Right View at the Beginning: Why am I Practicing?

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 49:49

One of the most expansive yet simple definitions of meditation that I've heard recently comes from Sayadaw Tejaniya. He describes meditation as experiencing the mind and body directly from moment to moment with the right understanding. Very simple. All-inclusive. And the key point I really want to talk about tonight is this: experiencing the mind and body directly with the right understanding.

In a very important way, you could say that the beginning, the most important aspect—not just as we begin our retreat but as we continue whatever phase we're in, in our life of awakening, our life of awareness—is that we bring to our meditation, to the whole day, the understanding that we begin with right view, with right understanding. This is the first step on the Noble Eightfold Path.

You might say, "Right, if I had right view and right understanding, I wouldn't need to be following the Noble Eightfold Path and sitting here meditating." But as with everything, there are degrees.

In a simple but comprehensive and profound way, to talk about right understanding in terms of beginning a retreat, in terms of where we are in our practice, is to have some understanding of why you're doing this. Really deeply, why mindfulness? Why an intensive meditation retreat? But even that's too narrow. Why do we need to experience the mind and body directly, with or without right understanding? What's the point?

This is a question that doesn't have one philosophic answer, something we can read and study and say, "Okay, I know this is why," because that doesn't cut it.

The simple answer is that the right view, the reason for our practice and meditation, is the cultivation of wisdom. Wisdom—a buzzword that could mean many things. As I mean it here, the wisdom that the Buddha is pointing us towards, the wisdom that develops through our wholehearted commitment to moment-to-moment awareness, to whatever's happening right now. The commitment is to the awareness, not to what's happening. And that's the biggest shift.

The wisdom isn't about coming to a particular insight. "Oh, now I've got an anattā insight. I can chalk it up, write it in my books, and when I leave, I'll be a better person." That might all happen, and that would be cool—nothing wrong with that. But the way we know to do things is to do something for a result. A very wholesome result. Yet with that in mind, it can often be the case that we become so focused on trying to be mindful correctly, being more mindful, being mindful of every moment, that it becomes an activity I am

doing to achieve a specific result. If you get a sense of this, you'll see it's just another activity in saṃsāra. "Now I'm doing mindfulness. And if I do it right, I'll get whatever my particular story is." But we'll get something, because we wouldn't do anything if we weren't going to get something for it, right?

This isn't the wisdom of the Buddha. But this is all we know. If we said nothing good is going to happen, everything is going to keep on going just like it is, the world is going to keep on spinning, you'll be happy, you'll be sad, you'll suffer, you won't, everything will change, you're really not going to get any better than you are right now—and you've got to really put out effort to be present for every moment—would you come? Probably not. At least not in the beginning.

The wisdom that arises through this willingness to relax into mindful presence with whatever's happening, without resistance to this particular moment, without fixation or holding on—"Now I've got it, let's hold on to it"—without getting lost in the story of what this particular experience means about me, whatever it is. It's just this.

The wisdom that arises from that is different from what we might expect. It's simply the potential, the possibility of recognizing reality just as it is.

You might think, "Big whoop. That's what I signed up for?" Well, you know what? That is a big whoop. Because in terms of how the Buddha describes what's going on in our mind, how we suffer, why we suffer—and we'll talk about that the whole month—it's not because what's happening is bad.

It's not because we're messed up. It's more like, *why* are we messed up? Because we don't recognize what's really going on. And so we keep bringing these misconceptions to our meditation practice and turn it into another endeavor to try to make ourselves different and better. And when that doesn't really meet our expectations, we're lost. What do we do now?

But the wisdom of the Buddha is so radical because it completely undercuts this view. This is what you call wrong view. And the right view—simply the right view of just starting our practice—is the willingness and the trust that through moment-to-moment mindful awareness, we can recognize when the heart and mind is fully present without being distorted by greed, wanting something to be different, aversion, hatred, or fear.

