Three Jobs of a Yogi

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:01:03

So how are you doing? You dragged through the first day. That's great. Especially just for new people to know—everyone who's done lots of retreats before already knows—nothing's always, but the first day can be a bit difficult because you don't know what the heck you're doing, right? And you don't know why you came.

Well, I'm not really here to tell you why, but I'll try to talk a little bit, very simply I hope. I want to start by picking up on something Steve mentioned that Tejaniya sometimes talks about. It's just a way of trying to describe very simply why we practice, how we do it: the three jobs of a yogi. Yogi is shorthand for what we use for meditators, so we're all yogis here.

Do you remember what they are? Of course not. The first is knowing why we practice—right view. Then just meeting each moment with awareness. And the third job is the sense of steadiness, persistence, continuity. I just want to talk a little bit about each of those. It's actually relatively simple.

You might think right view—to start with right view, right understanding—it's both the beginning and you could say the ending of the path of awakening. If you've at all tuned into any kind of Buddhist teachings, to think right view, that's really, when we really understand the way things are, that understanding, that actual recognition of things as they have come to be on a deep level, is what frees our heart and mind from confusion, from greed, from aversion, from suffering. So how the heck can we start with that?

Right view has many, many levels of subtlety. But on the very first level, the way to talk about it here is a little sense of knowing the attitude, why we start this practice, why we're talking so much about the steadiness of awareness. What's the power of it? Why, really?

I like this definition of meditation as we're doing it: meditation is experiencing the mind and body directly from moment to moment with the right understanding. That's really what we're doing—just experiencing mind and body directly from moment to moment with the right understanding. So on this level, the right understanding is the attitude we bring to each moment of awareness.

Right view, even in this way, right understanding, is not meant—I certainly don't mean it, and I'm sure the Buddha didn't—as a set of philosophical concepts or ideas that you should write down and remember. There is some learned knowledge, like what I'm talking about tonight if you haven't heard it, and that's a sense of secondhand information. Let's put it that way. The secondhand information just can incline us to be interested enough to explore. It's not that right view means you can list the Four Noble Truths and you can list anicca, dukkha, anattā—impermanence and suffering and not-self—and it's all like this, and you

write a whole thesis of it, and it doesn't change your experience one iota because it's informational but it's not transformative, really, on a cellular level, an understanding level. That's like the depth of wise understanding. So it's not a philosophical thing.

But I actually really appreciate the translation into English as "right view," because for me I experience it as quite literal: recognizing what's occurring accurately. Not how we think it should be, not thinking about it in the right way, because pretty much once we start thinking about it, it's over as far as accuracy—unless we recognize it's thinking. But to recognize what's happening accurately.

This is the power of this simple awareness we've been talking about. When we say just feel the sensation, it's like this, you might think, What? So what? I've got to sit here all day and go, "Sensations like this, sight is like this, hearing is like this, walking is like this, anger is like this, frustration is like this." Give me a break. We focus on the object. But the awareness, the power of the steady, simple, unbiased awareness, is that through the steadiness of it, without our doing, the accurate recognition of what's occurring just begins to emerge more and more. And this recognizing accurately changes the whole way we understand and thus relate to experience in our life.

So that's a huge topic, obviously, because that's the beginning of right view. I like to think about the Buddha—when the Buddha awoke, the story of sitting under the tree, awakening to the freedom from all confusion, from greed, from hatred, from suffering—and yet he lived the next forty-five years in this world.

He didn't wake up into a different world. He woke up into a world and he lived 45 years—the peaceful one, the awakened one—in a body that does what bodies do, which is sometimes it feels good and sometimes it doesn't. He'd be sick and have backaches and headaches. He had a whole sangha of monks and nuns with whom he worked, whom he really taught and shared with. And there were times when that was wonderful, and times when—well, you know what it's like working with a group of people. Times when it was organizational dukkha, organizational suffering. All the monks and nuns' rules that are in place now came about because of some behavior that wasn't so great one way or the other, and then he'd make a rule. There were wars. He had kinship with families on different sides of wars, fighting over water rights. I mean, basically it was life, the same life.

So what was different?

And this is like—it wasn't rocket science, but it took me years to actually look and go, "Oh, duh, he wasn't floating around on a cloud out of body all the time." He was here, engaged, really engaged, really caring, spending 45 years of his life, the whole rest of his life, sharing with people to help them understand, out of compassion. He didn't need to do that. He could have just gone off and really been in peaceful mind. He spent 45 years really engaged. So it's not removal from life at all.

