Wisdom Shines Through Our Actions: The Buddha

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:00:05

The first moment of launching out into the silence always feels really strange to me, and then it gets going.

What I want to talk about tonight—the general theme—is that we've been talking so much about the steadiness of awareness and the importance of continuing steady awareness with wisdom to recognize all the conditioning, all the habits of mind that cause suffering. Of course, I'll have to include that; don't think you're getting away without it. But what I want to emphasize more tonight is how that wisdom feeds and strengthens wholesome states. I want to mention a few ways this actually occurs—there are many ways—and really as a way of encouraging and emphasizing the recognition of wholesome states with awareness as well.

Theoretically, this shouldn't be necessary, since you're all committed from morning to night to steady awareness, noticing everything that arises and passes. So you equally notice the wholesome with the unwholesome, correct? No. Once a day there's a wholesome state, and the rest of the day—that's about how it is. I noticed.

So here's the focus. A couple of reasons I want to mention this. One is what I just said: because we talk so much and really start to explore the suffering habits that arise in the citta, in the heart, which is essential, sometimes it actually happens that even though we've been resisting them forever, our habit of mind in retreat gets a little too focused in one direction. We get into another habit of mind that just doesn't quite recognize the wholesome or bring full awareness into it and inhabit it with the same confidence with which we inhabit greed and hatred. We may not have the same trust or the same personal feeling that it's mine, but we need to recognize it.

Another thing is that sometimes on retreat, at different times, people feel that we're getting so involved in all the minutia, all the little stuff, that it seems to feed just this obsession with me, me, me—my stories, my this and my that. It just seems like I'm more self-involved than ever. And another kind of doubt that can come up at times is: this is great, I'm really learning a lot, but it seems so subtle and esoteric, so supported by the silence and separateness of retreat—what does it have to do with daily life? Noticing the little subtle movements of greed when I look at the person walking next to me, what does that have to do with daily life?

The answer, of course, is everything.

So those are perhaps some reasons I'm planting in the mind. What I talk about may or may not have anything to do with you, but I'm thinking it does.

What I really want to talk about is right view. Wise understanding is the first step in the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha's fourth of the Four Noble Truths describes the way of living, the way of practice to cultivate and deepen awareness, wisdom, right view. We've talked about that, right? You've noticed we talked about that.

The second step of the Eightfold Path is sammā saṅkappa, which is variously translated as right thought, right intention, right motivation. We've been talking about noticing the motivation, that impulse in the heart and mind before moving. That's really what I want to talk about tonight: sammā saṅkappa, right intention, right motivation.

This is from the Dalai Lama. A few people have also been expressing something along the lines of—nobody actually said this exactly, but this is my point—wondering whether this approach is really enough, or whether it's just something Sayadaw U Tejaniya made up. So just to say, it's not like this is completely separate or doesn't align with what other great Buddhist teachers say. The Dalai Lama puts it this way: Buddhism essentially consists of two things—the view, which means a definitive understanding of the interdependence of all things, and action, which can be loosely defined as non-violence. The view and action.

The second step of the Eightfold Path—wise thought, wise motivation—is the key, the impulse, the link to action: right speech, right action, right livelihood, which are the next steps in the path. So this intention is crucial. It's key.

The Buddha was very clear. I think I read a similar quotation in one of my other talks. The awakened mind, the awakened heart shows up and manifests in our actions. This is from the Buddha: "A fool is characterized by his or her actions. A wise person is characterized by his or her actions. It is through the activities of one's life that one's wisdom, one's discernment, shines." He says this over and over. Our actions are the inevitable effect, the result, the manifestation of whatever quality, whatever attitude is in the mind in the moment that impulse to speak or act arises. This is extremely clear.

And so it is a profound aspiration, I feel, to even begin to hold the aspiration to really purify, to transform the habits of our heart and mind, the habits of consciousness—those habits that, unrecognized and unthinking, keep leading us into wanting and aversion and more confusion and suffering. It's a profound and, to me, really beautiful aspiration.

But we can't do it as an act of personal will. We've said that many times, because what do we know? How do we know to act from? We don't quite tune into the awareness. We try to get rid of greed by aversion. We try to get rid of aversion by greed—"Let me feel loving kindness." We're thinking, we're trying to think our way in, and we may mean well. But we don't know what's going on. We don't have the tools. It's not

something we can just personally wish into being.

This is where the key lies—this second step, this understanding of how to recognize motivation and what attitude in the mind colors our actions. That's what we've been training in. But what's really quite wonderful is that in the light of wisdom, in the light of steady awareness, as wisdom develops, the natural effect of that wisdom is that these unwholesome habits begin to naturally transform. I'll speak to the specifics that the Buddha addresses in Samma Sankappa, but it's remarkable. It really is.

