Four Modes of Progress and Working with Difficult Emotions

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:02:18

And my friends, I'm inspired by your practice. It's almost two weeks, in case you don't remember. It's so inspiring, really. And I think each of the teachers here is inspiring because they have been through it, they know. Three months. All these teachers you see here have been really practicing, and all of you have been practicing too. It's so inspiring to see other people really practicing.

So today I would like to talk about four ways of progress and working with difficult mind states or emotions.

Maybe by now you are beginning to ask yourself what you got into, especially if you have never done six weeks. You're wondering what's going on here. It's hard, it's painful. Is that familiar to you? I know, when I was here in 1999, the first week was so painful. And I was going to be here for three months. I had also signed up for the New Year retreat, so after three months, then another New Year retreat. I was wondering, how is it going to be for the next three months plus a New Year retreat? I think it was led by Rodney Smith. Sometime less than a week. But all the same, I was really trying to project what was going to be down the road.

So I want to talk about these four ways of progress. These are not failures, in case you fit in any of the categories. It's not failure, whether it's slow or quick. I'll draw from a discourse of the Buddha called the Vītara Sutta from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the numerical discourses of the Buddha.

In this discourse, the Buddha talks about four ways of progress. And maybe you can relate to them. One of them is painful practice or progress with slow comprehension. Is that familiar to you? Another one is painful progress with quick comprehension. What about that? Another one is pleasant progress with slow comprehension. Maybe some of you fit in this category. The fourth one is pleasant progress and quick comprehension. How many of you fit in that? I wish all of us fit in that category.

It's very important not to put yourself in a pigeon box and say this is where I belong. It's just pointing towards the way we progress, how the practice manifests, because you can switch. And this is not for the whole six weeks, by the way. Not for three months are you going to be fitting in one category. You can change from day to day, from one sitting to one sitting.

But what's very interesting about these four ways of progress is not to take it personally in case the practice is very painful. Not to take it personally, or not to compare with others who seem to sit

comfortably and really cruise in for three hours, while for you, within twenty minutes, it's so painful.

So this is very helpful to know—that different people have different mental faculties. In Pali, these are called indriya, the five mental faculties, and they will change also. The first one is faith and confidence. The second is energy, effort. Some people have a lot of energy. They can sit until morning, maybe two AM, maybe eleven. The third one is mindfulness. It's also a mental faculty. Some people are very good at mindfulness.

They walk slowly, every time, all the time. These are simply different mental faculties at work.

And then there is concentration. Some people have more concentration than others. Some have moment-to-moment concentration, while others have really deep concentration. Those who practice the jhānas can even count them—one, two, three, four—and it goes to eight. Some people are good at that.

Some people are good at wisdom. They can discern details, the elements, and all of this. Wonderful people. And I've seen it at the Uganda Buddhist Center. My mother became a nun, and she is good at faith—faith and confidence in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. I have another devotee who is a staunch Buddhist. He can talk and talk about everything. But when it comes to faith, he has so much. So I've seen this happening actually.

I'll talk more about these five spiritual faculties—how to arouse them and how to sharpen them—in my next talk. But in this talk, I would like to discuss what makes progress painful, and how we can convert that pain, how we can shift from painful to pleasant, at least for a moment.

This is about the mental states that make practice difficult for us, painful for us, very stressful for us. These mental states are three: greed, hatred, and delusion. We can bunch all unwholesome mental states into these three.

Perhaps to help you understand how these mental states manifest in our daily life here at IMS, we can start with something very familiar to us: the notes board. How many times do you check the notes board? One time, two times, three times—reading the same thing again? We encourage you to check at least once, but it's amazing. It's truly amazing. Sometimes I pass by and see how this bulletin board becomes the focus of our attention throughout the day.

Usually, there's not much that changes, actually. There are some changes, no doubt about it. I don't want you to miss anything important—I don't want you to say, "From that last talk, I'm going to stop checking the bulletin board." But try to be moderate in how you check it. There might be an underlying state of mind called greed—that desire for stimulation, that urge to keep looking. Because we read newspapers daily, and now there's no newspaper. Now there's the notes board, a little substitute. So check your mind. See how it goes.