So what was different? I'm not here to tell you how the Buddha's mind was from the inside—don't even

think that—but I know some of what's different. We have intimations, and we all do in moments, moments of freedom, that what changes isn't the external circumstances. You don't stop having unpleasant experience. The more you practice doesn't mean life just gets pleasanter and pleasanter. Look in your mind—do you somehow think that's what's going to happen? You think at the end of nine days here, everything's going to be better, or else you wasted your money? And we laugh, I laugh. But when I really look in my mind, I keep getting caught in that one. "Oh, this backache. What's this doing back? I thought I conquered that one."

Anyway, what changes is the understanding and thus the relationship—the understanding of how we perceive, how we recognize experience. When we recognize it accurately, we stop looking to any experience to give us confirmation, to make us happy. We stop blaming experience for making us unhappy. So the Buddha could walk around India barefoot begging for his food for 45 years—how does that sound?—and be happy.

Once we recognize this, it's how we respond, both internally and in our actions externally. There's a quotation from Martin Luther King I like a lot where he says, "Nonviolence doesn't just mean that you don't shoot a person. It also means that you don't hate a person." And I would actually say, in terms of what we're practicing and learning here, it's from the inside out. When something is difficult, our natural response is to hate it or hate ourselves or fix it or whatever, and we're suffering.

So when we start to understand differently, we can still meet the situation and act and respond appropriately. It's not a withdrawing from life, but it's understanding what's going on in our own mind and heart—not in the other person's. That's their business. We don't even know what's going on in our own mind and heart, right? How much do we assume and project onto what other people are doing? I mean, that's just what our minds do. But come on, we don't even know why we're doing what we're doing half the time.

So this is what we're exploring here. We start to see that the suffering, the confusion, the lack of peace that's arising in our experience—that this steadiness of awareness with right view can help us see the way out of—isn't because of what's occurring. And this is a hard teaching, and we will resist it and fight it and find reasons why it's not true. But it's not because of what's occurring that we really deeply suffer. It's in the relationship. And the relationship isn't difficult because we're stupid jerks, stubborn, willfully trying to suffer.

Because we don't recognize accurately. Because we're not in practice.

It's not that some people are given the gift of awareness and some people are not. It's as natural as breathing. Have you noticed that at all today? Or are you looking for something too highfalutin?

So right now—do you feel your hand? How hard was that? Was that hard? Anybody who couldn't feel your hand? It didn't take a lot of effort, and it was immediate as soon as there was the thought of

remembering, right? I doubt there's someone thinking, "I can't find awareness of how to feel my hand." It's right there. It's so there we don't even notice. We take it for granted. We're not interested.

So one way of talking about this—and I think Steve started talking about it today, and we'll probably say the same thing every night, I'm just warning you—one very simple way, and this is direct from the way Sayadaw U Tejaniya talks about it, very simple but helpful, is how we can recognize experience as we're practicing here. And this moment-to-moment thing directly affects what I was just talking about on the wider level of our relationship to experience and suffering.

So, mindfulness of our experience with right view. Steve talked today about how there's an object—an object arises in our experience. One way, and this is from the Buddha, we can notice what occurs as we go through the day, is that six different experiences tend to arise, keep on arising, right? Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing—physical experience with the body. Those are the five physical senses. And then the whole mental realm: thoughts, emotions, moods. These are all coming and going. Has anybody not noticed that? As I said, you can't stop them from coming and going. This is what's happening. This is what we call our life. This is what we're experiencing.

So whatever's arising—say a particular sight arises, or, well, let's keep it simple, a sight, or say a twinge in your knee as you're sitting. So that arises. That is arising. It's simply the object arising. It's not personal. It's arising from whatever particular conditions have come together in that one moment to cause the arising of that particular sensation or that particular sound.

Does that make sense so far?

We don't stop and think, "What are all the things that made that sound come?" Those frogs croaking—it's just there. But once you start to go into it, it's endless, right? Any one thing you pick goes back to the Big Bang if you want to start figuring out what all the causes are, because everything's interconnected. So I'm not saying figure it out, but it arises due to lawful causes.

So say a sensation arises, right? That's the object. Any of the six senses—mood, a thought, aversion arises. The sense of that natural, not even awareness, but just the consciousness of it. The sight arises, and if your eyes are open and your eyes work and you're awake, they're seeing, right? That happens. You don't have to plan, "In a minute when this light goes on, I'm going to see." Or, "In about thirty seconds, I think the knee's going to start to throb." We don't know, and it's out of our control.

Do you get that? And yet we take it so personally.

So this knowing just happens naturally. That's not the same as awareness, as Steve said.

