Working With The Judging Mind

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 47:37

Good evening.

I'd like to start off the talk tonight with a favorite passage of mine from *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, a wonderful classic dharma book by Suzuki Roshi. He says:

"In our scriptures, it is said that there are four kinds of horses: excellent ones, good ones, poor ones, and bad ones. The best horse will run slow and fast, right and left, at the driver's will, before it sees the shadow of the whip. The second best will run as well as the first one does, just before the whip reaches its skin. The third one will run when it feels pain on its body. The fourth will run after the pain penetrates to the marrow of its bones. You can imagine how difficult it is for the fourth one to learn how to run.

When we hear this story, almost all of us want to be the best horse. If it's impossible to be the best one, we want to be the second best. That is, I think, the usual understanding of this story and of practice. You may think that when you sit in meditation, you'll find out whether you're one of the best horses or one of the worst ones. Here, however, there is a misunderstanding of practice. If you think the aim of meditation practice is to train you to become one of the best horses, you will have a big problem. This is not right understanding. If you practice meditation in the right way, it doesn't matter whether you are the best horse or the worst one.

When you consider the compassion of the Buddha, how do you think the Buddha would feel about the four kinds of horses? He would probably have more compassion for the worst one than for the best one. When you are determined to practice meditation with the great mind of a Buddha, you'll find the worst horse is often the most valuable one. In your very imperfections, you'll find the basis for your firm, way-seeking mind. Those who can sit perfectly physically usually take more time to obtain the true way of meditation, the actual feeling of practice, the marrow of practice. But those who find great difficulties in practicing will often find more meaning in it. So I think that sometimes the best horse may be the worst horse and the worst horse can be the best one."

Comforting, isn't it? Unless you happen to be one of those yogis that sits in full lotus and is just cruising along—in which case there's hope for you yet.

It's so easy, and such a strong inclination, to see ourselves in relation to others, to see how we're doing. How do we compare with others? Am I a good yogi? Am I one of the worst yogis here? Have you seen that in your own practice?

Bhante talked about this yesterday: the Buddha's teaching on *mana*, a Pali word often translated as "the

conceit of I am." By conceit, he doesn't necessarily mean "better than"—that's often how we use the word in English. Rather, it refers to any kind of separating ourselves out and getting caught in selfing.

In the stages of enlightenment, as many of you know, in the Theravadan model there are four stages: stream entry, once-returner, non-returner, and arhat, the fully enlightened being. At various stages, different fetters or obstacles fall away. You might be comforted to know that the conceit of I am doesn't fall away until you are fully enlightened. So if you find yourself comparing and selfing, one way you can think of it is: well, you're no higher than the third stage of enlightenment.

This is what the Buddha had to say about this tendency of mind: "One who thinks oneself equal to others, or superior, or inferior—for that very reason disputes. But one who is unmoved under those three conditions, for that person notions of equal or superior do not exist. An accomplished person does not by philosophical view or by thinking become arrogant, for he is not of that sort. For those who are free from views, there are no ties. For one who is delivered by understanding, there are no follies. But those who grasp after views and philosophical opinions—such as these, they wander about the world annoying people."

And you can guess who is most annoyed by the mind that gets into this. Especially on a silent retreat, nobody knows what's going on in your mind but you—which is both the good news and the bad news.

So I want to talk tonight about this tendency to compare ourselves and to judge ourselves, others, and life: the judging mind, the comparing mind.

When does it happen for you? Have you noticed when it tends to arise? Particularly on retreat, in the more social situations—like sitting down at the table in the dining room and there are people near you. Notice what the mind does.

There's somebody eating very mindfully. "Oh, look at Miss Mindfulness over there. So impeccable." Or, "Oh my goodness, how much they put on their plate. Wow." Or, "I dropped a fork. Everybody knows."

Walking practice is another very common area rife with the judging mind, the comparing mind. I think Pante was talking about it the other day. You see somebody who's walking so slowly—"Wow, look at them." Or, "Who are they trying to impress and prove?" The same exact stimulus can have a very different response just a couple of hours later. You see somebody walking fast and it's, "Gosh, they're just themselves. They're not trying to prove anything. I wish I could be that unpretentious." Or, "Don't they get it? Why don't they slow down? Think you're in New York or something?" The mind will just go everywhere.

And particularly—not only what they're looking like outside, but what am I looking like in here.

