Mingling Our Minds with the Dhamma

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:00:43

Dingo Kenzi has a phrase that has always stuck in my mind, one that I like very much. He talks about mingling our minds with the Dharma, which I just love. That's what I want to talk about tonight.

The rest of how I remember it—I'm not sure if this is accurate or if I made it up—is mingling our minds with the Dharma until it's so mingled that we die with no thought of Dharma in our minds. You get it? It's so mingled that you don't think about the Dharma as some separate belief system or anything. It's just how our minds are—purified. I can only assume that would be the mind of an arahat. Who knows?

But mingling our minds with the Dharma really means using all the aspects of our life and realizing that all the aspects of the Buddha's teaching—not just meditation—are about purifying these troublesome habits of mind we've been talking about the whole time: these torments of greed, hatred, and delusion. As we know, the cessation of dukkha, the third noble truth, is the remainderless cessation, the relinquishment of craving, of the torments.

This purification of the habits of our mind, what I'm calling mingling our mind with the Dharma—this is the work of our whole lifetime. Our whole lifetime, at least. We don't have to know what happens before or after, but it's at least this whole lifetime. Not one retreat, not ten years. I don't say this to be depressive; actually, it's been more and more inspiring to me when we realize the actuality. In the last some years, I've come to appreciate more and more how everything the Buddha taught comes from some different angle of helping us purify and transform these suffering habits of mind. All of it is to be used, not so much in a hierarchy.

It's been helpful to me in my own practice, and also in speaking with people, when—you know how on retreat we can get caught up in questions like: Should I do concentration practice or vipassanā practice? Which is better? Which do I need? Which is going to get me enlightened faster? If I miss one, do I not get it? And if I'm doing vipassanā, which form? More precise? Do I do noting? Do I do open awareness? Choiceless awareness? Just resting back? If I don't do the right one, I'm going to miss it. And then: which things do I have to know? Okay, dāna and sīla are pretty good—you do that if you can't do anything else, but that's not the real thing, right?

Trying to figure all that out can be—I'm making it a little funny—but it can really cut close to the heart. I've talked to plenty of people, and myself included, who are really in a state of suffering frenzy about it: "Oh my god, why didn't I know about this practice before? I've been wasting all my time and I didn't know about this one. This is the real one!"

Starting to actually realize—and this is me thinking—the Buddha taught all these ways, offered all these different approaches, because at different times, different approaches are what's accessible to us. We need them all, in all times of our life. When, say, concentration isn't available but the practice of sīla is, we shouldn't think, "Well, okay, I'll do sīla, what the heck, until I can get concentrated again—that's the real thing." That attitude is klesha-driven. We need to actually come to respect and honor all of these practices.

I just want to touch lightly on several of these. None of this is new information, but I'm trying to bring it together under this way of looking at it.

We know that transformation of these habits, as deep and long-lasting as they may seem, is absolutely possible. It's possible because citta, what we call the mind, is not a static entity. It's not an entity at all. Andy Olenski had a description of citta I liked: this moment of mind-heart. In Buddhism, the mind is not a subject that has objects as content. We talk about it that way—"the mind"—and right away we think of a thing, just from the use of language. But the mind is not a subject that has objects as content; it is rather the activity or process of cognizing a flow of events.

This is, to me, one of the most freeing things I've realized: the so-called mind is simply a moment-to-moment arising activity of cognizing. Moment to moment to moment to moment. When we try to look at a whole lifetime or even a whole hour, we can't do it. But moment to moment? That's workable.

That's possible. And that's what we're cultivating. We're cultivating sati—mindfulness is moment to moment, one moment giving rise to the next.

When anger is being cultivated, it's also moment to moment. A moment of anger, unrecognized, being fed by attention, gives rise to the next, to the next. But because it's a flow of events—really much how Guy was describing kamma, you know, the past is over, but it's moment to moment, how intention works, moment to moment—this is where all of the different tools the Buddha offers us come to bear, where we can work and where we can really see change.

And also recognizing—and this again, not to be demoralizing, but it just seems to me so true and it's helped—recognizing how subtle and deeply ingrained the habits of the torments are. All of you have seen that. And instead of getting frustrated when you think you're clear of it and suddenly it pops up—has that happened to anybody? Suddenly it pops up. You say, "Oh, right. The conditions arise. Without mindfulness, they pop up."

So this little example from my life occurred to me today when I was thinking about this. Just so little, nothing. But I was on a self-retreat, I think it was last year—it all blends—in Switzerland, in a place I like very much. I'd been on retreat, quiet, for about two weeks, and I was just walking on the country roads there and the hills and mountains. People walk by, not many people.

