Wise Intention Arises Naturally from Wisdom

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:00:23

Here we are.

It's great. It's been so much appreciating speaking with everybody and whatever you're going through—the depth of commitment that it takes just to still be here. Someone was saying, "I feel like all I'm doing is just going after pleasant. That's all I see, that's all I do." And I thought, you know, if all anyone was doing here was going after pleasant, no one would last a day here. Really, you'd be out of here. So just widen out the scope, give your mind and aspirations some credit.

I want to talk a little bit tonight about wise intention. Something that comes up frequently here, different people expressing what seems like a paradox: we keep stressing in the instructions and working with awareness that what we're cultivating is this steady momentum of awareness that's non-interfering, non-aggressive, not trying to fix. Just watching what's occurring to see, to learn how the mind and heart works. That is what we're stressing. And then people often say, "But what about action in the world? How do we...?" You've heard those questions.

So I want to talk about it because it's not really a paradox. It's just an incomplete kind of understanding.

The first thing to say: when we talk about steady awareness, taking it with you, just notice—you've been acting. You've been acting with body, mind, and speech consistently through all your time here. And awareness has been coming along. Awareness can be aware of action. It's not either awareness or action. We're bringing awareness into our activities.

But what I really want to talk about is the steady awareness that's not interfering, that gets right into, surrenders into whatever's occurring in this moment, resting at ease, knowing it fully, feeling it completely. That turns out, in the way of the Buddha's teaching, as wisdom grows, to be the farthest thing from passivity. It's really just the opposite. It's movement into the ability of heart and mind to respond appropriately in situations rather than from these knee-jerk reactions we're not even quite aware of.

The Buddha was very clear that action is how we can tell our understanding. He said, "A fool is characterized by their actions. A wise person is characterized by their actions. It is through the activities of one's life that one's discernment, one's wisdom shines." He's so clearly saying that the clarity that comes from our understanding leads to wise action.

One of my favorite quotations is from Maha Ghosananda, a Cambodian Buddhist monk who has passed away. He was a peace activist, a teacher of wisdom and also mettā, loving-kindness, in the Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand during the time of the Khmer Rouge. He happened to be out of Cambodia when

all the devastation and killing was happening, when the Khmer Rouge were killing so many millions of Cambodians and basically most of the monks and nuns. Most of his family was killed, so he was touched directly. It's not that because he was out of the country he didn't feel it.

He went to the refugee camps where all the displaced Cambodian people and families that were left were living. Because it was a largely Buddhist country, many of the people were Buddhist, and they really would respect him. He would go and make a little temple in the middle of the refugee camp. When he'd come and the people would gather, he would start just quoting the Buddha, the really profound teachings: "Hatred never ceases by hatred. Only by love alone does hatred cease." Just to have that depth—you'd have to really know that, not just say, "This is a good idea, I think I'll tell it to these people whose lives have been devastated." But to go in and really actualize that. Later he led peace marches throughout Cambodia. He was quite an activist.

He once said this at a demonstration against landmines: "All the landmines in the world have been planted by the landmines in our own hearts. So to understand and thus remove the landmines in our hearts is the way to remove them in the world."

This is, I think, very directly the link between the wisdom that arises through the steady, non-choosing awareness—not choosing to just pay attention to what we think is good and ignoring what we don't, but the steady awareness that reveals what's really going on—and where this wisdom and the ability, the natural response of heart and mind, really shifts. We can bring it along, but it shifts naturally from being caught in greed, in ill will, in hatred or cruelty, to renunciation, which is just renouncing the greed, to generosity, to mettā, loving-kindness, compassion.

Sure, there are many things we can do, ways in our life that we can actively cultivate these, and that's a whole other talk. That's certainly true. But first, to really start to see that with the wisdom that comes from accurately recognizing what's going on in these crazy minds of ours—as we start to watch, the natural effect of wisdom is that our motivations start to change.

That's what I want to talk about—this quality in our heart, in the mind, of intention or motivation.

I mentioned the first two verses of the Dhammapada in one of the groups today. The Dhammapada is one of the most well-known sections of verses from the Buddhist Tipitaka. These are the first two pairs, very well known:

All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a corrupted mind, and suffering follows as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.

Corrupted mind. Guess what makes a corrupted mind? It's subtle. We haven't talked about it too much—our three friends, right? You know what our three friends are?

Speak or act with a corrupted mind, and suffering follows as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.

The second couplet: All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind—the word for mind being the same as the word for heart—so mental activity, made by mind. Speak or act with a peaceful mind, peaceful heart, and happiness follows like a never-departing shadow.

