Meditation: Experiencing the Mind and Body Directly with Right Understanding

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:02:02

So tonight I want to talk about essentially right view, but in a very pragmatic way. It's actually at the beginning of every retreat, when I first start talking, I always end up talking about this. And I really tried to talk about something else tonight, but I just couldn't, because this just feels so important to me, to my heart, and just to understanding what we're doing.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya described meditation once as simply experiencing the mind and body directly from moment to moment with the right understanding. That's the little caveat at the end—with the right understanding. Experiencing the mind and body directly moment to moment, as you know, also isn't that simple. So what I want to talk about is what do we mean by right understanding, right view.

When we translate it as "right view," it runs into our tendency to think right means wrong, I'm good, I'm bad. And then we can get our backs up about it right away. I'll actually move into that habit of our mind later on. But one thing the Buddha said about why right view is so important—and this connects to the talk last night about the four right endeavors—is this: "I do not see a single other thing so inclined to cause the arising of wholesome states not yet arisen, or if arisen, to cause wholesome states to further develop and increase, as right view. For one with right view, wholesome states not yet arisen do arise, and if arisen, wholesome states are inclined to further develop and increase." He goes through all the four right endeavors. I'm not going to go through that, but just consider the importance of right view.

The way I want to talk about this tonight is in a very pragmatic, simple way. What wise understanding, what right understanding, can we bring to our moment-to-moment mindfulness practice? What attitude do we bring?

If you look in the suttas, in the discourses, there's a lot of information about right view. It could seem as though you're talking about learning and coming to agree with a whole set of philosophical principles. It's not that. I'm not going to go into that at all tonight. But the way I love to talk about right view—the attitude we bring to our meditation moment to moment—is that it's not about philosophy or theory or believing anything. I actually really like translating right view into English quite literally as recognizing accurately what's occurring in the moment, in our mind, in our body.

So can I just explore a little bit what that means—recognizing accurately—and what's in the way? Why don't we recognize accurately, and why does that cause so much suffering? The right attitude is: it's like this. Without aversion, without clinging, then I can recognize accurately. Is there something I can do about

it? Sometimes, apparently not.

What I really love about the Buddha Dhamma and what I read about the Buddha is that despite the fact that there can be millions of very abstruse and precise theories and philosophical concepts and things to learn and lists and all of that, at the core, the Buddha was really concerned with the salient points, the facts of our life. Why are we unhappy? Why do we suffer from dis-ease, and what will free us from that? He just wouldn't get sidetracked into discussions about many fascinating things that he said don't really lead to our own understanding.

What's also really clear is that everything he said—and what I'm saying tonight too—is not about believing this or that, because belief won't do it. Belief may incline us to lend an ear, to listen. But the very famous, common saying of the Buddha is *ehipassiko*—come and see, come and look, inquire for yourself, investigate for yourself. He's saying turn our attention to what's going on in this moment, in our experience, in our mind, in our body, so-called internal, so-called external, and see what's really going on. This is really the place where we discover the source of dis-ease, the source of freedom from that dis-ease—the seeds of both rising in our own mind and heart stream, here and now.

Something interesting about the Buddha, the so-called peaceful one: after his complete awakening, he woke up into the same world that he was living in before. The world was still filled with war, injustice, inequality, violence, greed, hatred, prejudice. The world didn't change. And he kept on living in that world and engaging in that world. But from what I can understand from reading—I'm not at all claiming to know how the Buddha's mind and heart was—from what he said, from what we can see, what changes is the understanding of what's occurring in one's experience, the understanding of what we really are, what experience really is. And that shift of perspective, that shift of recognition, then of course changes how we understand, how we respond, how we relate to whatever's going on in the world.

And this is the suffering that the Buddha says we can free ourselves from. You can't change the whole external world. But Buddhism also isn't about pacifism—you don't try to change anything. It's about: where can we start? Where does suffering begin? Where does it end in our own experience? The seeds are in our own mind and heart. So what changes? How we recognize and how we respond, internally and externally.

An example is when Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Nonviolence means you not only refuse to shoot a person, you also refuse to hate a person." So where we start is in the recognition—not even refusing to hate a person, but the clear recognition that hatred and greed and desire don't make any sense when we're recognizing things accurately. It's not like we have to somehow get out the pick and the shovel and root out every wanting that's arising in the mind. Have you tried that? Somehow another one seems to find a little hole to come in, because it's the understanding, the recognition.

