Introduction to Awareness Practice: 3 Jobs of a Yogi

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 57:59

Looking out at you all on the first night, I feel a lot of empathy, having done many retreats myself. I can see how peppy you're all feeling. One time, many years ago, I was teaching a retreat with James Baraz. It was the first night, there were about eighty people, and the room was arranged in a semicircle. We hadn't said, "Please don't lie down when we're talking"—we forgot to say that. Literally, I'm not exaggerating, halfway through his talk, I was sitting with my eyes closed while he was speaking, and when I looked up, two-thirds of the room had completely downed out, lying down. Luckily, James has energy and could keep going, but it was an uphill battle. So you may be lying down in your minds—that's okay.

Tonight, I'm going to try to keep things simple, which is not my strong point, and talk about an introduction to this way of practice. I'm basing this on something Sayadaw U Tejaniya likes to say, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, describing what we're doing here in practical terms as "the three jobs of a yogi."

These three jobs are contained in this description of Vipassana meditation: *Vipassana meditation is experiencing the mind and body directly from moment to moment with the right understanding.*

So those are the three jobs. The first is to begin practicing with right understanding. The second is cultivating awareness—experiencing the mind and body directly, which is what mindfulness is. And the moment-to-moment part represents continuity: not just a couple of moments and then kicking back, but moment to moment to moment through the day.

Right understanding is the attitude, the understanding we bring from the beginning—some sense of knowing why we're doing this. Then we cultivate and remember awareness with right understanding, which means awareness not distorted by wanting and cockamamie ideas. The third job is steadiness, perseverance, continuity.

What's amazing—Thich Nhat Hanh often talks about the miracle of mindfulness, the miracle of awareness—and it is beyond amazing to me, over and over, that by experiencing through mindful awareness what's happening in our mind, in our body, in this moment, directly, not through the filter of all our interpretations, we begin to understand deeply. The more we practice, the more continuous we are, the more we understand why the Buddha taught this: to understand how suffering and happiness and freedom arise in our own heart and mind, nowhere else. Mindfulness, awareness, continuity—this is the condition that allows wisdom to arise, that allows us to recognize accurately. It's really amazing.

What I loved about the Buddha's teachings when I first heard them, and all along, is that he was eminently practical. Even though there's a great deal of philosophy and very specific, fascinating stuff to study, the core is simply seeing why we tend to feel as though we're living in contention with life so much of the time. And I know I'm using the royal "we," but probably if you felt everything was really great, you wouldn't be here.

The Buddha says, let's really look and see. It's not about looking out there and asking what's wrong with life. It's looking and seeing why we are living in contention with life. How can we come to live with ease, with peace, with wholesome qualities of loving-kindness and compassion? What can bring this about?

This moment-to-moment direct experiencing of our mind and body is the key. We begin to experience things as they are, not as we think they are or think they should be. And then we see, over and over, how confusion, suffering, contention, aversion, wanting—whatever arises in this moment in the mind stream, in the heart—arises due to causes and conditions, not because we're bad people or stupid, but due to habits, conditions, misunderstanding. We see how it arises, and by continuing to pay attention instead of running away when it gets unpleasant, by continuing to notice how it is with this awareness, even that becomes a support for awareness. By noticing how the confusion acts, we start to see how suffering is created.

This recognizing accurately is the wisdom that allows for change. That's what's coolest to me. It's not that we have to personally figure it all out and then consciously make some kind of change, because we don't really have a clue. But when the clear heart and mind of wisdom recognizes how things are, we naturally respond in an appropriate way. This is how wisdom works. This is an incredible key.

Let me give a very simple example. I have a little nephew who's just over two, the only child in my family right now. I'm having fun watching him grow. It's wonderful to watch—I'm sure if you have kids, you know—how they just naturally learn as they go through stages.

So I just thought of this simple example. You know how kids get these blocks with a thing that has a triangle and a square and a circle, and they're supposed to put the right shape block in the right hole? At first, when they're too young or just starting out, it's impossible. One goes in right, so then they think they should all go in, and they're trying to force them. So he's trying to force the triangle into the circle or the circle into the square. It doesn't work. He doesn't know why and just keeps pushing and pushing, getting frustrated, getting angry. And then that anger—not only with kids, right?—can escalate and turn into not liking what's for dinner or getting mad at me. It can turn into a whole thing.

