The Two Darts

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 55:49

I want to pick up tonight on what Greg was talking about last night, this idea of how our spiritual life is sort of against the stream of everyday conditioned experience—what we learn and how we're conditioned in the world. But we also see how it's, as the Buddha said, like swimming upstream against our own internal conditioning, our own ways of seeing the world. It's not all about the external. In fact, the whole path is really about purifying the confused ideas and confused perceptions and suffering in our own heart and mind.

This swimming upstream—what we really start to run into here on retreat, and people already are, is that it starts to get a little bit of a rub, or a lot of a rub. It's really starting to see, and this is helpful, this is good, that the habits of mind we're so familiar with, so comfortable with, so miserable with—but we're comfortable with them. That's who we are, right? Don't tell me to give it up, even though it's completely making me miserable.

The steadiness of non-biased awareness allows us—and the steadiness is key—to start to see what's actually going on on a more moment-to-moment level. We start to see how we're swimming upstream against assumptions we had, or unconscious ways of being, habits of our heart and mind. Big habits. Already today, people have written notes or mentioned in groups, and it's normal, it's part of it. You're feeling the rub, but the awareness mind, the wisdom mind, is also seeing: "Oh, this habit of mine."

Let's take judgment, which a minimum of fifty percent of people experience. We're seeing the habit of judgment or the habit of something else. You kind of knew it was there, but it's coming up all over the place. People have been saying they're seeing these habits of mind, seeing how the mind is throwing out judgment about all kinds of things that really don't need to be judged—and they're suffering from that.

There can be a spark, and people have expressed this, a spark of appreciating seeing it. You recognize: look at how there's aversion, how you start judging and judging everything, and then you're judging yourself in an infinite regression. You see, "Oh, this is so unnecessary. This is so much suffering." There can be a feeling of—well, maybe happiness is going too far right at the beginning of seeing it—but a sense of, "This is good to see. I'm glad to see this." Can anybody relate to that?

That's an aspect of insight, a kind of intellectual insight. But we really mean it: "I'm glad to see this, and I see this is useful, so I'll stop doing it." This is the next part. We mean that. We want to do that. We have no more use for this.

And what happens generally? It can be amazing. It keeps going and gets stronger. It starts showing up

everywhere. It feels like we've walked into a giant waterfall of judgment and there's no way out. It's bigger than it ever was before. Am I exaggerating? At moments it's like that—coming up more clearly, but it can be such a mystery at the beginning, before we have the steady awareness to see what's happening, to understand why. Why does this continue? We've seen it clearly, we really understand this isn't serving a purpose, we don't want to do it—and it keeps happening more and more. We're just sucked right back down.

And not just on retreat, but in life. It doesn't end there. This isn't the end point. This is a beginning point. This is where I think it's like, wow, what's really going on? What's happening here?

So I want to start from that place and talk a bit about picking up again on what Greg said about field work.

This is what our steady, mindful awareness reveals—being with experience as it's occurring, not as we're trying to control and fix it, which is what we usually do. "I don't want to do this anymore, so I'll push it away, and then we'll pretend it's not happening." And then, as the Buddha said, it's like holding a snake by the tail—it flips around and bites us again. Because we don't really understand why it's happening. We don't really understand. We just see that this is a stupid thing to keep doing. It's like knocking ourselves on the head repeatedly without knowing why.

So the steady awareness—that's why the steadiness throughout the day, which we're cultivating, is so key. The non-judging awareness and the steadiness allow us to see this fieldwork of what's really going on.

Tonight I want to talk about just one aspect. We've mentioned briefly the vedana, the feeling tone—pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. I want to re-remind most of us, and perhaps introduce it for the first time to some of you, as a way of thinking about and then hopefully bringing attention to our experience to see what's happening.

This is one way, again picking up on what Greg offered, of how the Buddha described life, or our moment-to-moment experience. Greg said it several times: the six different sense experiences happen in contact. Contact is described specifically as a moment. And actually, I love this about the way the Buddha describes things, and the way I see in my experience—it's always only moment to moment. We extend it in our mind forever, but it's just what's happening in this moment. That's always workable. It's bearable. This moment projected ad infinitum into the future is unbearable—that thought. But in this moment? Okay, what's happening?

Contact is a moment where, for example with seeing, there's a visual object, the eye door is working, and there's consciousness. Those three things come together, and there's a moment of seeing. That's just what's going on all day, as Greg said: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, thinking, thinking, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, thinking, thinking. A lot faster than that, going on all day. That's it.