There is another mind state that perhaps you already know about: aversion, anger, hatred—these are all

basically the same thing, given different names. You can check this today itself. How is the weather? Is it too hot? Do you like it? It depends where you come from. Me, I'm from Uganda.

But there's something coming up. Maybe it will be a little bit cold in another four weeks. And there's a tendency for me to not like the weather. Even though I can't do much about it, still there's resistance. Because I grew up in Uganda, and I went to India for five years. I spent five years in Sri Lanka. I spent two years in Thailand. So I like it when it's warm. For me, this weather is okay. But when you come from—we have ten countries represented here—yes, I've been to some countries which are cold. And maybe this weather is not good for you. And then there's aversion.

So try to watch your mind state as you go through the day.

Then there's a whole mind state called delusion, the deluded mind. Do you know what that mind state is? Deluded? Some people ask me, "How do I know that I'm deluded?" Of course you are deluded! Actually, most of the time as a teacher, as a monk, I've learned a lot from questions. People ask me so many questions and I say, "Wow, thank you very much for uploading!" Because most of the time I download—I come here and then go back to Uganda, I leave some stuff here. But most of the time when people ask me questions, I say, "Wow, that's a very interesting question."

So, what is delusion? A mind is said to be deluded when it's distorting reality. Taking things which are impermanent, it takes them to be permanent. "I'm angry for the rest of my life"—no, you've been angry for the last two hours. Anger is changing all the time. So that might be a deluded mind. Fixating. Taking things which are impermanent to be permanent. Taking things which are really suffering and taking them to be pleasant. Taking things which are of selfless nature and taking them to have a self. Taking things which are not beautiful, and the mind takes them to be beautiful. In other words, it distorts reality.

This reminds me of an instance that happened in Japan. Cows were dying because of drought. It was a dry season, and they kept giving these cows hay—very dry, brown, very dry—so they didn't eat. They didn't like it. So what the Japanese did was start manufacturing glasses, goggles, with green color. And they put them onto cows. I'm telling you, they ate every single bit. It's just amazing. They didn't even leave a blade of grass which was dry.

It's amazing what goggles we put on in our life that can distort reality.

Here's the good news. The practice is there for us to put on the real glasses.

Not the green goggles, the red goggles, and all that. Because we tend to see life according to our glasses, our goggles, our prism. That's how we see the world.

Sally and all of us are giving this series of practices that helps you to see things clearly—to see things as impermanent, as unsatisfactory, as selfless nature. And also the talk yesterday: seeing the body as the body, not just through your goggles, through your lens. This is very, very interesting.

Now, as my focus today is about these mind states, I would like to tell you that the life of a monk is not as easy as you think. You might think, "Wow, this monk lives in a monastery. Everything is very easy for that monk." And you might think maybe it's so difficult for you. But I'm telling you, it's not easy as a monk—mostly when I'm traveling, actually. Not so much in the monastery where people know me. Like in Uganda, people know me. I have followers. My mother. They know me. It's very easy. They feed me. We meditate together, chant together. It's very easy.

But as soon as I step out of the monastery, life becomes a little bit hard. I have to practice in the same way of practice. Not different. Not only in Uganda, but also here when I was staying in West Virginia for eight years in the monastery.

I remember one incident that challenged me very well. It's very vivid when I even speak about it—how I had to look at my mind state. I think that was 2007. I was scheduled to teach at Spirit Rock, the POC, People of Color retreats, and I was told that I was the first one to break the ice, open the retreat, give the five precepts.

So I left the monastery, arrived at Dallas airport with my alms bowl. I think you have seen my alms bowl. Have you seen my alms bowl? I put it in the check x-ray and then people told me, "What are you carrying? It's confusing the machine. We've never seen it."

I said, "What? You've never seen an alms bowl?"

"It's that we don't know. Please bring it out. Get it out."

I said, "This is my alms bowl. I eat from here."

It brought a lot of problems.

Another time, somebody asked, "We need to check you, we need to check you."

