Power of Steady Awareness to Change Our Relationship to Life

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 48:01

I guess I'm going to talk about awareness tonight. It's all I ever talk about—it seems like it's all I ever talk about because it's what I always want to talk about. It's so amazing, the power of recognizing our innate natural awareness as it becomes steadier and steadier. It's so liberating. And awareness is so available, yet it's so overlooked by us in our life.

You know, it's like the Tibetan saying: it's closer than your eyelids, yet you can't see it. And then when we do notice awareness of something, the something that we're aware of pulls us in more. Even if we dislike it—"I dislike it"—there's a lot more juice in that than "oh, awareness of dislike." So we get in there. But awareness itself is such an amazing, liberating, beautiful, freeing, completely natural, no-quality non-thing.

I'll talk a little more, just a bit of elaboration really, about our practice here—the practical way we cultivate steady, stable recognition. Simple awareness. Simple recognizing of what's happening, whatever is happening. And how this really works to open our heart and mind from the dream of constriction and reactivity and loneliness and fear, to the potential to just be here with oneself, with others, in a different way. Still here, though.

We're all familiar with the Buddhist story—I won't go into that. But the point, really, is that when the Buddha awoke and declared himself the peaceful one, truly free from the torments and suffering of the afflictive emotions, living a life of ease and peace, the point to recognize is that the world didn't change. He was living in a human body, with a human mind, with other human beings, and the nature of the world didn't change. The freedom, the peace he discovered was not about somehow making everything better. It didn't mean the body doesn't get sick. It didn't mean any of that.

So what is this peace, this freedom? What's the direction he opened up and pointed to—found in so many other spiritual ways too? And what is the direction we can begin to glimpse in little moments? Start to get just an intuition, an apprehension of how this is really a possibility, in moments here and now. How can conscious awareness—the steady, mindful awareness of just what's happening—affect our understanding of the world in such a way? Because that's what changes: the understanding. How we understand ourselves and understand the world. And the responses and reactions and qualities that arise in our heart and mind based on that understanding.

Here's an example. A while ago I was listening to a talk by Anam Thubten, a Tibetan lama who lives in the

Bay Area in California. I like him very much. He's funny, but he's very—I don't know, I just like him. He's tuned in. This really stuck with me. It was last year, but it could be now. It's just more and more true. He was talking about the really challenging times that we're all living in, how really distressing things are.

And he said: any of us can so easily be overwhelmed by the challenges—personal, in the world, whatever particular one is hitting us at a certain time. We're so easily overwhelmed, as if pulled into a whirlpool of worry, of fear, of anger, self-blame, other-blame. We're spinning in this whirlpool of really suffering emotions and thoughts. Can anybody relate to that at all?

Sometimes it's such a habit we don't even know. The particular thing that distresses us comes up, or we hear something, or we read one line of the news—that's enough often—and into the whirlpool we go. Sometimes we're just spinning helplessly in it. Other times, even when we've been cultivating awareness and wisdom, we can still be sucked in.

And he says—this is him—we're swirling in this whirlpool, in this world, and it's kind of the way of the world. It's often, in my opinion, exacerbated by how things are set up. For example, I don't know if you've noticed, but often when you see on TV that there's been some kind of disaster—something like a cyclone, not even something deliberately caused by other humans—some news person runs up to someone whose house has been destroyed, sticks the microphone in their face, and says, "Who do you blame for this?" Have you noticed that? So often asking, "Who do you blame?" As if this should be the first response, the first thing someone should say, immediately. If anything bad happens, there's definitely got to be someone to blame. And often we blame ourselves.

Sometimes, when I've seen this—I mean, I could be projecting, I don't know what's in the person's mind—but they look kind of taken aback. And then they seem to clock in, figuring out who they should say they could blame.

We feel compelled to blame someone. But this cycle can become so consuming that, as Adam Tesfon says, when this happens we lose touch with the natural dignity of love, compassion, and wisdom. When we're spinning in this swirl of fear, anxiety, and blame—whether directed at self or other—we've lost touch with what the Dalai Lama spoke of, our true human values. We've lost touch with present moment awareness. This brings us back to Anantapta.

