Three Jobs of a Yogi

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 49:14

So tonight I'm hoping to just give a general overview, a sense of what's the purpose, how this works in a very general way. The idea is that it'll give you enough impetus to keep going for another day.

What I've always been inspired by, what got me interested in Buddhism in the first place and why I trusted the teachings of the Buddha from the beginning, is because it seems so practical. Everything he was teaching, everything he was sharing—and he said this many times—was to help us normal people understand why we suffer and why we don't need to. What we're doing based on our confused interpretations of life that causes us more suffering. So he's being very practical and direct, not trying to give us a whole philosophy—then you look at how many Buddhist texts there are, amazing, right? But if you just cut to the chase, cut to the practice, what he's really teaching, it can really be quite simple and basic. And amazingly, it's amazing really, how this simpleness of mindful awareness, steadily recognized throughout all our activities with a mind that's not caught up in reactivity and projection, how that can be so liberating. We call it the liberating simplicity of mindfulness. Thich Nhat Hanh called it the miracle of mindfulness. It's really quite amazing.

It's not that the mindfulness takes us to creating something different or into a different world. It took me years to suddenly recognize that when the Buddha woke up, he woke up into the same world that he was living in before. He didn't float on a cloud somewhere, and he was called the peaceful one. But he still had to deal with all the regular aspects of life that we all have to deal with, for forty-five years. So the difference wasn't that somehow everything got pleasant and all the unpleasant things went away. Not at all. But the difference was in the understanding, how he recognized and thus understood reality.

And so that's really what our practice is offering us—the opportunity to explore moment after moment after moment in a very simple way. And it's a shift in understanding that's not about thinking about it. We talk and talk about all the different techniques, but it's all about our own moment-to-moment experience. That's what shifts the confusion that we don't even know we're living in. That's the whole point. We don't even know. We wouldn't do this stuff on purpose, right? We wouldn't say, "Let me choose how to relate to reality in a way that's going to make me really much more tense than if I just let it be as it is."

We do what we do because we think it's the thing, whatever it is in the moment, that's going to bring us happiness or ease or bring peace to other people or be helpful in some way. And then when—not all the time, sometimes it is helpful—but then when it isn't and it blows up in our face, we go, "Well, somebody did something wrong. Probably not me, but somewhere in the world something's wrong. It shouldn't be happening like this." This is taking us in a whole different direction.

So what the Buddha saw is really that, and what he's speaking to, the seeds of suffering that arise in our own mind and heart. It's not that the Buddha's awakening could fix the world. And our practice and our sincere cultivation of wisdom and compassion, it does bring more understanding and peace and compassion to ourselves. We do respond in the world differently. That does affect people, but it's not going to fix the world. He couldn't end war between his own clans of his mother and father. But the suffering that he was pointing to is the confusion and the pain and the stress that's arising moment to moment—not every moment, but a lot of moments, more than we want—in our own mind and heart. And also to discover the peace, the ease, the compassion, the beautiful qualities that also arise right here, right at home, in our own mind and heart.

So he's offering us in this simple practice—the way we're offering here from Santa Eutasia Nia—giving us a tool that's very available to start to and to continue to explore, so that we start to understand: how are these seeds of suffering arising? How are they ceasing? They arise in a moment, they cease in a moment. How do the wholesome, beautiful qualities of compassion, of wisdom, of interest, of mindfulness, of collectedness of mind, of faith—how do those arise? What's the effect when there's wholesome in the mind? What's the effect when there's the suffering?

So it's not that we're trying to parse it out and write it on a piece of paper. It's handing us the tool to really explore and learn for ourselves. And when we see things accurately, as they really are—this is the miracle of mindfulness, as Thich Nhat Hanh called it. Because the accurate recognition, recognizing things as they truly are, is actually what allows for the wisdom that changes our response. It's really quite amazing. We don't have to figure it all out. Thank God, we're not doing such a good job. But we can trust—the more we're willing to trust, able to trust—the steady continuity of awareness that sets up the condition for this clear seeing.

In one of the lists of different kinds of insights, there's one that's quite a developed insight called yathābhūta ñāṇadassana, which means knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be.

That's a very deep, profound insight knowledge—as they have come to be in this moment.

So that's always available, right? As they've come to be in this moment. It's not an insight knowledge of going somewhere else. It's like, wow, this is how it really is right now. It doesn't seem like much, does it? But that is really what this practice is about.