The point being that the seed of all action, according to the way the Buddha saw it—and we can explore this in our experience with our steady awareness—the seed of action isn't the act itself, but the intention, the quality in the heart-mind that gives rise to the action.

The way the Buddha talks about intention, it's a very specific mental factor or quality of mind. In English, intention can have a couple of different precise meanings. One is the really broad intention, aspiration—like what Steve and Alexis both spoke about: What is my intention in life? What's most important to me? Or even, my intention when I go back is to do X, Y, Z. It's still kind of broad, even if it's for a whole day or a whole year or a whole life. It's a wide-ranging thing. But we often use the same word, intention.

That's not the specific intention we're talking about here. It's a Pali word, *cetanā*, and it refers to something in any mind moment. The energy kind of coalesces—there's a little feeling of a little "uh," a little impulse that leads to speech, that leads to action. They say even thoughts, but let's stick with noticing it before action and speech. Before every movement, every speech, it's not personal. It's just, again, the whole series of cause and effect. But this energy kind of coalesces and gives a little—about to do—just, and then there's the movement, then there's the speech, then there's the voice. So it's a moment-to-moment thing, very precise and immediate.

And it arises, of course, due to whatever conditions are going on. When the Buddha spoke about wholesome or skillful, unwholesome or unskillful speech and actions—wholesome karma, unwholesome karma—he was very clear: it's the intention that marks something as wholesome or unwholesome. In other words, what brings suffering for ourselves or others.

So often we tend to think about how something looks. We could be trying to do a good thing for somebody, and it looks like the right thing, but we could be filled with fear or filled with aversion—let me do this thing so they can just stop suffering and get out of my face. You know what I mean? Even though you're doing something that's ostensibly kind, it still isn't a bad thing to do. But internally, what's being fed, what's being strengthened in one's own mind-heartstream at that moment would be the aversion, or would be the fear.

Do you get a sense of what I mean? The same action from the outside could be arising from very different qualities that are motivating in the heart and the mind. That's the whole source of skillful means. When we keep talking about being in pain during a sitting—when should you move?—we kind of want a list: go for this amount of time, and then when it's like this, move. And we always say no, it totally depends on the situation and the state of your mind, because it's really about what quality motivates that movement. It could be aversion. It could be compassion. It could just be clear seeing, a kind of neutral recognition: Oh

yes, this is causing pain, the reaction is getting too strong, so I'll move. All of those look the same from the outside. Are you getting a sense?

So that's the seed of action. It's so subtle a thing, happening every mind moment, that we need this steady, steady awareness we've been cultivating to begin to really notice that this is even occurring much of the time. We might notice the grosser ones. We might notice, you know, I really feel a sense of love and I want to do something to help you.

But moment to moment, because the mind and heart is arising and passing in every moment, it can be changing so quickly. So without the awareness, for most of us a lot of the time—not always, but the reason the Buddha talks so much about really bringing in the awareness to see the difficult aspects... We also want to see and appreciate and really feel the wholesome, the beautiful qualities. But the reason we want to keep noticing when greed is arising, when aversion is arising, is because it's so familiar. We so often don't recognize it. It is, as we were saying, the default mode. So often things are happening underneath the level of consciousness. It's just habit, just habit driving the bus—the difficult habits of mind.

Tara Brach in one of her books gave a good example of just how habits, the default mode, can operate. Mental habits take less energy, and they can just operate underneath conscious awareness a lot of the time. I love the example she gives: if you're driving, listening to music or whatever, and changing lanes on a busy freeway—now, a lot is really going on, isn't it, in the mind? Seeing and hearing and thinking and checking the perceptions, the movement of the hands, the movement of the eyes, the movement of the leg. There's a whole lot going on. But if you've been driving for a long time, that's just almost second nature, isn't it? You can change lanes and be drinking coffee. And if you drive on the freeway in LA, you know, people are doing everything while they're driving. It scares me to death, but they're putting on their makeup, they're shaving, they're talking on the phone, they're drinking their coffee—because they're in the car for two hours on the way to work. But anyway, you get a sense. It's just operating below the level of consciousness a lot of the time.

And that's what's happening frequently with these habits of our mind. We don't quite see what's going on, and it's the steady mindfulness that lets us start to see it.

Someone mentioned something very common in a group: being aware, say, of a pain in a particular part of the body. You're watching it, watching the mind. Awareness is there. You see the aversion come. You see it go. You see the sensation—it's not moving. Then all of a sudden, you move without having recognized or consciously said, "Now I'm going to move." Can anyone relate to that? You watch it ten times, and all of a sudden you moved. That's the moment.

