everything. I'm not saying that at all. Please don't. You'd make yourself crazy. But this sense of it being so ordinary, this sort of waiting for something special to happen, is another way that we lose awareness. "Well, this isn't worth paying attention to, so I'll wait until something really important comes." Just notice when that's happening.

And again, awareness doesn't care. Awareness isn't more—I won't say lovable, of course it isn't lovable—but it isn't more fulfilling if the object is incredible. It doesn't matter.

It's that sense of moving into appreciation, into fascination with the process rather than the object. It doesn't matter at all what the object is.

This is something Tejaniya says a lot: our tendency, our samsaric tendency, to think bigger is better, that intense is more meaningful, means that we wait for the intense experience and think insight's going to arise from that. And all this repetitive stuff, which makes up how much of our lives—ninety-nine percent?—we meet with, "Oh yeah, right, there's seeing, there's hearing." Not really that pristine openness, that opening into the unknown.

But insight can arise with anything. It can arise from the most mundane perception. Because it's not about what the object is. It's about the steadiness of awareness, that freshness of not knowing, that time when the mind lets go of the old views that are constricting and not allowing us to recognize accurately. And you never know when that's going to happen. You never know. So that's why every moment of awareness might be it. But if you're wanting, then be aware of that.

Dogen Zenji, the great Zen master, said, "If you cannot discover the truth right where you are, where do you expect to find it?" So that's a form of delusion.

The last form of delusion I want to mention, something Tejaniya talks about a lot, but I'm sure you'll recognize it, is again how we take a perception of anything—the descriptions, the thoughts in the mind—and we make all these assumptions. Basically, we make up a story about what it means, and then we believe the story.

But sometimes we can see ourselves doing it. Here on retreat is a pretty good place to see that. When you're in silence, and if you don't know a lot of people here—has anyone noticed?—you see someone, you've seen them a few times, you see them come sit down, you see them walk into the dining room. You don't even know their name. And you have a whole story about them, right? What they're like, what their personality is like. I don't know how far it goes. It might just be a feeling sense. But do you know what I mean? Complete assumption.

The longer a retreat goes, the more you really start to believe it. On three-month retreats, people really can get out there about what they think other people are like. And then when silence breaks and they talk, people have told me—I'm not making this up—like in one minute of conversation, all their assumptions were just shattered. They were in love with the person. The person opens their mouth and it's like, "Oh my

god. Nothing like what I thought this person was." But we believe it.

So that's an easy one to see. But we do it as making up a view, basically. We do it with practice a lot. We do it whenever we think we know. We don't recognize we think we know. You'll know you're up against an assumption, an expectation, when there starts to be friction, when there starts to be dissonance.

So let's take your practice here. "Well, I'm walking up and down. Like I said the other day, I'm just walking up and down thinking about stuff. This can't be right practice." Or someone said today, "I feel like it's really easy. It's fun. It can't be right." Notice the assumptions we're making, the stories we make up. And again, as Steve said, that's what we do about our stories of who we are.

So watch that. It's a lot of fun. It really is. If you're just watching it without judging, just with this unbiased awareness, this uninterpreting awareness, watch the stories. What particular experiences or memories or perceptions—"that person looked at me funny"—and it brings up all the bad things you ever did in your life. Notice that, and then all the bad memories that you have, and that story of me, and the feeling that goes with it. And it feels so true. It feels so real. It's real in the moment, and that feeling is real.

But the idea that story is *accurate*—that's not real. And then notice when it changes: the next day, the next minute. Just watching that reveals a really huge delusion.

This is from Ajahn Sumedho, who is perhaps a forty-year monk in the Thai Forest tradition, a very great and respected teacher. He says: "So then the self arises. I start thinking about myself—my feelings, my memories, my past, my fears and desires—and the whole world arises around Ajahn Sumedho." Can you relate to that? It takes off into orbit: my views, my feelings, my opinions. And I can get caught in that world—that view of me that arises in consciousness. And that's all it is: a view arising in consciousness in that moment. It's an object, like any other object.

But if I know that's what's happening—that it's just a view in consciousness—then my refuge is no longer in being that person. I'm not taking refuge in being a personality, or in my views and opinions. And so it goes away. I let it go. And the world of Ajahn Sumedho ends.

Now, he says ending doesn't mean that Ajahn Sumedho dies, or the world ends, or that I'm unconscious. None of those things. In Buddhadhamma, the world is the world we create in consciousness. That's why we can be living in different worlds. The world of Ajahn Sumedho is not going to be the same world that you create. But that world arises and ceases. And that which is aware of the world arising and ceasing is transcending that world.

So our refuge, then, is in this awareness—rather than in trying to sustain refined experiences in consciousness as our refuge, because you can't do it. Resting in this conscious awareness is what he refers to as coming home, or our real home. It's what I call taking refuge in awareness, loving awareness. And awareness includes anything.

So let's just sit.

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