# Some Benefits of Continuity of Awareness

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 50:39

So tonight I wanted to offer just a few thoughts on why the steadiness of mindfulness, why the continuity, is actually the key piece—the condition that allows for liberating wisdom, paññā, to arise in the citta.

By the way, someone asked today in a group, what's the difference between heart and mind? I think I'll just clarify so I don't have to keep saying heart-mind. In Pali, the word *citta* is translated as all mental experience—thoughts, emotions, all of that. Sometimes here in the West we've had to make that distinction. We kind of think about the mind as thinking and the heart as emotions. And so a lot of times we have gotten in the habit of saying heart-mind to convey that it's all connected. So I feel like just saying *citta* instead of heart-mind. That's what I mean by it. It's all the mental activities.

So I wanted to talk about why the steadiness of mindfulness is really the key condition that allows for liberating wisdom, for paññā, to arise. There are so many different ways I could talk about this.

To begin with, starting from the top, there's this quotation from the Buddha. At one point someone came to him and asked, "In what way is Nibbana directly visible here and now?" He gave a long answer about how it is directly visible, inviting one to come and see for oneself, to be personally experienced by the wise. He says when lust, when greed is abandoned in the mind, when hatred is abandoned—there's a paragraph for each of them—when delusion is not arising in the mind, in each of those cases, Nibbana is directly visible.

When the mind is obsessed or overwhelmed by—or really in our case, when it is just colored by—greed and we don't recognize it, or by aversion, or by delusion, which those three come together in what's called the three defilements or kilesas or poisons of the mind, when they're present in the citta, in the mind stream, and we're not aware of it, Nibbana is not available. That's really the deepest suffering that comes from these qualities.

He says when any of those are present, you can't see clearly, you can't see your own good, you can't see the good of another, and you can't see the good of both. A lot of times people say, what's wrong with clinging when you're just having a pleasant feeling about something? You're not hurting anything, and it's in the moment, and it feels pleasant, and it is onward leading to have more pleasure, and that becomes the habit. But when clinging is in the mind and not known, we can't see our own good, we can't see the good of another, we can't see the good of both.

These are habits of mind—greed, hatred, confusion. The absence of them, cultivating moment-to-moment mindfulness, can also become a habit of mind. But these so-called poisons or kilesas, they're not

inevitable. They come and go like everything else. And so the quality of clear seeing moment by moment by moment, the steadiness of that attention, is what allows for the wisdom to arise to actually see how this is working, how we get lost, how we can come out of getting lost. It's not theoretical, it's not like something I said or you heard me say.

The steady awareness—why it's so important—is that the awareness is receiving whatever happens, not picking and choosing. "This is bad, so let's pretend it's not happening. This feels good, so let's go there." We know how to do that. We've practiced that twenty-four-seven since we were born. But we really want to learn how the steadiness of awareness without selecting what's worth being aware of is how we can actually learn in this way how these states affect our mind.

Thich Nhat Hanh said, along with everyone else, all of our difficulties stem from mistaken perception. That's why there's so much emphasis on direct experience or true knowledge. That's exactly what we're doing here—direct experience. But until we start getting familiar with what awareness is, what mindfulness is, we don't even know what direct experience is. We feel like we're some steady-state being, but it's really some concoction coming together and falling apart, coming together and falling apart, and we call it "me," and it's changing all the time. And we don't even know it.

This is one of my favorite quotations from Thanissaro Bhikkhu, about how we get so confused, how we're living in the world so confused. *Samsara*—you know the word samsara—it literally means wandering on. Many people think of samsara as the Buddhist name for the place where we currently live. We're in samsara, we're suffering in samsara. The place we leave when we go to Nibbana. That's what a lot of people think. But in the early Buddhist texts, which he's a scholar of, samsara is the answer not to "where are we?" but to "what are we doing?" It's not a place, it's a process—the tendency to keep creating worlds and then moving into them. As one world falls apart, your mind creates another one and you go there.