So I was on retreat, which makes this all the more striking—I really had to notice this was happening, because I should have been more mindful. I was just walking and present, and a woman came walking up

to me, passing me on the road, and came over to me with some kind of piece of paper in her hand, like a brochure. She said something to me in Swiss German. I couldn't understand it right away, but I could have understood a little bit had I paid attention.

Instead, what immediately came up—and I could track it later, what the conditions were—was a kind of pulling back, a turning away. It was like, "No thank you," and turning away and walking away. An aversion, a "no thank you, don't." I realized later, and I felt bad of course, that she was probably just asking me for directions or something. I mean, I didn't even really stop to see.

But I realized it was all the years of walking somewhere in the street and someone comes up to you with something they're trying to sell or something they're trying to get you to take, or the Watchtower, and just, "No, please leave me alone." That's what was coming up, just like that—boom, like that. I kept on walking and she walked, and then within two seconds the sense of moral shame came up. Aversion, just like that, so quick. The conditions come when I'm not paying attention, when I'm not mindful.

Now, to see that without judgment is really important. This is mindfulness coming back into play again, and we understand. I picked such a simple little example because that's what helps me see: "Oh right, all my life really needs to be dedicated to using whatever tools are accessible in the current conditions to help purify the habits of mind." Because they just pop up so easily. They're so comfortable otherwise.

But change is possible when we really are committed—which all of you are, or you wouldn't still be here. We can use all the different ways, but change is possible.

I just want to tell you this story that Sally was very kind to point out to us. It was a little interview with someone on the news a few weeks ago, with a young man who is a rookie in his first year as a wide receiver—which is an American football term—on the New England Patriots, which is a fairly successful team. That's a primal spot for some young guy in football.

But the interview with him was very touching because he was talking about how when he was in college in Georgia—he went there on a football scholarship—he realized that he could only read on a junior high level. Junior high is about ages twelve to fifteen. So he was reading on a low level for someone in college.

He decided he really wanted to get better at that. He really wanted to learn how to read, and he really committed to it. He would start trying to read and it wasn't easy—not easy for him. In his spare time, when he was getting massages, they showed in the interview a picture of him getting worked on after a football game, reading away in some book.

But the interesting thing was this: he was in a Barnes and Noble looking at books, and he struck up a conversation with some middle-aged lady.

He's a young African-American guy, and this is a middle-aged white lady, and she says, "Well, why don't you come join our book club?" And he goes, "Okay." He joined this book club, went to it every month for

two years. They show a photo, and it's all these middle-aged white ladies and him. They're all twice his age, and they're all sitting there talking about books and what's going on, and he's so happy being there. He did this for two years.

Now he's on the New England Patriots, and he's just written a children's book about the magic of learning how to read. He's also started a kids' literacy foundation. He's talking to the interviewer, and he says, "You know, sometimes people have called me a nerd." The interviewer said, "Well, how does that make you feel? Usually that's kind of an insult." And he goes, "Wow, you know, actually I'm proud of it. It's like a badge of honor for me." He said, "The football, that came naturally. That was a gift. I didn't have to try. But this reading, I really had to try. I really had to commit. So coming from where I came from, to be called a nerd—that's a badge of honor."

His vibe was so sweet and loving, sharing with all these kids with his book, teaching them how to read. And then he goes out and plays football and knocks people over. He was in the Super Bowl—you couldn't do better than that in your first year.

Just seeing this reminds us that when there's commitment and dedication and the willingness to keep going, change is possible for all of us in all the different realms. Not to underrate the power of conditioning, but we can embrace what the Buddha called the three pillars of the path: *dana*, or cultivating the intention of generosity; *sila*, non-harming behavior; and *bhavana*, mental cultivation—along with various other tools I want to mention. They all work together, whichever one is accessible at a particular time.

As Sally was saying last night, we really are often, in cultivating the happiness of a wholesome heart and letting ourselves feel it and trust it and move in that direction—we are so frequently moving in the opposite direction of the stream of culture, the stream of society.

Thich Nhat Hanh wrote, a long time ago, something I know he stood by: "Society makes it difficult to be awake. We know that 40,000 children in the third world die every day of hunger, but we keep forgetting. The kind of society we live in helps us forget. So that's why we need exercises for awareness, for mindfulness. We've lost our taste for silence. Every time we have a few minutes, we pick up a book to read or make a telephone call." This was before the days of cell phones—and it was bad enough then. Now it's overwhelming, right? We know that. "We do not know how to be ourselves without something else to accompany us. The first thing for us to do is to return to ourselves in order to recover ourselves, to be our best."