What I love about right view is that when we recognize accurately, the responses that lead to our habits of desire, our habits of clinging and aversion and confusion and "me, me, me, me, me"—have you noticed

that one?—what leads to those habits just stops arising. It's like they're abandoned, but not abandoned by an act of will. The steadiness of clear seeing, the steadiness of clear recognition, mindfulness, naturally is a condition for the arising of wisdom, which is the accurate recognition. It's just so cool.

One phrase that's often used to describe clear seeing, clear recognition—Bhante used it the other night—*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*, translated in the old English translations as "knowledge and vision of things as they are." But several friends recently have told me—friends who know Pali a lot better than I—that a much more accurate translation is "knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be in this moment."

Do you get a sense of the different feeling? "Things as they are"—boom, things, solid, are, not changing. That's kind of how we normally look at things. But "things as they have come to be," to me, gives much more a sense of the causes and conditions all coming together, leading to, bringing us to this moment as it has come to be right now. And it's still in flux. You get a sense of the movement, of the interweaving of all the conditions giving rise to this moment, which is itself a cause and condition for giving rise to the next moment. Things as they have come to be. It keeps me from landing in solidity.

For example, very simply: think about all the causes and conditions that you even know of—and we don't know a lot of them—that have come together to allow you to be sitting here right now. How many? We can start with all the obvious ones, whichever ones are obvious to you. You're healthy. Somewhere back there in some other world, you decided to come here. And here you are. You made all those decisions. The people that support you. The money to come. You're healthy enough. Those are the obvious ones.

But then there's all the other ones that go back to just the fact that we're alive. That your parents got together, or you wouldn't even be here. That there's food to eat. And where does the food come from? The farmers who grow the food. And how do the farmers grow their food? What families support the farmers? How did the food get here? What about the people who drive the trucks and drive the trains? And then, of course, we're using gasoline. So whether we like those oil fields or not, up in Canada, they probably had something to do with the fact that we're sitting here. Because even if you walked, unless you grew the food and you didn't use any fertilizer whatsoever—anyway, we're all connected to everything. If you keep going, where can you stop?

To me, it goes back to the Big Bang. I was reading this book by Bill Bryson about science, and—long story short—he's talking about the static on TV, and some of that static is actually generated from the cosmic rays that came from the Big Bang. So if you're really bored and you watch the static on the TV, someplace you're seeing the universe as we know it coming into existence. That's kind of far out, this whole concept, but things as they have come to be—where do we stop?

It takes away the solidity. We start to experience just a little shake-up of the views that we don't even know are in the background, coloring our perception. This brings us to the distortions of perception. This is really the key to why we don't recognize accurately.

And we don't recognize the distortions. But when we see things as they've come to be, this sense that you can never just stop and say, "Now it's this, separate from anything else." It's like a time-lapse movie of a bulb growing into a plant—there's the stem and the leaves and the flower, and then the flower wilts and drops off and goes back to the earth and turns into earth. And if you kept watching that, where could you stop it at any time and say, "This stem is separate from the bulb"? It's separate from—now it's just stem, now it's just flower. It's like that. There's no kind of resting place, which we hate when we want one. But when it's just "this is how it is in this moment," a whole lot of our sense of confusion and distortion goes away.

So this is really at the heart of awakening—awakening from confusion, from dis-ease. The heart of awakening isn't about moving into some other plane, floating off on a cloud somewhere. It's really, at the most profound level, a fundamental shift of perception. A fundamental shift of how we recognize the nature of reality in a moment—just in a moment. How we recognize affects how we think and describe, respond and react. It's at the heart of everything.

And we can see this even in a little moment when you have what we call an insight. An insight can be personal, psychological. It can be about something that's going on in the practice. But when we see the shift from being caught in the "meanness," the taking it so personally, to seeing just this cause-and-effect process—it's just nature. These particular causes lead to this condition in this moment.

And wishing this moment were different—has anyone ever wished this moment were different? How useful is that? How can this moment be different? It's impossible. Byron Katie, that teacher in California, said, "When you fight with reality, you lose." This moment is this moment. It can't be different. But when we shift to see causes and conditions, taking it so personally, our confused reactions just pop away.

