# A Wise Person Is Known By Their Actions

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:01:47

So tonight, I want to talk about something that came up last night. A couple of people said things, wondering, you know, if in the heart-mind there's no greed, hatred, and delusion, is it just like a big, vast wasteland? And that question actually comes up a lot. I find it quite poignant. People have said to me, not here, but elsewhere, "If there's no greed and aversion, what do I do? Just sit in my room for the rest of my life?" It touches me—we're so immersed in those habits that become the intention for action that we say, "Well, what else could there be?"

So I'll say there is something else. And I want to talk about that tonight.

The Buddha was very clear. One of his statements is: "A wise person is characterized by their actions. A fool is characterized by their actions. It is through the activities of one's life that one's discernment shines."

So this isn't just an esoteric practice that we can engage in because we have the time and can really watch all these subtle movements of mind and clinging and aversion. It's not just a mind game. Buddhism isn't just a mind game—it's really about the bottom line: how we act in the world, with ourselves, with others in relationship, is how the understanding, the wisdom of heart and mind, shows.

And that's because, as the Buddha often said, intention is the seed of all action, the heart of all action, and it comes from the mind. I'm sure you've heard this, the most famous opening of the Dhammapada: "All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a corrupted, impure mind—basically a mind of *kilesa*—and suffering follows, as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox. All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind. Speak or act with a peaceful mind and happiness follows like a never-departing shadow."

So knowing, being aware of what's arising in the mind-heart—same word, you know, in the Pali, *citta*, mind-heart—knowing what's arising, knowing the habits, what gives rise to the mental intention that gives rise to action: this is the seed of freedom from suffering in our own mind and heart, and also in how we relate with the world.

One of my favorite quotes comes from Maha Ghosananda. He's died now, but he was a Cambodian monk, a peace activist, sort of like the Cambodian Thich Nhat Hanh. After the Khmer Rouge had basically killed millions of people in Cambodia and destroyed most of the nunneries and monasteries, people were all living in refugee camps in Thailand. He was a Cambodian monk, but he had been out of the country during the years this was happening. Most of his family members were killed, so it's not that he wasn't

touched by this.

He would go into the refugee camps, and as Cambodia had been essentially, largely a Buddhist country, people had a familiarity and respect for the Buddha's teaching and for monks. He would just go and start talking about *metta*—the core teaching of the Buddha: hatred is never ended by hatred, only by love alone. Can you imagine going into a refugee camp where everyone's there because their family's been killed and saying that? Coming not from his head, but from what he really knew.

He led peace marches through Cambodia after that. And once, in a speech at a demonstration against landmines, he said: "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."

Really, this is where we start. And it may seem daunting, but I want to connect it now to just what we've been doing here—this whole practice of steady awareness, watching all the subtle and not-so-subtle habits of our mind. We've been emphasizing noticing the *kilesa* habits, but there are also many beautiful, wholesome habits of mind, which I'll talk about in a minute.

But we can have—have you noticed how we can have a really good intention? Like understanding the landmines in our hearts. We can have a really good intention: "I'm not going to get angry anymore." How does that work for you?

But we mean it, don't we? We say it because we don't really know—not just intellectually, but on that *bhav anamaya-paññā* level—how these habits of mind work. We don't really know deeply the habits of our mind.

And without wisdom, the wisdom that arises from steady mindfulness, steady awareness... really, the wisdom sees the false lure of greed, the false lure of aversion and hatred as a response to difficult situations. It sees through that. And that seeing through is what allows for the natural emergence of the beautiful, of the wholesome, that the Buddha talked about. I'll get there in a minute.

But until we really are recognizing moment to moment our habits, I like to say, they drive the bus. We don't think so, but just that sense of, "I'm not going to get angry anymore." You leave here: "I'm going to sit every day at 7:30 in the morning." We know how hard that is, right? Even when we really mean it.

Or a great example from a retreat here, when U Tejaniya was here one time. A woman said in a group—so since it was twenty people, I feel okay to share it. She was saying, "I'm really watching the habit of my mind, and I went into the dining room at lunch here, and the menu's up on the blackboard. The menu was something that I know is really not good for me, that I'm allergic to, that makes me feel unwell." So wisdom was there. She said, "Well, I'm not going to eat that." That was wisdom in the mind. But then somehow she filled her plate with that stuff and ate it. She was asking, "How come? There was wisdom. How could I do that?"

And Tejaniya, being as he was, said, "Well, superficial wisdom, real kilesa."

And so this is where the sense of bringing the awareness along with us, while the unwholesome habits are running, is where the wisdom starts to come. But what I'm assuming she did—I don't know, but it sounds like—you go in, you have the wise thought, and then you think, "Well, that was good enough, basically. I had the wise thought." I mean, you don't really think that, but that's what happens. And awareness goes on a holiday. And you're sitting there eating whatever it is that made her ill. And then you go, "How could that happen?"