That's what the Buddha is offering us, asking us to do, giving us so many ways to practice.

I want to mention a little bit about generosity and moral conduct, just in terms of how it works to purify our heart-mind. I don't have to go into it extensively because we've talked about it all. In the early days when I first began to practice Vipassana in the West—I first learned it in India, but in the West, at the

Insight Meditation Society, when it wasn't with Goenka anymore—I think it's not everybody, but it's kind of a Western thing. In the beginning, we were all really enamored and fascinated by the meditation aspect, whether concentration or vipassana. That's really where it's at, you know? And it is very powerful, don't get me wrong—it's the main thing we're doing. But it's almost as if a glance would be made to *sila*. You take the five precepts at the beginning of the retreat. *Dana*—we'd say, "Oh yeah, generosity is good." Not that much said about it, kind of assumed. And if anything much was said, it was because it helps the mind not have remorse, so you can practice better. I'm glossing it a bit, but it was sort of like that.

Joseph always tells us how Munindra, his teacher, at one point came to him after listening to the Western students and said, "What are you doing? It's like you're sitting in a rowboat and you're rowing as hard as you can, but you forgot to untie it from the dock."

You really need Dana and Sila. It's all part of the purification process, and sometimes that's what's available to us. Sometimes that's really where we can touch. We've talked about this through the retreat—those moments when kilesa is not distorting our perception, not distorting our heart, where you just feel that sense of purity. And you may not think of it as much, just this kind of cleanliness. Someone described it to me as their awareness feeling squeaky clean, like right after you've cleaned a window—just squeaky clean, nothing there.

Sometimes we look for that in a meditative state, but this sense of the happiness of a wholesome heart and mind can be recognized in acts of generosity, in moments of virtuous conduct, or simply refraining from harmful states. That's often where it's available. You don't have to wait for a deep meditation state.

So thinking about the practice of generosity in this way—as a transformer of consciousness, as a transformer of the habits of clinging, obviously, but also the habit of me and other, the habit of self-reference, the habit of fear too. Think of generosity that way.

And to me, the secret teaching that I didn't really get here, that I didn't get until I'd spent a lot of time in Thailand and Burma, was the really powerful happiness, the joy that comes about through moments of generous intention. Whatever it is one is being generous about is almost secondary. But that moment of generous intention—it comes in three phases. First, the idea of a generous thing. And there's really this thing in Burma of "Oh, an opportunity for Dana!" That's the phrase that's used. "This is an opportunity for Dana."

In my growing-up Western way of hearing it, generosity is good, and if you have more you should give to those who have less. It's well-meaning, and sure, that's good to do. But there was a kind of "should" there, and a little bit of hierarchy, a little bit of separation. What I got in Burma is just this sense—just the idea of an opportunity for Dana—people would get happy. They'd perk up: "Oh good, this is a place I can be generous," whatever it was.

We know people there who amazingly give so much. They have good businesses and they give so much

money. And then there are people who have nothing, but they'll just—a little boy came up once whom I never saw before or after and just gave me this tiny little flower in the street. This little seven-year-old boy, probably fifteen but looking seven, gave it to me and bowed and walked away. I thought, what little kid here is going to do that when I'm walking down the street? Can you imagine? But he was so happy to offer and go away. That happiness.

And then in the receiving, there's that equal happiness. You let it in. This quality in that moment—the moment of thinking about it, the moment of actually offering the generosity, a smile, whatever—and then the moment of reflecting on it later if you've been the one who's been generous. It also brings up joy. Not the joy of "I'm such a great generous person," but the joy, the happiness of a wholesome heart in that moment. That's really what's being cultivated and developed with this practice of generosity. It's something we can really look at in little ways all through our life.

Again, it's not that I should be generous. Still, that's better than doing nothing, I guess, but that's not the transforming of the habit, the purity of the habit that I'm talking about. It's really letting yourself feel just that happiness, because the sense of barrier goes away.

I had to learn to receive as well with that same openness. Because when someone comes and offers and you go, "Oh no, I have so much more than you, don't offer that to me"—you feel what that does? It just shuts the whole thing down.

And the joy is really in the mutuality, in the sense that separation is gone in that moment, the sense of clinging and the sense of ownership. It's a beautiful, just a beautiful thing to include in our lives as practice. And it's something that is available, you know, in times when we think other things aren't.