In that moment, you've had all these intentions. For whatever reason you're not going to move—"I'm not going to move, I'm exploring it." But as soon as awareness goes away, it's just, "Oh yeah, right, move." It's unpleasant, we move, I'm out of here. It's just what we do from habit. It's not inevitable. But you see why awareness is so key, because that's a little thing. Big picture, so you move—so what? It's not the end of the

world. And you're wondering, why do we make such a big thing out of not noticing you moved? It's not that you failed, but this is really a little example of what's going on.

So start exploring: have you ever noticed where you have some really good intentions in your life? Really sincere, but you can't quite follow through for some reason. Like, "I'm going to sit every day." Or, "When I go back home, I'm not going to get drawn into that difficult interaction with my family member. I'm just going to radiate love and compassion." Have you ever tried that one? But we mean it, right? How come we can't do it?

A good example from a retreat with Sayadaw U Tejaniya a few years ago at IMS—because it was shared in the group, I think I can say. Someone went into the dining room, and the menu was up on the blackboard. She saw something on that menu that wouldn't make her really ill, but something she really couldn't digest well, that wasn't good for her to eat. So she saw it, and wisdom came up, just with compassion: "Oh, I'm not going to eat that, because I care about my body." And then she found herself heaping it on her plate, eating it all, and going away feeling rotten.

So she said to Sayadaw, "How could that happen? I had the intention to care for my body and not eat that, but that's not what happened." He made one of his jokes, you know—he said, "Well, it was like weak wisdom and strong kilesa." Which is partly true. What I would say is that moment of wisdom, of really seeing with compassion—that was a true moment of intention, of wisdom and compassion. But then, a lot of the time, we have that, and there's not the steady momentum of awareness, because every moment is a new arising mind moment. So that moment was a moment of wisdom and compassion.

Then the awareness was kind of abandoned, or whatever. And then the old habits arose—well, that looks good, I think I'll eat it, it really tastes good. And just the greed habits come up, or the delusion habits. I don't know what was in her mind.

So you see, you can get a sense of where steady awareness matters—not to make yourself do the right thing, but to watch and even learn why you're doing the other thing. "I really don't want to eat it and I'm eating it, a big pile of that stuff." Well, let the awareness come along, and we start to see what's going on. Because until there's the awareness and the wisdom of seeing how these patterns work, I don't know about you, but I don't really believe it. We just kind of check out. But seeing how it's working—to me, that really brings in the saṃvega, the urgency, the willingness to keep on practicing, to keep on cultivating awareness.

I don't mean this in a discouraging manner, but the more I've been watching and practicing, the less you take it personally, the easier it is to just see: oh, this is how these patterns work. If greed's in the mind and we're not aware of it, it's easy for it to arise in the next moment. The more I've practiced, the more I've seen how really deeply conditioned these patterns are.

Quite a few of you have been saying, "Oh my God, I'm just seeing craving, craving, craving everywhere.

What's the matter with me?" I'm going to say: nothing. There's a reason the Buddha picked it as the cause of suffering. It wasn't just like, "Let me pick something." What's the cause of all the suffering in our minds? Craving. It must come up once in a while! Of course we're going to see it a lot. That's a good thing if we can keep on with awareness.

But with lack of steady awareness, the sense of urgency comes to me because without the awareness, without really understanding these patterns and allowing the wisdom to appreciate and grow the wholesome motivations, the wholesome intentions—in moments of stress, in moments of crisis, when awareness falls away, what's the default mechanism that's going to come up?

I read this one little statement frequently because it so touched me. I heard on the radio a discussion with a young man who was in prison, I think for life. He was young. I didn't hear anything else about him or what he did. He was in prison for life, and they were having an interview with him. He was saying with so much sincerity that he wished he could take back the three to five seconds of his life where this violent act just came up. Three to five seconds. But can you relate? Because it's not an act of will—"I'm not going to act from aversion anymore." With all the wider intentions in our heart, if we don't know how our mind and heart works, if we're not trusting, if we're not continuing to cultivate awareness whenever we can, to just keep watching—and to be willing to bring in the awareness when the unwholesome motivations come, and meet that with kindness, with compassion, not with judgment.

That's the whole point of this non-judging awareness: to see how it's working. If we are bringing in the awareness with judgment or trying to fix it, there's no way to see what's really going on. As soon as there's ill will, as soon as there's some kind of not wanting to see it clearly, we can't recognize accurately what's the appropriate thing to do.