A few of you have given examples like this. Sitting, for example, and there's a lot of pain, wherever in the body. And then sitting with the pain, however you're particularly reacting, responding to it. And then recognizing a lot of aversion in the mind, whichever form that aversion takes—whether it's outward hatred, inward judgment, just basic, pure, unadulterated aversion. Everything's getting worse and worse and tighter and tighter, and there's either a sense of "What's wrong with me? If I could do it right, it would go away," or "If this idiot didn't give us forty-five-minute sittings, I wouldn't hurt." Whatever. We're all wrapped up in the reactions.

And then there's a moment where you see: oh, the pain arising is natural, just natural. If the body sits in a position for some amount of time without moving, pain's going to arise. And the amount of time changes all the time, depending on the conditions of our body at that particular moment. It's just nature. There's nothing personal in it. And then, just seeing that, the personal goes out. Often it's like, "Oh, the aversion is completely extra and actually unnecessary." I mean, this isn't something we're telling ourselves—"Oh, you're bad, this is unnecessary." It's like we just see: oh, this is how it is. Unpleasant physical experience. Aversion is not a necessary response to that. Boom—sometimes the whole bubble just bursts. And it's just

what it is.

Now, this isn't always what we might think it's going to be like to have insight. Usually we imagine the bubble bursts, the pain goes away, the mind is really filled with light and bliss, and then we think, "Oh, I got it." And sometimes I feel so much compassion when someone comes in and says it's their second or third retreat, and their first retreat they had the great retreat—filled with light, filled with bliss, all this wonderful stuff happened. I think, oh, I'm so sad for you. Because now you're going to spend God knows how long trying to get that back, never believing that this other stuff going on is actually where we're going to learn the seeds of confusion and the seeds of peace.

None of you believed that, did you? But it's true.

So that's why it's so fascinating, but also important, to recognize what are the distortions—to even see if there are assumptions, ideas in the back of our mind about what's good, what's bad, what's right, what's wrong—or just how we interpret experience without even recognizing that we're interpreting, because it's so familiar. We don't even know it's a view. We just think, "Well, this is just how it is."

So the classic—well, I just want to read from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, one of the classic descriptions of how we keep getting caught.

As the Buddha said when he first woke up and wasn't so inclined to teach—and as Bonnie mentioned—he said, "Oh, there are some beings with a little dust on their eyes, a little distortion, not so much." And he was really moved by compassion, it's said, because when he looked around, he said everyone wants to be happy. We all share that. And in our confusion, in our not really understanding what the potential is, what true freedom from dis-ease is, in beings' efforts to be happy, they keep on doing just the thing that keeps them spinning in confusion, in suffering. And so that moved him to compassion, it is said.

The classic description of this is samsara—that seemingly endless cycle of leaning into, wanting, becoming, getting, losing, the next, the next, the next. Whether you just talk about it in this one life or over lifetimes, it's plenty enough to talk about it in this life to get the sense. Most of you have heard the phrase "ocean of sorrow," right?

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche describes it as a form of renunciation, which coming off of Bhante's talk the other night, I appreciate. He talked about renunciation as the foundation, the root of our path. It "implies not only the strong wish to free oneself from life's immediate sorrows, but more profoundly, the wish to free oneself from the seemingly unending cycle of samsara, which arises from a heartfelt weariness and disillusionment with the endless quest for gratification, approval, profit, and status."

Let me read that again. Does it resonate at all? The heartfelt weariness and disillusionment—that may or may not resonate—but the endless quest for gratification, approval, profit, and status. I'm projecting some, of course; I don't know how you all feel. But the quest for gratification, status, approval—I'm assuming most of us would say, yes, you can see how that certainly is a source of suffering and we'd like to abandon

it.

But samsara shows up on an even much more subtle level. That's really what I want to talk about tonight: the habits that come in, how we're perceiving moment to moment here with our mindfulness practice.

This can be a challenging teaching, this idea of renouncing the quest for gratification. We might say, okay, approval and all that—we don't need that. But gratification? I didn't really sign up not to have any more gratification. But what are we talking about with that? He's not saying it's bad, but futile. How does it keep us? What keeps us on this path, even when intellectually we know about it?

Just some ways of describing it: that leaning forward, that sense that the next—when Guy talked about sense desire, but it's not just with sense desire—that this next thing will make me happy. That happiness and gratification and peace is going to come from just getting that thing we lack. You get a sense of how it keeps us off balance. It keeps us believing that yearning. As Guy said, we even almost misinterpret that yearning as a kind of pleasantness. It's comfortable anyway, because it's so familiar. Even though it keeps us off balance, this sense of insufficiency—of I'm not enough, this moment isn't enough. Even when things are pretty good, could it always just be a little bit better?

