Simple Awareness: Conditions For Wisdom

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 49:52

So, end of the first day of a retreat—not quite the end. You've got to stay awake another couple of hours. First day of retreat, which can go all kinds of ways.

Tonight, I just want to talk a little bit about this practice we're sharing with you and why—just some simple ways of understanding why mindfulness, why simple awareness is so powerful in freeing our hearts and minds from confusion. Not all the reasons, but pointing to the background of this practice.

Someone asked today, "If we're practicing to free ourselves from suffering, isn't that just more aversion?" In a way, that question can take us into the heart of how the Buddha taught, why he taught, why he decided to teach—which I'm sure many of you know—but it speaks to the heart of our dilemma.

You probably know this story well. When the Buddha first awakened, he wasn't very inclined to share or to teach, because he said people wouldn't get it, and it would be burdensome to schlep around for the rest of his life trying to explain it to people who wouldn't understand. But he was moved, cutting the story short, he was really moved to compassion because he said that with his omniscient eye he could look through the world and read people's minds. And he could see that really each of us, each human being at least, just wants to be happy. We all want to be happy. And in our sincere trying to be happy, we basically keep doing the things that keep us spinning in suffering and confusion—because we just don't understand what suffering is and what can bring happiness. We don't understand ourselves and reality accurately. That's what motivated him to teach.

So it's true. He said, "I teach suffering, or *dukkha*." I don't like "suffering" as the translation because it's too limiting, too always unpleasant, and *dukkha* is not always unpleasant. But anyway—teaching *dukkha* and the end of *dukkha*, certainly leading to happiness. The highest happiness is peace. He's not saying we're doing this just for the heck of it and you're not going to feel any better.

But the heart of it is that we suffer, and the confusion that we wake up from—it's not that the world changes. It's that we misunderstand ourselves, the world, reality. And in misunderstanding, we do the things we think will make things better for us, but those very actions just keep us spinning in confusion. That's the loop that's called *samsara*: wanting and getting and wanting and getting, just spinning and spinning because we don't know how to step out of it.

When you look at the Buddha's life, when he woke up, he kept on living in a body, in the world, and the same stuff happened. The world didn't get better. People didn't all start acting filled with love. The same stuff was going on. So his freedom of heart and mind had to be something different from being able to

organize things the way we want them to be.

But don't we keep trying to do that somehow? We can't even organize our own mind, right? That's what we see here. My God, that's the first insight. If you haven't done an insight retreat before, the first insight is: your mind is not yours. It's not in your control. Causes and conditions come together, a thought comes, and you are not in charge of it—though we keep thinking we are.

So at the heart of awakening, it's not about rearranging everything. It's about seeing, recognizing—using "seeing" for cognizing; I don't necessarily mean visually seeing, I'm using it as a shorthand for knowing—a moment of reality just as it is.

There's a phrase, one of the highest insights. It's called *yathā bhūta ñāṇa dassana*. I love this phrase. It translates as "knowledge and vision of seeing things as they have come to be in this moment." Recognizing things as they have come to be. That is liberating wisdom—not somehow achieving a certain state that gets us out of this hell of being in a human body and mind. No. It's seeing what's really so.

And that has an amazing power, because the Buddha is saying that when we misunderstand, when we misinterpret, when we misperceive, we put a whole story on top of what's happening, and then that's how we react. That's how we respond.

And it just takes us more and more into confusion.

So the miracle of mindfulness, to borrow a phrase from Thich Nhat Hanh, is that it gives us the way to begin to recognize, just to rest with full attention, full awareness, full presence in this one moment. And when it's mindfulness that's not clouded by confusion, then there's an accurate recognition. And moment after moment of that changes everything.

This is the definition of vipassana meditation that I like from Sayadaw U Tejaniya. He says, "Vipassana meditation is experiencing the mind and body directly from moment to moment with the right understanding." You can hear that's what we've been saying all day. Mindfulness is experiencing the mind and body directly—not through the veil of all our ideas about what it means. And that's what I'm going to talk about for the rest of this talk, because we don't even know that veil is there. We think we know what's going on.

Experiencing the mind and body directly from moment to moment—so that's the continuity through the day. Not just, "Oh, here's a moment of feeling tingling," and then we're off for three days. It's the steadiness, with the right understanding, which I think Alexis talked about: right view, wise view.

