Mindfulness and Right View (Retreat at Spirit Rock)

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 53:17

I want to talk tonight about giving a bigger context for the purpose of cultivating this steady, non-judgmental awareness that we're exploring—that this whole retreat is set up to help develop, recognize, trust, and cultivate. It's not just for the heck of it. And it's not just to be a better mindful person. It really serves the deepest purpose, in my understanding, of the Buddha's teachings.

The thing that really drew me to the Buddha's practice in the first place, and really the way the Buddha taught when I started to be able to read and hear and understand it a little, is that it's never been about adopting a new philosophy. There's an endless amount of information and philosophical discourse and ways of understanding and describing the mind and heart and the world in the Buddhist teaching, don't get me wrong. One could take the Buddhist teaching and spend your life in philosophical debate and discourse about it. And many do. That's not my bent.

But the heart of the Buddha's teaching is really so pragmatic, so practical from what we can tell. He started teaching and everything he offered was from the point of view of helping us see for ourselves how suffering is created on a moment-to-moment basis in our own mind and heart—how the seeds of suffering can grow and create suffering in a moment when the conditions are ripe, and also how the seeds of peace and release from suffering arise in our own mind and heart when the conditions are supportive of that.

As someone said last night, maybe it was Fran, these teachings aren't about "if you believe this then this will happen for you," because belief just doesn't cut it. It's all about *ehipassiko*—you too come and see for yourself. Come and look.

So everything we say, everything the Buddha taught, this whole retreat—we're really trying to set it up to support everybody to get interested enough, or just stay interested enough, to keep bringing this interested, mindful attention to our life, to our mind and body process. Not just for the heck of it, but because when we really recognize accurately what's going on, that's the condition in a moment that gives rise to release from the confusion, the suffering, the angst that gets created in our response, our reaction to experience when we don't understand it accurately.

To me, that's the most amazing thing about the way the Buddha spoke about what frees our heart and mind. I think most of us, when things aren't right, when we're suffering, we try to fix everything externally. Nothing wrong with that when we can do it. But a heck of a lot of the time, we can't do it.

The Buddha is saying that the suffering comes not because the external conditions are as they are. Yes, a lot of the time, external conditions and internal conditions are really difficult, really messed up. We're not saying everything's hunky-dory. But when we don't recognize our experience accurately, then the response that arises in the way we think, in the way we feel, in the way we act in relationship to experience—that response is what creates and continues to keep us spinning in suffering and confusion.

And so what's so cool is that the freedom, the wise understanding, the right view the Buddha speaks about—*sammā diṭṭhi*, the first step of the Eightfold Noble Path—is wise understanding, right view, recognizing accurately. When we recognize accurately what's going on, then the response of heart and mind is in alignment with things as they are. It sounds simple and maybe not that exciting, but it changes everything. Everything. It's really so amazing.

From Mingyur Rinpoche: "If we want to be happy, we must figure out which causes and conditions lead to our well-being." Which makes sense. "Similarly, if we do not have a clear understanding of the conditions that create suffering, how could we possibly expect to free ourselves from it?"

This meditation, the whole Buddhist path, is about recognizing accurately the conditions that create suffering in our heart and mind. And once it's accurately recognized, it's actually a natural effect of the accurate recognition that we respond appropriately in a way that doesn't create more suffering for ourselves, just on a moment-to-moment basis. It's not a one-time thing and then it's over. You probably know that by now, right? It's never going to be a one-time and it's over. This is our life, this whole life.

But what's amazing is that the power of accurate recognition is what frees us, and the steady, non-judging mindfulness of the simple experiences—just the simple things we've been talking about today—that is the powerful tool. The steadiness of that sets up the condition for wisdom, for accurate recognition to arise.

One of the definitions, I think it's from Sayadaw U Tejaniya, of Vipassanā meditation: Vipassanā meditation is experiencing the mind and body directly from moment to moment with the right understanding. Sometimes he calls that the three jobs of a yogi. The moment-to-moment mindfulness—you're probably getting it that that's what we're really leaning on—experiencing the mind and body directly, just as it is, with the right understanding.