So part of the job of awareness is—it's not going to automatically stop that. We can't stop the habits with an act of will. We know. We try, and we'll keep trying. You're not going to stop trying. I guess it's better to at least recognize it's unwholesome and try to stop it than not know. But generally we say, "Okay, that's wisdom, I've done it, done, dusted," and we stop paying attention. So that's how it happens: "I really wasn't going to get angry the next time my partner did that totally stupid thing. But somehow I did, even though I was going to cultivate compassion."

So, you know, they're good ideas, but we really need the steadiness of awareness that isn't judging. That's why when someone comes in and says they've been watching how aversion was coming up in the retreat here, and they describe seeing it all, and they think they were failing—I say, "That's great." I mean, awareness is watching all of that. And I can see people kind of go, "Geez, whatever I say, she's just going to say awareness is watching it. That's a big help." But I only say it if I mean it. And it is great that awareness is watching.

Of course, then we think, "Okay, I saw it once, right? That should be enough." Don't we say, "I saw it already. It's not going to come back"? But some people start to notice, as the mind gets quieter, the heart gets quieter on retreat, and as the awareness is getting more momentum, spreading out—

being in a hurry, the mind thinks then everything should get better. And what people often comment—because it's true—they say, "My God, I'm just seeing craving everywhere I turn around." Anybody notice that? Yeah, right. How could it possibly be so much? And then, if we're taking it personally, we go into some story, trying to push it away or beat ourselves up or think there's something wrong with us.

But the Buddha, out of the whole field of experience for the second noble truth, the cause of suffering—he picked *tanha*, craving. It must come up once in a while. It must have a big effect in our life. So when we start to see how often it's coming, I'm serious, that's when the wisdom mind is starting to kick in. It's like, "Look at that." The awareness can keep on watching it. It starts to—maybe not as fast as we want—but it starts to lose its glitter, its false promise, even a little bit.

This is what we're doing here, and it's not just esoteric playing with the mind. This is to really see and know what our habits are. Our particular ones. I mean, they all come down to greed, hatred, and

delusion—and that's not particular. This is how human minds work. But as Steve said, they're habits. They're not the only possibility. Here they shine up more because we're looking at them, but that's great, because in our daily life—like that woman eating all that food—they're in the background. And that's often what gives rise to intentions, to action, if we don't know, if we're not aware.

So even when we can, on some level, control—like using the precepts—that's great. We can make a commitment not to act in certain harmful ways, and hopefully for all of us that hasn't been super hard: not to kill, not to steal. Well, if you had a tick on you, you know, at least you'd look at what was going on in the mind—and that's the point, right? So we do make some commitments: "I'm not going to do this, I'm going to refrain from that." And we can do that in life on a gross level.

But on a more subtle level, when we're not aware of how these habits work, when we don't really see them, when we've just continued our habit of looking away when they come up—then if the seeds are there in a situation that's unexpected, they can sprout.

There's a quotation I say a lot from a book I read, because it really touched me. It was by a man named Hassan Bayev, a Chechen surgeon. If you remember in the 90s, there was a big civil war between Chechnya—which is part of Russia, an Islamic part—and Russia. It was very violent, very horrible.

So he was a Chechen surgeon who had been living in Russia doing surgery, but when the war started, he came back to Chechnya, to Grozny, the main city, just to work in the hospital and offer his skills. The whole book was called *The Oath*, and it was just about his experience, which was more horrible than we can even imagine. The conditions sounded about like the mid-1800s here in terms of medical facilities. And he was the only surgeon after a while in this hospital.

He would treat whoever came, from either side—the Chechen patriots, the Russian foot soldiers, the Russian officers, anybody who came. And because he wasn't taking sides, he said, "I'm a Chechen patriot, but I'm not taking sides in terms of healing people." So he was actually under danger from both sides. He ended up being kidnapped, had a very severe concussion, his life was threatened, and he had to escape to Boston. It was actually the Chechen side that kidnapped him and hurt him.

But the point I'm getting to—just to give you the picture—he said: in a situation you've never been in before, where he'd never held a gun, never been in such danger, he said, "You don't know how you'll behave." And he said, "I was fortunate because I have my surgeon's oath not to harm." He felt so clear in his heart, in that wisdom. He knew it wasn't just an idea but that in his heart-mind he was committed to non-harming. He said, "I felt very fortunate I had that."

I think it's a wise thing to say. When we're in a really difficult situation we've never been in, the habits of fear and anger that come up in response to difficulty, in response to the unpleasant—they zoom up. Or the habits of greed that come up when there's just something we want so much to get away from. They just come up. The seeds are there.