"Right" is a tricky word because we immediately go into right and wrong, good and bad. But take that away. Right view means seeing or being with experience fresh, just recognizing whatever is occurring in this moment, how it has come to be as a result of so many different conditions that we can't see. But it's just like this, free of any overlay of our idea about what it means.

And that's the tricky part—free of any overlay about what it means. This is what we're practicing.

I think it's really interesting, this definition, and this is the way we're trying to share this particular style of vipassana: the emphasis on right view. The Eightfold Path begins and ends with wise understanding, wise view. And you might think, "Well, I can't start the path by having the end of the path already—wise view." No. But we can start with some understanding, a little bit intellectual, a little bit practice, of right understanding of just this: that whatever's occurring is not me. It's arising due to conditions, many of which we don't control.

But when we don't see that, we take everything personally. If it's a pleasant experience, we congratulate ourselves—we did it right!—and the whole story gets going. Then it goes away, and we're having an unpleasant experience, and we blame ourselves, we blame that noisy person next to us, we blame somebody because something went wrong. And all the different moods and thoughts and stories and reactions follow on that. We're so far from just the actual moment of experience, so fast. This is how we don't even know that there's been this overlay put on experience.

This is why we're practicing the simplicity of mindful awareness. It's radical. Because in this wise view, right view in terms of mindfulness, we're not trying to make something happen. Even—I know, it doesn't really compute, right? You come here, you're sitting, you're walking, you're not talking, there's all these things you're doing differently, and we're saying every moment that you're awake, remember awareness. And then we say you're not trying to make something happen!

We're not. We are trying to keep recognizing awareness. We're trying to shift our refuge. But it's not our MO to do that without wanting some kind of better result. And that's such a habit. We talked about it already today—it just slips in. It's so hard. "Okay, I've remembered awareness a lot today. Where's the goodies? When's something going to happen?"

I said patience. It's only been one day. We're talking our whole life—I've got news—at least just this life. Just stay with this life. But we're like, "Okay, something should happen, and it should be better than it was when I came. It shouldn't be worse, right?" It just slips in there. And it seems so normal. We don't even recognize it.

So it's not our MO just to try to be with what is without any "so that," without any reference really to what's it going to do in the future and what did it do yesterday. It's just like this now.

In the moments of that kind of presence—which I'm sure many of you have experienced today—if you recognize that moment, it's really quite peaceful. Because the mind's not making a big hullabaloo about whatever's happening, good, bad, or indifferent. You're just hearing. Bird. Not "oh, the bird" and then all the commentary. Not "oh, the black flies" and everything that follows. Just hearing. Hearing. And nothing around it.

That's peace. That's not the idea we're thinking about when the Buddha looked around and said we want

to be happy. We're not thinking, "I want to just hear, and nothing should be created around it. That's my idea of real happiness." Maybe. Maybe not. Probably not at the beginning of practice.

So it's radical, this learning how to just be with what's happening. And then we start to recognize the views that overlay, the ideas that we overlay—and this is where it gets really interesting. Because we're not here to say stop those views. We don't even know what they are. But as we start to recognize just moment-to-moment awareness, and as we've said, just one moment is simple, is not exhausting—that's all, just one moment, you don't have to project it into the future—the more steady it becomes, the more that awareness mind, which is not personal, allows us to recognize the views that are overlaying. Because ultimately they don't really match. And it's really interesting to see.

When I was on retreat this last month, one thing I started noticing—I like to do walking meditation a lot—I'd be walking and just watching what's going on in the mind, seeing, hearing, noticing the thoughts and the moods, and I would see how it would always keep slipping in some sense of "just get a little bit better" or "what does this mean?" And then I would start analyzing, you know, some Buddhist philosophy thing, looking at vedanā and looking at clinging and all of that, but forcing it out of some wanting to understand. And then this line kept coming to me: just let reality reveal itself. Quit looking so hard. Just moment to moment, let reality reveal itself and tell its own story. Quit making up a story and putting it on top of it.

So this is where we start to see how the belief we have, the view we're holding in the back of our mind about experience that we don't recognize—how that affects how we react, respond, and the moods and the beliefs. It can take us way down the road.

