Steady Recognition of Awareness Untangles Confusion

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 51:28

Just sharing in the groups over the last couple of days, but today particularly, I was feeling something I often feel—the tenderness, really, of being human, of living this life as a human being on this earth.

It's not easy. Being human, there's a lot of tenderness to it, but there's a lot of beauty and love and kindness. There's also sorrow, difficulty, loss, pain, fear—all of that. It's part of being human. There's no way around it. It's part of what we signed up for without knowing it when we took birth in this form.

Sometimes you just feel it more tenderly than others. And the sense of all of us here—I mean, all humans—we want to be happy. We want to live with ease. As Mingyur Rinpoche says, everything we do, every move we make is in the pursuit of trying to be happy. And that's, of course, really normal, natural.

I was feeling the tenderness of that and also really appreciating all of us here in this situation, sharing in the groups and in your practice. Just sitting here in this last sitting and looking out at all the people sitting so quietly, all kinds of stuff going on inside. I don't know all your intentions, so I'm projecting, but assuming there has to be some level of really sincere intention, motivation for understanding, for freedom, for ease. You couldn't even still be here after four days of doing this without that really honest, sincere intention. People can't stand it otherwise. And it's really touching.

I remember a friend's mother said to me once, "What do you do? You mean there's no TVs?" It's like a whole other level of reality.

So it's natural that we want to be happy. And I'm sure all of you know this—I'm not saying anything you don't already know—but how the Buddha was really moved out of compassion to teach when at first he was thinking it's too much trouble to try and really share what he had seen in his awakening because it's subtle and hard to see. People won't get it. And he was really moved, this is the story, moved to compassion. With his all-seeing mind he could see how much everyone wants to be happy, and in trying to do so, is doing so from confusion, from misunderstanding, and doing the very things that keep us spinning in the confusion, in the suffering, and not really knowing why we're doing that.

Do you get a feeling for that sometimes here? We're really sincere, and we might have a little moment of really being free—you see the potential—and then we're spinning in the stupid story again. Really in it. Not just "oh, I'm sort of in it," but really in it. Or am I the only one?

It's kind of a mystery. So there's a tenderness to that, for me, with our sincere motivation and the effort

and the willingness to be here and all the wholesomeness, all the beauty. And it just calls forth so much patience and willingness to look and willingness to really walk this path. It's not easy. This is compassion.

This is the first noble truth, of course, of the Buddha—that this unsatisfactoriness in life, this being human, includes the beauty and it includes the difficult. And the beauty also doesn't last. The difficult also doesn't last. Nothing lasts. Nothing's steady state.

But the suffering that awakening frees us from—and I know we're all knowing this now—isn't what we would originally think in the beginning of our practice, or when we're doing, as Mingyur says, just trying to be happy. The idea of happiness, the idea of freedom of heart and mind, as we've said before, is basically this: difficult stuff should stop happening. I shouldn't feel grief or loss or whatever.

And so the freedom that really the Buddha's teaching and awareness is taking us into is different from that. It's not a freedom that gets rid of the stuff we don't like, but it gets rid of the sense of me not liking. That's a whole different angle. We can't think our way into it.

But you'll recognize it when I say it, because I think I've already said it fifteen times.

All of our difficulties—this is the Dalai Lama now—all of our difficulties come from our moment-to-moment mistaken perception. *Perception* is a very specific term in the Pali. It really means how we recognize experience in a moment. We recognize a person, we recognize a clock, we recognize this as a retreat—that's perception. Moment-to-moment mistaken perception. Because we don't recognize accurately.

And so this is one aspect of the *moha*, the delusion that Alexis mentioned. We recognize inaccurately. And this ignorance, this inaccurate recognition—this is still the Dalai Lama—is really what feeds the 84,000 destructive, obstructive emotions, the afflictive emotions, and the cognitive obscurations.

I like that phrase: the afflictive emotions. And I like how they put in 84,000. But we can stay with greed, hatred, and confusion—that's enough. The 84,000 are just subsets of that. And cognitive obscurations. I like that because it's not always afflictive emotions that are confusing us. It's not always that we're feeling aversion, or we're in greed. We can feel quite balanced. But the *moha*, the confusion, the not recognizing accurately, can still be clouding the consciousness, the *citta*, and producing inaccurate perceptions.

And why is that such a problem? That's what we'll go into—how these inaccurate perceptions feed our confusion and reactivity, and we get so lost so fast from what's actually true.

