Perception, Papañca and Personality View

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 59:50

So tonight what I want to talk about is this experience of thought—thought, perception, papañca, and personality view. It's all a train that follows. It's something that I find just so interesting, so fascinating, and we certainly all spend a lot of time in the realm of thought.

To begin with, it's important to remember—I know we've said it—but so often in meditation we come to feel like we're in some kind of a battle with thought. We feel that the better we're meditating, the less thought we have, and that the goal is to somehow get rid of thought. Which of course it's not. It's to simply understand what thought is, how it's useful, how it functions, and how it gets us so confused—through bringing awareness to thought rather than fighting it.

From Tejaniya: "When you feel disturbed by the thinking mind, remind yourself you're not practicing to prevent thinking, but rather to recognize and acknowledge thinking whenever it arises. If you are not aware, you cannot know that you are thinking. The fact that you recognize that you are thinking means you're aware." Isn't that good news? Remember, it doesn't matter how many times the mind thinks, wanders off, or gets annoyed about something, as long as you become aware of it. I know you don't believe that, but that's where we're starting from.

To begin just by talking about thought—what's so amazing to me, the longer I practice, is how powerfully we get caught in thinking, how powerfully we suffer from thoughts. Thought can be very useful, but how it runs our life! Do you have any sense what I'm talking about? It's amazing. And we get so immediately into the thought, the content. What we've been trying to point to, and you're getting it, but I just want to emphasize it, is to turn to the awareness and see what is actually a thought.

Of all the sense experiences, thought is the most ephemeral, isn't it? A thought is just a thought. That sounds like nothing, but that's actually an incredibly freeing insight.

So right now, deliberately think a thought: "There's a deer in the grass." Just think that thought. What was it? It came from nowhere, it's gone. Probably it's gone, unless I said that and it came back again. That thought is just nothing really, isn't it? It's just like smoke, like nothing. A thought energy—all thoughts are just like that in terms of the energy of thought. They come together with strong emotion or not, but when we're lost in the content we don't recognize a thought. All thoughts just come from wherever they exist and they dissolve like clouds back into space.

I can't remember when it was, but I remember the feeling of the first time that it really hit me on the insight level. I was all caught up in whatever the heck, and then: "Oh, it's just a thought." Just looking at it,

it has no more anything than "the deer's in the meadow." It's just a thought. As Joseph Goldstein's teacher, Munindraji, always used to say: a thought of your mother is not your mother. Just a thought.

So we begin by exploring that, but it's so hard to believe. This is from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche: "This mind is always being carried away by one delusion after another. Thoughts of hatred or attachment suddenly arise without warning"—have you ever noticed that?—"triggered off by circumstances, and unless seen through with wisdom, they quickly take root and proliferate, reinforcing the habitual predominance of hatred or attachment in the mind."

Can you relate to that so far?

"Yet, however strong these thoughts may seem, they are just thoughts and will eventually dissolve back into the emptiness. Once you recognize the intrinsic nature of the mind, these thoughts that seem to appear and disappear all the time can no longer fool you. As clouds form, last a while, and then dissolve back in the empty sky, so deluded thoughts arise, remain a while, and then vanish in the emptiness of mind. In reality, nothing at all has happened."

Don't try to think about that too much, but just take it as a possibility. Just like that thought—"the deer's in the meadow"—it's gone. Nothing. Where did it go? Wrong question. There's no where. It's gone. Nothing at all has happened.

Somebody said at the end of the month-long retreat a year or two ago, thinking along those lines: "Oh, on this month, every day, so many thoughts, so much is going on in the mind, go through so many mind worlds." Don't you?

And then at the end of the month, I realized nothing really happened. In the whole month. Nothing really happened. It's like that. Just to open the possibility to look at a thought as a thought.

So then, again, it's amazing how thoughts get so solid that we can suffer so much from them. I mean, they're useful too. If we understand thought, we can use thought. We're not hating it. We want to understand it. But how do they get so solid? And how do thoughts get so solidly creating the story and the sense of me?

The word in Pali, *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, is often translated as personality view or identity view. Steve has mentioned a few times the story of me being created. It's just thoughts. But it feels so solid.