Here's an example I've been using the last couple of years, a very simple one. I have a young nephew, and I've been watching how kids learn things. When he was two or three—this is very simple—you know those games where you have a box and wooden blocks of different shapes: triangle, circle, square? Children learn how to put the right block in the right shape. Before he knows how it works, an adult will show him, and to him it looks like magic—you put it in and it just goes in. He tries it, and it doesn't work. Because he's putting the circle in the square and the square in the triangle, and it doesn't work.

And you can see, I could see, how he doesn't just go, "Oh, it doesn't work." It's like, "They could do it and I can't. What's the matter?" Frustration and anger arise. In the little mind, if it were an adult, there might be either self-blame or blaming the adults—they're keeping a secret and not telling you how to really do it—or deciding this is a broken game, or "this stinks anyway, throw the whole thing out the window, let's go outside." All of that gets going. And it can build up. Even with a little kid, it can build up into a whole tantrum.

They keep trying, and then suddenly, maybe by mistake, the right block goes into the right opening. And when he suddenly sees the shape, it's like the ignorance, the cloud of confusion in the mind, went away at that point. Then they see: oh, every time, that's just how it is. All that other stuff—the anger, the blame, the

wanting—you don't have to talk yourself out of it.

It goes away because it doesn't make any sense. As soon as the realities recognize the way it is—oh, okay, you put the blocks in here. And if I want the square to go in the triangle, it's not going to work. That's just how it is. There's no blame. There's no suffering. That's just it.

That's the difference between *yathābhūta* and *yathādasana*—recognizing things as they have come to be in this moment, versus when we put the overlay: "If I could really do this right, I would get this block in here no matter what. There's something wrong." That's simple. But I like that example because it's really a metaphor for the whole thing. The overlays, the views that might be in the back of our mind, could be a lot more complicated. And so we can get caught in many aversive or wanting reactions and stories about ourselves and others and what this means—without actually, without mindfulness not being colored by the aversion, the clinging, we can't recognize accurately. We can't recognize accurately when that's going on in the mind.

There are many different ways, many different views, of course, that can be held in the back of the mind as we go through practice. But the most pervasive one—and Alexis touched on it, I'm just going to touch on it, but just play with noticing it, not try to think your way out of it—the most pervasive view, kind of at the heart of the Buddha's teaching, is this overlay, this interpretation on so much of our experience, of taking it personally. It's me, or it's mine. That just feels true, doesn't it? And that's the thing with a view. It's not like we're thinking, "Oh look, now I am putting on the overlay of self to this sitting that was so terrible, and I just couldn't even focus, and thoughts were coming all the time, and I remember my last retreat—it was better, and now it's not, and what am I doing wrong?" At times you can see, "Oh, that's an overlay of self, taking it personally." But more often we're really caught up in, "Well, what is wrong? If I could do it right, I wouldn't be thinking. If I could do it right, I wouldn't lose awareness."

As long as there's that taking it personally, that clinging to a particular idea or experience, the clinging and aversion distort the awareness, the mindfulness, the consciousness that's meeting the experience, and we can't recognize it accurately.

The Buddha even said, in one place, "This *nibbāna*, this freedom, is visible here and now." And someone asked, "To what extent is it visible here and now?" He said, "To the extent that greed, hatred or fear, negativity, and confusion are not present in the consciousness, in the mind." When they're not present, they're not distorting, they're not caught. And this is a moment-to-moment thing. So in a moment when you may feel quite aware, but it's filled with resistance to what's happening and not recognizing that resistance, there's not going to be accurate recognition of what's happening.

For example, it's like, "That noise is the source of my suffering." And that just seems clear. We're caught up in that. That unpleasant noise, and that person shouldn't be making it, or they shouldn't be running the lawnmower during a sitting, or whatever—clearly the source of my suffering. Or there's a really pleasant experience. You're feeling really light and happy and good, and you think, "That's clearly the source of my

happiness." So this happy, pleasant experience should definitely be strung out, made to happen again, made to last long—and we get into a clinging, a wanting, a holding on to something that cannot last. Because we all know intellectually, but it doesn't really get down in the gut: nothing, nothing, nothing lasts. No state of mind, no thought, no mood, no sensation in the body, no experience in the world—nothing lasts. Some things seem to last longer than others. But the sense of thinking, "This unpleasant experience is my suffering, this pleasant one is my happiness"—that's where we get caught. That's where greed and resistance, confusion, are coming into the mind, into the awareness, and we're not recognizing accurately.