One definition of Vipassana meditation—I think this is Sayadaw Tejaniya's definition of how we're offering the particular practice here, and I like it a lot: Vipassana meditation is experiencing the mind and body directly, from moment to moment, with the right understanding. At other times he calls these the three jobs of a yogi. You're all yogis. These are the only jobs you have here on the retreat: experiencing the mind and body directly from moment to moment—that's the perseverance, that's the continuity—with the right understanding. That's it. Of course, it's not so easy to do, but that's really a great definition of what we're doing, what we're learning here.

To talk about experiencing the mind and body directly, that's mindfulness. With the right understanding—I want to speak about both of those, just introducing them in a way. What does that mean?

As many of you have been doing different kinds of insight meditation for a long time, I'm sure most, if not all of you, are familiar with the basic idea of mindfulness: simply feeling, knowing what's happening in this moment. Sensation in the body, or as Alexis described, hearing a sound. We're talking about knowing with awareness that that's happening. But the simplicity of mindfulness without it being distorted by any kind of reactivity or assumption about what's happening—just letting this experience be totally present without adding anything extra—that's what's so tricky. Because so much of the time we don't know we're adding anything extra. We think that's just how it is. That sound is bad. It's driving me crazy. I'm going to lose it if that sound continues. And it's wrong—we're in a meditation center, it shouldn't be happening.

I go to sound a lot for examples because it's so clear it's happening outside of us, but it's exactly the same for a mood or a pain in the body or anything else. And also because when we're practicing in Asia, sound is the most incredible teaching tool you can imagine—it's inescapable, really loud. I think most of the meditation centers have some kind of clause written in that there should be construction going on no matter when. I don't think I've ever been in one when there wasn't some construction happening. And it should be as close to the meditation hall as possible. And it's always loud.

The first place I ever went, they had rebar—bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. And then they had an electric sander machine with this one high-pitched sound, and it would go on all day from seven in the morning until four in the afternoon. It was closer to where I was sitting than the back of the hall. After a couple of weeks, I finally thought I'd made peace with this high-pitched sound. And then, my God, they brought in a second one that had a different pitch. You just think you're going to lose it. And sometimes we do lose it—in the privacy of one's own hut. Anyway, that was a digression. That's why I use sound a lot.

So we often don't know that we're adding to our experience. This is what the steadiness of awareness brings in: the right understanding. As Alexis said yesterday, this operates at all levels, but one simple way to begin bringing in the idea of right understanding, wise understanding, is thinking of whatever's arising as simply nature, arising as the effect of causes—which is true for everything that's arising, internally and externally. As Mingyur Rinpoche talks about, recognizing the same interplay between cause and effect that conditions other things in the world is also shaping our own mind and experience. So think in terms of looking steadily at cause and effect and not taking it personally. Gardening—you plant a seed.

If you know what kind of seed it is, it's naturally going to grow into that particular plant. It won't grow into a different kind of plant. But it will also need the particular causes and conditions—the right soil, the right water, perhaps fertilizer, the right weather. And if any of those are too much or too little, it may not grow, or it may not grow well.

But if we get upset because we planted a daffodil bulb when we really wanted peonies, it doesn't make a

lot of sense. We tend not to do that. If the plant doesn't get enough water, we may not like it—we wanted the thing to grow—but we don't take it personally. It didn't rain. There's really nothing one could do about that. So we look at that series of cause and effect, and everything works like that. Everything.

As Mingyur Rinpoche says, we can look at how cause and effect conditions our own mind, and how that shapes our experience. We're not different from a plant in that way. He writes, "If we want to be happy, we must recognize what causes and conditions lead to well-being in our mind and heart, in our experience. Similarly, if we don't have a clear understanding of the conditions that create suffering, how can we possibly expect to free ourselves from it?"

This to me is just a very direct and simple explanation of what we're doing with our steady mindfulness practice. The quality of mindfulness with wise understanding is this quality of simple interest, not taking it personally, seeing what's arising and then seeing what happens next, and then what happens next. Not only when it's nice stuff—understanding what leads to more wholesome, beautiful qualities—but also when it's difficult. When sounds are coming and aversion is arising in my heart and mind, the invitation is not to stop paying attention, not to close down awareness at that time and think, "Well, I can't practice. This is too unpleasant and I can't really focus on my breath, so forget it until they stop."