In any particular moment where the mind, the heart, consciousness is present and clear—and everything's moment to moment, right?—there are moments when the consciousness isn't obscured, when we're not caught in greed or aversion or resistance, when it's just clear and no confusion is emanating from that. In those moments, there are still different qualities of mental states in the consciousness, but those are when the beautiful, wholesome qualities shine out. It could be equanimity. It could be calm. It

could be loving-kindness. It could be compassion. It isn't always like some big, overwhelming emotion. It could be very subtle and peaceful. Or just peace. Just the heart-mind that isn't fabricating some whole story of problems. Just that moment of peace. And then it's over and we jump into the next thing, which I'll talk about. But this is what naturally shines out—the beautiful qualities.

So the path of our practice here, we're talking about really recognizing and cultivating the recognition of this receptive, natural, conscious awareness, just the simplicity of steady awareness. Nyoshul Khenpo, who was a great Tibetan Dzogchen master, said our dharma practice works in two ways. One is to recognize the nature of the non-deluded mind, the non-deluded heart. And the other aspect is discovering how the deluded mind works. Both of these are going on.

A lot of the time here, what we're doing is learning, discovering how the deluded mind works. But we maybe don't really recognize that we're learning that. We're just hating that it's here and wanting to get rid of it. But the simplicity of how it works—it's not that wisdom is allowed to arise because of the steadiness of receptive awareness and we get to sidestep the difficult stuff. The way that the wisdom really arises as to how the deluded mind works is by clear recognition, by—I hate to tell you, but you already know this—hanging out with the difficult stuff.

And it's so often on retreat, or in life—but we'll stick with retreat because it's a little microcosm. It's the same mind, right? Whatever's coming up here, the way the mind works on retreat, it works the same way in our daily life. We just have a little more space to explore it here.

But so often, you know, we really feel like the practice isn't going well, or we're hopeless, or we're caught in aversion, or we can't recognize awareness. Or it was going great, but now we're bored out of our mind—and what are we going to do? Whatever, 84,000 choices.

And going back to what the Buddha saw in the beginning, our go-to habit is: *this is wrong*. And once I understand this, it's going to stop happening, and I've got to do something to get rid of it, right? That's just where we go. But it's not like that. It's really by being with. It's like you had a choice—you don't have a choice. You're being with it because it's here.

And when we say again, really accept the moment—because this moment could not possibly be different. Everything's come together. All the conditions that have come together to make this moment, it's like this. How can we wish this moment was different? How the mind, the heart, the awareness meets this moment is setting up conditions for the next moment. But this moment is as it is. How do you know it should happen? Because it is. Because all the conditions have come together.

And so it's really by—when these difficulties or unwanted experiences arise... I think it's Joko Beck, maybe it's Pema Chödrön. Instead of thinking of it as dislike, just think of it as unwanted. And that's true, right? This is an unwanted experience that's happening right now.

But the steady awareness—that hopefully you've noticed, because we say this no matter what you tell us,

right? We just say, okay, be aware of it. How can you bring awareness into this? Receive it with awareness. That quality of awareness that isn't judging is what allows for the wisdom to start to come in, to begin to understand how the deluded mind works. If we just think we're waiting for it to go away and then it gets the way we want it and we can just be happy in that, we've learned nothing. We've learned nothing.

And for me—and it's not only for me—I've had long retreats. There are periods on retreats that are sometimes really difficult. Sometimes there are moments that are difficult, moments that aren't. But sometimes, on some retreats, we call them dukkha retreats. If you look back, if you've had a lot of years of practice, I'm sure you can look back and think of particular retreats where you're like, "What is going on? Dukkha, dukkha, dukkha." And they're not all like that.

And in the middle of it, even though you're really bringing awareness, you're practicing, it doesn't mean you're doing something wrong. But our subtle background idea is still: if I'm aware right, it's going to go away, right? How many times do you say, "I was really, really mindful, but it's still here"? It slips in.

And you can't really tell, mostly, in the midst of really learning to bring awareness into the difficulty. You don't really see until kind of later the effects of that. I mean, sometimes for me, after a period that was really difficult—and maybe it could be in life too, it doesn't have to be on retreat. Bringing the same awareness in life, it's the same. And you may think—you can't even tell sometimes. Are you just spinning in it? Are you just kicking your heels and caught and spinning? Or are you really learning how to bring awareness, how to meet it differently? And sometimes you can tell—a moment of seeing it differently—but a lot of times you can't until later.