Keep on trying. Keep on trying. Come back later when the anger isn't completely distorting attention. Because once anger is distorting attention, we can't see accurately. I don't imagine a kid would be thinking this way, but this is how we would: "What's wrong with the people who made this stupid thing? It doesn't work." Or, "What's wrong with me? How come I can't do it? They're doing it fine. What's my problem?" On and on and on. The more we don't recognize the anger, the more it's distorting our perception, and we just

start to either send it outward to the world or inward to ourselves. We're in contention.

But say he comes back, or he's a little older, and he's able to have enough steady attention that's not all angry—just picking up the blocks and really noticing, just seeing what's going on and actually seeing how it works with the shapes. He really gets it. Once you get it, you get it. The anger's gone. All those stories are gone. You quit trying to put the triangle into the circle. You really get it.

What made that possible is just steady, calm awareness. And when it sees how things work—just kind of like the laws of nature—*oh, that's how it works*—the whole problem falls away.

That's a pretty simple example, but that's the process. That's the process we are entering into: exploring our whole life, the whole process of our mind and body, how it works. Because without recognizing accurately, it's like we're fighting gravity. *Something's wrong, I can't fly. Something's wrong, I feel heavy.* We're fighting aging. *There's something wrong—I get older every year.* We do feel like there's something wrong when you start this. Really, who made this up?

But at the heart of awakening, at the heart of what really frees our heart and mind from this contention—what I would say is the essence of right view—is this deep fundamental shift in how we perceive and thus recognize and understand and respond to our mind and body experience, to how the mind interprets experience, and to life.

Not a one-time thing, okay? Just forget that. Just totally put it down—the idea that you're going to have one moment of a fundamental shift and it's all just going to be clear and you're going to float out from this retreat filled with compassion and love for all beings and wisdom. You'll have moments. I can't tell you—and it's very embarrassing actually—how many retreats I have done thinking, "I've got it now."

But it would sneak up in the background. I'd be going along, going along, and halfway through the retreat I'd realize I was suddenly feeling frustrated, which meant I had an expectation I hadn't seen. Somewhere in the background: "All right, I thought this one was going to do it. And then we wouldn't really have to be aware all the time anymore. We wouldn't have to do this stuff anymore."

Just forget that, and you'll find it a lot easier. Because what we're really learning to do is shift our refuge—shift the refuge from the habits of mind, of self-centeredness, of wanting, of aversion. That's not like a should. I'm not making a list.

I'm going to stop being self-interested now. Okay, from now on, greed is out. No more greed. Hopeless, you know? Don't even think about it.

But what we're doing is bringing awareness to understand how greed is when it arises and how it works. Don't believe anything we say, or anything the Buddha says, that greed causes suffering. Instead, recognize when it's present and keep being aware moment to moment. See what occurs. See what kind of thoughts come up. See what kind of behavior comes up. See how you feel. See how you relate to the world.

That's where the wisdom comes—from the awareness and the steadiness, the continuity.

We really do start to see. And it's amazing that the seeds of suffering and the seeds of freedom and compassion arise in a moment and pass in a moment. There's no solid state, which is sometimes unsettling and scary, but actually that's what allows for change. That's what allows for wisdom. That's what allows for shifting refuge from these old habits, from this confusion.

At the heart of awakening is right view, and Steve is going to talk much more about the specifics of right view because it's the first of the Eightfold Path—the first step. And it kind of goes in a circle, so it's also the last. How can I possibly start my practice, or even continue in the middle, with right view when it's so complex? But we can start very simply, and that's what I want to talk about tonight.

In terms of right view, bringing this to our moment-to-moment simple awareness, the misperception or confusion—the thing we don't understand—is a little deeper and a little more complex than not getting that a triangle is a different shape than a square. It's a little closer to home and a little more complicated.

But I would say the way both Ajahn Buddhadasa and Sayadaw U Tejaniya use similar language here is helpful. Ajahn Buddhadasa was a very famous Thai forest teacher and scholar in Thailand in the last century—he died in the 1990s. I was lucky enough when I was a nun there to spend some time in his forest monastery. So did Fran—you were there some too.

So the basic misperception I want to point to, just to simply begin our practice—we're not going to understand it in depth, but this is taking in information—it's the first level of wisdom: heard wisdom. Things that we've heard, things that we've read. We don't know it in our cells, but we're listening, we're learning, we start to learn. This is important because without hearing something or reading something or having a point of view we never encountered, it's a lot harder to discover it on our own.