On one retreat here many years ago, in my early days of practice, I really got into slow walking. I tend not to do it in that extreme way, but I mean, I really went for it. So it would take me about forty-five minutes

to go from the hall to the bathroom, or to my room. But I loved it. I was just really—as you might find out—when you get into that groove, it just feels so good and you're not trying at all. So I don't want to discourage those who are into that. It's beautiful when you're practicing that way.

But I could see myself—when I was all by myself, I was just really delighting in it. Lifting, moving, placing. When somebody else would come by, I'd have a whole different reason for practicing that I started to notice and name. I used mental noting to a great extent. And after a while, I'd be noting: "Lifting, moving, looking good. Lifting, moving, looking good, looking good." Because that was what was going on in my mind.

And we come from such a competitive culture, those who are, for better or worse, living here in the U.S. "We're number one, we're number one." And probably most countries have that feeling of pride. Even if you go to football games, they sell the foam fingers with the index finger sticking up—number one, number one. There's a tremendous pressure that gets put on a culture that values being the best so much.

And we do it whether it's our country—which is different than having pride in whatever particular characteristics your country has and feeling really appreciative of your heritage and your past. But when it gets into comparing, "We are better"—the mind just tends to do that. Whether it's our religion, or our meditation. "I'm a Vipassana meditator. Yes. I'm of the Theravadan school, the real teachings of the Buddha. Oh, those Zennies and Tibetans, they just kind of took the Buddha's teachings and ran with it."

Or Buddhism and Christianity and all the great world religions—just think how many wars, how much hatred, over each body of teachings trying to understand the incomprehensible, all pointing to the mystery in their own way.

Or whatever class or ethnic identity. And again, so much pain in seeing ourselves as better, or internalizing "not as good" from all the messages in the culture. Or not even realizing that it is so internalized, whether it's privilege or internalized oppression. The great wounds in our culture, our society, in humanity—it doesn't matter what culture you come from, there is othering that happens, the comparing mind.

And it also is true within our own being, intrapersonally. My body—taller, shorter, curlier hair, straighter hair—priding ourselves on it or not. Or our mind. "I have a clear mind. I have a creative mind." And whatever you've been gifted with, it's something to really honor and appreciate—your uniqueness. But if it gets into comparing, "I am more creative than maybe everybody here"—the mind will go any place.

Even to the point where our neurosis can become a badge of honor. I remember going to college and reading a lot of existential literature—Camus and Sartre—and just feeling like the more screwed up one is, the deeper you are. I'm pretty deep because I am messed up inside. And those happy people are just shallow. Now I'm teaching about awakening joy, but that was what it was back then. "Oh God, how shallow. Don't they see what's going on?"

So when for you—I'll invite you to take a moment and go inside to make this relevant to your own experience—when does it come up? Here on retreat or in your life, that comparing mind, either "not enough, not good enough" or "better than." Without any judgment, hopefully, just seeing the humanness in it. Remember, no higher than third stage. But just see how it gets activated and how painful it is.

I'm remembering now—I hadn't planned on telling this story, but it comes to mind around competitive practice. In the first years of practice, I was really wholehearted, gung-ho, and I still am in my own way, though it looks a little different on the outside now.

Late night sittings was one place where I could see this happening. "I'm going to be the last one here." And then at some point, I caught on to myself and I said, "I think I'm going to be the next to last one here. That's really cool. And I can let go of being the last, even though I know I could be the last." Yes.

I remember going to Joseph in an interview and saying I was seeing my mind do this thing, and it was really humbling. And he told me a story—I don't know if he shares it these days—but in his early days of practice, he said, "I had exactly the same trip going on with my sitting." He said when he was in the Burmese vihara in Bodh Gaya, there was this guy from Denmark in the next room. The wall didn't go all the way up to the top, so you could see if the person's light was on. And Joseph was determined to sit longer than the guy next to him. Every night that Danish light stayed on. He went through months of practice, and finally when they spoke, he said, "How did you do it? You never went to sleep." The guy said, "Oh no, I just slept with the light on."

It's amazing. And it can happen even in the dharma seat. It's not that once you get to the dharma seat, this doesn't happen. In my earlier days of teaching—this is in the 80s, about 35 years ago—when I started teaching bigger retreats in the major leagues, we'd go down to Yucca Valley, a big retreat center in Southern California. Joseph would give a talk one night and just blow people's minds with clarity and depth of wisdom.

Then Jack Kornfield would give a talk the next night and just hypnotize everybody with his magical spell. Sharon Salzberg would give a talk and tears would come down, the whole audience weeping with loving kindness. And then I'd have to go on. And I knew if I was in the audience, I'd be saying, "Get that guy off and get Goldstein back on." It was really painful.