He says we practice in order to re-recognize awareness, again and again. How can that be so powerful? Because when we're not just sucked into the swirl but suddenly *aware* of the swirl, something shifts. It's not that all of that magically disappears and we find ourselves living on some cloud of peace. But the shift from being sucked into that swirl of pain to the awareness of it restores that confidence, that taking refuge, that trust. In that moment, we're with awareness rather than giving all our energy and belief to the emotions and the story as being who we are.

We practice to re-recognize awareness, and with it comes access to kindness and compassion. These we

can offer to the world. That's what Anantapta is saying, and it's an amazing power that recognizing awareness can have.

You don't have to believe what he's saying or what I'm saying. I'm offering it as an example, as a pointing—something to have a look at in our practice, in our time here. It doesn't have to be the huge swirl of the most suffering experience. It can be stubbing your toe walking up the stairs and thinking, "They should have a sign on these stairs!" Or someone saw you stumble and now you're thinking, "Oh my god, I'm so embarrassed." That's a little mini swirl, but we can get caught in it.

Practice just the awareness of embarrassment. It feels like this. It doesn't mean the embarrassment goes away, but that velcro that sucks us in, that *being* the embarrassment, wondering what they think—it changes completely. Awareness of embarrassment. The awareness itself isn't embarrassed.

Little things. Check it out. Explore it. The steadiness of awareness is incredibly powerful. So that's our practice.

One definition of Vipassana meditation that I like—this comes from Sayadaw U Tejaniya, but it's not unique to him, and Alexis alluded to it this morning without saying it directly—is that Vipassana meditation is experiencing the mind and body directly, from moment to moment, with the right understanding. Sometimes Sayadaw U Tejaniya calls that the three jobs of a yogi: experiencing the mind and body (that's simple mindfulness, simply recognizing what's happening), from moment to moment (that's the perseverance, the steadiness, the continuity through the day), and with the right understanding (that's what makes it *right* mindfulness—not "I know what's happening" while being lost in thought).

I'll say a little bit about each of these.

So knowing, experiencing the mind and body directly. Simple sati, samma sati, right mindfulness as it's described in the Noble Eightfold Path. None of this is anything you don't already know. You've all been practicing, you all know mindfulness—the awareness, the attention, simply being with what's arising. So simple, just as it is, without adding anything extra.

A sensation arises and you know it. You can just feel it. Maybe perception—that recognition, just a factor of mind—comes in and notes "tight" or "hurts" or something. It's just that. Sati recognizes it as that and leaves it as that. It's free from elaboration, from preference, from judgment, from wondering what it means about me, from comparing to how it was yesterday, from how we wish it was at another time, from thinking it means we have to go to the hospital. It's simply sensation.

Can you get a sense of how totally easeful our lives could be if we could really live like that? And immediately the mind goes, "No, you can't just have sensation, because you have to function."

You can't just be hearing sensation, sensation. You have to know that the sound of the bell means you get up and walk out.

Once I was on a retreat myself, a three-month retreat, and I'd been sitting quite a while. It was deep into it. I was practicing not exactly in this style—a little more directed attention—but still the same mindfulness. Basically, I would just be noticing what happened. So I started coughing. Cough, cough. I'd feel tickle, tickle. Cough, cough. Notice hearing, seeing. There wasn't a lot of elaboration at this point. It was pretty mindful.

And then at one point: cough, cough—oh my gosh, I've got bronchitis. That was a thought. But at that time, I used to get bronchitis quite a lot and I'd get really sick from it. So that thought had a little bit of oomph to it, unnoticed. "Oh my God, I've got bronchitis." Then: cough, cough, tickle, tickle. I didn't have to do anything. And the whole thing calmed down. I could just be noticing.