That's what we tend to do—decide it's not working now. But as Mingyur Rinpoche says, if we don't understand the conditions that lead to suffering, how can we possibly expect to free ourselves from it? Without steady awareness paired with wise understanding, the assumption we make is that the sound is the cause of my suffering, or that my inability to concentrate because of that sound is the cause of my suffering. And we just go with that.

When we're seeing through the veil of assumption, of wanting, of aversion, we draw inaccurate conclusions. We don't know they're inaccurate. And we build our choices on that foundation, getting more and more confused or locked into a particular explanation. "It's impossible to really be present with that sound. It's impossible for me to be at peace while that sound is happening"—or this pain in the knee, or feeling sad, or whatever it is.

A simple way to describe nature: What's happening? All that's ever happening in our experience is the arising and passing of these six sense experiences. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing sensations in the body, and the whole mental realm. I know it's a lot—the mental realm is complicated. But just one after the other, happening all day long.

Did you have a moment today where none of those things were happening? Well, maybe there were moments you didn't notice they were happening. But that's all there is. And it's not in our control. I use sounds as an example because they're so obviously happening outside of our control—and yet we think we should be able to control them. Can you control what sensations arose in your body today? Or, God forbid, what thoughts arose? Could you control whether it stayed pleasant? Could you control whether mindfulness remained? Could you control whether you felt bored or sleepy or whatever?

But without steady awareness, without seeing cause and effect clearly, we often think we can control these things. Our habit is to get really glommed into the experience, into the object that's happening.

We don't quite recognize awareness itself. We just get into the experience, and then we like it or we don't like it. This is really the huge habit of our mind.

We think whatever's occurring—one of these six sense objects, which is one of the brilliant things the Buddha articulated—a sight comes, a sound comes. Even being aware of seeing or hearing, it's experienced just as a little tinge in our heart-mind: kind of pleasant, kind of unpleasant, kind of neither one, not making much of an impact. That's just part of how things are. Not bad, not good.

But we often don't notice that. As something gets more pleasant, or we like it, we say, "Of course we like it." And that becomes our position. Or it's unpleasant, and we don't like it, and it shouldn't be happening. We like it, say in meditation, and that means we're doing it right and it's going to get more and more like this. We don't like it, it's a little bit unpleasant, and that means something's wrong. And neutral, neither one—that means nothing's happening and something better ought to start happening, like soon.

Sometimes people find their minds even create a whole suffering story just to escape neutrality. Why? Because at least then I'm suffering. And ultimately, it's all about me.

This is so familiar we take it for granted. Without steady awareness, we really don't tend to notice that the sense of pleasantness or unpleasantness—how we define and describe the world—is really what gives meaning to the experience. And we just assume that's true.

So as I say, if it's unpleasant, we assume there's some problem with the experience. And often: what does that mean about me? Or what effect is it having on me? Or if it's something happening internally, we think *I'm* doing it. If it's mental, then we think that *is* me, and there's something wrong with me. This assessment is so intertwined with the experience that we often don't even notice it. We just think, "Yeah, sure—it hurts and it's bad and something's got to give here." Or, "Yeah, sure, this is pleasant, and this is how it's supposed to be. Finally I got it right, and it's going to stay this way and get more and more this way because now I'm doing it right."

We don't even notice that. It coheres into a story just like that. We think that's an accurate representation of what's happening, and then the whole thing builds up. And it's so familiar. We're so used to defining and explaining, giving meaning to each experience based partly on pleasantness and unpleasantness, and then based on what it means to *me*, that it just seems real. We don't even notice it. It's like gravity, right? We don't think about gravity very much through the day. You don't really think, "Good thing there's gravity—we're staying on our cushion." But it's part of what we can notice when our attention opens up. Such a familiar habit.

So to say something's unpleasant—I'll go back to that sound, just to keep it simple. Bringing in awareness, first recognizing awareness, not just hearing and "I don't like it" and this whole story. The difference

would be recognizing the hearing. A hearing. I can still hear it—it's like thirty years ago, burned in my brain. But that's just an experience; it doesn't have to mean anything else.

So there's the hearing, recognizing that hearing is arising. All the conditions for it are present; you don't have to think about it, it's happening. It's unpleasant. I can feel the quality of not liking it. That's another arising experience. That's a mental quality arising in my heart-mind—not liking it, aversion. That's a fine next object of awareness. It's the next object of awareness: an unpleasant vibration. Then there's irritation in the body. There's a kind of cringing back, a tightening. That's the next arising experience: unpleasant physical sensation.