The sound, I find, is more easy to work with. When we really can just, in a moment, experience this awareness of hearing—and you can just notice, "Oh, no, no, no, that sound"—it's just feeling the hearing. And then notice the thoughts arising, the aversion with the thoughts, the sense of self-blame or other-blame, and the whole story that's going on. We see, "Oh, that's the suffering." The sound is just a sound. As Ajahn Chah, the great Thai forest monk and meditation teacher, said, "The sound isn't bothering you."

You're going out and bothering the sound.

It's kind of like that—just a little shorthand—but this is what we keep exploring. These are the qualities that block accurate recognition, that block right view in a particular moment.

For me, one of the most freeing realities about how our mind and body works, the one that truly supports me, inspires me, and gives me the trust and energy to keep looking at all this, is the fact that our mind is arising and changing moment to moment to moment. And by mind, I mean mind and heart. *Chitta* is the word in Pali, which means all our mental activity. I'm not trying to create the kind of split we can get into here between thinking mind and emotions. I mean all mental activity.

It arises. Conditions come together—physical, mental, inner, outer—and there may be sadness arising. Fine, that's what's happening. It's going to last a while, and it's going to change. So there'll be a moment when maybe there's resistance to the sadness, not recognizing it, and there's a real sense of struggle. But then there's a moment: "Oh, resistance is like this." The awareness is recognizing resistance. So it stops fighting resistance, and resistance is just the next arising experience. The whole sense of struggle and "me" drops away. There may even still be the sadness, but the shift is from owning it, believing it, holding on to it, resisting it—to something more like a qigong or tai chi shift. From "this is me, this is me, I like it, I don't like it" to "oh, it's like this now." A shift into the awareness. Taking refuge, just for a moment, resting in the awareness.

And that's the thing: everything's only a moment. So we're all caught up and not having awareness, really identified with greed, and then suddenly there's a seeing through it. There's a moment of purity of heart and mind where there is right view, wise view. It's not like it's all distorted, all greed, hatred, and delusion, and then finally one day—boom—it's all gone. Every moment is a new moment. Every moment, awareness

can be accessible. And it doesn't matter what the awareness is noticing. I say a lot that awareness doesn't care what's arising. It's equal with anything. It's not like if what's arising is resistance, the awareness is thinking, "Oh, I don't want to be with that. It's going to get me all dirty. I only want to be aware of the nice things." Our identification says that. Awareness doesn't care.

Or as someone else said to me, "No, you should say it cares equally." So whichever fits your personality pattern—you can go with "it doesn't care" or "it cares equally." Either way, awareness is just pure. It's just clear. Whatever's arising is the perfect gateway to re-recognize awareness, because that's what's happening now. And there's always a new moment. It's not like we're stuck. We don't have to be afraid.

Sayadaw U Pandita, he was a very tough teacher, very demanding, but I found him incredibly compassionate actually. He said to me once—I don't remember what was happening in my practice—but he just said so kindly, "You know, you don't need to be afraid of anything that comes up." And when we start to, and begin to, and continue to trust the sense of awareness, even the most difficult stuff, when we can touch it with awareness rather than identification, it really, really shifts things. I'm speaking from personal experience here. It's completely different. From being all caught up to "Oh, look at that, the body's doing that, and these are the conditions of the body"—and then it moves from resistance to compassion automatically.

That's one of the beautiful things, actually, about moments when the awareness, when the mindfulness is not distorted by the habits of greed or aversion or just confusion. The wholesome, beautiful qualities of response arise naturally. So when there's not greed or aversion, if you just happen to notice the body's hurting and awareness simply sees it—instead of "Oh no, stupid body"—it becomes "Oh, poor body. What can I do to help it?"

So if you're sitting here, for example, and there starts to be some pain in the knee, and the first reaction involves that sense of taking it personally—back up a minute. The way that sense of taking it personally can work, it's really fun to explore as you go through the practice here. And please, don't take taking it personally personally. This is just what our minds do. If you're going to get disgusted or overwhelmed by it, that's not helpful. The whole attitude we're bringing in with this awareness practice is, "Wow, that's interesting. Look how the mind works."

