Sallatha Sutta: The Dart

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 54:50

This morning I was enjoying the discussion and the questions answered with Steve, talking about how the qualities in the citta—I'm going to use citta, meaning mind or heart—the wholesome and the unwholesome, and really how the practice involves the different ways that these habits of greed, confusion, and *dosa* (the word in Pali that covers the whole range of resistance) are seen through, not acted on, and eventually uprooted or abandoned. These are the three roots, you could say. And this abandoning happens not by an act of personal will, but through wisdom. Wisdom does the work, the ultimate abandoning.

This made me want to talk tonight about a sutta, one of the discourses of the Buddha. It's one I often refer to—I've gone back to it over and over in my own personal practice, and I bring it up frequently in talks. But tonight I wanted to actually use the discourse itself as the main theme. It's called "The Dart," where the Buddha talks about his subtle but accessible discovery, his understanding of how in a moment these habits of mind arise.

The citta, the mind-heart, is changing every moment. There's nothing just sitting there like a lump. Even when we say "the latent tendency" for greed to arise, that it's a seed—that's a way of talking. Because the citta, the mind, heart, mental energy is changing every moment. It's more that there's a propensity, given certain conditions, for something to arise. There's no steady state in that way.

In the sutta, the Buddha is describing how these tendencies arise in the moment, how he's seen it, how then it develops so quickly into habit. This is the second foundation of mindfulness: mindfulness of vedana, of feelings. This is something arising for us every moment, but it's so quick we tend to overlook it. We end up in the tornado of reactivity without quite seeing how we got there. Awareness provides the conditions we cultivate that allow wisdom, clear seeing, to arise.

So the Buddha is really answering the question: What is the distinction, what is the difference that exists between a well-taught noble disciple—that's the translation for an awakened person—and an untaught worldling? I always have trouble with that word "worldling." The word in Pali is *puthujjana*, which I actually like. Sayadaw U Pandita, who was a great teacher, gave us a series of about fifteen talks in a row on *puthujjana*. He'd come in and say, "Tonight we will talk about *puthujjana*"—meaning we were going to be talking about the defilements.

So what's the difference between them? That's an interesting question, something we can look at.

The Buddha says: An untaught worldling, *puthujjana*, experiences pleasant feelings, experiences painful

feelings, and experiences neutral feelings.

Now, just a clarification about why "feelings" is the translation of a specific Pali word. In English, "feelings" is very general—it could mean moods and all kinds of things. But here it's a translation of the Pali word *vedana*, which means specifically this feeling tone. We tend to say "feeling tone" to distinguish it from moods. It's the quality of pleasant, painful, or neutral that's felt mentally, associated with each moment of sense experience, including mental sense experience.

So when the Buddha says "experience a painful feeling," if there's a sharp stabbing in my leg, there's the stabbing, and the vedana, the mental experience, is the feeling tone. That's what he's talking about. It's subtle—we tend not to see it, as you'll see. But he's saying it's arising with every sense experience; the mind can notice that.

So: an untaught worldling experiences pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings. A well-taught noble disciple likewise experiences pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings.

Already this is uniting something. Somewhere deep down, don't we think the painful feelings are supposed to stop? That's really the essence. He's saying no, they don't.

So what's the difference that exists between an awakened one and an ordinary worldling?

When a *puthujjana* is touched by a painful bodily feeling, she worries and grieves, laments, beats his breast, weeps, and is distraught. He thus experiences two kinds of painful feelings: a bodily and a mental painful feeling. It is as if a person were pierced by a dart, by an arrow, and following the first piercing—the painful physical feeling—is pierced by a second arrow.

How could this happen? It's similar with the *puthujjana*. When touched by a painful bodily feeling, she worries and grieves, laments, beats her breast, weeps, and is distraught.

So she experiences two kinds of feelings, a bodily and a mental one. And I want to say also that a mental and emotional unpleasant experience can itself be experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The second dart—the grieving and lamenting and beating our breasts—could also arise in response to the first dart being a mental experience, say of sadness or whatever.

Do you get a sense of how quickly that happens? There's something, and it doesn't even have to be very unpleasant—just a little tightness in the body—and the mental feeling of unpleasantness arises really quickly. I've always been in awe of how the Buddha noticed that, and noticed how it's happening all day long, because it's so quick.