So it's the deep aspect of our steady awareness practice. Seeing all this is what's going to free us from that.

I was listening to NPR a couple of years ago, an interview with two men discussing work they were doing with young men in prison. They were doing a project called Interrupting Violence. They were talking about some of the young men who were in prison for really intensive crimes—murder, assault—in prison for a long time.

And just a quotation from one young man, very young but in prison for maybe life, if not many years. He said, "I wish I could take back that three to five seconds when I acted in that violent way."

It gives me the chills, you know?

I might think I wouldn't do something violent, but you don't really know until you really know. It can't be theoretical; it can't be what we wish. It has to be that we've trusted awareness—the steadiness of it, the willingness to stay with what's going on in our mind.

And this is where the beautiful part comes in. Through wisdom, through that steady awareness, as we've said, it allows for, gives the condition for, wisdom—clear seeing, just recognizing what's going on, the truth of things. It lets wisdom arise.

The natural effect of wisdom, when there's wisdom-awareness-mind turned toward aversion or clinging—if there's really enough wisdom in that moment, it's not feeding the kilesa. You can be aware of the kilesa, but it doesn't get stronger and stronger. Wisdom can watch how it behaves, and it can fade out. The kilesa, not the wisdom. Sometimes the kilesa goes and the wisdom fades too. But this is really how wisdom works. We see it clearly.

When the kilesa fades in terms of an intention as a motivation to action, what the Buddha describes is how the three unwholesome thoughts or intentions that lead to action can transform with wisdom. We can try to transform them by wanting to, by making a resolution in our mind that we're going to do it. But when there's really strong wisdom that sees through the greed, the ill will, the thoughts of cruelty, it does in a moment naturally transform.

The Buddha talked about three—there's a whole sutta where he talks about wise thought. Thoughts of greed and thoughts of lust transform in the light of wisdom-awareness to thoughts or intentions of renunciation, of generosity. Thoughts of ill will naturally shift when they're seen through. It's not like you're just left with this big empty void. The response, the quality that comes in the aware, awake, responsive heart-mind at that point, would be one of metta, of friendliness—or if it's been more a cruel kind of thought, of compassion.

The Buddha was exploring this in his own mind. I want to share his attitude. This is one of the suttas where he's talking about his practice before he became a Buddha. He starts it out by saying, "When I was still only an unenlightened bodhisattva..." So his unenlightened bodhisattva was pretty good, you know,

but he's describing his practice.

I want to read a little, because listen to the tone he's saying it in. He said, "Suppose I divide my thought into two classes. On one side are thoughts of sense desire, ill will, and cruelty. On the other side, thoughts of renunciation"—which is really like the clinging evaporates—"non-ill will," which is metta, "non-cruelty," which is compassion.

So you see, noticing these two kinds of thoughts—and even in saying it I can see in my own mind how just even a little subtly comes up: "Well, these are the bad ones, and these are the good ones," with a little hint of aversion. Maybe not you, but...

So he's just noticing these two different kinds, and then he's just practicing. He says, "As I abided, diligent, ardent, and resolute"—this is the language that's in the Satipatthana Sutta. He's not saying, "As I was lolling around under a tree having a nice tea and spacing out." He's saying, "As I abided, diligent, ardent, and resolute, a thought of sensual desire arose in me, and I understood thus: this thought has arisen."

Is that what we say? "You're filled with greed!" No—"I understand a thought of greed has arisen." We could follow the Buddha's example.

And so the awareness keeps looking. "This leads to my own affliction, to others' affliction, to the affliction of both. It obstructs wisdom. It causes me difficulties. It leads away from Nibbana." But he's not shaking a stick at himself. He's looking at the qualities that come up in his mind with this thought of greed. "And as I considered thus, it subsided in me, in my mind, in my heart." He's just noticing.

Same with thoughts of ill will, same with thoughts of cruelty. As he's abiding, ardent and diligent, thoughts of ill will come up, thoughts of cruelty come up. And he just notices them, just like that, and says, "Oh yes, when this thought of cruelty is here, it's for my own affliction. It gets in the way of Nibbana." He understood that.

Not intellect—I understood that. And in understanding it, it starts to fade. It fades out.

Then on the reverse, he noticed the thought of renunciation arose. And as he abided thus, he thought: "This thought of renunciation has arisen. It does not lead to my own affliction or others' affliction. It aids wisdom, does not cause difficulty, leads to Nibbana. If I think and ponder upon this thought, even for a night, even for a day, even for a night and a day, I see nothing to fear from it."

