Awareness Naturally Strengthens A Beautiful Mind/Heart

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 57:38

So I guess the overarching topic I want to talk about tonight could be called just action.

A lot of times there can be confusion or misunderstanding, or at least sometimes we can feel as though, as we've been practicing like this, cultivating awareness, we just keep saying whatever occurs, just being with it, being with it—really total radical non-interference, right? Which is amazing for truly understanding what's going on. But in the beginning, it can be confusing when people think about, well, when I'm in my life, what does that mean? Does this mean complete, radical—I mean, you don't do anything, right? It doesn't make sense, but it's something that sometimes people get confused about. They wonder, are we somehow abdicating engagement, choice, decision in life? Does living with awareness mean awareness doesn't care, and so I don't care about whatever's going on in life? And of course, that's not true. But I want to talk about how it works.

Another thing that sometimes comes up, quite frequently, is underneath that a sense of, well, doesn't it seem like anything we do—and quite a few people have said this, some here and on other retreats—that we're supposed to see that wanting is suffering and confusing, but it seems that anything I do is from wanting. And then we think, I want to be enlightened. If I didn't want to be enlightened, I wouldn't practice. If I didn't want to support my family, I wouldn't work. And some of that confusion comes from using the word "want" in a very global way. But I remember someone on a three-month retreat years ago said, "Without wanting and aversion, what would I do? Just sit in my room for the rest of my life?" I feel kind of sad at that, but that's the bottom line of what we're used to.

This Buddhist teaching is certainly not about becoming passive and quiescent in life. Even the Buddha, as a monastic renunciate, was an incredibly active, engaged human being, engaging with people all the time. So that's not what this is about. In fact, there's one sutta, just one line, where the Buddha says, "A wise person is known by their actions." Their actions. It is through the activities of one's life that one's wisdom, one's discernment shines. So that's really getting right to the point. The heart of how our wisdom manifests, he's saying, is in our actions—that's how we can tell.

So what does that mean? What does it mean when he's talking about actions in that way? That's more what I'm going to talk about.

You can see that awareness practice is not to abandon acts in the world—I mean, we couldn't—but to allow wisdom, when there's a moment of understanding before we act, that gives our mind, our

awareness, a moment of choice. Without awareness, it's like that person said: our knee-jerk reaction to so many situations is to respond with wanting or aversion. Or at least it's all about me, me, me. It comes from what's going to make me feel the best. That just seems normal. But as wisdom grows, and as there's more steady awareness, there's just some knowing of what's going on. When a situation presents, there's the potential to respond in a much more wise and appropriate way. So it's not about not responding, but about not responding out of this reactivity.

But what does the Buddha mean by action? When he says the actions of a wise person show who's wise, does it mean that every action we do has to be somehow amazing? Does it mean that every action is somehow only serving being? You can't just go to the store and buy some pretzels—everything has to have a huge meaning? And that's of course not it.

Action is very specific, the way the Buddha talks about it. He says, "Intention"—the word cetanā, volition—"I tell you, is action, kamma." The word kamma or karma literally translates as action. "Intention, I tell you, is action, is kamma. Intending, one does action by way of body, speech, and mind." So what he's saying is the heart of every action isn't in the movement, how it looks, or even the results, which is out of our control anyway, but it's the movement of mind, this cetanā, this volition, that's at the heart of every action. That's what determines—"determined" is kind of too strong a word—the wisdom, the wholesomeness, the unwholesomeness.

So intention, many of you know, but if you're new: it's just a little mental impulse, in the way the Buddha talks about it, that leads to action of even thought, speech, and body.

It's like a little movement in the mind. The energy gathers together and then leads to action. Without that intention, there wouldn't be movement, there wouldn't be speech, there wouldn't be action. And it's meant to be happening in every moment. So most of the time we don't notice it. And often when we do notice it, it's something that's very easily identified with as "me." But it's just another piece in a train of cause and effect.

A very simple example: we're sitting, an itching sensation arises in the body. There's a little unpleasant feeling, not quite noticed, a little bit of aversion, and there's the intention—oh, move and scratch it. It's just a whole chain of cause and effect going on. So that intention, then, is said to be—the quality of that intention, what makes it wholesome or unwholesome—is the qualities of the state of mind that's coming along with it, that's conditioning it. So that was pretty mild, barely any aversion, just a little scratching. But without intention, we wouldn't scratch. You can be sitting and there's an itch and the mind is very calm and there's awareness of the itch. And for whatever reason, aversion, reactivity doesn't come up. And there's no movement. There's no need to scratch. We're not saying you shouldn't scratch. I'm just saying that's how the cause and effect works.