Can you relate at all? At the same time, you bump into other people, all of whom are creating their own worlds too. And we wonder why we can't communicate so well. This isn't like an exaggeration or something. He's really describing what we think our life is without direct experience. We're just kind of lost in these worlds, lost in these worlds. And it is just going on from one to the next to the next to the next. We keep trying to make it a little bit better, right? We get this world a little bit better, not really seeing that it's still going to come apart too when we don't see clearly.

Ajahn Sumedho—he's an American man, most of you probably know who he is—anyway, he's ninety-something now, still giving dharma talks. It's amazing. He says a similar thing: "Samsara and nibbana are not places to go, but modes of perception."

So we're coming to perception. Samsara is when the perception of experience is seen through the lens of delusion—of me, of what he calls *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, which is a word in Pali meaning personality view or identity view. It's a form of *moha*, of delusion, of the third poison, you could say—that's taking any experience to be me or mine and then perceiving whatever's arising through that lens. And that's what

he's saying is samsara: sense of self. That's the core wrong perception, the misperception that keeps the whole thing spinning—one world coming into another, another, another one. And until we have the direct perception, the direct experience again and again, that allows for the sudden accurate perception to see, "Oh, it's not like that"—until that can happen, we can think about it all we want, but that just solidifies the whole thing.

So nibbana, he's saying, is the mode of perception free from this confusion, free from sense of self. In other words, just recognizing more accurately. I've always loved that about the Buddha's teaching and the way he describes it. In some ways, the way he describes freedom—it's not that we're going somewhere else, just as Thanissaro Bhikkhu says. We're simply perceiving things as they are, accurately. It's like we don't need to create some new thing. We just need to keep having the willingness to land here, to land here, to land here, in this moment, as well as we can—free from expectation, free from thinking "I know what's going to happen"—just surrendering into this moment. But with this quality of heart that's interested, aware: "Oh, it's like this now. It's like this now. It's like this now."

I could do that, you know, twenty-four-seven. And because we want something a little more obvious, something showing that something's happening, we tend to lose our patience with that. That's why we're up here talking, talking, talking—trying to get you all to just keep remembering, to just keep remembering. And it's like, as someone said in a group, we can go days or an entire retreat and there can just be one moment where somehow the *kilesas*, the great hatred, clears away. And there's the awakeness and the awareness and interest. It just clears away, and the perception is accurate. And there's that sense of, "Oh, all the confusion, the sense of struggle—it's just not even that you put it down, it's just not there." And there's the sense of just ease. It's not like fireworks going off and everybody's bowing to you. It's just, ah. It's just ease. There's not all this hoopla going on.

But so, I want to then go talk about the hoopla a little bit—that's how we get so lost, so far, so fast in these worlds. So I mentioned perception, and I'll start talking about that.

Many of you know, but just to clarify: perception, in terms of how the Buddha speaks of experience, is the translation of the word *saññā* in Pali. And it's one of the mental experiences that's said to be arising in every mind moment, every moment of *citta*. So the way he describes it—I think Greg's talked about some of the sixth sense experiences, right?—that's all that's ever happening. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, some physical sense experience or some mental experience—that's all that's ever happening. And we make up all this stuff, my God, but that's all that's ever happening.

So a sense experience happens, and our sense organs—so say a sound, something happens to make a sound, the sense door is working, your ear is working, and there's consciousness. When those three come together, there's the experience of hearing. That's called contact, the experience of hearing. Very simple. And it's just all conditioned. It's nothing personal. Happening all the time, isn't it?

Every moment that we're awake, this contact is happening.

In that moment of contact, a couple of things occur. Perception arises, which is this quality of recognition—how our mind recognizes that experience. And at the same time, the vedana, the mental experience of it as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, they're coming quite right together.

Perception is essential for functioning. You hear a sound and the mind just knows, "That's the bell," or "That's the lunch bell"—so it's even more specific. And then the bell at six in the morning is, "Oh, that's the wake-up bell." Now, it may be a completely different felt experience internally, right? The same kind of sound. So the perception can be different depending on the state in our heart and mind.