Often this right understanding, wise view, can be information that's handed to you, that we need to hear in order to inspire us to look more carefully. But what I personally really appreciate about the translation of *sammā diṭṭhi* in the Pali to "wise view" or "right view" is that in my mind, which is pretty literal, I translate that literally: that the view of experience is accurate. The shift of perception, the shift of recognition—"Oh, that's how it is." All the reactions of dislike or self-interest or greed or confusion fall away because they no longer apply.

But anyway, I have a nephew, a three-year-old nephew, and he's the first in my family—the first and probably the last, given the age of my brother—little one. So it's been fun watching how he learns.

This is just an example of how little kids learn. You know those toys where you put blocks in with different shapes—a triangle, a circle, a square—and you have to put the triangle block in the triangle hole? It's not rocket science for us, but for a little kid, you just see an adult do it, and then you can't do it yourself because you don't have the sense that the triangle doesn't fit in the circle. So the kid's trying to put it in the wrong one, and you can watch the frustration build and the confusion.

If it were an adult thinking more clear thoughts, you might think, "What's wrong with me? This is messed up. They made it wrong, or I'm stupid, or how come my mother can do it?" Because it was so easy for them and I can't do it. So given your propensity, you either blame inside or you blame outside or you throw the whole thing out the window. I have a good friend—she's a nun—and she'll be working on her computer and says, "I just want to throw this whole thing out the window." This is in the monastery over in Burma, but I can really relate. So it's not just little kids.

But then, suddenly, watching a little kid—and you can say it's developmental—suddenly it clicks in and he gets it. Maybe he doesn't know the word, but he can see: triangle, triangle, it matches, it goes in, the whole thing starts to work. And all that reactivity? It's just gone. Because it doesn't make any sense anymore. Because he's seeing things more accurately. This is the nature of things. And when there's accurate recognition, all the hullabaloo goes away.

That's simple, but that's really what I'm talking about. The nature of insight is this shift of perception—from not recognizing accurately and getting reactive, to just, "Oh, it's like this now. That's how it is." This is what our mindfulness is helping us practice.

So we stop fighting. It's not personal. It's like we stop fighting the law of gravity—probably we all stopped fighting that a long time ago. We stop fighting the fact that bodies get older. Well, no, actually, people don't stop fighting that. But you'd think we would, because it happens. It's the law of nature. And that whole extra suffering is just a sense of denying or not recognizing things as they are, or wishing they were different.

Have you spent any time at all today wishing things were different? Did you have any moments of experience arising where somehow you're thinking, "This isn't right. It's not supposed to be like this right now. I'm doing it wrong. It's too hot. The instructions are stupid. I shouldn't have come. I'm too sleepy." Whatever—something's wrong because it's supposed to be different. That's exactly the place of being in contention with reality.

And what this steady, moment-to-moment mindfulness is hopefully giving us the practice to see is: "Oh, it's like this now." Ajahn Sumedho says that all the time. "No, no, I'm sleepy." "Oh, it's like this now." And attention, a total sense of presence, just drops into feeling how it is—good, bad, indifferent. It's not that everything becomes lovely. You're still sleepy and your body's heavy and you're sweating. And—oh, it's like this now. But the contention is gone.

As the teacher Byron Katie says, when you fight with reality, you lose.

So we're here to embrace this quality of moment-to-moment awareness—to see what reality actually is.

And we can't think our way into it. We have to keep practicing. That's what this is about.

Let me give you another kind of example. In my mind, it's the same kind of example—a shift in how we think about something, or the way we use language, can actually affect how we experience. We don't recognize accurately.

I was reading a book about nonviolence as a powerful tool, both internal and external, for social change—how it really needs to come from within. The author was talking about Gandhi and Martin Luther King and the real power of nonviolence as both a strategy and a way of life. But he was also saying that it's often perceived from the outside as weak or passive—as if nonviolence is just the best you can do when you really should be fighting.