So this is a thought. He's not saying, "Bad thought, go away." He said if he was pondering this thought for twenty-four hours, he sees nothing to fear from it. But—he's so practical—but with excessive thinking and pondering, I might tire my body. And when the body is tired, the mind becomes disturbed. So I quieted my mind. So practical! Yet there's no judgment going on. He's just seeing how it works. That's what wisdom does.

And then this is the famous line: "Whatever a bhikkhu, a practitioner, frequently thinks and ponders

upon, that becomes the inclination of the mind. If one frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of sensual desire, thoughts of cruelty or ill-will, one abandons the thought of non-cruelty to cultivate the thought of cruelty, and the mind inclines to thoughts of cruelty." And just the reverse. If one thinks and ponders about thoughts of compassion, then in that moment the mind has abandoned thoughts of cruelty and it will incline to thoughts of compassion.

It makes sense, right? It's not rocket science really. But it's this willingness to just keep looking. And that's what's so beautiful—what I appreciate is that wisdom sees: "Wow, this thought of greed is really an intention of greed. It brings you to act on it. It causes suffering for myself and others." Just noticing that, not with a big stare. And noticing too that the thought of renunciation actually brings happiness to myself and others.

So I want to talk just a little bit about each of those three, to support bringing the same steady awareness to noticing the wholesome, to noticing the beautiful qualities when they're present in the citta, in the heart-mind. And realizing that just as awareness-wisdom starves the unwholesome—to use the Buddha's language—wise attention to the wholesome feeds it, strengthens and supports it.

This is the reason Guy Armstrong once said, in a talk he was giving, that he thinks it's a beneficent universe. And I was sitting there in my "the world is dukkha" mode, thinking, "Beneficent universe?" But I saw what he was saying. It's like it's the natural order of things that when there's steady awareness and wisdom and clear seeing, the heart-mind inclines to the wholesome. It's natural. We can help it along, but it will happen naturally. So don't believe me—but look. Keep looking. And we'll see how it happens even here on retreat.

I want to say a few things first about the intention of renunciation. These intentions—renunciation, generosity, metta, friendliness, non-greed, non-ill will, non-cruelty, compassion—are actually the second step of the Eightfold Path. The first stage being Right View, which we've talked about quite a bit, leading to sammā-saṅkappa, which is variously translated as Right Thought or Right Intention. And these three are specifically named as the Right Intention that arises from Right View, from Right Understanding.

So renunciation—it doesn't mean what some people might think. We tend to think of renunciation as external, as a giving up of things. Going into the monastery with a narrow wooden bed and nothing else—that's renunciation. And we think, well, that doesn't really appeal. As the Buddha said, his heart did not leap up at the thought of renunciation when he first heard about it. He didn't really understand. But as he came to understand it, that really changed.

What I want to say about renunciation is that it's wise intention. An intention is what's inside the mind and heart; how it manifests in the world can have many different forms. So it's not about the external giving up of things so much as the inner contentment of being with what is—that allows for this feeding of greed to just dissolve. Because the greed starts to be seen as a cause of dissonance, of suffering. And the allowing of that to simply evaporate brings a real sense of joy and peace in whatever kind of simplicity.

So exploring that internally. Someone, again, was saying to Tejaniya, who's a monk—and he became a monk later in life. He's not one of the Burmese monks who started when he was seven years old; he'd had a whole life. Which is part of why he really pushes this practice of noticing, this gentle awareness of everything, because he did this in his daily life, not as a monk.

So they were saying anyway, all this projection—"Oh, as a monk and renunciation, it must make you so pure"—they were doing all this, and he would never really take that kind of projection anyway. He said, "You know, you can be a monk, and all that desire, all that craving—it still can be there. It's just narrowed down into only two objects. But you can still have just as much craving as ever." That's not renunciation.

And conversely, you could live what looks like a normal life in the world, but you're not bound to things by that craving.

So, playing with this sense of inner contentment, the simplicity that can come when the craving really isn't being fed. And we tend to think also, when we think of craving, we skip over it—tanha, this wanting—and look at the objects. People will always say, "Well, what's wrong? I'm craving peace. I'm craving enlightenment. I'm craving a happy family. What's wrong with a happy family?" It's like, no one's saying that. We're missing the whole boat, which is what we do. We go to the object. It's not about the object. It's the craving itself that's the deluded source of suffering. And renunciation arises when the craving evaporates. There's this sense of real presence and peace and contentment leading to generosity.

What happens on a retreat, or off-retreat—when we start to, with a steady awareness, as I said before, see how much craving is popping up—if you can hang with just watching it, you start to see how craving works. And some of the magic of it starts to go out. Because isn't craving like this siren call? "If you do what I'm telling you that you need, you'll be happy." We're leaning into whatever the thing is. And then we get defensive: "But that's a good thing to want." Or we blame ourselves: "That's a bad thing to want. I shouldn't be wanting that." It's not the object.