These states can be there, they can be recognized, and they're simply another arising experience. But when we don't recognize greed, fear, and "me, me, me," then it completely distorts our perception. We recognize inaccurately. We respond to the situation to the best of our ability, but since we're recognizing it wrongly, our response—which is usually trying to make ourselves happy—just doesn't work. And we don't know why.

You've all practiced a lot. You know what I'm talking about, I hope. You have some sense of what I'm speaking of.

What the Buddha's pointing us to is so radical. He's not saying you have to change everything. It's: stop trying to change everything and really, really, a hundred percent land here in this moment and just let it be as it is with full commitment and presence. And the moment-to-moment clarity, purity of heart and mind that's present is the condition—and we call that mindfulness—it's the condition that allows for accurate recognition. That clear recognition of things as they are cuts through our confusion, our distorted responses, and the way we act in life that keeps our suffering going.

There's a phrase in the Pali, *yathā bhūta ñāna dassana*, which means "knowledge and vision of things as they are." It's one of the highest understandings.

So why we practice with a wise view to begin with is just to have the sense that it's not ultimately about somehow changing myself or being a better person. I mean, that's all great, that stuff happens. But it's not about that. It's not to get something. It's to have this willingness, this trust—just this trust to be so present and awake with things as they are—that the clear seeing changes our whole understanding of ourselves, of one another, of life, of what we really are.

It's radical. It completely cuts through. And we can hear it.

The Buddha talks about three levels of *paññā*, of wisdom. I find this very helpful because they're all aspects of wisdom, but only the third level is truly transformative of how we live in the world.

The first level of wisdom is what you would call heard or borrowed wisdom. It's when we hear things. I'm sitting here talking to you, and if this is something you've never heard, you're hearing it. Whether it's wisdom or not, that's another story. But it's when we hear things or read things, learn about things, and we go, "Hmm, okay," and it's going in. That's often the kind of wisdom I learned in school. I could memorize it, I could say it back, I could say I know it. But it doesn't change us. It doesn't change how we live in this world or understand the world.

The second, intermediate level is our intellectual understanding. We contemplate this heard wisdom—what we've read, what we've learned. We take it to heart, we think about it. Yeah, that makes sense.

So talking about impermanence, for example, as we often do, as you're all very familiar—it's one of the deep insights where we can all say, "Yeah, I've heard about impermanence. It totally makes sense. I don't argue about impermanence." Probably no one here is going to really argue that impermanence doesn't seem to be true, right? It's not rocket science.

And yet—*and yet*—does anybody here ever find their mind and heart still clinging to something you know is going to change? Do you ever find yourself clinging to something that's been gone? It's already gone. Maybe it's gone a second, maybe it's gone ten years. Maybe it never even existed in the first place, except as a thought.

So that intermediate level of real cogitation—that makes total sense, but it doesn't quite transform our understanding.

And then the third level is really *bhāvanā*. It's called *bhāvanā-mayā-paññā*, which is insight, intuitive wisdom. It's when you have one of those "aha" moments—and I'm sure you've all had them. You can have it in daily life: if you're doing Sudoku and suddenly you go, "Oh, that's the number that goes there!" It just pops up from somewhere. Aha, and you just know it.

So it is with our Dhamma wisdom. With impermanence, there will be a moment where—wow, yeah, it's all really changing. A moment. It doesn't last forever either, but you get a sense of the different levels. And so the *paññā* that is cultivated through our trust and steady awareness, the one that really changes how we live, is this third level.

Mindfulness, even in the form of sitting and walking practice, is not an end in itself. It's not about getting the technique, because you'll hear there are all different techniques, and that can be really confusing. If you think it's about getting the technique right and becoming more and more perfect, you keep hearing, "Well, you could be with the breath, or you could be with hearing, or if it's better for you, be with the body." And you want to say, "Just tell me what to do so I can do it right! This is just driving me crazy." We just want to know how to get it right.