So here's the punchline to the story. This went on for some time, the first couple of years. And it just got so painful that I went to Ram Dass, who was one of my two main teachers and mentors, along with Joseph. I said to Ram Dass, who was really impactful in my life—how many people here have read *Be Here Now*? Yeah, for those younger than that generation, that was a book that changed everything, just changed my life.

So I went to Ram Dass and said, "You know, this is crazy. It's so humbling to give a talk and just know that I wish somebody else were up there." And Ram Dass said, "You know, Joseph Goldstein's already taken.

Why don't you just be the best Jamie Barr you can be?" I went by Jamie in those days. And it took me a while to really get that—oh, maybe I have something to say in my own way. But it was a while to get there.

We all are unique expressions of life that have never manifested in the unique way they're doing through you. But it's really painful, that prevalent comparing mind, when we believe it. And it's ultimately rooted in the sense of not being good enough, not being enough. That somehow, if I were only a bit more, then I'd be okay. We measure ourselves against impossibly high standards, or against what our last retreat was like.

You notice that? You remember the very last few days of your last retreat, where finally everything just falls into place, and you say, "I want to do this again." The hook comes back at you. Then you sign up, and you find yourself thinking, "Gosh, there's so much sleepiness and restlessness. It's not like it was." But you forget how it was at the beginning of that other retreat.

Somehow it's all rooted in the fear of not being good enough—this sense of unworthiness or self-judgment or self-hatred. Sally mentioned the other night when the Dalai Lama was here. I was at that retreat. It was in 1979, just a few months after the Dalai Lama came to the States for the first time. It was in this very room, and he had a Q&A, and somebody asked about self-hatred. Like she said, it took a while for him to get the concept. Until finally he said—this is after two and a half months of people practicing—he looked at this person and said, "You're wrong. You're absolutely wrong."

Can you imagine? After two and a half months of sitting, the Dalai Lama saying, "You're wrong." But he said it with tremendous compassion. Something like, "What makes you think that everything else is part of the fabric of life, and somehow you're a mistake? You're not good enough? This is real misunderstanding."

But we do it. There's a teaching from *A Course in Miracles*, a Christian body of wisdom, a beautiful set of teachings. And there's this one line I love that says, "Believing in your littleness is arrogant, because it's preferring your own opinion to God's." What makes you think that somehow you're a mistake or you're not good enough?

The Third Zen Patriarch, in probably my favorite piece of Dharma wisdom, has this line that I love. It says, "To live in this realization—to live in the highest realization—is to be without anxiety about non-perfection." To live in the highest realization is to be without anxiety about non-perfection.

That's when you know you've really made it—when it's okay to be perfect. It's okay to be perfectly you, just the way you are, instead of trying to be perfect, which is never possible. That's not what humanness is about.

So first, how does this happen? How do we get into this complication? We were talking about the five skandhas, or five khandhas, the other day. The third khandha—there's form, there's feeling tone (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral), and then there's perception. Perception, as we said in that question and answer period, is the recognition of what is here. "Oh, this is a bell." Your brain or your mind files it, compares it,

and places it in your previous experience with a name and the familiarity or non-familiarity of something you've encountered before. "Oh, this is a bell."

And then it's just a hop, skip, and a jump—just one little connection—to the mental formations about that perception. "Oh, this is a pretty big bell. Not as big as some bells that I've seen. Oh, this bell has a sound a little bit higher than the one that I know at home." The mind starts to compare. And in that comparison, there is better or worse that often slips in—particularly around us.

To see who you really are is to see who you are without, as the Buddha says, those notions of superior or inferior—but simply this particular expression as being unique. Each individual expression of life has its own beautiful quality. Ajahn Sumedho talks about it in one of his books as the shining through of the divine. There it is, shining through us through a special manifestation. But what it is that shines through, we can't even take credit for. And so when you feel you're not good enough, you're creating a separation that really doesn't have to exist.

One Tibetan master, Trungpa Rinpoche, I remember him saying once: "Timidity is just another ego trip."

Here's Marianne Williamson—perhaps you're familiar with this. She says: "Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

There's another quote I appreciate from Nyoshul Khenpo, a great Tibetan master. He says: "Buddha nature, the essence of awakened enlightenment itself, is present in everyone. Its essence is forever pure and flawless. Those who recognize their true nature are enlightened. Those who ignore it or overlook it are deluded. There's no way to enlightenment other than by recognizing Buddha nature and authentically identifying it within one's own stream of being."