So what I want to take us through—and of course it's much more subtle than I could talk about, but just to give a sense—is the way the Buddha described this process. We don't have to be on retreat to see it. We can see it going on in various ways all the time. But just to begin to tune in, to see how thoughts get so taken for solid and create what seems like a sense of me, and we believe the whole thing because it's unexplored, unexamined.

The place we begin in trying to describe all this is the moment of perception. Remember Steve talked

about perception last night? Any time there's a sense door experience—the way the Buddha described it, say, seeing: dependent on the eye working, and forms being present, eye consciousness arises. When these three things come together—your eyes open and working, some form there, consciousness—that moment of eye consciousness is seeing. That meeting is called contact. We're not going to see all of that; we just become aware of seeing.

In that moment of seeing, perception automatically arises, as Steve was explaining. This is just happening every moment. The perception could be "room" or "person" or "bird" or "color"—whatever the perception is, it arises spontaneously. And also, at the same time, arises *vedanā*, that felt sense. It's very subtle: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. By the time we're naming it, that's already another perception. But these are just happening all the time. Seeing, the perception "a bird," pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. You don't see that clearly, but maybe it just feels a little nice, a little not—no big deal.

So starting with perception: what we perceive, we think about. That's just normal. And it's useful in that that's how we construct our world. It's not like it's a problem.

When I hit the bell at a certain time, we all agree, "Oh, thank God, it's the end of the sitting." We're thinking about it, but that's just the perception of that sound recognized as "bell." And it places us in this time of day, all together in a meditation retreat here at Spirit Rock. Our whole world can come out of that perception and the thoughts about it. It's useful. If we didn't have some kind of agreed perception, the bell would ring for the talk and—what's that sound? Bell? What does that mean? Where am I?

Have you ever woken up—if you travel a lot—I have a friend who says he actually likes these moments where he'll wake up and just have no clue in the world where he is, what year it is, sometimes even who he is. The perception isn't recognizing anything. But the delusion isn't making something up. You just go, "I don't know."

So, anyway, it's useful. That's what I'm going to say. Perception and the thoughts that come from it can be very useful.

And as we've been describing all along, when we ask what's the problem with the kilesas—besides the fact that they don't feel nice—the biggest problem is that when a kilesa is present in the moment, in the conscious moment of mind and consciousness at the moment of contact, we're not recognizing it. It actually distorts the perception. We perceive wrongly. We've talked about this. And we don't even recognize that we perceive wrongly.

Then the Buddha makes this little list: what we perceive, saññā, we think about, citta. All the thoughts about it, and the more we think about it, those thoughts kind of solidify into what he calls a view, diṭṭhi, of "yes, this is so, this is how it is." And then that leads to more thinking, thought, and action. So whether it's accurate perception or not, this is the process that happens.

Let me give you an example from a good friend of mine. At the last retreat I taught, someone who comes

to a lot of retreats wrote me a note saying, "Please tell this story," but it didn't fit. So I said, "You have to come to another retreat." He's not here, so I'm telling it now. But anyway, it's a great story to delineate all of this.

A good friend of mine in Switzerland told me that many years ago she was sitting her first meditation retreat with Ajahn Sumedho. This was perhaps twenty, thirty years ago. At that time, there weren't Vipassana meditation centers in Switzerland, so they rented these big summer camp houses where they send school children for the summer. They're big old houses with lots of rooms, but only used in the summer—old, built of creaky wood, not insulated or very well built, very noisy.

At this particular retreat, the room they were using for the meditation hall was on what we would call the second floor, and the room immediately below, the same size on the ground floor, was the room they were using for walking meditation. She was sitting during a scheduled sitting—a formal schedule which you're supposed to follow. So she's in the scheduled sitting, following the breath, and feeling, kind of for the first time, "Finally, I can find the breath." It's just getting a little bit quiet.

And then, as I said, it was a really creaky house. You could hear everything. She starts to hear these creaks, and somebody walking downstairs in the walking room. You just can't do it quietly. Immediately she feels this aversion, which she didn't recognize of course, but it's: "They're ruining my samadhi. It's getting so quiet. What are they doing walking during the sitting time?" This is a very scheduled retreat—you're not supposed to walk during the sitting time. Creak, creak, creak. She's getting all worked up about it.

Being that it was this part of Switzerland where you follow the schedule—that's just what you do—I've been with another friend when the train was three minutes late. I am not exaggerating. "Well, this never used to happen." Three minutes late! We're glad if the train even comes.