But even more than that, perception in itself is conditioned. And we tend not to particularly notice—we just think, "Oh, that's what it is. That's the robin. That's the bell. This is a zabuton." We just take our perceptions for granted. But perceptions are conditioned by our culture, by how we grew up, by our past experiences. Some sound that may be quite neutral or lovely to one person may trigger someone else's past trauma and be a scary sound. It's not that there's one right perception, but our tendency is to just completely believe, "Well, that's what it is."

This is a fun thing to explore, actually. When I first realized this, I was visiting a friend, and I just said to her, "Would you pass me that blue throw on the back of the couch?" She goes, "What blue throw?" I said, "That one." She goes, "That's not blue. That's green." We both tried, we both practiced. I could not see it as green. And she could not see it as blue. We didn't come to blows about it.

But that quality—that goes to the world, right? Look at the world. And I'll go into how that solidifies. It goes from the perception to what we think about it, and on and on. "This is true. This is a view. I'm right and you're wrong." And we don't even notice it. Boom, like that.

So perceptions are often inaccurate. And we don't know. Is there a really right one there, blue or green? Is there really an external perfect reality and we just have to figure it out? Don't waste your time. It's all conditioned.

Once we see how perception is conditioned by our memories and experience, we can also start to explore how each moment of perception can be distorted—is distorted—when there's the kilesas, when there's wanting or aversion or delusion, a sense of "me" in the mind stream, not really recognized. It's like we're looking through those glasses. Like I said with the bell, you could really see the difference. Seen through craving: "Oh, that's great, lunch!" Seen through aversion: "I don't want to get up—oh, bad bell." But more than that, the kilesas can so distort perception that we aren't anywhere close to what's really happening.

It's interesting to watch. There's a nice Tibetan saying that craving puts feathers on the object—it makes it look really much more attractive.

And so, I mean, pick a relationship when you're first getting into one, and the other person is just—everything's so wonderful about them, right? It just is. You just don't see anything wrong, which, if that didn't happen, you wouldn't get into a relationship. So, you know, it gets you there. You're lucky if

some of it stays. And later, if—God forbid—it happens that the relationship ends, and you're thinking about all the stuff that you're seeing now that led it to end, you could say, well, that was all there in the beginning. I could actually see it then, but the mind was like, oh no, no, that doesn't matter. There's only this beautiful stuff, there's only this beautiful... And at the end, it was like, only this bad stuff, you know?

When you're angry, someone you look at looks ugly. When you're in love with them, they look beautiful. They're just being them.

So we can't—like the Buddha said, when there's greed or aversion in your mind, you can't see your own good or the good of another. You can't really assess the situation accurately when it comes to act. But if we don't recognize that, we don't know it's there.

How do we recognize it? Yes, of course—the steady awareness, the steady awareness that's willing to hang out when we start to recognize there's some greed or there's some aversion. It isn't like, oh, aversion, let's not go there. It's like, oh, get interested in it. How does it feel? How does it act? What's going on with it? When we see clearly the power of correct perception, all the negative or afflictive thoughts, craving thoughts, vanish.

Last year—I think it was last year—I was teaching a retreat at the Forest Refuge, and one of the meditators came to me. We'd been there about a month, so this was about three weeks in. It was just a great little example of noticing how the quality in the mind completely changes perception. This person's job was cleaning the bathroom. And they said they'd been going in, not like massively averse, but just, I've got to clean the bathroom. In their cleaning, it was just a little kind of dull and heavy.

Then one day she went in, and her mind was just feeling really bright and happy. She went in and said, oh, all these fixtures, they're so bright and shiny! They're just kind of glowing. It's so lovely in here. And she could even say, okay, you know, I don't think the fixtures are a lot different than they were yesterday. Probably not. That's what the mind does.

So that's a simple one. It's fun to see. Or sometimes on retreat—maybe there's too many of you and it hasn't been long enough—but after a while, in some way of never looking at anyone, you get everyone pegged anyway. And there's the ones you like, the ones you don't like, you know. Or just the socks—you know who it is. Then your mind goes through the reactions that you've made up to this person.