I'd always heard, and I didn't understand it for a few years, that if you're really annoyed with someone, you should give them a gift. I'd heard this as a Buddhist teaching, and I kind of thought, I didn't really get what that was. And then I started getting suspicious if anyone gave me a gift.

But I can see now, if you're talking from the point of really the intention of heart of generosity, that transforming intention. So if you're giving the gift, it means truly giving it. It doesn't mean, "Here, take this gift and be gone." To really be generous, you open your heart and hand the flower. And in that moment, there's not ill will. When there's really that intention of generosity, there's not clinging and there's not ill will. So it's not to give them a gift for them. It's to purify your own heart and mind.

Things like this are available to us when you can't find your breath, when you can't find a moment of concentration, when you think bhavana, never mind mental cultivation. You can just do a little something. Smile at a lady in the store who looks really grumpy. Be kind to the person behind you in line who has a whole lot of bags and you don't have much, and just really with kindness let them go and not look for something back, but just do it. And let yourself feel the happiness of that.

That's not an ego trip. That's really one of the wonderful things about how mindfulness wisdom works,

and we've said this before, but you can really trust it: when you put mindful attention on the wholesome, to use the Buddha's language, it feeds the wholesome. So when you're feeling the happiness of generosity with awareness, it lets that grow. That's not the same as "I'm so great." It's really feeding the wholesome.

And mindfulness on the unwholesome—being mindful of "I don't want to give that, this is mine," and just being mindful of how that feels—starves it. It doesn't mean it naturally goes away, but you're feeling that this feels really crummy. Mindful awareness notices that. So it's trustworthy to explore the difficult habits. We don't have to be afraid to look at them with mindfulness. It's not that if I see it, it's going to get worse. It's just the reverse, just the opposite.

So that about dāna. And sīla—this moves into actually the Eightfold Path, where the Buddha talks about sīla, samādhi, paññā. Virtuous behavior, samādhi is the whole bhavana meditation aspect, and paññā is wisdom.

To start with sīla, the teachings talk about three called the three rounds of kilesa, the three different levels you could say that kilesa acts out. And I think Sally talked some about this last night in talking about motivation. But the first round is called the transgressive. It means you actually act or speak from unwholesome, from greed, hatred, or confusion. And what purifies the transgressive level of defilements, of kilesa, is sīla—restraint, not acting out, consciously restraining, non-harming behavior.

And this isn't just, "Oh, that's the best we can do." This is the Buddha saying 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. So it may be at the beginning of the rounds of the transgressive, but it actually shines through our whole life.

So the transgressive: actions of speech and body motivated by greed, hatred, and delusion. And we're protected from that simply by restraint, by wise restraint. We may still feel, be quite aware of, a thought coming up of wanting to say something aversive or do something unpleasant or harmful. But the actual conscious refraining from doing that is a wholesome act.

You've seen it all here, how when we do act or speak from unwholesomeness—and bring mindfulness along with you—it has an effect of keeping on feeding. It affects other people and the whole thing grows. You're feeling a little bit impatient, and you go into a store and you say something in a really impatient way to someone in the line in front of you, or to the lady who's checking out your groceries. You can see right away it affects that person and you can feel it come back. Maybe they're a little more grumpy to the next person coming after them, and then that affects that person, and it's a whole chain reaction.

Or the person is just nasty back to you, and so you leave the store in a worse mood than you came in with, and you slam the door in somebody's face, and someone says, "Can you give me some money?" and you go, "No way." It just keeps feeding itself. We can see that.

So the simple restraint—the lady checking you out is making a mess of it, and you manage to keep your

mouth shut and not say something—consciously recognize that restraint.

That's a wholesome action. And we really tend—maybe you don't, but I tend to—go to the fact that I'm still thinking the unpleasant thing, and so I'm still bad and wrong. But to notice the restraint really feeds it.

If it's possible, you could even feel—you know, there's still the unpleasant, there's still the unwholesome thing in your mind, so it's not quite so clear that it's a happiness as with generosity. But you can get a little bit of a sense of the purity of not speaking in that way. You really can feel that. Restraint.

On retreat, you can practice restraint at the sense doors. Off retreat it's a little harder, but here it's like when you can see grumpiness in your mind or greed really strong, just going out through the eye door. You can just bring mindfulness in right at the eye door, feel the greed, and kind of keep the attention here. Not feed it by going looking for something to want.