So she's hearing the creaks. Every time the creak comes, it feeds the aversion, strengthening: "This is not the way to do it. You're not supposed to walk during the meditation time." But she was there. She wasn't going to leave because the teacher was there and you don't leave.

Finally, nothing else to do but try to give it up and go back to the breath. She managed to do that, to feel her breath. The mind calmed down a minute. And then, when she wasn't thinking about it, when she actually got a little more steady awareness going, she noticed that she was actually leaning against the wall. When she took a breath, her back hit the wall, and that was what was making the noise.

So you see the whole process right there: saññā, the perception, unpleasant vedanā—which might have been the sound but might have been the thought—the ruined samadhi, all the thoughts about it really hardening. And that takes like that amount of time. "This isn't right, this isn't the way things are supposed to be."

And then her whole background, you know, of being Swiss—it's all right there. The whole sense of "me"

and "this is who I am" and "this is what's right."

And then steady awareness, without looking for something, and the perception cleared. The aversion dissolved and the shift of perception showed what was really going on. So once she saw clearly what that accurate perception was—"Oh, that's from me breathing"—well, do you think she kept on being angry at the imaginary person walking downstairs? You don't have to try and get rid of it. It's gone, right? Because it doesn't make any sense, because that's not what's happening.

That's exactly the process, both ways, that's going on for us all the time. When the Buddha talked about the hallucination of perception, the three characteristics—when we don't recognize the constantly changing nature of every moment of experience, when we don't recognize the unreliable nature, meaning we think we can land in this thing and it'll make us happy, when we don't recognize the impermanent and we don't recognize the non-self nature—it's not because we're stupid. It's not because we're just ignoring. It's because we really are perceiving so frequently, so inaccurately, without having a clue that that's what's going on. It's really called hallucination or perversion of perception.

So what we perceive, we think about. What we think about, we complicate. And that becomes, just like that, the story of "me."

This is the Dalai Lama's teaching: all of our difficulties come through mistaken perception. That's why there's so much emphasis on direct experience and true knowledge—just recognizing accurately. I talk about this all the time, but it's so amazing to me, the power of it.

So I think when we're really talking about what insight is, what right view is—remember I said the first night, right view, I really like it because it's seeing accurately—I feel that insight is really a shift of perception. So you could say that my friend had an insight: "Oh, it's not that. It's this making that sound." And then if the steady awareness keeps going, you can see the whole process. "Oh, how the mind did all of that." The insight comes simply from the shift of perception that's enabled to occur through steady, non-judging awareness, as best as we can do. It allows us to recognize accurately.

So the way the Buddha described this whole process of getting lost in thought and view: "Dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises." And this goes for all the other senses, including the mind. "The meeting of the three is sense contact. With contact as condition, feeling arises"—vedana. What one feels, that one perceives. We feel it, we perceive it—happens at the same time, really. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one complicates, one mentally proliferates. I'm not making this up; this is from the suttas. One complicates, one mentally proliferates with associations, with memories, with the whole nine yards—okay, he didn't say that. "With these proliferations, with these complications as the source, the mind, the heart, is beset. It's assailed by complications, by trouble."

Can you get a sense of that? Can you think of one remote example of when that happened to you in the last half an hour? It's not personal. This is just what the mind does.

So what we perceive, we think about. When the perception is inaccurate and when it's colored by kilesa, the thinking is colored by the inaccurate assumption and the kilesa, and it just explodes into a whole story. And so the antidote, the understanding, is again the accurate perception that simply cuts through the confusion.

So in terms of this hallucination of perception, these complications of mind in terms of creating that identity view, that personality view through thought moment to moment—I want to take us into an exploration, investigating this sense of personality view. Not starting by thinking "there is no self."

So somehow I have to figure out how there is no self and think about it, because that's the whole approach—it's just thinking about it. We're trying to understand something, but those thoughts are still coming off of an inaccurate perception, a wrong perception.

All kinds of thoughts arise. When I recognize not-self or anattā, if my self vanishes, how do I find the car keys? How do I remember where I live? If there's no self, how do I function? It can seem silly, but we can really get caught up in this. Or we think if everything's annihilated, we won't care about anything. How will we function? As if there's some solid self and we're going to have some big bang experience somewhere down the road, and the self is going to explode. And then there won't be a self and everything will be different.