So that's one way you can think of what we're doing here. When we, at the beginning, took refuge in the Buddha—what does that mean? On one hand, there is that amazingly inspiring being who lived twenty-five or twenty-six hundred years ago, who showed that awakening is possible. But he showed it's possible for all of us. When you take refuge in the Buddha in a more fundamental way, you're taking refuge in your own capacity to awaken. It's a very profound thing to take refuge in the Buddha right inside. It means you can't—if you really get it—you can't pretend that you're not enough.

You might know this intellectually. It's a whole other thing to embody it.

And this is what we're doing more and more. I'm sure you've been touched and inspired by the Buddhist teachings that have made sense to you. And little by little, it's a matter of moving from the conceptual to the embodied. That's why we're practicing here.

There's a beautiful way of thinking of the teachings. First, you hear the Dharma. Probably when you first heard the Dharma—like when I read *Be Here Now*, or maybe when you listened to a teacher—something touched you deeply. *Wow.*

Then there's understanding the Dharma, where it's really starting to make sense to you, more than just a kind of inspiration as a possibility. "Oh yeah, I understand. I'm starting to understand."

Then there's realizing the Dharma, where you have a true, verifiably faith-inducing understanding. "Oh yes, I get it. This is more than just an idea. I really see it. I really get a glimpse of it. I'm realizing what it's all about."

So hearing the Dharma, understanding the Dharma, realizing the Dharma—and more and more, after you realize it, then there's being the Dharma, where this is your home, this is where you are living from, and it's not just an accident or a glimpse. You might forget, and until you're fully cooked you undoubtedly will forget, but this becomes more your home base, your perception of reality.

This is a process that we're in that takes a lot of patience, a lot of persistence, a lot of kindness. And I want to talk a little bit about both working with the comparing and judging mind and some attitudes that will help you in this process.

There's one issue that's so central where the comparison comes in: evaluating how your practice is going. "Oh, I was pretty clear that time. This must be going pretty well. I think it's happening." Or, "Oh my God, there's just so many emotions. I'm just this mess of emotions and going through a lot of tissues here."

Or it can go the other way, where you see people really having emotional catharsis and then you say, "Wow." One of my first retreats I went to, I was sitting and everybody around seemed to be crying and going through lots of tissues, and I was just sitting there—in, out—with my breath. And I went to Joseph and said, "I don't know if I'm doing it right." I thought, "I don't know if I'm getting my money's worth." But it was more that everybody seemed like they were going through such deep transformations, and I was just sitting there feeling my breath coming in and going out. What gives?

And he said, "Don't go looking for trouble. It'll find you soon enough."

And it did.

But we have all kinds of ideas about what good practice looks like. Hindrance-free yogi, deep slow-walking yogi, whatever it is, and we measure up against that. It's really impossible to tell where your practice is by what it looks like from the outside.

Sometimes you can be in very deep dukkha land and think, "Oh, what was the point of coming here?" not realizing this is going to be the richest retreat. This is where the gems will be discovered. This is where I'll face my fear and see it's possible to not only survive, but see I have capacities for courage and strength that I didn't know were here. I can even see through fear. But while you're going through it, it just seems

like nothing is going right.

Or just the reverse—"Hey, I've been feeling really good these last week and a half or so. I'm really going now." And it might be really going well, but it might be just that you're coasting and not playing your edge. You don't know.

But here's one thing you can use if you want to get a sense of your quality of effort: rather than looking at the external, keep checking in with your sincerity. That's the key ingredient. Just your willingness to show up as best you can, and willingness to come back when you see you've gone. Your sincerity will sometimes lead you to do very different things, if you see that you're doing whatever you're doing in support of your practice.

And so you might notice, "Oh, what I really need to do now is just really follow the schedule and not take breaks and just give myself wholeheartedly to it." But it might mean, "I need to have a cup of tea and just chill out. I'm trying a bit too hard now. I need a walk in the woods. I need to sit here and be willing to touch my pain."

It doesn't look any one way on the external. It's about getting in touch and seeing: Why am I doing what I'm doing? And if there's a sense that you're doing it to support your practice—"I'm doing this so that I can really show up fully"—good practice.

So it's more about your sincerity of effort, your sincerity of intention, than what it looks like. And only you know. That means you have to give up looking any particular way for others. "What are they going to think of me?" You don't have to worry about it, because they're worried about what people will think about them. We're all absorbed in "What are they going to think of me?" without realizing that everybody is having that same internal thought. Don't worry about it. Just stay connected to something in you that loves the Dharma enough to come here on a retreat of six weeks or three months, something that says, "I want to wake up"—or whatever it is that's touched you.