So I just want to share what someone said in a group. I thought it was so insightful, really, because it's true. They were seeing there was a huge craving to scratch an itch. And have you noticed there can be a huge craving when you're walking just to look at who's walking by? Have you noticed? And you feel like you're going to die if you don't look at who's walking by. How strong that craving can be.

And this person noticed it was that kind of craving for something—scratching an itch, whatever. They noticed, "Oh my gosh," it just popped into their mind: "This is the same level and intensity of craving I remember back from high school when I had a huge desire crush on somebody." It's the same level of craving for something so innocuous as scratching. That's right. That's it.

So seeing craving on retreat, when you think, "How can I have craving for looking? It doesn't make sense"—and then we dismiss it because the object seems insignificant. No, don't dismiss it. This is how we really see. It is the same quality of craving. So whether it's craving for enlightenment or craving to look at

the person next to you—and what happens when you look, if you keep paying attention? You look, and pretty much you judge, right? "They're better, I'm better." It really did you a lot of good.

So you feel worse. You feel worse from looking. That was great. And then, you know, if you're aware that happened, then you get aversive towards yourself. Or then you say, "Well, I can't handle this anymore. I'm going to go have tea. Let's blow the whole thing off." It really did a world of good.

But if you keep noticing, you see—wow, this promise of craving doesn't really pan out. Unfortunately, we have to see that about a hundred million times. But watch it, watch it, and you'll see. Don't you notice? It's the craving itself that's creating the dis-ease. Not the itch, not the looking or the not looking, whatever it might be.

So say it's for something like enlightenment. We can have a sincere aspiration and intention to do what is necessary in our practice. It doesn't have to be from craving.

Renunciation is this: in a moment when craving is seen through and it drops away naturally, there's just this sense of peace and real contentment and ease with what is. The more the wisdom awareness notices that, there can be times when craving starts to come up, and there's the wisdom that allows us to be with it. So there's also the wisdom that lets us, with awareness, rest with the unpleasant.

Which is also the next one. All of this is rooted in not wanting to be with the unpleasant. *Taṇhā*—it has the story that it's pleasant. Have you had times when you go into a daydream? We even make the confusion of thinking the craving itself is somehow happy, is somehow pleasant. We're lost in this pleasant story, not noticing it. But if you really look and hang with it, without feeding, without getting rid of it—it's mostly unpleasant. It's dissonant. It takes us out. It takes us away. It brings dissatisfaction in the moment.

Seeing that, the more we know that on the *bhāvanā-mayā-paññā* level, then craving can come up and you notice it quicker. Awareness can be with it, and it just drops, really. Play with that in little ways. The food time here, lunch, is a great place to play with that. So many people mention experiences they have around the eating and the wanting and going for seconds or not going for seconds and watching the whole thing. A lot of people bring that up, right?

And if you can really just get interested in exploring—I remember the first three-month retreat I sat. It wasn't full like this, maybe fifty people. But the food... I mean, it was a poorer time for IMS, shall we say. At tea you would get an apple, and every second day, two spoons of peanuts. I'm not kidding, that's what we had. Some days there would be enough food, but not the sense of plenty. And I would, you know, the bell would ring, I'd be there, go eat.

There was this one guy. I didn't know anybody. He would come wandering in late, twenty minutes late, twenty-five minutes late. And again, it wasn't as many people as here, and some of the food would be gone. There wasn't just tons of it. And he would come in very carefully, eat whatever, and I'd think, "God, he must be enlightened." You know? It's amazing. He must be so enlightened. And I'm not even a huge

foodie, but just, you know, that's the hit of the day.

Well, sometime later, years later, it wasn't like a big thing, but I started to notice on retreat that I was walking in really late and I wasn't thinking about it. I could be sitting before noon and some craving would come up. "Oh, I smell baked potatoes" or whatever. And it would come up and I'd see it—oh yeah, okay, craving's like that—and it would just go. Didn't get all into it, didn't feed it, and there's this sense of peace. You do what you do, you get up, you walk in and eat. There's baked potatoes, there's not—there was always something. I didn't starve.

And that's the sense of renunciation, not a willful thing. But the willingness, the steady awareness that can be with craving, sees how it works—it loses its allure.

You just hang out with it, and then you can make a choice from awareness-wisdom. Maybe you're really hungry, so you get up and go eat—that's fine. We still take care of ourselves. You can still appreciate the food. But this renunciation just starts to occur quite naturally, and we appreciate it. And from there, it can move into generosity.