That's what makes the experience of seeing or hearing. The sight, the eye works, the consciousness is there, seeing is occurring. As soon as we recognize that seeing is occurring, that's awareness. And as I think Steve took you through, you get a sense of the subtle difference. When I said "feel your hand," there

was probably already a consciousness of it, but when I said "feel it," there was an awareness. You're still in the same experience, but there's this subtle shift. You get that feeling of that shift from—really, we're just identified. We could say later what's happening, but there's not really an awareness. We're just not thinking about it at all; we're just in it.

So there's the object arising, the recognition of the process—thinking, seeing, hearing—that's awareness. And awareness is just as natural as consciousness. It's not some big thing you had to manufacture, was it? You just had to remember. But you see how it's so nothing special that we don't tend to notice?

Then the third piece of the way he describes meditation practice—and where the third piece is where all our confusion and suffering lies or is released—is in that moment of awareness. Nothing other than the awareness. Feeling hand, feeling twinge, seeing, whatever, just seeing. In that moment that there's awareness of what the process is, what's the attitude, the quality that's in the mind, in the awareness at that moment?

Until we even recognize awareness, never mind recognizing the quality—but once we get in the habit, which is what we're trying to cultivate here, the habit of moment-to-moment awareness, that's all—you start to notice what's the quality in the mind that's aware.

I'm going to give examples, but I think I saw some nods. You already get a sense of the difference it can make. If in that moment of recognizing that seeing is happening, that recognition, that awareness is just "oh, seeing, it's like this"—do you get a sense of how that's freeing?

"Oh, look at that deer! It's so beautiful!" No, no, no. You're totally in the object. But "oh, seeing the deer"—and it's just calm seeing, no good, no bad, just what it is. There's a kind of being there with it, but there's space around, there's ease, there's just no problem one way or the other. You don't have to do anything about it.

We don't notice that. Into the deer—it's so beautiful, and oh, I love deer, and what are their lives like? Oh, they have so many ticks, and how does it feel to me? At least they don't hunt them here. I'm so lucky, or I'm so not lucky, or I should have been more of a nature lover. Whatever—you get a sense. Gone, gone, gone. But we don't notice that. We don't notice that often.

So in this way of practice—practically really in all ways of practice—we're noticing the object. As soon as we're conscious of it: oh, seeing is happening, thinking is happening, feeling the body is happening. And when there's not a lot of wanting or aversion or stories about me, it's just that simple awareness. One moment after the other, after the other.

And with the steadiness of that, we start to recognize more clearly the processes of our life. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, wanting. And much of the day, much of what goes on in retreat is nothing really special. Are you waiting for something special enough to notice? Probably. But it's like this—this is it. Yes, this is it. This is our life.

Come and tell us something else that happened other than seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mental activity. And did any of it last very long at all? And then another one came—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, mental activity.

And then you think, "Oh my God, let me get out of here," right? What is that? Oh, that's mental activity. And there's awareness.

When you recognize what is influencing, what is affecting that moment of awareness, when you feel that sense of struggle—"Oh my God, is this all there is? I can't bear another..."—oh, that's aversion. That's awareness again. Aversion has become the object. Knowing, recognizing the quality in the mind of aversion. And in that moment, the awareness is not affected by aversion. And that's a teensy sense of what a moment of freedom is.

Do you see this? And you still might be thinking, "Oh my God, I want something different." But when we're not so sucked into the object, but just noticing the process, it can just be what it is. And it's not a disconnect, not caring—like the life of the Buddha. It's quite present. Because we're not afraid of stuff. We're not needing to hold on to something to make us okay. We're really here, really here, for this moment, which is whatever it is.

Another way Utejniya talks about this right view is recognizing, as I said, that whatever's arising is this moment's effect of all the previous causes. This moment could not be any different. How could it be? It's here. And it's not personal, it's just nature. It's a way, a language—just nature. The nature of seeing, the nature of hearing, the nature of feeling, the nature of thinking. We all experience these things. It's not so personal.

So how does it get so personal? It gets personal when we don't see this process. Our habit is really being sucked into what's occurring, into the object, liking it, disliking it. That's the habit. We get absorbed.

So there's an unpleasant smell—I'm not picking something too horrible, right? There's an unpleasant smell and you're really sensitive to smells. So there's smelling. It's unpleasant. We don't like it. If you're recognizing that smells one object, recognizing that sense smelling is happening in the mind—"Oh my God, I don't like it, I kind of shrink"—shrinking feels like this. Tightness in the mind feels like this.