And for many of us here, you're already in the second level of wisdom the Buddha talks about, which is really using our intelligence, our understanding, where you think about it, you explore it, you're really getting it on a deeper level. Yeah, this does make sense. I can see it. But it's still a bit prompted. You know it, but when the chips are down, no, that's not what you know.

And the third level, bhāvanā-mayā-paññā, is really the insight level where—you know, like when my nephew suddenly goes, "Oh, yeah, right, that's how it works"—you don't have to think about it anymore. You know that's how it is.

So we're bouncing around between those levels in a lot of different ways all the time. It's not linear. Nothing's really linear.

Anyway, the way Tejaniya describes it is just to say that in this first wise attitude, whatever's occurring in our mind, in our body—our thoughts, our moods, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, physical sensations, the whole range of moods—it's just nature. It isn't personal.

We take it all so personally. It's my fault or it's your fault. You're making me feel bad. But we take it all so personally. Instead, we can say: no, it's just nature.

So when I said a minute ago, "Notice when greed comes up and just really notice how greed arises, how wanting feels and how it..." if you're taking it personally, that's not possible.

Right? It comes up and it's either, "This feels like crap, let me go get whatever I want so I don't have to feel this anymore." Did you ever notice that's really what greed is doing? Or it's like, "Oh no, here I am, I'm so committed to practice, I'm really working, and here's greed, greed, greed. And the more I think about it, the more I see it—greed, greed, greed. Greed to look, greed to hear, greed to eat, greed to sit. I'm sitting and I want to walk. I'm walking and I want to sit. I'm sitting and I want to lie down. I'm lying down and I want to get up. Greed, greed, greed—it's hopeless."

That's taking it personally. It's not so helpful. Does that sound familiar, though? Can anyone relate to that?

It's just the way nature works. Greed arises—it's a habit, but it arises due to causes and conditions. We'll talk a lot more about this as we go on. Mostly, something pleasant comes up in the mind, or there's something pleasant, and the mind just leans in. It wants more. It's a habit. We don't notice, and it turns into greed. Aversion is the reverse. And then it goes into a whole story. It's just nature.

When you're not taking it personally, awareness can come in and go, "Oh yeah, look at that—greed. It feels like this. It feels like this in the body. These are the kind of thoughts that are coming up. What action does the mind want to do?" Watching it with awareness, you don't have to act on it.

It's really—I'm serious—fun to explore this stuff. Because in that moment, just that moment of simple direct awareness, "Oh, greed is like this"—greed is just as valid a support for awareness as a sensation of breath or walking or hearing. "Oh, greed is like this." Awareness of greed. In that moment, just for that moment, there's a sense of freedom. We're not so locked into the story, and it's just, "Oh, this is what's happening."

Mingyur Rinpoche says—and I hadn't thought of it this way, although it's kind of obvious—that whatever's going on, whether greed can be fiery or wanting, or we're in some story, or we have a pain, it can be very fiery and wild. But awareness itself in the moment is inherently calm. And so that's why when there's this kind of—call it like a Tai Chi move—a shift of refuge from "Oh no, my back hurts, what am I going to do?" to "Sensation is like this, the pain is like this," and there's a recognition of the awareness of the pain... the pain is still pain. We think, "Oh no, it all goes away, la la la." No, the pain is still pain. But when the refuge is in that awareness, just for that moment, that's inherently calm, and it really feels like, "Oh, right."

Then we try to hold on to it, and there's wanting—until we recognize, "Oh yeah, wanting is like this." And there are times when the steadiness of awareness is really beginning to get momentum, and whatever comes, the awareness just starts to have its own momentum, and there's that recognition. When it's like that, it's so easy. It's so simple.

I can say that. I feel that sometimes. And then the next hour, or the next five minutes, you have the first level of wisdom about that. You remember, "I just have to be aware of this sensation and recognize it's unpleasant and awareness is calm—everything's going to be great." Fat chance, right? Because that's not what conditions are present right then. It's not because you're failing. That's taking it personally again. It's because the conditions for clear seeing aren't quite present. Either the wanting or the aversion or the delusion, the meaning-making—it's still there in the mind that's aware, kind of distorting the awareness, but we don't quite recognize it.