Often when we discuss this, people ask, "What's the difference between unpleasant and aversion?" Because of course it's unpleasant, and it moves right into aversion. In case you didn't pick it up: grieving, lamenting, beating the breast—all of that *is* aversion. And I like that he exaggerates it, because it doesn't just go, "Oh, unpleasant, a little bit resistant." We're off in the tornado! Within no time, without

mindfulness, without awareness, we're just off. And many times one thing leads to the next, to the next, and we're way down the road. You couldn't even notice what started this particular storm, what unpleasant feeling triggered it.

Sometimes when I could trace it back, when I'd be on retreat, it would be something so innocuous. I remember one time doing walking meditation, feeling fairly present—I wasn't just spaced out—but suddenly I found myself in a storm of negativity and self-hatred, with all the selective memories of bad things I'd done and people who'd been mean to me. Where did this come from?

I applied what is always the way to wisdom: *It feels like this right now. It just feels like this.* Just landing in the present with the storm, but with the body. Then I kept walking. And what I saw—this is really true—I had a little pain in my big toe. That was it. A little pain in my big toe that I would feel when I walked. When I was aware of it, you couldn't even call it pain, just a little unpleasant feeling would come and boom—tornado. One thing leads to the next to the next.

That's our problem.

Then the sutta goes on, and this is the part I find very poignant, very subtle and interesting. Having been touched by that painful feeling—the second one—he or she resists and resents it. It's not just that moment of aversion; we resist and resent it. And then, in one who resists and resents painful feeling, an underlying tendency or habit of resistance comes to underlie the citta. The habit of mind and heart tends toward resistance.

Under the impact of that painful feeling, the sutta continues, one then proceeds to look for and enjoy sense happiness. And why? An untaught worldling does not know of any other escape from painful feelings except the enjoyment of sense happiness.

I love this. It's so profound, but so obvious.

Then, in one who enjoys sense happiness—going to it for relief—an underlying tendency, the habit of craving, of lust as the translator says, for pleasant feelings comes to underlie the citta. A lust for pleasant feelings. And so one does not know, according to facts, according to the Dhamma, the laws of nature—one does not know the arising and ending of these feelings. Does not understand the gratification of pleasant feelings, the danger and the escape connected with them. In one who lacks that knowledge, the underlying tendency to ignorance gets going.

This is just so amazing to me, and it's something we can really start to explore. When one with these underlying habits—which have so quickly begun to develop—when one experiences a pleasant feeling, a painful feeling, or a neutral feeling, one feels it as if fettered by it, or bound by it. Another translation says we feel as if joined to it. I would say *stuck* to it by Velcro. Whether it's pleasant, painful, or neutral—it's like, "This is me," basically.

And such a one is fettered by suffering, the Buddha declares.

So that's our dilemma, as he describes it. I want to talk about it because this—as I'm saying—is giving you information. Many of you, if not all of you, have already experienced this, because it's happening all the time. But when we discuss it, this is the aspect of wisdom: heard wisdom.

I'm describing it, and the Buddha described it, for us not to take it on board as a piece of philosophy—because that doesn't help us—but to take it and look in our own experience. Don't look too hard for something, because that's wanting and it blocks. But when we're just landing in our experience with this open awareness, like I said about that time when I was walking with my foot—"What's happening now?"—I didn't try to analyze and go back. I just, with awareness, surrendered into "right now it's like this." What's going on? And just by seeing it, it can come up, because you have that information. And then the more we see, it moves into the third level of real insight wisdom, where we really do start to understand the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the form of these feelings.

I'll talk about that before I go to the difference with an awakened being, who experiences the same. Well, the difference, of course, is they don't lament and beat their breasts, and they don't shoot themselves with the second arrow, because they understand the nature. I'll get into that more, but I want to talk just a little about this first.

The way the Buddha is describing our moment-to-moment experience here—we've mentioned it before—he's really, in a way, pointing to the six sense experiences: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and the whole realm of mental experience. Pleasant and unpleasant moods, emotions, thoughts, the conceptual realm, loving-kindness, anger—the entire realm of mental experience. Those things are just happening over and over. That's what we experience all day, right? Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking—over and over. Have you noticed it doesn't stop? Have you noticed how fast stuff occurs? That's just how it's going on.