That's a language that Ajahn Sumedho uses. He was an American man originally, who's been a monk in the Thai forest tradition for forty-some-odd years. And I love the way he talks about practice and awareness. It's the same thing as just awareness of something. "Oh, bad smell is like this. Aversion feels like this."

Do you get a sense? I feel like a qigong move, a tai chi move—from the aversion, the smell, and "How could they do it? Oh, I don't like it"—to: "It's like this." It's not trying to fix anything. It's not saying that this means X, Y, or Z about me or the other person. This is what's occurring now.

And we can see much more clearly in that moment when there's not the wanting, the aversion, the judging, the "me." Unpleasant smell, tightening in the body, aversion in the mind. "How can this happen?" You see that whole process without trying to fix it, without trying to figure out where's the suffering. It's obvious.

It's not the smell. It's all that stuff our mind is doing in reaction—that's what's holding on. It's like a snowball of confusion and suffering, going and going and going. And then you think, "Oh God, and now I'm doing it, I'm making the snowball of suffering, I might as well just hang it up." But that's just the same thing. Don't go into the content of the thought. Feel that—oh, that's aversion. Aversion feels like this. Just for that moment, it becomes the object.

And what's so remarkable, in terms of introducing us to the freeing potential of balanced awareness—that's what I'm going to call awareness when it's not affected by greed or hatred or confusion, balanced awareness—is that even a moment of recognizing this is like a moment of freedom. Just to get a sense. It doesn't mean that aversion will never arise again. But we stop being so afraid of this stuff, and we get interested in what's going on. How is the mind working?

Instead of somehow secretly believing we're going to figure it all out so that we can manipulate our internal experience and the whole world so we don't have to deal with anything that causes us harm or unpleasantness anymore. I'm not saying we're looking for harm, but I'm just saying it's not in our control. If our freedom, our happiness, our peace, and thus our ability to act in the world with compassion and caring hinges on getting it all copacetic, it's not going to happen in this world of change.

There's a word that I like in the Pali language: *yathā bhūta*, which translates as "things as they have come to be in this moment." And that's a description of one kind of high experience of insight, you could say. Everything's momentary. Things as they have come to be. So you're stomping up and down the hill, hot and sick of the noise and sick of whatever, and you go, "Oh, things as they have come to be right now. It's like this. Just like this." And we ever so subtly shift—as in that Tai Chi move—from being all involved in the content of the object to awareness.

So whatever the particular experience is, in terms of what opens up the way to recognizing and trusting more and more this potential for freeing our heart and mind—it doesn't matter. In this practice, it does not matter what the object is. All objects are equal in terms of being an opportunity to re-recognize the simplicity of awareness. Whether it's a subtle tingling experience, a subtle breath, or seeing something, or hearing something, or smelling a bad smell, or noticing you're filled with rage—but suddenly rage becomes the object. It's still rage. But the shift is from the absorption in the object into noticing the process with interest. We get really interested: How is this working?

And that's one of the reasons this style of practice can actually be so relaxing, so enjoyable. It really can be—I know you don't believe me yet—but it can be, because we're not trying to make a particular experience happen. And when you want that, that's wanting in the mind. And right away we're saying,

"This one's no good, this one I need, this is okay but it isn't quite good enough." Has anyone experienced that today? "Am I doing it right?" That's immediately—doing what right? Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, feeling, thinking. It's happening without our say-so. Are you doing it right? It's just happening. Awareness doesn't care.

And it doesn't matter if you notice the first little flip of anger. It's easier if you notice the first little flip—it's easier.

But if you've stomped up and down the hill for half an hour in a rage, thinking furiously, and suddenly you go, "Oh, this is rage. Rage is like this" — that moment of awareness is just as pure. It doesn't matter whether it was awareness of an incredibly blissful state or rage. The awareness is untouched, unstained. It's just arising here in this moment. Nothing can harm it. It's always available when we remember.

But it's not our habit to remember. It's our habit to base what's important on what's happening. So here, why we're going on about this, is to give us information to help us remember, to explore and see if what I'm saying is true in your experience.

I've been practicing for many years, and I want to say one thing that I have more and more respect for. This may not be encouraging, but it's true, and it actually helps me a lot. What I have more and more respect for is the power of habit in our minds. Good habit, bad habit. You all know external habits, but the power of habit in our mind is so strong and so familiar that without some information, without putting ourselves in a situation where we consciously try to observe and see what the habit is — notice I didn't say get rid of the habit, I said observe and see what the heck is going on, what the habit is — without that, we're just enthralled to it because we don't know there's another option. This is what you might call samsara.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who was quite an amazing Tibetan teacher, talks about renunciation — which we think of as giving up everything externally nice. That's not what he's talking about. Renunciation is a quality of heart and mind of joy and simplicity. This is how he describes it: "Renunciation, the foundation of the path, the root of all the stages, implies the strong wish to free oneself, not only from life's immediate sorrows, but from the seemingly unending sufferings of samsara." Samsara being that seemingly endless cycle of conditioned existence.