So one way, I think Alexis mentioned, that the Buddha described our moment-to-moment experience—and which I also find very helpful in terms of exploring and running a retreat like this—is through the six sense experiences. He mentioned that.

If you go through the day, you're seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching—the whole mental world. And that one, yes, that seems to take an inordinate amount of space, but that's just arising too. Thoughts, moods, emotions—these things are just occurring over and over and over. Seeing, smelling, hearing. A lot of the time we don't quite notice what's happening, but there are many, many moments of sense contact all day. That's what's going on.

There are many short little ones that happen that maybe you don't notice at all. Or maybe we do notice, but they're no big deal. You're walking, maybe feeling the sensation of the foot on the floor, but not making anything of it. You hear a sound or whatever. But then there are other perceptions—a thought, a sound you like or don't like, a smell of the food at lunchtime and you're hungry, a memory that comes up and you're off into a whole world of your past life that goes along with that memory.

So certain of the six sense experiences come and the attention really gloms onto them. It's me, or it's mine. The mind, the consciousness, privileges certain sense experiences, certain perceptions as me and mine, and immediately goes into them and hangs on tight. Until awareness starts to get momentum, we don't quite notice that's what's happening. We're just walking along and suddenly we're like, "Oh no! I remember when I was doing that thing in third grade, and it just shows that horrible aspect of my personality, and it's coming up now in the way I'm looking at people when they walk by in the hall." And it all seems so real and so true and so unpleasant—although it could be completely different in five minutes. You have a whole different memory about how great you are and what you're going to do and how you're going to change and what wonderful things you're going to do when you leave here.

We don't notice that a thought came up that was pleasant—oh, that's me. Or a sound came up that was unpleasant, and there's immediate aversion—oh, that's me. And the sense that we can control, as I said, we take credit or we take blame. We congratulate ourselves or we react. Like my nephew—we react with "How can we fix it? How can we keep it? How can we hide this so people don't see how horrible we are?" Whatever it is, we get into a whole story, and the wanting and the resistance and the sense of me, me, me just keep growing and growing. And then it's gone. You're just walking. But we don't maybe notice that it's gone.

This is a really interesting practice, just to see that this is the habit of our mind. When we see it, great. We can see how it works. We can see how it puts on this overlay, how everything gets so much more complicated and full of suffering. We can see how when it goes away, there's just hearing, there's just seeing, and things are simply as they are. Exploring this is a huge part of our practice.

We start to see that what's occurring is arising due to all the conditions that came together in this moment—not because I decided, "Now I'm going to get really concentrated." Sayadaw U Tejaniya said once, and it's like, oh yeah, right, why didn't I think of that before? He said, you know, getting concentrated in meditation is a result of certain conditions. You can learn what the conditions are. Wanting to be concentrated is not one of them. And when we're wanting—I'm picking that because it's very present when people are on retreat—wanting to be concentrated completely blocks seeing what the conditions are. We can't just look and see.

A Tibetan lama friend of mine, Lama Drimed, said that when all these different experiences are coming or going, we're just part of nature. It's just nature. There are sounds and smells and tastes and physical sensations. We're here. We think of ourselves as this body in nature, but there's really no separation.

We're all just part of nature. But when we solidify around a particular experience—and we do that all the time—when it feels like me, he says we're like locked into what he called the narrow bandwidth of being a separate human being, separate from all of nature. And that's what we do a lot.

We can't think our way out of this, which is our usual approach. Don't even try. But this is an invitation to trust present moment mindfulness.

That's what's so amazing about something that seems so simple. This is called sakāya-diṭṭhi, personality view, identity view. The Buddha talked about it a lot. It's really one of the core confusions that keeps us spinning, not recognizing accurately.

We used to think you don't talk about that at the beginning of a retreat because it's too subtle and people think about it too much and get confused. But it's at the core of our misperception and our suffering.

Ajahn Sumedho—you know who Ajahn Sumedho is? He's an American man who's been a monk in the Thai forest tradition for forty, fifty years. I've found him quite inspiring, the way he talks about practice. He said he used to think, and people would think, that you have to practice for a long time before you can even start to talk about or explore sakāya-diṭṭhi. But then he thought, why practice for twenty years with the wrong understanding? Why practice for twenty years out of the delusion that I'm practicing to achieve something, to get somewhere?