That's why we talk about this when you're practicing sitting, walking, eating, whatever. I said today: when you feel some tension, some struggle, just gently check—what's the attitude in the mind? Not like an analysis checklist, but sometimes you can just kind of feel, "Oh, what does it feel like?"

Nothing. It's really calm. Or it's like, oh, I really want this to go away. And you just feel that. You just feel that.

And then there are other times when—I was just doing a self-retreat and I could feel the tension in my body. I knew intellectually that there was some wanting, some resistance that was influencing the awareness, the being present. I knew it intellectually, but I couldn't quite feel it. Awareness couldn't quite touch it. It was just kind of subtle. Like when you're pretty present, but your glasses are just a little bit wavy—they're not quite the right prescription. You're looking at it, you just can't see clearly. And you can't see it till you see it.

But we continue moment after moment with the simplicity of awareness, because then you know: Oh, I know something, there's some tension, and I don't see what it is. That's what's happening now. Tension feels like this. There's nothing outside of awareness. Nothing that we need to get rid of or push through in order to make the awareness correct. But remembering that is so hard. That's just dropping the me-ing, the doing, the ideas, and just—ah, it's like this now. That's Ajahn Sumedho's language, and I use it so much. It really helps me.

In sitting, I find my mind tends to get a little more convoluted if something's going on like that. I find that when I'm doing walking meditation, it just kind of eases out a bit. I don't know. But we're all different. There's not a right way. It could be lying down for you, or eating, or whatever.

But anyway, what I can tell is when it's convoluted, and there's this subtle trying to figure it out, just—oh, it's like this now. It's a dropping, a surrendering into the simplicity and honesty of awareness of just how it is now. You don't need to know how. It's like this. And then there's awareness again. That doesn't mean it fixes anything—it's awareness. You can learn to recognize how that feels.

A friend shared with me something one of her teachers said—a Tibetan teacher. He was describing just the immediacy of awareness, how it feels, to a group he was teaching who weren't particularly practitioners and didn't have the language they use in that Tibetan scene. I loved it. He called it "just being

with the very, very now."

And I love that because I can think, oh, I'm feeling my emotions, I'm feeling my step, you know. But this—you can tell there's just something like, oh, the very, very now. Just totally here without a pulling back or a "so that," or a needing to understand, or a subtle fear. If I feel this, it's really going to feel lousy, and then what's going to happen? Where's my mind going to go? From just—ah, the very, very now. To me, that's taking refuge in the Dhamma, in the way things are. And that is the simplicity of awareness. That's why it's such a miracle. The steadiness of that is what actually starts to allow wisdom and accurate recognition to arise.

So Buddhadasa—I mentioned him a while ago and got off onto Utajaniya—but he talked in his book *Mindf ulness with Breathing*. The book itself was just about working with ānāpānasati, but he had a very broad way of teaching and understanding. He wasn't just talking about samatha, one-pointed practice. He was talking about wisdom, awakening practice.

He said, again, it's all nature. All arising experience is nature. And he was really big on nature. He had a forest meditation center way down in the eastern mid-Thailand, and he didn't give a lot of instructions. The monks would just go and live, for weeks, for months, for years, in tiny little huts in the middle of the forest. He was really about that—just being silent and aware in nature. After a while, you start to see it's not like "I'm in nature." This, it's nature. It's all nature.

And then he went on to say: when it's nature, whatever's arising in this moment is the result of an inconceivable train of causes. This is the effect. We can never understand all the causes in one moment. And essentially, this particular moment right now can't be different.

How can this moment be different? It's here. There's no way it can be different. As Jack always says, give up all hope for a better past. This moment can't be different. But with accurate recognition, with wise attention that isn't putting an overlay of blame or confusion or interpretation—it's just here, the very, very now—with that wisdom that can arise, the response that arises within this moment, well, that's what really can be very different.

When there's just the habit, you keep trying to throw that square block into the triangle and you never succeed. But when there's this very clear seeing—oh look, that's how it goes—quite naturally, it's also nature. The understanding shifts. The response shifts from aversion, from clinging, to one of wisdom, to one of metta if that's appropriate, to compassion if that's the appropriate thing. It's not an act of personal will. That's what's so cool. It's nature. It happens naturally.

The steady learning to have some trust in awareness, practicing—that's what we're doing. We're just practicing recognizing this simple awareness over and over and over. The retreat gives us support to do that because when there's so much coming in, our habits are so strong, even when we want to do it, it's just harder. It's possible, but it's harder. So we need to give ourselves some energy, some practice in

shifting the habit.

