Exploring Awareness of Thought

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 55:16

Tonight, I just wanted to share some reflections on the phenomenon of thought, of thinking, and the different ways it shows up—how we get caught, and so forth. None of this is going to be new to you. I'm just touching on a few different points that are interesting to me and have been helpful, hopefully to you as well.

A few years ago, I was doing a self-retreat, and for some reason at that time, the quality of thought became really interesting. Not the thought itself, but the way that the conditioning of my mind would give thought so much more importance and meaning than many other experiences—even though when I'd look directly at a thought with awareness, clearly it's just empty. So that's known on one level, but then to keep seeing how the attention, and maybe the belief, would keep privileging thought and the content of thought. Not always, but so frequently. And it just got really interesting to me, exploring it when I wasn't aggravated with it.

I was noticing how we take the thought description as a more real, accurate description of reality than what it was actually describing. There's a quotation from Audubon, the bird naturalist, who said that if there's a choice between the drawing of the bird and the bird, trust the bird. With thoughts, it's like trusting the thoughts describing the knee pain rather than feeling the sensation. That's a simple example—it gets more convoluted. But it's just kind of like, why? It's so empty. Why does this keep happening? And then it doesn't, as we know, just stop with the one thought.

I wanted to start with mentioning a word that's not often in the suttas, but Ajahn Buddhadasa spoke of it in the last years of his life. He was a great Thai forest bhikkhu, meditation teacher, and scholar. The word is *atammayatā*. It basically means "not made up of that." What it really points to is the quality, the state of heart and mind of non-fabricating, of not concocting—which I actually love, "not concocting." Not constructing. Based on non-identification prior to the quality of thought making distinctions between self and other, just not fashioning anything.

This is really, in a way, the highest peace—the heart and mind independent of responding or reacting to experience. It's not exactly nirvana, but it's up there. I just love this non-concocting idea because we can use it to explore ourselves, all the different kinds of ways that the habits of our mind do concoct out of experience. That's what Andrea was speaking about when she discussed the concoctions of sense of self the other night. It's a concoction, a fabrication.

Ajahn Sumedho talks about this too—how we create our world and ourselves. It's a concocted state of being, moment to moment. A concoction of the five khandhas, the five aggregates: a concoction of physical

form, of vedanā (feeling tone), of mental states and concepts, of perception and consciousness. These things are happening often with thinking. It's not only with thinking, but thinking often holds the concoction together—this sense of "me," even though it's arising separately in each moment.

So in terms of thought, there are different ways thought creates, fabricates a reality, a concoction that just seems so real when we don't think to look at it. And sometimes when we do meet it with awareness, it still seems so real because we're so used to it. Ajahn Sumedho frequently talks about how we create a sense of self with our thoughts. Is that familiar to you? And you can't create a peaceful self. So try it out. Not that you haven't, but it's really interesting. You can't—because the concoctions, the fabrication, aren't actually in alignment with what's really going on.

In the broad way, we create a sense of self from thoughts and stories.

We're telling ourselves stories all the time. This is one of my current favorite quotations from Thanissaro Bhikkhu, who is one of the three living foremost translators of the Pali suttas into English.

He's talking about samsara. Samsara literally means "wandering on." Many people think of it as the Buddhist name for the place where we currently live—you know, we're living in samsara, the place we leave when we go to nibbana. But in early Buddhist texts, samsara is the answer not to "where are we?" but to "what are we doing?" We're samsara-ing.

I love this. He says: "Samsara is not a place, it's a process—the tendency to keep creating worlds and then moving into them. As one world falls apart, the mind creates another and you go there. At the same time, you bump into other people who are creating their own worlds too."

Does it make sense? We never know what's going on with ourselves. We think we know what's going on with someone else, but they're in a completely different world. Things don't match.

This is on a really obvious level of our thoughts. We can just see how—and a lot of you have brought it up in the groups—even in one sitting, all these different worlds come. We're up, we're down, we're equanimous. We're seeing all our childhood failures. We're feeling so inspired. We're remembering some weird thing that happened. We're really upset about that person who looked at us cross-eyed, and then it turns out they weren't even there. There are all kinds of worlds we're creating. And without awareness, it's like we jump from world to world and still feel like it's the same me. Can you relate to this at all?

