Mundane and Supermundane Right View

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 49:25

When we first begin with this style of practice, when one first begins and we're all trying to get the felt sense, the trusted sense of steady, receptive awareness—which includes not holding on, as we've said ten million times—it takes a while to start to feel the flow of it, to trust it, and to really get a sense of what is meant by awareness with right view.

Right view is a huge topic, but by now I know that everyone we're speaking to has, at times, really experienced—not intellectually, but intuitively, experientially—that sense of the mode of receptive awareness. When you can say it's flowing, it's steady, and whatever's arising, as Mingyur Rinpoche said, is simply an object that reintroduces awareness. Whether it's something beautiful or something difficult, whether it's mundane, whether it's clinging or aversion or love—whatever's arising, there's this sense of "it's all here." That flowing awareness with right view, you really can at times get a sense of how that could move toward a taste of freedom, really.

People have said that when something difficult comes up, a pattern, they can feel it's coming. It still feels difficult, but there's that little shift you can't really describe to someone else—into the awareness *with* it, not *of* it, but *with* it, rather than *in* it, fighting it or trying to figure it out. Like, "Oh, it's still happening, but it isn't suffering in the same way. It's still unpleasant, but isn't suffering."

Different people have said this in different ways. And when it's like that—which it isn't always—you don't have to think about it, but that is really almost supermundane right view. The right view that it's all coming and going, whatever it is. Whatever it is introduces us to the nature of Dhamma, the nature of life. There's nothing to be preferred. There's nothing to be shut out. And everything comes and vanishes.

It really starts to highlight or give us more of a felt sense of the emptiness side of things—empty of its own lasting self-existence. When the awareness is steady, everything's arising due to causes and conditions. Some of them we don't see because they can stretch way back, but we can see that coming together, we can see whatever's happening coming together, doing its number, falling apart, the next thing going, going, going. The more we are trusting and resting with this receptive, steady awareness, the more this just soaks in. Not thinking about it, but it soaks in. It gets a little harder to take everything so solidly and everything so personally.

And then, at some point, it isn't so hard because everything's changing, and we're resting in receptive awareness. As we all know, sometimes whatever's occurring—not that it's pleasant or unpleasant—overwhelms the awareness. In the beginning, with instructions, I know it's confusing when we try to give the sense of receptive awareness with whatever's happening, but also teach that if it's too

much, you can use skillful means to redirect the attention, to take care of the awareness.

Often in the beginning—because that's what we know, though not only in the beginning—the mind takes it that when aversion or clinging comes, it's bad and we need to redirect the awareness. Or when something unpleasant comes, we think, "Oh, it's overwhelming the awareness, I need to move it." But it isn't overwhelming the awareness—it's just that we don't like it. Or we have the idea that the kilesas should not be occurring. That's a view we have. It takes long conscious awareness before we really understand experientially that aversion can come up and be known and felt, and it passes, and it doesn't matter.

Awareness doesn't care if it's aversion or bliss. *I* care. I want bliss. I don't want aversion. And everything's locked into place. Awareness doesn't care. And that's the turning in the direction of freedom. It doesn't care, but it's present.

So in the beginning, it's confusing for all of us. We don't know: when should I redirect the attention? What should I do? This is coming up. I can't be with it. But mostly we can be with it. Not very frequently do we truly need to redirect.

I remember a long time ago, I heard a talk by Ajahn Sumedho about practicing in Thailand, in a kuti. Those kutis have tin roofs. If you've ever been in one in the hot season with the sun beating down—I have—you want to die. They are so hot. And he said he'd have three robes on, these really heavy robes. And he said, "I'd be sitting, sweating through my robes, thinking, 'I can't bear this another minute.' And then I'd find that I could."

That's what it's like.

That's just another minute. "I'll bear this another minute." Okay, it's like this.

So it's definitely confusing. But as we come to trust receptive awareness with right view, and more and more see that whatever our skillful means might be, the motivation is taking care of the awareness—not making things the way we want, but taking care of the awareness.

When something difficult arises, or it could be something wonderful, but it comes up and it's so strong that it has overwhelmed the awareness, basically you've lost connection with awareness. It's not like, "This is just strong and hard to be with." It's overwhelmed. And you all know what I mean by now. At that time, that's when the right view is really to take care of the awareness. That's when we consciously have the intention to redirect the attention to something just neutral and easy to be with. Because what we're doing is refreshing, rediscovering, refueling into that quality of awareness. And that's what we're taking care of.