The Buddha said—one of my favorite quotations: "When one is dwelling with a heart or a mind that's obsessed or oppressed by ill will"—and he says the same thing for greed and the same thing for delusion—"and does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen ill will, on that occasion"—he's not saying this is who you are forever, he's saying on that occasion—"when the mind is obsessed with ill will, one cannot know or see as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both."

So he's not saying bad or wrong. He's just saying when the mind's obsessed by ill will, when it's obsessed with greed, you can't see what's good for you, what's good for others, or what's good for both. Even when we want to do the right thing, if we're not in the habit of bringing in awareness and just watching what's going on in the mind, we can get so tricked. We just don't know.

I often feel this sense of actually respect for the power of the habits, the unwholesome habits of mind. But that same respect will start to come in for the wholesome habits, because they develop naturally in the light of awareness.

Some years ago, not that long ago, maybe three years ago, I was in a relatively new museum in Atlanta

called the Museum of Civil Rights and Human Rights. It's all about the civil rights movement in the fifties and sixties—a very moving museum. But just the point I want to make now is on the top floor, it's talking about human rights and various historical moments. It's mostly writings and photographs, pointing to various times and histories of human rights crimes. One point just said: "While systematic human rights crimes often start with a small, powerful group, they can only be carried out if others are persuaded or coerced to join in or deliberately look the other way." Basically, for ordinary people—

What would I have done if I was in the Holocaust? I don't know. I haven't been in that situation. For ordinary people, the pressure to take part in abuse or to look away is real. They risk punishment, they risk death, they risk danger to their families—all kinds of things, huge fear. So this exhibit was just making a point of that, bringing it home, inviting you to look in your own heart and mind. It was a whole great process in that museum.

What it makes me think of, when I was visiting Dachau, or reflecting on any of the horrible things going on in this country—the violence and the racism and all kinds of suffering—is that if we're not really tuning in to our own heart and mind in a moment of stress, who knows what's going to come up? Who knows what we would do? Like that young man in prison, we might want to take back that three to five seconds.

We can't control all of that. And this isn't to make us feel scared. This is to hopefully inspire us to really have urgency, out of love and compassion for ourselves, for our families, for all beings. The place where this starts, the best way we can manifest that in the world, is by beginning with what we're doing here—understanding how this inner work and life in the world come together.

So all this "being with, being with, being with" isn't some esoteric mental game that has nothing to do with life in the world. It's exactly the reverse. Really coming to know how we would act in such a situation—we don't know until we're there. We know what we want to do. So here, every moment that there's the ability, the willingness to allow awareness to feel, to notice what's going on—that's a moment of strengthening this power of seeing. And that's what gives rise to natural wisdom.

What's so beautiful, really, is that in the light of wisdom, the habits driven by kilesa, acting from kilesa—it just doesn't make sense in that moment. I don't really like to talk about "letting go" of a particular action or intention, because to me that phrase can have a little tinge of aversion—"get rid of this, I'm letting go of this." But when we just are with it without adding the extra judgment, it stops making sense.

As the Buddha said of his own practice before he became fully awakened, he was watching his mind. He said, "I have two types of thoughts. I can put them on two sides." So he's not the Buddha yet, but he was pretty good, right? He was pretty far along. And still, he said, when he was walking or sitting, being very committed and paying attention, thoughts of greed would come up in his mind. Thoughts of ill will would come up. Thoughts of cruelty would come up in his heart.

So maybe we could cut ourselves some slack. If this guy, who was so close to being a Buddha, had these thoughts come up—it's just habit. And he said he would just notice: "Oh, a thought of cruelty has come up. If I really explore it, I see that it leads to my own suffering and the suffering of others. So I don't pursue that thought." But he's not saying, "Oh my God, I can't believe this came up, this is terrible, what am I going to do?" He's just looking at it: "Oh, a thought of cruelty has arisen in my mind." Really, it's awareness.

Then he saw the same for thoughts of ill will and greed. And on the other side, a thought of generosity would come up, a thought of renunciation, a thought of friendliness, of mettā, a thought of compassion. And he'd say, "Oh, I see this has arisen. And as I look at it, I see no harm to myself or another that can come from being with this thought, from contemplating this thought. Even if I stayed with this thought for a day and a night, I see no harm that could come from it." Except—he's so practical—"I could tire myself out. I could tire my body and my mind from just staying and thinking for so long." So then he stopped thinking about it. He's just so practical.