A friend was telling me some years ago that she was studying with Sogyal Rinpoche, and he had many projects, one of which was to support poor nuns in Tibet. You would kind of adopt a nun and give a certain amount every month to help her eat and clothe herself and be able to keep practicing. My friend was really inspired by this. First, there was the generosity—she wanted to do it, and that made her really happy. But in order to have that money, she had to consciously take it out of her clothes budget, so she didn't buy new clothes. She would give that money to the nun instead.

So there's the renunciation of the new clothes, and there's the generosity of giving, and both of them made her equally happy. It wasn't this wrenching sense of not having what she wanted. She said, "No, I'm not buying this. This money goes to the nun." And that thought of letting go—the craving would simply dissolve, and generosity would arise to replace it very naturally.

Then you bring awareness. Let the awareness notice it. Feel that sense of contentment in not wanting. Feel the happiness that arises in the heart-mind with generosity. You keep paying attention. And that's awareness-wisdom strengthening the wholesome. That's really wise attention. So just playing with that.

Now, ill will and thoughts of cruelty—I'll put them together. It's more obvious. Ill will transforms into mettā, or non-hatred, which is really simple friendliness. Cruelty transforms into non-harming, or compassion.

Both of the unwholesome ones—ill will, cruelty, all the forms of aversion—arise as our conditioned response to difficult, unpleasant, painful experiences. Whether it's physical pain, some action in the world, some interaction, or some thought in your mind, when something is unpleasant and difficult, the habit tends to be some form of pushing away: fear, aversion, aggression, ill will. Get away from me.

Now, mettā. Let me read you what Ajahn Sumedho says, because when I've mentioned mettā or non-ill will, something goes through the mind: "What, so I'm supposed to love this stuff? Somebody's really acting in a very aggressive way and I'm supposed to feel all this love in my heart for them? How do I do that?"

Ajahn Sumedho on mettā, in regards to difficult people or situations, internal or external:

"Mettā does not necessarily mean loving it. One is simply witnessing the unpleasantness in a situation, in a thing, in a person, or in oneself, without creating anything around it. That's what I consider to be mettā."

I'll say it again: witnessing, really present with, the unpleasant in a situation, in a person, in oneself—in space, without creating anything around it. In other words, the heart-mind is not reactive. It's not making a story about me, about them. It's not getting into aversion. It's just: Oh, this is happening. It's like this.

Does that sound like anything we've been talking about all week, only calling it awareness? Sometimes mettā and awareness can have the exact same qualities. That's what we're talking about here. Not loving, but simply the ability to start from witnessing the unpleasant in ourselves, in the situation, in a person. This is awareness. And the steadiness of it is what allows wisdom to arise—the wisdom being, hopefully, starting to see the possibility of a different response.

It's so ingrained in most of us that the natural response to aggression, or the safe response to anger, or the safe response to difficulty, is to get the heck out of here, or get rid of them, or meet anger with anger. It just seems like that's what we do, and anything else would be weak or letting ourselves be walked on.

The Dalai Lama, when asked about why there seems to be a lack of compassion in human society, said: "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 emotional states, reinforcing them. If we were to give the same amount of energy, attention, and reinforcement to compassion and caring, they would definitely be stronger.

To me, this reinforcing of compassion and caring, the ability to be present with the difficult without responding, without the mind only knowing how to go to the unwholesome—this is what awareness and wisdom offer us. And it starts with that willingness to be with the unpleasant. As Joko Beck says, "Can I find in myself a willingness to rest in this confusing and painful situation?" I ask myself that a lot.

And that's what we can start with—what's happening here, silently, in your own experience. It's not just a lucky first-world problem, being able to look at your anger, at your grief, or how somebody walking loudly really got you ticked off and you're in a murderous rage and then you try to talk yourself out of it because, well, look at the stuff in the world, I have no right to be in a murderous rage. No—look at it! Just like with craving, let awareness be with it and see: how does the anger work? What happens with it?

You'll see. We do see. We know, as the Buddha said, it causes us suffering, it causes others suffering. Keep looking, because then we think, "But what's the alternative? What else can I do? It's the only way to protect

myself." We have to see that's not true.

James Baldwin, the great American writer, says an enemy is someone whose story we have not heard. I love that. So when there's that anger—now, not being angry doesn't mean, "Okay, do whatever you want." But it means there might be another wholesome quality, compassion, mettā, that actually provides a great, really strong intention for action. And we can see more clearly than we can when the mind is filled with anger.

The Buddha says: "When one dwells with a mind, a heart, obsessed and oppressed by ill will and does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen ill will, on that occasion one neither knows nor sees as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both."

So when we're lost in fear, in ill will, in anger—even when we're trying to do the right thing—you know, it's why it's such a tricky place when there's so much injustice and so much suffering in the world and we really want to engage with it. Whether we want to engage with climate change, whether we want to engage with the refugee crisis, whether we want to engage with homophobia, with racism, with just somebody mistreating someone we see on the street. And if what we've been giving unconsciously the power to is anger, hostility as the source of strength, then that's what's going to come out.