Sometimes when you're really quiet and things are happening, stuff can be seen occurring so quickly that

people go, "Oh my God, it's so exhausting!" But it's exhausting when we try to control or stop or have an opinion about each thing. That is exhausting. And that's the next piece we really want to get to, because that's what our habit of mind mostly is.

So I said it's happening fast, so many contacts occurring. The next thing the Buddha talked about is vedana—that with every sense contact, each one, there's a mental experience. We experience each contact in our mind. There's a seeing, and it has a slightly pleasant tinge, or unpleasant tinge, or neutral. That's not inherent to the object. That's something occurring in our own mind at that moment. For someone else at that same moment, the sight of a similar object is a different experience. You might have a sense of unpleasant, they might have a sense of pleasant—perception and all of that. Or neutral, where we don't even notice.

This is just a very quick mental experience that the Buddha said happens with each sense contact. Ever since I first learned about this, it's one of the first things that helped me think, "God, this guy was some kind of amazing genius. How did he come up with this?" Because it's so quick! All of those contacts, how fast I described them—each of them with a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral experience. And a lot of it just goes by. We don't have to make anything of it.

But how much of the time does our mind make something of it? We like it, we don't like it, as Greg said. The pleasant, unpleasant, or neutrality goes unnoticed because it's so quick and subtle. Right away, most of the time, what happens is the mind goes into preference. We like it if it's pleasant, we don't like it if it's unpleasant. That's pretty universal.

And because we don't notice that it's just a reaction of mind, a habit—it's pleasant so we like it, we like it so we want it, we try to get more, we try to hold on, unpleasant the reverse—something deeper happens. Even more than that, this reaction comes to shape the very sense of whether something is pleasant or not. Look in your own life.

Don't believe anything I say or we say—this is just an invitation to look. So much of the way we consciously or unconsciously assess experience or life or anything is whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. And if it's unpleasant, there's something wrong. Basically, if you follow it through, the idea is that somehow unpleasant stuff or unwanted stuff—as I think Pema Chödrön likes to say—shouldn't be happening. It's a mistake. The pleasant, of course, is what we want.

And not only do we like it, but we assess ourselves by pleasant things or skillful things. When something's unpleasant or we have a really negative thought, and we don't notice the unpleasantness, we jump right on: "That's bad. I'm bad." It goes into a whole downward spiral.

So it's not just that in the moment we get into clinging or aversion—it is that. But without recognizing this kind of pattern happening, it comes to be the way we evaluate ourselves, the way we evaluate the world, the way we give meaning to ourselves. And it also really is strengthening the sense of me. It's all about

how is it affecting me? How do I evaluate me? And then how do I evaluate others?

Any discontent, any suffering—this always arises from unpleasant. And a lot of the time, the sense contact is a thought, an idea that's unpleasant. A lot of our confusion and going down the rabbit hole of negativity and self-judgment is from thoughts that are unpleasant. And then we judge them as bad and wrong. And because it's all about me, I'm bad and wrong and hopeless and useless, and I should only have pleasant, good thoughts.

Of course, even talking Buddha Dharma encourages this split, right? We talk about wholesome and unwholesome. And as it happens, wholesome states of mind tend to be more pleasant than unwholesome states of mind—that is true. But we don't have to add on top of it, you know, the judgments. But we do. So we're starting to see how we do that.

Ajahn Buddhadasa—I think maybe Greg mentioned him—was a Thai forest monk and teacher from the last century, very scholarly. I spent some time at his monastery a long time ago. And he said once, looking, if you start to notice this going for the pleasant, going for the pleasant, going for the pleasant, start paying attention. He said ninety-five percent of everything you do is for the sake of pleasant feeling. That may not be the right amount, but look and see. When we make a decision, when we decide what to do, when you decide where to sit in the dining room, when you decide what kind of tea to have, when you decide what to eat or not eat at lunch.

You don't have to add a "bad" to this. You don't have to add a judgment to this, because then we can't see clearly. It's like just seeing cause and effect. How does this work? It's fascinating. Of course we prefer pleasant if we could have it—that's not the problem. It's the attachment.