This is samsara. This is what we call the rounds of rebirth—never mind different lifetimes, but moment after moment being reborn into this particular world. This particular world of feeling hungry and wishing you had a good hamburger. This particular world of loving to look at all the beautiful young animals and feeling so fortunate. This particular world of feeling so tired you just want to fall on your face and never have to come into the meditation hall again. On and on and on. Some are obviously more difficult and more compelling than others.

But when we just start to tune in this way, to see how thought is concocting all these worlds, it's amazing. What's amazing is how much we don't recognize it. When we start to practice, when we're sitting, when awareness is just noticing thoughts—and then of course we get into what feeds them—we start to see those worlds. We start to see how it's changing.

It often comes together when people describe it in groups. They say, "Wow, it's amazing seeing all of this, the ups and downs and the coming and going." And just the sense—this is my language, not anyone else's—of awareness noticing this, and somehow there starts to be a sense of release from having to be the inhabitant of all those worlds.

Even in just one sitting, when you're not buying into each new world, isn't it a relief? It doesn't matter so much what's coming up. Isn't that a relief? We don't have to take our stand on every thought and mood and emotion that comes through. No wonder we're exhausted in life—we feel like we have to own each of those. Just having awareness receiving, letting it come and go, not concocting around it, is an incredible ease and peace.

So noticing, always noticing the concoctions—but just notice those moments of ease when it's not happening. You don't have to concoct anything around it. There's nothing to say about it. But I'm always encouraging people to notice these moments. You could call them a moment of alert awareness in which the heart-mind is free from kilesa. It's just a moment of presence, of is-ness, of just not creating anything. And often it's not necessarily ecstatic or anything.

It can be quite neutral, quite peaceful.

And so a lot of our cultivating awareness isn't just noticing the unwholesome, the suffering qualities in awareness, but also noticing the peace, noticing the wholesomeness, noticing the absence of kilesa.

We were saying in one of the groups today, talking about when there's not aversion, not ill will—and appreciating in the Theravada language, *dosa* is the overarching word for the kilesa of hatred and all its many subsets, down to the tiniest irritation or aversion. In the Pali, the way it's talked about, it doesn't jump right to metta. Instead there's *a-dosa*—the "a" is a negation. So, no dosa in the mind. That's lovely.

Metta is like a stronger mental state that we feel, and it's beautiful. It's not dosa either; it's metta. But it doesn't have to be metta to not be dosa. You don't have to feel love for all the world to recognize: there's no ill will, there's no aversion. It's just this. Peace. You don't have to get attached to it. It's not what maybe you're looking for in the beginning of practice—we're often looking for something more positive. But this is just the peace of no-dosa.

Now, another way of understanding how the mind, the thoughts, and the mental states go out and concoct and create—maybe you've heard this. It's quoted in Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Pasanno's book, *The Island*, which if you haven't seen, is really wonderful. It's a great compilation of many suttas and references, and also teachings from Ajahn Chah, since he was their teacher. It's all about awakening, sotapanna,

enlightenment—just really good, with lots of quotations.

This is something from Ajahn Chah that I'd seen before. He's describing one way suffering and concoction happen when we're caught in thoughts. It's a kind of re-describing of the Four Noble Truths.

He says: "The mind that goes out in order to satisfy its moods is the cause of suffering."

Do you get a sense of that? Does that ever happen? The mind going out to satisfy its moods—this is, of course, without awareness.

"The result that comes from the mind going out in order to satisfy its moods is suffering." That's the first noble truth. He turns it on its head.

Then he says: "Seeing the mind clearly is the path leading to the cessation of suffering." That's kind of what we're doing—awareness of the mind. Seeing the mind clearly is the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

"And the result of seeing the mind clearly is the cessation of suffering."

I like this, because turning it around makes you actually think rather than just running through the truths one, two, three, four. It also feels very much in alignment with this cultivation of steady awareness—the mind seeing the mind clearly.

Even in a moment, many of you have experienced this: when the mind is going out, caught up, there's suffering—maybe you wouldn't put it that way—and suddenly awareness recognizes clearly what's happening, and the suffering in that moment ceases. That's exactly this, just in a moment.

So that's another way to explore. Because it's thoughts, usually—the mind going out to satisfy its moods. But how does that usually manifest? This brings us to the next aspect, which you're all familiar with: how much of the mind going out to satisfy its moods is triggered by the reaction to vedana?