But it's not an end in itself. It's a supportive condition to relax into full presence and awareness of this moment's experience—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, mental experience, thinking, emotions, whatever. And this is the radical thing: it doesn't matter what mindfulness is aware of. Because it's not about the what. It's about learning to recognize and trust, over and over, the mindful awareness itself. Whether you're sitting, whether you're walking, whether you're eating, whether you're trying to space out, whether you're just waking up from three hours of spacing out—it doesn't matter what. You'll find it's even possible to be aware while you're spacing out. But then it's not really spacing out anymore, is it?

It's about that, not about getting it right.

This is quite broad, as you can see. It's not about a meditation retreat or a forum, or sitting and walking enough hours so then the rest of the time you're free. It's not about this incredible effort to get somewhere. It's about our whole life. Meditation, real meditation—that practice of awakening, the process of awakening—isn't limited to some form.

This form obviously we think is tremendously helpful and supportive, because we get so lost in what's happening in our daily lives. There's so much happening that we get easily distracted. We forget to notice that there can be awareness of what's happening.

Have you noticed that today? Do you know the difference between knowing what's happening and recognizing that you're aware of what's happening?

Right now, are you seeing me? Yes? Okay. Were you aware that seeing was occurring before I asked you that? Did you get a sense of the difference now when I ask, "Are you aware that seeing is happening?" Seeing, if your eyes were open—some of you had your eyes closed—but if your eyes were open, you were seeing. Notice how, until I mentioned it, we don't tend to be aware of the process.

Now, did it take a lot of energy and effort to be aware that you were seeing? No, it doesn't. It just takes remembering. That's what our practice is—remembering. And it gets more and more interesting.

The awareness of the process of seeing is actually what we're cultivating. Seeing—how many sights do we see in a day? Some are beautiful, some are ugly, most of them are neutral. We're not even aware what's going on. We wait until there's something really good to see, like the Super Bowl.

Then we're really into seeing. Big whoop, then that's over. Then there's something else to see, like a tennis match—now that's really good to see. But then it's over. Then there's a sunset, and then there's something beautiful, and then there's something ugly, and most of the time there's nothing. And we think it's all about seeing something better. Get a better object. Same with how we feel inside, same with our moods, same with our emotions. This is the wheel of samsara. We forget. We're so sucked into what's happening that we forget that the process of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking—that the awareness of the process is our practice.

I read this from Bhikkhu Anālayo in his book from a few years ago about the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Foundations of Mindfulness. This is actually from a footnote where he's quoting Jack Engler, who's a well-known psychologist and meditator, a friend of ours. He's theorizing that one of the reasons Western meditators may progress more slowly is the tendency to become absorbed in the content of awareness rather than continuing to attend to the process of awareness.

So that's really what we're cultivating with our moment-to-moment mindfulness. Sitting, walking, eating, whatever—to keep remembering to notice the process of awareness. It's not stressful or difficult. It doesn't require huge energy. It doesn't have to be exhausting. But remembering it... we just get so sucked into what's happening and our habits of "what does it mean about me." The habits of our mind are so strong. That's nothing to criticize. This is just yathā-bhūta, seeing things as they are. It's not personal.

But without having a little sense of right view of why we're practicing, then we can, with our greatest commitment and sincerity and effort, really do meditation practice for years and end up feeling dissatisfied, a failure, or feeling it's useless—because we're doing it from the wrong understanding.

I want to read a little bit from an article someone pointed out to me in the New York Times yesterday. Someone was writing an op-ed piece—I won't say his name—but he's talking about mindfulness and meditation. He said he's a 25-year mindfulness meditator. He didn't say Vipassana, but that's clearly what he's been doing. And clearly very dissatisfied, let down.

Let me read a couple of things, because this is like the trap we can so easily fall into. It's kind of

heartbreaking to me.

He's saying people talk these days about the promise of mindfulness—that mindfulness meditation will reduce your blood pressure, reduce your social anxiety and depression, improve your relationships, including your relationship with yourself. Meditation in the right doses, he's saying, is also valuable as a means to relax the body, to quiet the emotions, to refresh one's energy. There's growing evidence that meditation has health benefits.