We tend to focus on the actual action and the effect or result of it. And the Buddha is saying the whole heart of suffering and wholesomeness in actions is in this intention together with the qualities of mind.

You've probably heard these very well-known two stanzas from the very beginning of the Dhammapada, which is one of the texts in the canon, the suttas:

All experience is preceded by mind, is led by mind, is made by mind. Speak or act with an impure mind and suffering follows as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox that pulls it.

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.

That's a very well-known couplet in the Buddhist teaching. And I think it's really quite profound—it comes to the heart of why we see the power of really devoting ourselves to cultivating and trusting this moment-to-moment receptive awareness that's willing to see whatever's going on in the mind. Because the mind, moment by moment, is really the seed of all the things—all the speech and action and even thought, though that's harder to see—that we do in the world.

So it's not that looking at our mind is some kind of esoteric, removed activity that has nothing to do with, that's somehow divorced from, living a full, rich life, from becoming a more useful person in the world. It's the absolute heart of that. It's the best—if there's any other way to actually come to understand why we're doing what we're doing and actually have the chance to change that, it's because we're really seeing it at the source. You know, we have the idea, "I'm going to stop doing this." Forget it—you just decide "I'm going to stop," whatever it is, but we're not seeing the motivations that get it going. We're just kind of lost.

Or as Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said, "Actions are the servants of the mind." When you think of it that way, when the Buddha is saying someone's wisdom shines through their activities in the world, this is what he's talking about—the motivation, the intention, the quality of heart and mind that's giving rise to our actions.

Without mindfulness, of course, it's really easy to miss the motivation a lot of the time, isn't it? Even when we're looking for it, half the time we can't notice it because it all moves so fast. But just to begin to tune in and see—because you could say in actions, sometimes you could talk about three parts of it. There's the motivation, there's the result of the action, and there's the external circumstances, the situation. That's one way of talking about the elements of an action. And usually, as I said before, what we tend to really notice is the action, and we judge whether it's good or bad usually by the result—if we get the result we want. But that's not so much in our control.

I always use this example because I think we can all relate to it really easily. The same action could come from very different motivations. And it may or may not have a similar result in terms of what the Buddha is saying. Say you have someone you're close to and you have something you really, out of all the love in your heart, want to give them some feedback about. But it could be feedback that you actually know—

It's not just because you don't like it, but it's something they do and you really do care for them, and you can see that it's alienating other people. It's not simply that you don't like them personally. So you really, out of love, do want to tell them.

There are many different ways that could play out, aren't there? Part of the situation is that you wait. You're really aware of your motivation and you don't say it until you're genuinely feeling clear, feeling metta, not feeling aversion, truly caring for them. So that's one piece—the motivation. That's the best we can do.

And there's always a good chance we sort of think we are ready. "I'm going to wait till I really feel like that." But then something happens and they do the thing, and you're a little bit off balance. You get thrown over and suddenly blurt out, "You know, I've really been meaning to tell you this thing." It comes out completely different, and it impacts them completely differently.

Or consider the ambience. They come home from work and you're there, but you actually don't wait to see—maybe they've had a day from hell. You don't know because they're just looking fine. You think, "Okay, here we are together, have a little drink and let's just talk about stuff." But meanwhile, they're a mess inside. So you share this thing with all the love in your heart and it just crushes them, because you didn't have that information.

So on one hand, you're doing it out of real metta. But even if you do it out of real metta, and it's the right time and everything, it's still not in your control. The other person goes, "Oh, thank you so much. I've been waiting all my life for you to tell me this." That would be rare—but it's a possibility. That's the result we want, right? And you feel like, "Oh, this was a good action." Or they throw something at us and we think, "Well, you stupid jerk."

But anyway, you get a sense. The Buddha is saying that a great deal of the time, the result is out of our control. And this is because we don't know what's going on with the other person. Often we don't know the situational information. Sometimes we could find out and sometimes we can't. So that's a kind of ignorance—not that we're foolish, but simply that we don't have all the data. We don't have all the information. Everything's like that, you know? It's just not in our control.

So to learn to think about what's wise action and what's unwise action, and what we can actually be aware of—it comes home again to this: What's happening in this mind and heart? That's what awareness can see. And that really is the seed to our ongoing suffering or happiness. It keeps going; it's lawful. This whole practice is lawful.

So here's the good news, which somebody reminded me of today. They said I mentioned this a couple of years ago, and I thought at the time, "That's just a crock. That isn't true." So I don't care if you believe it or not—just keep looking. But it actually is true in my experience, and someday it may be in yours. Probably it already is, but I'll keep talking about it.