Tension. "It shouldn't be like this." That's the next arising experience. Judging, not liking.

Do you see what I mean? Being present doesn't mean just being present with the lovely stuff. It means being present moment after moment, but without buying into the assumptions—watching how they're being created. Actually, that steady awareness with the wise understanding, "Oh, it's just this now, causes and conditions," that's what transforms everything. Of course aversion arises. I've spent my whole life cultivating aversion when unpleasant things happen that I don't want to have to be with. And I don't think I'm the only one.

As we said about awareness, every moment that awareness arises in the heart-mind, it's that much easier for it to arise in the next moment. But that doesn't just work with the wholesome, right? It works with whatever. The more you practice something, the more it arises, the more naturally it arises. So spend a long time with unpleasant physical experience, the cringing back, and aversion arises. Aversion is unpleasant in itself. The attention doesn't want to be there. And it just turns into a whole story, which is a way of trying to avoid. "Why are they doing this? I shouldn't have to deal with this. I need to move. I don't know..."

There's nothing wrong with thought. We're not trying to stop thought. We just want to bring awareness into that story, into that whole process. The steady perseverance of awareness feels that whole process and asks: Where is the suffering here? That's the question. Where is the suffering here? And when we're with that whole story, it becomes clear the suffering isn't the sound. The suffering isn't even the thought. The suffering is the identifying—taking that aversion as me and fighting with present moment experience.

When awareness recognizes, "Oh, aversion feels like this," there's a stepping into awareness rather than letting me be the aversion. It changes everything. This is really the miracle of mindfulness. It's not changing what's happening. But the shift from being the aversion, or hating the aversion, or being lost in that story—and that story could go on for hours—that shift is everything.

When we wake up from the story, pay attention. What was the effect? Is everything hunky-dory now? Do we feel free? Do we feel better? Usually we notice: it didn't do the job. The story just helped us not notice what was happening for a while, although it whipped everything up more.

The freedom is: "Oh, aversion feels like this." And the interest, the energy, is in the awareness. Awareness can include whatever's happening, but as I say, it's not stained by it. It's not about me. There's not that sense of personal suffering or personal needing something pleasant. That's the moment of intimation of freedom, of ease.

In that moment, all that *mishigas* is happening—the sound, and even the thoughts—"Oh, that's like a particular button: you push this button, these thoughts come out." Awareness notices it. And in that, just for that moment, resting in the awareness, there's ease, there's peace. And really, unbidden, often, rather than all this aversion, a moment of compassion comes up for those poor guys out there in that heat, working eight hours a day.

What's it like for them, holding on to that sander and having to run it eight hours a day? When I'm all caught up in identifying with the unpleasant, not recognizing it, it really is all about me. But in that moment of awareness—I'm not saying I *should* be compassionate—it opens up the world. It opens up the field. It's like, wow, those poor guys out there, it must be tough for them. And the next moment, the sound comes, it's still unpleasant. The sense of aversion might come, but awareness sees it. It just drops away that much sooner. It really is a kind of magic, just a simplicity of awareness.

And that's really the key. Where's the suffering now? What's happening now? When we say "with awareness, what's happening now?" you don't have to try and delineate it all, say it's a big, whole story. Like, what's happening now? "Oh, I really hate this feeling." Okay, start right there. Awareness notices hating this feeling. How does that feel? And with this quality of interest, awareness is just interested in what's happening now. It's not bringing in a judgment. Awareness isn't liking or disliking. It's like, "Ah, it feels like this." And that can be with anything.

This is where we really start learning to trust—to really trust being with the awareness rather than glommed into the object. Because that's our other habit: the habit of not noticing liking, disliking, pleasant, unpleasant, and using that to define everything. The other habit—and this can be a meditation habit too—is that there's an awareness of whatever object is arising: the breath, hearing, anger, boredom, just a sensation. We're quite aware of the object but not recognizing the mindfulness, not recognizing the awareness. So we get completely glommed into the object. You can get quite focused that way, and that's not a bad thing, but that's just one particular way of being in meditation, in awareness.