Sometimes a similar thing comes up, or you find yourself in another situation, and you see that there's a level of freedom from identification with that experience. The experience doesn't necessarily stop arising, but there's a different relationship to it—a kind of freedom from being so identified with it. It's not that you can clock how you're learning and how much freedom is coming, but you'll notice it later.

Learning to trust this more and more can give us a sense of faith, confidence. When the garden isn't growing as fast as you want—and it never will, as Nisha was saying last night—we can have confidence that the steady, non-judging awareness, just remembering that, is the only personal effort we can put in with this style. But something is happening. Something is happening. It's not in the way that we think, because the way we think is based on misperceptions.

So let me say a bit more about awareness. This is from Ajahn Tejaniya, trying to describe how this receptive awareness—I mean, it's just part of us—is like being the pure witness to whatever is being experienced. With difficulty, sometimes that's hard, but also with the beautiful, still being the pure witness without holding onto or rejecting experience.

It's really a different sense of being fully present, really being the witness to the suffering in ourselves or in the world, really feeling it. It's not like a removed, "Oh yes, that's suffering. Oh yes, this is happiness. I'm

the pure witness." It's feeling it. And the more that receptive awareness is really receiving, we actually feel it more completely, but without rejecting and without holding onto experience. This is the doorway. This is what allows for compassion for ourselves, compassion for others.

I was listening to a talk online from a Tibetan Lama, and someone asked him at the end, "Can you say in one word what the Buddhist teachings are?" Which, you know, that's kind of a silly question. But I thought he came up with a great answer. He thought about it a minute, and he said, "Empathy."

Empathy is really—and then he talked about it—but really that comes from just being able to be with the suffering, to be with the beauty. When there's that empathy of feeling it in ourselves, we're naturally able to be with it with others. Actually, the sense of self and other isn't so much there when there's empathy. I thought that was a lovely answer.

As we cultivate trust in the simplicity of awareness—we don't create the awareness, we just learn to recognize it—this is what makes a vast understanding and response to life become possible. We start to see through our misperception of being separate, of being an independent me. We're not so much constructing the world through that misperception, that self-centered lens. That's really the ultimate misperception that gives rise to all the others—this self-centered sense of me, separate from others, where everything refers back to me.

Sogyal Rinpoche once gave an example of this sense of everything referring back to me. He described how in Tibet, when we're going to build a house and we're making the footprint for the house, we start with the center stake. Then we have a long measuring rope, and from that stake we measure all the way around to get the dimensions of the house. He said that's like the sense of me—the center point of everything, and everything is measured from that sense of me. That's really the ultimate misperception.

This practice addresses the habit that leads to the habits that blind us: the habits of wanting, the habits of resistance, of aversion, the habit of reflecting that everything's about me. This is really where we get lost, from that misperception. And we can't just talk our way out of it because it's unconscious. Like I said, it's like gravity. I don't think "me"—something just happens and me noticing that happens.

Joseph tells a story that illustrates this perfectly. It's small, but it shows what happens. He was sitting a retreat here himself, and you know, he's tall, so he stands out. Plus people know who he is, so everyone's looking at him. He was standing second in the lunch line, just like here, and the first person went to help themselves to the soup or whatever, and the big pot still had the lid on it. So the person picked up the lid, and it dropped on the floor and made a heck of a racket. You can imagine, when you're all standing in silence—a heck of a racket. And everyone's looking, because everyone's lined up. He says his first thought was that he wanted to turn around and go, "It wasn't me."

That's what we do. Whatever's going on, how does it affect me? That's the point.

In a moment, in any moment, when there's that receptive awareness—really present with what's

happening, that sense of empathy—then you may think, well, you're not doing anything. You're just receiving. But when the perception isn't clouded by confusion, as Anam Thubten says, the heart will know what to do. We don't have to think, "Oh no, if I'm just being receptive, I can't function, I can't do anything." No, no. The heart will know what to do. It becomes clear. It's just obvious. So learning to trust that.