The Buddha's saying even when we're trying to do the right thing, if the intention's coming from ill will, from anger, we can't see clearly the good of others or the good of ourselves or the good of either. So how can we learn to really trust? And again, it can't be done just by an act of mind, an act of wishing. But when we start by connecting with awareness, as we're doing here, without creating anything around whatever the suffering aspect is—and we practice on the little ones here, sure, to give us some trust, some faith.

But you see, do you see at times in your practice when you just connect? You're filled with aversion from something, you know, something essentially stupid—some sound or whatever. You know it's essentially stupid. That doesn't help, because then the aversion goes on you. But you're filled with it. Or say a pain, which a lot of people have experienced. And seeing the aversion, seeing the fear, eventually by being able to rest with the aversion without creating anything around it, rest with the pain without creating anything around it—at times you'll see the whole sense of suffering drop. Maybe the pain's still there. Sometimes people can't even call it pain anymore.

And then there's clear seeing. So sometimes with a knee, you know, there may be something you really need to do to take care of it. When you're in that whole world of reaction and aversion, who can see what you need to do? You can't tell. You think you're either going to have to have surgery tomorrow, or it's absolutely nothing—it's a dharma pain. And you can't tell. We're just all wrapped up in the kleshas.

When we can see clearly, when the aversion drops, when there's connection with things as they are, wisdom lets us see what to do—in little picture, in big picture. But it goes against the stream of what we know, and against the stream of society. And it is hard to try—even when we start to know for

ourselves—reacting from aggression, reacting from self-aversion brings more suffering. I know, if I could meet it with mettā, there's more peace and more ability to act appropriately. But everything around you is saying, "Are you crazy? You got to protect yourself. Are you crazy? Tell those people what they're doing wrong."

Get out there and, you know, whatever it is.

So to this point, I think Steve said—or the Buddha said—if you can't be with wise people, be alone. But sometimes *we're* the wise people, you know? And we're so affected by other people; none of us can live in isolation. So when we go out, we'll be getting all kinds of signals: "Want! Want! Be angry! Get upset! That's how you are in the world."

We need sangha to help us remember what we already know for ourselves. But sometimes we're the ones who—when you have that deep sense, you know that you don't want to come from anger, that there's another choice—then your being able, or my being able, to act that way can really affect other people.

I heard this great story on a public radio program. It's called *Invisibilia*, and it's talking about all qualities of mind that aren't seen that affect our life. It's really interesting. So this is called non-complementary behavior, which I would say really is responding to aggression with metta, or kindness, or non-aggression anyway.

So this group of people—two families, I think—were together outside in the evening in their backyards. It sounds like a suburb somewhere. They were having a lovely dinner together on this lovely evening, outside eating, drinking wine. And all of a sudden, a guy came out of nowhere—they didn't see him coming—and he had a gun. He just showed up, stuck it to one of the people's head, and said, "Give me your money."

They're freaked out, of course, don't know what to do. And they said, "We don't have any money. We're just having—" "Give me your money."

So the first response was someone saying, "What would your mother think? What would your mother think if she saw you doing this?" And he says, "I don't have a mother. Give me your money." And really, the gun was to somebody's head.

And at this point, one of the people said, "Would you like a glass of wine?"

He said, "Huh?"

So, okay, well... and he sat down, had a glass of wine, they started talking, kept on going. And they were scared—it's not like they're like, "Oh la la"—they were scared. But they really had wine, they were having a conversation with him, and after a while he goes, "You know, I really see... I came to the wrong place."

So he said okay, he'd go, and he got up and he wanted hugs from everybody. And then he took a glass of

wine and went off.

Well, they ran into the house like crazy, locked all the doors, right? But he went off, he didn't come back. And then later when they went and opened the door, he'd taken that glass that he'd drunk the wine from—he'd left it very carefully on the curb and went away.

Cool, huh? Yeah.

So to come from that place, it takes a real trust, doesn't it? And knowing that's what can come from steady mindfulness and awareness.

I love stories like that.

And then I think what also can bring it in is when our habit of not wanting to bring full attention to difficult, unpleasant situations—how that feeds the thoughts of separation. Like James Baldwin said, "An enemy is someone whose story you haven't heard." So we don't want to hear their story. We don't want to connect. It's a lot of what goes on in the world.

So another story I heard on the radio, about the refugee crisis in Europe—this was last fall, I think. You remember, there's one of the big refugee camps in Calais, just in France. I think they've actually destroyed it. So it was last fall, and there were a couple thousand people there living in really not very good conditions, and they were all trying to get out and go to England. There was kind of a lot of upheaval, but they weren't being violent or anything.