Do you find yourself sitting on—well, I don't know if they have it here—at IMS, when you're sitting on the toilet and they have the cleanser on the back of the seat, and you just sit there and read that thing avidly for ten minutes? What is hydroxychloroquine? What could that be? Let me compare it to this one over here and see which one is... A little bit of restraint at the sense doors can actually be helpful not to feed the greed, and you can appreciate that.

And the more we practice, there can be a happiness. The Buddha says it's not an act of will that freedom from remorse arises in one who is endowed with virtue. It is in the nature of things. It's just natural. If you are acting with virtue, refraining from unwholesome speech and actions, it is natural that you would experience freedom from remorse.

The more we practice with this, it really is purifying the habits, so that—I imagine you all can taste this, I'm sure you all can—you start to recognize and appreciate how natural aspects of *sīla* become for you. How in a place where maybe earlier there would have been an urge to act on something, nobody's looking, and it just isn't there anymore. You don't. Appreciate that. Feel the purity of that. It's something that can really bring us happiness.

So I'll give a simple example. Oh, I forgot I had some examples I wanted to give of the happiness of generosity too—I might go back and read that. But anyway, a simple example. I've said it before. It happened here with a friend of mine.

We were in the old Spirit Rock bookstore before it moved. We went down, and I wanted to buy a little statue that I had seen there. You know how it's self-service, and no one was there at all. But my friend had often helped Marianne on days, so she knew how to get the little magnet thing that opened the big cupboards out in the other room—the ones that don't have handles, but you get this magnet and open them.

So she opened it, and this one huge closet was just full of tens and dozens of statues. We were piling

through all of them trying to find the one that I wanted. I took out one and she took out one. Almost simultaneously—they were very delicate—and this one was Manjushri. It had this little sword. We just barely touched it and the sword broke. It happened to both of us, and we were like, "Oh, it broke! It broke!" These things are like sixty dollars. We didn't say anything. We just looked and said, "Okay," and we took it over to the office and confessed to Marianne.

She was like, "Ah, it doesn't matter. It happens all the time. We glue it together and sell it again, half price." But we were ready to pay for it.

Later we discussed it. And the thing that made us both so happy is there was a fleeting thought in the mind: we can put it back.

No one will know. No one was there. And that thought came up in each of our minds and got absolutely no traction whatsoever. It arose and then it wasn't even a possibility.

Later, my friend sent me an email and she said—I liked how she put it—"To see one's mind have that thought, and then one has the choice right away to see what karma is one creating in this moment." And in that moment, there's no choice. It's so clear.

This is the effect, the *vipāka*, of previous purification, and it's something you can really appreciate. There was no possibility that either of us would have done that. And instead of going to bad that the thought arose, it's like—wow, feel how lovely it is to be able to trust the purification that is going on in your mind and heart. To trust that *sīla* is really available. And the more you let yourself feel that happy wholesomeness, the more likely it is to arise again in the future. So just very simple things, but really letting it in.

What I wanted to read—two things about generosity—because the other thing about generosity is that hearing about others' wholesome actions can bring joy to us too. It's contagious. Just in the same way that acting in an unwholesome way can start a chain reaction going, so too can generosity.

So I just want to read you these two little stories. Maybe it won't make you feel good, but just see. How do you feel? Because if it touches something in us, that's touching it because that happiness of the generous impulse is available in our heart and mind.

This I cut out a long time ago, many years ago, about a seventy-eight-year-old man, Matt Dawson, who had worked for fifty-nine years for the Ford Motor Company in Michigan, and he was still working. He could have retired. But he didn't, because he gives most of his money away. And when this was written, he had just given two hundred thousand dollars to Wayne State University. But over the course of his life, he gave away more than a million dollars—this guy working at the Ford Motor Company. His first gift was to the United Negro College Fund, fifty thousand dollars, and since then he gave them almost two hundred thousand more. And he gave two hundred thousand to Louisiana State University, money to churches in Detroit and Louisiana, thousands of dollars to the NAACP and to community colleges.

And when people asked, "Why do you do it?" he said, "Well, I get joy. I get happiness out of this. I can go home and sleep good." He said, "No matter how much you make or how little you make, you've got to save a little of that to share. I was raised like that, to help others. I have more than enough for myself."

See, it's hard to not feel good, right? You can try, maybe, if you're in a really bad mood—I understand.

This is another thing, from a woman at a retreat a few years ago, and she wrote this to me. She had heard some of us talking about offering support to some poor nunneries in Burma, and she had offered some *dā na*. And then this came, just out of the blue. She said, "I've been on the verge of quitting a job I no longer 'need'"—in quotations—"and wondering if or how this job serves me. I've decided to keep the job for five or six more months and give all the earnings away to causes that I love. And this one is the first of many." So she was saying, "Thank you, because this gift brings me great joy and opens a whole new chapter of work as *dāna* to the world."