Now you've all heard all of this, I imagine. And not to say it's not true, and not to say what's good or bad, but if that's why one is meditating—and it might be—then either you get that and good, okay, done, it's over, or you don't get it and you really have to find another way. Maybe yoga, nothing wrong with yoga, or take a pill or whatever. It's limited.

He goes on to say, "What I haven't seen is much evidence that meditating leads people to behave better, improves their relationships, or makes them happier. In the modern world, meditation is far more effective as a technique for self-management than as a means of personal transformation, much less enlightenment."

This is someone who's been doing mindfulness meditation for 25 years, very sincerely. And that may be some of your experience. I'm not here to say what anyone's experience should be. But I can speak for myself, and I know not only for myself, that what makes me so sad about that is clearly he's bringing such a wrong view to the whole reason for doing it. When that goal comes from misunderstanding, then the way we go about it is coming from our inherent misunderstanding, and it's just another thing we're doing. It's so sad.

As he goes on, he's clearly seeing meditation as a very specific, limited activity, distinct from mindfulness in life. So that point I would really like to get across. Hopefully you all know that. The specific form of meditation that we're doing here—whatever you're doing internally, the sitting, the walking, the being in silence—this structure isn't with the rest of your daily life. But what we're cultivating, this recognizing the process of awareness, is not in any way limited to a meditation retreat or to depths of deep samādhi concentration. It's about recognizing awareness, whatever's happening—subtle, gross, busy, thinking, no thought, lots of energy, no energy, you're sick as a dog, you're feeling great. It does not matter. As long as we're conscious...

awareness is available and accessible. The structure of the retreat is simply to give us really supportive conditions to help us keep remembering and recognizing, because the habits to do otherwise are just so strong.

Why? I don't know. We won't even go there. One of the things that will make you crazy, according to the Buddha: the workings of karma and the beginnings of things. So don't go there. How are things now? *Yath ābhūta*—things as they have come to be in this moment.

What really drew me to the Buddha's teachings—I mean, I was practicing before I understood it was the Buddha's teachings, but when I started reading extensively about them—is that the teachings are so pragmatic, so practical. What really got him, at least according to the mythology and the texts, what really got him doing his own inquiry and got him to awaken and then to try to share what he saw with others, was grappling with the basic dilemma of life and death. Why do we suffer? And why is it that in only wanting to be happy, we continue to make choices that keep us spinning and suffering?

He saw that after he awoke—that's what motivated him out of compassion to teach. But what got him to look for himself was simply this: we all want to be happy. We don't want to die. We don't want to be sick. Everyone gets sick. Everyone dies. Everything we love goes away. We have to be with things we don't want. And that is how it is. So far, there doesn't seem to be another way. And if you'd found one, I bet you wouldn't be here.

So he's really grappling. And when he woke up—this is also what I love—when he woke up, the Buddha, the awakened one, the peaceful one, he wasn't living on a cloud in some other realm, in some other world. He's still living in a body, with kinspeople who got into fights over water and killed each other, people coming in and being totally obnoxious to him all the time, the monks getting into arguments, the nuns getting into arguments, the laypeople always trying to prove things. Can you imagine if all the people wandering around practicing were coming up to you and wanting to engage you in debate every day and prove you were wrong? What a nightmare. And he didn't live in another world. Yet his heart was free.

So it always got me looking: what's the difference? What's the freedom of the Buddha? And looking then, because it sneaks up in the background, the wrong view in my mind—why am I on this path? If I'm really honest, I'll look and see: well, maybe then I won't have a bad back anymore. Maybe my personality will get a little bit more friendly, finally. You see those things back there. It's great to see them. When we don't see those ideas, that's what's running us. When we see it, we go, "Oh yeah, there it is again. Wanting, wanting. If I do it, I'll get better."