A lot, right? Maybe all. We don't want to say everything, but a lot.

You all know vedana—I'm assuming you know what we're talking about. The response to vedana. It's so pervasive. This isn't new information: when there's pleasant feeling, the habit of the mind is to cling.

We're all like, "Yeah, we know that." We do. So why? Why does it keep happening? Unpleasant—push away. Neutral, neither pleasant nor unpleasant—like the mind of delusion, you just don't notice it.

Actually, a few people have mentioned boredom coming up, and then bringing interest to boredom and seeing how it changes right away to something else. I love that. Boredom is one manifestation of awareness just not being quite connected to experience. Boredom is kind of like the deluded response to neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

I find looking at so-called neutral vedana really interesting, if vedana happens to be an aspect of experience that is naturally presenting itself to you in these days. I'm not saying you need to go out and explore vedana now—I'm not trying to direct practice in that way. But at different times, different aspects of our experience, as we're getting interested with the awareness, as the awareness is getting more steady, we start to see the cause and the effect, how the concoctions come and how they fall apart. At times like that, vedana might just start to be noticeable, just popping up. So explore it then. It's really interesting.

What I was going to say is that neutral vedana—I find it really fascinating in my own experience, but also talking to people over the years who come in for interviews and bring it up. Neutral is the way in to the experience of calm, the experience of peace. It's not the high of bliss. It's not the intensity of some incredible suffering that we know we're learning from.

Over all the years that I've taught on three-month retreats, people often come in and they're in practice—they're not just checked out, they're in practice—and they say, "Nothing's really happening. Stuff comes and goes," and they can describe it, but they feel like there's nothing. No mental states happening. "What's the point?" Really, over the years, I'll ask, "What about calm?" And they go, "Oh. Oh, calm. Yeah, yeah." It doesn't occur to them to notice calm. This isn't one or two times—it's common. And in our culture now, God forbid there should be thirty seconds we're not looking at the phone or on the internet or somehow feeding ourselves.

So it's fascinating. Again, non-aversion—it's peace, it's calm. It's not some big hullabaloo. And noticing it: this is peaceful. This is sublime, as the Buddha says—the non-creation of formations. So that's my little piece on appreciating when boredom comes. Wow, what's going on here? Then boredom's gone anyway, but just exploring it.

In terms of how vedana keeps catching us, Ajahn Sumedho said something in a talk that stuck with me. He said we are very sensitive forms. This mind-body experience that we're living—we are very sensitive forms. And we experience our life as constant vedana. Vedana is arising at every moment of sense experience, at any of the six sense doors. Every mind moment, as experience is arising, vedana is arising along with it. We're rising and ceasing, and it doesn't stop. It doesn't take a break.

So we're very sensitive. This is how we're experiencing life in these forms—pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. It doesn't have to be a problem, but that's how it is.

Don't believe me, and don't believe Ajahn Sumedho, but just notice from time to time. When things are coming and going very quickly and awareness is truly present—feeling pleasant, unpleasant, neutral—sometimes when there's that little or stronger coagulation of self around the experience, it can really feel oppressive. Of course, that's a little bit of aversion in the mind, but it's like so much is happening every moment. Please stop.

But when there's not that coagulation or aversion or clinging, just coming and going, coming and going,

coming and going—it's fine. There's no leaning into the next moment, no wishing it would stop. It's just this. And it's gone already. As soon as you notice, it's gone. There's no comparing it to the past because there's only now. That's just how it is.

So we're sensitive forms, as Ajahn Sumedho says. But again, we all know this. The habits, though—Roy's been talking about the strength of the habits of mind: greed, hatred, confusion. These habits arise in a moment from this visceral, seemingly instinctive reaction to pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. We can notice it with awareness. It doesn't have to be a problem. Even the reaction doesn't have to be a problem. We're going to see that many times.

I could give three whole talks on this alone, so I'm really condensing because it's fascinating. But we can truly see it. It's not a problem that this happens. It's not a problem that we have aversion to it happening. Of course, nothing's a problem when awareness is there. But this is just to see how the concoctions keep happening so quickly and so frequently. One of the major beginning points of this construction is vedanā arising in the mind—pleasant, unpleasant—so quick.