There are lots of ways of talking about how we get so far away so quickly from just the simplicity of experience. Tonight I'm focusing mostly on thoughts, because that's a good way we get lost. But let's start with Vedana—you know Vedana, feeling tone, right? Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. Any sense experience—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, or emotions—the mind, the citta, experiences it as having a quality of pleasantness or unpleasantness or something kind of neutral. This is subtle and quick, this feeling tone, Vedana, something the Buddha talked about. And I think it's so brilliant that he could notice that. Because as you know already, and I'll say again, it leads so quickly into so much confusion when we don't notice it.

Ajahn Sumedho puts it this way: we live as sensitive forms. This is back to the tenderness of being human in my mind. We live as sensitive forms. In other words, there's constant Vedana, feeling tone, arising in our mind—pleasant, unpleasant, neutral—with every sense experience. And that's constantly, twenty-four seven. It doesn't take a break. So we're really sensitive forms. The hearing is neutral, or it's a little bit pleasant, or it's a little bit unpleasant. We don't notice it most of the time, but this is going on. This is our experience. The sense doors—it comes with a sense of pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. It just makes a little impact in the mind.

We often don't notice, and often it's just subtle enough that nothing comes from it. But because it's so frequent—it's so frequent—there are plenty of times when it makes a bit more of an impact. Say it's really cold. You go out and it's really cold and windy, and it really makes an impact. You notice. Maybe you don't recognize the unpleasantness, but you notice it. Or maybe you love it when it's cold, so it's pleasant. It's not like the coldness is inherently pleasant or unpleasant. It's how it's impacting this particular being at this particular moment.

With the right information, or right view as Sayadaw U Tejaniya would say, there'd be a sense of: coldness. It's unpleasant. Cold is like this. The body's feeling shivering. Shivering is like this. It's just what's happening. But with misperception, which just comes in right away, it becomes "I'm so cold." Do you get the difference? It's adding a whole "I'm." Cold feels like this, but "I'm cold"—which goes almost immediately to "I don't like it. I didn't bring the right clothes. What's the matter with the weather in Massachusetts? What is going on?"

In two seconds, you're into disaster. It takes no time. Me, me, me—and then you see someone else walk by with a really good down coat, and you don't have one, and then you're into all this wanting. Then you're saying, "Okay, okay, I'm really trying to boycott Amazon, but I'd really like to go back to my room and order a down coat, because I could get it here by tomorrow."

If you've been here on the three-month retreat—I've been teaching it often, not recently, but for thirty, thirty-five years—the last some years, it's been a really different experience. You come in and there are piles of packages in the foyer halfway through. Where are these coming from? And then you realize the retreatants are back in their rooms ordering stuff online, and it's getting delivered. This is really true. It used to be that occasionally somebody's partner would send them some cookies, but now it's unbelievable.

That's a digression. But that's where we go. That's where we go. You could be there, you've walked out, you've felt cold, and thirty seconds later we're down that rabbit hole. That's how fast it happens—when we're not recognizing accurately the misperception that "this cold is happening to me." That "me" has a sense of clinging, a sense of tension. Not to judge it, but just to notice the difference, how it feels. "Oh, cold is like this" versus "I'm so cold." Playing with that, noticing how it works.

And of course, as I said, it doesn't stop there. As soon as there's "me," there's pleasant or unpleasant. Pleasant is the same: "That would be so nice. Let me go get more." There's a judging of experience. Pleasant experience is good—it's supposed to happen, it's normal. Unpleasant—there's something wrong with it, or with me. Something to do. And it just spirals, spirals, spirals.

That's the afflictive emotions getting going, right? And as soon as they're getting going, you can't actually recognize what's really happening. This is where we're talking about just what's really happening. "It's so cold and I don't know what to do and I have leftover bronchial stuff from when I had bronchitis in December..." And if you ask, "What's happening?"—"Well, I have bronchial problems and I might get sick." But what's actually happening? Oh, there's tickling. An aversion. That's what's happening.

It's really hard—how hard it is—to simply rest in "Ah, it feels like this." Because it feels so real. This is where we really get lost, if we can't just appreciate the simplicity of awareness. The thoughts take us. And so quickly, so quickly, we create a world in our thoughts, right? And we believe it. We believe the description. Maybe I'm not the only one—the mind comes up with a description of thought, of liking, of disliking, of what's wrong with this, of how it should be, what's really going on. And then, without even recognizing it—because it was ten seconds from feeling the cold or hearing an unpleasant sound to "How can that possibly be happening?"—we're gone. And we really don't even know that that's just a created world of thought. We really think that the mental thoughts are the actual description of what's happening.