So start looking now. We're practicing to be fully present with things as they are in this moment. And that's what frees our heart and mind from greed, hatred, and confusion. It's amazing. All this practice we're doing isn't to get somewhere else. It's just to retrain the habits of our mind to land here. It's like this now. It's like this now. That tai chi move is so powerful. You can see how immediately the personality view springs up and we're the center of everything.

Just a funny story Joseph Goldstein tells on himself. He was on retreat, I guess here, and in the food line for lunch—long, long line, everyone's there. He was the second one in line. The first person took the lid off the big pot and dropped it, and it made a heck of a racket. You can imagine, everyone's there, it spills all over, huge racket, everyone's looking. And Joe said his first thought—and he had to restrain himself not to actually say it—was, "It wasn't me."

That's what we do, right? Immediately, whatever happens, it's all about me. Right there.

So with awareness we see that, we laugh at it. Wow, look what the mind's doing. Even that isn't personal when we can see it. There's nothing our mind can do that need be outside of awareness. We start to learn to trust it. Laughing helps. Wow, look at that. And in that minute, it wasn't me—it was awareness noticing. It really shifts.

In the moment of simple mindfulness, the whole concoction falls apart. For that moment. The Buddha talked about consciousness as a magic show. It puts everything together. It seems so real. But if you look

behind the scenes of a magic show and see how the tricks are done, it loses its interest. This is like the concoction of self.

So don't even try to see through that. I'm saying all of this just to support our willingness, our interest, that whatever's happening, see if we can simply re-recognize awareness. It's like this now. I feel completely confused. It's like this now.

And the more we trust it, the awareness becomes more—it could be joyful, it could be peaceful, it's interesting. It becomes a refuge, more than needing to have every experience confirm us or tell a story about us or explain what it means about us. The awareness really becomes the refuge.

Recently, a few months ago, I was visiting a friend, a person who's in their early nineties now, a very inspiring person. This is someone who has lived a very rich, full, and varied life, and is a longtime, very deep practitioner of this practice—a very wise person. Being ninety, their body is frail, they're living in a retirement place, pleasant but a small apartment, can't get out much, can't do much.

And this person was saying—and this is a very sincere person—that this is the most interesting time of my life.

And I said, really? Why?

I said, well, if I'm just walking across the room here to the teapot, that's totally my life. That's everything. That's what I'm doing. I'm just walking across the room. It's everything in that moment. If I'm pouring the water for the tea, that's everything. That's my whole life.

This person wasn't referring to something in the past, wasn't looking to the future. Total presence. It's so alive, so present. Everything is so interesting. And it was so inspiring to me. This sense that this person is really living in the understanding that it's not about the object, it's not about the activity. It's really the living itself, the wakefulness, the purity of the heart and mind in that moment. Purity meaning just really being present with what is, without needing anything extra. That's the most interesting time of their life.

When our life is in that moment, it's complete. That's what we're practicing. From that, response is possible. It's not like we become some kind of zombie. From that moment of pure presence, if there's some action that needs to happen, wisdom sees. Wisdom knows what to do. It's obvious. One teacher called it "doing the obvious." It's just a knowing. It's not even me. It's wisdom that knows because there's clear seeing.

So that's really what we're doing here. And that's why we talk about the third aspect: the simplicity and honesty of mindfulness with right view. We notice when it's not right view because there's struggle, there's tension. Then we notice, what's going on? Wanting, aversion—oh, look at that.

And the continuity, the simple perseverance. Whenever we forget, the next moment we remember, here we are again. That's why every moment is Dhamma. Every moment is a moment when the truth of reality

can reveal itself. Reality isn't more real when it's a pleasant moment. Reality isn't more real when what we want to happen happens. Or when what we don't want to happen happens. It doesn't matter what's happening now.

The willingness to meet any moment of the day, to treat all moments as equally valid—that doesn't mean you're not going to forget a million times. It's not a holding on. It's this perseverance, this willingness to wake up no matter what the activity, all day. This is what we're practicing here.

So these eight days, it really isn't about pushing in a short time to get to some particular state. I was thinking the same thing during this last month I was sitting. It's a time to have the conditions where we can really just practice recognizing awareness, whatever's happening. Whether we're in our daily activities, whether we're doing formal walking meditation, whether we're in the movement session, whether we're doing our work meditation, whether we're lying down, whether we're in the sitting—there's really not a hierarchy. It's not like sitting is better and you go to your room and check out. It's not like sitting is worse. It's whatever's going on.