What we want to cultivate here is not just that, but a kind of widening out, a tuning in more and more to the awareness of any object. It's kind of like a little bit of foreground-background shift. It opens up the field. So this simple awareness, free from concept, free from trying to hold on to a particular object—we allow whatever's happening naturally to happen, and awareness can receive it. It's a whole different way of being, a kind of openness to the unknown in each moment. It brings a freshness, an interest.

Let me give an example that I like a lot, from somebody who really inspires me: Yo-Yo Ma, the very well-known cellist. Years ago, I saw a documentary about him on German television. Since I don't speak

much German, I didn't understand a lot of it. But this part I did understand, and he just so inspires me. To me, he embodies this sense of freshness and wonder that comes from steady attention without preconception. It opens up the world.

In this part of the documentary, he was in a helicopter, going with his million-dollar cello to Africa, to some small tribe somewhere in what looked like the Kalahari Desert—a small tribe in Africa—to compare music with them. He's really interested in music from all different kinds of traditions. So he gets out of the helicopter with this million-dollar cello, and he meets the man who is the storyteller, the one who holds the stories of the tribe and serves as its musician, who sings. And this man brought his instrument. His instrument was a long pole, and the body—the round thing that would make the sound—was really like a big old oil can. Then it had strings, like frets coming up, and a couple of strings rising from that. So it kind of looked like a big bass fiddle or something, but it was just this oil can and a couple of strings coming up from it.

And so he's playing on that, and he has Yo-Yo Ma playing some beautiful classical piece on his cello. And then Yo-Yo Ma is so fascinated by this man, by this instrument, by how he can play it, by what he can do with it, by the kind of music he's making. Totally different kind of music. And he's just so entranced with it. He says, "I could never play that." And he's asking him questions. And he said, "Let's trade instruments and try to learn how to play each other's instrument." So he's using the man's instrument, trying to play. He says, "I could never do it like you could." And he's so entranced. Present. Enthusiastic. This wasn't put on in some kind of way. So free from ideas or assumptions, just looking fresh in the moment without bringing in the whole backlog. Not abandoning who he is, but bringing in this openness.

I love that. I think of it so often because to me it's the perfect example of the freshness of present moment mindfulness with wise understanding. Not bringing in preconceptions, not bringing in "I'm going to like it, I'm not going to like it." Just listening freshly and seeing what arises and then being totally present for it.

That's what steadiness of awareness can bring to our life. It's really a shift, but it necessitates a willingness to be with the beautiful, a willingness to be with the difficult, a willingness to be with the neither beautiful nor difficult. In other words, what's happening now? It's like this in this moment, just like this, without bringing in anything extra. And naturally we begin to notice a wider, deeper aspect of life and connecting circumstances.

So another little example of how remembering awareness shifts the picture, in whatever we're doing, not just meditating. It was a couple of days ago, here, for me. I got up in the morning, and I was a couple of days out of jet lag, because I flew here from California. I forget what I had to do, but I had to get up and go somewhere, do something. And I was just feeling really tired. My body was feeling really tired, and my mind was dull. I wasn't in aversion, which is already something, but I was noticing: "Oh, I'm so tired. I have to do this. I'm so tired." I was just being aware of tiredness, tiredness.

And suddenly it occurred: Ah, awareness is like this. Tiredness is like this.

I don't know if you get the shift. I knew I was tired, but my attention was really in feeling tired. "I'm so tired." So even without adding aversion, that was like the whole world in a way—Carol's world then. The body's tired, the mind's tired, have to go to this, dragging along, that's how it is.

And then: Oh. The shift into "it's like this now." That's the shift into awareness of what's happening. Still tired, still all of it, but the energy, the interest. It's almost like identification, but it's not really. It's just that you stop identifying so much with the tiredness. Just, oh. Tiredness is like this. But the awareness—you just recognize it again. Basically, that's all it is: recognizing awareness.

It took that narrowness out. Suddenly, awareness recognizing tiredness also recognized: Ah, it's a lovely day. I looked out the windows—the sun and the snow. It was really quite lovely. It felt really fresh. What a nice day. And then the thought came up: Oh, I get to come and help teach a meditation retreat. It's really such an amazing thing in this world. That's why I'm here, to spend this time sharing the Dhamma. What could be better in the world? That really feels like something useful.

I wasn't just telling myself that. Those were other aspects of experience in that moment. The release from being just in the object of tiredness, tiredness, tiredness—just allowing awareness of tiredness, just recognizing awareness—it allows whatever else is occurring to also be known.