Have you heard this? A long time ago I mentioned that Audubon, who was famous for recognizing and drawing birds, said: if there's a drawing of a bird and there's the actual bird, and the drawing is different from the bird, believe the bird.

And so we're learning, with awareness, what's happening in just the simple sense experiences. Come home, as Thich Nhat Hanh says. It's an act of real wisdom to just not have to sit. You can walk. You can be doing the dishes, whatever you're doing. Come home to just this moment—which includes thinking, but recognizing thinking rather than being lost in the content.

What's happening now?

But we get so lost. You probably also know this story about long ago, a monk who was living in a cave, and he painted a picture of a tiger on the wall. It was so realistic that when he turned around and then turned back, it scared him. That's what we do. That's what happens.

As Ajahn Sumedho says, we concoct these worlds based on the reaction to pleasant or unpleasant or neutral. That actually colors our perception. A whole story comes up, and we're inhabiting that world without even knowing it. We think that's the world.

This is from Thanissaro Bhikkhu, an American monk in the Thai tradition. Perhaps you know who he is—he's one of maybe three living translators from the Pali into English of the Theravada Buddhist texts. He has a monastery in Southern California.

He's talking about samsara. You know the word samsara? It's usually translated as "wandering on," which is considered this life. He says samsara literally means wandering on. Many people think of it as the Buddhist name for the place where we currently live. We often say, "Oh, samsara—there's a lot of suffering in samsara." Samsara is about birth and death, suffering. It's just a place, the place we leave when we go to nibbana.

But in the early Buddhist texts, samsara is the answer not to "where are we?" but to "what are we doing?" I love that. What are we doing? 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 world of being really cold and needing a better down coat—then you come inside and that world is gone. We create another one and go there.

At the same time, you're bumping into all the other people who are creating their own worlds. They're living in their world; you're living in your world. We're bumping into each other. And lost in these worlds, we don't even know what's really happening. This is the essential misperception. This is how we get so far so fast.

Ajahn Sumedho says this is like a concoction. We concoct the whole world of being cold, or coming back in and being in a nice warm retreat center and feeling safe. Or you come in and it's a nice warm retreat center, but then somebody walks past and you think they're looking at you with a stink eye, as they say in Hawaii. And you think, "What did I do?" You don't feel safe. What's going on? You can't talk. Then you've got a whole other world in two seconds, and they don't even know you were there—they're in their own world. Who knows what their world is?

But we don't even think that. We just think we're in our own world. We're concocting these worlds again and again and again, concocted based on the perception, based on the feeling tone, the mental states that come up, the thoughts that come up about it, the concepts. We're living in our own world without even knowing it. So complicated, so quickly.

As the Buddha said when he talked about this: what we feel—vedana—what we feel, that we perceive. You walk out, unpleasant cold, you perceive it as cold, or however you perceive it. A hell realm of freezing, the cold hells, whatever you perceive. It's amazing, it's invigorating—whatever your perception is. Just like that.

The Buddha taught that what we perceive, we think about. And what we think about without awareness, we complicate. This is still from the Buddha. We complicate with associations—all our associations of coldness—with memories, all our memories of coldness, and everything we've ever read.

All our concepts, all our ideas—all of this happens from thinking in the blink of an eye, doesn't it? And then the thoughts keep going, going, going. And then the Buddha said these thoughts turn around and assail a person. They turn around and attack us, basically. Just like painting the tiger on the wall. It's exactly that.

This is what we do again and again and again without recognizing it. We wonder—we might think we're mindful, but if there's not the steady awareness that we've been talking about, we might jump in and see aversion to the cold and then not notice all those worlds. And a little bit later, we're eating in the dining room and we're in another whole world of greed or shame or judgment or embarrassment—whatever the particular world we're in—without quite recognizing it again.

Ajahn Sumedho says we don't often recognize how flighty our minds are. I'd say our attention is so flighty. Without the steadiness of awareness, we don't notice the cessation of one world and the beginning of another. That's why we're talking about this: when we have steady awareness, you really can see. You can see this whole process, like I was just describing. When I described the cold, you could see how that happens.

So with steady awareness, not abandoning awareness no matter what happens, we start to see these worlds come together and fall apart, come together and fall apart. The more we see that, the less able we are to keep identifying with each one. I mean, it's exhausting, isn't it?

