Right View: From the Beginning and All Through the Path

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 55:53

I would like to share some thoughts about Right View, which is really the beginning and the ending of the path of awakening.

I'm sure you're quite aware that in the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path begins with Right View. And of course, it's not a linear path. It's not that at the beginning of the path we should be completely awakened—that doesn't make sense. You'd think it should come at the end. But there's a certain degree of Right View that begins the path and then permeates all aspects of our practice. It keeps cycling through. It's certainly not a linear path; it's circular, spiraling deeper and deeper.

So even to begin our practice, we need and we have some essential aspect of Right View. This is something we can think about intellectually, but we keep coming back to this attitude of how we relate to our moment-to-moment practice—whether it's from Right View, right understanding, or from confusion. It really affects how we practice. The attitude in our mind and our awareness in a moment of paying attention matters deeply. It's a bit like what James was talking about last night when he spoke of bringing to mindfulness the qualities of interest, relaxation, and being kind. That's the quality in a moment of awareness, and that's really what Right View points to. It's the heart of the Buddhist teachings.

We've been giving lots of instructions, and you all know many more techniques. I'm sure you know this, but just a reminder: the practice isn't about getting the technique right. All the meditation techniques, all the methods, all the instructions—they're not about perfecting those so that you become a good meditator. The Buddha wasn't there to teach, "This is how to be the perfect follower of the breath, and if you can do it perfectly, you're enlightened." No, the techniques are in service of cultivating steady mindfulness, cultivating at least a moment of mindfulness that grows more and more steady. All of the Vipassana techniques are in service of that. That's the beginning of Right View. Right View then imbues everything.

But even steady mindfulness—why do we want to cultivate that? That's not an end in itself either. The Buddha's whole teaching has many wonderful, fantastic side effects and results. But the heart of the teaching is to really awaken our hearts and minds from delusion, from the confusion that creates suffering arising in our hearts and minds on a moment-to-moment basis—suffering that comes from the way the heart and mind respond to situations inaccurately, incorrectly, because we don't recognize what's really going on.

So his whole teaching is to really have the motivation, the understanding, the trust—the faith, the

saddhā—in this potential: that freeing the heart and mind from confusion and suffering is really possible. As he said at times in different suttas, don't settle for anything less. Even for wholesome states of mind—that's wonderful, but don't settle for that. This is really the deepest aspect of Right View, which we cycle into and out of over and over. We keep coming to understand it a little bit more, then we lose it completely. That's on the deepest level.

But even to begin our practice, we need to know that the Right View which can lead us to even start is the sense that somehow we're not really getting it right. I mean, if we really had it all together and things made sense, who would spend a month sitting here like this? It's not really a vacation. We come here knowing, having practiced before, that it's not going to be a joyride. There will be moments that could be a joyride, and there will be plenty of moments that it's not. Because that's life. You think life gets different because you're sitting on a cushion? No. You just see it more clearly.

So sati, mindfulness—it's not an end in itself, but it's the amazing tool. The steadiness of mindfulness is the amazing tool. What does it do? How does it open this really deep potential of awakening?

It's not that mindfulness is creating a new reality. It allows us to recognize this reality, this moment of mind-body experience, accurately. We may think we're recognizing accurately, but if we were, we wouldn't be so embroiled in confusion.

One of the ways Sayadaw U Tejaniya defines Vipassana meditation is as experiencing the mind and body directly, from moment to moment, with the right understanding. So that's what I want to talk about tonight—the beginning right understanding that we can remind ourselves of, that we have to remind ourselves of, because it's not completely in ourselves all the time.

Right view, which is often the translation of samma ditthi, the first step of the Eightfold Path—it's not about learning another set of beliefs, or believing anything, or taking another set of concepts and saying this is true, everything else is false. Not even the Buddha's teaching. Right view isn't about believing anything.

Sometimes it's translated as right or wise understanding, which is also good. But personally, in the way I'm talking tonight, I really like the translation of right view because I think it's very literal.

Right view is far more simple, and I would say elegant, than believing another set of concepts or views or explanations. It's simple, elegant, and totally radical in terms of our experience.