With steady awareness—the kind we're cultivating, which isn't "I should do this, I shouldn't do that," but just interest, seeing what's going on—we start to notice the motivations, the thoughts, and what they lead to. That steady awareness is the condition for wisdom to arise. And when wisdom recognizes what's

happening, it naturally feeds wholesome states of mind and heart.

It's really amazing. When I started to trust that—which is the way Sayadaw U Tejaniya talks, though he didn't make it up, he just emphasizes it—I started to realize: that's really true. I don't have to figure out the wisdom. I just put in the trust and the steady awareness.

The more wisdom recognizes craving and keeps on watching it and sees the suffering, the wisdom isn't feeding it. It's going, "Look at that, look at that," and at some point—not forever, but just for a moment—the craving is put down.

When wisdom sees the peace of no craving, or wisdom sees generosity, it strengthens it in a way. It's like leaning in. Just as when delusion is feeding anger the anger gets stronger, when wisdom is meeting the wholesome, it strengthens the wholesome. We feel how that feels, and the inclination of our mind and heart is to move towards that—because it's really more happiness-producing.

This is something the Buddha

This is something the Buddha really examined closely for himself. There's a well-known sutta where the Buddha is talking about the time before he was the Buddha, when he was still doing his practice. He was probably a little farther along than some of us at this point, but it's a sutta where he's talking about two kinds of thoughts.

He says, "As I remained heedful, ardent, and resolute, thinking filled with sensuality, filled with greed, arose in me."

So have some faith. He's about to be the Buddha. He's ardent, he's resolute, he's heedful, and thinking filled with sensual desire arose in him. Cut yourself a break.

But then, this is how he meets it, which is our lesson. He says, "I discerned, I saw thinking imbued with sensuality has arisen in me. And that it leads to my own affliction or the affliction of others or the affliction of both. It obstructs wisdom. It promotes vexation. It does not lead to unbinding, to release."

This isn't a judgment he's making. He's looking at it with discernment, with wisdom, and saying, "Oh, here's thinking with sensuality." He's watching what it does. He says it promotes vexation. It leads to his own affliction. It leads to the affliction of others. This is what happens. He's simply watching, and this is what he sees.

"As I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, it subsided."

Isn't that what we've been saying? As he noticed, it subsided. As he noticed that it leads to the affliction of others, to the affliction of both, as he noticed that it obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, and does not lead to release, it subsided. Whenever thinking filled with sensuality had arisen, thus it was simply abandoned.

Do you really hear that what he's saying is just what we've been doing? And then he did it again the same way, the exact same thing. Thinking filled with ill will arose in him. And then thinking filled with harmfulness arose in him. The exact same process—it led to affliction and vexation, and on recognizing that and paying attention, it subsided.

So whatever a person keeps pursuing with their thinking and pondering, whatever we think about frequently, that becomes the inclination of our awareness, of our consciousness. If a person keeps pursuing thinking filled with greed, then the mind is bent by that thinking imbued with greed. In other words, just as we say, it becomes a habit. If we keep in the habit of following thinking with ill will, then the mind gets in the habit of going in that direction of harmfulness. But this is good—he's simply seeing, watching how his own mind works.

And then, again, the other direction. "As I thus remained heedful, ardent, and resolute, thinking filled with renunciation arose in me."

Renunciation really means the releasing of clinging. That's what he means. He doesn't mean renunciation in terms of thinking about objects or activities that he should give up. He's talking about this as a quality of heart, a quality of mind—renunciation as the letting go.

So thinking filled with renunciation arose in him, and he discerned that thinking filled with renunciation had arisen. And that leads neither to his own affliction, nor to the affliction of others, nor to the affliction of both. It fosters discernment, it fosters wisdom, it strengthens wisdom. It promotes lack of vexation, and it leads to freedom.

"If I were to think and ponder in line with that renunciation, even for a night, even for a day, even for a day and a night, I do not envision any danger that would come from it."

So if you want to get lost in thought for a day and a night, get lost in thought of renunciation! He didn't see any danger that would come from it, except—and he's so practical—except that thinking and pondering a long time would tire the body. It's just totally practical. When the body is tired, the mind is disturbed.

And a disturbed mind is far from collectedness. So I steadied my mind right within, settled, unified, and concentrated it. Why is that? So it would not be disturbed.