A few things to keep in mind about working with this judging mind, this comparing mind. One is kindness and compassion with your process. And forgiveness for all the ways that you don't quite measure up. We need a basis, a grounding of kindness, in order to create enough safety and refuge and heartfulness to see clearly. If we're struggling and trying to fit ourselves into some imagined idea of good practice, that very struggle is contracting in the mind, and you'll be working against yourself.

So I'd say, for myself, the essence of my instructions—I think I'll be giving instructions tomorrow, so I'm going to remind you again—the essence comes down to being interested in what's happening, being kind with what you see and kind with whatever your experience is, and having a sense of ease and relaxation where you're not contracted. That's it: a relaxed, interested, kind awareness.

Interest is really the key. I have a birthday card at home that I've never given away because I love it so much. On the front is this baby—almost an infant—and he's holding in his hand a booger right out of his

nose. And there he is, mesmerized, fascinated. You open the card and it says, "You always were easy to entertain. Happy birthday."

I aspire to booger-hood! Just letting your natural interest bring you in, just for the sense of wonder. It's amazing.

As the meditation deepens, as the mindfulness gets stronger, you want to pay attention. Here's a little insight into the process. At the beginning, it takes some effort to be here. It's true, because we're so used to going to past, future, fantasy, whatever, and it takes effort to bring yourself back. But as you put in that effort to be mindful, the mindfulness starts to get stronger. And when it gets stronger, you see more. And when you see more, it's more interesting. And when it's more interesting, you want to pay attention. And so it keeps pulling you in. "Yes! Oh, the present moment—it's so cool!" Have you ever had glimpses of that?

The alternative is if you say, "Well, if I'm mindful, I'm mindful. If I'm not, I'm not. That's okay, I'm just going to be... I'm going to lighten it up this time."

It won't really happen if you don't put in a wholehearted, sincere effort. And if you're not consistent in your mindfulness—and continuity is the key, continuity of awareness no matter what you're doing—then your mindfulness isn't so strong. When it's not so strong, things aren't quite as interesting as your fantasies. When they're not so interesting, it's boring. And when it's boring, you don't want to pay attention. Heaven forbid anything but boredom, which is a whole other talk—a very profound thing to explore, but for another time.

When it's not so interesting and you don't want to pay attention, when the mindfulness is weak, it continues to be uninteresting and you're on a track toward just intermittent mindfulness. So interest is the key. Letting that sense of wonder pull you in. At the beginning, you might need to trick yourself or pretend that it's interesting. But after a while, as it gets stronger—oh yeah, this is really interesting. Really amazing to see life so vividly. And everybody here has done retreats, so you know what I'm talking about.

Interested, but relaxed. Not pouncing on experience, just relaxing enough so that the mind is at ease. And I like to make it like a game. That's what makes it a bit more fun for me, because it's easier to pay attention when it's fun. So I'm just playing the awareness game. It doesn't matter how long I've been gone—oh, there I am. Come on back. It's just the game of awareness. Or walking—let's see about walking. How interesting. There I am like a baby taking my first steps. Just what is going on here with walking?

So interested, relaxed, and kind. Which means whenever you see yourself wandering, or see whatever is arising and it's difficult, there's the kindness that's right here.

I want to teach you, since I have this chance now, one way to bring this kindness to your experience. Some of you are familiar with this, but since this is one opportunity I have to share it with everyone, I want to offer you the self-compassion practice that is so helpful and effective as a way to hold difficulties.

This was developed by Kristin Neff and Chris Germer, who've done a lot of retreats here and at Spirit Rock—who've kind of packaged in a simple formula what we do here. So this is the self-compassion break.

When you're really having a hard time with the judging mind, or with your meditation not going as well as you'd like, or you're confused—very simple, a few different steps.

First step, the way I like to do this—this is my own variation and it's a little bit different than what Kristin and Chris said, but they said, "Yeah, that sounds good. You can do it your way." So what I do is start off by putting your hand on your heart, because this physiologically releases oxytocin and soothes the system. Just try this. Put your hand on your heart and notice what it feels like as you do that. There's tenderness. If you don't do anything else but just do that, that's good enough.

And then they offer a few different reflections, three different reflections. You can use your own words, your own variations. Maybe I'll put them up on the board so you don't have to worry about remembering.

First one: "This is a moment of suffering," or "This is hard." Just acknowledging—oh, this is hard right now. This is a moment of suffering.