Some of the main effects of this, unexamined: it keeps our attention, our sense of what's real, of what's going on, always kind of looking outward. Even when it's about our own inner experience, we're looking outward to what's making me feel bad or what's making me feel good. We're always kind of leaning into, as Gregory describes, that leaning into the next pleasant experience, leaning into the next experience to make this one okay. It keeps it going, keeps it going, but it keeps the focus narrow. Me and other, me and good, me and bad—how can I control experience to get it the way I want it to be? And we can get really involved in that.

It doesn't mean we can't make choices, but when we're really thinking that if we get it all copacetic, all pleasant—even though we know everything's changing—don't we keep doing that anyway? We think, "Well, this is good now. Oh, it changed, but this next one will be a little better." There's a lovely Tibetan Buddhist phrase: the definition of samsara is the urge to correct. We just always could make it a little bit better. And since nothing's steady state, that never comes to an end.

Also, because of this narrowness of focus, it really...

It strengthens the sense of me and other, right? Because we're always leaning forward or leaning away. It

strengthens that sense of me and other. And again, it's this narrowness of perception, narrowness of the world.

And when that's just for a moment dropped—and that happens in or out of retreat, moments when there's just a minute of awareness, mindfulness, of whatever, pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, it doesn't matter—but just being. Let's say you're sitting, drinking your tea, and you're just there, tasting the tea, not making any story, not "me." And there's a sense of... you don't sit there thinking "there's a sense of vastness," but there's not the sense of narrowness. There's just the sense of—anything I say is too restrictive. Me and the world, it's like, this is just... it's all this. This is what's happening now. Everything is like this now. Not "I'm like this and mommy this and this has to go and this has to..." This is it for now. And it's just this sense of ease and peace.

On retreat—I know my first retreats that I would do, I didn't really understand what was happening at all, but I could remember moments. I'd leave the retreat and I'd remember a moment. I remember one retreat in particular, I thought, that was like the most... I was sitting somewhere, and that's what happened. It was just so clear, and everything was beautiful. I remember that blue lizard. It was the most beautiful blue lizard, and there's something about that place in California and that lizard that was so perfect.

But it's nothing to do with that. It's to do with a moment of just pure, awake presence where the heart, mind, energy is all collected and present without wanting or aversion or separation. It's like, ah. It's just perfect in this moment because there's nothing in excess and nothing lacking—because you're not thinking in those terms.

But even so, our habit of attributing everything to the environment or to others or to experience—we often miss that that's happening in this moment of conscious awareness. We think it's the externals, right? So that's something that we lose by being so focused in.

And then we just... we can be so like, it's like we're trapped. We're just tossed between pleasure and pain, pleasure and pain, our whole life, like ping-ponging back and forth. Does that make sense?

I have this one memory that to me personifies this being tossed back and forth between pleasure and pain. It makes me laugh. I was watching the Super Bowl one time. So I ask in advance the forgiveness of anyone here who's a football fan, because I'm not going to get any of the details correct at all. I don't remember what year. It was the Super Bowl. I was with friends who were totally into it. But I remember just this at the end.

So I know the Patriots were playing, and Tom Brady was the quarterback. I can't remember who the other team was. And this was right at the end. So again, I ask your forgiveness—I'm totally not a football fan. But it was like the last two or three minutes, something like that. And the Patriots, something happened. They didn't have the ball. The other team had the ball because my memory is Tom Brady sitting on the bench. And the other team did something where they suddenly got a touchdown or whatever, so they were ahead

and there's like hardly any time left. And the camera panned to Tom Brady, and he was like the picture of total dejection. Total. I mean, physical, mental. It was funny because, you know, I don't know him. It was just funny to see how total—total dejection, like his whole life in that moment of losing.

But then because they'd made a goal, the Patriots got the ball again. I can't, again, I totally don't remember what they did. But whatever they did, it was some amazing thing, and in two minutes they made some points and they won. So it was totally, you know, amazing if that could happen. So then they panned to Tom Brady again. And he's like—he wasn't just kind of, "Oh, isn't this nice?" He was ecstatic. He's leaping around.

He's grinning. Between those two minutes, his whole life encapsulated in each of those moments. I always keep remembering that because it seems to me that's what we do. That's what we do. And it doesn't end with the Super Bowl. It's everything—it's lunch, it's sleeping, it's everything. And as long as we're trapped in that, that's what we are. We're trapped.