So you're sitting in the dining room, and this person who you have a little reaction to—not even knowing their name—and you see them walking by towards your table, and you're like, I'm not going to look though. I'm not going to look. You're sitting there not looking. Then they sit down, and finally you can't help it. You look. It's not that person at all, right? And you say, oh! All that, all that hoopla. Oh, it's this whole other person. And it completely vanishes. It completely vanishes because it doesn't make any sense.

That's insight. That's how insight works on a much more profound and subtle level. I try to make it funny because then we can really explore it. But this is going on all the time. Don't take it personally.

So I have to organize my mind here. Which direction do I want to go?

There's a sixth sense experience happening all the time. And with each sense experience, there's perception and a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling that comes with it. As you know, one of the deeply, deeply ingrained habits of the unaware mind is that when it's pleasant, some wanting arises. When it's unpleasant, there's aversion, a pushing away.

Just like when some person walks by—the perception is "someone I don't like"—and all this unpleasant thought comes up. Just noticing how that happens is really different. It's not feeding it.

But how often is this happening? Every moment of the day, these sixth sense experiences are occurring. Some perception of the other is arising, some subtle pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral tone. And it doesn't always engender craving or aversion. Sometimes stuff just goes by—it's neutral, there's no reaction to it. This happens more often than we realize, because we tend to get hung up on the ones where there is a reaction.

But just to realize how quickly everything's happening—this is a piece of starting to have some respect for how and why our minds get so caught up so quickly in these stories. There's just so much happening so quickly.

With steady awareness, it's not like everything goes into slow motion and you see each sense experience and the perception and the vedanā. But sometimes, with a steady awareness, you do kind of notice how these building blocks, how this concoction comes together. And that can be really interesting to see—the perception and the vedanā, and then that goes into thinking about it, into papañca.

As the Buddha said—let me read this: "What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one complicates with associations, with memories, with ideas. And then these associations and these complications turn around and assail us."

Can you relate to that at all? This is what's going on. I don't want to say twenty-four-seven, but it's going on a lot. You're just minding your business, somebody walks by, there's just a glimpse. Actually, what was really seen was a glimpse of color. That was the accurate perception—a glimpse of color. What was added was the idea that it's this or that person. That thought experienced is unpleasant. And then it's thought about, it's complicated, and these notions turn around and assail one.

This is without awareness, without mindfulness. It's not that this happens with every single sense contact, but this is what happens when we're getting lost. And then it turns into a whole world, like Thanissaro Bhikkhu was talking about.

"The tides of conceiving sweep over one who is not aware and mindful." That's from the Buddha. The tides of conceiving. And sometimes it feels like that—just sitting here and this tide of this story comes over. And it goes away. And then the tide of that story comes over, the tide of another story.

And then we don't want to know that anymore. So we just dull out or go and say, "I'll pick this story and get lost in it for a while." That's when we go off into thinking about stuff. Even if it's a suffering story—at least I don't have to notice all these other ones. It's just too exhausting. Saṃsāra is exhausting.

Of course we're tired. My gosh, this is what's going on in our lives. We're constantly reacting. We like this. We don't like that. We like us. We don't like that. We don't like this. What does everyone think about me? What do I think about them?

And this is, as Ajahn Sumedho says, we're sensitive beings. This body is sensitive. There's perception and vedanā going on all the time. And when there's not steady awareness, the reactions to this, the papañca, just goes on with it, and then it strengthens from thinking about it. It hardens into a view—this is true, everything else is false. This is what's really happening. We don't even know anything about perception and vedanā, and yet we're certain this is what's happening, and all our reactions are, of course, right. Anything else is wrong. Until it changes five minutes later, but we don't notice that. We're in a new world.

So I just want to give you an example. Many people have heard this, and someone here could tell it better than me, but I know you like to hear it, so I'm telling it for my friend sitting back there. He knows what I'm about to tell.

This one story I really like because it's so perfect for this—it explains the whole thing. A good, good friend of mine was sitting for her first meditation retreat many, many years ago. I won't say where, because it would help identify her. But she was sitting, and it was in a rented facility. This was before there were all these centers. It was an old house that had been used for a summer camp, so it didn't have a lot of insulation—a really creaky wooden house. And it was her first retreat. You know how first retreats are. They're not always so wonderful.