Well, all that shifts is our perception and the resultant thoughts, views, actions, and understandings. Reality doesn't change. That's what's so far out. Impermanence is already the nature of things. It's not like we go from permanence and somehow everything falls apart—it's already all falling apart. We just don't recognize that.

When we perceive accurately, it may be scary at first, but we come into an ease and harmony. Just like my friend recognizing where the sound was coming from, all that fighting and hullabaloo—what will I do?—drops away. It's like, "Oh, this is what's happening." Just at ease. You can like it or not like it, but this is simply what's happening. So much simpler.

In beginning to explore and recognize this sakkāya-diṭṭhi, this sense of personality view, we can explore rather than try to get rid of it or pretend it's not there or hate it. Explore it. It's an experience that arises from moment to moment and passes away just like everything else.

Ajahn Buddhadasa, the Thai teacher I think we've mentioned, liked to say—and this is one of my favorite lines—"The sense of self is simply a condition that arises when there is grasping or clinging in the mind." All conditions arise due to causes. So the sense of self, personality view, the thoughts of "me," that felt sense of "me," simply arises when there's grasping and clinging in the mind. And when the grasping stops, it falls back away. This is going on all the time.

The Buddha, in one sutta, talked about the whole way consciousness works as being like a magic show. He says it's like having a magician at the crossroads back in rural India, performing all these magic tricks.

When you're watching from outside, it's amazing—how do they do it? But once you get behind and see the tricks, it's just not amazing anymore, is it? "Oh, that's how they do it, okay." All the magic's gone, but you see how it is.

It's exactly the same with consciousness when sakkāya-diṭṭhi is operating, when personality view is present. We don't even recognize it as an assumption—it just seems like that's how it is. "I'm this personality. That's how I am, for better or worse." And it's an assumption. We may work really hard to change our personality and get it better, but we're still assuming that's what we are. We don't really stop to look, and it's so solid precisely because it's not examined or explored.

Ramana Maharshi said, "Ego, or the idea of self, or personality view"—you could put any of those words in there—"is like a ghost caused by the play of shadows. Look closely and the ghost vanishes. The ghost was never there." So also with this sense of separate self, personality view, ego—so long as one does not look closely at it, it continues to give trouble. But when one looks for it, it's found not to really exist.

And that's really the function and the result, the wisdom that results from the steadiness of awareness simply exploring what actually presents itself.

One of the ways our inaccurate perception strengthens into thoughts and then into views is that we stop recognizing what we believe. Instead, we start looking for what we think we already know. So instead of having an open, receptive mind that just notices whatever's presenting itself, whether small or big, the attention becomes unconsciously skewed to recognize what it's looking for, what's familiar—in big examples and small examples.

And I remember all the times I've been clumsy and I'm not a good athlete. And I literally went back to the fifth grade when they put me in the remedial gym class—for those who couldn't throw a softball more than thirty feet or something. I mean, really. But it was with friends, it didn't really traumatize me. I didn't care about gym, luckily. But my thoughts are back there. And right away, that's my whole life. It was forty years ago, and yet here's my whole personality—this clumsy person who's not an athlete—and here I am.

And then at some point I stepped off the tub, and I looked at the curtain, and it looked okay. I looked around and thought, "Oh, it's a nice day." And I went outside and started walking, and I saw the beautiful hills, and I started walking faster and enjoying the feeling of the body, and I thought, "I really love hiking."

And where's the clumsy guy? Gone.

So now we have the person who loves hiking and nature. But that's equally just arising. And we wouldn't normally experience it that way. You wouldn't say, "Boy, that sense of self really passed away. This is a different one." But it was.

And so we start to see this—just this simple thing of exploring in our own experience, just watching how these constructions form. And we're watching them in the relative sense, noticing how sense contact

triggers thought, how thought triggers memory, how memory reinforces a sense of identity, how that identity colors everything that follows. We're seeing the mechanics of it.

But then, if at any point we bring that deeper quality of attention—the awareness that's looking for what's actually here—we start to notice: Where is this one who's clumsy? Where is this one who loves hiking? And in that looking, it's not that we find nothing. We find experience. We find sensation, thought, memory, preference. But the solid "me" at the center of it—the one who supposedly persists through all these different arisings—that's what we can't locate.