This is what he calls wise intention, the second step of the Eightfold Path. The first step is right view, wise understanding. We begin there, and it keeps cycling deeper the more we practice. Wise understanding—how we understand the world—gets deeper and more comprehensive. But even in the beginning, in a moment of wise understanding, in a moment of paññā, a moment of wisdom, the natural expression is going to be that the intention of greed, the intention of ill will or hatred, isn't what arises. Rather, it would be one of renunciation or generosity, of friendliness, of compassion.

So just noticing in your own mind, tomorrow or tonight—those moments when you're aware, when the heart and mind is perhaps calm, or whatever's going on—you can see that the heart and mind isn't kilesa-ridden at that time. You know what I mean?

It's not riddled with greed. It's not riddled with ill will. Maybe it's just neutral. But maybe it's also wholesome. Just notice that. In that moment, there's like a space.

You know, when there's self-involvement—remember, I read from Desmond Tutu the other night—when we're so self-involved, our whole world shrinks. We create a sense of self and other, and difficulty, and fear. When it's not *kilesa*-ridden, just notice this: there's a kind of space. And in that space, the kind of wisdom—you don't have to think this—but the whole situation is recognized just more accurately. And if there's something to do, to say or to do, the response can just come up much more naturally, appropriately, from connectedness, from recognizing the whole situation—either letting go of clinging, generosity, friendliness. It's just the natural response, doing what's obvious.

Sure, we can cultivate these qualities in our lives, but to notice that they're the natural effect, the natural response of wisdom—I just want us to keep exploring that, because that's what really, for me, feeds and strengthens faith. The confidence. Because it's not about "you're so great" or "I'm so great" or "I can do it." That's just a self-involved way of looking. The confidence is in the laws of nature, the laws of dhamma. It's like having confidence in gravity. You don't have to think about, "Do I have confidence in gravity?" I hope

you're not going around thinking about that.

And so the more we start to see both that the unwholesome, unrecognized, just makes it easier to come up in the next moment—but to see that with clear seeing, with wisdom—then what more naturally arises is the renunciation, is the friendliness, is the non-cruelty or the compassion. Learning to trust that. It's not like you have to do it with an act of will. Just like hopefully we're learning at times to trust that awareness arises again by itself. Have you noticed that from time to time? We keep pointing it out. Sometimes it feels like a lot of effort, right? But other times you're lost in thought. You don't think, "In five seconds I'm going to arouse awareness." It just comes. All of a sudden it's here. That wasn't your act of personal will. Just like that. Noticing this, the faith can deepen.

So then I want to talk a little bit about these three wise intentions. Mostly just because we've talked so much about the *kilesas*, it's really important with steady awareness and wisdom to also recognize the wholesome. When we've talked about the five spiritual faculties, a lot of the reason is to recognize when wholesome qualities are present in the heart and mind. Because when wisdom recognizes the wholesome—this is the Buddhist language—it feeds the wholesome. This is another thing we can trust, have confidence in.

When wisdom is recognizing the *kilesas*, it's just, "Oh, look at that greed. Greed is like this." You know, when we're caught in it, we're caught. But when wisdom's watching it, as Sayadaw U Tejaniya says, we're seeing how greed does its job. And you see what it does, but it's not being strengthened by the awareness. But the wholesome, when it's recognized by awareness—actually, it grows. Awareness feeds it. I mean, wisdom feeds it. Awareness doesn't feed it; wisdom feeds it. And that's a really cool aspect of the way the universe works—that wholesomeness strengthens wholesomeness, that wisdom strengthens wholesomeness. It's not all, "I've got to sit here and get all these good qualities, get rid of all these bad qualities, and do it now." Good luck.

So each of these could be a talk in itself, but I just want to talk a little bit about them because they're all wonderful. Renunciation, which is actually a very happy quality of heart and mind. It's not the biggest one going in this culture, I would say.

I think it's often misunderstood. The Buddha too, you know—there's a sutta where he said when he first heard about renunciation, his heart did not leap up at the thought of it. So we're in good company.

But I really think, and this is from my experience, that we don't understand what renunciation actually means. Remember, we're talking about intention—a quality in the mind and the heart. It's not external so much as in the intention.

Renunciation wisdom is recognizing how greed works, which we've talked about a lot. And renunciation is what happens when greed is seen through in a moment—it's the quality of mind that simply renounces the greed itself. We think of renunciation as getting rid of objects, but this is the same misperception that

we tend to have with greed as well. We miss feeling and noticing the greed because we're looking to the object. Greed is a real quality of mind, this thirst, this tanha. And we'll say, "Well, but it's okay if there's greed because this is a good thing I'm greedy for." Or we think, "Oh, I'm so greedy because that's a bad thing I'm greedy for." And we're skipping over the quality in the heart and mind.