So our process here, bringing in steady awareness, what it's doing is fieldwork to see what's actually feeding this habit. One of the meanings of the word Dharma, or Dhamma, is the law—the law of how things are. And so dependent origination, one of the key teachings of the Buddha, shows that all things happen lawfully. In other words, if you plant a seed, it's lawful. If it's an apple seed, you're going to get an apple tree, however much you might pray for mangoes. That's what it is. The cause leads to a lawful effect. And the same thing's going on in our bodies, in our minds, in the habits of our mind.

So we can start to look with the steadiness of awareness and see what the seeds of dukkha, the seeds of suffering and confusion, are in our moment-to-moment experience. What conditions lead us to getting more caught? What conditions lead us to seeing more clearly? Because wisdom—recognizing accurately the quality of wisdom that arises in the mind—really does see in a moment: "Oh, this holding on isn't really serving me." And instead of willpower, wisdom just puts it down for a moment. You'll only experience just a moment: "Oh, I don't need to do that." And it's different from hating it or pushing it away. "Oh, I don't need to do that." That's a moment of wisdom, clear seeing. And more and more of those moments are what really start to give us access to peace and ease.

This is where we talk about the key role of vedana, the feeling tone. This is why the Buddha made it the second of the four establishments of mindfulness. He's breaking out all of our experience: established mindfulness of body, established mindfulness with vedana when it's arising, established mindfulness with citta—all the qualities of mental states—and then with the dhamma, with how different things in the mind function. He broke it out, in my opinion, because he highlighted it so much. Understanding vedana through clear seeing is such a key to helping us release these mindless habits we have, where we don't realize how we got there because we didn't recognize the vedana.

I want to talk about this from one of the teachings of the Buddha, one of his suttas, one of his discourses, where he describes this. I have always really liked it. Many of you know it—it's called the Dart, or the

Arrow. I like it for two reasons. One, it starts out by saying: what's the difference between an awakened or enlightened person and a regular person? So he gets our attention. He's going to tell us what the difference is. That's useful.

The second thing is, in this sutta he's really explaining how the habit gets reinforced. The seed of suffering is always greed, hatred, and confusion—these qualities in the mind called the three roots of confusion, of suffering, that the Buddha always points to. And we can feel when they're present. We get confused and we suffer. And they're habits. It's not that we're willfully wanting to do this—they're habits. We get sucked in, partly from what I've been describing.

So he's describing here how these habits get reinforced. I just find it so practical. I want to share it a bit and talk about what the sutta says. That's how he starts it: what's the difference between an awakened person and a regular person? He calls this regular person an "untaught worldling," but I always have trouble saying that.

I'm just going to say we normal folks experience pleasant feeling tone, we experience unpleasant feeling tone, and we experience neutral ones. The well-taught noble disciple, the awakened person, likewise experiences pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feeling tones.

So just in case, lurking in the back of the mind, hidden, is the unseen belief that we really think we're going to get rid of all the unpleasant experience in life if we get awakened—forget it. Hang it up. That belief is keeping us spinning. That's just another form of samsara, keeping us spinning toward the pleasant. And then every time there's something unpleasant and we're lost, we think, "Oh God, I'll never be enlightened because this unpleasant thing is happening." No. Awakened and unawakened alike experience all three.

So what's the difference? A regular person, when they are touched by painful or unpleasant bodily feelings—say you're having an unpleasant pain in your body—that person worries and grieves. He laments, beats his breast, weeps, and is distraught. You get the drift. Your knee hurts. "Oh my god, my knee! The ambulance! And this, and what are they doing, and we're sitting so long..." And if you're lucky, it stops there.

So he thus experiences two kinds of feelings, two feeling tones: the bodily unpleasant and the mental unpleasant. The Buddha says it's as if you were hit with a dart, and then on the heels of that first strike, you're hit by a second dart. Really, it's more that we hit ourselves with the second dart. The second arrow—hence the name of the sutta.

So that person will experience two types of unpleasant feeling. You get a sense of this, right? It really makes sense. And it may not just be a bodily unpleasant feeling. Often, I'd say even more when we're on retreat, it's a mental unpleasant feeling—like judgment, for example. And then we hit ourselves with another dart, an endless regression on how bad that is, how bad we are, why that person shouldn't be

doing whatever they're doing, in or out.

So this is where it gets interesting. Being touched by that painful, unpleasant feeling, the regular person resists it and resents it. Okay, makes sense so far, right? We resist it, we resent it. So then in one who so resists and resents the unpleasant feeling, the underlying tendency of resistance against painful feeling comes to underlie the mind. In other words, it becomes a habit, a tendency. When there's unpleasant, the habit, the tendency is that right away resistance and resentment come up. Can you relate to that? Normally, yes, that's what happens. It becomes a habit.