You've all seen now how when we don't recognize what particular quality in the mind—the kilesas, the unwholesome habits, or as Steve was saying the other night, the dangerous habits—when we don't recognize their presence, they drive the bus. Sometimes even when we do recognize them, they still drive. But at least awareness is going along, and that's a significant difference, which I'll get to in a moment.

Even with good intentions, even when we have a really clear sense—"I want to be more kind," or "I'm not going to eat this harmful food"—we really mean it. We're totally sincere, and we absolutely can't do it. We don't know why.

I remember in one group with U Tejaniya some years ago, there was a perfect description. A woman, a long-term meditator, had a certain food she was really allergic to. It wasn't just that she didn't want it—she liked it. She was coming into the dining room at the meditation center in Barre, which has a big blackboard announcing what the meal will be. She came in, saw that food listed, and noticed the wanting arise. Her mind said, "No, I'm not going to eat this, out of compassion for myself." So that's wisdom, she thought. But then, she said, she went and sat down and took it and ate it.

So she asked U Tejaniya, "How come? There was this wisdom, but I didn't act on it."

And he said in his way, "Well, superficial wisdom, real and deep kilesa."

It's like that, right? That moment of wisdom—"I'm not going to do it because it's harmful to me"—that is a moment of wisdom. A moment. That's the key here. Mind moments are arising and passing really quickly. Without recognizing this, we think, "Oh, I'm not going to do it," and we stop looking. Hence the emphasis on steadiness of awareness. We don't notice all the moments of greed that are running the show. I guess you can relate. People don't laugh if they can't relate.

That's why it takes a real kind of seeing that is helpful—seeing all the different things in ourselves and in life. For me at least, if you don't go drown in self-judgment, which is of course just flipping to aversion, you can really say, "Oh wow, look how strong this habit is. Let me recommit to awareness." Of course, that requires some sense of verified faith, some sense of confidence that this work actually leads somewhere.

The key is in recognizing what's the motivation for action. As the Buddha said in the Dhammapada, that famous verse at the very beginning: "Mind is the forerunner of all things. Speak or act with an impure mind and suffering follows you like the wheel follows the hoof of the ox that draws the cart. Mind is the

forerunner of all things. Speak or act with a pure mind and happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves you."

The key here is that mind is the forerunner of all things. And so when the Buddha speaks about this impulse of intention, *cetanā*, it's really like an impulse that leads to speech and action, and we can notice it arising. Often we just feel the impulse and notice the thought—like this friend thinking, "I want to not eat this"—without noticing, because it can be subtle, all the impulses and the wanting, the greed that was coming with those impulses.

As the Buddha describes what makes action wholesome or unwholesome, our tendency is to evaluate it by the result. Or by how it looks, or whether it got what it wanted. But this is absolutely not the case in terms of the way the Buddha understands the world and what's really supportive for us to see. Both the qualities of the pure heart and mind and how they manifest, and how the impure manifests—the intention is really the heart, the seed of action. It's the quality that's together with that impulse in the heart and mind in a particular moment that motivates the action.

The exact same action, looking from the outside, could be motivated by a whole slew of different things. Because when you look at it, we don't actually control the results of action, do we? We could do something that really, if you tune in, is felt from kindness. We're really trying to help someone, but we don't have the big picture. So maybe there's been delusion. We projected some whole story onto how unhappy that person is that wasn't true at all to begin with. That's big delusion. But maybe we even saw something accurately and tried to help, yet what they really needed was just to be left alone. That kind of thing is simple enough.

I use speaking as an example often, because say you have something a little difficult to communicate to someone, but you're not doing it in anger. When you're clear, you get in touch with this sense of caring, of kindness, because you know this little thing they do is really bringing a lot of negativity their way from other people, and you want to help them. Well, you can already surmise the various kinds of motivations and intentions that could give rise to the exact same words.

So if you're really clear with yourself, you could do it quite from loving-kindness. But you didn't check out what was going on with them, and they just staggered home from the end of a most stressful day. They're at the end of their rope, and you decide to give them this really loving feedback, and they're just not able to hear it. That's a kind of not getting the big picture. Or perhaps we've practiced being loving, but in the moment, that's not really what's happening. "Let me tell you this for your own good and for the good of all beings"—and various other things. The words are the same. But how it's received, even when you do it with loving-kindness and it seems like an appropriate time, is completely out of our control or even knowledge. We don't know how that person is going to hear it, how they're going to receive it.

So as the Buddha said, the key, the heart of action, of intention, of motivation, is the quality in the heart-mind that the action is springing from. And this is the place that is so cool, what I was talking

about—because in the light of steady awareness that allows wisdom to recognize accurately what's going on, which is what we've been doing, the motivations begin to naturally transform. This is what the Buddha called *sammā-saṅkappa*.