You'll see as we go through this retreat that we tend in our instructions not to emphasize focusing on one object. In moments we are, but we're not going to say come back to that object, or it's better if you're focusing on one thing. Sometimes it's on one object, but sometimes not. There's often a much more broad sense of awareness, where whatever's arising—the experience, the object—is touched lightly with awareness, and then another, and we might have a bigger picture. It's quite interesting.

So that's part of what we're doing. But then the habit of mind—that was an example, my little example, where the habit of my mind is, thank goodness, once in a while shifting into really recognizing awareness and resting there, rather than always jumping into "Carol's tired, Carol's tired, Carol's tired." Yes, Carol's tired, the body's tired, and this is happening, and this is happening, and awareness is knowing it all.

It's what I call a shift of refuge. We don't even know what refuge is when we're caught in "me, me, me" and what this means about me and our unrecognized assumptions. We don't even know it's refuge—looking for the pleasant, trying to make it better. Basically that is what we're all doing, but it just isn't working.

So we're learning to recognize and trust the simple, whereas it really doesn't seem like much of anything. That's why we have this time together. This refuge of getting interested in the process of continuous awareness rather than trying to have a particular thing happen.

As Sayadaw U Tejaniya says, steady awareness with right understanding is not to create something. We're not trying to create any kind of particular state or experience. It's not to reject what's happening. And as things happen or stop happening, we don't forget to notice them either. "Oh, I saw that one already, so

never mind"—no. That's what's arising now. We notice it. Whatever's occurring, we don't let go of being aware. We're not creating something, we're not rejecting something, but whatever's occurring, awareness recognizes it.

As this becomes more of a refuge, you'll see it pop up. You'll see it become accessible. We can remind ourselves in difficult times in life too.

This was something Anam Thubten, who's a lovely Tibetan teacher in the Bay Area, said. He was giving a talk, I think on Zoom, somewhere in the first year of the pandemic. He was talking about how now, just in the environment, in the world, we're easily overwhelmed. And it's only gotten worse now, if anything. We're easily pulled into the whirlpool of fear, of worry, of anger that is swirling in the world. Not always, but at times it can be easy to be pulled into it. It's a habit.

He said that in those times when we're pulled into that whirlpool, it just feels so natural—we lose touch with awareness. When we lose touch, we just forget about awareness and we lose touch with our innate dignity, with the access to love, with the access to compassion. We're pulled into that whirlpool of fear.

So we practice to re-recognize awareness. Our practice isn't going to end that whirlpool of fear and anger swirling in the world. But we practice to re-recognize awareness. And when we do, in a moment of recognizing awareness, we recognize that whirlpool, but then the access opens—it opens us up to natural compassion, to natural connectedness with beings in our heart, to love, to wisdom. And then that's what we can offer to the world.

So we practice to just re-recognize in any moment of the day, whatever is happening, just to re-recognize this simplicity of awareness.

It's come to be for me when I do a retreat, I think, "Oh, I have all this time now." It slips in that I want something to happen. But really, it's all this time, all these moments of the day to practice recognizing and trusting awareness, whatever's going on. I really think that's what we're doing here.

This is the third job of the yogi, Sayadaw U Tejaniya would say. Call it perseverance, or being present with what's happening in the mind and body from moment to moment. In some ways when we talk about right effort, in one way it's that quality we described this morning of just that simplicity—just feel your hands. That much effort. It's not striving, it's not tiring. And then again in the next moment.

And then again in the next moment. But it's still only one moment.

So when we talk about this simplicity of relaxed perseverance, or when we use the word "continuity"—one three-month retreat, we started calling it "the dreaded continuity." Because it's only just in a moment, but when our mind hears me say, "And now this moment, and now this moment, and now this moment," there's something in the mind that goes, "Oh my God, there's no way. Okay, this moment, all right, but oh, give me a break."

So what is happening in that moment? Projection or fear. There's only this moment. There's only this moment.

And so the third job of the yogi is that whatever is occurring through the day, however long it's been that we forgot to recognize awareness, as soon as we think about it, here it is again. Whatever we're doing.

The continuity is an essential piece. And that's why you'll see starting tomorrow—this is really thought out, the way Tejaniya teaches, but it's really helpful—you've probably noticed that tomorrow the schedule is more open, that we're not having so much sitting, walking, sitting, walking. This is not just because we felt like it, but it's not to make it less continuous. It actually gives you the opportunity to strengthen your experience, your understanding of what it means to recognize awareness—not limiting it to the sitting posture, not limiting it to the walking time.