And then I said, "Please, you can check."

They said, "Please stand there. Male assist, male assist."

I looked at the time. Actually, it was getting close to my flight to California. And this is a five-hour flight, and that was the day the retreat was going to start. Some of you may have been on that retreat, I don't know.

But anyway, what happened is they kept on calling, "Male assist." There was no male assist. So I looked around. I said, "My flight is going to leave very soon."

Finally, a male assist came. And I said, "My flight is departing very, very soon."

He said, "Well, we need to check you."

I found that I was really thinking about losing my flight, having to go back to the monastery, which is one hour and a half away, and somebody just dropped me there and left.

So it had implications if I really missed the flight. I started to think about what would happen when I miss the retreat in California—how am I going to eat? I found that the mind was racing through all these mind states: fear, aversion, and all these things.

The male assist started to tell me, "Okay, please, I'm going to touch you." Then I said, "Please, it's all yours."

But as I was thinking about missing my flight and all that, my mind was getting tighter and tighter. So to loosen my mind, what I did was say, "Wow, thank you for the wonderful massage!" We all laughed, actually. It's amazing how everything was changing in the situation.

And then I thought it was over. He said, "Please, now sit down. I want to check your legs." And then he was doing this, touching my feet—I had socks on. It reminded me of 1994 when I did my first retreat in India, at Tushita. There was a Canadian who was teaching reflexology, and I had spent a lot of time having one. So I said, "Wow, this is wonderful reflexology!" And we laughed.

Then another time he said, "Okay"—I thought actually it's over. The second time, the third time he said, "No, just wait a minute. Just step here, step here, step here." Wow, the memory came of when I was in primary school in Uganda. We used to do gymnastics. I said, "Wow, I've spent a long time without doing gymnastics. This is so beautiful!" So we ended the whole thing and I said, "Thank you very much for the wonderful day." And then he told me, "You made my day wonderful."

This showed me that actually we can change our situation in life. We can change it if we want, or if we are ready. So if you have a painful meditation, it doesn't have to be painful. You can change. You can change your situation.

Up to now we have given many, many instructions, many ways on how to deal with the mind and feelings. We've talked about mindfulness. Can I talk about it again? I think you've had enough of it. By the way, can you have enough mindfulness? No. The more the better.

So the way you can actually transform your painful experience into pleasant experience is to be mindful of these mind states which are difficult. Some mind states are not so difficult. Let's say delusion—after all, you are deluded, so maybe it's not so difficult. It may also be pleasant.

Let's talk about greed. Greed is not so painful, but it can be very painful, especially when you go through your day with this attachment, this desire for the next sit to be better. Not to say that you should not have aspirations—you should have aspirations, as Carol talked about. We should aspire for the next sit to be peaceful. But we should not get so attached to how the next sit is going to be, with too many expectations and all that.

I'm going to give you a few ways on how to deal with difficult mind states, drawing from a discourse

called the Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta, which we find in the Majjhima Nikāya. It talks about how to deal with obsessive thoughts—how to deal with obsessive thoughts that make our practice difficult.

But before I do that, I would like to draw your attention to these five mental faculties, because some of you may not know where the Buddha mentioned them, but I just want to remind you. Sally has given beautiful talks about right mindfulness. These are words of the Buddha. He said, "Here in this teaching, in this dispensation"—in Pali, "bhikkhus," and you know who are bhikkhus now—"a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body," and it goes on, "feelings in feelings," and so on, "ardently, with mindfulness, and with clear comprehension."

So there are three mental states, or mental faculties, mentioned here. One is effort, another is mindfulness, and another is clear comprehension—sampajañña.

That's another way of saying wisdom. But the discourse doesn't seem to talk about faith and confidence as a mental factor—yet it's implied. Actually, when the Buddha is talking about practicing mindfulness and effort, it's implied that there's also what you call faith and confidence. How would you end up here without faith and confidence? How would you start practicing mindfulness or breathing without faith and confidence? At least you know that the body is breathing and the mind is aware that the body is breathing. That's faith and confidence. The discourse, of course, doesn't clearly mention that this is the five mental faculties, but it's understood. Even concentration as a mental faculty is implied, because how are you going to move from mindfulness to clear comprehension without concentration?