What do we mean by that? That sense of something arising — we like it, we don't like it, it's pleasant, it's not pleasant — and right away there's that absorption into it. "I need more of this, and this is what's going to make me happy." Or the sense of it's unpleasant — we don't know that consciously, but just that pulling away, assessing it as wrong, bad, unhappy. "Get rid of it, and then I'll be happy." But the cycle is, as he's saying, this endless leaning to the next thing, leaning to the next thing. Just a little bit out there, it's going to be a little better. Do you have any sense what I'm talking about?

And so he says that with this sense of just starting to tune into that comes a heartfelt weariness, a

disillusionment with the endless quest for gratification, for approval, for profit, for status. He's not saying you hate it, but a disillusionment, a weariness. And this isn't an aversion — this is the wise understanding, the right view of seeing things as they have come to be. That when we just zone in, zoom into the object — "Oh, if next time I sit the mind's a little quieter, then it'll be better" — it doesn't matter what it is. That leaning forward, that absorption into the object, keeps us off balance, no? Keeps us yearning. It keeps us fixed there and not seeing the whole picture — the sense of all the connectedness, the cause and effect.

That sense of "this pain in my knee goes back to the Big Bang and it's not in my control; it's nature occurring in this moment" — that is very different from "this pain in my knee, this burning, what can I do? How can I fix it? How can I possibly meditate if this is happening? If I just get up and don't sit anymore, get a chair, then it'll all be okay." It's not that we don't take care of pain. It's that "then it'll all be okay." We only see the object and it's going to make me okay in the future. We don't see the whole process of what's actually happening — that wanting, that aversion in the mind, that resistance to experience as it is that keeps us in this sense of a separated bubble of me.

It's all about getting it better, getting it fixed, getting rid of the unpleasant—me, me, me. And how come I feel so isolated? How come it's never okay for very long? Because our idea of okay isn't really working.

How do we notice it's not working? By starting to notice the awareness of the process, getting more interested in awareness steady moment to moment. That's a continuity, and that's essential. We start to notice the process, and that gets so much more interesting. You start to see through. You start to notice the vastness. You notice where freedom is, and it's not by getting everything okay.

Let me give you a little example of the shift from focus on object to seeing process. It's just a simple one, but this is how it is. Our lives are made up of simple experiences.

I was on a retreat a long time ago, one of my first three-month retreats I think, and I had a car. It was way two months into the retreat. Very strict schedule, silence and all. And basically, the idea—so that was thinking arose, which I didn't notice as thinking—that I wanted some chocolate chip cookies. I wanted chocolate chip cookies. You can imagine, two months into a retreat. Very strong wanting, which if you asked me later I would have said, "Sure, I thought about cookies and I wanted them." But that's like consciousness, that's not awareness really seeing the process.

Well, I had a car. I went out into town in Barre and bought a bag of chocolate chip cookies. And overall I'm not a binger, so it's not like that. So I had this bag. I went back to my room. And I thought I was being very mindful, you know? And this is when we think we're being aware and we don't notice the attitude in the awareness.

So I was sitting in my room and I thought I was being very mindful. I was focused on undoing the bag, feeling the sensations, opening the bag. I wasn't just thinking about something else and stuffing it down. I was very present, but completely missing the attitude in the mind that was aware—for quite some time. I

ate a lot of those cookies, big bag. I remember because it was like one of those aha moments, you remember. I probably ate two-thirds of the bag just sitting there mindfully, thinking I was mindful, eating the cookie, chewing, feeling it, swallow, feeling it drop down, then seeing okay another cookie, reaching, chewing. This took quite a while. We're slow, we don't notice. And this is where we can think we're mindful and not see the attitude, that third piece—we miss the whole thing.

Suddenly—but I was being aware with awareness—I suddenly got a little bigger and I noticed: oh, chewing, chewing, chewing, the cookie feeling drops down. But there was this yearning feeling in my chest, like this longing, and the cookie was missing that. It would kind of drop past that feeling into my stomach, which was getting more and more full and not very pleasant.

So I said, oh, what's happening in the mind? It's longing, yearning. Oh, it's the loneliness. That's what's occurring. The cookies—they don't really do much for yearning and loneliness, but we think pleasant sensation is going to do it.