And then under the impact of that painful feeling and the resentment, the person proceeds to enjoy or to look for some kind of sense pleasure, some kind of sense happiness. And why? Because a regular worldling does not know of any other escape from painful feelings except the enjoyment of sense happiness.

I find that so real and so poignant. He's not saying sense pleasure is bad. He's just describing the habit of resistance to unpleasant feelings. We just think, "Of course there's resistance." We don't even notice that because we didn't notice the unpleasant to begin with. And the next thing the mind does is go look for some sense happiness—whether it's looking for a pleasant fantasy if you're stuck sitting on the cushion and there's nowhere else to go, or going to have a cup of tea, or going to the fridge for ice cream. Out in our life we can get ourselves into a whole lot more complicated trouble going for some sense happiness because we're not seeing clearly.

And so then the underlying tendency, the underlying habit to lust, to crave for pleasant feelings, comes to underlie the mind. You get a sense of this, right? It's really happening like this, again and again and again. It seems so real. The person who does not understand, who does not know according to facts—just according to the way things actually are—the arising and ending of these feelings, or who doesn't really understand the gratification, the danger, and the escape connected with these feelings, in one who doesn't understand that, the underlying tendency to ignorance and confusion in relation to neutral feelings comes up, and that becomes the third habit.

So I just want to say a bit about these things, but it's really, really interesting.

Seeing how quickly it becomes a habit with unpleasant to lust for pleasant, how both of those—resistance and craving pleasant—are such deep habits that underlie the mind and how frequently they're reinforced. This is the thing: the lawfulness is that a habit is something you keep practicing.

Seeing it once, in that moment of really seeing—"Oh, look, I'm craving for thirds at lunch because I'm just not feeling very good. Oh, I don't need to do that. I can just be with not feeling fine"—and there's a peace that comes with that. And that's a moment of freedom. But that's a moment. And that moment doesn't go on for the whole rest of our life. How many more moments, not only here but in our life, are we practicing from these habits?

This isn't to be demoralizing. This is to be realistic, so you don't get too discouraged when we really see clearly something isn't helpful and five minutes later the mind is doing it again—because it's been practicing it for however old you are. It's been practicing it. And so just to be realistic: actually the power of clear seeing is stronger. The power of wisdom is stronger. But one clear seeing isn't enough to wipe out a whole lifetime of habit. That's why we practice. We're just practicing awareness.

So Chokyi Nyima, who's a Tibetan Lama—he's actually the brother of Tsoknyi Rinpoche and Mingyur Rinpoche—he's talking about renunciation or weariness with samsara. But what he means by weariness is just getting weary of this endless, endless, back and forth, back and forth—pleasant, unpleasant. And he said: watch your mind, watch the fickleness of the mind, how easily it is influenced just by a simple pleasant or unpleasant sight or sound or smell or thought into an immediate mood. And that immediate mood goes into a whole world of story.

Can you notice that? Notice that in the sitting or in the walking. I think when I was giving the walking instructions the other day, I was alluding to that. You can be walking, and there's just a beautiful sight. "Ah, the spring. It's so beautiful." It's pleasant. And it goes into a whole world. Three minutes later, someone cuts across your path really close—and not even too close, you didn't have to put on the brakes—but they intruded on the beauty of the nature and the oneness of experience that was completely ridiculous, and boom, unpleasant, boom, you're off into a whole other world. And then you know where that goes five minutes later: "I am hopeless. I am useless. How can I think I can practice with my mind?" Endless, endless, endless.

And when we start to notice vedanā, it's a trip. As Chokyi Nyima says, how fickle the mind is. Pleasant—boom, into a whole world. Unpleasant—boom, into a whole world. Neutral—we're completely spaced out. Let's go look for something to happen. It's neutral, right?

And watch your mind. When I first saw this, it was like, "Oh, my God." The mind will cook up an unpleasant fantasy rather than be neutral. Something that never happened, but it might happen. It might happen next year, and this person might say—I mean, you're really pissed off. And why?

What was the point of that? I'll tell you the point of that. I got to feel really pissed off. I got really strengthened.

When it's neutral and it's just like this, when you're really aware in that moment, there's that sense of it's all here, the vastness, there's no problem. But when it's neutral and we're not really quite aware, not aware of the neutrality, it's kind of, well, what's happening? I didn't come here for nothing to happen. Let's get some juice going. Let's have something happening. Let's go. This is the underlying habit of neutral.