Back to Buddhadasa—he could be kind of funny. He says we're always appropriating the things of nature as "I" and "mine." And this is the basic misunderstanding that wise view starts to see through. He says we've been thieves all of our life by appropriating all the things of nature—whatever's occurring—as I or mine. He says we've been ignorant and we suffer for it. But when we become wise—and he's talking about this last step of practice—we realize, oh, it isn't mine. It belongs to nature. And so we just throw everything back to nature and don't steal anything anymore.

We don't have to wait until it's always like that. We can have moments of that, just in very simple experiences. Explore that here.

I noticed again, just this last month—I was doing a self-retreat at home—this wasn't new information, it was just a different way my mind looked at it. We always see different angles that spark the interest, and interest is really such a key motivation to help us keep exploring in this way.

I noticed how with all the different experiences, all the perceptions that come in—what's happening? Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, sensing with the body, and the whole mental world, which includes all the constructs, the thoughts, moods, the mental states. All these things are happening and being perceived by the mind. I started to notice how certain experiences or certain perceptions were privileged in a way as being me or belonging to me. There were tons of other sensations and perceptions, pleasant or unpleasant, mostly probably kind of neutral. Maybe I noticed them, maybe I didn't. They just kind of go by. It's whatever. Oh yeah, that deer—there's seeing. You don't even notice seeing. There's hearing. There's warmth. It's neutral.

Then all of a sudden the warmth gets really hot, and there's a little aversion, a little unpleasantness, and the mind goes into aversion. What's the matter with my body? Why is it so warm? Why don't they turn on the air conditioning? What kind of—on and on. That particular perception has suddenly been privileged as me, as mine, without wisdom, leading to all kinds of responses, all kinds of contention, one way or the other.

Or it's really pleasant and we think, this is great! Finally, something's happening. I had a few moments where I really felt aware. I got it. I'm finally—how can I keep it? How can I get it back? So it's pleasant, but we're privileging that as mine.

And once we do that, that steady awareness that can look at what's happening—what are the causes, what are the conditions that bring this about, and how does it change—we can learn if we can watch like that. But when we start to clamp down around anything as me or mine, the awareness gets distorted. It may not completely snap shut, but it's not recognizing accurately anymore.

So we spend a lot of our life like this. But again, this isn't something you have to figure out intellectually. This is what's so cool to me. The steady simplicity of awareness is what we're learning. We recognize how

things are. It's how things are. It's not like if you really get clear, then you'll stop being yourself. We're just like we always were—which is maybe not good news. Ajahn Sumedho says, "It's not your personality that gets enlightened." I kept waiting to get a new personality. Forget about it.

But we get more friendly, because it's nature. You can see the causes and conditions. And the parts that come from really reacting out of confusion do start to lessen and ease away.

Again, my friend passed on another thing her lama said. I liked his way of putting it. He's talking about how all experience is nature—whether it's hearing, whether it's thoughts, whether it's moods, whatever it is. It's just all aspects of nature, cause and effect, natural law. And he says, when we hold on to and solidify any particular experience as me, we suddenly get locked back down into what he called "the narrow bandwidth of a sense of personal identity." I love that. And we lose the connection with the vastness, we lose the connection with the whole, with the whole range.

One easy way to play a little bit with this—not if you're in a big struggling mode or in a lot of pain or aversion, but when you're calm yet awake—I find playing with hearing meditation helpful. Now, it doesn't work for everybody. For some people hearing has too much story or sense of personal stuff with it. But for me, just sitting and being present with hearing—not listening, not reaching out, but just sitting. Okay, feel sensations. I'm not blocking anything else out. But allowing hearing to be at the forefront of what's received. Not listening, just hearing.

And over some time, just hearing sounds come and go. There's a natural recognition—the mind recognizes. It might recognize a bird or a frog or whatever. That's fine. But that's not hearing. That's a perception. That's thinking. That's not a problem. But just know it's not hearing. That's going on, but you're not getting caught up in it. Just hearing, hearing, hearing, hearing.

And after some time, when the mind is calm, the hearing could be a lovely bird. The hearing could be the turkeys. The hearing could be someone stomping into the hall in the middle of your sitting and slamming the door. The hearing could be someone breathing really loudly near you. And it's just hearing. It's just nature. The hearing could be your stomach growling, and you normally would get all embarrassed because it's me—but it's just hearing.