So each time there's anything, it's experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. How often do we actually notice that? Even when we're mindful, everything's so fast. It's often not the predominant or observable thing, so don't make yourself crazy always trying to see it. It's often not observable. Because until we even have a sense that this is going on, the way we misunderstand our experience forms in the background our view of ourselves, our view of the world. When we talk about right view and wrong view, this is really how one aspect of wrong view gets formed—pretty much, I would say, with most of us.

So all these things happening, the six senses spinning through all day, every day—pleasant, unpleasant, neutral—so often not being noticed. But the inculcated habit! Because we're all of an age where we have spent all of our life, how many times in a day, practicing liking the pleasant, not liking the unpleasant, not noticing the neutral. When you're bored, check out neutrality. Something else needs to happen, and quick! Many times people come in kind of chagrined in an interview and say, "I just noticed that I'm happier to have my mind create suffering than to be calm." It's a little more "me" going on here, even if it's a

suffering one.

So we've practiced a lot—to the point that of course we like pleasant. If you had a choice, pleasant or unpleasant, of course you'd choose pleasant. And I don't think the Buddha was saying you can't tell the difference. We can tell the difference. We can keep on telling the difference. But because it seems so joined, the worldview that can get established in the background—and again, don't believe me, I'm just putting this out, but explore and see for yourself—good, right, "the way it's supposed to be," the direction we're all moving: doesn't it head in the pleasant direction? When your practice is working, isn't it pleasant? When something is unpleasant in practice, in life, we tend to think it's wrong or not supposed to happen.

Or when you start getting into—if anyone here ever gets into a little bout of self-judging, which I know very well you do—see if it arose from something pleasant. Yeah? Probably not. Same with doubt. But you may have experienced something like a pleasant physical sensation, and there was a quick thought: "This isn't what's supposed to be happening. I'm not doing it right because I should be experiencing something other." And that thought was unpleasant. And we didn't catch that. It's often the thoughts and the emotions that are really quick that we don't notice, because they're so much more subtle than physical.

So, often unrecognized, but the worldview—that happiness, peace, and ease is associated with pleasant—persists. Moving all the way into liberation, when we talk about freedom of heart and mind and peace, it's hard for me to even think about that without associating it with more pleasant feeling and less unpleasant feeling. No? And so when we experience in our life discontent or unpleasantness or suffering—again, we're not saying we go looking for suffering or that we should hurt ourselves. But we always have to explain even a little bit, because the question arises: "I hurt. Why should I sit with hurting even for a second if I can move and get rid of it?"

It's like asking, "You people are crazy. If I'm restless and I can get up and move, why the heck should I sit with restlessness? What's the point?"

Then we all offer the answer, "Well, when we die, we're going to have to be with it, so we learn now." That's true. It's a way to at least get the person back there practicing. But it's so much more immediate than that. Although, who knows how immediate that other reality is also.

It's so much more immediate because if we don't have the capacity or the interest to sit and be present and see what's really going on, then our responses—out of all the care in our heart to make ourselves happy or to bring happiness to others—are based on misperception or based on wrong view. This is really the sense of it: there's unpleasantness, we move towards pleasant, and that's the only outlet we know.

So it can be as little as feeling restless and going to get a cup of tea. And mind you, we're looking at the process here. I'm not judging or saying there's anything wrong with a cup of tea. The Buddha's not saying pleasant is bad. He's just saying we need to understand how pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral keep

changing and cycling around.

But deep down, isn't there that sense that you could just get it a little bit better? A little bit better. And whatever it is, even if we get what we want—we do sometimes, right?—there's not unpleasant, it's pleasant, there's that ease. Do we really stay present and notice how long it lasts? How quickly the pleasant feeling changes?

The tendency is that when one pleasant experience is gone, we don't notice that what happened is a new experience came and that pleasant one went. We think, "Oh, it's gone. I need to get another." So there's that subtle leaning into the next thing. That's really samsara—the sense of just, it could be a little bit better. Even when it's all copacetic, it could be a little bit better. And when it's really unpleasant, we think the problem is in this situation. If I can get rid of this situation, then I'm on the path to happiness.

