Three Levels of Wisdom

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 41:08

No need to try to understand or recognize more clearly, to make things different somehow, to do it correctly. Just getting more and more comfortable and at ease with this sense of light touch awareness, just receiving whatever's occurring. Gross, subtle, precise, vague, broad, seemingly many things occurring at one time—totally fine. Or naturally more precise. There's not a hierarchy.

And you'll see, as awareness naturally gets a bit more continuous, because each moment of remembering mindfulness in that moment of citta makes it more likely it arises in the next moment. It's lawful. So as we go along naturally, as Tejaniya says, as we keep practicing, right view gets more familiar and we clearly recognize when there's wrong view distorting or flavoring the awareness. We recognize—not that we're thinking about whether this is right or wrong, but with so-called wrong view, mistaken understanding (put it that way, rather than right or wrong), there'll be some sense of struggle, dissonance. It just feels like something isn't right.

And our tendency without awareness is to go into the object or into the story. We think that's what's not right. But now we start to recognize—our awareness actually recognizes, as impersonal—oh yeah, the attitude in the mind is actually out of sync with reality. Oh yeah, it's like that. Just noticing that, that's already wise view again.

As Tejaniya says, the object of awareness becomes more and more the mind, the quality of the mind, not the story. We're aware of the story, of course, but the interest is in the process, what's occurring in the mind. So as we go on, we begin to cultivate naturally a keen interest in the state of our mind, in the process. And just through the steadiness of willingness to remember awareness—we can't control how steady it is, but through the perseverance, the willingness to, with a light touch, recognize, oh yeah, here it is again—the recognition of process, of causes and effects rolling on without me being in charge, just naturally begins to be more obvious.

Natural wisdom, paññā, arises not from our personal doing. So this is the wise view that arises on the deepest level, just recognizing accurately: it's like this now. Of course that level of paññā, wisdom, also arises when the conditions are present, not because we wish it were so, which can be a relief. We can quit trying so hard and just be here for this moment.

The Buddha spoke of three levels of wisdom, and we can access the first two as skillful means.

The first level is simply heard wisdom. For instance, when we hear, "Oh, wise view—it's all nature, it isn't personal." That's something we've heard. And maybe it makes sense. It doesn't transform us in the

moment, but at times it can be a wise use of thought. When there's a recognition—awareness recognizes, whoa, really caught up in something now, a difficult emotion, a lot of aversion or craving, reacting to it, or just taking the whole thing really personally—awareness recognizes that. You can just drop in this heard wisdom, sutta maya paññā. All right, it's all just nature. Causes and conditions creating, coming together as it is right now. It's just a thought one can drop in, and then continue with awareness. Sometimes that can just help as a reminder. But if it leads to thinking, analyzing, not so helpful at that time—drop it.

And then the second level, cintā maya paññā, is a kind of intellectual understanding. Tejaniya likes to talk about it as the steady awareness gathering data. Not with a tally sheet, not taking notes, but just the steady awareness starts to recognize: maybe it is all nature. It starts to see some instances of conditions coming together and, oh, that's how the sadness comes up. Oh, that's how the conditions fall apart and sadness ends. Just gathering data, it starts to make more sense. It brings a little more confidence. Again, it's natural. It's not thinking about stuff. It's steady awareness gathering data.

This kind of understanding is not transformative in itself, but it really supports the confidence to keep showing up.

And the third level, of course—*bhāvanā-mayā-paññā*, insight-level wisdom—is what spontaneously occurs when suddenly the conditions come together and awareness is recognized. It really is all a natural process. I'm not doing anything here. That "aha" moment—that's the mental factor of *paññā*, real wisdom arising in that moment. Also arising when the conditions are appropriate, not through an act of personal effort. And in that moment, it is transformative. For that moment there's a real seeing and understanding. And that moment changes. Awareness notices, and the next moment arises.

Perhaps later—the next day, or two minutes later—the mind feels all reactive and caught up in something again. Our old habitual tendency might be to immediately chastise ourselves: "Ah, you understood it, now you've lost it." But now, rather, we can pop back up to that first level of wisdom, heard wisdom. "Oh my god, I lost it—oh yeah, it's all causes and conditions. It's a natural process." Let awareness just explore through being present how it's happening. And we're back in the second level, steady awareness gathering data.

So the moments of difficulty, the moments of seemingly lost insight, are equally valid moments for the arising of wisdom as a subtle, really interesting experience of impermanence, for example. Awareness doesn't care what the object is. It's not stained or damaged by difficult experience. It's not made better by a lovely experience. As soon as there's the remembering of awareness, it's available—whatever is occurring in this moment.

So just resting with awareness, attention into this moment's experience, not looking into the next moment, not needing to compare to the past moment. Just this.

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