But it doesn't mean you don't know what's happening. If the coughing had kept getting worse, without being reactive, the thought "this is bronchitis" could arise. There'd be the sense: do I need to go to the doctor? Do I not? Thinking arises. Thinking is known. Mindfulness can be aware of all of the six senses—all the physical and the mental sense. We can know what's happening. That's not the same as all the reactivity and elaboration that comes when it isn't quite mindfulness, when we're getting confused with the reactions. And that's where everything goes wonky, right?

When it's not just hearing or seeing—say you're sitting here feeling tired. Okay, feeling tired is like this. Awareness notices tiredness. And really, it's not a problem. It's tired. It doesn't mean it feels good. It doesn't feel good. It feels like this.

What makes the difference here? The right understanding that the Buddha talked about, that Uteshanu is talking about—when we are mindful with the right understanding, what allows it to be simple without adding all this elaboration is when there's not that adding to the experience of me or mine.

A sensation arises. And you can see this in your own practice. It doesn't need some great esoteric deep concentration to see it. It could be something simple like a little niggle in the back. You just feel it. You're just aware and noticing things. And then—like my bronchitis—suddenly the thought comes: "Oh my God, this could really be a bad thing in my back."

Now, if that thought isn't noticed, already it's become *my* sensation, *my* back. That thought comes up and there's a little bit of fear, a little bit of aversion. The afflictive emotion has started to kind of feed off of the mindfulness, and it starts to distort the mindfulness. So what was just a little sensation now is *my* back, *my* pain. How long can I sit with this? The aversion starts getting stronger, there are more thoughts about it, we start having memories of our past life—I mean this life, past times in this life. We'll just stay in this life; it's enough to deal with. We start worrying about the future, start looking at everyone else, start thinking: who's to blame? Those teachers for making us sit so long.

This was the stupidest thing I ever did in my life—and on and on the mind goes. We're way, way down the line from simple sensation or simple unpleasant feeling. This is where the afflictive emotions, the

torments of mind, come up and multiply. And it all starts from that subtle sense of me, that subtle sense of mine, which is arising. It arises and passes. It arises so much of the time. But there are times when it doesn't.

When these kilesas, these torments, are not recognized—when something arises and we don't quite see them—that's when it's not the simplicity of mindfulness. That's when we've got the beginning of a little mini whirlwind, or a really big one.

One other thing that can happen in the way we're practicing here, with just awareness noticing whatever's occurring: maybe nothing particularly difficult comes. Just seeing, hearing, sensation. And then suddenly it's like—boring. There's nothing, so what? Seeing, hearing, smelling—so what? I mean, we want to bring an awareness that leads to some insight. It's called insight meditation, right? So shouldn't there be something a little more interesting than hearing, hearing, oh that person's coughing, okay coughing, I don't like it, okay not liking?

It's boring. Again, we don't quite recognize this as one of the afflictive states, but that's delusion covering over. It's a subtle disconnect. When we're saying boring, too mundane, not really interesting enough—there's a subtle pulling away, a subtle aversion. And I see for myself that this could be present a lot in life. When we're actually feeling rather at ease, not caught in a lot of wanting or a lot of aversion, it can be like a pseudo heading towards equanimity. Oh yeah, it's peace. Uh-huh, yeah, it's fine. It's nice. Okay, it's like this. Whatever. You want to go out? Whatever. It's all equanimous. No—it's all disconnect.

But when there's that genuine relaxing, that opening, that really committing and trusting to just open with fullness of presence into this moment, whatever it is—as Dipa Ma said, who was a wonderful Bengali woman with really profound, deep practice, who died in the late eighties or early nineties—she said: when you're really awake, nothing is mundane. Nothing is mundane.

When awareness is recognizing experience—that being confident, having confidence, resting in the awareness rather than looking to the experience to affirm us or give us meaning or feel good or feel bad—just awareness is so... it's not necessarily joyful, but it's just alive.

And so that's why I keep wanting to talk about it and keep inviting us all to keep recognizing more and more. Because it's such a little shift—from being aware of an unpleasant sensation to being in the unpleasant sensation. The sensation doesn't go away, but that shift to the awareness of it, somewhat like what I was reading from Ajahn Tuffon though that was a stronger experience—it's amazing because the thing is still occurring, yet the suffering about it is gone. Even if it's just a quick moment. And when you recognize that, it's not me recognizing; it's just like that, just obvious.