The point that intrigued me in this particular article was looking at how language reflects assumptions. We may be aware of some of them, but often we're unaware—yet they're affecting how we think about things, shaping how we even recognize what's happening.

He was saying the very term "nonviolence" actually makes violence the norm. "Non" positions it as the exception, and then we think that way. What about if the only word for war were "non-peace"? Doesn't it create just a little shift? Such a small thing. I'm not going to go into a whole linguistic exploration, but language, which reflects so much of how we think—and it's different from culture to culture—can shape the way we're thinking and looking at ourselves and life.

So why is it that we get so habituated to not recognizing accurately? Why should it be so difficult? I don't think I can answer that either, but that question leads into what I want to talk about next. This is really part of the exploration of moment-to-moment mindfulness.

We were saying that awareness can be with anything: the movements of mind, thoughts, sensations in the body, sound, sight. Sure, it takes some steadiness and practice to notice the more subtle movements of mind. Absolutely—that doesn't come right away. But we can actually notice how the mistaken assumptions and habits of mind and heart and reaction arise. It's not like we have to hear about them and say, "Okay, now I'm going to stop doing that," because we can't. We don't even know it's happening in our mind. But hearing it, we can start to get interested in exploring.

One essential wrong view, one misinterpretation of moment-to-moment experience that is, according to how the Buddha talked—and certainly in my experience—at the heart of our confusion: a central misunderstanding, misperception, wrong view, and one that is arising very, very frequently in our moment-to-moment experience. It's arising and passing because nothing is steady-state. It's not like there's this wrong idea sitting in the back of our mind that's always there. Nothing is always there. The mind isn't

always there either. Everything's changing every moment. But this one arises frequently.

It's called in Pali *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, or personality view, identity view. It really means the habit—incredibly deep—of taking any particular moment of experience as being me, or mine, or who I am.

I'm going to try to keep this from getting too abstract, but this is really at the core of our suffering and confusion. This is where all the distortions and reactions to experience arise—out of this habit of taking ownership. As I always say, we take everything personally, and it's not personal.

"What do you mean? Of course it's personal. I'm sleepy. Who's sleepy? I am. Who's suffering from it? Me."

Yes, it feels like that. We're not saying it doesn't feel like that. We're not saying try to think your way out of it, because who's trying to think their way out of it? The more you think about it, the stronger you feel the "I." So I'm not saying abandon that. Just start to watch what happens when a particular experience is somehow separated out as me or mine or I.

Very simply, going through the day-to-day, noticing when you were aware—I'm sure there's plenty of times you weren't aware, so only the times that awareness was remembered—noticing whatever's occurring. There's seeing happening, hearing happening, sounds come and go, sensations in the body coming and going, moods, emotions, thoughts coming and going. All of that. Maybe tastes when you're eating, smells. All of these things are happening over and over and over, sometimes very rapidly. You agree with that?

So when Steve was talking about moment-to-moment awareness and how we're practicing with really the very mundane experience much of the time, it's exactly so we can start to notice. You need the steadiness to start to notice this.

So notice how you might be walking or outside. There's sensations—it's warm, it's cold—there's hearing, there's a perception of bird, there's a thought that goes by, there's a sight that's happening. Not that you're naming each thing, but there's awareness that is going on.

But suddenly, a particular experience is somehow privileged. Being me or mine—and we don't say "neon lights me or mine." You're just walking along, and suddenly—Steve kept talking about being in the sun, right? So suddenly you're walking in the sun. There's been warm sensations, there's been hearing, and all of a sudden it's a hot sensation, and something happens: "Ah, I'm so hot."

That particular physical sensation of warmth—before it was just coming and going, it was warmth, it was relatively neutral, there was hearing, there was seeing—but suddenly it's like, "Ugh, I'm so hot." Do you get a sense of the difference? The feeling of heat or warmth has been kind of privileged, it's been pulled out of the whole flow which keeps on going and going, of me or mine. And this sense of heat or unpleasant has somehow come up and it's *me*. And the whole flow can kind of stop at that point.