Right view is literal, and it means the view, the way we recognize ourselves, the world, in a moment of experience. There's only this moment of experience. It's right in terms of being accurate—in a moment, recognizing what's actually happening. Not through some veil, some mist of assumption, distortion, self-identification, liking, disliking, whatever. In the beginning of practice, we don't even know that's there.

You think, "What are you talking about? I'm just seeing how it is. It's cold and I don't feel good, and that's how it is. Let's fix it." That's our idea of what's going on. We come in here, it's cold in the morning, and we think, "They should get this heat together." That's just the reality. This is wrong. But there's a little extra in that, you see? There's a little extra.

So right view. Just this moment. How is it?

There's a phrase listed in Pali, one of the higher knowledges, realizations. The phrase, which I love, is *yath a bhuta ñana dassana*, which means knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be. I'm indebted to Gil Fronsdal for giving it that precision of translation, because it's often rendered as "things as they are," but that gives a solidness. "Things as they are" makes us feel it's like this now—solid, non-changing.

But "things as they have come to be" gives me the sense of fluidity. They've come to be in this moment as a result of so many causes and conditions that there's no way we can even name them all. And this moment could not possibly be different. It's impossible, because this is how it's come to be right now. The next moment will come to be in a different way.

So "things as they have come to be" recognizes the impermanence, the changing nature, the conditionality, the impersonality. And when this is recognized accurately, appropriate response is much more possible.

This is the sense of right view—things as they have come to be.

When you look at the Buddha, or read about the Buddha after his awakening... for years I never thought of right view and right understanding as "we recognize experience differently and thus respond more appropriately." In the back of my mind, there was always this feeling that somehow it all should get better, shouldn't it? Things should shape up somehow. We should shape up the world, for God's sake. People should get better. Something should change.

But when you look at the Buddha's life, he woke up—the Peaceful One, the Fully Awakened One—into the same world that he was asleep in. He woke up in the same world. Things didn't change. There were still wars and poverty and prejudice and bias.

He lived with physical ailments. People still acted in totally irrational, stupid ways, both toward him and otherwise. His awakening didn't end violence in the world. It didn't end hatred. It didn't end prejudice. But how he lived in and understood and related to the world was completely different. He lived in a world of relationships and action.

So when I look at that, I think, "Oh, right, so what is awakening about? What is right view?" It doesn't mean people start acting nice, necessarily. It doesn't mean they walk up and say, "Oh, you look so bright and clear." Don't you kind of secretly think when you leave retreat that everybody's going to say, "Wow, you're really amazing. You're just filled with metta and compassion"? Yeah. Once in a while that happens. But it doesn't last, because nothing does. And that's not really what it's about.

So what changed? What changes? How we recognize and how we respond. We move from misperceiving—we perceive wrongly, we interpret wrongly—so we respond in ways that increase our own confusion and suffering. And much of the time we don't even know that's what we're doing. That's what the Buddha's talking about with wrong view. For me, it's fascinating when I can start to tune into it. It's also painful at times when we begin to see all the ways we're misinterpreting and complicating things for ourselves.

I'm trying to talk on a very basic level of right view here. But why? Why do we so misperceive? Why do we misrespond, embroiling ourselves in so much suffering? I'm not going back to origins—forget that. The Buddha said one of the things that will drive you crazy is trying to think about the beginnings of the universe. So he didn't know about the Big Bang, I guess.

How we perceive, how we think about things—this is the heart of what the Buddha's teaching is. He talked about how his teaching is against the stream: against the stream of common society, of common culture, of all the different common cultures. That's not so different now than it was then. But it's not only the external culture he's talking about. It's also the internal ways that we perceive and understand the world—ways we may not even recognize. We take them for granted.

As it's often said, when we're growing up in a particular family, in a particular culture, and if we're only surrounded by that particular culture, we don't even realize that there are other possibilities, that there are so many other cultures and ways people live—until we travel a little bit or step outside, if we happen to be able to live in a bubble like that. But then we start to see: this is true for all of us. How we're brought up, the cultures we live in, the things we meet in our lives—these have an effect on how we interpret, how we look at things. Some things we recognize, but much we don't.