Because consciously or unconsciously, when it's so structured in the day, doesn't it feel like we think, "Oh, thank God, okay, no structure. I can just go kick back"? So the downside of it is: no, you can kick back, but you have to be aware that you're kicking back. And that's not tiring, no matter what we're doing. Taking away the complete rigor of the schedule actually allows us to explore.

Sayadaw would say in terms of sitting—and it'll be talked about more tomorrow—but it's not like how long you sit means you're more aware. Sit and see with steady awareness, with this interest. What's supporting awareness? Maybe you're really tired and you've been sitting for fifteen minutes, but you can bring awareness to the tiredness, so you keep on sitting. Maybe you're really tired and you're falling on your face and you're trying to be aware of tiredness, but you're just feeding aversion, aversion, aversion. That's not so helpful. We want to cultivate awareness, not aversion.

So you might say it might be more useful to walk. Walking, you can be more aware. What brings in more awareness? What conditions support remembering awareness? That's what our job is.

So whether we're sitting or walking, notice why you sit. Notice when you get up. Why? Notice why you start walking. Notice when you stop walking. Why? Mindfulness, steady awareness, requires this real honesty with ourselves—because we're not judging. We just want to know why.

So we're walking and we're having a moment, really present, hearing and seeing. And then suddenly we're turning away and walking into the dining room. Now without awareness we might say, "I had enough and I'm tired and I need to have tea." With awareness we can see, "Oh, the image of tea arose. There was this feeling of wanting. There was this feeling of, 'Oh, how nice that'll be.' Pleasure, pleasure, pleasure, pleasure." And the next thing we knew, we're walking in to have tea. That doesn't make tea bad, but we want to know what's happening.

So this gives us the chance to do it. Whatever's going on in the day, that moment of noticing wanting as you have tea is just totally equal to a moment sitting on the cushion where you're really present, or walking.

Our friend and colleague Joseph Goldstein likes to talk about, in terms of retreat, the three aspects: the sitting meditation, the walking meditation, then all the rest—daily activities. Which, by the way, that's not just Tejaniya talking about that. When we would sit with Sayadaw U Pandita, it was very strict, a very strict schedule. But when you'd go into the interviews, he wanted to know what happened in the sitting.

He wanted to know what happened in the walking. And he wanted to know how your mindfulness was in daily activities.

So Joseph says he likes to present it as: reverse the priorities. The most important part of your practice is the daily activities—bringing in awareness when you're taking a shower, when you're eating, remembering awareness no matter how long it's been gone. Then the walking, then the sitting.

This is really it: we can take awareness with us anywhere we go. Appreciate it. Why? Because this is not a short-term thing where somehow we sit and sit and sit, we practice and practice for eight days, and then we have some kind of steady-state awareness that we're going to take with us.

Those of you who've done lots of retreats know very well—secretly—you keep thinking it's going to happen at some retreat. Secretly. Pretend you don't. I pretend I don't, but secretly, it was years before I'd end a retreat and realize, "Oh, it didn't happen." I was kidding myself. What "it" is, who knows—but something great that wasn't going to go away.

So that's not what we're doing. We're not pushing. But gradually, in the beginning, we have to remember, consciously remember, more and more frequently: "Oh yeah, am I aware? Am I aware?" But as we've said, that momentum starts to grow. It starts to get much more natural. We relax, we allow, and that becomes more and more our way of being.

In the beginning, it takes trust. It takes a willingness to remember—but only this moment. Perseverance, but in this moment; it doesn't have to be hard. Just the willingness to do that again and not expect a special moment. Any moment, because awareness doesn't care. Awareness of a boring moment is just as clean and freeing and present as awareness of a beautiful state of bliss.

I'll end with this from Sayadaw Tejaniya: "As mindfulness is remembered more and more frequently, gradually it develops its own momentum. We come to appreciate moments of awareness more than we appreciate our entrancements with the reactions of mind or whatever is arising."

That's really the momentum that builds—we appreciate the moments of awareness more than we get involved in the entrancements.

Thank you for your kind attention.

May the beneficial energy of our practice together, of our committing to the Dhamma, may that beneficial energy be shared with all beings everywhere as a support for their awakening from confusion and suffering.

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