He says the same thing about thinking filled with non-ill will, which we could call metta or friendliness, and the same thing for thinking filled with harmlessness, which moves us into compassion. He says exactly the same things about all of these. And the same principle: whatever one thinks and ponders upon frequently, that becomes the inclination of the mind.

So there's good news here—it isn't just that we're stuck with the kilesas. Even in steady awareness, really steady awareness, the wisdom that comes from that naturally works. In the first case, when you see the thinking filled with greed, for example, and wisdom mind is just watching, watching, watching, it

naturally releases in a moment. This really happens. And then it starts to become more natural for the thinking, the motivation of non-greed, of renunciation moving into generosity, to arise.

This is really what we mean when we talk about the lawfulness of the Dhamma—this is lawful. It's not necessarily an act of will. It's what happens when wisdom is steady, recognizing the suffering and delusory aspect of that craving. *Whoa, I don't need that.* And we put it down.

People have given little examples of this. It happens on retreat where you can notice it in small ways. Different people describe different experiences. We go somewhere we expect greed to come up, and just for some reason one day there's no greed. It wasn't an act of will, and it's like a surprise. *Where's the greed? It's not here now.* And that absence of greed is like a renunciation, and the person describing this felt it as a kind of calm, a kind of peace. Recognize that. That's a natural unfolding. That's the natural result of wisdom.

It's a little moment, but recognizing these actually helps. It's what gives us more verified confidence that this is actually happening. Don't just say, "Oh, this is some weird thing—there's no greed right now but it's coming back." Really notice: the wholesome motivation has arisen. And when we feel it, when we get familiar with it, it's actually more pleasant than greed.

So even though we do tend towards the pleasant, the Buddha uses that tendency. But we tend towards wholesome pleasant, and it's more pleasant than the unwholesome pleasant. It kind of is that way—until we get to where either one doesn't matter.

The same with aversion. People describe going into situations here where just being around people can trigger aversion or judgment or whatever, and then sometime you're waiting for it and it doesn't come. Just a sense of friendliness. Just a sense of, *Oh, okay, you too.* When that first would happen with me, I'd go, "Whose mind is this? This ain't my mind!" It's like, no, it isn't my mind. The other one wasn't my mind either. But just to notice. Don't think, "Oh, I must have been spaced out because I just missed the aversion. For sure it was there and I just missed it." No. Really feel where there's just a tender connectedness. And that's non-ill will.

In terms of non-harmfulness, one of the ways it really comes up for almost everybody on retreat is towards our own really difficult experience. Have you even had a moment where you've been struggling with some painful experience of body, emotion, mind, internally, and you're trying to be mindful, but basically there's that blame, there's that negativity, there's that whatever it is towards it? And at some moment, that shifts. What was it that Mark said? "Honey, it's okay"? Is that what he said? *Honey, it's okay.* But really, it's like, "Oh, oh yeah, it's like this now." That's the shift.

The harmfulness—because that digging at ourselves, that blaming ourselves, that judgment—that's really a kind of abusive mind towards ourselves. It's almost cruelty, you could say. And when that drops, and it's like, "Oh, it's like this now"—what's changed is that motivation in the heart-mind. It's shifted from

harmfulness to compassion. Compassion is the quality of awareness of heart-mind, of citta, that just totally meets the suffering without any negativity. Out of that is where compassion arises.

These aren't acts of personal will. This is where the trust really has to come. I can't decide, "Okay, from now on, no more greed in this situation."

You know how we try that. "Oh, I got it! Now, every time this really horrible emotion comes up, I'll just go, 'It's okay, honey.'" That works once, right? Then the next time: "It's okay, honey. It's okay... How come it isn't working?" Because we're back in the outer action and not noticing again the motivation.

And what do we have to do to fix it? Yes, yes. That's all. After we go through trying everything—"How do I get back the good motivation?"—oh, right. I discern that thinking imbued with harmfulness is arising right now. And that's already shifting things.

So in the course of our ongoing practice here, cultivating awareness, it really is the lawful way it works that these suffering habits of speech and action and thought do start to shift. Because we're spending many more moments not pondering them.

The two different ways of thinking that the Buddha talked about—greed and lust tend to switch to renunciation, generosity. Ill-will tends to switch to non-ill-will, or mettā. Harmfulness to harmlessness, or compassion, karuṇā.

I just want to talk a little bit about those three. They're not esoteric; we all know all of them. But just to mention them a little bit, to recognize how they arise in small ways through the practice.

As I say, awareness and wisdom in awareness function in both directions. They help the unwholesome to dissipate, and they strengthen the wholesome. It's actually an amazing arrangement. And we can trust it because it's not something we create.