And so Buddhist teaching—awareness practice, moment-to-moment awareness practice—is actually a stepping outside of the unrecognized, unspoken, unquestioned worldview and self-view that we may have been operating from in the background, whatever it is. This can be very uncomfortable at times, even if the self-worldview isn't a particularly happy or pleasant one. But it's familiar, like an old cozy bathrobe. You just get all cozy in it, even though you put it on in the morning and get really depressed and never want to go outside and just slump around the house. But you don't want to take it off because it's so cozy. Sort of like that.

Here's an example—not a personal one—of the ways ideas we don't even recognize shape how we interpret and perceive things. I hope this works. It worked for me. I was reading a book some years ago. I didn't take very good notes—I think the book was called *Nonviolence*. Anyway, I was reading the foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

And he's talking about nonviolence as the word, noting how in Gandhi's philosophy and teaching—in the Hindi, it's ahimsa—both of those are negations. Violence, or ahimsa is the negation of violence, just like nonviolence is the negation of violence. And so without recognizing it, he says, it's as if saying violence is

the norm.

And nonviolence, rather than being a really active, proactive response to life, rather than being a whole view of life, it's simply, in that way—ahimsa, nonviolence—it's like it's the negation of violence. Violence being the thing that's expected. He said, what if you turn it around? What if the only word for war were non-peace?

You get his sense? Just a little thing like that. You don't say, wow, I don't even recognize the subtle effect words can have like that.

So it is sort of to turn in and kind of see—you have to stretch the mind a little bit. What would that mean?

Just along this same theme, I heard an interview soon after I was reading this, part of an interview with James Lawson. Do you know who he is? He's one of the foremost—he's pretty elderly now, I think he's still alive, two years ago he was—pretty elderly now, but he's one of the foremost theorists in this country on the philosophy and the actions of nonviolence. He studied Gandhian principles in India. He was a conscientious objector during the Korean War. But during the Civil Rights Movement, starting in the late fifties and early sixties, he was really one of the main people who was training all the civil rights workers, especially those young people in Nashville who started the Freedom Rides and the sit-ins. He was really the major trainer of how to do really important action from nonviolent principles.

And so in this interview—this is just one line from the thing—but the interviewer was asking him, "Well, how do you then deal with violence if you're talking about nonviolence?" And he said, "You're asking the question from the wrong angle." Nonviolence creates, it stems from a completely different configuration of power than the one you're imagining, or the one that would ask, "Well, how do you deal with violence?" He didn't really go into it or outline it in that interview, but it's that same sense of: if non-peace is the only word for war, everything changes. And he's saying it's a completely different configuration of power. You're asking basically from the other way of perceiving, which is really what we're doing all the time in our daily life.

One last thing that gives a hint of it too, 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 just to me, that gives a little sense of looking from a whole different angle, from a whole different place, a configuration of power that has nothing to do with the external kind of power we think of. He's always talking about soul force, power of the heart. You can't even think all the depth of that.

Well, that's just the example I was giving—to take up that our essential wrong view, the essential misinterpretation that the Buddha's teachings speak to, that we carry around with us because it just seems so normal. You know what I'm going to say, I'm sure: it's sakkāya-diṭṭhi. Diṭṭhi means view. Sakkāya means personality or identity view.

So what that means really, in the nitty-gritty moment-to-moment experience, is there's the whole field of sense experiences happening. I think Sally mentioned the sense experience. So there's seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, physical sensations, thoughts, moods, images—all arising from moment to moment, right? We agree on that? And it's just like this, seems like a flow, a stream, one after the other after the other. This is one of the ways the Buddha described our life.

So this is just going on. Whenever one of those is—particularly when the energy of grasping comes—it's identified, it's felt as, taken as being me or mine, any particular one of the sense experiences, that's a moment of sakkāya-diṭṭhi, a moment of personality view.

Now mostly when we're meditating, we might notice—when we're being quiet, one of the advantages of a retreat environment—we're actually first even noticing there's this constant flow of sense experiences. And we might notice that some are just coming and going, and then suddenly there's this energy of, kind of like a mental energy to grasp it and go, "Yes, this is happening to me." And it feels different from all the other ones.