So she's sitting in the meditation hall that's upstairs, and the walking room was down underneath it. Creaky old house. She's sitting there, and it was a sitting period, and she said whenever people were walking, it was so creaky—you'd hear everybody walking. It used to be like that in the walking room back there. When people would come in, all the floors here would creak. One of the years I was the manager, I think '84 or '85, the other manager, Rand, got on this mission. He really got on this mission to try and fix the floors so they wouldn't creak coming in, because people would be sitting and they'd hear someone walking out there. Which is actually good for practice. People can walk. It can creak. So what?

But anyway, so this was the sitting time. There's noise, and she heard someone walking in the hall downstairs. She was, of course, on her first retreat, trying to be with the breath. She's supposed to be with the breath. She's clearly not having a good time, in some aversion. And she hears the creaking, and—ugh—how can somebody do that? That's not right. That's not right.

I have to say, this person is from a culture where things should be done properly. That's not right. This is the sitting time, not the walking time. And that person shouldn't be making all that noise. It's wrecking my

meditation. How can I be with the breath? So this went on for a while.

And then for whatever reason, she said, "Well, I'll just go back to the breath."

So she went back, tried to feel the breath. And then she did feel the breath. And then she realized she took a deep breath. She was leaning against the wall, and when she took a deep breath, her back went into the wall. And that was making the creaking sound that she was hearing.

Luckily, no one else heard. It was clear, right? In that moment, all the anger at that mythical person went away. It's just gone. That's what insight is. That's what insight is.

I want to break this down because that's how it works. Being with the breath, the hearing arises, and there's perception. The perception was, "Is somebody walking?" So that's already an inaccurate perception. It hadn't come to the aversion yet, but inaccurate perceptions can also be based on ignorance. We don't have all the information. Notice how the mind tends to make something up that approximates what it is. And if we don't know that we don't know—we really thought that was reality—that was based on ignorance.

And it was unpleasant. So the perception and then the story about it and then the unpleasant moved into aversion. And then the aversion, the thinking about it, turned into all the memories and associations. And it hardened into the view: one person should not be walking during the sitting time. They are wrong. And because they're wrong, it's messing up my practice. That was not an opinion. That was the explanation of reality, right? And that's what we do. It's solid, solid.

And if she hadn't, for whatever reason, brought the attention back to the breath... We didn't have a lot of wisdom then, but that was sort of adverting the attention. When we say, "Okay, you're getting lost in something, shift the attention to something more neutral to take care of the awareness"—without knowing it, she was doing that. She sank back into the breath, and at that moment, the story wasn't happening anymore. She just felt the breath. And because there was steady awareness that wasn't at that moment colored by the aversion anymore, it was just with the experience—oh, it perceived in a completely other way, more accurately, because it wasn't colored. And in that accurate moment, just a fraction of a moment of accurate perception, the whole story is gone because it was never true to begin with.

So that's actually a very powerful statement of the power of accurate perception. You can see the power that greed, aversion, confusion, delusion—it's all about me—have over our mind. And we can experience it on the grosser level like this. At first we don't recognize it's aversion, and we just think it's righteous indignation at this person who's being really thoughtless. But then later we can say, "Oh yeah, that's..." All it does is create suffering in the moment and the suffering of confusion.

And if it had been a retreat where you could talk—thank God for silence—how often would we have said something? On the three-month retreat, there's often someone who has a little cough, and there'll be a cough drop on their pillow. We beg people not to do it. A cough drop on the pillow. "Here, maybe this will

help your cough." Mettā. It's always fine mettā. I mean, how deluded can you get? The person doesn't feel mettā when they're reading it, I'll tell you that. You have to process it for half an hour because they took it in another way.

So thank God for the silence on retreat. But it goes into more and more subtle ways, what the Buddhists call the vipallāsas, or you could call them distortions of perception. Joseph likes to call them hallucinations of perception. And this is taking us into what has been mentioned quite a few times: the three characteristics. The distortions are, although things are always changing, the perception is one that doesn't see change.