It's really available to us, you know. You don't have to be in deep retreat, or retreat at all, for this to be available. And we can call on it when we can't find *bhāvanā*.

Okay, so back to the three levels of *kilesa*. The transgressive level—we're protected by *sīla*, restraint. The next level is called the obsessive torments. You can already figure out what that one is, right? And for that, we're protected by *samādhi*, by collectedness of mind.

The obsessive level—you can guess—it's not just wandering mind. It's really the spinning, the spinning, whether it's a self-hatred story or a greed story or a lot—it doesn't matter what it is. But that spinning, spinning, where we just feel assaulted by it. Not just a once shooting up, like when I was walking past that lady in Switzerland, but really constant, relentless.

And so *samādhi*, in all the different ways that it shows up—not just one-pointed focus, although that's one way—but *samādhi* really meaning the collectedness of mind, heart, *citta*, the unification, the steadiness. So you've all experienced it in different ways. It doesn't have to be a deep state.

It can be that many things are still happening, but there's this sense that the citta just feels collected. A lot can be going on, but it's not as if your attention is all distracted, flying all over the place. There's a sense of stability.

Samadhi can be samatha, one-pointed concentration. All the Brahmaviharas, in the way we've been sharing them here, are samatha practices. They kind of do double duty, because it's samatha—the collectedness of mind—but it's also cultivating the wholesomeness of the Brahmaviharas, which is obviously another way of purifying the habits of mind through bhavana, through meditation.

But the steadiness, what that does is this: when the mind is steady like that—and really it can be one-pointed or wider—it's a protection from the hindrances arising, from the obsessive kilesas coming up. It's almost like when the collectedness is strong, the hindrances can't get in. I don't know if you've noticed

sometimes that something which usually would bring up self-hatred, and it would spin and drive you crazy, but you're pretty present, the attention's steady, the mind is focused. And the self-hatred thought tries to come up and it just bounces off. It can't get in. Or it comes up and you just look at it and it's gone. It's a little different from wisdom—it just can't arise in that moment. The mind is so clear and steady. That's samadhi. And that can go, of course, as the Buddha said, to depths we can't imagine.

This is really useful. Whatever state you're in doesn't have to be one-pointed. It can be what we've talked about as khanika samadhi, what Mahasi Sayadaw called momentary samadhi—the same steadiness, but the object can be changing from moment to moment. The level of steadiness and collectedness and unification can still be quite strong. I think when Sayadaw U Pandita talked about Vipassana Jhanas, he was alluding to this kind of equal level of collectedness, of steadiness, but we're with changing objects, not moving into one-pointed practice.

So when it's like this—not to engender clinging—but one of the reasons it's so pleasant is because the hindrances aren't there, distorting the citta, the mind and heart. And this purity is a kind of happiness, a kind of peace. You can experience it in different ways and to different degrees. But one of the reasons why doing samatha one-pointed practices can be very supportive is because it can give us a much more obvious taste of what a pure mind-heart moment feels like. So that we can actually say, "Oh yes, there is something better than having another M&M. There is something actually more beautiful than fulfilling the next desire." And it doesn't matter if what's going on is pleasant or unpleasant—it can bring a kind of confidence in the power of the mind.

And then it can lead to attachment, because that's just how the hindrances work. But in the moment of the steadiness, the unification of mind, let yourself taste that. And I want to again make the point: it's not dependent on one-pointedness. It can be when a lot of things are going on, but there's still that steadiness that isn't distorted by kilesa.

So this I really appreciate. But it's not a state that we can cling to, and it doesn't bring us to the end of the habits of mind. Often people will see, especially in a very focused samadhi state, that it may seem really strong—and it is really strong—and the hindrances can be very far away. And then that state either ends or it decays. It's going to decay sooner or later. And sometimes it happens that within not too long a time, people are really surprised that the hindrances or the difficult patterns come back. Sometimes they come back slowly and not too strongly, but sometimes it's like they hit you upside the head. You go, "What's going on? I was so in there. I really had it. And now this lust is coming up like crazy. What's going on?"

And it's because that protection from the obsessive defilements is temporary. It's conditional. It's useful because we really can appreciate that quality of protection and that purity of heart and mind, and it strengthens our faith and trust. But it's not all. It's not the end of it.