But awareness trumps wanting. Awareness of wanting. Wanting is like this—and you're back in awareness. There's no experience we can have that blocks awareness when we remember it. You don't have to stop thinking to recognize awareness. You don't have to only have a particular sensation or feel your breath or only have subtle emotions. You can be really angry, a little bit out of control—hopefully not here—but you can even be aware of that. So don't put some particular way awareness should look onto it. Just keep re-recognizing and keep trusting it.

And so this, I mean, another thing I found very inspiring, an example of this waking up and still in the same world. Many of you have probably read this. You know Mingyur Rinpoche? He's a Tibetan Lama, the younger brother of Tsoknyi Rinpoche. Very well known, very renowned.

About two years ago, he had his teachings organized and he said, "I'm going off on a three-year retreat." But he didn't just go to the forest refuge where it's really nice and cozy for a three-year retreat. He has

many people who love him and are very connected to him, and he knew people would want to support him. So he kind of snuck out of his hotel in the middle of the night. As his brother said on the website, he didn't even take a toothbrush. He didn't even take any money. He just snuck out and went off like you read about in the old days, off to just roam and practice. No one knew where he was for two years.

Now just recently he sent a letter out. He'd run into one of his supporters who had begged him after two years, "Would you let me be with you?" And so they were together and then he sent out this letter. I found it so inspiring because this is present day. This is why I teach—because of this possibility of undercutting our understanding of what really brings happiness.

He said: "I myself am wandering without any fixed location, staying in isolated mountain hermitages and other such places. 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 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 true nature of these experiences, their very essence, is that of timeless awareness and vast compassion."

He says, "This natural clarity of awareness has been with us from the very beginning. It is the very essence and true nature of our minds." And then he offers the koan we're all faced with: "One must maintain the flow of pure awareness to the best of one's ability without meditating, yet not getting lost in distraction."

That encapsulates the whole thing. I found it so inspiring because this is somebody writing just a couple of months ago.

And "not meditating," I would say in terms of what we're doing here, means not thinking of meditation as that guy writing in the New York Times described it—as a separate, specific activity done by me to get somewhere, somehow separate from the rest of my life. It's all meditation.

"Without getting lost in distraction" means, as Jack Engler said, not getting so lost in what every experience means about me and how it can fulfill me and make me feel better or worse, that we lose sight of the simplicity of awareness. Knowing that you're seeing right now. Knowing that you're feeling. If you're feeling sleepy, knowing you're sleepy. Awareness of sleepiness. Any object, any experience points us back to awareness.

That's what non-distractedness means. It doesn't mean clamping down, shutting out all thoughts, only focusing on one thing. That can be useful for cultivating shamatha, cultivating a real steadiness of mind, but that's not what he means here by non-distractedness. And it's not what I mean by awareness that we can recognize connected with any object. Non-distractedness means simply recognizing awareness.

When we are just in moments—when you experience that flow of awareness, that non-distractedness—there's nothing that can happen that's a distraction. That loud noise, that person running up and down the steps above your room last night—that's hearing. That's awareness of hearing. That aversion arising in your mind, that blame, all the pictures of that person, the notes you're going to write, "How can they be here?"—that's aversion. It feels like this. Awareness of aversion.

"Big whoop. I don't want to be aware of aversion. I want to be aware of bliss. That's why I came."

Okay. Wanting. Wanting. Feels like this.

I know it sounds a little silly. Try it. Keep trying it. You'll come into an interview and say, "So and so is happening." Oh, really? Great. It's like this.

It comes to be such a refuge, such a relief, such a source of happiness—even though the practice isn't about making us happy. Happiness arises when the mind lets go of clinging to wanting it otherwise. When it lets go of aversion and pushing away. "Oh right, I'm furious with that jerk running up and down the stairs." Anger feels like this. I do this a lot. I notice, "Oh yeah, awareness of anger." After a while you don't even have to say that. But it's like a Tai Chi move—from being lost and absorbed in the experience of anger and what it means about me, justifying or blaming or blaming yourself and the whole nine yards, to simply: "Oh, anger and blame feels like this." You don't have to do anything about it but recognize the awareness. Over and over, this comes to be such a refuge.