There's a Tibetan saying that describes samsara as the urge to correct. Look at that in your practice. What's happening now? That's the steadiness of mindfulness. It just could be a little bit clearer, a little bit steadier, whatever. That little movement is the movement out of peace into the whole world of wanting and becoming and losing and wanting and becoming and losing.

So it keeps our attention focused outward on the next gratification. It keeps us focused on the object, on the thing. And what we don't see is the vastness, the connectedness, the non-separation. We just see this thing: it's going to be good, it's going to be bad, it's all about me and gratification and getting everything copacetic. We can't recognize accurately what's really going on, because we're not even really looking at what's really going on. The perception is colored by this wanting, by this view that we don't even recognize, because without turning awareness onto our experience, we don't even know there's any other option. That's what's so sad. We don't know there's any other option.

Awareness practice is kind of like a shift to the bigger picture. And we can see, when we're wanting success—or when samsara is keeping us trying to get a new thing, a new thing—and we can see we're not getting it, that is a little more obvious that it's suffering. Although we forget and go for the next new thing.

But what's even more insidious to me—the most insidious aspect—is what Guy mentioned, where we confuse the yearning, this moving, this always trying to have some kind of pleasant feeling, we confuse that with pleasure, with happiness. And because we don't turn around and look at the experience, we just keep looking to the next thing and may not even recognize it.

I know this makes us sound like doofuses. So let me give you a personal example, which will make me sound like a doofus, but that's okay.

I noticed a couple of years ago—and this, for me, was a great description of *saṃsāra*—because if we knew it was suffering, if we knew it was making us unhappy, we'd be motivated to stop. But we think it's making us happy. That's where it's so insidious.

So for some reason, I'm a big fan of watching professional men's tennis, which is odd since I'm the most unathletic person you could ever meet. But I am. And so I watch it, I get really involved, and it's the only sport I watch. When I've talked about this before, people always come up to me about all their other sports—"Yeah, I really know what you mean, I could never understand sports until I started watching..."

Anyway, I don't do it to make myself miserable. I do it because I think it's enjoyable. I think it's enhancing the quality of my life. Obviously I have a lot of choice about what to do with my time and my life. So I hadn't really explored it until two summers ago.

Of course I have certain people that I most appreciate watching—I'm trying to put it in neutral language. Me and fifteen million other people enjoy watching the same person, so I'm hardly unique or creative about it. But anyway, two years ago this guy was about to win Wimbledon, which is the most prestigious of all the tournaments, and it would have been amazing if he did because at his age it would have put him back to number one—the best possible outcome it could be, right?

And so that happened. It was the best possible outcome. And you're so happy. For how long? A day, two days, not every moment of those days for sure. And then it's over because the Olympics are coming. It's all gone. You have to go through the whole thing all over again.

And then I started noticing what's actually going on when I'm watching a tennis match, when this guy's playing. Am I actually enjoying it? No, it's torment. You can ask my friends who've watched me watch. It's really torment. Sometimes if it's a tie in the fourth set, I have to leave and go take a walk. I just can't bear it. I don't even know the guy. I probably wouldn't like him. That's a whole other thing—what is this all about? It's a fascinating look at the human psyche.

But anyway, I'm doing it because I think it's enhancing the quality of my life. I'm doing it because I think I'm enjoying it. And I'm a nervous wreck, and I hate being nervous. I dislike suspense. I'm watching it all for the occasional amazing shot, which is like a tenth of a second—wow, that's amazing—then it's gone. At least they replay it, so you get it twice, then it's over.

So then I started to look: wow, what am I putting myself through?

So I haven't actually completely stopped, I have to say. But with steady awareness, you can't hide from yourself anymore. It's not quite as totally—I can't really pretend that it's completely pleasant. It's clear to me that it's samsara.

And to me, I love that as an example, because with the big suffering stuff, that's not a hard sell. But with this, it is. And it's not like someone telling me it's bad. It's just the steadiness of awareness of what's

actually going on in my mind and body, in my perceptions, without any judgment. I wasn't trying to say I'm bad or good, just asking: what's really going on here? And whoa—it's really different from my idea of it.

This is where I think samsara continues to seduce us. Because until we know or trust really deeply in our heart from our own experience that there's another way of relating to experience, one that offers a different way of peace and happiness—until we know that for ourselves, we don't know any other option.