This is what the practice gradually reveals. Not through thinking about it, but through this patient, curious, sustained attention to our actual moment-to-moment experience.

I can't put up the damn shower curtain, and it's hopeless, and I need someone to do things for me, and it just goes on and on. It feels really real. It feels really solid. That's who I am.

And if we're not seeing clearly, we miss that it's just thoughts and emotions. What's happening right now? I'm not back in the rehab gym class. I'm just standing on the tub with my fingers a little stiff. All these thoughts and moods are coming up. That's all that's happening. It's not the whole story of my life. It's not even me. It's just what's happening.

But as long as we don't see thought as thought, we don't bring our attention into the present moment—just what's happening, like that. It might still be unpleasant, but it's fine. But when we get sucked into not seeing thought as thought, when we get caught in the story—if I hadn't even been watching that, you know how that could really take hold. You could go into whatever. It could really take hold—one that's even more intense than that. And then we can really drop into "this is who I am."

Sogyal Rinpoche said we get into so much confusion and pain by letting ourselves get lost in whatever happens. You project a thought, then the second thought believes the first thought. Then the third, fourth, and fifth thoughts are projected. The first thought is by this time already a reality. By the time the tenth thought comes, it believes the fifth one has always been an actuality.

Can you notice that? It's all so solid. And if you turn around and just look—what is it? Thought. They're just smoke. They dissolve into nothing when we turn and look.

And so this is what we can really do. Over and over, turn and look and see. The personality view is arising and passing. It's not the same for a few moments together.

Notice tonight, tomorrow—just for fun, not with aversion (well, you can't help it if there's aversion)—but just for fun, see how many different stories of self come triggered by what sense contact. What thoughts come? See how some are more solid than others. Just see the construction of this magic show, and how when the awareness is a little bit steady and you see it coming and you see it fade away, you say, "Oh, nothing really happened." Then you think, "But that's true. You were in a rehab gym class in the fifth

grade. That was true."

That's got nothing to do with it. That's gone. If it's true or not true, I don't even know. Am I making it up? I don't know. It's gone. What's happening right now is where we're going to be able to be with accurate perception.

Ajahn Sumedho says we create ourselves with our thoughts, then we attach to the thoughts and believe the thoughts, and we don't let in—this is where we get the selective perception. When we're attached to one personality belief view, we don't let in the perceptions that don't fit with that.

Notice how you do that. Notice if you ever happen to have self-judgment during this week. And even if you're aware of it, but only sort of aware of it, really the thoughts are being believed, right? Say you're judging yourself about whatever.

It could start from anything. I noticed one time on a retreat, when I could backtrack and see, I had gotten into the whole world of my entire life of self-judgment—back to all the things I'd done wrong and my bad personality traits and on and on. When I really traced it back, there had been a minimally painful sensation in my foot during walking meditation. Really minimally painful, and I wasn't really aware of it. So the aversion just kind of colored the perception, and then some thought or other came up about how I wasn't really doing it right. And then boom—gone into my whole life.

In that moment, when you're really believing that personality view, do you happen to remember all the things you did well in your life? No. And if it does come up, it's "yeah, but..." Like when I was talking about generosity practice—reflecting on generosity, reflecting on gratitude. If you're in a real self-judging personality view snit and you first start to do it, it's like, "Well, I did this really good thing." And then immediately: "Oh, you just did it because you wanted people to like you." Whatever you can come up with, it's going to be seen through that lens. Nothing else is believed.

But then the next day—like several people said today in groups—they have really good days and really bad days on retreat. You notice that? On the good days, whatever story it is about your life now, or about your spiritual life, or "I finally got this," or "everything's so clear"—whatever it is—the next day it's all, as one yogi used to say to me, "gone to hell in a handbasket." I have no idea what that means, but it's very vivid. It's like: that yesterday, that was made up. This is how it is now.

But unexplored, we would still say it's all me. It's all the same me going through this. We don't notice that these are two completely different experiences. One completely went away—we don't notice that. The other arose due to other causes and conditions, but through the same kind of magic show of creating this sense of self.

So just to stop and look, to get interested in watching how the whole thing comes up—it really gets fascinating.