And so the BBC reporter was going around just talking to normal citizens in Calais. He ended up talking to this one middle-aged French lady, and she was just saying how she hates these refugees and they should go back and they're just causing trouble—typical of what we'd hear, right? Aversion.

And he said, "Well, have you ever actually been there in the jungle?"

And she said, "No."

And somehow he talked her into going there with him.

And so she went in with him. And this is it—this is like awareness, just connection with what is, different from our ideas about it.

So she went in there with him, and he was talking to some young men, and she was talking to one of the young men from—I don't know if he was from Iraq or Syria—and he was just describing how hard it was. He's in his early twenties, he just wants to work, and there's no work there, and there's nothing to do. If he goes for a walk in the street, he feels really unsafe, targeted by the truckers, targeted by police. All he wants to do is work.

And so she's going, "Wow, these conditions are awful. These people are good, they don't have enough food,

they don't have anything to do."

So she went to the main office of the camp and volunteered. She became involved in wanting to volunteer and help. Just like that. It's a natural effect of clear seeing—non-hatred arises when we see things as they are. We can also know that and turn our attention to that, and wise attention will strengthen that possibility.

But this is what the guide means when he says it's a beneficent universe. This is how it works. When we see clearly how hatred brings separation, how fear brings separation, how aversion even to a pain brings separation and more suffering—just the willingness to recognize, "It's like this." Not wanting something, just "it's like this now," can change everything.

So, you still have some time here. Notice. Just notice the little times. Because it's the same mind, it's the same process, it's the same habits as in the big pictures. And you can learn to trust it from the little—that's the beauty of practice. But it doesn't mean we can't see the same thing in our daily life. So that's our path.

The attitude that the mind, the awareness, is meeting the experience right now—how we meet, not "we," but how awareness, mindfulness meets this experience, whether it's with simple interest, curiosity, kindness, or whether it's through buying into delusion. But when we meet it with just this open kindness, this sense of not making an enemy, that's our path. That's the whole practice. And it doesn't matter what's occurring—something subtle on retreat or our daily life practice. The path is how the heart and mind is meeting this moment. That's where the awareness is.

As Steve was pointing out this morning, it's always available. Always. You just have to remember it. And when there's more steadiness of awareness, the truth of how things are reveals itself. That's just like the law of nature, like gravity.

So we can take in information—I mean, I'm blabbing, you're taking in information or not—but we can know, okay, maybe non-greed is more wholesome and more happiness-producing than greed. So that's a piece of information. It can incline us to look and see: Is this so? Look and see how we meet when we're dealing with the neighbor in the upstairs apartment who's stomping around every night at four in the morning. How we meet all the aspects of that—that's our path of awareness and wakefulness and wisdom. Changing the diapers, driving in traffic—great one, you know. So it might not be as refined awareness, but awareness is always available. This is what we do here, this is what we take with us no matter what aspect of our life.

How do we meet this moment?

A few years ago—I won't even get into it, but the politics in Burmese monasteries is baroque and pretty out there. Anyways, a whole bunch of bad stuff was going on with Sayadaw U Tejaniya. He was kind of the target of gossip. That's how they do it in Burma. They go, "Oh, everything's fine," and there's all this background gossip. And people were saying bad stuff about him and trying to isolate him, saying lies and

things.

I was just having a conversation with him, and I said, "Well, this other monk is saying all these lies about you, trying to turn people against you." And he was just being quiet, he wasn't doing anything. I said, "Well, why don't you just at least say what's true? You don't have to say something bad about him, but just say what's true."

He says, "You know, I just don't—" *kusala* means wholesome, *akusala* means unwholesome. He goes, "You know, I just don't want to add any more *akusala* to the situation."

I love that. Just kind of see this, all this unwholesome stuff going on, and he's just not adding unwholesomeness to it.

It's out of our control. All we can know if there's awareness is our motivation—and even often that, not clearly. We never know how our actions are going to land. We can't know the effect of any action.

The awareness and the motivation, the quality of our mind—that's all we can really know. So he's saying, okay, taking a stand there, not creating more akusala. That's really our practice of mindfulness, awareness, wisdom.

I'll just end with one line from Desmond Tutu. He was giving a talk to a bunch of young college students in Boston. One of them was saying, "We live in the midst of a culture of violence. There's violence all around us. How are we supposed to love? We grow up with hate."

And Desmond Tutu said, "No, we *learn* to hate. That's not our truest nature. That's not the truest nature of mind and heart."

And he was looking at each person, going, "You make a difference. You can make a difference. You, you, you. One person can make a big difference. So start with yourself."

That's what I wanted to talk about tonight. Thank you for listening.

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