This may be a somewhat simple example, but I can get quite discouraged sometimes just looking at how this quest for pleasant experience, basically, where it gets us in the world.

I was listening to the BBC this morning. I always like to listen; there's always something interesting about how the world is. So today, they mentioned it was the fifth anniversary of Grand Theft Auto 5, the video game. I'm completely ignorant of video games, so they were describing it. This was all very serious on the BBC. They were interviewing the woman who was the announcer, interviewing all these men—not kids going, "Oh, awesome!"—but very serious, professorial video game expert types. I have no idea what makes somebody a video game expert.

They were talking about how it's one of the crowning achievements of creativity, with very artistic visual qualities and satirical humor. Going on and on about it. Apparently, it's one of the most popular video games of this generation.

So the newscaster asks, "But is it ultra-violent?" And they played some clips of some of the things that are incredibly violent, misanthropic. And these experts say, "Yeah, misanthropic." I looked up misanthropy—here's the definition: hatred, dislike, or distrust of humankind. So these experts are going, "Yeah, okay, it's misanthropic. So what? But it's creative."

And she said, "But isn't it dangerous?" "No, not dangerous. Sure, it's violent. But you don't have to do violence. There are other really cool things you can do in the game too. You have a choice." And the misanthropy, that's just a side note. They're going on about how amazingly creative and wonderful this is.

Okay, easy for me—I'm not sucked up into that. Someone else could say that about tennis, I grant you. But I don't think it's really quite the same. Just to see where we go... And actually, what was more shocking to me wasn't the game or how they described it, but these really serious professor types completely jumping over the violence and the hatred of humankind, saying, "Well, that doesn't matter. That doesn't make it dangerous"—never mind if 135 million people are buying this thing. What's getting put into the minds of all of us?

We can't do anything at that level about what other people choose to put in their minds and how they choose to look at what's coloring their perceptions. But we can do that for ourselves.

That's what we are doing here.

The classic way, of course, that the Buddha describes one of the habits of misperception that we get into—and you all know this, this is nothing you don't know, I just read it again from the sutta because it always deeply touches me—is how the Buddha describes all of our experience, the "all," as simply kind of rotating sixth sense experiences. Has someone said that here? Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching with the body, and the mental world of thinking and emotions, formations. That's all that's happening, over and over and over. As Joseph says, seventeen billion times in a moment, fast. But that's it. And then we just construct all these explanations and worlds out of it.

So these are happening over and over and over. And what we're really good at practicing is: something comes—a sight, a sound, a smell, a taste—and it comes together with that, our minds feel it very subtly as being kind of pleasant, or kind of unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. This is something we often don't notice, and we'll talk about that more in the instructions in a few days.

But the net effect, just in a general going through our day, is we really practice: as things come up, if it's pleasant, we like it, or we think it's good, or we don't even know we like it, but there's the leaning. If it's unpleasant, it's assessed as off, bad, wrong, gotta be fixed—something. If it's neither pleasant nor unpleasant, it's either okay or we don't really notice. It doesn't mean much about me, so it's not very interesting, right?

We practice this; we've practiced this our whole life. It's not bad or good, but it's so comfortable, so familiar, so "how it is," that this becomes the lens through which, when we're not aware of it, we assess and evaluate experience. If it's on the pleasant end of things, it tends to be seen as acceptable, or good, or going in the right direction—even if we don't even get into clinging. The bliss states, for instance—very few people come and say, "You know, my practice really stinks. I sit down, the mind gets calm, and bliss arises. I'm really having a problem with this." Very few, until they understand.

The unpleasant, just subtly unpleasant—that becomes the lens through which we evaluate so much of experience. It's bad, it's wrong, I'm wrong, it shouldn't be happening, whatever. And so we're right back in that cycle of samsara: get rid of the unpleasant and get more of the pleasant. Not only just to feel good, but because the unexamined deep belief is that really, pleasant is the best we can do as human beings, that this is where freedom and happiness lie. But we don't say that to ourselves—that sounds rather simplistic.

And I'm sitting here blabbing this, telling it to you, I've said it a million times, and I look at it in myself and I still get amazed. Even when my mind's in a fairly present, subtle state and I start to feel I'm kind of glitching on, caught up on something, I sit and look at it and go, "Oh, wow. Holding onto the pleasant again." Not just holding, but thinking the pleasant is right and unpleasant is wrong. Let's just call it that way. And then we get into struggle with it.