When we talk about right view, there are these two modes. One is: anything coming and going is all equally empty, equally just what it is in the moment, equally a doorway to awareness. On the other hand, really through the steady awareness, we come to understand what brings confusion and suffering on our regular mundane level. The steady awareness helps to see that.

That gets less confusing as we go along. As we understand experientially how the awareness is, then we understand that we can, with it, really see: How does greed get so strong that it completely takes me over? What experiences—not asking yourself, but watching—what experiences increase greed to the point that it's taking over? Or aversion, or fear, or whatever? Not that it's bad that it's there, but to the point of taking over.

I wanted to say a little about right view in the way it's talked about in the suttas. This is a vast topic, and I'm condensing it to five minutes. Using Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, the Buddha talks about mundane and supramundane right view. I feel like we're working in those two sides of the coin—you can say two realms, but really two sides of understanding—back and forth all the time.

When it's flowing, when everything is just coming and going, it's approaching that quality of right view, that sense of a shift of perception that recognizes things in a different way and frees the heart and mind from confusion, sense of separation, and clinging in that moment. Supramundane.

And then when we're either caught in stuff or really watching and seeing that if I keep doing this it leads to more greed, and can consciously shift—we feel like that's a doing. That's different from just whatever's happening, whatever's happening doesn't matter. But then seeing where it does matter and making a conscious shift, a conscious choice—this is what you could call mundane right view.

I want to share what the Buddha says about them, but first I'll read this from His Holiness, talking about nirvana and regular life:

"To find happiness, it is indispensable to have a correct view of the nature of mind and the world. Someone who has the wrong view about nature cannot follow the path of transforming a habit to realize liberation. What is meant by right view is not faith or believing in any particular dogma, but a clear understanding that is reached through thoroughly examining reality."

That's what steady awareness makes possible—thoroughly examining reality moment to moment.

"This kind of examination will refute the belief in the independent existence of things, which is the root of our distorted vision of the world, and replace it with right view."

This also implies, in Tibetan language, a recognition that the nature of freedom is the essence of our own mind—pure, without confusion. But it also involves identifying the factors that keep us from perceiving that nature, so that it becomes possible for them to be abandoned, for us not to feed them.

That's a way of talking about mundane and supramundane right view. It's huge, but when the Buddha talked about mundane right view, he was talking about knowing the Four Noble Truths—not just intellectually, but in our hearts. It's not completely transformative, but that way of looking at the world is very important. He said if it really came down to one thing, you could say it's the understanding of kamma: not all the complications of it, but the understanding that actions have causes and results. And

not understanding that, he says, is what keeps us really bound in actions that cause suffering.

This calls on us to see what Joseph describes as the big picture of mundane right view. It's learning to see what qualities in the mind, what qualities in the heart bring us suffering, and how our wholesome actions of body, speech, and mind—even though they're still rooted in the realm of desire, even though they're not coming from freedom—really have the effect of bringing us happiness in this world.

The Buddha says this is a very important aspect. He's not saying, "Oh, that's second class." He says it matters how we live in the world in a way that brings ourselves and other beings happiness, ease, love, compassion. How to live in the world without actions of speech, body, and mind that cause more confusion and suffering for ourselves and others. This is mundane right view, but it's very, very important. And it's actually what makes it possible for the awareness, the wisdom, to arise to actually see—

more clearly. Supermundane right view—the shift of perception that allows for the understanding of freedom—is only possible when the heart-mind is not clouded by wanting, aversion, or the contraction of self.

So working with this mundane right view, the real sense that actions have effects, have results, that it affects me, it affects others, that nothing is outside of that—this is really, really key.

And in fact, when the Buddha went on to list very mundanely, you could say, the ten right actions—this is under right view, under his description of *sammā diṭṭhi*—he's talking about the level of action, which I think you know. I'll just read them quickly to see how obvious but important it is. These aren't rules where if you don't follow them you're bad. These are things to pay attention to, because paying attention with awareness to the causes and conditions that lead to wholesome actions and their effects, and the causes and conditions that lead us to unwholesome actions and their effects—this is the information, as the Dalai Lama said, that allows for the habits to transform. So it's not a secondary thing.

You know the unwholesome actions; the wholesome ones are just the reverse. The first are bodily actions, basically the precepts: destroying life, taking what is not given, wrong conduct in regard to sense pleasures—essentially greed and sexuality, but wrong conduct. It's not saying *brahmacharya*, it's not saying celibacy, it's saying not hurting people or yourself.