Or it could be something really pleasant. "Oh, the cool breeze. It's so nice." And then the next thing you're

thinking about how you're going to make it cool back in your room. And then you're thinking about the nice cool vacation you're going to take after this, and then on and on and on.

But before that, it's just a sensation arising, a sound arising, a thought arising. When the sense of me comes in, then it leads to reaction—and we want more, or we don't want it at all. We think about things. If it's something unpleasant that keeps on occurring, we start thinking this shouldn't be happening. How can I get rid of it? Why don't they fix it? Why is this going on? It can lead to a whole lot of resistance, anger, suffering, blame. And something that we like can lead to a whole story of how to get more, or what does it mean about me?

And what we don't notice is how what had just been a very steady flow of awareness—different things happening—has suddenly shrunk and gotten frozen in a way.

Lama Tsultrim Allione, the Tibetan lama, talks about how really thoughts and all our experience is just nature. We're nature. Yet we take everything that occurs personally, as if somehow we're in charge of it, as if we can control it. So if you're really sleepy, there's a sense it shouldn't be happening, or it's my fault, or if I do X, Y, and Z, sleepiness will go away. Other than going to bed, you probably can't control that.

Do you control what thoughts come? We wish, right? Can you control the sensations that arise in your body? No. Everything that occurs—there are conditions that are coming together, some internal, some external. We're really affected by the environment, by other people. But the tendency, when a particular experience has been privileged as I or mine, is that it becomes separate—me—and everything else is other.

So Lama Tsultrim was saying to recognize when that happens, instead of realizing that thoughts, sensations—it's all just part of nature. At the moment when a certain experience is held to as me, we kind of solidify. And he says we become locked then in the narrow bandwidth of personal human experience. We become a human experiencing this narrow bandwidth, and we lose the sense of—not even the connection, because that implies me connecting with something else—but we lose the sense of the inclusive nature of experience, of nature. What we're calling me is just conditions arising as part of nature, as a natural result of whatever the causes are in this moment. It becomes me and that's other. And how can I change the other so that the me is more comfortable or happy or whatever? It goes in that direction.

So when we get locked in this narrow bandwidth, it is what distorts our accurate recognition, and it leads to what the Buddha really spoke of as the deepest emotional habits of mind and heart—what are really the wellspring of confusion and suffering in our mind.

And those are—I'm just going to mention—the habits of greed, wanting what we want; aversion or hatred, really just trying to push away what we don't want. And this can go very subtle and get really far really fast. And then the basic delusion, just not recognizing accurately. Like my nephew, before he could tell the

triangle and the circle apart, before he got frustrated and all, there wasn't greed or aversion. He just wasn't able to recognize accurately. That's a kind of delusion.

Our habit of solidifying around a particular experience as "me" and "mine" is so frequent and common. This is also nature. It's a habit that I'm going to guess we all have. I'm just going to hazard a guess—I haven't met a person who doesn't have that habit. But it's so familiar and it seems so right, it happens so much, that mostly we don't even look at it or notice it or question it. We just get involved in the reaction of liking, disliking, and confusion. This is what mindfulness helps us begin to see through in another way.

I'm back to the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu. So the Dalai Lama is saying that the paradox is that although we have a drive for self-focus, the drive behind self-focus is to seek greater happiness for yourself. And this is just what the Buddha said. The compassionate thing that motivated him to teach when he first woke up—because he was thinking, "I don't really need to teach, I could just kind of hang out in peace for the rest of my life." But he looked around and he really saw that everybody wants to be happy. That's really at the heart of all of us. But by not recognizing accurately what brings happiness and what brings suffering, we keep doing—in trying to be happy—just the things that keep us suffering more.