So there's a sense of not privileging something as me. There's not that narrow bandwidth of me and everybody else, me and the other. It's just what's occurring. Just playing with that from time to time might be interesting.

Often it's thought that we shouldn't be talking about this sense of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*—this personality view, this tendency to privilege, to go through life from the center of "it's all about me or mine"—in the beginning of a retreat or early in practice. Because intellectually it's very hard; we can't really totally understand it intellectually. And it's a subtle and ongoing experience. Plus it makes some people frustrated to try and figure it out. You can't figure it out, so just forget trying to figure it out. No, no, that's

got to wait till later in the retreat or whatever.

But this is what Sayadaw U Tejaniya says, and Buddhadasa too, and Ajahn Sumedho as well. No, this is where we start. Because we want to begin and continue our practice with the right understanding, with the right attitude.

Ajahn Sumedho would say, you know, some people he knew practiced for twenty years very, very sincerely—but without even looking at this. Not that we can totally understand that we're not a particular separate self, but they practiced without even examining it. Or as Sayadaw Tejaniya would say, we're practicing from a sense of me. It's all about me trying to get something. There's the striving, there's the effort. You could try, put in so much effort, so much trying, so much sincerity, push to really deep states, and it could still be coming from this delusion of it being all about me getting something to be better. He said, so why wait twenty years until you finally can get some insight? I'm not talking about just words—let's start with at least having that intellectual understanding and looking at it.

Because it's natural. You'll notice the times when everything kind of coheres and it's all about me. You notice it because it starts to feel kind of yucky. Except when it feels good. Because sometimes it feels good—that's why we keep going. It's just comfy, like an old blanket. Yeah, me.

I would notice sometimes all these feelings of real sadness, nostalgia, thinking about my dead parents. It would come in, and I could see a habit of mine, almost wanting to really sink into it. And I'd think, why? There was nowhere to go with it. It wasn't like there was something I needed to think through or figure out. Oh yeah, we're so sad, it's all gone by. What's that phrase? *Alles vorbei*—they say it in Germany all the time. It's all over, it's all bye-bye. And I could see my mind wanting to go there. Why? That's so crazy. But it does, because it's just comfy.

So the simplicity and honesty of awareness is really what we're here to learn and practice. This is our amazing ally, the amazing tool that really begins to allow us to see all of this. Again, from Ajahn Sumedho—and I think this line is extremely important to remember: we don't create awareness. We recognize it.

How much of the day have you, subtly or grossly, been trying to create awareness? Giving the attention or trying to find it. It's really because that's what we know. I have to try and make something happen. That's the me-ing and the my-ing. That's what we know, what we've learned. It's incredible. I find it very hard to trust that just, oh yeah, trying feels like this—and to see that that's awareness. You might say, "I came here to sit and 'trying feels like this'? I came here to walk up and down sweating in the heat, and 'sweating and feeling aversive feels like this'? And they tell me this is good practice? I don't think so. Complaining in the mind feels like this?"

But when I say "it feels like this," that implies awareness is actually there with it. The very, very now. Just for that moment. And day after day, what we're doing here is moment after moment, simply practicing.

This simplicity of awareness, this honesty of awareness. We don't try to create it. We start to see that as soon as we remember—oh yeah, am I aware?—it's right there. Am I aware? How can I get it? Am I aware? As soon as you ask yourself that, you're aware. And it doesn't matter of what. It doesn't matter if it's gross. It doesn't matter if it's some incredibly subtle thing. It doesn't matter if you don't even know what—there's just some feeling. Am I aware? We get more and more trusting. As soon as we think, awareness is available. It's so simple that we keep thinking we have to do something. We'll keep falling into that.

The simplicity of awareness—what I mean by that is this landing in the bare experience without confusing that for all the interpretations. You know what I mean by interpretations? And it's not that the interpretations are bad. We can recognize that's a thought, that's a memory, that's a mood. That's fine. That's, again, bare experience. But then—oh, look at that little deer with its velvet horns. I wonder if that's the little Bambi that was born in our driveway last year. It looks so cute. I wonder if it's lonely. Oh, isn't it great being in nature, and so happy, and yada, yada, yada.

What's happening there? Seeing. Thinking. There's a particular mood in the mind. Liking. It's pleasant, or whatever. That's what's occurring. That's the simplicity of awareness. We can be aware of anything. We tend to get lost in the overlay of interpretation.