The perception is of permanence. The distortion regarding dukkha, as Devon was talking about last night, is not recognizing the unsatisfactory nature of things. The perception is that this is going to give me happiness, satisfaction. And with anatta, the perception of no solid self here, the distortion is the perception of a solid self—me.

These perceptions arise moment to moment to moment. They're not solid state. But because we don't even recognize that, because they're so familiar, arising so frequently, this is the level the Buddha is talking about. When the heart and mind, even on this subtle level, is obsessed or colored by wanting, by aversion, by the confusion of me, we can't see accurately. We simply can't see accurately.

These distortions are really moment to moment. They might be seen through, and then they come back because they're so familiar. The sense of self just feels so familiar that many people assume it's something that's always here and that we need to get rid of it. But that's an assumption based on an idea.

The more we can just practice, just cultivate a bit of trust and keep falling back into this moment of simple awareness—whatever's going on. Remember, we've said a few times that mindfulness can be with anything. So we think you have to be mindful and get rid of this sense of self. But as Ramana Maharshi said—I have this quotation in my mind—the sense of self is only real because it's not examined. It's only real because it's not investigated. When you really look at it, I'm paraphrasing but this is more or less the quotation, when you really look at it, you see that it was never there. It vanishes into thin mist. Just in one moment.

Notice if hearing that your mind kind of jumped: "Oh, I got it! And then it'll vanish and be gone forever." That's not seeing impermanence. Notice.

The more we can cultivate steady awareness, you can start to notice the distorted perceptions. Notice when you're perceiving permanence in a way. This isn't like a judgment, like "I've got to see." Just notice. When we assume that I'm just going to keep talking until a certain time and we're all going to keep sitting here—that's an assumption. That we're going to wake up in the morning, that the cooks are going to be here to make you breakfast. Once in a while it hasn't happened. There have been a couple of times they didn't get here in time and breakfast wasn't ready. You never know.

But you can just notice when you're sitting and you go, "Oh no, this knee pain, and it's thirty more minutes—I can't bear it." That's an assumption of permanence. Just little things. So just go, "Oh, look at that. Look at that."

There's a sutta where the Buddha talks about the perception of impermanence. And he's talking about perception. The perception of impermanence is what allows for—basically, it leads to liberation. The perception of impermanence. So we think perception might not be much, but that's the place of being lost in confusion or freedom. Just this moment of perception, of seeing something in a different way.

When the mind isn't clouded with these thoughts—"Oh yeah, this pain's going to be here"—and then you notice the next moment you were lost in a thought. You don't know if the pain was there or not; you have no clue, because something completely other was happening. And then in the next moment there's the pain, and the mind goes, "See, it's always here." We didn't notice the gap because of the lack of steady mindfulness.

This is really where the steadiness of receptive awareness is so powerful. And we have to practice it because our habits are so much to check out when we don't like something or we get a little bit bored. So that's just why we keep reminding: come back, come back.

That's why I've said it in a few groups. It's so common. We say, "Well, this is always going on." I'm going to say never. I probably shouldn't ever say never either. But I won't let someone get by with "This is always happening." Nothing is always happening.

When you find your mind saying "always" or "never," that's a great clue. Check it out.

Some of you might think, "Well, I wasn't aware of that pain, but it's still here and it was there before, so it must have been there in the meantime." That's a thought. That's inverted perception. That's a hallucination of perception.

But we don't have to figure it out. Can we have just the simplicity of trust? Just: what's happening now? We get all confused, and then—okay, just what's happening now? Just what's happening now? And the steadiness starts to reveal what's always been so.

That's what's so powerful about the quality of insight: it isn't changing reality. It's not like we have to get somewhere where everything becomes impermanent. We don't have to get rid of some solid self and then live in some ego-free bliss. There's no solid self now. There's no solid self. There's no me there. And we're not living in ego-free bliss either. You can keep bringing in awareness and see it comes and goes. It comes and goes. Nothing's steady state, including insight.