Some people are complaining, "Oh, I don't get concentration." Actually, there's what we call moment-to-moment concentration that you develop when you practice mindfulness. So please keep on practicing mindfulness, even when you are experiencing very difficult states of mind. That's the first way of sharpening and really making sure that the practice can progress a little bit faster, not too slow.

When the Buddha is talking about these four modes of practice, he's describing different combinations. For the first one, he talks about when you have excessive greed, hatred, and delusion and you feel pain and sorrow. He's talking about when the five mental faculties are dull and not sharp. So you have to sharpen them by the practice of mindfulness. This is very important. And we have to reduce greed, hatred, and delusion—that's what I'm going to talk about. But this is just a reminder for you, because you may be wondering why the practice would involve painful progress and slow comprehension. That's the reason. It's slow comprehension because the five faculties are dull. And it's quick when the five faculties are sharp, very clear—with faith and confidence, mindfulness, effort, concentration, and wisdom. When they're sharp, there will be quick comprehension. But it's painful, of course, whenever there are mental states like greed, hatred, and delusion.

The best progress is when it's pleasant and quick. That's when you have reduced greed, hatred, and delusion, and the five mental faculties are sharp. Pleasant progress with slow comprehension occurs when there's no excess greed, hatred, and delusion, but there are dull faculties.

I think this is very important, but I don't want you to get caught up in labels. You know, "Yes, I'm a meditator who has pleasant and very quick progress"—and you label yourself. In the monastery in West Virginia, people used to put labels on themselves: "Silent Yogi." This was to help them not have discussions with the staff at the monastery. Here, you're not going to hit the newspaper of Barre—what's the newspaper in Barre? Maybe the Barre Gazette. You're not going to make the news that your practice is pleasant and quick. But don't get disappointed either. No need to have labels.

The key is: How can I make my practice, which is slower, a bit quicker by sharpening the mental faculties? How can I make it more pleasant by actually learning how to deal with unskillful states of mind, like greed, hatred, and delusion? And then you can transform them into skillful states of mind.

Now, a very common phrase used in English is "difficult emotions" or "negative emotions." This is a little bit difficult for me to understand. I understand, experientially of course, difficult emotions. But the word negative—I never understood why people call emotions negative. Difficult, I understand. I've gone through a lot of difficult emotions, in case you're not sure.

You still want to hear about my experience of difficult emotions? Before I give five ways of how to deal with them, we have time. We can enjoy the ride. What difficult emotions do I go through as a monk? Because there's a tendency for people to think that monk life or nun life—monastic life—is very easy. And for us who are not monastics...

It's very difficult. I tell them the difference between monastics and lay practitioners—there's only one difference. The way we practice, all of that is similar. The difference is that monastics don't have excuses not to practice. That's the difference. We don't have excuses.

You can say, "Oh, today I cannot practice because I was busy. I have to go to a wedding, there's dinner, I cannot practice mindfulness." Yes, yes, you're right. You are very busy. I understand. But for us, you cannot go to your teacher with such stories. As a monastic, you cannot go to Bhante Gunaratana and say, "Oh, I was busy teaching in Brazil, and I didn't have time to practice." You cannot do that. So that's the difference, in case you're curious.

Let me give you another experience, in case you think monastic life is easy.

In 2006, I left West Virginia for Bangkok. It was a long flight from Dulles airport to London. I waited twelve hours in Heathrow before I could board the connecting aircraft—twelve hours in a stretch. Then I traveled from London to Bangkok for a conference. I arrived at around 8:15 p.m., went out of the airport, and there was nobody to pick me up.

I was wondering what was going on. Can you imagine traveling from Washington D.C. to London, waiting twelve hours, then another twelve or fourteen hours going through Moscow, arriving in Thailand at 8:15, and you don't see anyone waiting for you? That's something, as a monk.

Sometimes as a monk it's very challenging when you are going to give a talk on how to overcome anger and anger is arising. Can you imagine? You're scheduled to give a talk on difficult emotions and here you are, going through them. That's a bit of irony.