A friend of ours described this one time. She labels herself an aversive-type personality, and her friends tell her, yes, that's true, you are. So one time she was feeling particularly identified with that thought and that story, feeling bad about herself and all of that. She came to sit for the day somewhere, but she was aware of this train of thought going on: "Yes, I'm an aversive person. I'm an aversive person." So she was just watching her mind over a couple of sittings, watching what thoughts came and went, what moods came and went. She'd done quite some practice by this time.

And she said, yeah, it's true—quite some aversive thoughts came up. Maybe ten percent of the thoughts that came up. All other kinds of thoughts and moods and personality stories came: moments of generosity, of calm, of sleepiness—the whole show in an hour sitting. Each one, a different arising of personality view, of perception and thoughts, and the view "this is me," and all the attendant confusion and papañca. That's the word for proliferation—papañca. And then reacting to it and suffering from it, or liking it. But usually we don't quite notice how it comes together, goes away. Comes together, goes away.

This is from Ajahn Sumedho: "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. It takes off into orbit—my views, my feelings, and my opinions. I can get caught in that world, in that view of me that arises in consciousness. But if I recognize that happening, if I know that, then my refuge is no longer in being a person. I'm not taking refuge in being a personality or in my views and opinions. Then I can let go, or it just lets go naturally, and the world of Ajahn Sumedho ends. It doesn't mean Ajahn Sumedho dies and the world ends, or that I'm unconscious. In Buddhadhamma, the world is the world that we create in consciousness."

And this is like different worlds moment to moment. That's why we can be living in different worlds. The world of Ajahn Sumedho is not going to be the same as the world your mind creates.

But both of those worlds arise and cease. And that which is aware of the world arising and ceasing is bigger than it—it's transcending that world. So our refuge then is in this awareness rather than in trying to sustain our personality view or refined experiences in consciousness, because you can't do it. Our refuge becomes awareness rather than our personality.

Just notice if your mind is going, "I don't like that." It's not saying the personality goes away, but it stops being our refuge. And as we look more closely, we see it's not a solid thing anyway. It's really changing all the time.

As we look more closely into the magic show of the perceptions and the thoughts that come with them and the moods that come with them and all the thoughts, you might start to notice—see if this is true for you, it's certainly true in my experience—that when the train of thought and description comes together with a really strong emotion, the tendency is to think that it's more true, more real. Especially difficult emotions. I've noticed that part of the makeup of the emotion is the story: "It's always going to be this way." Have you noticed that? Even though you've seen it come and go twenty times already in the week, it comes

again, and it's like, "Ah, it's always going to be this way, and it always has been that way." Even though I can remember times it wasn't there, it was really here submerged the whole time waiting to spring, right?

But it's not so. Just because a thought comes together with strong emotion definitely doesn't make it more true. If anything, it may make it less reliable. But we don't have to argue with it. Remember to turn our attention. Just turn our attention on and see.

Ajahn Sumedho again—he talks a lot about this, awareness of "it's like this." He talks a lot in this language and the personality view. So he says just notice you're really angry or really sad. Notice the difference between "I'm angry" or "my anger" versus "anger is like this." "My sadness is so unbearable. I'm so sad. I've been so sad all my life, or all week"—compare that to shifting the awareness to exploring how sadness is manifesting right now. Sadness is like this. An expression of, as Tejaniya would say, sadness is just nature. This is the nature of sadness. This is the nature of anger. This is the nature of clinging. When it's "my sadness," it's so much more difficult to be with.

So just trusting to turn the attention—and then we'll see, back to seeing this nature of thoughts. This is from Dilgo Khyentse again:

"Yet 'I' is just a thought. 'I'm so sad. I'm so angry. I'm so useless.' Thoughts and feelings have no intrinsic solidity, form, shape, or color. When a thought of anger arises in the mind with such force that you feel aggressive and destructive, is that anger actually brandishing a weapon? Is it at the head of an army? Can it actually do things, crush them like a rock, carry things away like a violent river? No—anger, just like any other thought or feeling, has no definable true existence, not even a definite location in your body, speech, or mind."

You may feel tightness that is triggered by anger, but you can't actually locate the anger in your cheek anywhere. I love this last line: "It is just like a wind roaring in empty space."