So as soon as I saw that—ah, loneliness is like this, that's what's happening, this is what's happening—awareness just relaxes into it. There's nothing to fix. It's just like this. The resistance goes away, but there's clear seeing.

It's okay. Loneliness is painful, and I can be with that. It's just like this. This is life.

And when we open into it—we all experience loneliness sometimes—it can almost open us into compassion for the world. When you can be with your own loneliness, and you're with someone else who's lonely, you don't try to say, "Oh, buck up! Why don't you go to the coffee shop?" You say, "Oh, yes, loneliness is painful. It's like this." You see, it's all connected.

The Tibetans have a saying I love. They say, "Samsara is the urge to correct." Just notice how much we're trying to correct experience. And when you notice that leaning forward, that leaning forward—you don't have to correct that. Oh, leaning forward is like this. Awareness takes care of itself.

Our job is simply what's happening right now. Getting more and more interested in the experience of awareness. It's just a little coming and going. Trusting it more. Don't look for such a big thing. Trusting it more. Not expecting some big thing to happen.

This week here isn't so much about having some wonderful experience by the end. Not at all. It's just waking up moment after moment, learning to shift the habit by getting interested, shifting our refuge from aversion and clinging and trying to correct—to awareness. How do we do that? Not by correcting trying to correct. That's just more wanting. But by simply noticing—oh, awareness of wanting. Wanting is like this.

The awareness is always available. We'll forget for a long time, then it's there. And the more and more we just recognize it, recognize it, recognize it, it starts by itself to get a bit more momentum. It does feel

effortful at first. We have to keep remembering. That's one of the reasons we come to retreat.

As Steve said, this is just our life. We can bring awareness to whatever's happening. But because the habits of getting involved in what's happening—liking it, disliking it, and the third, really taking it as what does that mean about me, all the thoughts about me—we get so seduced by that. We forget about awareness.

So we have more simplified days here, to give us just a little more chance to notice awareness. Because it's the same mind and body. It's not different, not a different process. But as the days go on and you're hopefully not on your email and texting and not doing stuff, the mind will naturally get a little bit quieter. There's just a little less of this incredible amount of input that we meet every day in this world. I mean, it's unbelievable, right? So here, there's a little less. As life is a little simpler, it's a little easier to notice what the process is. That's all. That's all we're doing—practicing that here. Just shifting.

It's so poignant to me that the habits of our mind, what has really become our refuge, is this wanting, leaning in to getting some pleasant, happy experience—or trusting that the unpleasant is bad and that this is the source of my suffering, pushing it away, being in this struggle—and then interpreting all experience as meaning something about me. Do you notice that at all? And that's just thinking. You don't have to stop that.

When we notice, "Oh yeah, thinking it's about me," that's just thinking. But when we don't notice it, we're in struggle again.

It's poignant to me that this is our refuge. We say, "Of course I want to get away from unpleasant. Of course I do." I'm not saying we need to be with unpleasant, that we need to go looking for trouble. But it's going to find us sometimes, and if we can't be with it... We say, "No, of course that makes sense. Of course wanting pleasant makes sense." We'd go to the mat for this—this is how I'm going to be happy in this life. And then even when we know it—I know it—but the habit sneaks up through the back door.

Just keep watching. And this isn't personal. It's not personal at all. It's just deeply ingrained. It's poignant.

There's one sutta where the Buddha describes this, our habit as unawakened ordinary worldlings. He uses the example of being hit by a dart, by an arrow. You experience one form of unpleasant experience, right? And when we're not understanding, not seeing with wise view, then immediately—he says we get upset, we beat our breast, we're anguished, we cry, we tear out our hair, we get all upset. "How could this dart have hit me? How am I going to—oh my god, my knee hurts, I'm going to be in the hospital..." Second dart. He calls that the second dart.

And he says then, in the face of unpleasant experience like that, the ordinary person—the only escape they know from unpleasant experience is to go find a pleasant experience. And so it comes to underlie our mind that we resist the unpleasant and lust after the pleasant. For the ordinary person, that's the only escape they know.

This is samsara. This is samsara.

I feel such compassion, really such sadness, to think of a life that feels like no way out. No way out because the search for pleasant is endless, and nothing lasts, and there's no way to avoid unpleasant.

So this awareness, the steadiness of awareness, is essential—which is why we talk about continuity for seeing the process. In just that moment, it's a step out of samsara.

There's the unpleasant pain as the first dart, and the mind starts: "Oh no, how can it be?" Fear is like this. It's still fear. I know I'm saying it lightly. It's still fear. It still hurts. But that involvement has switched to interest in the awareness, interest in the process. How is this working? What's the actual source of the suffering here? We get interested. Is it the actual sensation? Is it the thoughts in the mind? Can I kind of see how they go back and forth? What's going on here?