I keep saying it's not an act of will because that's so hard for so many of us to either trust or believe. If it feels like I did it, that's the identification with the cetanā. And when something comes up and shifts in one go—wow, it just changed—it feels like magic. It feels like magic because in that moment there wasn't a sense of noticing or identifying with that sense of volition. It came just... instead of a volition to have an unwholesome thought, the volition to have a wholesome one came. Just out of the causes and conditions coming together. This is what makes it wholesome.

It's really helpful to understand that as the conditions are being set in motion, if we continue with steady awareness, wisdom is going to grow. It's not that we're just going to magically not have any more greed, hatred, and delusion. No, that's a long way down the road. But these little moments, like the ones I just mentioned—they're going to happen. You may not notice them, but you'll start to. It's inevitable. It's just the way nature works. The same as nature growing.

I was walking yesterday outside and it was still nice, and I was just thinking how in this last week you've

all seen how spring is just like... it's amazing, right? It's just sprung up. Every day the plants are a little bit higher and the buds are opening. It's amazing to see. And it's just lawful. It comes in its own time. We thought it should have come back in April, but it didn't. There's a whole long winter, like two months longer than you want it to be. And you can want and try and water and do whatever you want—those buds aren't going to come up. Those plants aren't going to come up.

There's nothing you can do about it. And at the right time, with all the conditions, they come up. You couldn't stop them if you wanted to. I suppose you could rip them all up, but you can't really stop them from growing. You can't make them grow faster. You can't make them grow slower. This is just what happens.

I loved that reflection yesterday. But then today came, and I thought, "Oh, that's perfect too." Because that's how it is with our minds. It isn't just better, better, better, better—everything's good. It's more like, "Wow, I'm really seeing something!" and then, big time, lost in the well of delusion. Whether it's from one moment to the next or one day to the next, that's just how it goes. Up and down, up and down, up and down.

So we have to really, again, like the Buddha said, discern: "Thinking imbued with ill will has arisen in my mind." Not "Oh no, forget it," beating your breast. Simply noticing. And then as I notice, it fades. And there's a moment of compassion towards myself. Having a long-range view, the patience to trust that this really does occur naturally.

As we get more familiar—or a lot more familiar—and trusting of these qualities of heart-mind, of renunciation, the opening up, the release of clinging, of mettā, friendliness, of compassion, then we can also consciously incline the heart, the mind, in the direction of renunciation, of generosity, of mettā, of compassion. As we learn to recognize the wholesome, it becomes an act of wisdom. There are times when you can actually choose in a more conscious way to move into the wholesome.

Let me give a simple example. Take renunciation. Food is a good place to play with this on retreats. Say you're walking into the dining room. Maybe that's a place where greed doesn't arise naturally, and you notice, "Okay, great, no greed." But another time you walk in—I'm just making this up—say you're heading towards the back table and you came in late, back where they put the desserts. There's one piece of cake left. You see it, you're not all crazed, but you see it and you'd like to have that piece of cake. Then you notice there are still more people behind you, and you think, "You know what? Yeah, I'd like to have it, but I can leave it. I don't need it. Let someone else have it."

A simple sense of renunciation, moving into generosity. And then you keep watching, and you really feel the happiness of watching someone else take that cake and eat it. It's actually a nicer happiness than shoveling that thing down your throat. It's gone in two minutes and then what? Did it make you that happy? Maybe. You had a hard day, maybe you needed it. But other days you can really say, "No, let someone else have it."

That's more like conscious intention, where we incline the mind and keep paying attention. In regular vernacular, we notice how it feels. You notice the quality of ease, of peace—that's how it would be for me; it might be different for you—or a kind of happiness at being able to let go. Then we may cling to it, whatever. But actually appreciating the happiness of wholesomeness isn't necessarily leading to clinging at all. So don't be afraid to let that kind of pleasantness, that kind of happiness, into awareness.

Don't think, "Oh no, that's just ego feeling happy. I'm so great, I'll let him have the cake." Don't do that to yourself—unless it actually is that. But if you really feel into it, I mean, it might be. But then it wouldn't actually feel happy. It wouldn't actually feel so good. There's a quality of genuineness we can recognize: "Wow, look at that. It makes me happy."

This is something we can actually contemplate. As I mentioned earlier, the Buddha said to contemplate your generosity because it actually brightens the heart and mind. It leads onward to more wholesomeness. It inclines the mind and heart in that direction, which is a lovely direction—one that doesn't lead to the affliction of oneself and doesn't lead to the affliction of others. Do you get a sense of what I mean? These are just small examples, but we can do this in big ways in our life or in small ways.