In particular, he mentions that the motivation or thought of sense desire, of greed, transforms to the motivation of renunciation, and from that to generosity. That of ill-will transforms to *mettā*, to friendliness. And cruelty, another aspect of hatred, transforms to compassion.

You'll notice he doesn't say thoughts of delusion transform to wisdom, because as we've said before, that's not a matter of personal intention or thought. That's a matter of long, clear seeing that allows for wisdom to arise. But these are plenty to work with in terms of wholesomeness and really experiencing consciously the happiness of it.

So of course we start with the steady awareness that notices how, and how frequently, the unwholesome, the difficult habits of mind are kind of the fallback mode. And how, sometimes really obviously but sometimes quite subtly or suddenly, they can become the motivation for action.

Sometimes what really inspires me to keep having the willingness to open to this, to look at it with interest—not with "Oh my god, more aversion," but with genuine curiosity, really wanting to see it—I may have mentioned this in one group. I was on a retreat a while ago doing some walking meditation in a pretty calm, clear state. I wasn't feeling a lot of aversion. The mind was calm, there was quite some wisdom, some happiness, all of that.

And just then some thought came into my mind, thinking about some email I was going to answer and what I would say—a little funny answer—and it went on. But then I thought, wait a minute. And I saw in that little funny answer that had come up, which I could just dismiss as nothing, no suffering, gone on to the next thing, calm—but in that little funny answer there was just the teensiest bit of aversion. Because humor definitely can carry that, and I'm from New York so it's even more so. But it wasn't really harmful or anything. It was just a little tweak of aversion, and then gone.

I could see my mind go, "Well, that's okay. That's no big deal. It's not hurting anyone." And I thought, wait a minute. It's not a big deal, but the more we practice, the more the steadiness of awareness comes, the more the wisdom comes, the less it's okay. And this wasn't an aversive judgment. This was actually inspirational to me. Oh, okay—that's the aversion I really want to see. When aversion arises in the mind, when greed arises in the mind—because for me, it's my aspiration—it's not okay, really.

It's okay, it's a little bit aversive, and maybe they even missed it, they won't even know, they'll think it's funny too. But I can feel—you can feel. You know, we're learning how to feel how aversion feels: that separation, that contraction. Same with greed. Same with delusion. You start to feel it.

Really, the danger of it is that it blocks freedom. The danger isn't just that it doesn't feel good. The danger is that even subtle aversion—one can't see, as the Buddha said, with aversion one's own good or the good

of another or the good of both. One doesn't recognize the pure nature of heart-mind with even the littlest bit.

But to look in that way needs to come with balanced awareness, not when you're already spinning in self-hatred, right? I think you get a sense of what I mean, and it was inspiring to me. It's like: right, keep going, kid, keep going. It's not just settling for good enough.

So that's one way I get inspired. Another way is just from noticing other little ways it comes up. If I'm walking in the city and I see a homeless person begging and I go in the other direction because I feel awkward, I let myself feel that. Let myself feel it. And then, just like here, you go or you don't go, you do whatever you do, but you bring awareness along with you. You bring it along with you.

Or paying attention to things in the world, to people in the world. I've used this in talks before, but on the radio three or four years ago, I came in the middle of some interview on public radio. I didn't even know who they were talking to. But it was somebody who was doing some kind of social research in prisons and had been talking to young men—young men in long-term incarceration for violent crimes. I didn't know any more details than that. But the person interviewed was describing one interview he'd had with a young man who was in for some very serious violent crime, very young, and in for life basically. And he said—the guy in prison said—"I just wish I had back that five to ten seconds where..." basically the greed or the—he didn't say it quite in our language—"I wish I had back that five to ten seconds where I did that violent act."

And that just struck me, because we all know how, even when we have quite some tuning in to what are the habits in our mind, given the conditions—and we haven't been paying attention, or something strong enough triggers us—boom, they just can come shooting up. And without enough self-knowledge, without enough care in the mind in terms of our behavior and action, without recognizing motivations, five or ten seconds is enough to ruin yours and somebody else's life. So stuff like that will really re-motivate me. And you can see it anywhere. You can see it anywhere.

This is where we start to see for ourselves: what do we really trust? Again, we've said this a lot—what is your refuge? For that young man, whatever was going on, anger, violence seemed like the only safe response, the only refuge, because of what had been practiced.

So here, starting to recognize—we've been talking about awareness as a refuge—but now I want to talk about the three wise intentions, motivations. Because as we learn to feel and recognize them, see how they arise, know how they feel, inhabit them just as fully as we inhabit the unwholesome qualities, this will also strengthen the wisdom, which will strengthen the confidence, the faith, which gives us the energy and the willingness to keep on being mindful and stabilize the mind—and it strengthens wisdom. Those are the five spiritual faculties that Steve's going to talk about, so I'm not going to say much more about them.