And that's the key attitude that really supports us through the continuity of the day—interest in what's happening.

So that's the step out of samsara. That's the other possibility when we're faced with unpleasant or pleasant: to be with it with a calm and peaceful heart and mind. Awareness is our way to discover how that is possible.

We can't do it by willpower. Believe me, I'm sure you've all tried. I've really tried. I know how it feels when I'm caught in fear, reaction, or wanting—like wanting those cookies, wanting, wanting. Wanting is unpleasant. Try just being with wanting without fulfilling it, but really being with it.

It's unpleasant. We get the thing we want, and we don't recognize that wanting itself was unpleasant. We feel happy because we got the thing, but we're happy because the wanting stopped.

Hang out with the wanting. It's just wanting, it's just a feeling, it's just a mood in the mind—so what? Oh, wanting's like this. That sense of recognition is just a little door into the potential of freedom. It's the escape instead of just having to go get something pleasant to avoid the unpleasant. And that's just the endless trying to fix of samsara.

So here we are. That's why the steadiness through the day, the continuity, is essential. Continuity—I kind of call it dread continuity because people hear it and then they think the "should," you know, I should be aware every single moment or I'm not doing it right. I think you've discovered today that it's impossible, it's not in our control. But the idea of continuity is this sense that every moment is equally important. The sitting, the walking, the simplicity, the qigong, the simple activities help us to keep recognizing moment to moment—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, feeling, moods. But standing in the food line is just as valid and important a moment of any of the six objects and potential of awareness, or when you're sitting on the toilet. It really doesn't matter. And the steadiness through the day is where awareness begins to get its own momentum.

And so this is only possible when you get this sense—and we'll keep talking about it—of not trying to make something happen. Not this strong effort of leaning forward. We get exhausted. Not in this practice, not focusing really intensely. Like when I described eating those cookies and I'm really feeling the sensation and I get really intense, I'm missing the big picture, and you get exhausted.

So this is why it takes a couple of days here to start to trust the awareness. You've been all spaced out, you're standing in the food line, and suddenly—oh, standing is like this. I can't... what is that? What is that? Oh, wanting. Curiosity feels like this. And the interest is what takes us through the day. Not heavy focusing, not trying to be aware, but just the remembering and the interest to see how the mind is working.

So in that way, we have the precepts so we're not hurting anybody, but in this way nothing's wrong. Anger comes up—oh, you get interested, how does that work? Happiness comes up, concentration comes up, fine. We don't hate concentration. Calmness comes up, fine. Calmness goes away, fine. Noticing all of it.

So this steadiness through the day with just interest to see how the mind is working is what allows us to keep remembering, keep remembering. If every time you remember, you beat yourself up, pretty soon you don't want to come back into awareness because you don't like beating yourself up. When you notice—oh, I was thinking for who knows how long—but awareness of that, awareness is like this, you start to really shift your refuge, just appreciating awareness. And as we trust it more, it starts to get its own momentum. So that's in these days, these early days, what we're really doing.

So it's not so exciting. Just moment after moment after moment. But relax. Be present with this. And, you know, the day really does get more enjoyable.

So I saw someone out walking, just being at the stream. Now, if you're on a retreat and you're thinking, I'm at the stream—hearing, seeing, happiness, aware of this—fine. But if you're thinking, I'm at the stream but I ought to be in the sitting, then I'd be being aware, and you're not noticing that, there's this sense of struggle. But if you're at the stream and you're like off in la-la land—what helps balance awareness? If you say, I'm going to just take a hike because it's all the same, but you hike all day—because we're so in the habit of wanting and aversion and meaning, we're not in the habit of awareness—you hike all day, you have a good time, but you weren't aware at all, or you were aware for two minutes in thirty hours.

You come back, and the question is: what helps balance your steady awareness? That's how we decide. You sit for a while, you walk for a while, you have a cup of tea if you're getting really tight. But if you think you're really present, if you think, "I'll just have a cup of tea because this is boring," no way. Boredom is like this—boredom is mind, boredom is an object of awareness.

But say you go have a cup of tea anyway, just because you want one. Okay, wanting is taking you down to the tea, but you can bring awareness along with it. You don't abandon awareness just because you're doing something you know is wanting-driven. We think, "I won't pay attention because I'm not really

practicing"—no, no, no. There's nothing that isn't a worthwhile object. Everything brings us back into awareness. So you bring awareness along with you while you're wanting, while you're drinking the tea, and then you notice: did it support continued awareness or not? And that's how we go through the day.