So the insight can be really deep—you can have a profound insight into the truth of change, that nothing's reliable. Really deep. It's transformative, but not steady-state transformative. Are we waiting for that one insight where we don't have to be mindful anymore? Forget it. Just forget it.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya, who's one of my teachers—I was saying this to my colleagues this morning—he talks about the three kilesas as like a street gang. He said they get out on the street, trying to cause trouble. And greed and aversion are the ones you really see; they're out in the front. But delusion is like the mafia boss in the background who's really running the show.

So you can have a really deep insight. You really are, for a while, free of inverted perception. You're not creating a sense of self. You truly see that different things are arising. And then—it doesn't have to happen, but everything's conditioned, including moments of mindfulness.

You know, maybe you've done retreats and you're really quite aware afterward, really interested, paying attention. And then more stuff comes in. It takes reminding ourselves, and then there's a little bit of thinking, "I can kind of coast on this, right? I've been aware. It's here. It's much more available than before. So now I can coast." And we coast, and it's there. You remember, but a little bit less, a little bit less, a little bit less.

And what happens when there's not that receptive, wakeful mindfulness seeing what's happening? Then the street gang gets busy. It's like the kilesas just want to come out and party. That's what they do. They fill a void. If there's a void, something comes into it. Something's always arising in the citta.

Ajahn Sumedho says we create ourselves through our thoughts, and we cannot create an ultimately peaceful sense of self. I want to drop that in because I find it really interesting—we keep trying, but we can't create an ultimately peaceful sense of self. This is how we can practice with it: just moment to moment, in little things, noticing the difference.

We can notice sometimes when we're caught up in the inverted perceptions, and sometimes you can notice it and explore bringing in receptive awareness in little things.

I'll give an example. Say today it was really hot—I'm making this up—and you're walking outside, aware, and then feeling really hot. There's a kind of knowing it, but not really receptive awareness. What Joseph calls "more or less mindfulness awareness." You know you're walking, you know it's hot, you vaguely know there's aversion, but not really. If someone came up to you and said, "Is there aversion?" you'd go, "Oh yeah, sure, I know it." But you weren't really aware, receiving it, being with it.

So there's the heat, and the mind is saying, "This is too hot, I shouldn't be walking," or "You shouldn't even have retreats in this kind of weather, why don't we have it somewhere else, this is bad for my health." And the citta—all the memories, the thoughts come up—what I need to do, and about my heart, and ice packs. I was watching the French Open, and they have these heat waves, and these tennis players have ice packs—why can't I have an ice pack? It would be better for us, why don't they give us that? On and on.

And you don't realize it's suffering. We just think this is justified behavior in our mind. This is a world we've entered into. Sakkāya-diṭṭhi, personality view, complicates the whole thing. And then this becomes, as the Buddha says, agitation through clinging. Clinging to the idea, clinging to the aversion, clinging to

"this shouldn't be happening to me"—whatever it is, there's clinging to it.

If it's a condition that keeps going and you kind of wake up and feel how you're in this, it can be interesting to just stop a minute. Okay, just simple awareness. What's the actual perception right now? Just walking. Walking. There's heat. Heat feels like this. Just—heat feels like this. And maybe it feels unpleasant. The mind goes, "Oh, I don't really like it." Okay. Unpleasant thought. Aversive thought. There could be an aversive thought. It doesn't mean those don't happen. It's just awareness of it rather than completely identifying with it.

So there's the heat. There's dislike. There's aversive thought. It's unpleasant. And that's it. There's nothing else around it. It's just what's happening. It doesn't mean we have to only have pleasant, clear experiences for awakening, for insight. Oh, that's what's going on. Agitation through clinging. Release of agitation through non-clinging. Just—it's this, it's this. Actually more present with the heat. It's just heat.

There's another story Sayadaw U Tejaniya likes to tell about a yogi, a meditator who was practicing in Burma, where it can get really hot. Really, we're talking hot. Once I was a nun in Thailand, and in the hot season, you're in this little kuṭi with a tin roof, and the sun baking down, and you have to wear long sleeves and everything. That's hot. It's good to explore aversion and just how it can be hot and peace at the same time.