These three naturally transform in the light of steady wisdom and awareness. Let me read from the Buddha. Here he's talking about before his self-awakening, when he was still an unawakened bodhisattva. I love that there are not that many suttas where he's talking about what his mind was like before he was awakened. It's still pretty far along, okay? But anyway, this is a very famous sutta, the Two Sorts of Thinking. I'll just read a few lines of it.

He says: "As I was practicing, as I remained heedful, a way of mindfulness aware, ardent, energized, and resolute, thinking filled with sense desire arose in me. I discerned that this had arisen in me." Just mindfulness, right? You don't go, "Oh my God, thinking with sense desire, what am I going to do?" No—"I discerned that thinking with sense desire had arisen in me. I saw that it leads to my own affliction. As I noticed it leads to my own affliction, it subsided. As I noticed that it leads to the affliction of others, it subsided. As I noticed that it leads to the affliction of both, it subsided. As I noticed it obstructs discernment"—which is the word he's using here for wisdom—"it promotes vexation and it does not lead to liberation—it subsided. It subsided."

He's just doing what we're doing. Watching it. Seeing how it functions. It promotes vexation.

It leads to my own affliction and the affliction of others. He's seeing that in himself, and through the steady awareness, it subsides.

The same with thinking imbued with ill will arose in me—exactly the same thing. Thinking imbued with harmfulness arose in me—exactly the same thing.

And then he said, as he kept on, whatever a person keeps pursuing with their thinking and pondering, that becomes the inclination of their awareness. So we've seen that. That's the habit. Think about it all the time. It's like a rut—a rut in emptiness. I don't know where the rut is, but somehow it keeps feeding. That's what arises. It gets easy.

So if one keeps pursuing thinking—and by thinking here it's also motivation leading to action—imbued with sense desire, that's how it's going to go. With ill will, with harmfulness, that's going to be the easy response that leads to speech and action.

Then he goes, "As I remained thus heedful, ardent, and resolute, thinking imbued with renunciation arose in me. I discerned that this had arisen in me and that it leads neither to my own affliction, nor to the affliction of others, nor to the affliction of both. It fosters wisdom, discernment, clear seeing. It promotes lack of vexation and it leads to liberation. If I were to think and ponder in line with that renunciation, even for a night, even for a day, even for a day and a night, I do not envision any danger that would come from it, except that thinking and pondering a long time would tire the body." He's like, just totally, this is just what happens. "When the body is tired, the mind is disturbed. And a disturbed mind is far from collectedness, far from steadiness. So I steadied my mind right within, settled, unified, and concentrated it." Why is that? "So my mind would not be disturbed."

So he's really looking in the same way at thoughts of non-ill will, or metta, and thoughts of harmlessness, or compassion. Really just exploring them equally with steady awareness and seeing they don't lead to harm for me or another or both. They don't cause vexation. They don't block wisdom. Not a theory, but watching it in his own mind and heart.

And in the seeing of that—this is what's called the wisdom of seeing—oh, this is how the harmful ones act, leading to vexation. As I kept on noticing, as I kept on looking, they subsided. And you've all seen that sometimes. Then we assume it should always subside immediately. That's extra. But seeing how, through the steady awareness, the unwholesome is not being fed.

It may have a momentum and keep going. There are times when it's kind of half equal because the mind moves so fast, like when we act from the greed but bring awareness along. The motivation is kind of flipping back and forth between greed and awareness, greed and awareness, but because the mind moves so quickly. But as the awareness gets stronger and the wisdom stronger, the kilesa actually subsides in that moment.

And the reverse is also true. As awareness is really aware of non-clinging—let's say that for renunciation, or generosity, or metta, or friendliness, or non-ill will—the awareness of it, the wisdom that seeing that it causes no harm, actually feeds the wholesome. We don't have to think, "Oh, here this is, let me hold on to it, let me whip it up, let me get it stronger." We can really trust that through the steadiness of recognition of awareness.

It's like Guy Armstrong likes to say, the way he thinks of it, it's a beneficent universe. When I first heard him say it, I thought, "What, a beneficent universe? You look around?" But he said, no, because this is the laws of how it works. When you notice the wholesome with awareness, with wisdom, that naturally feeds it. When there's wisdom in the heart and mind, these unskillful motivations naturally begin to transform. It's not an act of will.

So this is really a wonderful thing. That's why I want to talk a bit about where that came from. One way it happens, as I just described from the Buddha, is just by steady awareness. We see this causes suffering, and the transformation is the wise mind goes, "Yeah," and just puts it down. This doesn't make sense.

When we really see that clinging is causing suffering in a particular situation, like holding a hot potato, you don't have to think about it. Should I put it down?