But exploring—and here we're back to awareness, we're never going to get away from awareness, never—it's good because, as Alexis was saying, it becomes our friend. A friend that never leaves us, because we need it.

So renunciation is about recognizing the suffering aspect of greed. And in a moment when that's recognized, just for that moment, it dissolves. It doesn't mean there's no appreciation for beauty or for whatever the thing is. It doesn't mean we can never have the thing. But it means the greed is abandoned in that moment.

I think I referred to this example in another talk during the last retreat. A woman came in and said she was completely blown away by exploring this quality of greed. She was in a sitting and had this incredible desire—and desire in English covers many different mental states, so I'm deliberately not using that word. I really mean this quality of greed—to scratch an itch. You can imagine how strong it was in a sitting, how it felt. And she wasn't scratching, not because scratching was bad or good, but just to explore that quality of greed. Awareness was really exploring how the greed felt. And she said it was so strong, it was amazing.

Then suddenly it flashed in her mind—this is what I think I mentioned—when she was a teenager and had this unbearable crush on somebody in her high school, just filled with greed. And she said, "Oh my God. This is exactly the same quality, the same intensity of greed to scratch this itch as it was when I was in high school thinking I was going to die from greed for this person."

That was a huge insight. Do you get a sense of it? We think it's about the object. No, it's about that quality in the mind. And seeing that in that moment, there was a real moment of wisdom, of insight. It was like, "Whoa, this is crazy." And it just for that moment dropped away. Just for that moment. This is what we explore. It's the craving that creates the dis-ease, not getting the object.

So renunciation does actually breed a real quality of simplicity in the heart and mind, a kind of contentment. Because with less craving, you can still do whatever you do, but you just have less need to go out and fill it up. And it's not like you're left barren and empty. It's actually the sense of simplicity of just being able to be present with contentment and appreciate what's here.

On the other hand, one could live very simply out of a forced idea of renunciation that has nothing to do with what's actually going on in the heart-mind. Someone said to Sayadaw U Tejaniya once, kind of projecting, "Oh, you're a monk, you became a monk after you were grown—amazing renunciation—you must feel so pure." He won't put up with stuff like that for very long, and he said something like, "Don't make up a whole story. Just because someone's a monk, they can have the same amount of desire as you

did in your life, only it's just channeled into two objects." Because there's not much you can have—you can have food, you can have robes.

That's what they get. And believe me, I've hung out more with nuns. They can get into very incredibly fine details about the robes. I've had friends that are nuns go on about the length and how this hem is and how this folds and this one and that one. The same amount of greed can come in.

So watching the renunciation is really this quality of just not needing to go with the greed, starting to feel the suffering of it. And it moves into generosity. Because when we're not holding, there's just this impulse to offer whatever is needed. And the thing about generosity—maybe Steve will talk more about it tomorrow—it's such a state of happiness. Generosity, just that act of offering and the act of receiving when you don't shut it down, the whole circle of that, it's a really happy state of mind and heart. It's really wholesome.

But I think we all know, we've had it implanted in us, that giving is good, helping is good, and it is. But to actually tune into the moment-to-moment intention, that motivation, that movement, that quality in the mind and heart—first there's the renunciation, the greed just isn't making sense, and then just the offering—it's a very happy state because it's actualizing the interconnectedness, the non-separation in a way. So I'm just dropping these seeds in. Explore that. Recognize it.

The Buddha even says to contemplate at times: if you're feeling lost in negativity, sit and contemplate past acts of generosity of your body, speech, and mind. Not to say "I'm so great," but because in contemplating, in remembering it, it can bring up a happiness, a wholesome happiness that can actually bring a brightness to the heart and mind. It's really like countering the kilesas. The same with our sīla, by the way, the same with our non-harming conduct.

So moving into the next one, I'll put them together: friendliness and compassion, non-harming, non-ill will. Obviously, what arises when the habit in a moment of reacting to unpleasant or suffering with resistance or fear or aversion—that's our habit. And often I can see in myself that I want to do something to help someone, and still it's better to do it than not, but at times the motivation really isn't compassion. Because compassion is a real connecting with suffering. It's this quality that we bring in with our awareness. Being fully present, without resistance, without clinging, without blame—really surrendering into it, feeling with. That's the quality of compassion, or the quality of friendliness if it's not as much suffering.