And that space of recognizing just what's happening is what allows for yathābhūta ñāṇa dassana—clear recognition of things as they have come to be in this moment.

So what changed in the Buddha's awakening, living in this world? What changed for Mingyur Rinpoche? As he described it, the deep certainty in his heart, in his mind—this third level of paññā—the deep certainty that no matter what happens, "I know the true nature of experience is timeless awareness and vast compassion." That deep certainty. We have moments of it, and we lose it. But notice in those moments, just the simplicity of being with awareness, how our heart and mind then responds to experience from that place is very different.

What changes, what frees our heart and mind, isn't that all the situations around us get better—that's out of our control. It's not that we get a better personality. It's that we're no longer caught, even just for a moment, in reacting and responding to life from these habits of aversion pushing away, of greed holding on, and of telling the story of me—of having every experience need to fulfill in some way "me," or else it makes me suffer and we must get rid of it. That's what you call saṃsāra.

Dingö Khyentse Rinpoche has something I've really liked a lot lately. He's talking about the three fundamental attitudes which arise and which are the foundations of our practice of awakening. The first one is renunciation—and that's what I want to talk about for a moment now. The second is compassion; the third he calls pure perception, or that accurate recognition, yathābhūta in Pali.

But renunciation, as he's describing it—he's not talking about the renunciation of not eating at night or not wearing jewelry or sleeping on the floor, that kind of thing. He says the foundation of renunciation, the root of all stages of the path, implies the strong wish to free oneself from the seemingly unending sufferings of saṃsāra. Saṃsāra being the seemingly endless cycle of conditioned existence. This wanting and getting, or wanting and not getting, and either way, leaning into the next moment, leaning into the next thing, pushing away from that. Wanting, getting, wanting, getting.

With this renunciation comes a heartfelt weariness and disillusionment with the endless quest for gratification, approval, profit, and status.

Let me read it again. And this isn't a should or an idea, because that doesn't work—it just makes us feel worse about ourselves. But this sense, just for a moment—we'll have it for moments and then we get hooked in again—but a moment of heartfelt weariness or disillusionment with the endless quest for gratification, approval, profit, and status. That's saṃsāra.

And when we don't have that right view of trusting awareness, when we don't simply look at and watch how this cycle is playing out, then we just get sucked back into it again. So with this right view of the process of awareness, moving from content to process, you don't have to stop that cycle, but we see it. Without awareness, we don't really quite notice that's what's happening. Awareness can change the whole thing.

We think, "Okay, this time it didn't do it, but next time it will." This time I didn't get it, but next time... or, "This time I did get it, but now it could be just a little bit better. Just a little bit better." You bring that to formal meditation too, right?

No matter how good a retreat you've ever had, don't you hope this one's a little bit better? There's a Tibetan definition of samsara as the urge to correct. So just notice—you're doing walking meditation, and you think, "But I could feel it just a little bit clearer if I tried a little bit harder." That's the cycle of samsara.

How does sati, how does mindfulness shift that? It's not like you come in with a hammer and declare, "This is bad, I'm going to stop it right now." I mean, I've tried that. Have you tried that? "I am now going to give up clinging. I'm going to stop wanting things." It doesn't work, right? That doesn't work. We try it and then we get aversive because we couldn't stop wanting. "I understand very clearly—I talk about it all day long. I know that wanting doesn't work. So what's the matter with me?" And then you're in aversion. Both of these responses are all about me, me, me. Awareness is different. Awareness is like, "Oh, wanting is like this." It's a movement from the object to the process.

I'll tell you a simple little story of where that happened years ago, many years ago, on my first three-month retreat. This was bad, so don't do it. I had a car, and it was like two months in, an oblique November in Massachusetts. I just got this—what I thought was a yen for chocolate chip cookies. I can say it's only the first day of this retreat, so you can't be too far along in these things yet. And it got bad. I mean,

it got really bad. I had to have chocolate chip cookies. Just so much wanting.