And conversely, when something isn't working out and you can't change it, there's often a tendency either to get angry or to blame and judge oneself, or to really feel ashamed, or to put the blame outward and spin in more anger. And neutral? We just ignore it.

When we talk about samsara, it's this living in a world of constant change where sometimes it's beautiful, sometimes it's not, where sometimes it's fair, sometimes it's not fair. Sometimes we have what we need. Sometimes everything seems to be going wrong. And we somehow think it should always keep moving in the hopeful, positive direction. And somehow we can control it. So when there's a lot of things going wrong, we tend to judge because we think, "I ought to be able to make this not happen."

This is samsara, and we're stuck to each experience like Velcro. It's pleasant: "Ah, finally, so happy." It's unpleasant: "Oh my God, I'm suffering." It's neutral: "When is life going to actually wake up? When is something good going to happen?"

The Tibetans have a saying I love—that the definition of samsara is the urge to correct.

And it's really like that. It's not always huge. It's just that little urge leaning forward, and not noticing that that's endless when we don't notice. So unexamined.

Some of the effects of this is that it actually feeds the sense of insufficiency, of discontent. There's always that kind of suddenly looking outward, or to the next thing, or away from this thing. Never just totally present, at ease with things as they are.

Things—as someone reminded me, I use this phrase a lot—*yathā bhūta*, which is a phrase from the Pali that means "things as they have come to be in this moment." You get the moving nature of it. Just in this moment, things as they have come to be couldn't be any different in this moment. And when there's the wisdom, the awareness, it's just like this—without thinking it needs to be corrected or anything. It's just like this. That's what allows the clear seeing, and an appropriate response can come up.

But when there's this sense of glomming to the pleasant, and I'm it, we never can just relax and see

clearly. Same with the unpleasant. Always on that little, "what next, what next?" It keeps us always looking—I want to say outward, but it keeps us looking into the object, whether it's so-called inside our own heart and mind or outside. Looking to the experience, looking to the object for peace, for fulfillment, for meaning. And the objects, as we've been saying, are always changing. You put faith in any object for real peace and happiness, and it's gone. But we don't see that.

And so we kind of stay in the thrall. Even when we're sort of present, but we don't see this process—in the thrall when something wonderful happens: "Oh, it's great!" Or something horrible happens: "Oh my God!" And that's when, as I said the other day, life can be exhausting when it's like that. We're trying our best to respond appropriately, but because we don't really see what's going on, we can't. Someone's unhappy here—have some chocolate. I mean, there's nothing wrong with offering somebody chocolate, but it's not really going to take away the grief. So how to be with it in a way that's understanding.

Just to give an example that really works for me—it doesn't work for everybody, but I'll offer it anyway—of seeing how the ups and downs of life, pleasant and unpleasant, immediately follow each other. We take it so completely personal, which we do, and then we so inhabit it. And it can completely change the next minute. We so inhabit that and don't even see what's going on. We don't have the continuity of seeing. We're just in each experience. It's like this. We don't...

So this was a couple of years ago. Probably most of you know—I'm not a football fan—but when the New England Patriots were playing in the Super Bowl. Because I live in New England, I'm more aware. I wasn't watching the Super Bowl, but people said, "Go back and watch the last two minutes." My friends recorded it. So I went back to watch the last two minutes.

Tom Brady is the star quarterback. He's sort of to New England what Steph Curry is here—but not approaching the mania that I am experiencing here around this. It's really wild around the basketball world. So Tom Brady's the star quarterback. In the last two minutes, he and his team had done a really good job, had completed a lot of passes. But now the other team had the ball, and they were ahead, and within two minutes it was clear that they were going to win. There seemed like no way they could lose.

And then the camera cut over to Tom Brady sitting on the sidelines. Never saw a better picture of dejection. I mean, really, he was sitting there, his head was down, just sitting there, so dejected. And then I think the other team was actually on the goal line, and somehow they lost the ball. They turned it over, and the Patriots got the ball and managed to make a touchdown, and they won. This is all in two minutes—a completely wild and unexpected kind of thing. Then they cut to Tom Brady, and he's leaping around like a maniac, waving his arms and grinning.