I mean, the trick is not to throw it with aversion. The trick is, "Oh yeah, let me just put that down." It's like that.

But another thing I want to explore—this is how I look at it too—is what allows for the clear seeing to come, for these kleshas to kind of drop away. It's that the wholesome, the beautiful qualities of renunciation, loving-kindness, compassion—these are qualities that can really arise from a broad, inclusive awareness. I'll talk about renunciation in a moment, because you may not think of that right

away as a beautiful quality, as a happy quality. But that's because we don't understand what it really is.

When we're still caught in what Lama called the narrow bandwidth of "it's all about me," we may have the thought, "I want to do compassionate action," but we really can't see much beyond our nose. We want to do it and we think we want to do it, but that's when we can't. We can't really see what's clear. We can't really get a broad, more accurate perception. But just widening the perception to take in the whole show—it changes everything.

This again from the Dalai Lama, part of that same quotation. He's talking about universal interdependence, which is a way of saying not separate "me-self," just all arising experience: "Since we are all dependent on each other, and all other beings want to be happy and not suffer just as I do, my personal happiness and suffering are inextricably linked with those of others."

In other words, there's no way we can act out of greed and hatred without affecting others as well as ourselves—just as the Buddha said, the affliction of ourselves, the affliction of others. And seeing that, this narrow bandwidth opens up. Even if you're not acting, but the motivation shifts, it can shift the whole picture.

Let me tell you a little story—really a non-doing story, but just a shift of inner motivation. A long, long time ago, too long ago, I was traveling by myself on an overnight train in India. I had a sleeping berth, but not a private one—second or third class. So I had a berth, which is just like a shelf, with three other berths in that same little compartment. But I hadn't thought to get the ladies' car. So it was me and three guys on this berth.

I didn't feel totally comfortable. I mean, there were a million other people on the train—you're definitely not isolated. And in the daytime, there were people everywhere. But then they all leave, and it's just me and these three guys. They were just lying there. They weren't bothering me at all. But every culture has different ways that are appropriate. Lying there staring at me isn't really rude there, whereas here, if they're all lying staring at me—well, you know.

So I was extremely self-conscious and a bit aversive. I just turned to the wall, but I really felt impinged upon. Not scared—I knew nothing was going to happen—but I was aversive and felt impinged upon. "Me, and they should leave me alone, and my space, and blah, they're in my space."

I was like that for a bit of the night. And then at some point, somewhere, something in my mind shifted and I said, "Okay, this is *our* space. We're all just here." That was all. But it was a real shift—that thought was coming out of a shift in motivation rather than saying it and trying to rationalize and pretend that I really felt different. You can try that. Sometimes you can talk yourself into it, but usually not.

Anyway, I thought, "Okay, it's our space." That's all I did. I just kept on lying there. We got up in the morning, and of course their whole families came in, and suddenly there were twenty-five of us there in the car. But I hadn't said a word. I hadn't been like, "So it's our space, we're all one, let's shake hands." I

hadn't spoken to anybody at all. But the whole motivation in my heart and mind had changed.

So they brought in their families, they got really friendly—where they hadn't spoken to me before either. And they were buying me little sweets when we stopped at the stations and giving me chai. The whole thing was a completely different experience. It was really such an interesting lesson.

So it's a natural occurrence. Not like I was doing something to be good friends with these people or making any effort. They just felt the difference. We're all connected, you know. You lie there emanating aversion—it's not a secret.

So really we start to see from this the interconnectedness. And this again strengthens these wise motivations, *sammā saṅkappa*.

I want to say a little bit about each, because each one could be a huge talk, but I want to touch on each briefly. Hopefully you can recognize when they're arising in your experience, because they are. They're not some incredibly esoteric thing. But do notice them just as much as you notice the others.

Renunciation might be the one that is most not recognized, or not quite recognized, as the really happy state of heart-mind it is as a motivation. Remember, the motivation is about what's occurring in the *citta*, not about the outward appearance.

We often tend to think of renunciation as a grim giving up of something we want. So we still have the greed and we're giving it up in order to better ourselves—which could be one way, but there's suffering in it because we're losing something we love. You kind of think of it as harsh and grim.

But the intention of renunciation, when it arises in a moment in the *citta*, is the abandoning in that moment of the clinging, which is actually an experience of spacious joy and ease and peace. And it's not about how much stuff we do or don't have.

Someone said to U Tejaniya once in a group, kind of idealizing, "When you left your lay life to become a monk, it must have been such a renunciation. Now there's so little craving. You have so few things." He won't put up with stuff like that for a minute. He said, "Yeah, all the craving for all the ten thousand things—the same amount of craving gets narrowed down into two objects: food and robes."