In our daily life it's still like this, but it's happening so fast. Generally, I think a lot of us, we don't notice a particular thing like that—it just feels as though it's me.

This stuff is either happening in me or to me. This is me in my life, right? Or am I the only one? Creating a sense of self and other.

The way Sogyal Rinpoche describes it, he called it this fascination with me, with the sense of me. And that's a real feeling, the sense of me, isn't it? Sometimes when we talk about sakaya-ditti being a view, not being an accurate interpretation of reality, we think, well, there should be no sense of me. But there is a sense of me. Do you have a sense of being me or I sometimes in the day? Do you notice it? It can be noticed because it's not always there.

I actually love exploring that in practice, but it's so frequent and it's so taken for granted. It's like what I was saying before about nonviolence—you don't even think about it. The sense of me isn't thought about. So Sogyal says this is like a fascination with me. This sense of me, which is a real kind of sense—it feels like me. It doesn't mean it is; it feels like me. And so that becomes the measuring point for all experience. Everything relates back to the sense of me.

Joseph gives a great example. He was standing once on retreat in the food line for lunch, second in line. There were big pots, and the person in front of him lifted the top off a pot and dropped it, making a heck of a racket. You can imagine, in the silence, deep in retreat—a heck of a racket, everybody looks. And he said his first thought was, "It wasn't me."

We do that. It's all about me, right? The measuring point for everything. It's cold out—is that good for me? Bad for me? Something happens, and we think, what's this going to mean to me? Incredible things happening in the world, good or bad—well, what's this going to mean for me? That's the first thing, and

then we can widen out.

Now, this isn't to be looked at with judgment or self-judgment. What's that? That's all about me too, right? "I'm just the most self-oriented person in the world. I'm the most self-judging person here." Just watch it all. Watch it all. But don't take it personally.

So Sogyal says everything is measured from the sense of me. It's natural, but that doesn't make it true. It's really fascinating. And that's where we get seduced into it. That's where we really don't quite notice.

This is where our wrong view feeds the confusion that keeps us from recognizing in any moment accurately what's occurring. An incredible complexity comes into our reactions to a moment of experience as soon as it's being recognized through the veil of distortion of sakaya-ditti, of me.

Even this, though, can be recognized with mindfulness. There's nothing that awareness can't recognize. So it's not hopeless—otherwise, there would be no point in bringing it up. We can explore it. But the complexity of our life, of our response to all these different sense impressions, is triggered by, distorted by, the not recognizing sakaya-ditti when it's operative in a particular moment of mindfulness, a particular moment of awareness.

Let me give you a simple example. The other morning when it was really cold—

Start with just perception, just the recognition of experience. Say you're walking outside. My body is very sensitive to cold, so I'm using that as an example. Walking outside, the cold is coming, and the cold sensation is occurring. Maybe there's a sound of wind, and there's an experience of that as being unpleasant. That would just be perception—coldness feels like this, wind, unpleasant.

But the sense of sakaya-ditti would be, "I'm so cold. I'm so cold." Do you get a sense of the difference? Cold is like this, versus I'm so cold. It starts right there, and it's unpleasant.

So then from what we perceive, as the Buddha says, we think about. Like the example I was giving before: I'm so cold, and I come in here to sit and it's fifty-eight degrees. Can't these people get themselves together? Don't they know? Okay, maybe we want to save propane—turns out there wasn't any propane—but maybe we want to save it. Don't they know it's flu season? The last thing we want is for everyone to get sick here, right?

So it depends how far that goes. One thought might be all, or maybe it went on for twenty-five minutes. Who was suffering? Only one person was suffering from that particular train of thought. The other person was suffering from their particular train of thought. But that's the incredible complexity coming from the sense of me.

Those thoughts—and it could be on the pleasant side; I'm just using the unpleasant because it's more obviously suffering—all of that is going on. And then it comes down into a view: Yes, this is true. It's too cold. They're not on top of it. I'm going to get sick. This is not okay. This isn't good for my body. And it's all

so solid. Do you get a sense of that?