It just touches me so, what he says—that we normal people don't know of any other escape from unpleasant feeling, from unpleasant experience, except to lust after pleasant sense pleasure. As long as we're in that cycle without looking, we don't even know there's another option. As Greg was talking about

last night, substituting a higher pleasure until you really don't need to substitute at all.

But this is where, back to the sutta, when the Buddha says the normal person doesn't understand the gratification, the danger, and the escape connected with these feelings. That's a phrase he uses frequently—gratification, danger, and escape with something. Bhikkhu Bodhi, who is one of the, I would say, three main translators and interpreters of the Pali texts into English living at this time, describes it beautifully. He says these are three movements in the unfolding process of insight: understanding the gratification, understanding the danger, understanding the escape. Not saying one's bad or wrong, but just understanding them.

So in terms of the gratification of going for sense pleasure, the Buddha talks about understanding the gratification. I looked up gratification in the dictionary. To gratify is to satisfy or please, to give pleasure by satisfying desires or humoring inclinations. I thought that was good. The Buddha says, if there were no gratification in this world, there wouldn't be clinging. But when he talks about the habit of clinging, of craving for the pleasant, when he discusses the Four Noble Truths, which we'll explore later, he picks a specific word for the second truth, the cause of our confusion, our suffering. He picks the word *taṇhā*, which translates basically as thirst. It's really this quality of thirst. I need this. I lean into it. That's what we're talking about here.

And the gratification is, first of course, obvious—something is pleasant, and we like that. That's a gratification. But unwise attention to the gratification gets us lost. So gratification is, he goes on talking about in the Second Noble Truth, this *taṇhā*, this thirst, accompanied by delight, relishing experience, now here and now there. I love that phrase. I watch in my own practice when there's craving for something. Pick little things here. And you're not judging it. You're just bringing steady awareness to it. Judging it, then you can't see clearly. So when there's craving, when there's wanting, great. Awareness of craving feels like this. See what the gratification is. See it clearly.

I've also seen sometimes we confuse the actual feeling of wanting itself. I've noticed how that can be confused with actually being a kind of gratification. You almost think the wanting is pleasurable. Look and see if that's true for you.

And then I've noticed, as I was saying, in terms of neutrality—I would see how, like when I was doing self-retreat at home, just a mellow, quiet retreat, just practicing awareness. My phone's there because I would stay in touch with people I needed to through texting, just because I was alone for a month. And I could see, doing walking meditation, the phone's over there, and if there's a little bit of dullness—not a lot, just a little bit of boredom, a little bit of neutrality—I think, well, what can I do now? There's this sense of, oh, I could check the weather. Any damn thing, you know, it doesn't matter. It could be something like, oh, I could go outside and pick flowers.

I mean, it doesn't have to be that the thing we want is anything wrong with it. But noticing that wanting and how it gives a sense of enlivening—we confuse that with what being alive feels like. Wanting, you

know. Boredom, neutrality—no, no, wanting. So we want, and we confuse that enlivening, or think that that enlivening... what's getting enlivened again is the sense of me wanting. So explore that. I've seen this a lot, and I think it's really interesting—it kind of wakes us up. This can be a kind of gratification. So explore and see for yourself: what's the gratification? And always the sense of me gets a little bit stronger in that.

So he's not saying there's no gratification, but explore and see what it is, what it is for you.

And then what's the danger? What's the danger? And of course, the first danger the Buddha mentions is that everything is impermanent. And not just that at some point it goes away—nothing is steady state.

So that sense of gratification... we all know how it is online, right? You go online or on your phone to check one thing. Maybe not when you need to know it, but for, like I said, some kind of gratification. How common is it that you stop at that one? You check the weather—okay, that was enough, right? Five hours later, or whatever, how many things have you done? How good are you feeling? Not very.

But it's like that moment, that little moment of gratification, pleasure—it doesn't last very long. It never does. But because we keep leaning into the next, we don't see it. So that's the first danger. That's the real danger. Everything's impermanent. And if that's what our mind is leaning on for real peace, for real ease, it's completely unreliable.