Someone might say, well, of course he's happy. I'm not saying he shouldn't be happy, or that he shouldn't be sad. It's the totality of each that strikes me—and not seeing that this is the human condition. To me, that's samsara. Then you have to live with all that time in between, the back and the forth. I could just go to the last two minutes, but they had to live with however long that whole game lasted.

So we don't see it. We don't recognize it. We're always caught in looking to the object, the experience, for happiness, for peace.

The next part Joseph discusses is how these habits become underlying tendencies, because we go for the pleasant experience without understanding its coming and going. We don't understand the nature, the gratification, the danger, and the escape.

And this is again from the Buddha: "Before my enlightenment, oh monks, while I was still a bodhisattva"—while he was still practicing to awaken—"it occurred to me: What is the gratification in the world? What is the danger? What is the escape from the world? Then it occurred to me: whatever pleasure and joy there is in the world, this is the gratification."

The pleasure, the joy, the happiness, the pleasant sense feelings—that's the gratification. And I want to emphasize that he's not saying this doesn't exist or that it's bad. Yes, this is the gratification.

What's the danger? That the world is impermanent, that all experience is impermanent. It's all bound up with unreliability, with dissatisfaction, and subject to change. And as someone said the other night, the change is really so momentary. We all see the big changes, but the pleasant feeling is changing so quickly, coming and going, and we don't see that. This holding to the pleasant, the habit, comes because it's going the next and next and next, and we're not really seeing it as it is—how fast it's changing, how totally unreliable any feeling, any experience is.

It's pleasant and there's gratification in the moment, yes. But right away comes that clinging to the pleasant, thinking that's the source of happiness, not seeing the danger.

And the escape is the abandoning of this lust, this desire for the gratification, for the pleasant. This is the escape from the world.

I want to point out: escape from the world—he didn't say that. He said the abandoning of this habit of craving, of lust, is the escape from the suffering in the world. He didn't say the escape from the world is to go in a cave and never have anything to do with anybody. He didn't say that. He didn't say that there's no more gratification in the world. He said the abandoning of the lust. Agreed.

So that's really what Steve was talking about this morning. That is really where freedom comes. And it's not an act of personal will, because it doesn't work. We can try. I think I said the other day, you try all the time: "I'm not going to crave anymore. I really get it. I've heard it. I've read it. I've seen how fast pleasant things change. So I'm giving up believing that that's really the way to happiness." It's something to incline the mind towards.

If it works for you, wonderful—I'd really love to hear it. But the habits are so insidious, and as you see, it happens so quickly.

Abandoning lust for the world does not mean abandoning interest in the world. It doesn't mean

abandoning care or compassion or engaged activity. It doesn't mean any of that. Actually, even in a moment—it doesn't have to be the heart-mind completely free forever of greed and aversion—but when there are moments of steady awareness and we can see clearly and wisdom comes, in those moments of wholesome heart-mind, there isn't greed, hatred, or delusion. The response to the moment is going to arise out of beautiful, wholesome states. That's what there's room for when they're not shoved out by wanting, by leaning into the next thing, by avoiding something because it's unpleasant.

So actually, the abandoning—even in a moment—of lust for the pleasant and resistance to the unpleasant is what allows for a more appropriate response. Whether it's compassion or wisdom or equanimity, or just a sense of doing what needs to be done in this moment without any big whoop about it, without resistance, without wanting, without putting it all back to what does it mean about me. Just what needs to happen.

But it's not an act of personal will. Wisdom does the work. Wisdom does the work. It's wisdom, which is a quality in the citta, that arises just like greed—comes and goes, just like greed. So what we can do, and what we are doing, is cultivate the conditions that allow for wisdom to arise more frequently, to grow stronger, so that we can actually begin to cultivate a different habit of mind.

There are many ways to do that. The main one, and the one we're talking about here—you know what I'm going to say, right? It's the long habit of continual awareness. And it really is an amazing thing.

Someone today asked something like, "What wisdom is coming from noticing my foot's asleep?" Fair question. In the moment, it's not like we get this great insight. But every moment of awareness that isn't distorted by these habits is a moment that's allowing for clear seeing. The continuity is necessary because we need to see the process—what I've been describing about pleasant or unpleasant, and to notice that, to notice the reaction, to notice how the reaction spins out of control and leads to more thoughts and feelings, and then how we go for the pleasant. We need a steadiness of awareness to really notice the process.