So I got in my car and drove into Barry, and luckily there's not much else you can do in Barry. I bought a bag of cookies and brought them back to my room and sat there. I thought I was being mindful. Chewing, chewing, swallowing, swallowing, chewing, chewing, swallowing. I went through two-thirds of that bag—and it was a big bag too. That's not something I normally do, just to say. Two cookies is usually enough. A whole bag? Something else was going on.

But I didn't quite recognize it for a while. Chewing, chewing, swallowing, swallowing. And suddenly, awareness clicked in and I saw what was really happening, which was wanting. Oh, the cookies—there's this pain, this yearning. It was kind of like here, but the cookies were dropping past it into my stomach. They weren't really touching the yearning at all. It's like, "Oh, that's wanting. That's what wanting's like."

To me that's just a little example. If we don't stop and look, we just keep eating the cookies. We get to the end and go, "Well, I guess it wasn't chocolate chip. I guess it was oatmeal I needed." We just don't get it. That's samsara—what the heck's going on? But suddenly we go, "Oh, awareness. Wanting feels like this." And that's the difference.

In samsara, wanting, yearning, loneliness, aversion—it doesn't feel too good, does it? And our whole ethos is: if something doesn't feel good, something's wrong, make it better. You want something? Go get it, and then you'll feel better because the wanting goes away. We say, "Just hang out with wanting feels like this." And people go, "Huh? Huh?" Go to someone on the street and say, "Just hang out with wanting feels like this instead of going and trying to get a better job. Just hang out with it." They'll say, "I don't think so."

But try it. That's the shift to awareness. We don't have to respond. In fact, with wisdom, with clear seeing, there's not the urge to respond. "Oh, that's just wanting." Not to do anything about it. Doing things about it just keeps it going. "Oh, that's just wanting." And awareness of wanting is just that. You've taken refuge in the awareness again, and it really can stop being a problem—in that moment.

I mean, I've done this a million times. It'll come up again. So what? We're not saying it should stop. We're just saying, let's see what's really going on. "Oh, wanting feels like this." The habit of mind is to move away from it. Just stay with it. You're back in awareness. And there's peace. There really is peace. Even with wanting, it's just some sensations. It's just some energy in the mind. It's also just awareness and compassion when you bring full attention to it. You don't have to fix it.

So with steady sati, with steady mindfulness, the interest becomes the process—not the what, not how to fix it. It changes everything. Steady, steady, steady. The reason we have this structure is because we have to just keep remembering. The habits of getting lost and distracted together are so strong. That's just how it is. But the more we practice, the more steady we are with it, the habit of awareness—of recognizing awareness, of trusting awareness, of really loving it—gets stronger and stronger.

I call it a shift of refuge. Our refuge, what we grew up with, what I grew up with—refuge is to go after

pleasant, get rid of what's unpleasant, do whatever we can to bolster our good sense of self. That can be helping other people, that can be doing anything. But at the core of it is the me, me, me.

The shift of refuge to just appreciating awareness rather than evaluating it by what's happening—it's so much easier. It's so inclusive because there's nothing in our mind, in our heart, in our experience, in other people, in life that needs to be shut out. There's no barrier, no differentiation that needs to be made. There's no judgment—"My awareness is better than your awareness." I mean, who owns awareness? Nobody. "My awareness is better because I'm aware of really subtle tingling sensations in my finger and you're only aware of aversion, so my awareness is so much better." I think that's awareness of me-ing. But awareness is untouched. It doesn't care. Or as someone else said, it's not that it doesn't care—it cares, but equally for everything. Take your pick.

And so our practice here is really about just cultivating this shift of refuge, just in one moment, and then in this moment, and then in this moment.

I think that's all I want to say. Thank you for your attention.

So please come if you'd like.

And so our practice here is really about just cultivating this shift of refuge—in one moment, and then in this moment, and then in this moment.

I think that's all I want to say. Thank you for your attention.

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