So at 8:15, 8:30, I have no phone. I can't call anyone. I stayed in the airport the whole night. Breakfast time came—no breakfast, no one appeared. I thought maybe they would remember me at 8:15 a.m. I looked around. Nobody.

Meanwhile, I was getting really hungry. And difficult emotions were arising: Am I going to be left here forever? What am I going to say as a monk? I knew that fellow monks were the ones organizing this ride, but they had dropped the ball. Breakfast time, still no breakfast.

Since it's a Buddhist country and I had my alms bowl, someone told me, "Go around and get some food." I was getting ready to go out with my bowl—you can receive food in Thailand this way. But then the telephone attendant said, "Wait, wait, don't go. I'm going to bring you food."

I sat down patiently, really saying to myself, "Wow, that's amazing."

She came up with a sandwich with bacon, which I don't eat at all. I have allergies to bacon, beef, and basically anything with four legs.

So she brought a sandwich. I couldn't say, "Please take it back." You see, monks simply eat whatever we receive. Whatever doesn't mean that if they put bacon there you have to eat it, but we receive it, and then we have to bless people. As I'm doing this, I'm sitting there very hungry, thinking, what can I do with this sandwich? I opened it and started scraping off the bacon. It was dry. I'm telling you, I ate it, and I will never forget that sandwich.

Then I sat down and waited. And waited. And waited. Meanwhile, I'm getting impatient. Twelve o'clock comes—missing lunch. I thought, what's going to be my first word to the person who has made me go through all these emotions? Worry, fear, impatience, you name it.

So I started drawing from the Buddha's teaching. I thought, yes, let me go through the Buddha's teaching. What tools am I going to use? I was amazed. I found some tools that worked for me. As soon as I saw the first person, I simply said, "May you be happy. May you be peaceful."

Here are a few things I want to share with you that I thought worked. I've tested them. I'm not a person who's just reading the Tipiṭaka—"Here are the Buddha's words." No, no. I'm a person who is sharing things that I've actually tested, that I've gone through, and they work.

Here's the discourse that works very well. It's called the *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta*. The Buddha here is telling us that whenever you have a thought of anger, a thought of greed, a thought of aversion, a thought of fear—all you have to do is substitute. Replace it with the opposite.

Now, what's the opposite of greed? Generosity. Letting go. It works. Just let it go.

For me, when I forget my umbrella in Sri Lanka, where I spent five years and it rains a lot—when I can't find my umbrella, I say, "Wow, may the person who's going to use my umbrella enjoy it." I just let go. It was always amazing: when I let go, I feel peaceful. Instead of saying, "I liked this umbrella that was given to me by Guy Armstrong, and I miss it," I found out that just letting go, wishing people to be happy—those who actually got my umbrella—brings peace.

Sometimes I go to a monastery with Birkenstock sandals. I go out and I can't find my shoes. I say, "May the dogs enjoy my shoes." It's amazing how shoes disappear in monasteries in Asia because they have dogs, and the dogs like shoes for some reason.

But one time I was in Malaysia, in a monastery in Kuala Lumpur. I could not see my shoes. I said, "There are no dogs here. Monks cannot take my shoes, of course." And they were Birkenstocks from Germany—very good shoes. I like them. I keep getting the same thing again and again. And monks, we don't travel with many things.

We have only one pair of shoes.

It was quite amazing. At 10 a.m., I woke up and couldn't see my shoes anywhere. I searched—no shoes to be found. I thought to myself, it's not the dogs, and it's certainly not the monks who took my shoes. As it turned out, there was a German monk who also happened to like the same style of shoes, and we had simply shared them without realizing it—code sharing, you might say. They were preparing to take me to buy new shoes when suddenly my shoes reappeared. It was remarkable how they turned up.

So anyway, letting go is very, very good. I had to let go of my shoes. And when they came back, there was no difference in my mind. This is the practice.