And the switch that happens, the way wisdom starts to work in our experience, is that we start to get more interested in the process than in our reactions to each individual experience or object. Because our habit is, with each object or experience, we assess it: like it or don't like it, what does it mean about me, what's the effect going to be, what can I do. There's a sense of separateness, of one-one-one. We don't see the big picture. We stay in this separate little reactivity. We stay in "what does it mean about me."

But when we start to see with a steady awareness that begins to build a little momentum, we start to see a process. This is where it's like, "Oh, I see it working. I really see it working"—like that silly example of me and my big toe hurting. I really saw it, and I wasn't expecting anything. Just with awareness, looking: "Oh, look at that." It wasn't about "I have to stop aversion" or "I should fix my big toe" or "How stupid am I that this happened." It was like, "Wow. This is like a natural law. This is how it's working when these habits have been developed—aversion and wanting, greed—without recognizing them." And seeing it function,

it's like, "Wow, how cool."

Not expecting that with an act of will we can come in and say, "Okay, now I see it once, it's over." Think how many mind moments we've practiced these other habits in our life. Just think about it in one day.

So in a way, it's kind of encouraging. I'll say it's encouraging. I don't think we need as many moments of awareness and wisdom to cut through, for insight to arise, as we've had moments of delusion and greed and aversion. I really don't think we need that many. That's the power. Wisdom and the wholesome qualities are actually a lot stronger because they reflect the truth of how things are. This other way of functioning is based in confusion and not seeing. So when you see, "Oh wow, look at that, isn't that interesting?"—then I know. I know that that process was true.

You don't have to think about it anymore. That's what we mean when we talk about insight, the quality of insight. We might reflect on it later, but there's this sense of *oh*. The perception is shifting. You see it in a different way. And seeing—it doesn't have to be visual, I'm just using that word for all perceiving—there's this recognition: *Oh, that's what's going on.* You just know it.

It's like when a puzzle suddenly shifts—one of those trick-of-the-eye images where you can only see it one way, and then suddenly you see it the other way. *Oh.* You couldn't see it until you could. And once you can, you can't unsee it. You can fall back into seeing it the other way, but you know it's there. And if someone comes and tells you, "No, you didn't see that," you don't have to get into an argument. But you know. You know.

This is really what the quality of insight is. You can see why we can't create it from an act of will, because that would just be thinking about it. And we don't even know what we're looking for because we haven't recognized it yet. The way it actually reveals itself is so different from what we expect.

So we become more interested in the process rather than entranced by what's going on. This is the shift. This is where awareness, steady awareness, becomes what Ajahn Sumedho calls "an escape hatch"—the way out of samsara.

And now I have to say it again. When I said "the way out of samsara," did somewhere in the back of your mind, not quite articulated, a thought arise: *We're not going to have to keep going through all this stuff?* The samsara, the difficulty—but the stuff keeps happening.

So this is from Sumedho. He gives a kind of grin and says, "But it's not what we might think it is, the way out of samsara." It doesn't mean this stuff stops. He says that when we really determine in our hearts and minds—when we truly commit ourselves to cultivating awareness in our lives—then something changes. On a retreat like this, if this practice is new to you, it might give you enough of a taste that you want to make that determination. It doesn't mean we make it once and it's over, but there's a sense of reordering our priorities. He talks about this a lot.

When you really determine in yourself to cultivate awareness, then you start using everything that happens in your life—everything that happens, no matter what's occurring—as a way to cultivate awareness. On retreat and off retreat. That's why we structure the practice this way.

Someone today—I won't say who, because I didn't ask permission—said something I really loved, so beautiful. They spoke about having this determination and working with it in life, deciding to take some classes in a kind of craft they're not particularly good at. And just watching the whole process of trying to do, and doing or not being able to do, all the reactions that arise in the mind. The whole thing is held in the light of awareness—just watching what the mind is doing, being present with that entire process.

But the difference between being with a process and being with a process *with awareness* is that the Velcro isn't there. You might be jumping up and down with excitement or feeling really dejected, but there's this knowing: *Oh yeah, I think this is going to make me happy.* How long was Tom Brady happy from his Super Bowl win? Then there was this whole football deflating situation, and he's being sued—I mean, something always happens. That's how life is.