It's so fast: from the pleasant thing not quite noticed to a whole world created of thought. So quick. And it can just be a simple world. A smell, a nice smell, not really noticing the pleasant quality. And within thirty seconds, you've gone from "What's for lunch?" to what you like, to your favorite bakery, to what you're going to do when you go home, to the dinner parties you're going to plan. My first three-month retreat, I planned all these dinner parties. Endless planning of dinners. I never gave one of them, but endless planning of dinner parties.

It's just—that's not a bad concoction, it's just a simple thing. But it can happen just like that, from the pleasant or from the unpleasant. And it can go to much stronger ones. I don't have to go into that.

We're so seduced so quickly into believing the thoughts. Pretty soon we don't even recognize that that's what's happening. The thought-constructed world becomes the description of the world. Never mind that back there with the dinosaurs, there was a moment of pleasant feeling that we didn't notice. We're way off in our world.

And this, of course, as we all know, is the phenomenon that's called papañca. It's also called conceiving. The Buddha talks about the tides of conceiving washing over one. Papañca is another word for this proliferation.

So feeling, vedanā, arises in every moment. And as the Buddha says, what one feels, one perceives. It's often said that feeling and perception seem to arise right together. One feels a pleasant feeling—it's a smell—and the perception arises: that smells like bread baking. It just comes right together.

It's like a little concoction, but that's not a problem. That's just what's happening.

When it turns into another world—this is the whole rest of the formula of papancha. What one feels, one

perceives. And this is, of course, without balanced awareness. What one perceives, one thinks about. Oh, bread baking, some thoughts about it. What one thinks about, one complicates with associations, with memories, with ideas. And these notions then assail and overwhelm a person.

Something as simple as "that smells good, bread baking"—and we end up... I don't even know where my mind just ended up, I don't even want to say. But you could end up in horror. You could end up in some wonderful world of what you're going to... all over the place, just like that. Just like that. So fast.

These are the tides of conceiving that overwhelm and assail a person. You know that story about the monk who painted a picture of a tiger on the wall in a cave, and it was so realistic that when he turned around and looked at it, it scared him? That's what we're doing—concocting with thoughts, with this papancha.

I just want to say, in terms of awareness of thoughts, wherever we're noticing them: simply because a thought arises in our experience together with a strong emotion or a strong force or mental state does not make it more true or accurate. Sure, it calls our attention—awareness, noticing. What are the hooks? What's the mental set? What's going on with it? But so often when a thought is insistent or really coming with a lot of grief or a lot of wanting, we're overlooking the concoction and again giving the power to the content of thought.

And that's what's so amazing, because of all the experiences, all the six experiences, thought is by far the most ephemeral, the most empty. When you really look at a thought, what is it? Just this energy. Whatever the content is, that's just content, but all thought is just... And when strong emotion comes with it, we can sometimes miss that and give all this meaning to the thought. But in my experience, just because there's a lot of emotion doesn't make a thought more accurate. In my experience, it makes it a lot less accurate. It doesn't mean not notice it, but not so much believing it.

So: what one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one complicates with associations, memories, and ideas. And these notions then assail and overwhelm a person. These are what you could call the tides of conceiving that wash over a person.

From vedana to saññā, perception—this place here is really where all the construction takes off into the ozone, if we're not quite aware at that point.

Thich Nhat Hanh—I read this so many years ago, before I even understood it, but it stayed with me because it seems true. Thich Nhat Hanh said all of our difficulties stem from mistaken perception. He's saying all. The Dalai Lama says something very similar. That is why there's so much emphasis on direct experience or true knowledge. That's really what our awareness is: just receiving direct experience. A perception is a direct experience, recognizing the perception, but not necessarily assuming the perception is accurate.

Of course, we know this. Perception is based on memory. So I don't know why I'm into bread baking. I don't know why that popped up, because I haven't smelled it and I haven't thought about bread all day.

But that's the one we're sticking with. The smell comes up, perception of bread baking. Now, if you come from another culture and you've never smelled bread baking, that wouldn't be the perception that arose. The perception might be linked to something else that was familiar, or it might be not knowing.

Perception is so much based on memory and our own particular experience—our particular personal experience, our cultural experience, the experience of our family group, our cultural group, our ethnic group. Everything we've been through is affecting the perceptions that we have. Again, this is sort of back to what Thanissaro Bhikkhu was saying: because from the perception we create these worlds, and we're in our own world, and we think everyone else's is the same, but their perceptions are different. And so that's why there's so much colliding.