He's really saying it's not the amount of objects, it's the amount of craving in the heart-mind. So really look at that and see. But notice here, in the times when the craving is put down, notice the space that opens up. Notice the joy that leaves. And as one does live a simple life, if that's what one does—that's not what it has to be—but real renunciation is a kind of simplicity that comes from genuine joy and happiness and ease. If you're renouncing and wearing a hair shirt, filled with aversion and grimness, that's not *sammā saṅkappa*. That's aversion and grimness. So it's really looking to see.

Explore this. Quite a few people have mentioned the dining room as apparently a wonderful place for insight. I've had similar experiences, like the example I just gave. People in different ways have really

enjoyed playing with noticing how craving comes up around any particular kind of food—whether they thought they shouldn't have it, like the woman in my example, or they thought they should only have one helping instead of five, or whatever it is. Watching how the craving came up and all the different responses.

First there's that joy. This isn't renunciation yet. This is the joy, a kind of wisdom in the steady awareness of just watching how it's working. And having the permission to go get the food or not go get the food takes the pressure off and lets you really explore.

But then there are times when you hold yourself back, you don't go get it, but there's that tightness. It's a working towards renunciation, but you can still see there's the wanting, the tightness. You're like, "What are you talking about? This is a real joyful thing? I don't think so."

And then there can be a moment when naturally the craving just falls away. You think, "Well, I just don't want that." Notice that. A lot of the time when the craving falls away, we move on to the next thing. But inhabit with awareness that moment of renunciation. Notice the ease, the spaciousness, the coolness that comes in the heart and mind when the *kilesa* dissipates. The *kilesas* are like hot. The mind is burning. It dissipates.

It's okay now. No. Stop and notice that. Stay really present with it. It's like this. Just like this in this moment. Nothing in excess. Nothing is lacking. That's a moment of renunciation, of ease.

From that can come a natural generosity that's also a joy of the heart. It's kind of the next step, not a should. But do you see how it can be easy to skip over it, wait for the next kalesha to come? Really notice it, because bringing that same steady awareness to the wholesome that we're bringing to the unwholesome feeds the wholesome. It strengthens it—not in a holding-on way, but really recognizing: oh yes, comfort, ease. Non-clinging feels like this.

And it becomes more familiar, more trustworthy. It's not something we hold on to, but every time we recognize it, we're strengthening that habit, if you want to look at it that way. So really take some time. When you start to feel an ease—some kalesha, it could be ill will or aversion, is easing out—don't just think, "Okay, thank God, that's over." Stop. Notice the heart-mind that's free of kalesha at that point. This is totally important. Over and over and over, because this is really what's changing the habit and bringing in the confidence. This same sense of simply not being so engrossed in "me"—which is how it feels when there's wholesomeness. It just opens up.

So in terms of renunciation, that's really where the opening happens—to not just seeing what I need and what I want, but what's the situation in the bigger picture. It could be in the dining room where you really want another biscuit, and you can see there's only three left and there's still five people to come. And not as a should—oh, there's five people, oh, okay—but the wanting just falls away. There's a natural ease of seeing this is really what's needed in this situation. That's wisdom. That isn't self-referential. You get a

feeling for that.

And that can go all the way up to the whole environment, the shortage of everything that people need in the world, and noticing when we're overusing. Without having ideas about how one should behave, but really noticing in oneself when we're using too much—what we feel is more heat than I need, or more water than I need, or more whatever than I need—and not a should, but that sense of no clinging, it's not all about me in the mind. It's just naturally: oh, I don't need this much. There can be more. I don't need to use this much electricity. You might think, "Well, no one else is going to get it. I might as well use it." That's kind of the rational kalesha mind. But "oh, I don't need so much electricity, just turn it off"—that's the renunciation. Wise motivation of renunciation. And it's a sense of, again, as the Dalai Lama says, being in the wider picture, the sense of connectedness. You say, "Oh, I'm connected with all beings," but it's just not that inner reference so strongly.

So to say a little about non-ill will, which is how metta is described. Again, I'm just trying to give a flavor of each of these so you recognize them. Ill will we know. We're learning to recognize ill will. Metta—sometimes again, not mistaken, but a limited idea of metta may be making it a little too amazing. "I radiate"—when the Buddha talks about radiating metta in all directions, we could easily think it should be this amazing force of love moving out to all beings. And so I love the way Ajahn Sumedho likes to talk about metta.

He says, what I call metta is the ability to witness the unpleasant in a person or a thing or any situation or an aspect of oneself—to witness the unpleasant, to be really present, without creating anything around it.

You get a sense of that? In other words, it's like this. Just being purely present, non-ill will, is actually metta, friendliness. Much more available than you maybe would have thought, right? Non-ill will.