Second reflection: "Suffering is a part of life." And you might think of all the people in the world who are going through what you're going through right now, and just include yourself in there. Suffering is a part of life.

And third: "May I hold my suffering with kindness and compassion."

This is suffering, and suffering is a part of life.

And may I hold my suffering with kindness.

As you're doing this, you can be both the one receiving that comfort and the one giving it. There's a wise one that can hold that hurt one, that confused one inside. It's a kind of coming into wholeness.

So that's one way to hold it. Actually, I'll share with you my own version of this that I used with the judging mind for quite some time in my early years of practice. I was just looking at the judging mind, because I saw I really had a judging mind—maybe even better than yours. And I really wanted to work with it.

So this is what I would do. At some point I said, I need to change my relationship to the judging. You might close your eyes again as you do this so you don't feel too self-conscious. Just imagine that you had a really harsh judging thought. And you can try this out. Put your hand on your cheek and feel the tenderness in the cheek as you silently say to yourself, "Oh, judging, judging"—like it's okay, just judging. Feel the tenderness in the noticing.

I did that. That was my main practice for about two years, both in retreat and at home in daily life. It wasn't like I did this each time, although I did it a lot at the beginning. You know, you can kind of

surreptitiously just touch yourself. But what happened after a while was the tone in my mind started becoming softer and softer to the point that that was the response: "Oh, it's okay, dear." And then whenever I'd have a judging thought, it became another opportunity to practice compassion—letting the Quan Yin right inside of you do the noticing. Because she or he is right in there.

So, self-compassion, forgiveness, just for all the times those habits have been created. They're just habits of mind that need to be held with kindness.

Another way to work with the judging mind is having a sense of humor. If you can move from "Oh gosh, look at my mind" to "Look at the mind do its thing"—if you go from "my mind" to "the mind"—that's a huge shift, because then you're not taking it personally.

To laugh at this mind—on one retreat here, it's interesting, being here I get in touch with all of those moments. On one retreat, again working with the judging mind, there is this line from the Third Zen Patriarch, the same one that I quoted before: "The burdensome practice of judging brings annoyance and weariness." That made a lot of sense to me, so I played this game. Every time I'd notice a judging thought, I'd tack on "the burdensome practice of judging." Particularly in the dining room: "Oh my goodness, look how much food. The burdensome practice of judging." I would go through a meal saying that about fifty, seventy-five times. After a while, the only thing I could do was laugh. Look at the mind. "Oh God, doesn't she eat any food? Is she a bird? The burdensome practice of judging." And laughing makes a huge difference.

Another thing is seeing the emptiness of the thoughts, how empty they are. They've come from nowhere and return to nowhere. Joseph has a very good instruction about this, by the way, that I highly recommend you trying. He says if you're sitting in the hall and you're bothered by your thoughts, just imagine they're coming from the person behind you. Very effective, you know. You just kind of picked up radio waves. For all intents and purposes they did, because you don't say, "Oh, I think I'm going to have some neurotic thought of doubt right now." It just comes on its own. To not take it personally—there's tremendous freedom in that.

When you start seeing through that taking responsibility for your thoughts, and you see how empty they are, there's tremendous freedom. You see all those thoughts of judgment and comparing as just habits, mental fabrications to be seen through.

So: kindness, compassion, forgiveness, a sense of humor, seeing the emptiness of the thoughts, and really learning to give yourself the same benefit of the doubt that you give to everybody else.

Just your own sincerity. That's good enough.

So I'll close with a poem that I love. Actually, I can't pull up the one I'd planned, but I'll close with a different one—there were two possible endings.

This is about the courage to take a look inside and be with everything, which is really how we learn to see all the beautiful qualities within. This takes courage. And I want to share this beautiful poem about the willingness to go to those difficult places and discover that you have everything you need. There's no comparing yourself with others. There's no comparison when you see it, when you see that everything is right here.

This is called "Unconditional" by Jennifer Wellwood:

Willing to experience loneliness,
I discover connection everywhere.
Turning to face my fear,
I meet the warrior who lives within.
Opening to my loss,
I gain the embrace of the universe.
Surrendering into emptiness,
I find fullness without end.

Each condition I flee from pursues me.
Each condition I welcome transforms me
and becomes itself transformed
into its radiant jewel-like essence.

I bow to the one who has made it so,
who has crafted this master game.
To play it is pure delight.
To honor its form, true devotion.

So let's sit for a few moments.

Thank you very much for your attention. See the Buddha right inside. That's where she is. That's where he is.

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