As we go through the practice—and our practice here is just moment after moment remembering, that's all, nothing special—

All these so-called mundane experiences—everything, everything that arises—we can be aware of. Each

moment becomes a doorway to simply recognize: oh yes, awareness again. Oh yes, here's awareness. Oh yes, awareness of hearing. Awareness of boredom. There's nothing awareness can't notice.

And as we go through the days, awareness gets a bit more natural. What really becomes natural is that we trust it a little more. We have a little more confidence, a little more willingness to recognize it. It's not that we don't recognize it because we're recalcitrant or obtuse or stupid—it's that the habits of our mind, the habits of how we've learned to relate to life, are just so strong. These are the habits that bring us into identification with experience and into the reactions of the afflictive emotions.

One of the main ways these habits form is moment to moment to moment. But because they form moment to moment, they're also ceasing moment to moment. Remember, nothing's more than a moment.

Something Ajahn Sumedho said—I liked how he described it. He was describing how we live in these bodies, how we are these bodies and minds. He says, and I like his phrasing, that we live as sensitive forms. In other words, the five sense doors and also the mind are experiencing constant input, aren't they? Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, emotions. If you close your eyes, as Alexis said, there's still kind of visual images. You can stop your ears, but there's still some sound going on. We're not trying to shut anything out—and you couldn't even if you tried. You couldn't go through the day, you couldn't go through five minutes, without constant sense input. That's what our life is: the five senses and the mental one.

And as the Buddha described—and you all know this—every sense contact you experience comes with vedanā, with a quick feeling tone in the mind of it being either slightly pleasant, slightly unpleasant, or kind of neutral. The Buddha thought that little experience of subtle pleasant or subtle unpleasant or neutral with each contact was so important to bring mindfulness to that when he taught the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the discourse Alexis talked about on the four foundations of mindfulness, he broke experience into four different areas. The first is the body. The second is vedanā. He broke that out as being absolutely key to explore.

Why? Because with the steady awareness of seeing how it works, the truth reveals itself, and we can stop getting so caught in the habit.

So let me just describe it a bit. This constant sense contact, from the moment we're born, arises together with pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This is going on, arising and ceasing, arising and ceasing. You get the drift? It's kind of understandable, in a way, how frequently we tend to space out when we're not really aware, and how we tend to get caught in our reactions to pleasant or unpleasant. We seek sense experience, but—maybe this isn't true for any of you—I've certainly noticed there are times when I'd really like a break from the constant arising and passing, arising and passing: pleasant, unpleasant, pleasant, unpleasant, seeing, hearing. You don't even realize, you know. But if there's a little bit of reactivity in you—not at all of them, but at many of them—that's one of the reasons things are so tiring. We don't even notice that.

So the right information is this: there's a sound, slightly pleasant. That can be noticed, and that's all. The right information is that's just what's happening. Awareness notices. There doesn't have to be anything extra. As soon as the sense of "me" or "mine" comes in—that sound is unpleasant, my unpleasantness is bothering me—there's the constriction. Even though it's little, even though it's very subtle at first, that's the beginning in that moment of the afflictive emotion.

"It's so hot. Heat, heat. I'm hot. I'm really hot." Just that little bit of difference. We're not saying right or wrong, good or bad. We're saying we can bring awareness to notice this too. This is where the steadiness of mindfulness through the day allows us to... We don't even have to look for it. Just stay steady with awareness. Keep coming back when you realize it's gone.

You can't help but notice the difference. Notice how as soon as the sense arises that "this sound is bothering me." And if you stay with awareness, you can notice a little bit of tightness, a little bit of thought—what can I do? What's the matter? That person is making that sound and they are making me feel aversion. That shouldn't be happening.

Susan and I were just laughing because in a way I said, no one else can make us feel aversion. Aversion arises in our heart and mind when there's unpleasant, and there's a sense of holding on to that unpleasant and really falling into the spiral. Awareness can recognize, "This really feels unpleasant." And that's it. Nothing extra.