Or as James Baldwin said, an enemy is someone whose story we have not heard. When there's ill will, we're not hearing anything. And that could even be the story of some difficult emotion or physical experience we're feeling. Metta is just this quality of presence without pushing away, without adding a story, just fully with it. So meeting your own experience, hearing it, hearing the story—that's a kind of metta. That's a kind of non-ill will.

And so, hopefully you can see how that arises here on retreat, of course in daily life. But I mean here, many people say, I've seen it myself, how easy it is that somebody—and it's nothing personal to anyone—but usually somebody does something that bugs us, maybe just once, and the mind makes the thing, right? But the ill will is just that feeling of negativity that comes up, and then if you're exploring it with awareness as the Buddha taught, did you see the thoughts that come from it? Hopefully, here, mostly not actions. That's why silence is so wonderful. Really, it lets us explore this stuff without being afraid we're going to really say something that we'll regret just because the ill will was taking over at that moment.

But seeing how, if we just keep feeding the story, the ill will—and every time that we see that person, that's what we think—we can see how the seeing triggers the ill will. And then we think about it. And then say it's a sound that's being made. Then we hear a similar sound, and without even looking, we assume it's that person, even though it's a sound everybody makes, right? But that sound that comes from everybody is all about that. And you see how it builds up.

But then when we witness the unpleasant in a person or thing, you start by just witnessing the unpleasantness of the ill will in our own heart-mind when it's arising, instead of jumping away from it to blaming the other person, or jumping away from it to blaming ourselves for having ill will. Both of those are not just witnessing the ill will with awareness. Oh, it's like this. Ill will feels like this.

When you can be with that, then when the person heaves into view, you're able to just witness seeing. And when we're not creating anything around it, when awareness is just simple awareness we've been talking about, all of a sudden the perception spreads out, right? It happens to me all the time. And what I was perceiving as arrogant or whatever my mind was making up—because we don't know what's going on with anyone else, and we don't even know what's going on with ourselves, and we think we know what's going on with other people—when that spreads out, and we're just witnessing the unpleasant behavior without creating anything around it, there's a kind of connection. That's metta too. It's connection.

I'm not trying to talk myself out of the ill will. I mean, that's better than just being with the ill will, but I'm not trying to. The perception shifts, you know? You see something you didn't see, and what I was perceiving as arrogance—I said, oh. Wow, to behave like that, you just get this sense: that's a lot of suffering. That's a lot of suffering.

So that's actually compassion. Compassion comes up in response to suffering. Metta is connection with whatever's going on. They're both very close together. It just arises naturally, right? You don't have to make it. Notice that. We tend to go, okay, well, that's good, I had a moment of compassion. And then we sometimes think to really bring full awareness and inhabit that is a kind of an ego thing, you know?

I don't want to give it a lot of attention. I think I'm such a compassionate person, but I really need to notice how much ill will there was. And don't forget about that. But if the ill will is gone, really notice that it's gone. Notice the gone-ness. Don't keep holding onto it in memory.

And notice what this simple friendliness of metta or compassion—which is more like the connection with suffering, the quivering of the heart, but without aversion—let that be there in your awareness. Really notice, again, the coolness. Compassion is a beautiful emotion, even though it arises in the face of suffering. Notice the coolness of non-kilesa. Notice the spacious, all-inclusive quality, that it's not all about me and what you're doing and how it affects me. It's simply: oh, it's like this now. Me and you and the whole situation—it's like this now.

And then it can be that something somebody's doing seems to impact your activities and get in your way,

and suddenly you realize, oh, that's a lot of suffering. And without even thinking about it, you just get out of the way. I don't need this. They can have it. But it's not an aversive thing. It's really letting go. And there's this sense of love and happiness in the whole situation—they need it more than I do. You don't turn that into a big ego thing. You could, but then it won't feel like happiness. It won't feel like coolness. Just notice that.

Do you see how these little moments arise so much on retreat? I see some nods, so thank goodness you're seeing some of it. And this isn't just a little nothing—this is really important. Really important to notice, because this is the path.

The steady awareness that we've been cultivating, this steady awareness free from kilesa, how that awareness is meeting each moment of experience—that is the path of non-harming, of metta, of renunciation. The reason those habits start to grow and transform is because in any moment, how the citta, the mind, the awareness is meeting the moment, is the path. There's only this moment.

So when we're meeting difficulty or greed with this clear awareness that isn't filled with difficulty or greed, in that moment you could say it might manifest as metta or compassion or renunciation, but it is actually the wholesome that's feeding that. In that moment, we're cultivating—or rather, the wholesome is being cultivated—in that quality of steady awareness.