That's what the Dalai Lama is saying here: "The drive behind self-focus is to seek greater happiness for yourself, but it ends up doing exactly the opposite. When you focus too much on yourself, you become disconnected and alienated from others. And in the end, you also become alienated from yourself. With too much self-focus, your vision becomes narrow. And with this, even a small problem appears out of proportion and unbearable."

Have you had any moments like that today? Retreats are great for that. I mean, really, even in your mind you say, "This little thing that's going on that I really feel murderous rage about..." You can have a thought that your reaction doesn't seem quite in line with the mundanity of this situation. But you can really see—oh my goodness, little things cause so much suffering. And in our daily life, it's the same thing.

Now here's Desmond Tutu. He's talking his own language, but saying the same thing, so it's not just the Buddha. He's saying, "You know, in a real sense we have a very profound complementarity." In other words, we're all part of each other, the whole world. You don't have to be a believer in anything. He said, "I learned to be a human being from other human beings—learning to walk, learning to speak from other human beings. We belong in this delicate network. It is actually quite profound."

That's what Lama Dreamed was saying. We lose the sense, the recognition of this delicate network when it becomes "my sound, my hearing, my reaction."

Back to Desmond Tutu: "Unfortunately, in our world, we tend not to recognize our connection until times of great disaster." He's talking externally, how in times of great disaster, then we come forward and try to help. But I want to say also, internally, what we can explore on retreat here and in our life is when it's a time of personal disaster. And on retreat, the personal disaster may just be that you didn't get oatmeal for

breakfast or something. It can feel like a personal disaster.

So what we can explore is—that's what we're practicing for. We don't have to wait for a huge disaster to knock us out of our habit of viewing everything as "me" and "mine." Because that's what happens with a big disaster, personally or worldwide. It shakes us up. It makes us look fresh somehow. We can see in a different way. It kind of knocks us upside the head or the heart.

We don't have to wait for that. This is why we want to practice this simple moment-to-moment mindfulness—because it sets up the conditions that reveal things as they are. It doesn't have to only be accessible when everything's falling apart. It's just this simple. The simplicity of mindfulness, which can include everything.

What I mean by that... Can you hear the bell? I'll say it again. Just the simplicity of hearing. Just what it is. Mindfulness. No big whoop.

Then, did you notice if there were any thoughts that came after that? Which is fine. Mindfulness can notice the thought. "Why is she ringing the bell?" "It's a nice sound." "It's not a nice sound." "I wish that was the bell for the end of the talk because I'm sleepy and I want to go to bed now." "How much longer is it going to be?" "Is it hot in here?" All of that is just natural. Mindfulness can notice all of that.

The simplicity of mindfulness, though, is it's just not adding anything extra. So the simplicity of hearing the sound—hearing. If we think "bell," that's a perception. Mindfulness can recognize that. There's nothing that occurs in our mind, in our body, in hearing and seeing and feeling and thinking that needs to be outside of the simple moment of mindful recognizing. It's like this now. Nothing excluded.

So that whole train of thought I just described—when we're not aware of it, we hear the bell and the next thing we know we're really kind of disgruntled and feeling restless and tired and wanting to go, and aversive. And everything I'm saying, you know, "Shut up, shut up already, I want to go." And you don't quite know how you got there. Then suddenly you wake up feeling really aversive right now. "I shouldn't be feeling aversive. I should be really in mindfulness and really loving—that's what the retreat's about."

But as soon as you notice—oh, aversion—that's mindfulness. That's the simplicity of mindfulness. It's like this now. There's nothing that's outside of this simple moment of awareness.

Ajahn Sumedho often uses the phrase, "Mindfulness is the point that includes." I love that. It's a point, meaning it's just this moment. It's not about what happened three seconds ago, because there's only this moment. But whatever's occurring in this moment, the simplicity and honesty of mindfulness can just relax into it. It's like this now. You don't even have to have words for it. Just—it's like this now.