Here's the Buddha. Now this is the part that is always very poignant to me. The obvious: he talks about an "untaught worldling," which is a word in Pali. When he feels a painful bodily feeling, he or she worries and grieves, laments, beats her breast, weeps, and is distraught. So she thus experiences two kinds of

unpleasant feeling: bodily and mental. Have you noticed that? It's as if you were pierced by a dart, and following the first being hit by a dart, you shoot yourself with a second dart. My knee hurts, I'm so bad, I'm so awful, it's so wrong. The two darts.

What does an awakened person do? They experience one sort of bodily, physical, unpleasant feeling. And that's all, this peace around it. But this is what unawakened people do when we don't look: having been touched by a painful feeling, we resist it and resent it. We pull away, we push away. And under the impact of that painful feeling, one then proceeds to enjoy sensual happiness.

Why? Because an untaught worldling does not know of any other escape from painful feelings except the enjoyment of sensual happiness.

I find this so poignant. We don't know of any other escape from painful or unpleasant feelings except to go grab some pleasant feeling somewhere. Can you relate to that at all? It's not that there's anything bad about it—it's just that that's the only way we know.

If we don't know that there's a path, if we don't know that the real freedom of our mind and heart doesn't mean we have to get away from all unpleasant feelings—because that's impossible—but that there's a peace, an ease that allows our heart and mind to rest fully in this moment. Pleasant moment, unpleasant moment, neither pleasant nor unpleasant moment. Fully, without resistance, without clinging, without making up a whole story about what it means about me. It's just this.

You get a sense of how much ease that brings. A painful feeling in my knee—we're picking simple stuff, but it's also very true with our complex personality habits and our deep-seated tendencies toward self-hatred or blame or shame. All of these are brought about by understandable causes and conditions, arising in this moment. We can understand those causes and conditions, so they're valid. But the arising itself is extremely unpleasant, scary. Whether we then turn that unpleasantness back on ourselves with more blame, or whether we turn the aversion outward on the world, either way we're in the spinning of more wanting, more aversion—back in the futility of samsara.

And that moment of "Okay, pain is like this. Self-hatred feels like this"—one of my teachers uses that languaging a lot, and I've found it enormously helpful. I'm all caught up in some story, and I think I'm being mindful. I'm naming every thought, I'm looking at all this stuff. But I'm missing the big picture, the giant fire that's coloring my whole mind that's paying attention.

The Pali word for aversion is *dosa*. I like it. Short, sweet, clear—it colors a lot of territory, and I don't get so caught up in the story. Instead of going, "Aversion to myself, that's based on my past conditioning, and that's loneliness, that's alienation, oh I see the thought, I see that..."—just *dosa*. Dosa is like this. Oh.

In that moment, it's unpleasant. But awareness can just totally be there without needing to move away, without needing an explanation, without needing to do anything—just open, present, touching it with kindness. Or a really beautiful pleasant experience, same thing. Wow, bliss is like this. No big story about

me, no big explanation, no going in, no pulling away. Instead of the struggle between "Oh my knee, and what's going to happen, and like Monty was talking about—the hospital, I'll never walk again, and what about the past, and what about the future, and me me me"—just: Oh, burning is like this. You actually feel the burning more clearly. But that's okay.

I really feel this—I've experienced it so many times. This is my daily life too. I'm not just talking about sitting on the cushion, particularly with complicated mental and psychological patterns. Like for me, self-hatred is a big pattern. And I know a lot of the past history—personal, familial, societal—the conditions that have given rise to this pattern in my particular individual psyche. And then I recognize that this particular individual pattern is also representative of something larger. I'm not the only person in the world who experiences this, I'm pretty sure.

When I'm fighting it or trying to understand it or trying to do something about it or trying to own it, I'm still subtly caught in the belief that it's unpleasant and it's bad, it's wrong. But when I can say, "Oh, self-hatred feels like this"—there's this feeling of complete relief that comes when I know my full awareness has just landed in what's really happening with no more contentiousness. Non-contention with reality. In this moment, it feels like this. There's an ease that comes.

That is what the Buddha is saying. For one who doesn't have a path, what is a cleaner, a more sure escape from unpleasant feeling? It's simply to open into what's happening now with simple, pure mindfulness—without assessment, without self-reference, without judging. Just: it's what it is.

But if we don't do that, he says, the underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feeling comes to be a habit in the mind. And then the tendency to resist unpleasant comes to be a habit in the mind.