Look tonight. Look tomorrow. Just notice the pleasantness or unpleasantness. Notice as the thoughts start creating a world. Notice the world that comes up, and keep noticing when it dissipates. Or maybe you don't actually see it end, but later you notice it's gone. Notice that. And how many in a day?

If we're identifying with each one: this one's happy, this one's not happy, this is pleasant, this is not happy, I'm so ashamed, I feel incredible, I'm so bored, I'm feeling peaceful, this is the stupidest thing I've ever done, this is so amazing, how could anyone not... It's exhausting. And that could be in ten minutes. It's exhausting when we're identified with each of those. But it's fascinating when we're really exploring it and not taking it personally.

Time goes fast when you're the one talking. Not so much for you. It's two different experiences.

One point I wanted to make about this: why sometimes it seems like we spend—those of us up here—a lot more time pointing to the kilesas, the difficult qualities of mind: greed, hatred, confusion. We talk about the beautiful qualities too, but we really give an emphasis to awareness recognizing when the heart, when the mind, when consciousness is clouded by kilesa.

Recognizing that wanting is present is very different from not recognizing it. Or aversion. Because we can be mindful—I can say I'm mindful, and I'm going to keep using the cold because it's easier than making up a new example every time. I can be aware of cold and think I'm quite mindful, quite aware. There's awareness, but not noticing the reactivity, not noticing the aversion. We all know this, right? It's like there's layers. Cold, cold, cold—and then the mind gets going. Then you realize you're caught in something, the whole story. What's happening?

Oh, it's really unpleasant. Aversion's like this.

But without recognizing—when awareness doesn't recognize that we're seeing through the lens of aversion or the lens of greed—that's where we get so caught. The whole story keeps going and we can't see what to do. We can't act appropriately. We can't recognize accurately.

And this is from the Buddha. I think without knowing, we don't recognize that wanting or clinging, aversion, resistance, or the sense of me—everything filtered through *me*—is present. That masks what's actually occurring. And this is really the basic misperception we're running around with in our life. We're just not quite seeing what's really happening.

The Buddha said, "When one dwells with a mind obsessed and oppressed by ill-will..." And that's how it feels. Our heart-mind is oppressed when there's ill-will, when there's aversion in it—oppressed by craving, oppressed by delusion. The sense of me, me, me at the center of everything—it's an oppression if you really feel it. When that's happening, one does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen ill-will. What's the escape from arisen craving? What's the escape from arisen delusion? We don't understand that. And on that occasion, one neither knows nor sees as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both.

He's really saying that when we don't see that those are present, we can't recognize accurately, and we can't see what's for our own good or what's for the good of others. Why? Even if we think we're well-meaning, even if we want to do something to help someone else in the world, but it's coming from greed or anger or self-righteousness—we just can't see clearly.

So explore here. That's what retreats are good for. They give us little examples to explore. Notice. It could be fun, really, going through the day.

If you start to notice, say there's some greed. Pick food—pick something easy, right? Say there's a smell coming, and you think, "Oh, there's going to be mashed potatoes." I don't know where that came from. Mashed potatoes, and you really like mashed potatoes, and it's ten in the morning. You feel the greed

coming up. And you notice the greed coming up, sort of, but then you're caught in it. Notice how when there's greed coloring the perception, it affects what we see.

With greed, it's sort of like—you know, there's this saying: a pickpocket only sees a saint's pockets, doesn't see that the person's a saint. You see what the greed wants and you don't see anything else. You have that sense—there's only two bananas left and there's four people in front of you, and you want to just elbow them aside. You try to think of a way: "How can I just go by and take..." It's like you don't care about anything else. The greed blinds what you see. Or the aversion works in the same way. Selective perception, I call it.

Notice if there's something here—a sound, or God forbid, someone, or something—and the mind has just got an aversion going. Notice how that thing seems to be ubiquitous. It's everywhere. If it's a particular sound, that's all you hear.

Sometimes we get locked onto someone we don't even know. We get what we call Vipassana romance or Vipassana vendetta. And it's nothing about the person, because you don't even know them. But there's something about them that gets wanting going, or aversion going. Either way, you see that person all the time. You know, you think, "They're deliberately putting themselves in my way." And people really—I mean, seriously—we don't even notice other stuff.

And this happens within yourself, when you're feeling self-judgment. There's a wear of self-judgment, but you're really believing it. So that's aversion.