I do that all the time, on and off retreat, when I'm really trying very dedicatedly to be mindful as we've been giving instructions. You try to hear the sound, notice the thought, feel the sensation, right? Have you been trying to practice like that today? Sometimes? Ever? Does it get tiring? Yeah. Does it feel kind of

stressful sometimes? Because it's like we're trying too hard. Because it feels like something I have to do as an act of personal will.

No, that's only how we know how to do stuff. So in the beginning, the act of personal will is simply that remembering—what's happening now. That's it.

What's happening now. You don't even have to name it.

So when I'm starting to feel that trying to be mindful, trying to be present, and I start to notice the stress and the tightness and it's feeling so effortful—the point that includes is simply: oh, it's like this now. I'm saying words because I'm talking, but I may not need to articulate "ah, effortful feels like this." The whole thing—you don't have to name it all, this is a sight, this is a sound—just the whole thing. There's a sense of total relaxation, of total presence and wakefulness into this moment. The point that includes.

And for me, there's always a sense of ease. Ease because the sense of fighting with or trying to fix what's happening is released in that moment. Oh, it's like this now. And if I had to put words to it, it's like: I feel totally stressed and tired and hot and aversive. Feels like this now. And there's—it's so weird, I know, it doesn't make sense just to talk about it—but there's a sense for me of the relief of no longer being in contention with reality. And a wakefulness: oh, it's like this now.

This is the shift from our entrancement with the particular experience, the object. Say striving, say tension. Our idea of it being about me—my tension, I'm doing something wrong, or why is there tension? And the idea of relief would be: I relax into tension, I name it, and it gets better. Right? Those of you who've done a lot of mindfulness practice—don't we often get caught up in thinking that if you were being mindful properly, the unpleasant thing would change? I've been with it, I've been with it, I've been with it. We go, right, uh-huh, and? Yeah, well, and it's still here. Okay, that's right. No one said mindfulness makes everything you don't like go away. It's nothing to do with that.

But the peace that comes—oh yes, it's like this—this is the shift to taking refuge in that moment of awareness, that moment of mindfulness, rather than getting our confirmation, our sense of self, our sense of good and bad and liking from the particular object. Because the object is changing every moment. And awareness, mindfulness, is not stained or gotten dirty or ragged if it's a difficult experience. It doesn't get more beautiful and pristine if it's a lovely experience. In some ways, awareness doesn't care what it's aware of. It's not like our wanting mind of me—we only want to be with the good stuff. Good means pleasant, basically, or some idea that I'm doing good. Awareness doesn't care. Oh yeah, it's like this now, completely stressed out. And the ease is: the stressed out is here, but the sense of it's all about me in that moment is gone. Just for that moment. Because the awareness—trusting the awareness, recognizing—it's just so simple.

And that's why we want to do moment to moment to moment these very mundane experiences. Because we want to have more and more chances to just recognize. It's so simple. It's like nothing.

This awareness, you know, like we've talked about this morning and will keep talking about—you're just feeling your hands touching. You're just noticing, you're seeing. You think, hey, awareness of stress. You're like, huh? I came here so I could say, okay, I know I'm stressed. That's it? That's what you got to offer? I don't think so. We're looking for something a lot more spectacular often in awareness than just this simple knowing. Oh, yeah. Hearing and knowing of it. Sensation and knowing of it.

It's so ordinary. It's available in every single moment of consciousness. It's so available and so kind of neutral, you could say, that mostly our habit is to completely overlook it because we get entranced by whatever it is that's occurring, whatever the object is—especially when it says something about me.

But even that sense of me—this is about me—can also simply be noticed by awareness. That's the point that includes there's nothing outside of it.

So noticing the difference, for example, in how complicated and reactive our experience can get when that little privileged perception comes and owns something. Say you're walking outside. Of course it's not cold now, it's hot, but go out tonight and it's cool. My body doesn't like cold very much. So it could be walking outside and there's just a sense of coolness on the body, coldness on the body, and it can just be noticed like that, just like the hearing of the bell. That's normal. Then the perception can recognize it as cold. Hearing—that's just normal. Awareness notices that.