And the tendency—this is my language—to have no clue about neutral feeling becomes a habit in the mind. Habit, because that's what we do over and over. That's all. It's just because it's what we do.

And so I feel so grateful just to know that there's another possibility. A lot of the time, my mind goes back into the habit. But even recognizing the habit is, again, a moment of awareness. "Oh, yeah, I'm really caught in wanting. It feels like this."

So the mindfulness—what it does, the steadiness of mindfulness that we're trying to cultivate here, this moment after moment after moment—first is that bare attention, as I just described. Just learning how to bring a mind that's in that moment, as Tejaniya says, with the right understanding. Meeting what's happening now, just as it is, without judging it. Pleasant—good. Unpleasant—bad. Neutral—who cares? No. Just as it is. Just as it is.

And the steadiness of that represents a shift. Generally, we're so engrossed in the object—and this is another thing samsara does: get this, get rid of that, me, this, that—that we don't see the big picture. So with our steadiness of mindfulness, of awareness, what's really happening is we're shifting from entrancement with objects to seeing the process. How is the mind working? How is confusion and

suffering arising in this moment? How is it dissipating? How is it being abandoned? How does it not arise in this moment? How does wholesomeness arise? We're really getting more interested in that.

So when we speak of awareness—Ajahn Sumedho has this line: "Awareness is the point that includes," meaning it's just at this moment, but in this moment it includes everything, anything. Or the way I say it: awareness doesn't care, meaning awareness doesn't have preference. It's not that you can be aware of something so horrible it's going to damage awareness. That can't happen. We can forget about awareness, but once you remember again, does awareness seem kind of ragged? Does it seem like it got a little worn out? Does it seem like somehow it got all dirty? No. Awareness is just pure and vivid and clean, always. When we again remember a moment of mindfulness, here it is.

The way I think of it is that for me, the love of awareness or the trust in awareness gradually becomes—in the habits of my mind and heart—stronger or more reliable, more trustworthy than the love or trust in the search for pleasure. As long as my comfort, my love, my trust, my refuge, even unconsciously, is in pleasure—if that's where I find my comfort—then subtly, in the big stress moments, that's where the mind will go.

But more and more, we start to really experience just those little moments. Notice them, those little moments that are so freeing, when it's just the awareness of something pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, either one. Just that ease when the whole construction of "me" and "good" and "bad" and "this" and "that" and "what did they say" and "what do I mean" and "what's going to happen"—ah, burning—falls away. Just notice the peace, the freedom, the space that comes from that. Because noticing these wholesome moments also reinforces the trust, the confidence, your own confidence from your own experience. That's the only place it can ever really come from.

So in recognizing process rather than being caught in objects, let me give you a couple of examples. One very simple one that I like, again from Tejaniya. He said, very simply—and this isn't even meditation—someone knows a car is passing, right? You're aware that a car is passing. He asks, "Is this meditative awareness?" And he says no, anyone knows a car is passing. A dog knows a car is passing. What's the difference? What would make it meditative awareness, where we're aware of process?

His way of saying it is: How do you know you are aware that a car is passing? What are you aware of that's actually happening? So you would notice if there's the sense, the experience of hearing, the experience of seeing. And then you'd be aware of the mental process—the sense of hearing, maybe the perception of car, or the mental image of car. You get a sense of really recognizing the process that's happening, versus just "oh, a car is passing." We don't really look at it otherwise.

Do you get a sense of what that means? And to me, it's a lot more interesting.

What was really happening just then? Because there's only those six things: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing with the body, mental constructs.

Another way to understand how these habits the Buddha talked about—the dart of aversion to the unpleasant, clinging to the pleasant, not noticing the neutral—how they come to distort perception. Starting to explore that is, again, also moving into process.

So I think Guy said the other night, but it's just looking when there's real greed in the mind, that real *taṇhā* , that thirst, that leaning forward. As Guy said, focus on the thirst. But notice the effect in the mind—how it kind of narrows and limits our perception. And what we perceive, if we're perceiving the thing we want, the Tibetans have a saying that wanting puts feathers on the object. You know, it makes it look so much more attractive. If you see it later and the wanting is gone, you think, "Huh?" Have you ever bought something, like something to wear, and you get it home and you go, "What was I thinking?"