In the sense of yata-bhuta, things as they are—so that's sati. You might be noticing all of that, but if you don't recognize the view of self and the aversion that's distorting perception, it's sati, but it's not what Sally mentioned the other night: samasati, the path factor, right mindfulness. Because right mindfulness recognizes the qualities in the citta. Mindfulness can be aware of sakaya-ditti, can be aware of aversion. That's fine—you know it's there. It still feels like aversion, it's still unpleasant, but mindfulness is recognizing it. That's samasati. That's path factor mindfulness.

Unrecognized, we just spin and spin and spin. As the Buddha said, agitation through clinging—clinging to the sense of self, clinging to the belief, clinging to the dislike, clinging to the unpleasant. And then if you think, "Oh, I'm clinging again," it's just another thought of me that's clinging.

But what's wonderful, what's amazing, what's so freeing about awareness, about mindfulness, is that at any moment it can flip—from being completely lost in the sakaya-ditti to, oh—

Sense of self is like this.

Or, "I'm so cold. This is impossible. I can't bear it." Oh, coldness feels like this. It still feels cold—it doesn't become all mellow and wonderful. It still feels cold, but it's just the sensations, and nothing created around it. That's the simplicity of clear seeing versus the complexity of the attachment of sense of self and all the reactions that come from that.

Ajahn Sumedho—the American who's been a monk in the Thai forest tradition for forty-some-odd years—he says we create ourselves through our thoughts. And we cannot create an ultimately peaceful self. Check it out. You've got a lot of time to see that.

But if you just look at the difference between this complication and the simple being—"Oh, sensation cold is like this. It's really unpleasant. Unpleasant feels like this." And a thought comes up: "I wonder why it's so cold. What's the matter?" And you go, "Okay, wondering feels like this." It's not that you have to push anything away. It's just shifting from the unconscious, unrecognizing that we're believing this interpretation, to what's the actual sense experience now?

Physical coldness. Mental unpleasant. Mental thought. Physical contraction around the coldness. Mental unpleasant. More mental unpleasant thought because the contraction is more unpleasant than the coldness, which is actually just cold. And spiral, spiral, spiral. And then you say, "Oh yeah, sakayaditthi is like this." I'm not just saying—I do that all the time. It lands you in the middle of the experience. It's not a suppression or a pushing away at all. It's like, "Oh, it's like this now."

Which is a phrase Ajahn Sumedho uses. It really helps me, because sometimes my mind is trying to analyze, trying to name it like I just did—cold sensation, unpleasant sensation—and really get into that. But behind it all, that can come from a trying to control and get it all copacetic, right? If I can name it all

and be mindful. Instead, just "Oh, it's like this now." Not even naming it, just "like this now." The resistance goes, and you're just being fully present in that moment.

And then the next thing arises. And if you're really cold and a thought comes, "Well, why don't I just put a blanket around me?"—there's nothing wrong with that. Just put on a blanket, for the love of God, and stop whining, Carol. It's so much more simple. It doesn't mean we can't respond in an intelligent way, but we're able to see what's actually going on rather than running all over the place.

As I did once at IMS many years ago. Yogi mind, when everything's exaggerated and you're really not seeing clearly. The heating pipe started playing the Rolling Stones. Not really, okay. But it was so loud. How can it be so loud? These heating pipes—something's got to be wrong. I was on staff at the time, so I knew the building, and I ended up running around down in the boiler room, way down in the basement, to see if the furnaces were working right. As if I would know, right? As a cook, what do I know from furnaces? Nothing. "It's got to be something wrong. It can't be making so much noise." Instead of just, "Oh, sounds like this now." It's probably not the Rolling Stones—but that could be, you know, a perception. But okay, it's loud. Just like this now. So much more simple, so much more simple and appropriate.