Sometimes the renunciation doesn't always move into generosity, but there's simply the simplicity of not needing to let yourself be run by the craving. Whatever it is becomes more simple. And again, recognizing renunciation, we're talking about a quality in the mind, in the heart, more than how it looks externally. One could live very simply and be filled with greed, not renouncing anything inwardly. It's probably harder to be really wealthy with many possessions and be truly simple—I wouldn't know—but I would say it's probably possible. Because it really is the quality in the heart and mind of non-clinging. Play with it. See how it feels.

Another thing we recognize from all of these—from non-clinging, generosity, friendliness, compassion, non-harming—is a certain feeling of connection. With generosity, for instance, you feel the other person receiving the cake, or whatever you offer. Feeling their sense of receiving and your sense of happiness creates this sense of not being separate. You don't have to get all mystical about it, but the generosity of one person is the happiness of another. The happiness of another is the happiness of the person who is generous. How do you separate it?

This brings to mind Archbishop Desmond Tutu from that wonderful book where he and the Dalai Lama have these long conversations about joy. He speaks about the concept we have at home in Africa, the concept of Ubuntu. Bhante Buddharakkhita, whom we teach with and who is from Uganda—I mentioned this in the fall—said, "Oh, I loved that you mentioned that, because that's absolutely what we have at home, this concept of Ubuntu."

Ubuntu says a person is a person through other persons. Ubuntu says when I have a small piece of bread, it is for my benefit that I share it with you, because after all, none of us came into the world on our own. And you realize that in a very real sense, we're meant for a profound complementarity. It is the nature of

things. You don't have to be a believer in anything. I could not speak as I am speaking without having learned it from other human beings. I learned to be a human being from other human beings. We belong in this delicate network. It is actually quite profound. Unfortunately, in our world, we tend not to recognize this connection until times of great disaster—you know how we respond then, we really want to help other people, we recognize it.

That's really what he's pointing to, this profound connection. What he's saying is just what the Buddha said. It's not some kind of woo-woo idea, but when we're not acting and seeing and viewing ourselves in the world through the lens of greed or hatred or self-interest, that's how the experience actually is. You can still tell I'm me and you're you—it's not that distinction disappears—but it's that sense of what I do affects you, what you do affects me. And this is onward leading, actually, to more wholesome states.

The Dalai Lama expresses something similar. He says that Buddhism essentially consists of two things: the view, which means an understanding of the interdependence of all things, and action, which can be loosely defined as nonviolence. But if one were to summarize the Buddha's teaching in one word, we would have to say that it is universal interdependence, of which nonviolence is a natural consequence.

Since we are all dependent on each other, and all other beings want to be happy and not suffer, just as I do, my personal happiness and suffering are inextricably linked with those of others. This nonviolence does not mean weakness or passivity. It is the deliberate choice of altruism in our thoughts and actions, so that it becomes inconceivable to knowingly harm others.

From that teaching, I want to emphasize the deliberate choice. The point I'm really trying to make through our practice here is that without awareness wisdom, we could make that choice, but we really couldn't follow up on it. Because when something comes hard and we're afraid and we don't even recognize it in the mind, we're going to act out of fear, we're going to act out of anger, we're going to act out of greed. The habits are just too strong.

But this is his way of saying it, or Bishop Tutu's way of saying it—this is the truth of how things are. When the kilesas aren't distorting our perception, the movement of non-clinging, of generosity, of friendliness, of compassion, are just going to be the natural response, in little ways. I'm not saying we should have the idea now that we have to go out and act out of compassion in every moment, because we're not going to be able to do it. But this is what's going to give us, hopefully, the trust to keep at least having the motivation to re-recognize awareness over and over and over. Trusting that the natural wisdom, seeing things as they are, goes in the direction of compassion, of metta, of non-clinging, of other wholesome states. Because that's the way it is. But we keep recommitting again and again to ourselves just to look and see.

To say a little about friendliness and compassion—we know what they are. Metta, non-ill will, non-hatred, friendliness. I think of metta or non-ill will as simple connection. Even when we use the word metta or loving-kindness, often people get the idea it's some real big emotion. It has to be this love, this

all-encompassing love where all beings are connected. You get the drift. But listen to Ajahn Sumedho's definition, talking about metta or non-ill will in regard to difficult people or situations: "It doesn't necessarily mean loving it. One is witnessing the unpleasantness in a situation, a thing, a person, or in oneself without creating anything around it. That's what I consider to be metta."