And so the third level we talk about is the so-called latent kilesas, or the underlying ones. These are the ones that drive us crazy. These are the ones when you think you're so clear, and people tell me this

story—they're walking so mindfully down to tea, and they say, "I'm not going to have anything to eat this tea." They're walking extremely mindfully past the table, and suddenly their arm reaches out and grabs something, and they go, "Who did that?"

"That wasn't me," right? It wasn't you. It was greed. It just sprang up. When the conditions are there, they say the seed is there, latent. And if the conditions are right—which are simply the conditions for greed plus a lack of awareness, a moment without mindfulness—poof, they can spring up.

Has anybody noticed that? And you think, "I was done with this pattern. I've seen through this pattern. It was over. What's the matter with me?" Don't take it personally. This is why we need all the different ways of practice. But they can really spring up.

And that's a little one. That's a funny one. But I heard this interview on NPR a couple of years ago. Two men were discussing work they were doing in prisons, in men's prisons with young men. They were calling their work "interrupting violence." I missed the details of how they were actually doing this, but they were quoting one young man in the prison. He said, "I wish I could take back that three to five seconds of my life when I did the violent act"—the act that put him in prison and completely changed his whole life.

That haunts me, actually. That three to five seconds. Latent defilements come up, and we're all so affected by the conditions and the society and where we live. We can't think we're separate from that. We can't be separate from that.

I'm not saying we never know what our latent defilements are—you've been looking at your minds for a long time; we know what's there, we know what they are. And so it's about really having trust in the potential of purification moment to moment, and the willingness to use all the tools at our disposal.

It's wisdom—paññā—that uproots latent defilements. The Buddha says they are abandoned not by acts, but by wisely seeing. This is what Thich Nhat Hanh says, what we've been saying all along: wisdom is the result of the long process of continuous awareness. You've seen that here, right?

And the difference between an obsessive defilement that's kept at bay through samādhi and one that's seen through with wisdom—you can kind of feel the difference. It feels more truly gone.

Someone gave an example, and you've all seen this. Say the old habit arises: you're seeing something, and the comparing comes, and the judgment comes, and then the self-judgment comes, and the aversion is coming, and that whole self-hatred—you know how that can happen, just like that. I know a lot of you know that. We can see it sometimes; we can be mindful while we're really in it. Or we can be really concentrated and it just doesn't quite come up.

But with wisdom, it would be different. An example—and I'm making this up—the seeing comes up. You see the seeing. The comparing comes up: "They're better, they're worse, they're doing this better." And

then suddenly it's like, wow. The wisdom comes that everything's in constant flux, in constant change. Their conditions are completely different from my conditions. What is there to compare? Comparing makes absolutely no sense.

And this isn't like a thought train. This is a sudden perception, and in that moment, the craving, the comparing, the conceit—in that moment, they just completely drop away. Completely gone. And I know, at moments like that, that's the moment of wisdom seeing through a latent kalesha.

Do you get a sense of how this works? It might come back—when it's completely uprooted it won't—but it'll come back a lot, a lot, a lot. So we keep on purifying. We keep on cultivating the steadiness of awareness, because that's what allows the wisdom to arise. Steady awareness in a moment of heart and mind that's free from kalesha.

So when we get discouraged—on retreat, off retreat—when we see that we're trying to put all our eggs in the basket of meditation, or of one particular form of meditation, and that's not available at this moment, or it's available but it's not doing what we think it ought to do, just remember there are all these other ways. Sīla, dāna, the brahmavihāras are also practices of intention. It doesn't mean you have to be overwhelmed with muditā, but every time that phrase is said, that's a movement of intention in the heart. It's different from "Oh, who cares?" It's "Oh, I really am happy for your happiness."

That's shifting the channel. That's transforming the habits in a little way.

Two other things I just want to mention. One is wise contemplation. We've mentioned it a little, and I've alluded to it, but there's a sutta from the Buddha I like where he's talking to a layman, basically asking, "You know, we're busy in our lives—what can we do to purify our minds?" And he gives six contemplations, of which I'm going to refer really to two. The other four are contemplating the three refuges. So if contemplating the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha—the beauties of those—is something that really speaks to your heart, then really do that. As I mentioned, a lot of the Burmese nuns use contemplations of the qualities of the Buddha that really inspire their faith. The other one is contemplating the devas, so if that is something that meets you, use that.