So just that simplicity of recognizing what's happening—sensation—that's samasati. In that particular moment, it's not like it's an incredibly powerful insight. But what we're cultivating through all the techniques is the moment-to-moment-to-moment recognition, recognition of this simple awareness. And that's what starts to give awareness its own momentum. You start to be able then to see more accurately, more clearly.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya likes to describe, instead of thinking of whatever's occurring as ourself, is to just think of its nature. Like, we tend to get upset about the weather, but probably—at least in this culture—we don't think we can control it. And so I may be upset about it, but I'm not really going to go out there and start blaming myself because it's raining or snowing, right? So that little bit of assuming we have control is taken away.

So when we're exploring in our practice moment-to-moment experience, especially when we start to see the painful, the distorting mental states that come when we're looking through wrong view, we recognize that these also are simply arising. Yathabhuta—they've come to be as they are in this moment due to just previous habits of mind. It isn't personal.

The deeply conditioned habits. As I'm sure you know, the Buddha spoke of the roots of our confusion, our deep suffering, as arising in this mind-body system through certain mental states or mental factors—the mental qualities of confusion, delusion, not recognizing clearly what I've been talking about. These lead to responses of either great greed, fixation, holding on, wanting, leaning forward, craving—or hatred, aversion, fear, pushing away. These three are the root mental qualities that lead to all the other suffering states we experience. And they really arise out of the misperception of relating to any experience as me or mine.

When they're present and not recognized, they're going to be present a lot. As we cultivate mindful awareness, we start to recognize them more and more and more. This is a very important part of practice. This is where I was going with seeing it as nature. If we start to recognize, for instance, how often wanting something to be different arises—even some little thing—and if in that moment it's taken as me, taken as mine: "I'm such a greedy person. I can't believe wanting is coming up again. I'm hopeless." Then right away we're back in the extra suffering, and we don't want to see it because we're taking it personally. And it's really, really hard.

But if instead we say, "Wow, wanting coming up again," or "Fear coming up"—I remember one period in practice where I thought I didn't have that much fear. I was waiting for some big, total panic that was going to send me fleeing. But then I started to notice little blips of fear coming up about everything. This was one phase of practice. I wasn't even on retreat. I was home, and I was taking the tea kettle off the stove, and I had this fear that I was doing it wrong. How can you take the tea kettle off the stove wrong? And the fear—I thought, oh my god, this is amazing.

Now if I took that personally, that would go down the path of "You're completely hopeless. All these years of practice and you're afraid of how you're taking off the tea kettle. Why don't you just hang it up? It's hopeless." Or I could get really overwhelmed. But when you're seeing, "Wow, this is a habit of mind, that's fascinating"—it's not something about Carol, because there's not a solid Carol here anyway. It's just seeing how this has been conditioned in this mind-body system. And the awareness noticing it is, as James said, really interested.

It won't be every moment, but just to hold that sense that whatever's coming up in this moment is arising due to its simply having been practiced a lot. As there is conditioning, here we're shifting—the yatā bhūta, recognizing things as they have come to be in this moment, allows the clear seeing that we can respond differently in this next moment. Like I said, instead of getting all upset about the cold, you just see how cold feels like this, you put on a blanket, no big deal.

So it makes clear seeing possible, which allows us to respond appropriately. It's not that these things aren't going to arise—greed, hatred, confusion. They will. They are. And the more we practice mindfulness and trust it, we'll see them more. Sometimes people come in and they'll say, "Oh my god, I'm a million times worse than when I started practice. I'm a hopeless neurotic mess." But we're just seeing what we didn't see before because the faith is getting stronger, the mindfulness is getting more continuous, gaining its momentum. There's more sammā sati than there was, and so it gives us the heart and the strength to really look at it, to not take it so personally. And it's important to see because without that clear seeing, these difficult states are what lead to the distortions where we recognize inaccurately.

There's a sutta, a very brief one, where the Buddha talked about the four ways of going off course, the four ways of wrong action. And they're basically this: prejudice based on what we like, what we desire; prejudice based on what we dislike, based on anger; prejudice based on delusion, not recognizing

accurately; and prejudice based on fear. We can see this in the world clearly. I imagine for you, certainly for me, we can see how that in other people impacts us, how it impacts other people. We can get really filled with despair and pain around that.