But you see, as I'm saying this, that doesn't sound like amazing, wonderful freedom, does it? You didn't come here and say, "Oh, I can sit and feel my back hurting and say, 'Oh, that's just unpleasant sensation, nothing extra.' And they're telling me that's freedom." I don't think so.

But we start where we are. And you will have like the subtle, "Oh, my back's hurting, okay, pain, it's just pain, it's just pain." And the clinging to the aversion can be so subtle that we don't quite recognize it. We're trying, really trying to be mindful, and in the back of the mind—way back there—if I'm mindful correctly with this unpleasant sensation, that means it goes away, right? Because I said that that's freedom. Freedom means this unpleasant thing's going to go away.

That is such... it just keeps getting in there again and again and again. I can't tell you how often I'll find being with something—I'm really quite aware, I know there's awareness, I noticed the thoughts of aversion, so I'm really aware—but it's still... you can still feel you're caught. You can still feel that little swirl is going on, and you start trying to look and see what's the swirl, but the looking is colored by aversion. I'm looking to see why am I swirling and why is this stupid thing still here when I'm being mindful?

It keeps slipping in, slipping in. And then, because we keep practicing, you recognize, "Okay, I don't like it, I don't like it, I think I'm mindful, I don't like it." And suddenly, suddenly—because when we're with awareness, awareness can be with aversion, awareness can be with greed, simply another thing

happening. The aversion and the greed might be strong enough that they keep arising and you really bring awareness to them. But at some point, the attention is feeding the awareness, not the greed. At some point, that clinging, that velcro drops away, and it's just, "Oh."

And it really is just sitting there with a sensation, and there's no problem. It might not last long, but notice when that happens. That's what I mean by the sense of a subtle apprehension, starting to see how these things can work. It's really quite... it turns into a real voyage of discovery. A real voyage—how is the mind working? How do these afflictive emotions arise in this heart-mind in this moment? And how do they cease in this same heart-mind in another moment?

All we need to do is just step back into this moment of noticing what's happening. We don't have to figure it out intellectually. We don't have to try and change what's happening. Life is doing itself. Simple awareness is just to notice that. Notice that without adding the story of me to it. And when that story comes up, awareness notices that too.

So what we're really starting to do is trust—trust more and more and more the simplicity of awareness. Our habit is to look to the objects, right? A really beautiful experience or some wonderful experience happens in the meditation, or something wonderful happens in your life, or something difficult happens, or just a sound you don't like. But the habit is, with the pleasant, the unpleasant, we're so used to taking pleasant as good, right, the way it's supposed to be. Unpleasant is bad, wrong. There's something wrong with me or something wrong with the world.

We go to blame if that happens. Neutral experience we don't notice at all.

And without being aware of this pattern, that's where we get into the wanting—always leaning into something nicer, something better, or holding on to what we have. The pushing away, trying to get rid of the stuff we've decided isn't good. It's always about what does this mean about me? How is it fulfilling me or affirming me, or making me feel that there's something wrong with me because this is arising?

Do you get a sense of how complicated that makes everything? And it's completely our habit. So walking out of here, you start noticing, "Oh look, I'm doing all this me-ing." Of course you are. We all are. It's also not personal. It's just a habit, and awareness notices that. You just get interested in seeing how this works. Seeing how—oh, just be with what is. Just be with what is. But I don't like what is. Okay, be with not liking.

We don't trust that at first because we're so used to getting our sense of meaning from objects, wanting the good ones and wanting to get rid of the bad ones. We're just caught in that. It's like gravity. It seems so true we don't even recognize it.

That's how this moment-to-moment steady awareness is so radical. Because it's like—just really drop into what's happening now and know that you're noticing it.