Then the habit of mind is that what we perceive, what we feel, we think about. So then there's the thought of cold, and this is where the sense of me can come in so strongly. "It's cold. How could it be so cold when it was so warm? And I was so warm, so now I don't have the proper clothes. And I know it's not good for me to be cold, and my proper clothes are all the way down at the bottom of the hill, and I have to walk all the way down there to get them, and now I'm going to get a cough, and now I'm going to get sick, and I have to teach the rest of this retreat, and I'm not going to feel well—I'll be up here coughing my guts out in front of all these people..." That's just how my mind might work. I'm sure yours are much more spacious and non-reactive than that.

And then it goes from the thoughts to what's called a view. The view would be: this is me, I'm cold, it's not good for me, something needs to be done. Like that. Me is really solid. Do you see how complicated it gets? What did it start with? Without the sense of owning it as me, we're out.

And there are plenty of times it's not like that. Walking, and there's coolness, and there's coolness. And nothing. It's amazing. We just recognize coolness and don't create anything around it. Life is so simple. It's so simple we can't stand it. So there's coolness, and then there's hearing, and then there's a thought: "Oh, my body doesn't like to be cold." But that thought can come and go and be recognized too.

So with the awareness practice, it's not that we're going to be able to stop all this complication. And there's no point in hating it—that's just more complication. But what we can do is get really interested in exploring it, include it in the mindfulness. See how, as the Buddha said, when we suffer, the extra

suffering is that the heart and mind creates agitation through clinging. Clinging to wanting it to be warm. Clinging to wanting to have more oatmeal. Clinging to whatever. Instead of: okay, coolness is like this. Hunger feels like this. It's really just to explore the difference between the complexification and the simple moment-to-moment sati. Mindfulness.

Often we don't talk about this at the beginning of a retreat, but the way that this particular style of practice—and we really learned a lot from Sayadaw Tejaniya—remember, Vipassana meditation is experiencing mind and body directly, moment to moment, with the right understanding. This is what makes all the difference. We want to start by talking about the right understanding. Not that we have it all the time, but this is just an idea we can put in. When you notice you're really all caught up and everything's complicated, just stop a minute and ask: what's going on now? You can often feel the contraction, the tightness in the mind and body, and you might notice that sense of "it's all about me right now." You don't have to get rid of it. Just bring awareness: oh, it's all about me. It feels like this.

Ajahn Sumedho, who talks about this a lot, says we have a tendency to think that we must wait and practice a long time before beginning to understand this personality view, or the idea of personality. It's often that way. People say you shouldn't talk about it until late, late in a retreat.

We can't understand by thinking about it. But Ajahn Sumedho asked himself: why should I practice for twenty years from within the delusion of "I am practicing to achieve something for me"? Complete delusion. Why practice from wrong view when we can start by simply having it in our mind to bring in the mindfulness and begin to see? Is this true or not? Don't believe me—just look and see for yourself. Get interested. Explore.

When you're feeling suffering and confusion, just check what's going on in the mind that's paying attention. And when there are times of ease—not some blissful, amazing experience, but ordinary moments—notice those too. Maybe not today, maybe you were too tired today, but there will be moments. You're just walking, or sitting, or eating, or sitting outside looking at a bird, and nothing special is going on. But there's some moment-to-moment awareness, and really there's a sense of non-struggle, of ease, of peace. Isn't that simply being moment-to-moment present with things? Notice that.

The next moment, of course, the mind will go, "I'm doing so well. I'm at peace. La la la la la." That's okay. Just notice that. And if that recognition clamps everything down, great—awareness notices that too. "Oh, I'm making it so special. It's like this now."

I always think of this awareness—the point that includes, that can be with anything—as like a Tai Chi move. It's just, "Oh, it's like this now." You don't have to move away from anything. We simply move from involvement, from really being seduced and entranced by the object, to noticing what's occurring. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, mental activity.