And Ajahn Sumedho is saying it's not that we create some ideal state through the continuity of awareness. He says that awakening out of delusion, we find ourselves in reality as it is—*yathā bhūta*, reality as it's come to be in this moment.

And again, the real isn't what you're expecting. Life is fair and unfair. There's pleasure and pain. There's success and failure. There are horrible things and beautiful things. That doesn't stop happening. It doesn't go away.

What changes? Back to the sutta. What changes is our understanding, and the understanding changes our response.

So the well-taught noble disciple does not beat his breast and weep when touched by a painful feeling. She experiences one kind of feeling—a bodily one—but not a mental feeling, as if pierced by a dart but not hit by a second dart. So having been touched by that painful feeling, she does not resist and resent it.

Can you imagine that? That's why we practice just being with little pains, being with restlessness, being with something that's unpleasant but not killing you. To see that it's really possible to be totally present without resisting and resenting it. Without needing to move away to go to something pleasant. And then when you're really clear about that, you can eat the shrimp. But it helps to be clear about that first. If you eat the shrimp before you're clear about it, we don't learn. That's where the awareness comes in.

So under the impact of that painful feeling, she does not proceed, does not need to go looking for sense happiness. Why not? Because a well-taught disciple knows of an escape from painful feelings other than by enjoying sense happiness.

To me, that's the most profound statement here. We know, even just for a moment, we know there's an

escape from painful feelings other than just needing to enjoy sense happiness. This not knowing that there's any other way out of unpleasant than to go for sense happiness is so poignant to me. I mean, look at the world. I don't have to say much else. Look at the world and this sense that we have to get more to be happy. And those people who are born into a situation where they can't get more, where there's really a lot more of unpleasant than pleasant—we think, well, a lot of compassion if we can be present, but kind of like it's hopeless for them. But it's not hopeless for us when things really go wrong. To see that there's another way out of that suffering.

She knows. So there's no underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feelings. That doesn't get developed. Because she knows, she understands according to facts the arising and ending of those pleasant feelings. It comes and goes. You know that. And the gratification, the danger, and the escape connected with these pleasant feelings. And so when she experiences a pleasant feeling, a painful feeling, or a neutral feeling, she feels it as one who is not bound by it, as one who is not joined to it, as one who is not fettered by it. Such a one, oh monks, is called a well-taught noble disciple who is not fettered to suffering. This I declare.

That's really one way of looking at what we're practicing. So what does that mean—to experience it without being bound to it, but we still experience it and we're not fettered by suffering? It's really this long continuous awareness that allows that to happen. The situation may stay just the same. But the unfetteredness, the freedom, is in the completely different response that arises from wisdom, not because we think we should.

So I'll give you an example from a good friend of mine who's given me permission to use this. She's been practicing in the Dharma for many, many years. We're close friends. Both her parents are dead now, but her parents lived in Texas. She had always had a difficult relationship with the family, but she was close. She'd go home every year and visit her parents and her siblings. And it was always a bit fraught. Not horrible, but normal fraught. Difficult.

But she said every time she'd go home—just as Steve or someone was saying here, if you think you're enlightened, go home and see what responses, what reactions come up. She said every time she'd go there, on the plane on the way, she'd think: I'm going to act from mettā. I'm going to be really kind. I'm not going to be triggered.

Does it sound familiar? Have you ever done that?

As soon as she walked in the door—boom. She was the most reactive she'd ever been. And she'd wonder, why? She's making all these efforts, but it's not an act of will.

So we're talking over years. She started practicing really looking at the steady awareness and observing what's arising in the citta in any moment. Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral—vedana—what's the response? We notice when there's anger, we notice when there's greed, we notice when there's love. It starts to become a habit. And this is the awareness getting momentum. It's not some great state. It's not based on a

kind of structured concentration that goes away at the end of a retreat. That's why it doesn't feel so special right now. But it starts to creep in, and we know it is from talking to you all. You're still wanting some juicy steak you're not going to get, so you don't quite trust this yet.