Why it's so difficult—and that's a whole other talk—is because all of our habit is to get the heck away if it's

unpleasant. And if we're trying to get away, there's no way of recognizing what's actually happening. So that's why it's practice. That's why we talk about the huge swirl that Anam Thubten talked about, or all the pain in the world, or something difficult in your life. What's useful about being on a retreat is you can work with... it's the same way the mind works with stubbing your toe. It works in the same way. Use these little experiences. That's why we talk about the steadiness through the day. Whatever you're doing is mindfulness practice, because that's where we're really going to go on this voyage of discovery and see how the mind works.

So don't try to think, "I shouldn't have aversion." That doesn't work. When aversion comes up, how is it? How do you recognize it? How does awareness notice aversion?

As Ajahn Sumedho always says—instead of going, "Aversion's like this." That doesn't help everybody, but it helps me a lot. When something's going on and I'm trying to name it, I'm trying to see it, but it feels too busy—I can tell there's efforting, I can tell there's doing. I'm not spaced out, but... "It's like this now." I don't even try to name it. It's like this now. Attention completely opens, drops into the body-mind. It's like this now. You just open and feel it, just for that moment.

It's a world of difference—the shift from identifying with something to awareness of it. It's so nothing and it's so everything.

So that's why being on retreat, seven days and seven nights, with all the little stuff that goes on—each moment is equally valuable for recognizing awareness, for letting the steady awareness show us how the mind works, how suffering is created, how when the afflictive emotion isn't being fed, the compassion comes, or the mettā for oneself, or the generosity—how that naturally comes. So many chances to see that, and it doesn't have to be any kind of wonderful experience. Some of the biggest insights, where you suddenly think, "Oh, I really see it"—

It can come just from—I don't know—touching the silverware and feeling the coldness. One time I remember I was very aware of eating and chewing and swallowing, and then I swallowed, and it was so clear. I mean, this sounds silly, but that's how insights are sometimes. It was so clear that the food was gone. It's gone. It's really gone. I mean, this is huge—wow, it really was here, and now it's really gone. It's turned to something else. Little things, you know. That's how it is.

Don't be waiting for some big lights-going-off moment, thinking that you're sitting here with tinnitus in your ears, sick of listening to me talk, wishing you could go to bed. That's the moment, because this is the only moment we have to really be here.

So this starting to, and continuing to, really bring our confidence, our trust into awareness—it's a beginning to abandon our entrancement with experience, with samsara, this endless round of sensations and wanting and losing, wanting and losing, just wanting more and more sensation.

I heard this advertisement on the radio last week. It was for Disney World, going on about this and that,

screaming and yelling. And right at the end, the announcer says, "Disney World. Every amazing feeling ever, and all at once." Oh my God, it sounds like a nightmare. But that was their ultimate advertisement to get you to come. This is the world we live in. Then I thought later—what if that was true? What would the poor six-year-old kid do, having had every amazing feeling you could ever have all at once? What are they going to do for the rest of their life?

Anyway, when you put it like that, it's kind of nice to put down that entrancement. It's beyond kind of nice to be able to just be present in this moment without all the reactivity, without needing it to be other, without needing something to fulfill me. And we can only begin to know and trust this from our own experience.

I'm just up here trying to share, hopefully just to entice you to keep looking, because this sense of steady awareness is always available. The movement from identification and wanting and aversion to "oh, it's like this"—it's always available. When the afflictive emotions are so strong, yes, sometimes we can't quite notice awareness. And as we go through the days, that's one of the ways we can offer little tips about meditating: how to take care of our awareness, to move it away from the all-compelling difficulty to something more neutral. You'll hear us say it's not about getting a better object—it's about what supports recognizing awareness, taking care of awareness.

So we start; every moment the Dhamma is revealing itself. That's why, as we go through these days, the perseverance—the third job of the yogi—is this: of course you can't be mindful every moment, of course not. Don't even think that. Or you can think it, but just notice you're thinking it. When we've forgotten, the next moment can remind: "Oh yeah, right—touching. All right, stepping. All right, thinking." And it doesn't matter what was going on before. We're here again. We're here again.