I actually love that. Something difficult, a pain in the knee, and one is witnessing that with awareness without creating anything around it. It's just like this. It's like that short quotation I read from Upasika Kee: what is, is. What is not, is not. You don't need to add anything extra. That's what Sumedho is saying about metta. Simple, complete connection. It's like this. Out of that arises acceptance, clear seeing, friendliness. Not making any aspect of ourselves or another person or experience the other, so to speak. Because really, in the light of the connectedness of attention, of awareness, there isn't the other—it's just what it is.

As the writer James Baldwin says, an enemy is someone whose story we have not heard. So a lot of our practice with awareness is just to hear the story of this knee pain. I don't mean making up a story—I mean just to hear the knee pain, the sadness, somebody else's pain, whatever it is that's going on. What is it? Without adding anything extra, but without needing to pull away.

And this is really what compassion is. The Dalai Lama—he's of course Mr. Compassion, so we always use his definitions—compassion is really when the heart-mind is meeting suffering fully, without resistance, without adding anything else. Compassion is that tenderness of heart that's meeting the suffering, in oneself, in another, no different.

What the Dalai Lama says is: how does compassion arise? By being with our own suffering. By being present, without adding anything extra, with our own suffering. From that, not needing to shrink back, not needing to resist or turn away from our own suffering, he says that naturally opens up and spreads out to empathy with other beings. We can really see this. We can really feel the natural interdependence that comes from opening, just being willing to be present with suffering. And so that's why it's so important on retreats, the difficult things that happen and all the stuff we go through, because that's where we're starting to see. What's the difference between all the fighting and "it's okay, honey"? Just the being with it.

How different is the experience when there's compassion and when there's aversion? Huge. And from someone else, you know, even when you try to do something to help someone who's suffering, but really the seed is our discomfort to be with. Because if someone's suffering, we're uncomfortable with it because we're uncomfortable with our own suffering.

So have you ever had someone really trying to help you, and they're trying to help you, but you can feel that the seed is their discomfort with your suffering? If you can feel that. I mean, if you've been sick, you maybe feel that. I've had, in the past—I'm fine now—a chronic disease, and everyone wanted to come and tell me, "Try this, try that, drink this, do that." You know, all the good intentions, and ten million things to

do, and now there's even more. There wasn't so much internet then. But you could really feel—and this wasn't a judgment—but I could really notice when someone, with really full intention, but there's a little pressure, a little pushing, and you could feel their dis-ease about it: "Do this, come on, fix this, we don't want to see you like this." Or someone else who'd been through similar things kind of goes, "Yeah, it's really hard, isn't it?" You feel the difference.

And that's not to put any of us down, but that's where the motivation really is what informs the connectedness. When there's compassion, we're able to be there. And a whole different way of relating opens up, our views drop away. Compassion and mettā both arise from just the simplicity of total contact, surrender into it. It's like this, without resistance. It can change everything.

So I'll tell this story—some of you have heard it—that I heard on the radio a couple years ago. Remember during the big refugee crisis in Europe? I mean, not that it's over, but when it was up in the news. And there was in Calais, in France, this really big refugee camp that was called The Jungle, that sounded really, really packed, really awful. Refugees from Afghanistan and Syria and all over North Africa, Southern Africa were packed into this place, basically trying to get to England, which didn't want them. So they're trying to sneak out and sneak on trucks and go under the channel and get to England. So they're in this camp and contained in the camp. Really, it's like a prison. They're not allowed out.

So I heard this reporter on the BBC went, visited the camp and talked to different people, and then he was just walking around in the city of Calais, and some of the people were having a big demonstration against having the jungle there, against all the people. So he's interviewing them, and they're all, you know, just the general "they shouldn't be here, whatever, get rid of them." But he found one woman, just kind of an average middle-aged, middle-class woman, very negative: "These people are horrible, they shouldn't be here," in the protests. And he said, "Well, have you actually gone there?" She said no.

So she was open enough that she was willing to go with him into the jungle and meet people. They did, and they went around and talked to people. She talked to some young men who had come and had to leave their family, and they're saying, "All I want is a job and an education. When I walk outside the camp just to try to go buy something, some of the truckers kind of beat me up, the police kind of beat me up, they throw me back in here, they won't let me leave." And she saw there were horrible conditions, and she thought, "Wow, I thought this was a free country. But maybe it's not." And she was, just from talking to people—that connection broke through her view, really strongly held view. And like all our views, we never have all the information. It broke through her views, the connection just with individual people. And she decided to go back and volunteer. She went back and became a volunteer there.