You're not trying to make things turn out the way you want them in order to be happy. We're just trying to know what is happening as it is, moment to moment. Thinking that things should be this way or that way is a kind of expectation, and this creates wanting and leads to aversion. Just noticing things as they are opens us to awareness and peace.

I want to close with a little story—a true story—because this might seem very moment-to-moment simple, maybe a little too refined or separated from life. But really, this simple practice, the commitment to it, the dedication to just this moment, the willingness to just try it and see... You don't have to know how it turns out. Awareness does its job and wisdom comes by itself.

And this is a huge relief. We don't have to create wisdom. We can't. All we can do is think about stuff. How far does that get us in terms of wisdom? With seeing what's happening as it is, wisdom arises naturally. And what's the appropriate action becomes obvious. Life becomes so much simpler in moments. I'm not saying every minute—then we're all caught up. But we know the difference. Sometimes I'll be all caught up and go, "Wow, I'm all caught up now." I know the difference between when I'm all caught up and when things are just occurring. I'm aware—the same things could be occurring in my mind, more or less. I mean, no two moments are exactly the same. But I'm aware: "Oh yeah, the mind's really going on a ride now, isn't it? The Carol story is really whipping itself up." Just like that. The Carol story doesn't go away. But that's how it is. It's a little more spacious.

But this really leads to quite a depth of awakening. I want to say it's not just some esoteric thing that used to happen. Probably a lot of you have read this letter from Mingyur Rinpoche. You know who Mingyur Rinpoche is? He's a Tibetan lama, brother of Tsoknyi Rinpoche. Quite well known, well practiced in this country and all over the world. He has a big organization, and about—I don't know, maybe it was two years ago now, something like that—he let everyone in his organization know he was going on a three-year retreat. So he went to Bodh Gaya, and everything seemed like a normal three-year retreat.

But what he did—he comes from a huge family of Tibetan really awakened lamas—he was in Bodh Gaya, and in the middle of the night, he just left. He took nothing. No one knew where he was going. His brother, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, who's quite a well-known teacher and lama, put a little talk up on YouTube. They were amazed. They were so in awe. He didn't even take a toothbrush. He didn't take any money. He just left and went off, just like the practitioners of old—aimless wandering practice.

And so last fall, one of his Tibetan friends and disciples, Tashi, happened to run into him in Kathmandu. He was so skinny, with a beard and long hair, and Tashi didn't recognize him at first, as he says in this letter. But something about that person felt familiar, so he followed him. Then he realized—oh, it's Mingyur Rinpoche. He went to him and begged, "Can I at least come with you for some time?" He bought

him a sleeping bag and clothes.

Mingyur Rinpoche had become really thin. He'd just been wandering around Nepal and Tibet, practicing in caves, unknown, begging for food. I want to read a little bit from the letter he wrote and gave to Tashi to bring back and put online for his friends and supporters, because it speaks to what I've been reflecting on. It's not about the externals.

He says: "I myself am wandering without any fixed location, staying in isolated mountain hermitages and other such places." We're talking about caves up in the Himalayas. And until he met Tashi, he didn't have a sleeping bag, didn't have a down coat or anything.

"I have experienced feelings of happiness and suffering, rising and falling like waves on the surface of the ocean. At times, food and clothing have been hard to come by, and I have felt cold, hungry, and thirsty. Even when I have begged for alms, I have received nothing but insults and harsh words. At other times, I have received food and clothing effortlessly, without even asking for them, and in my mind it felt as though I were enjoying the pleasures of the gods.

"While I have experienced both happiness and suffering, the most important thing is that a deep and heartfelt sense of certainty has arisen in the depths of my being, such that no matter what happens, I know that the very true nature of these experiences, their very essence, is that of timeless awareness and vast compassion. This natural clarity of awareness is the very essence and true nature of our minds, with us from the beginning.

"Therefore, we maintain the flow of pure awareness to the best of one's ability—without meditating"—he means without focusing hard on an object—"yet not getting lost in distraction. Recognizing the importance of this, I have passed my days feeling joyful and content, wandering through the mountains and valleys and staying here and there. From my heart, I sincerely encourage all of you to practice diligently in this manner as well."

We may have lesser joys and sorrows than his, certainly lesser sufferings while we're here. But every moment offers that same chance to re-recognize simple awareness. That's enough. Just the determination, the sincerity from our heart to remember when we can, to keep showing up. And when accurate recognition occurs, wisdom comes by itself.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for listening.

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