But the ones I want to highlight are recollecting your own virtues and recollecting your own generosity. I just want to read what he says. He says the same thing about both, so I'll do it with generosity. He says, "Furthermore, there is the case where you recollect your own generosity or where you recollect your own virtues." So just thinking about how generous you've been: "I live at home, my awareness cleansed of the stain of possessiveness, generous, open-handed, delighting in being generous." And then for virtue: "They are unbroken, unspotted, liberating, conducive to concentration."

"At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting generosity or recollecting virtue—your own generosity, your own virtue—their mind is not overcome with greed, is not overcome with aversion, is not overcome with delusion." So he's saying in that moment you're cultivating purity of heart-mind. Their

mind, their heart, heads straight, based on generosity, based on virtue. And when the heart is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the meaning of the Dhamma, experiences joy connected with the Dhamma.

"So Mahanama"—that's who he's talking to—"you should develop this recollection of generosity, this recollection of virtue, while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children." In other words, anytime—anytime that we can remember to do it.

And to me, that's something I never did. You know, just feeling lost and thinking, "Let me recollect my generosity." Does that occur to you all very much? "Let me recollect all the times I didn't act in a harmful way." This is something that's so available. It really brightens the heart. It leads us straight.

The last thing I want to mention—I know I'm going through these quickly—is coming off of Sally's talk last night on motivation: at times we can consciously work to tune into our motivation. It's always helpful, but sometimes we can consciously work to transform it in very simple ways—before, during, or after an action. That was the Buddha's advice to his son Rahula: whenever you can, notice the intention. If you notice it before an action, great. If you notice it only in the middle, good. If you notice it only after, good. But if it's wholesome, keep doing it. If it wasn't wholesome, stop doing it, even if you're in the middle.

It's also recognizing that we can sometimes consciously take the time to transform our intentions before an action, if we have time to do that. This is from Sister Chan Khong, who's the nun who's been with Thich Nhat Hanh forever. This is from her autobiography years ago. They were peace activists during the Vietnam War, but she's writing this much later. They'd been living in France, and the Vietnam War was long over. But this was a period when the Vietnamese government was arresting a lot of artists and monks and activists.

She said, "Every time I received news of a new arrest, I became angry. And I knew that I had to do walking meditation." Is that the first thing you think when you become angry? It's not a bad idea. "Sometimes I would walk several hours in order to regain my calm. Sometimes I needed several days or even weeks to relax my heartbeat, knowing how unfairly the authorities have acted in arresting such a lovely monk, nun, or artist. I always waited until I felt serene before beginning any campaign." Because she's quite an activist. "Thanks to this serenity, my words were gentle but firm, and people found it easier to cooperate."

She was involved in all kinds of activities and letter writing. And this is someone who'd been doing this since she was sixteen years old and was still doing it. We never just stop.

We say, okay, there's anger. I do want to act. Let me really cultivate non-anger before I do it. I love that. It really inspires me.

And on a more simple level, Mingyur Rinpoche suggested in one of his books something I know from Tibetan practice, which they do a lot: just as you're going through the day, here on retreat or in your life,

consciously setting an intention can transform a neutral everyday activity into a really wholesome activity—a beautiful quality of heart and mind.

For example, when you're washing your hands, you might say, "May my hands become clean so that I may be of benefit to all beings." Or when we're eating, "May all beings have delicious food." The example he gives that I love is about sleeping. When you're going to bed at night, when you're going to sleep, he says when we get into bed with the mind of bodhicitta, we aspire that our sleep be the cause of increased capacity to help all beings. Isn't that great? If you do it with sleeping, you can do it with anything.

And it may seem, okay, la la la—but keep saying it, keep saying it, just like with the metta phrases. Sooner or later, you start to actually feel it a little bit. It's a wonderful practice, and it's really fun.

I want to end with some words from Eleanor Roosevelt. Last year, I was visiting a relatively new museum in Atlanta, the Museum of Civil and Human Rights. It had just opened a couple of years ago, and I found it very powerfully organized. The first two floors are all about the civil rights movements in the fifties and sixties—the Freedom Riders, and Martin Luther King, of course, because he came from Atlanta. It's very powerful and interactive. Then the top floor addresses different human rights and some of the human rights abuses going on in the world today. It was very immediate.

There was one quotation from Eleanor Roosevelt that I want to end with, because I think it really works in the sense of working to transform our motivation, even in little actions—using all the tools at our disposal, all of them, whatever is available at any moment of our life. It's all working to purify. It's all working to free our hearts and minds.

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote: "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home. So close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we will look in vain for progress in the larger world."

I think mingling our minds, our hearts with the Dharma—that's the closest to home we can get to start to activate human rights in the world.

Thank you for listening.

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