Sweet story. There are millions of sweet stories like that. Just one person doing one thing, not to be a great bodhisattva of the ages, but just because it's doing the obvious, as I heard one teacher say, when the connection is there, when the wholesome motivation is driving our actions.

So, we can't figure all out how our life should be and what we're going to do and how we're always going

to come from the right motivation. But one thing I want to say first is to recognize—part of what's changing, not part, it's a big part—the habits in the mind. When we say what we frequently think and ponder on, that becomes the habit. And you maybe think, "Well, I'm not thinking and pondering on compassion all that much. It comes up sometimes, but not all that much. I'm not pondering on non-greed a lot sometimes." But every moment of mindful awareness that's just not distorted by kilesa, where you just—it's like this.

Every one of those moments is a moment of cultivating wholesome intention. A moment of "it's like this." It's non-greed, it's non-hatred, it's non-delusion. And so it's actually shifting the habits of where our mind tends to dwell. We don't notice it because there's nothing special going on. You know, my toe hurts—it's like this. But if it's not aversion, that's actually strengthening the habit of wholesome attention, of non-ill will in the mind.

It's happening kind of like getting wet in the fog, where you don't really notice it, as Suzuki Roshi says. You go out in a rainstorm, you know you're soaking wet. But this is like you go out in a fog and you don't really notice it, but you get drenched to the bone through your clothes and you couldn't point to any moment it happened. This is the power of moment-to-moment awareness. This is what we're doing.

So just one last thing. I'll simply drop it in. I was saying, how do we keep it up? We do tend to want to go home. I used to go home and plan how I'm going to always act only from compassion and kindness from now on. How long would that last? I'd be beating myself up—at least, if not anyone else—within two hours for not being compassionate. You're not compassionate enough, I'd judge myself. Because that's coming from a "should" up here.

But using the understanding of moment-to-moment motivation as really being the heart of action—how do we keep it up? In the bigger picture, it's like when we want to be enlightened. "I want to be enlightened"—it may not be this thirst, but it's an aspiration, a direction to which we incline our activities. It's been so helpful for me, and someone brought it up in a group, but it really can be so helpful to take some time with yourself again and again. Get really quiet. Go into what is really important, most important to you in your life.

We go through life making all kinds of choices—every day, a million choices. And I don't mean you have to, every time you're going to the supermarket, have a meditation and say, "What's really important and what things should I get?" Not that. But one or two things.

So say, just to make it easy, say liberation from clinging—say that was what's really important to you. Not to set that as wanting, but to see, okay, that's really important. And then when I'm making smaller decisions in the moment, I can tune in: what are the conditions that will support that result? The conditions being bringing in awareness and not acting from greed, just seeing what's going on. We kind of use whatever our larger aspiration is as a beacon, a goalpost to tune into in bigger decisions. But it's not like we're always looking there. It brings us back here to help us orient when we're deciding things.

Because there's no way we can know what's going to happen, how things are going to turn out. We could plot our whole life for the next ten years, and all kinds of stuff is going to happen we never even thought about—good, bad, and indifferent. But what we do have, moment to moment, is the sincerity of our own motivations.

This is something the Dalai Lama says a lot. People ask him how, with the Chinese government, he can keep advocating nonviolence. How can he keep having compassion? And besides saying that maybe the Chinese government took his country but he's not going to let them take his heart and mind—that's one thing. But what he says again and again is, "I can only trust in the sincerity of my motivation. I can't know how my choices and actions are going to play out in the future." We can't know that. But all we can do is keep coming back and looking at and trusting the sincerity of our own motivation, just with honesty. And when we blow it in our mind, then we meet that again with the sincerity of awareness, with the sincerity of non-ill will. This is really our action in the world. Whatever way in the bigger picture we choose to show up, whatever it is we're doing, it's going to be informed by our motivation in the moment.

So that's just what I wanted to share tonight.

Oh, I just want to read one little haiku, which doesn't really fit in—but it does in a way. Because sometimes when we say awareness doesn't care, or even talking about the wholesome, there can still be that feeling in the back that somehow either life gets better and better, or we don't feel the poignancy, we don't feel sadness. But we do.

Everything still happens. People we love die, and things get hard. That isn't going to change. And the tenderness—it doesn't mean we don't feel it. We feel it more, but perhaps without aversion.

So just this haiku I love, from Issa, a Zen master a couple of centuries ago. He wrote it on the death of his young daughter. It simply goes:

This dewdrop world
is a dewdrop world,
and yet, and yet.

That's our koan. A dewdrop world that's always changing—and yet, and yet.

Thank you.

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