It's fun on retreat. Some people have mentioned this. When you notice that there's been a perception which you didn't quite recognize and your mind has been reacting to it—this frequently happens—and then something happens that bursts the bubble and you see that your perception was completely wrong? I love when that happens.

Like when I'm in the dining room on retreat and someone walks in the back that for whatever reason I have a reaction to. And who knows why? When it's a small group, you know each other a bit more. But you know how it is on big retreats when you haven't met anybody and you don't know anyone. Yet by this time, you would have some kind of opinion—maybe subliminal—about everyone. So the perception of the person is affected by that.

Someone walking by, there might be a sense of ease or there might be a little sense of pulling back. Maybe it reminds me of that person back when I was in school who was really a jerk and I didn't like being around him. But we don't question these things. Someone walks by, or they're sitting at the table near me eating, and I just kind of feel uncomfortable—like that kid in school I always had to eat lunch across from, and for some reason I just felt yucky. The poor person! He didn't do anything.

So you feel like that, and then the mind can go on and on and on, and then I turn and look, and it's not that person at all. That's happened to me more times than I can say. And then if you're really aware, the whole thing can just pop. The world pops. But if you're not quite aware, then you go, "Oh no, how stupid am I? And what was I thinking?" And then we're in another world—a different one, not a nice one either, but the same process. That's seeing how the perception can form a whole thing.

One woman told me once, years ago, she was working in an office—let's call her Helga—and she came in and went to work, and then someone she worked with, a friend, was really frowning and just giving her what they'd call a stink eye. Then the friend went off without talking. So the whole day Helga was thinking, "What did I do to her? I thought we were friends. Why is she so angry?" And every time Helga happened to see this woman, it was already colored by "Why is she angry at me?" She just saw the anger and went through this whole thing. You can imagine the whole day.

Then by the end of the day, somehow she had a conversation, and it was a completely made-up thing. Completely. The woman was having something sad happening at home. She hadn't even looked at Helga. She hadn't even noticed Helga. She was in her own world over there. But Helga had spent the whole day creating this world of suffering and self-blame and other-blame out of a perception that went unquestioned.

So it's easy to do. This is one of the great things about silence on retreat. Because once we start talking to each other out of our confused perceptions, sometimes it clears things up, but sometimes it just explodes. Here we can do the inner work. The other person really doesn't know what's coming up in your mind, so don't worry about that. We can just watch what the mind is doing. We're all doing it. Let's face it.

Joseph used to say—way back in my early days when I was sitting a three-month retreat, probably Jack actually, this sounds more like something Jack would say—imagine if there was a big screen and all of our thoughts were projected up on the screen. How horrible would that be? Horrible! So luckily we just have to explore our own ridiculous thoughts. And if we can laugh at them, just look at this. How do we believe them when we're looking at them? They're so ridiculous, most of them. Well, mine are. Maybe yours are all really deep.

Just looking at them and saying, how can we believe that?

So perception is a real driver for this. As Sayadaw U Tejaniya says, the second thought believes the first. By the fifth thought, you're thinking, "Oh yeah, that's really true." By the tenth thought, you don't even know where it started, but this concoction has always been so, and this is the truth of the world. And how long does it take for ten thoughts to come? Boom.

So *saññā* – perception – drives *vitakka* – thinking. The perversions of perception: do we see inaccurately? Then we think inaccurately, like Helga making up all those stories about the other person working in her office. We think inaccurately. But then that's thinking. The tenth thought, as Sayadaw says, strengthens into *diṭṭhi* – into view. And this is like a stronger concoction of thought.

The bottom line view, of course, is *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* – view of self – as Andrea talked about. And that's kind of like the driver for all our confusion and suffering, really, arising moment to moment. But any view – it's basically a description that's really held to. As I read in one sutta, the Buddha says believing a view is like thinking, "This alone is true. Everything else is false." Well, that sounds so harsh. But when we look at this, Ajahn Sumedho says that without awareness, we can be totally committed to our views. Totally.