Anyway, so he's describing this yogi. It was so hot. The yogi was telling him, "I was in so much resistance."

I mean, this is crazy. I can't do this. Human beings can't live like this. And on and on the mind went.

But then suddenly something shifted. He had been bringing awareness to it, yet was really lost in it at the same time. But sometimes when you keep surrendering into mindfulness—you feel lost, but you can keep bringing in the mindfulness—and suddenly it shifts.

You realize: My body's really hot, but the mind isn't hot. The mind is cool.

And that's the shift to wise view, to wise understanding. It doesn't make the unpleasant situation go away. If you could only all really believe that and not forget it. Wisdom insight doesn't make the unpleasant situation go away, but the agitation through clinging does go away. And that sense of peace, it's just the relief of: Oh, it's like this now. That's how it is, however it is. It's so obvious, even though it's just a second. The difference is so obvious.

And so the more we can practice, the more we can really learn to trust that, to really see that the more steady our awareness becomes, the more there's continuity. We watch as the worlds are concocted and the worlds fall apart. Another one comes up and it falls apart. We're not trying to stop that from happening. We're just sitting back, receiving life as it's arising in this moment with this interest: How is it working? How do the kilesas in the mind create confusion? How does the absence of them lead into peace and a sense of freedom?

We're just watching to see. And don't believe anything I say or you read. Watch and see if that's really so.

Ajahn Sumedho says most people's minds are so flighty, so jumping around, that we don't notice the cessation of things. We don't notice the ending of things. So that's something to attend to in this bigger picture of the worlds that are being created—not even the subtle worlds of misperception, but the big worlds. We jump from one to the other because we often don't notice that one world ended and another one started. But the more we notice that sense of impermanence, that's what also allows for the perception of no separate self.

Just a couple of last things. Again from Ajahn Tejaniya: the benefit of continuity, of steady mindfulness, is it allows one to observe the aversion from the unpleasantness, or the greed from the pleasantness, in its infancy—when it's just starting up, when it's manageable, before it is full-on in your face and you can't look at it, you can't be mindful of it.

He would get into different moods on different retreats, but he would talk about this. Whenever there's kilesa in the mind—wanting, aversion, or delusion—if you can see it, think of it as being on a scale of how intense it is, from zero to ten. You know, like when you go to the doctor and there are those little smiley faces that go into a frowny face and you're supposed to say how much pain you're in. I never know—compared to what?

So he was talking like that, and he's saying: Most people notice aversion or greed in the mind, and it's like at a two, and you think, "Oh well, it's not very strong. It doesn't matter. I don't have to pay attention to it." There's some aversion, like when you're walking and it's hot, and you think, "Yeah, yeah, there's some aversion. It doesn't matter. It's not really bothering me."

This is really where we should bring attention. As soon as you notice it, let the awareness fully feel: Oh, aversion is like this. But we wait until it's an eight. And then it's so strong, it's hitting us in the face, and the mindfulness isn't equal to meeting it. We think, "Well, I'm in overwhelm. I've got to change something." And then we are in overwhelm and we need to shift the attention.

But starting right at the beginning—don't be afraid to let mindfulness be with whatever's happening. Whatever's happening.

Sayadaw U Pandita said to me once in an interview—and again, he wasn't soft and fuzzy. But something difficult must have been going on; I don't remember what. He said, "You know, when you have steady mindfulness, you don't need to be afraid of anything that comes up in your mind."

And that was so helpful to me. Fear might be what's coming up, but you don't have to be afraid of it. Mindfulness can really be with anything. So don't go, "Oh no, I shouldn't see it. If I see it, it's going to get worse." No, it's going to get worse if we don't see it. So just really seeing how it is.

I think I'll just end with Upasika Kee, who was a Thai laywoman, a very profound practitioner from the

last century. There's a book of her teachings called *Pure and Simple*. She was pretty heavy duty, I'll say. But anyway, I'd just like to end with this one quotation from her:

*What is, is. What is not, is not. No need to add anything extra.*

That's our practice.

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