When the feeling of strong, difficult emotion comes like anger, I can remember to turn my attention—oh, anger feels like this—and to say, let the wind roar in empty space. Awareness is bigger than the wind. It's bigger than the anger. Awareness can contain everything. I mean, it's not a thing, but it's like awareness can be with anything. So let the anger roar. The hand doesn't have to pick up a club and hit. And it roars, and we see it's really nothing.

"So instead of allowing these wild thoughts to enslave you, you can realize their essential emptiness, their essential ephemeral nature. If you see through the hatred within, you will discover there is not one single enemy left outside. Otherwise, even if you could overpower everyone in the whole world, your hatred would only grow stronger."

So examine the nature of hatred—or put any emotion in there. Examine the nature of anger.

Examine the nature of sadness, of greed, of happiness. You will find that it is no more than a thought.

When you see it as it is, it will dissolve like a cloud in the sky.

Part of why the habit of our mind and perception resists this, if it does, is that sense of familiarity with personality, with belief, with the sense of me—the comfort of that. A lot of times we say, "Well, I don't want my personality, my sense of me to dissolve like a cloud in the sky."

Quite a few people have mentioned this, and many of us experience it. When you're practicing or you're in your daily life and the mind becomes peaceful, it becomes calm. There's no big story going on, no big sense of me. And often people come into this state thinking, "Nothing's happening." Kind of upset, kind of worried.

Or even more interesting is watching the mind do its thing—picking a perception and jumping on it, getting into this whole papañca of creating a suffering story. It brings a lot of energy and familiarity and a weird, twisted comfort. Because, well, thank God I'm back again. Even if I'm an angry me spinning this story, it's familiar, it's comfortable. We like this better than calm. "I thought I wanted peace, but I'm not so sure."

But we don't have to take it personally like that. Just watching the habit, the sense of self—when it goes away like that, it's very important to learn to feel comfortable. Ajahn Buddhadasa calls it, when just in the moment there's not a strong sense of self, he calls it voidness. That's the translation into English by Santikaro. It's kind of a weird translation. But let's just say those moments where you notice a personality of you just drops away.

And even if it's a difficult one—that whole self-judgment—and it just goes. People notice it just goes. It's not like you talk yourself out of it. The perception shifts. That's the insight. "Oh, it's just thought." It's gone. And in that moment, it's just kind of peace or contentment or quiet. There may be some seeing or hearing, whatever's going on. It's just peace.

Sometimes when it's really sudden and lasts a little bit, the mind can get scared. But more often it's just a sudden moment of peace, calmness, no personality view, nothing much going on. These moments, he says, generate a contentment with those moments. Really notice those little moments of experience. Not to grab onto them, for then we will, but just to notice personality of you coming together and going apart.

And when the sense of me as a failure is gone, notice it's really gone. It's not here now. Just notice it's just calm right now. Or there's a sense of happiness. I'm just feeling the breath or hearing the turkeys. That's just what's happening, nothing much.

And then notice our sense of dragging the past like a corpse: "But before I was feeling so worthless, and probably that's going to come again, and I don't want to get too comfortable with this because it's going to go away." Just notice that. That's another arising of personality view and going away.

It's really so important to let ourselves just touch this—you could call it emptiness, I like to call it the

simplicity. The simplicity of the mind, the heart that's not concocting, that's not fabricating a whole sense of me or anything around whatever sense-door experience is happening. That's just landing here with what is without making any big story about it.

There's a Pali word that Ajahn Buddhadasa likes to point to: atammayatā. The best translation is "not fabricating," not concocting, really not constructing anything out of what's happening. So in that moment, it's like the mind, the heart, the awareness—it's at peace, it's independent. It's not affected by greed, hatred, or delusion.

Whatever's arising, it's met just as it is, and the mind just doesn't concoct anything around it. It's just the simplicity of being fully here in the present moment. You could call it the stillness of the non-reactive mind, but it's not the stillness of no experience. It's just the simplicity of things as they have come to be, and the deluded mind isn't making up a big story about it.

In some ways it's so simple we can't stand it, really. But that's it—just notice those moments of non-concocting, non-fabricating. Feel contentment with that.