And views aren't just views of sense of self, views of the world, views of politics – God help us – views of ourselves. It can be Dhamma views. I don't know how many discussions I've been in or sat on the edge of where Dhamma views are so held to. And it's not about right or wrong, but these are concoctions of mind. Attachment to view is really one of the strongest ways, unrecognized, that we're caught in the concoction of thought. And as we see in the world – we could talk about this for hours – when attachment to views

clashes, that's what's going on everywhere, right? So much suffering, so much confusion, so much pain. This is really the heart of the tides of conceiving.

And *papañca* – the congealing around the view of self – is really the perception, the thinking about, the view, the idea. You could say a view is an idea: "It should be like this" or "This is how it is." That often isn't put into words at first, at least in practice here.

I think Andrea has spoken to it, but several people have mentioned this feeling: awareness is flowing, awareness is there, noticing stuff, and then feeling you're in a place where it's kind of stuck. You don't know what. You don't know what's happening. Awareness can be with stuckness, or maybe aversion or something, but there's this feeling of something going on that's difficult and can't quite just relax – let it come up in relaxed awareness.

And then often – I've seen this many times – okay, relax into it. It just feels like it's not good enough. I was doing walking meditation one time at Shwe Oo Min, and it was fine. There was awareness, noticing what was happening, there was no problem. And then I just started to feel some tension. And the mind started saying, "What's the problem? What's the problem? It's just things coming and going. What's the problem?" And sometimes when I would just kind of let the awareness get quiet, just see what's going on that's not being seen – then the view popped up: "Oh, this isn't good enough."

Well, what does that mean? Whatever's happening isn't good enough. That's an endless view, right? Because it can always get better.

Not recognizing that view, it was kind of behind everything that was happening. Not good enough, not good enough, not good enough. Views about what's supposed to be happening in practice, views about how awareness should feel—any view about practice happens so frequently and slips in so insidiously.

In all my years of practice, at different times, something happens while you're practicing, you're caught up in some way, and suddenly there's an insight. It opens up and you say, "Oh, that's what's happening. I'm thinking it should be like this, but I can just relax and let it be." And it's a real insight. Insight isn't a thought—it's like, "Aha." But then often there's a thought or two expressing the insight, a way of knowing, and that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. And there's that sense of ease, of freedom. "Oh yeah, that's how it is."

I remember watching this during one three-month retreat. Within—I don't know—two and a half seconds, it would start to formulate in the subconscious: "Oh, now this is how it's supposed to be." And right away, I was free from that, but now *this* is how it's supposed to be. The mind just wants somewhere to land. "It's supposed to be like this." So we have some way to make ourselves miserable by always trying to make it be like this and beating ourselves up when it isn't. Why do we do that? I don't know, but we want somewhere to land.

So noticing views—the perception leads to thinking, leads to a view: "Ah, this is how it is." And this is

where the view of self, the tides of conceiving, the tides of papañca as the Buddha describes it, wash over a person.

In one sutta where he talks about the tides of conceiving, he's saying one should not neglect wisdom, paññā—just seeing clearly. Not creative, but just not neglected if it's there. One preserves truth, cultivates relinquishment, and trains in awareness. Train for peace. That's a nice little group—that's another whole talk. But one should preserve truth. And in a way, in our practice, in our awareness, it's just what's happening now. That's all. Just what's happening now. Cultivate relinquishment. Train for peace. Preserve, not neglect wisdom.

The tides of conceiving, of papañca, do not sweep over one who rests upon these foundations. And when the tides of conceiving no longer sweep over one, one is called a sage at peace.

So what's conceiving? The Buddha goes on to say: "I am" is a conceiving. "I am this" is a conceiving. "I shall be, I shall not be, I shall be possessed of form, I shall not be possessed of form"—past, future. All the "I am," just as Andrea was saying the other night, whatever form it takes—just notice. That's a papañca, that's a conceiving, that's a construction in this moment. You don't have to think all that stuff, but just kind of notice it.

As Bhikkhu Bodhi further elaborated, the tides of conceiving are thoughts and notions originating from the three papañcas. Papañca is described as having three roots, three different qualities in mind that are drivers of papañca.

One is craving. Wanting. Something comes up and craving really drives that concoction of thought, like we talked about.