That's one of the reasons, actually, that starting this afternoon and tomorrow, we don't have such a rigid timetable for the sitting and the walking. Because that means we're noticing what's going on in the mind. Instead of just sitting until the bell rings, which can be fine, maybe you're sitting and after thirty minutes, as I talked about today, you're just lost in aversion. You're just sitting thinking, oh my God, I have to sit till the bell rings, and you're just feeding aversion because you're not recognizing it. When, if you could recognize in your mind, let me stand up, refresh the awareness, go do some walking—then the awareness comes back in a more balanced way. You actually can find you're more continuous. I found this myself. When you're in your own rhythm, you're paying attention to what's going on in the mind.

You don't just walk because the bell rings. You don't just stop walking because the bell rings. You don't say, "Well, now there's no bell, so I'm going to my room to space out." Whatever's going on, you watch what you're doing and why you're doing it. And that's what's interesting.

It's not about setting up rigid rules—"I can never go to my room." You can. As Alexis was saying, if you're tired, rest. But watch why you're doing it. Don't set up some framework of "I should do this, I shouldn't do that"—within the bounds of the precepts and not harming ourselves or others, of course.

I'll use taking a nap as an example, because in some forms of practice you're really pushed not to take naps and not to sleep much. And I'm a person who has a lot of tiredness; I don't have huge energy. But you can watch.

Say you go to take a nap on a retreat. The first time, the mind is really dull and tired. The body is tired. You can see you're trying to sit and you're just falling asleep. And it's not aversion—you really need to sleep. This will help refresh. So you go and take a nap. You wake up, and you can see the energy is a bit refreshed. It was helpful. You start walking and think, "Oh, that was helpful."

The next day, it's a little unclear. You're not quite sure. "Maybe it'll be good, though. Let me try it." And you're watching the mind that's trying to repeat what happened the day before. You can't really tell—do I need the rest or not? So you just watch that. You rest or you don't rest, whichever you do, and you keep noticing. Say you rest. You wake up. It was okay. You feel all right.

The next day, you're not really tired—you're just sick of sitting and walking. So you think, "Maybe I'll go take a nap." But here, see, we're not trying to fool ourselves. You're not saying you can't take a nap, but you're watching what's going on in the mind. So you watch. You go take a nap, but you're really seeing: it's wanting, it's aversion to what's going on. It's just "I want to be unconscious for a while. I'm sick of being aware." And you take the nap, and you wake up, and you're more logy, more out of it, more dull. And you go, "Okay. That's an interesting piece of information."

That's what we're doing—exploring it all. As soon as you set up "I can't do this" and we don't look anymore, we don't learn.

Or we do the thing we think we shouldn't do. "I'm not having seconds. I've had enough to eat. I'm not going back for seconds." And the next thing you know, you're going back for seconds.

So don't turn off the awareness. We do that a lot. "I'm doing the bad thing, so I'm not going to be aware of it because that makes me feel worse." No. Bring your awareness along with you. Pile that plate with food and notice the greed. Shovel that food down and notice how it feels. Notice the self-disgust. Notice the whole thing. Because none of it's personal.

This is really where we're learning, and it gets interesting. That shoveling the food down was as valid a moment as a moment in sitting where the breath is really refined and subtle and there's light and bliss. It's the awareness—that's what we're cultivating.

To end with two quotations, one from Sayadaw U Tejaniya: "As mindfulness is remembered more and more frequently, it gradually develops its own momentum. We come to appreciate moments of awareness more than we get lost in our entrancements with the reactions of mind to whatever's arising."

That's really it. We appreciate awareness more than we're entranced with our reactions. But this is a natural occurrence.

And Sayadaw U Pandita: "When mindfulness is persistently and repeatedly activated, wisdom arises. This is the natural effect of the momentum of mindfulness."

We don't create wisdom. It naturally arises through steady, accurate recognition. It's amazing. It's not an act of will. It happens naturally.

This is back to Sayadaw U Pandita: "There will be insight into the true nature of body and mind." This is really the natural law. This is the Dharma.

So just this moment, remember awareness. That's our practice.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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