So anyway, she'd done a retreat like this, and she's going home on the plane. She said, okay, I'll just keep practicing, just watching my mind. That's all—just the awareness watching my mind. Rather than make this commitment that she was going to be the perfect daughter when she walked in the door.

So she's on the plane watching her mind, just being mellow about it. She had a wait in the airport, so she went over in a corner and did a little walking meditation, just watching her mind. But then she noticed, on the plane watching her mind, that this kind of reactivity—not just resistance, but a little aggressiveness—was there in her own mind. Her mind was thinking, well, when I walk in, my sister is going to do this and this and that, and I'm not going to put up with that. And she goes, oh wow. So actually, I'm walking in the door with negativity, ready for a fight. And I had no clue because I was saying I'll be peaceful, I'll be loving, I'll be happy—but not with awareness, not seeing what was really there.

So she kept on being aware. She said, oh wow, look at that. Not "oh, you're so bad"—just "oh, look at that." And so she just kept watching. She walked in. She was aware of that. Her sister did whatever.

She said it was the best visit she ever had, because she was just interested in the process. And what happens with the clear seeing is the wisdom kicks in. She actually responded with much more openness, much more acceptance, because she wasn't blocking what was going on in her own resistance—she was aware of it. When her sister did do the things she always did, my friend was already aware of her own resistance, and wisdom said, yeah, you don't need to act from it. It doesn't have to drive the bus. And she was actually able to be—not even able, it just happened by itself.

That's what we mean when we say wisdom does the work. Our work is really getting interested in the process. And that's what Ajahn Sumedho means by stepping out of samsara. The same stuff's going on. The Velcro isn't there. The wisdom, just from seeing how things are, is all we need to do.

That's what I love about Right View. Once there's a real recognizing accurately, the way that craving is abandoned—it's not like, oh my God, I have to give it up. It stops making sense. When you see, oh, I really want this pleasant feeling to last, and you can watch it evaporate and you're aware, it doesn't make any sense because craving is uncomfortable. We don't like to be with it. It's like, oh yeah, craving doesn't make sense—poof, it goes away.

When she walks in and her sister's starting in her reactive mode, but she knows her sister really had a lot of suffering. And when she was aware of her own reactivity and not reacting to it, getting angry at her sister didn't make any sense. Because when you can see the suffering in someone, what naturally comes is compassion—when we're not caught. You don't have to think about it. I mean, we can cultivate it in other ways, but in this way, the wisdom does the work.

So when we think about, oh my God, I have to give up craving and attachment to all the beautiful things—that's what we hear, isn't it? Giving up attachment, giving up lust for the beautiful things in the world. We think that means giving the things up. But it's all still happening. Giving up the craving is like the hugest freedom, relief.

And we can't do it because an act of will is usually coming from me wanting something different. Duh. Wisdom's like, "Oh, it's like this. Craving doesn't make any sense." Boom. It's gone.

Play with it in little ways, not in big ways. Then it'll come in the big ways.

And then we see, as I said before, when the craving, the aversion, these habits are abandoned, it doesn't mean that one necessarily just becomes quiescent, just lives a quiet life. One is as active as one's personality ever wanted to be—with more being in sync with what's really going on, responding in a much more appropriate way.

The Buddha says this really beautifully. I want to end with this. Someone asks, "In what way is one a wise person of great wisdom?" And he says it's many different ways. This one just suits my talk.

"In what way is one a wise person of great wisdom?" He says, "Such a person does not intend"—so that's the citta in movement, the intention, the wanting—"does not intend for his own affliction or for the affliction of others or of both." So we don't have any arising of wanting to do something to harm ourselves or others. "Rather, when a wise person thinks, she thinks only of her own welfare"—and notice, your own welfare is included; we're all equal—"thinks only of her own welfare, of the welfare of others, the welfare of both, and the welfare of the whole world. It is in this way that one is a wise person of great wisdom."

So just by getting interested in the process, see what kind of... if it comes up, you're making a commitment to awareness, and just gently watching, this wisdom arises quite naturally. And from seeing such a little thing as pleasant feeling come and go. Like someone said—I think Alexis said—with one thread, the whole dharma is attached.

So play with it. Play with it over the days. Don't make a big deal about it, but it's really one of the keys in to recognizing reality and freedom.

Thank you for listening to the dharma.

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