Every moment that awareness is meeting experience, just like it is, with that freshness, with that kindness, being fully present—that's actually, in my opinion and experience, a moment that's feeding and strengthening the habit of heart-mind, of compassion, of mettā. So all these seemingly nothing special moments of awareness, how our mind is meeting this moment, is the practice of wholesomeness, of mettā, of compassion, of non-greed. I think that's just really important not to think about but to recognize, to feel it. Because when we recognize the wholesome, again, it strengthens it and it strengthens our trust and

faith.

So compassion, mettā, arises not from resistance to the difficult, but from connection, from simple being with, without the aversion that keeps us from seeing clearly. And then again, the point is, it's natural. It's a natural expression of a moment of paññā, a moment of wisdom, a moment of presence.

James Baldwin had a wonderful line: "An enemy is someone whose story we have not heard." I really feel that. Once we hear the story—and that could be the story of your knee pain, right? You really hear the story—that connection's there. That's compassion. It's natural when we're not lost in the aversion and the self-centeredness. Not making someone the other.

But it's not so supported. It's not really what I've learned in society, even though I verbally learned it. What kind of works in the culture, what's supported in the culture, is another thing.

The Dalai Lama, when asked about what looks like a lack of compassion in human society, said, "Well, perhaps we just pay less attention to compassion and caring. We reinforce it less. Whereas in some sense, we fully embrace hostility and anger as an emotional state, fueling or reinforcing it. If we were to give the same amount of energy, attention, and reinforcement to compassion and caring, they would definitely be stronger."

How I relate to that is just that I've grown up with a sense that really in the face of the difficult or scary or whatever, anger is not only the best defense but the only defense, the only protection. And you can't just change that intellectually. But the more we see the strength that can come when the heart-mind is open and not lost in ill will, when it can see and recognize more accurately, the strength of appropriate action that can come from compassion, that can come from mettā, is really amazing. And we have more sense of what can be appropriate to do.

It's the last opposite of being a doormat. It's not like, "Oh, metta, compassion—okay, just walk all over me." Metta and compassion include us, right? It's not metta for everyone else while this one here doesn't count. It encompasses the whole situation. But the power of coming from a different angle than what's usual in society—it's really powerful when it happens.

There's another story I heard on NPR, on a podcast called Invisibilia. I don't know if you've ever heard it—they look at different ways the mind works, things that affect society. This particular story is a great illustration of what they call "non-complementary behavior." I really think it's about not just going along with the flow we're taught in society.

Two families—I don't know where this was, it sounded suburban somewhere—were out in their backyard on a summer evening, having a picnic dinner together at a table, drinking some wine, surrounded by trees and bushes. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, a man appeared with a gun. He just slid the gun in between two people. They didn't see him coming or where he came from. He threatened them, said, "Give me your money."

Of course they were startled, scared to death. They said, "But we don't have any money." He was holding the gun right up against someone's head. First they tried saying things like, "What would your mother think if she saw you doing this?" He said, "I don't have a mother."

And then, all of a sudden, one of them said, "Would you like a glass of wine?"

He was completely taken aback. "Oh... okay." So he had a glass of wine, sat down at the picnic table with them. He's drinking wine, they all start talking and chatting, having this whole conversation. The people were still scared, but this is non-complementary behavior. They're having wine, they're talking, and after a while he says, "You know, I can see I came to the wrong place. I'm going to go."

He gets up, and then he says, "First, I want a hug from everyone." So they all hug him. They give him a glass of wine to take with him. He leaves.

They, of course, run into the house and lock the door because they don't know what's going to happen. Nothing. Afterwards, they went and opened the door, and he had drunk his wine and taken the glass and left it very neatly right in front of the door for them to take back. That's it.

Cool, isn't it?

It's not like it's always going to work that way, but notice the power of clarity it takes to just, in a moment, come from the beautiful, the wholesome. It doesn't always work, I know, but sometimes it does. And it's not an easy thing to do.

Metta and compassion don't necessarily mean loving something. I used to think that metta meant I have to love people who are acting horribly. And of course, the mind would immediately go into resistance about that idea. But I really appreciate the way Ajahn Sumedho describes metta in regard to difficult people or situations. He says it does not necessarily mean loving it in the way we usually think about love, but rather witnessing the unpleasantness in a situation, a thing, a person, or in oneself without creating anything around it. That's what he considers metta to be.

Does that sound like anything we've been talking about all week? Just witnessing the unpleasantness—or the pleasantness, or the neutrality—in a person, a situation, oneself. Really present with it, without creating anything around it. And out of that, wisdom arises and the wholesome qualities get stronger, really more naturally.