And that was a simple one. When your knee hurts, the interpretation is quite different. When the person sitting behind you is making a lot of noise and they're ruining your samādhi, the interpretation is quite different. When you were doing really well and suddenly you lost it and you think you're going to scream and go home because you can't bear to be here another minute, the interpretation is quite different. And so the simplicity of awareness is just learning how to recognize the bare experience.

Seeing. Utejāniya talks about seeing a lot, and I've been playing with it more and more. I find when I can be aware of seeing as a process, it somehow just—nothing's always, okay—just clicks my mind into awareness and out of believing interpretation right away.

We see a lot. We use seeing to function. That's fine. But everything we're seeing is a concept. It's useful. We can tell each other apart. We can tell what's going on. We can tell the dining room from the toilet. All that's helpful. We can see. But the actual seeing is when you are aware that you're seeing. Do you get a sense of how that's different from just being in the looking? And then how we forget. So now I bet you're kind of aware that you're seeing, right? Doesn't it feel different? Just a subtle shift, but doesn't it feel different?

There's something different? That's awareness. That's all. That easy. Just practicing over and over.

So I like playing with seeing. It really has been very helpful. It gives you a kind of clue. Oh yeah, that's all it is. That's all it is. Not to change anything. Not to fix anything.

And this is the honesty of mindfulness, of awareness that I talk about. It's just the simplicity of being with it as it is, just as it is. The honesty is: okay, it's like this. And to see how the mind might subtly try to make it a little bit better so it reflects well on me. Even though nobody knows what's going on in your mind, it's

like, "Well, this isn't really... I'm not really feeling this selfish and vengeful. There are good reasons for it. It's not really vengeful." But no—this is how it feels right now. That's what's happening. Just honest. Because even vengeful, ugly thoughts are a support for awareness right now. It's just thoughts.

So the simplicity and honesty of awareness is what we're practicing over and over and over. And because the habits of interpretation and reactivity and self-blame are so strong, because our habits of focusing on the object of attention, the object of awareness, are so strong—have you noticed how we just get sucked in? Whether it's seeing or hearing, or definitely with mental experience, with thinking. We start by being aware of sadness, and the next thing we know we're back in the whole story. And then again: oh right, all right, this is sadness. Not to get rid of it, but just to recognize what's happening.

Because those patterns are so strong. We've practiced them our whole lives. And this is the natural law, cause and effect. How many mind moments? Have you noticed how fast the mind moves? How fast things change in your mind? Have you noticed that today? Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, thinking, thinking, thinking, pleasant, unpleasant—so fast. And we can't stop it because that's what life is. That's how it's occurring.

So imagine how many mind moments in our life we've practiced me-ing and wanting and blaming and aversion. That's just what we know, what we learned. We keep trying to put that triangle block in the round hole because that's just what we learned. We kind of don't quite get why it doesn't work.

So that's why the third job of the yogi is this persistence, this continuity, this moment-to-moment quality—that whatever we're doing, whatever activity we're doing, becomes the ground of awareness practice. That's why this schedule: awareness with everything.

And this is only possible—I mean, it's not possible in the beginning anyway—but it's only possible if we're bringing this relaxed, settled-back quality, trusting that we just have to recognize awareness, not trying to create it. If you're trying to create it, you're going to burn out really fast, right? It's just pushing, pushing, wanting. Instead it's like: oh, what's happening now? Awareness. It's been two hours and you haven't been aware. Oh no, I haven't been aware! Well, now I'm aware. Here we are. There's awareness.

When that's the attitude, it's natural. We're just starting to understand how it works moment after moment. Then with this relaxed quality—just whatever's occurring is okay, we're not trying to veer it in another direction—that's when the perseverance, the wise effort, the continuity, the momentum of awareness begins to start coming in of itself. It takes a little time. It really takes some trust, and it takes some patience.

Sayadaw Tejaniya says patience is technically an aspect of metta, of loving-kindness, a wholesome state. It arises from wisdom. But greed, as he points out, is looking for a result. You can be working really hard, trying to be aware, and greed is driving the bus. That's when you're going to flame out. You're really sincere, really trying to be aware so that you feel better or whatever—but it doesn't work. And patience

won't really be very accessible, because patience is an aspect of wisdom. Wisdom, that sense of settling back, trusting awareness, and investigating: What are the conditions that support my recognizing awareness? What are the conditions that seem to starve it?