Three bodily actions, and then four verbal actions that cause suffering if we don't see the greed or the aversion that's giving rise to them: lying, false speech. And it's interesting because he says somewhere in the suttas that a person who will deliberately tell a lie is capable of doing anything. He really has very strong things about truthfulness. Then slander, harsh speech, and idle chatter. So speech is a big one. And maybe if some of you practiced a little with speaking yesterday, maybe you saw—you already knew how powerful it is, how quickly it gets into the mind, how quickly we may lose awareness of the subtle level of this intentionality.

And then three mental actions: covetousness—he's not just saying greed, he's saying covetousness, when you want something that belongs to somebody else. Check it out, how unpleasant that is. Then ill will and wrong views. So wrong views is basically major suffering. But then you flip those to not doing those, and that's right view.

I say this not so you have to remember it all, but to see how he's saying wholesome action is at the heart of right view. Mundane right view, really given attention and care—which our steady awareness allows us to see—understanding comes naturally through steady awareness. We know that. And this is part of the path to awakening. It's not something lesser.

In terms of supermundane right view, to use Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation: I know I always think of it this way. What's really supported me so much in my years of practice is the understanding, the trust, that mind is arising and passing moment to moment. To think of something that arises and has to stay like that—then there's no way we can... we think, how can I have a mind that never has any *kilesa* coming up? It's impossible! And we think way down in the future.

But as we've both talked about, and in groups, just in that moment when being with something, when that shift to awareness with wisdom comes in, the clinging, the aversion, the me-ing about something is gone. It's gone. Really gone. And awareness is still there. And there's just that sense of coolness, of freedom, of ease, of however it is for you.

That shift of perception takes the solidity, the perception of solidity, the perception of me, the perception of problem, the perception of lasting—and it just evaporates in that moment. Nothing goes away. It just stops being created. And in that moment, just that potential for a moment, we all can experience that. Can't hold on to it. Can't hold on to anything. But just recognizing gives a sense of the peace, or the coolness, or whatever word works for you, of the heart and mind free from that sense of self-clinging, aversion, me and other. You're not saying all that stuff. It just isn't being created in that moment.

The perception of the shift, the fundamental shift of how we recognize and respond to moment-to-moment experience. I think Andrea said in her talk last night this one particular phrase: things as they have come to be in this moment. It's just, back to Sayadaw: it's just like this. But with this, that's what is really allowing for the non-creation in this moment of the torments, of the confusions.

Not that we have to chop them away with an axe, but in the moment of seeing clearly, receiving as it is, they're not created. They're not born. Always that potential is available.

And so in a way, that's kind of how I feel about awareness practice as we're doing it here, which is just a form of practice. There are times when that sense of the heart-mind can be free—not even thinking of heart-mind. It's just that the experience is so clear and crisp and bright, whatever it is. And we don't have to do anything. It's so clear we don't have to do anything. Anything we do just mucks it up.

But then at another time, it's all confusing. There is a sense of personal effort—a little bit—not to change

anything, but to look at what's happening there. There's awareness here. What will help refresh the awareness? How can I take care of the awareness? So there's a little bit of seeing and doing, with some intellectual wisdom that comes from past experience. That's useful—the first level of wisdom, what we've heard. The middle level is what we think about it, what we've learned.

So sometimes when we're feeling all confused, we can call on that. What's going on? Awareness—I can't feel it. What would help refresh the awareness? Not "how do I get rid of this?" No, no. What would help refresh the awareness? That's right. You remember: oh, just feeling my hands, being with hearing. "Oh, it doesn't feel good." It doesn't matter. I'm aware, aware, aware. And we start to trust that more and more and more.

So there's really nothing to do, but occasionally there's a little something to do. And finding these two, I think, kind of correlates with the two aspects of right view in a very simplistic way.

That's just what I wanted to share today.

May the beneficial energies generated from our sincere practice together be shared with all beings as a support for their freedom from confusion.

Just now. Keep going. Nothing else to do but be aware.

I just remember this story Joseph told us last night. Years and years ago at a Yucca Valley retreat, there was a lovely monk from Sri Lanka who collapsed during a talk—he had a little heart attack. He was okay afterward, so they had the emergency people come, and they were asking him questions to see if he was alright. They said, "Do you know what day it is?" And Joseph said, "No one here knows what day it is."

So we're in good company.

Thank you for listening.

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