What we're doing here though, and what is really amazing about this month-long period or two-week period of silent intensive practice—where we're not so much relating to each other or to the outside world—as I said with the Buddha, it's not that our awakening fixes the outside world. But what we are looking at is seeing: okay, it's not only everyone else who has prejudices based on likes and dislikes, on anger, on fear, on delusion. It's also arising from time to time in this mind and heart, completely clouding accurate recognition, completely clouding appropriate response. And as the Buddha said, leading to more agitation through clinging, affecting how we can relate to others in the world.

So this is some of the reason why we need faith, as James was talking about. These five wholesome spiritual faculties arise through our willingness to keep cultivating steady mindfulness, and they're essential. There are times we really need to call on confidence, on our faith or trust, because the stuff that comes up—we're stepping outside the comfort zone to recognize these things.

Or sometimes we can bring in the intellectual understanding of right view, really why I'm talking about it tonight. Sometimes when I'm totally caught, I'll really say, "Right, this is nature. This is cause and effect. It's like this now." And it gives me the faith just to relax into it. It's like this now. This feels horrible. It's like this now. For this instant it feels horrible, okay. But it doesn't have to have all the stories about me and past and future and everything. It's just like this now.

And then there's a possibility for the next moment to arise with a response of more clarity, more wholesomeness, more compassion, more wisdom.

When we don't recognize the effect of sakkāya-diṭṭhi that is present, we bring the same sense of misperception into how we approach our practice—just our simple mindfulness practice. This is what so frequently leads to striving, trying to make your experience be a certain way. Probably none of you have ever fallen into that.

Even trying to make the breath be a certain way, as if it matters. The breath is going to come and go, and if it stops coming and going, you won't be there to care about it. But it's going to come and go, and it's the object that helps us re-recognize awareness. It's not about getting a better breath. We think, "Well, I shouldn't be thinking about things." Thinking is occurring. That's what's happening. That's then the object to bring us back into awareness. Any object can bring awareness. But when we don't recognize that the sense of "me doing" is behind the technique, then we can practice endlessly without understanding.

Ajahn Sumedho says our tendency is to think you can't understand or even think about sakkāya-diṭṭhi in the beginning of practice—it's too obscure, too complex. You have to practice a long time. But he says, no, he's come to really believe—and I agree with him—that's crazy. Why practice for twenty years from the

delusion that I'm practicing to get somewhere and make something happen? Why spend twenty years doing that? You can start to just begin to explore, to bring in and recognize when the sense of self, sakkāya-diṭṭhi, is occurring. It's not going to stop occurring, but we can just recognize it, as I've been talking about, and see the difference between the complexity and the simplicity—when it's there and when it's not—without even taking that personally. Sakkāya-diṭṭhi also isn't personal. It's just a habit of misinterpretation of our minds.

When we don't recognize it—and I mean, probably many of us have practiced with great diligence, great sincerity, great effort—behind that, without recognizing, so much of it is coming from that forceful striving. Trying to get, trying to do, trying to be better, or trying to get rid of, trying to change your personality. Does this resonate with anybody? No, I'm serious.

And then we say, "Okay, well, I've got to stop doing that, right? I'm just going to recognize sakkāya-diṭṭhi and stop doing that. No more striving." No. This is the radical nature of moment-to-moment mindfulness practice. Sati, mindfulness of just what is occurring, no matter what is occurring. So striving—striving feels like this. It's just another movement of mind, another mental state. Trying to get rid of striving feels like this.

You just keep noticing. A good place you can see it in minuscule is the sense of trying to control your breath. You ever get into that? You just try to notice the breath and then as soon as you notice, you're trying to control it. And you think, "God, I'm not supposed to control the breath. I'm going to not control the breath." Then you try to just look at it from the side because you're not trying to control it. "I'm not really controlling—oh, controlling, controlling. Never mind, I'm going here. Am I controlling it?" And you're all wrapped up in a knot.

What about: "Oh, controlling feels like this." Okay. That's just what's occurring. Controlling feels like this. I don't like it. Okay. Not liking feels like this. Really. Really. I'm not kidding. This is really the quality of sammā sati—recognizing what's occurring. Steady, steady awareness starts to get its own momentum.