So with steady awareness, we start to see that. We start to see the endings of each gratification instead of not noticing that and moving into the next. We start to see how unreliable it is, how it feeds sense desire, how it keeps us caught. The more we're in this habit of resistance to unpleasant and craving for pleasant, as we start with our steady awareness to notice what's happening in our consciousness, in our mind and heart, you'll start to notice—look and see, you don't believe me, but you will—the mind isn't happy. It's in a tumult. It's just always back and forth, back and forth. Even when it's not huge suffering, it's not at ease. It's not at peace. It keeps us looking in the wrong direction. It's a kind of torment.

One of the translations of the word for greed, hatred, and delusion—*kilesa*—I think someone mentioned this, often translated as "defilement." That's not a great translation. "The torments of mind," I think, is a good translation. If you're aware, if you notice, when there's real greed in the mind or real aversion or fear or delusion, we're not happy campers. The mind really isn't at ease, the heart isn't at ease, and our actions or decisions aren't clear because we can't recognize accurately.

So these are all some of the dangers. Explore for yourself. It keeps us from seeing accurately, and we can't make great choices either because we're not recognizing what's really going on. You know, that second quart of ice cream trying to be happy—wasn't a great choice, maybe. It wasn't a great choice. With clear seeing, we could have done something different. Just resting at ease with the unpleasant actually can bring peace.

So those are the dangers. And the escape—normally we think escape is getting the heck away from unpleasant. That's the escape. But that's not the escape. The escape, as the Buddha describes it, is the

abandoning of desire and lust for the world, for the pleasant. The abandoning. This is the escape. The abandoning of the cravings for the world.

Not abandoning the world. That's not what he's saying. And when he says "the world," he's talking about this round of six sense contacts. That's what he means. So abandoning the lust, the craving, the desire for particular experience—the world. He's not saying abandoning the world. That's very different.

But tuning into this possibility of escape is something we can only start to trust when we recognize these little moments of that possibility. Because thinking about it, even if we think it sounds nice, without even a moment of experience of the peace of non-clinging, without that, it's just an idea. It doesn't quite go in. Because, you know, the pleasant feeling, that enlivening of wanting, that sense of me feeling happy—we don't really want to give that up. We'd like the unpleasant to go away and for there to always be pleasant. That's why I said in the beginning, that's not going to happen. The freedom is different from that.

But part of the danger is we don't want to give that up. And we can only imagine that as the only pleasure. That's what he's saying—without steady practice to see that there's another possibility. The quality in the mind-heart in a moment when it really does put down that clinging, put down that aversion, can just rest at ease with whatever's arising.

I think it's Joko Beck—I always quote this—but I think Joko Beck said it: Can I find in myself, in my heart, in this moment, only for a moment, the willingness to rest in this confusing and unwanted experience? Just for a moment. Just be with this like it is.

Steady awareness, unbiased awareness. It's not made better by pleasant. It's not damaged by unpleasant. And as we start to recognize and trust the mindfulness, the awareness more, instead of being so glommed into getting meaning from the experience, positive or negative, we can be more with the awareness. Oh yeah, that's really unpleasant. Awareness is noticing that. It's a whole different experience.

Like I described with the lizard, when I recognized what was happening, then there was the peace in the mind that wasn't clinging. It's like, ah, I don't need a particular external experience for that. I can start to really trust from experience—oh, this clinging. Watch. Just be aware when the clinging is there. Keep walking with the clinging and keep just noticing it with awareness. And at some point, it will stop. I promise, because everything stops at some point. And then keep on being aware. And you might really see that the peace and ease that comes is actually the ease we wanted from getting the thing we were clinging to. The peace that comes from clinging—you get the thing, the clinging stops. That's what creates the sense of ease. But it doesn't last because we're putting it on the object.

So it's not about giving up the world.

Back to the sutta, though. He's saying, what's the difference with an awakened person? So you can guess: with an awakened person, when they experience unpleasant, painful feeling, they experience a single feeling, a bodily one. They do not worry, grieve, and lament, beat their breasts and weep. They're not

distraught. So when they experience one unpleasant feeling, they experience one unpleasant feeling. That's it. Having been touched by it, they don't resist it, don't resent it. And because we're not in reactivity, there's not the underlying habit to go clinging for something. It's just like this now.

Ajahn Sumedho is always talking about this receptive conscious awareness. And he uses the phrase, what he calls, "Oh, it's like this now." I use that a lot in my practice. I can feel the mind kind of trying to figure something out or in reaction, and I go, what's going on? And instead of trying to figure it out—oh, it's like this now. And the total awareness just drops into: it's like this.