So we don't have to wait. We don't have to practice for twenty years and then say, "Oh, I was doing it all

from wanting to try and get something." When actually, it's like this now. Just moment to moment, simple awareness. And all these mundane moments of nothing special are just what we need. Because when nothing special is happening, we won't be so entranced by the object, and we have a better chance to notice the simple knowing, the simple awareness, and start to trust it.

The attitude that we bring to awareness, what makes it possible not to be in contention, brings us back to that nonviolence from Martin Luther King, where he's saying 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. It only comes from the attitude in the mind, heart, and the moment.

This quality of non-violence is the attitude that infuses wise mindfulness, wise awareness—the non-violence of refusing to hate or cling to whatever experience arises. The attitude we often bring is, "This is good, this is bad, I don't like this." But what's happening now? It's like this. This quality of non-violence, non-contention, really of interest—really seeing this is what's happening, this is life in this moment. Let's just see how it's working.

What allows us to see how these habits grow—the habits of suffering, the habits of freedom—is the steady moment-to-moment awareness, the perseverance, the persistence. When we're just aware for a moment, then we space out for an hour, then we're aware for a moment—sure, in the beginning that's out of our control. But what happens is we'll wake up again only when something is intense enough. Either we're really identified, really reacting, really liking something, and then we don't notice all those moments of simple awareness where there's a sense of ease, of peace, and just the knowing can be known. We don't notice that. Then we wake up again in the middle of some big reaction, and we think, "It's always me, I'm always reacting, this is how it is."

People come in for interviews and say—though no one here, since we haven't talked yet—"I've just been sleepy the whole day." Really? So when you had lunch, you were sleepy?

We do this same thing with our mental states. Someone comes in and says, "I've been sleepy the whole day." Really? So when you had lunch, were you sleepy? Well, no. At three o'clock, were you sleepy? No. So when exactly were you sleepy? "Well, there was about ten minutes in the 8:15 sitting where I was really sleepy. And then again at 4:30, I noticed I was really sleepy."

We do this. We take these moments and make them the whole thing, without the steadiness of moment-to-moment attention. This persistence is what creates the conditions for wisdom to arise—wisdom that recognizes accurately things as they are.

And this is what's so beautiful: it's nature. We don't have to create wisdom. We can't. But with steady moment-to-moment mindfulness, why we keep going through the whole day, that becomes the condition for wisdom, for clear recognition of things as they are, to arise naturally.

So this third aspect of the yogi—perseverance, continuity—as Steve said last night, every moment is a

dhamma. Awareness doesn't care whether you're aware of your breath, a really subtle sensation, what the food tastes like when you're eating, or you're having a little hissy fit in the toilet. It doesn't matter. You bring awareness right then, at any moment.

As we go through the day, we really want to see this—not to privilege sitting over walking, over eating. That's part of why we take away the steady schedule, so you can find your own rhythm in sitting, in walking. What helps you keep coming back into awareness? What helps you refresh your attention, refresh your mind?

And then really to see that whether you're walking down to have tea, looking at the horses, sitting in here, or doing walking meditation, it's all equal. Nothing is more or less important in terms of awareness.

We're not trying to achieve something here in a short period of time. It's just nine days of many, many moments, each an equal opportunity to begin to recognize and trust simple mindfulness, simple awareness—to see how it begins to get its own momentum. And that momentum is the natural condition for wisdom to arise. We don't have to make it happen. It's not an act of personal will.

Sayadaw U Pandita said, "When mindfulness is persistently and repeatedly activated, wisdom arises. There will be insight into the true nature of body and mind, and then unnecessary suffering falls away."

And Mingyur Rinpoche says, "Once we start our path of Dharma, every practice is an awareness practice. Every moment is an awareness practice. Every activity is an awareness practice."

So that's really what we're doing here. In any moment, however long you forget, it doesn't matter. The next moment we're awake, we start right here. It may seem mundane and not much, but it has the power to completely change how we live our lives.

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