The second driver of papañca, the second root of conceiving, is conceit—māna. And you know how māna is defined in the Theravada texts? It's defined as the sense of the mind comparing: that one is better than another, one is equal to another, one is less than another. So we look at the comparing, but really the heart of that comparing is the conceit of me and other. That's why even "equal" is māna, because there's that subtle—and this can be very subtle—conceit of self, conceit of other. And this, even very subtle, is one of the three big drivers of papañca, of thinking on and on and on.

And the third: diṭṭhi, views.

So these are the three roots of conceiving, the three roots of papañca, the three qualities in the mind unrecognized that just get us so far so fast: craving, sense of self and other—that little sense of me—and views. Views and craving are the most obvious, of course.

And whenever—I think when I'm answering email, this is actually a good time for me to really practice. I don't always, but to practice feeling when there's a view. Answering some business email, or we have different emails about things going on here—policy and various matters. Too often, too frequently.

Threads with several people. And we do have to give our opinions. That's what the email is, right? You have to give your opinion. You can't just say, "No, I don't feel like responding. I don't want to get into views." But I mean, we all feel like that. We'd rather just not engage. So this is how we have to function in the world.

When the email comes in, if I have a modicum of awareness—and sometimes I do, sometimes I don't—it comes in and it hits. Some things you can just feel. There's calm. I don't feel a tide of conceiving. I'm not thinking "there's tides of conceiving washing over me," but I just feel calm. I look, I think, and I can write an answer.

But there are other times when I read it and right away—it doesn't have to be a huge thing; if it's huge, I notice, okay?—but it can be just a little *uh*, a little tightness, and this sense of *yeah, but this is really clear how it should be*.

The three personality types, you know—the greed type that transforms into the faith type, the aversive type that transforms into discriminating wisdom, and the deluded type that transforms into equanimity. The aversive type just means the mind tends to notice the unpleasant before it notices the pleasant. It doesn't mean you're running around angry all the time. That's what greedy types think. I just want to tell you it's not so.

But there is this sense of discriminating wisdom—sometimes you think it's discriminating wisdom, but it's aversion. That can definitely happen. And so the email will come in, and if I'm not aware, it's just so clear what the appropriate response is and what should happen. I send it off, and half an hour later it's like, *oh*. There was a little tinge. It may still be mostly that I was right. But there could have been a little tinge of aversion, which definitely makes it harder for the person to hear.

But it's view—that's what I'm talking about. The sense of view is *I'm right. It's obvious how it should be*. And in that, even in a little thing, attachment to view, there's not the space to let in that someone else is looking at it in another way that never occurred to this mind. It never occurred because the view completely limits us. So whether it's sense of self, or politics, or what we think happened—it's endless. Exploring views is really, really important.

There's one place where the Buddha said—I think it's in the Sutta Nipāta—and the colloquial translation, he's talking about the suffering, the pain of attachment to views. He says, "People who are attached to views just wander around in the world annoying one another." So we can see that.

There's another place where he says, "The end of papañca is the end of conflict." The end of papañca is the end of conflict because we're not creating a sense of self or other. Or as Bankei, the Zen master in Japan, said, "Don't set yourself in confrontation with anything." It's just this—not adding anything extra, not conceiving a me, not conceiving an other.

This is from the Buddha. I like this. It's a little bit long, but I like it.

If the mind is left to its natural flow without any alteration, the present thought will not stay very long. When the present thought occurs, if we think it should not occur and try to stop it, that blocks the expressive power of awareness. But when the present thought first arises and we recognize it, we can just rest in the natural flow of that recognition without any alteration. It's like ripples in water—as soon as they arise, they disappear without a trace, which is the characteristic of thoughts. There is absolutely nothing solid, true, or imperishable about a thought. Just exploring thoughts in that way, even when the content seems really intense.

I'll end with this little poem about continuing the natural flow of thoughts without trying to change: "Whether eating or sleeping, going or staying, whatever one does, there is nothing more than this—even in the teachings of the Buddhas of the three times."

That's the freedom from papañca, from conflict, from atammayatā. There's nothing more than this.

Thank you for your patient attention.

Let us just be quiet for a minute, and then we can chant the sharing of blessings together.

This is an example of how thoughts are also useful. When we understand that they are intrinsically empty, we can use them—like words to share the merit, to cultivate the wholesome. We don't hate thoughts. We simply recognize their nature.

Let us chant together.

Now let us chant the verses of sharing and aspiration, through the goodness that arises from our practice...

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