Maybe it's unpleasant, maybe there's hardness in the heart, maybe the mind is agitated, but that's like this now. And there's no more resistance or clinging in that moment. Seeing it clearly, just as it is, without struggle—that's the way into peace and ease.

That doesn't satisfy our intellectual mind, but this is nothing to do with the intellect. It's that sense of the happiness that isn't based on pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling.

Here's what the Buddha says: When an unawakened person experiences one of these feelings, we experience it as though we're chained to it, as though we're joined to it. It's like this unpleasant feeling where we're just totally chained to that and all the reactivity. But an awakened person does not experience it as one chained or joined to it. There's an unpleasant feeling, a neutral feeling, a pleasant feeling tone. It comes. It's like this. It goes.

"Such a one, O bhikkhus, is called a well-taught noble disciple who is not chained, who is not fettered by birth, by old age, by sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair." He's not chained to this suffering. What a powerful statement. And the Buddha is basing it on just exploring this very subtle but happening-every-moment experience of vedanā.

There's something important I wanted to share about opening into the absence of torments. Really, the absence of clinging doesn't mean we abandon the world. It doesn't mean we don't act. It doesn't mean we don't have responsibility. But in the absence of torments, the mind, the heart manifests rather than through greed—it doesn't respond through greed or aversion. It responds through the brahmavihāras. It responds through friendliness, or through compassion, or through appreciative joy if someone's happy, through equanimity. These arise more naturally in the consciousness, in the mind-heart that isn't distorted by wanting, by aversion.

It's not personal. Neither is the wanting or the aversion personal. These are like lawful habits that arise. And so through the steady awareness, we're actually setting up conditions that lead to clear seeing, that lead to the wisdom that changes the habits. And that's why being with the difficult stuff, as difficult as it is, doesn't mean your practice is going wrong. I mean, we're not always with difficult stuff, but we have to be sometimes.

That's why Greg was saying, you know, maybe you have wonderful, wonderful experiences. I said to

someone today, if on your first retreat you have these amazing, brilliant experiences, what I say is, I'm sorry. Because I have a friend who, for ten years, said that happened on his first retreat. And for ten years he thought that's what's supposed to happen. Every retreat he was just in miserable agony trying to make that happen again. But the real wisdom comes from seeing how these things are created.

So back to the escape—when we're not caught, even for a moment, in these torments, there's the space in the consciousness, in the heart-mind, to discover this real peace or joy or ease or happiness, whichever way your particular consciousness describes it. That's available to us with the steady awareness that isn't caught in identification or reactivity. It's only available when we're not caught in the clinging or the aversion.

As the Buddha says of Ananda: "This is peaceful. This is sublime." The stilling of formations—just all the hoo-ha stops for a minute. It's so peaceful. It's sublime, the stilling of activities, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, just the putting down, as Greg described last night, the ending of craving, disenchantment from all the stories, nibbāna.

But just touching a moment of that, just when there's nothing going on, instead of going, "Let's cause some dukkha here, let's whip it up," notice—is it possible to even incline towards the peacefulness, towards the non-complication? Our habitual intellectual mind isn't too jazzed by that. But start to notice when it's like that. It's peaceful. And that grows and grows. The appreciation of that, the inclination to peace, to happiness, that grows more and more. And the habits of clinging and aversion—we notice them more. They get more obvious.

They get more gross. But in the noticing of them, with conscious awareness, we're not feeding them. They're not being fed. They may get big, but if you can keep aligning with awareness, you watch how they rise, you watch how they fall, and then notice—yes, this is peaceful. This is sublime. Just let it in. Just let it in.

And then in the next instant, some big craving comes up. You can only laugh. You might as well laugh. This is it. But then this is another chance—just awareness of craving. It's like this. It's peaceful. You don't have to do anything about it.

To end, I'll share a quotation from Pema Chödrön: "When we wake up, we can live fully without seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, without recreating ourselves when we fall apart. We can let ourselves feel our emotions as hot or cold, vibrating or smooth, instead of using our emotions to keep ourselves confused. We can just feel them. We can give up on being perfect and instead experience each moment to its fullest."

Just that last line—if we give up on being perfect and just bring in awareness and experience each moment to its fullest, life takes care of itself.

Thank you for your kind attention. I hope something was useful.

May the wholesome energy of our sincere intentions, our sincere practice together, be shared and benefit all beings everywhere. Truly, we practice to purify our own hearts and minds and to share that with all beings.

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