As we said, this becomes more natural. Right now it's not natural because we're entranced by what's occurring, entranced by objects. As we get more established, you can kind of fall in love with awareness in a way that isn't personal. We still know what's happening—maybe more clearly, because we're not so gripped by it. We can respond more appropriately, from wholesome states, from wisdom, from non-clinging, from non-blame, from non-greed. We can perhaps have a clearer sense of appropriate action.

So in our week here together, as we said, we're really not trying to achieve something in a short time or a long time. I know—this is what our minds know how to do. You don't come here for seven days without thinking you should have something to show for it at the end. If you do, it won't last anyway; nothing does. But we're here to have all these moments to practice recognizing awareness.

That's an incredible gift in the world. As Anam Thubten said, in any moment when we can relax back into awareness, that sense of dignity arises that allows for the beautiful qualities of heart and mind to emerge. And that's then what we share with the world. When we're lost in our afflictive emotions, that's what we share with the world.

So we're not trying to achieve something. We're simply using this time, whatever we're doing, to practice recognizing awareness. Starting from mindfulness—what's happening now? And then recognizing that we're aware of what's happening now. That's all. So simple.

And once we start to trust that a little, when we can relax into it a bit, we stop thinking subconsciously that we have to have some kind of worthwhile experience to be mindful of, something to talk about—not just seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting. When that starts to relax, when we start to trust the recognition of awareness, everything begins to shift. That's really what we're doing here.

As Ajahn Sumedho says, awareness is not about making value judgments about our thoughts, our emotions, our sensations. It's not about making value judgments. Awareness is about knowing these things fully. They are what they are at this moment. It's a kind of total freedom to receive life just as it's arising in this moment, just as you experience it. You don't have to fix it. You don't have to make some meaning. You don't have to say, "What does it mean about me?" Just receive it as it arises in this moment. That's why continuity is so key.

Here's another little practice hint from Sayadaw U Tejaniya. As we go through the day, whatever's arising, awareness of it—very simple. But remember, we're not trying to create something. We're not rejecting what is happening. And as things begin to happen, or they stop happening—say something difficult stops happening—we don't forget awareness either. A lot of times when we're really working with something and it goes away, we think, "Oh, thank God!" Like when the bell rings: "Oh, thank God!" We just forget awareness. But we don't forget. Acceptance of an experience does not mean we forget about being aware. Acceptance means we're really more present because we're not struggling with it anymore.

I want to end with a couple of short quotations. From Mingyur Rinpoche: "Discovering our own awareness allows us to access the natural steadiness and clarity of the mind, which exists independent of conditions and circumstances, and independent of our emotions and moods." This is a big one to start to trust. Awareness is aware of our emotions and moods, but it allows us to access the natural steadiness and clarity of mind independent of our emotions and moods. Awareness does not increase or decrease whether we are happy or sad. We don't attain awareness. Rather, we learn to recognize it.

And the effect this can have on our life—I want to read one thing from Ajahn Chah. He was a great Thai forest monk, a meditation master from the last century. He was the teacher of Ajahn Sumedho and kind of the founder of that whole school of monks and nuns from Amaravati. He was very down to earth. I just picked this book up somewhere: *Everything is Teaching Us*. Just the name is good—everything is teaching us.

So: "Whenever a person's mind enters the Dhamma, then the person has well-being. The person has a mind at peace. The mind then has a way to resolve difficulties. When pain and illness afflict the body, the mind resolves it naturally, understanding this is natural and not falling into depression or fear over it. Gaining something, we don't get lost in delight. Losing it, we don't get excessively upset. But rather, we

understand that the nature of all things is that having appeared, they then decline and disappear."

With such an attitude, we can make our way in the world. We are *loka vidū*, knowing the world clearly. The Buddha was said to be the *loka vidū*, knowing the world clearly. But when we're seeing just as it is in this moment, knowing the world clearly, then *samudaya*, the cause of suffering, is not created. Greed is not born. There is wisdom, knowledge of things as they really are, and it illumines the world.

This is a lot to take in, but it really does arise from our willingness to just keep cultivating the simplicity of steady awareness.

I'd like to sit quietly for a moment after this sharing.

Thank you for your attention.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.