So when we say that awareness has the qualities of metta, of compassion, of non-clinging, it does. Not that you can necessarily see them, but right there, just in how we meet the moment. One teacher said—not a Buddhist teacher, but he said—in every moment of activity, the heart-mind is committing to something. The question is: what? That's really what we look at in this moment. What's the attitude in the heart-mind? What is it committing to? And how we see internally is how we act externally.

Two reflections—from Martin Luther King and Eleanor Roosevelt. I was recently in Atlanta, where I have family, and we visited the new Museum of Civil and Human Rights, which is profoundly touching and illuminating.

From Martin Luther King: "Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence, but also internal violence of the spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a person, you refuse to hate them."

So that's what we're doing, only in reverse. We see that you refuse to hate them, and that's what leads to refusing to shoot them.

And this was from Eleanor Roosevelt, in the human rights section of the museum, which documented both historical and present-day violations of human rights, both in this country and around the world. She says: "Where after all do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home. So close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world." I'd say, you know, right here. "Yet they are the world of the individual person. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in terms of human rights in the larger world."

That's what we're doing, you know. That's how it connects.

So notice again, when there's a shift of attitude—the little ones I've mentioned, but sometimes in the bigger picture too—when there's a shift of motivation, of attitude, how that can completely change the sense and effect of the action.

I'll give you a couple of examples, one from Mingyur Rinpoche and one from Bhikkhu Anālayo—two very different monks.

Bhikkhu Anālayo said—very classical Theravada study monk—he's talking about practice in a retreat setting and how it can seem very self-involved and separate and selfish. But he says, practice in a retreat setting turns into compassionate activity through the transforming power of one's aspiration to awaken for the benefit of others as well as one's own benefit.

Check it out. When you notice, when you tune into that aspiration, then going through the same outer actions can feel so different. And it can even motivate you to action that you wouldn't otherwise take.

Even in little ways. This seems like a silly little example, but from my own practice, it really stuck with me. I was sitting in Burma this past winter, and I was just doing some walking on a little path in a kind of wooded area. There weren't many people staying at this place; it wasn't crowded. And there was some rubble—I don't even remember what, something sharp—right in the middle of the path. I was just very calm and peaceful. I would come to it, see it, walk around it. I didn't have aversion, I wasn't thinking about it at all, quite equanimous, but just in my own world, doing my own thing.

And suddenly the thought just popped up: "Well, this isn't bothering you, but what if somebody else comes along later and really hurts themselves on this?" I hadn't had that thought. And immediately I picked it up and moved it. It was just a nothing doing—you're doing the obvious. Picked it up, moved it, and kept walking. I said, "Oh, that's so interesting." Because that time when it was just about me, it didn't bother me. It never occurred to me to move the thing. As soon as the connectedness, the friendliness, the mettā thought came up, there was immediate action—just doing the obvious.

So when we think it's aversion and clinging and self-interest that leads to action, just notice: mettā, compassion, wisdom actually are extremely strong motivators for action.

From Mingyur Rinpoche. He's Tibetan, and there's a great emphasis on bodhicitta, which means cultivating the awakened heart-mind—practicing in order to wake up so that you can help wake up all beings. That's bodhicitta.

So he says intention—what our intention is—can transform neutral activities into wholesome, positive ones. He says, "Sleeping, for example." Did you think that could be a really wholesome positive? When we go to bed at night with the mind of bodhicitta, with a mind that aspires, we aspire: "May our sleep be the cause of increased capacity to help all beings attain enlightenment."

Try it. It changes everything. Really.

When you go to eat, really tuning into gratitude when you're eating. And now I've just started saying to myself, "May all beings have food. May all beings have drink. May this food give my mind and body strength to be able to serve myself and all beings." And sometimes you really say it and it transforms everything. We can do that with anything, with everything as we go through the day.

So that's it—you say the thing and then you drop it. Don't be labored about it. But just notice: sometimes it does nothing, and sometimes it actually brings up that shift of motivation. Then just play with seeing how that feels.

We need to get as comfortable and trusting with these qualities as we are with greed and aversion, with fear and self-interest.

I think that's enough. Just to say that the noticing, as I was saying, really builds confidence in the understanding, which strengthens all the five faculties toward wisdom. The wisdom, again, strengthens the confidence, and it keeps on going. Because as we practice and get to more and more subtleties, we're also noticing more and more, becoming more sensitive to the suffering in our own heart and mind. So it takes a continuing deepening commitment to ourselves to keep being willing and interested to show up for the difficult. It's like a cycle.

As we understand more, the confidence and the willingness to keep showing up deepens, and they keep serving each other in this beautiful, self-reinforcing cycle.

May we all practice for the benefit of ourselves and all living beings.

Thank you so much. I deeply appreciate what you're doing with your lives here in these nine days. It's truly amazing, given everything happening on this planet.

Let's sit quietly for a moment, opening to awareness in whatever way or posture feels right.

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