Mingyur Rinpoche, describing this, says we give attention to the object of meditation to support the recognition of awareness, of mindfulness. We use the object as a tool to access the mind of mindfulness. Now this is me, not him: for that purpose, any object is equally useful.

So it can be breath, or it can be controlling. It can be a pristine sense of coolness and little subtle vibrations, or it could be a massive whole body-mind feeling of hatred. It's like this. It's the awareness that we're recognizing, developing the steadiness of—not trying to make better objects.

And you'll know when you're trying to make better objects, because right away the *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* leads us into either greed, wanting to achieve something, or aversion, trying to get rid of something, trying to stop something, or delusion—you don't know what the heck's going on—or more, it's all about me. It's all about me. But then mindfulness can just notice that.

I'm not saying it's easy, but the more we start to do it and trust it, the more natural it gets. It starts to be that this old suit of clothes, the old fuzzy bathrobe of "me, me, me," isn't the only way of recognizing a moment of reality. So here we have all these moments to practice—simply recognizing mindful awareness. Mindful awareness.

A lot of times it feels like nothing much is going on. We want some flashy things going on. And if you can't have wonderful flashy things, we'll take some big trauma. Better that than boring, right? Nothing's happening. But awareness doesn't ever get bored.

We start to notice—this is back to Mingyur Rinpoche again—as we're using every object to recognize awareness, then we start to recognize the quality of the mind, the quality of the mind that's aware in any moment of awareness. Not just the object, not just the phenomenon perceived by the mind.

This is what James was pointing to last night when he talked about those qualities of interest in the mind, and relaxation, and kindness. Those are the wholesome qualities that we start to recognize. Interest is really a quality of bright mind, of wisdom, of non-delusion. Relaxation, I'm thinking, is really like a quality of non-greed. The fixation of clinging, of holding onto something, is relaxed. It's just as it is right now—non-greed. And kindness, of course, obviously non-hatred. Not the kindness of "oh, it's so nice"—it's just like this, without creating any negativity, any aversion, any "me" around it. It's just like this. Kind attention can just be with what is. And that's all.

In fact, one of Ajahn Sumedho's definitions of *mettā,* which I really love—*mettā* in terms of being with something or someone that's difficult—is just to experience the difficult or unpleasant in a person or a situation, just as it is, without creating anything around it. I love that. It's like this. And space. Nothing else you need to do.

So this is really *sammā-sati*. As Ajahn Chah says, we become the knower of objects, not the owner of objects. And so slowly, slowly, as the awareness gains momentum, the right view, the understanding—it starts to be more our default mode. Not completely, but it does start to be at times. Sometimes we actively remember it, but then there are times when, like I gave the example, all of a sudden: "Oh, it's just like this now." That arises spontaneously, and it's so obvious. And we really start to shift to the more accurate way of seeing.

I'll just end with this very well-known sutta from the Buddha. I know you know this—two alternate ways of perceiving. And we go back and forth between them.

This mind-heart is radiant, but it doesn't show its radiance because passing torments, *kilesas*, defilements, come and obscure it, hide it. The unwise, ordinary person does not understand this as it really is. So for them there is no development, no cultivation of mind. You just think, "Oh, this is just how it is. Greed is here and I'm the victim of it and there's nothing to do." This is the truth.

This mind is radiant, and it shows its radiance when it is unobscured by passing *kilesas*, torments. The

wise, noble disciple understands this as it is, and so for them there is cultivation, development of mind.

So that's what we're doing. We recognize that when the *kilesas* are covering the radiance, we don't think that's all there is. We can recognize the torments, but we know it's a passing show. And when the radiance is there—just the simplicity of the heart-mind at ease, at peace—just starting with that.

Don't go looking for Nibbana—just start with moments of purity. When there's not greed, not hatred, not delusion, recognize those moments as well. Just the simple radiance, really view that.

And when a new cloud comes, we don't despair. We know it's a cloud. Conditions brought it together. Awareness that radiance is still accessible.

So that's what I wanted to share about right view.

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