Aversion in the mind. And then what aspects of thoughts come up, what memories arise that you believe? If you think, "Well, but I did that good thing," it's like, "Oh, that's a crock. No. What's really true are all the bad things you could list about yourself." And you say, "Well, let me say some good things," and you go, "No, that's not true." The perception is just glomming onto the negative. And that's all we can see.

That's how, when the mind is obsessed or oppressed with aversion, it can't see clearly. There's some beautiful, there's some unpleasant, there's this, there's that—it's changing every moment. We don't see that. How often do you come in and say, "This has been going on all day"? Coming here, you've been feeling this boredom, or whatever it is, all day. And in that moment, we think that.

When you notice yourself thinking it, check in and see. How long, in steady state, did that actually last before a moment came in thinking, "I wonder what's for lunch?" "Oh, but I'm really such a horrible person. I'm really done today." "Well, you know, it's kind of nice out. Maybe I'll go for a walk." "Oh, god, I'm really so..."

Notice selective perception and see how it works. This is awareness helping us see how the deluded mind operates. It works the same in the world, in big things. And I won't go into any content, but I can see there are people I don't want to see anything good about. I really don't want to let in anything good. I can see my mind doing that. They're all bad. They're all good. And that's just not true for anything. Selective

perception blinds us. And mostly, it's about ourselves. We don't notice the cessation.

So watch yourself through the day here. Play with it. Notice with simple choices as you go through the day—we get used to bringing awareness into the quality of our mind. I often say, as an example, when you go into the dining room, you have to pick where you're going to sit. Notice how the mind chooses that. There's no right or wrong. But you might notice: Is it wanting that leads the show? "Oh, that's a good seat over there where I can see out the window and no one's sitting across from me." Or is it aversion? "I don't want to sit next to that person, and here I don't like to sit because it's too close to the line, and that's too close to the tea station." Or is it that you just don't even know where you're sitting—you just plop down? Explore it. It's not right or wrong.

Explore going through the line. Explore thinking, "Should I take an extra apple and save it for nine o'clock tonight when I'm really tired?" And how many apples do you pile up because you save them? And then they're rotting back there. Notice what you go through. It's really interesting.

If you don't make it right or wrong, the awareness starts to get more subtle, more tuned in, really seeing. You can see wanting arise, the impulse to save the apple. Whether you save it or not doesn't matter. But we don't have to be servants of the greed, of the wanting. We can see it.

We can feel wantings like this. If we don't see them, they do their job, as Sayadaw U Tejaniya says. Wanting has one job, and it does it well. Aversion has its own job, and does it well. But when we bring in awareness, we can see how these forces act. They do their jobs, but they come and they cease. We don't have to be driven by them. We don't have to be afraid of them.

This is why the steadiness of awareness really starts to help us see through these stories, these different worlds that are being created. We can see them being created—that's okay. But we can see them coming, and we can see them falling away. We don't have to be caught in them.

I'll end with something Anam Thubten says about the practice of awareness. When we can be with awareness, even though the habits are there, the awareness itself is untouched. Awareness of aversion is not averse. Awareness of being caught up in a story—the awareness isn't caught up in the story. It's watching. It's with it.

He says, "We are easily pulled these days into the vortex of fear and worry and anger. It seems to be swirling in the world." So easy to get pulled into that, and then we lose touch. He says we lose touch with awareness. We lose touch with our innate dignity. We lose touch with love and compassion, which are natural states, because we're lost in the vortex of aversion and fear.

So we practice to re-recognize awareness—awareness of fear, awareness of anger. But re-recognizing awareness, he says, when we're recognizing awareness, there's natural access to love and compassion, to dignity. Awareness offers us access to that again. And that's what we offer to the world.

It's a lot to think that just this simplicity of awareness can make that possible. But it does. It's not us. It's not something we create.

He talks about conscious awareness, his language for it, as "awakened attentiveness." It's not something that's created. We can't create it. We can't make it happen. It's not like a refined meditative state. It's simply recognized because it's completely natural, normal, always available. It's so simple that we overlook it.

I'll read this, because I love it, from one of the schools of Mahamudra Tibetan teaching—the four faults of natural awareness:

It's so close, you can't see it.
It's so deep, you can't fathom it.
It's so simple, you can't believe it.
It's so good, you can't accept it.

It's so amazing, and it's so nothing.

Thank you for your attention, whatever worlds were being created as we all sat here.

Thank you.

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