The Buddha used that metaphor a lot—feeding and starving. What feeds wholesome mind states? What feeds the hindrances? What starves the hindrances? What starves wholesome mind states?

So here, really seeing this, we're not here for nine days in a short-term push for some big experience that's going to do it. We're really here to spend nine days and nights practicing recognizing awareness. I know, it's not very exciting. You're not going to be able to show a lot for it. But it really, really deeply shifts and strengthens and changes our habits. It's not that it stays, but we remember. Every time you can remember and trust, that remembrance and trusting becomes available in daily life—because it's not dependent on a certain position or a deep level of concentration, or on having everybody quiet, or on feeling good. It's not dependent on any particular experience.

You may find that the thing that most supports you in remembering awareness tomorrow is taking a walk in the woods—or not the woods, this is Massachusetts, in the fields. Then the next day you say, "Oh, that was really good. That's what supported my awareness, so I'm going to go for a three-hour hike"—which I'm not recommending. You go for a three-hour hike, but you're not really looking at what's supporting awareness. You're back in memory, and you completely blow yourself out.

One of the reasons we have the open schedule is because, as Tejaniya says, it actually allows us and requires of us that we tune into what's going on in our mind and body with wisdom, and see what's feeding recognizing awareness now. So it's not that sitting an hour is somehow better, for example. You may think that sitting an hour is good, but really after half an hour you're filled with pain. The aversion to the pain is so strong that awareness can't really recognize it. You're just spinning, spinning, spinning. So you're sitting there for half an hour feeding aversion. Much more useful to stand up, make yourself comfortable, or go out and do some walking and rediscover balanced awareness. What's supporting your balanced awareness?

Or it may be the reverse. You sit for five minutes and you think, "Oh no, I've got to go walk. That'd be better. Nothing's happening." And you're walking, thinking, "Well no, this isn't really juicy. Let me go sit." And then you start to see, "Oh, this is just wanting, wanting, wanting." So let me just stay in one posture for a while and explore wanting. And that brings in the balanced awareness. You see what I mean?

This is like really making the practice our own, from our own understanding, our own wisdom—and this is what we take into our life with us. Understanding how it works. Understanding and trusting that awareness is to recognize, not to create. That all aspects of the day can be supports for awareness. Not all day every day. It really takes a lot of patience.

So just relax. Relax. Observe. And no matter how long it's been since you remembered awareness, as soon

as you remember—

And we're only ever here right now.

So that's the three jobs of the yogi. Right view—it's all nature. Just play with that. Don't force it. Just play with it. It's all nature. Then simplicity and honesty of awareness—mindful attention to whatever's occurring, just as it is. And finally, this persistence, this willingness to keep showing up, to keep remembering.

One last thing I want to say. What really supports this willingness, this persistence—not that we can always access it—is to reset our intention, our motivation. We have to keep remembering, keep retuning into: why the heck am I doing this? Sometimes it's just intellectual, but sometimes we really can reset it.

As I mentioned when taking the refuges, for me that often will do it. I'll remind myself—for me, trusting the Dhamma. Oh yes, this potential, the Buddha, the potential for awakening. Maybe I can't understand the direct link between being aware of knee pain and awakening, but let me trust it. This is why I'm doing this. Or whatever's true for you—I'm not trying to say what your motivation should be.

And then trusting even simply—this is again from Mingyur Rinpoche. He says, in terms of patience and strengthening the intention: we're using our attention to any object of meditation to support recognition of awareness, which is what I've been saying. Since our intention is not to get completely absorbed into any object—so absorbed that we lose touch with everything else—the intention is that whatever's occurring helps us recognize awareness. We'll forget that, we'll get absorbed, and then we'll remember.

This is what I really like, the way he said it. As we set this intention to recognize awareness—why we've been talking about it day and night—every time there's just that moment of setting the intention to recognize awareness, that's all, every time we do this, the mind will start to incline in that direction. It's just natural. And so the steady practice will itself begin to bring about the natural recognition of awareness. That's when the recognition of awareness starts to have momentum.

In the beginning, we have to keep consciously remembering, consciously setting the right intentions to recognize awareness. My intention is to recognize awareness. We forget. We set the intention. But that's inclining the mind. That's changing the kind of rut that it moves in. And it really does start to do itself after a while.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

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