Or an example I often give: I was walking in the desert in Yucca Valley a few years ago. And I love it there—the few animals, the Joshua trees, the space, the clarity. I just love walking in the desert. And one morning I was walking there, and the thought came through my mind, "Maybe I'll see a tortoise." They have these large land tortoises. They're few; you don't see them very often.

And I was quite happy until that thought came—which could have just come and gone. The thought itself is not a problem. But the clinging—ah, that thought was pleasant. And I glommed on: "Yeah, maybe I'll see a tortoise." And then I didn't recognize until I got home that the rest of the walk was, "Where's a tortoise? Where's a tortoise?" And all of a sudden everything became not tortoise, not tortoise, not tortoise. Everything I would look at, all I wanted was the tortoise. And nothing else counted.

That's what wanting does. It shuts us out. It really narrows and limits and imprisons the mind.

Aversion does the same thing—the pushing away of what we don't like. But have you noticed that when something's occurring that you don't like and you push it away, somehow it seems to expand and take over the world? Is there a sound in here you've heard that you really don't like? And can your mind just go, "Okay, one sound," and pay attention to something else? Oh no. It's married to that sound.

Thich Nhat Hanh gives a great example. If you have one little rough tooth, can you keep your tongue off of it? The rest of your teeth are fine. You're not running your tongue over your teeth all day. But that one rough tooth—forget about it. And then the aversion gets stronger. And you feel the tooth, which makes the aversion stronger. And then the aversion completely colors everything. And then if some poor soul walks in front of you while you're filled with this aversion over this rough tooth, you're like, "I can't believe they're doing—" whatever judgment comes out. And then you think, "What's the matter with me? Judging, I'm so horrible." And the aversion is just coloring everything.

Can you relate to that at all, or am I the only one?

And until we see it, we don't know. When we see it: "Oh, aversion is like this." I'm serious. It's not like every moment is like that.

But it can really be, oh, *aversion*. I'm so glad to see it. Really. Because once we see it, we can feel it. Aversion is unpleasant. So it's the same thing—we don't want to be with it because it's unpleasant. But you can feel it. You can relax into it. You don't have to, as Pema Chödrön says, spend your life walking around tensed up as if you're sitting in a dentist's chair waiting for the next unpleasant experience to hit. It's just like this. I haven't yet managed to do that in the actual dentist's chair, but I think about it.

The third delusion is neutral feeling, and it manifests in two ways. One is, of course, that it's all about me. This is really the third delusion, and it's so much fun to notice—really, it's fun to notice if you don't take it so personally. And it isn't personal. Every single person here, unless one of you is completely liberated—and I don't know, maybe you are—but otherwise, we're all sitting here, and so much of what happens, whatever it is—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, never mind thinking—how many degrees does it take to come back to me? They talk about six degrees of separation. I would say probably not even one degree of separation, right?

Somebody walks by—oh, they're walking better than me. Somebody has a pair of shoes—I'd like to have a pair of shoes like that. Somebody makes a noise, or you make a noise—what's everyone thinking about me? It's amazing. Oh, the fall is so lovely, and I'm so lucky to be here in it. Just to notice this. Not to judge it. Because the judgment becomes, "I shouldn't be thinking about me. I should be more enlightened than to think about me." Forget about it. It's going to happen. But it isn't personal. Just notice it. It's really fun. And then it's not personal.

The last thing I want to say is that the other way we get lost in delusion is—and this is one of the reasons it's so hard to maintain the steadiness of awareness—that so much of our experience is just simply mundane, repetitive experience. Why do we get bored with walking? We're waiting for something worth paying attention to to happen. Why do we kind of zone out brushing our teeth? It's not really compelling—okay, brush the teeth, big deal. But when's the insight going to come?

How much of our experience is just this moment again and again and again? How many times do we get out of bed and brush our teeth and go to pee and put on our socks every day? Every moment's different. And so this kind of glossing over, dulling out with the mundane, waiting for something worth paying attention to, waiting to get an insight from—this is, again, the same thing as being caught in samsara. So just wake it up in this moment with the simplicity of awareness.

I'll end with a quote from Dipa Ma, this little Indian lady who was an amazing, amazing yogi, just filled with metta and concentration. She was remarkable. She said: "There is so much sameness in ordinary life. We are always experiencing everything through the same set of lenses. But when greed, hatred, and delusion are not present, you see everything fresh and new all the time."

Every moment is new. Life was dull before. Now every day, every moment is full of taste and zest.

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

Thank you for your kind attention.

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