This is our path. And it arises only ever in this moment—how awareness is meeting this moment, what qualities are present in this moment. This is our path.

This is our practice. We can't do anything about the past. The future is just an idea now. All the moments we've had here, you know, non-aggressive mindfulness and the momentum it builds—it's, in some ways, I think it's the most powerful thing in the world for really bringing compassion and loving-kindness and some kind of greater humanity to ourselves and to the world.

Remember what I read that Martin Luther King said: nonviolence means you not only refuse to shoot a person, you refuse to hate a person. But this isn't coming from the "I refuse" up here. It's coming from that deep inner wholesomeness that only comes from this ongoing practice, from the practice of the heart and mind meeting the difficult without creating anything around it. Meeting the beautiful without creating the craving around it.

And so, as you go through these days, as you go back home, experiment with this steady awareness. This first part you've seen a lot, more and more clearly and deeply—some people were saying that today for yourselves—the actual suffering, the unsatisfactory quality of the unwholesome mind states.

Someone was describing that about really deep anger today. Being with it, being with it. Caught, caught, caught. But at some point, it was so clear how much suffering that was. If you just keep noticing that without judgment, the same with craving. Caught, caught, caught. Or wanting, wanting, wanting. Or not caught—like, "I love it, yeah, I'm going with it." But at some point: oh yeah, this is really suffering too. This isn't a judgment. And it doesn't mean that craving won't come up the next moment or anger won't come up the next moment. But the more that awareness is recognizing it, this is the wisdom. This is what will allow the spontaneous dissolving of the wanting, of the ill will in a moment.

What allowed whatever person it was at that dinner party to say, "Have a glass of wine"—you know, that's not something you could plan ahead. There had to be a moment of spontaneous dissolving of fear that one could do that. Just even for a moment.

And then the other thing is to recognize and appreciate and really feel the wholesome moments of quality in our mind. When there isn't clinging. When you walk outside or you go to eat and you're enjoying the food but you're not lost in rabid greed about it—I'm sure there are moments like that. Or when you're not in aversion, and that person who's just been bugging the hell out of you walks by and there's just nothing. You don't have to love them, but there's nothing. There's no aversion. Appreciate. Appreciate the wholesome moments because it really starts to go in and feel it, just like we're feeling the difficulty, the *kil esas*.

And then just a little thing to leave you with. Noticing there are many ways we can work. When we understand right attitude in our mind, we can really see when the mind and heart in a moment isn't colored by ill will or craving. Then we can use this steady awareness with any meditation technique. Because then we can do it without getting caught in the striving, without getting caught in the ill will of trying to fix. And there are many ways of cultivating these wholesome qualities, different kinds of meditation and inner life. All the different retreats could talk about different ways.

The only thing I want to say now, just to play with here, is: sometimes when you're not all lost in aversion but just going through the day, to consciously bring in a shift of attitude, to bring in a sense of compassion or a sense of sharing, just in your mind—not even doing anything. This is something that Mingyur Rinpoche talks about a lot. It can really change the whole tone of things.

Just simple things. Say you're washing your hands and just thinking, "May I wash and clean my hands to be of service to all beings." Something like that. Something that makes sense to you. That's all. You just start doing that. It feels so different from just washing your hands and running out. Or every time before I eat, I think, "May I eat this food to strengthen my body to be of service to all beings." Whatever makes sense for you when you remember it. And not just saying it—like when I was a kid and my parents always made us say grace before the meal. Each of my siblings, we had one, and we would say it so fast that you couldn't even understand the words.

Thank you. Okay, now we'd eat. Not like that—actually knowing what you're saying.

But play with that. So this is my favorite. I often use this. I'll share it with you. Even when you go to bed, when you're lying down to go to sleep—Mingyur Rinpoche offers this teaching about how intention can transform neutral activities into wholesome ones.

So sleeping. When you go to bed at night with the mind of bodhicitta, with the mind of cultivating awakening to be of benefit for all, we aspire that our sleep be the cause of increased capacity to help all beings.

That's nice, isn't it?

So you can even go to sleep with a good conscience. I'm going to sleep. May my sleep strengthen my capacity to help all beings. Doesn't that feel different?

And it's so easy. Just to incline the mind, the heart, toward the wholesome.

So that's the heart of what we're doing—with some small examples of how it moves into action in our lives.

Thank you all for your kind attention.

Let's sit for a moment.

Sitting or standing or walking or sleeping, for the benefit of all beings, in this next half hour.

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