Ajahn Sumedho also said once to a group of teachers—we were talking with him about how strongly we get sucked back into believing the personality view, all the different versions of it, and how we don't really trust these moments of simplicity, of non-concocting, of things as they are with no sense of self. We don't quite trust them. We think, "Okay, that came, but it's a fluke, it's a state, it's an experience—but really, this is who I am." Ajahn Sumedho, who worked a lot in Thailand and then extensively in the West, living in England and elsewhere, was saying that first, of course, one personality pattern that many of us really believe deeply is self-doubt, self-judgment. That's the one that gets under us, and we don't recognize it as a pattern arising—it's just the voice of how things are, telling us what we've done wrong.

He said—and this is his opinion only, but I think it's very interesting—that in his view, the biggest hindrance or obstacle for Westerners in their practice of awakening is that we have such a strong belief in our personalities. We really rely on them, take refuge in our personalities. We may hate them, but we take refuge in them. We may not even understand them clearly because we don't see their constantly changing nature. There are patterns, recognizable patterns to each of our personalities, just as our bodies are recognizable from each other. But it's all just patterns, shifting patterns.

So he says, we have such a strong belief in our personalities, we take refuge in them, and the magic show of the personality view becomes our reference point. That's where we land. And so when there's a moment of non-concocting or just simplicity, when you taste that purity, the flavor of the pure heart and mind, you think, "Well..." So easily we slip back into, "That can't be true for me." We don't believe it. We believe our personality view, and the personality view says we don't trust our moments of purity, of momentary freedom, of recognizing things as they are. "Okay, maybe, I don't know—but this self-hatred, that's really real."

Just take that in. If it makes sense to you, let it in. If it confuses you, let it go. But I think it's really very interesting.

So coming back to this simplicity of the non-concocting mind: in a moment when papañca is not being created, all this proliferation—one time the Buddha said the end of papañca is the end of suffering. Or there's that line from the Four Quartets by T.S. Eliot: "A condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything."

Because in that moment, just the simplicity of non-concoction, there's no self-referencing. You're not referencing this sound back to me, this mood back to me—it's just what it is. Nothing more and nothing less. There's no comparing, there's no remembering or extending it into past or future, there's no referencing it back to me, there's no judging. It's just seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling, mood—just what it is. A condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything.

The thinking mind, the personality of you, thinks, "I don't want to give up everything." But the reality of pure perception, accurate perception, is that nothing's being given up. In this moment, this is all there is. It's just recognizing it accurately. Nothing's being given up but our confusion.

I want to end with a quotation from the Buddha. My friend Fred shared it in Switzerland, but I couldn't use it there because the language is too complicated. I hope we can mostly understand it here. I like it. This is the Buddha talking about how his mind works, which isn't something you'd often hear. He refers to himself as the Tathagata.

He says: "The Tathagata does not conceive of a visible thing as apart from sight." Do you get a sense of what that means? There's just seeing. He does not conceive of a separate visible thing. He does not conceive of a visible thing apart from sight. He does not conceive of something unseen. He does not conceive of a thing to be seen. He does not conceive about a seer.

And then he goes through all the senses in the same way: "He does not conceive of a cognizable thing apart from cognition. He does not conceive of something not recognized. He does not conceive of a thing worth cognizing."

He does not conceive about one who cognizes.

"Thus, bhikkhus, the Tathāgata is such in regard to all phenomena seen, heard, sensed, and cognized."

Do you get a sense of what that means? It's just—there's seeing, and that's it. It's another way of expressing that famous Bāhiya Sutta we've been exploring: "In the seen, there is only the seen. In the heard, there is only the heard."

But here he's saying that when there's seeing, the Tathāgata's mind isn't conceiving about something else that isn't being seen. It's not referring back to "me, I'm seeing." It's not thinking, "Here's something seeing and there's something to be seen." It's just not making any distinctions.

The whole experience of seeing is everything and all. There's nothing else to think about in that moment. A condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything.

And in that moment, the mind, the heart is pure. The pure heart and mind in that moment is free from suffering.

So let's just sit quietly for a moment.

There is a poem by Rengetsu, a Japanese nun:

She saw that arising arose, abided, and fell away.
She saw that knowing this arose, abided, and fell away.
Then she knew there was nothing more than this,
no ground, nothing to lean on stronger than the cane she held,
nothing to lean upon at all,
and no one leaning.
And she opened the clenched fist in her mind
and let go
and fell into the midst of everything.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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