When there's a thought of anger, what should you do? Metta—loving-kindness. It's always better with metta. You can't have too much of it. I've heard that some people are afraid of cultivating too much loving-kindness because they worry that others will take advantage of them. I don't think so. The more metta, the better, the merrier.

Whenever there's aversion, send a little bit of mental loving-kindness. With delusion, you cultivate wisdom—reflecting on impermanence, the selfless nature of things, seeing phenomena in that manner. When there's fear, what should you do? You should cultivate courage. Have courage. Perhaps you're afraid of pain in your meditation. What should you do? Have the courage to extend your sitting for a few minutes—maybe two minutes, maybe five—and then see how it goes.

Substituting the opposite mental quality for whatever difficult state you're experiencing is very, very effective. I've seen it work for myself. Perhaps try it and see how it works for you.

The next method is called reflection on the danger of the mental state you are in—the difficult mind state

you are experiencing. Here I should mention that I prefer to use "skillful" rather than "positive" state of mind, and "unskillful" rather than "negative" state of mind. This distinction should be very clear. I don't want to use positive and negative so much. I prefer skillful and unskillful because this involves a psychological distinction that perhaps I will give a talk about later. What's the difference between skillful and unskillful? That's another talk entirely. Otherwise, I'll stay here for another hour, and you're going to develop some difficult, unskillful states of mind yourselves.

So this next method works very well: you reflect on the drawback, the danger of a particular state of mind. Let's say it's anger. What's the danger of anger? The Dalai Lama said that anger is only one letter missing to become danger. If you write "danger" and "anger," they differ by only one letter—the letter D. So whenever there's aversion towards your fellow yogis who are walking too slowly, who are eating too fast or too slow, or toward anything that rises before you like Mount Everest—

So many people—we are here together, and actually it creates a lot of mind states, you know? So say, reflect on your thoughts of aversion towards a mind state or an inanimate object. Reflect: "Oh, whenever I get angry, I feel stressful. I feel unhappy. I can't sleep." When you do that, the unskillful state of mind can subside.

I can compare this with when you are driving. You are not driving now, but just have a sense of imagination in daily life. When you are driving and see what you call a police car—the one who's going to give you a ticket—what do you do? Do you increase speed or reduce? What do you do? Everywhere I've been—Sweden, Finland, I've been everywhere—you find people will give you a ticket if you are driving very fast. So what do you do? You increase or decrease? Of course you decrease. Why do you decrease your speed? Because you are going to get a ticket, a fifty dollar ticket, and that's not fun.

So the same thing when you have a negative, unskillful state of mind, and then you are indulging yourself in this negative state of mind—what I call an unskillful state of mind—and you reflect, "Oh, I'm going to suffer. This state of mind leads to stress. This state of mind leads to restlessness. This state of mind leads to whatever danger you have experienced"—then you can drop that thought like a hot brick and continue with skillful states of mind. Skillful states of mind you continue to cultivate.

So the next method: the first one was replacement or substitution. The second is reflection. Now, if that doesn't work, you redirect. The third method is to redirect your mind to something skillful. And we have given a lot of instruction about that method. Come back to the breath. Come back to the body. Feel the body. When the mind is wandering, please come back to the breath. Come back to the body. That works wonders.

In my experience, I've already shared with you—you remember when I was at Dallas airport? I redirected my mind to massage, to reflexology. So instead of thinking, "Oh, this person is wasting my time. I'm a monk. I keep 227 precepts. I don't have a single knife. I don't have a bomb." Instead of running this kind of thing—and it's easy to go through that actually, because I mean, what are you going to find in these robes?

But again, I go to some places and they search me. Even Bhante Gunaratana—we were teaching together in California. He's a monk. My teacher is now, I think, ninety. But when he was eighty-something, we went to San Francisco. They were searching and searching this monk who is not going to have a pin. They think that he's carrying something. It's not their fault. I'm not saying that's their fault. But it's just the perception. It's amazing, this perception we have—that you cannot even perceive who is somebody who is calm and peaceful. My teacher is pretty calm. He was doing like this and this and this. It's amazing.

So redirecting your mind—from maybe greed to the breath. Maybe when you have a lot of aversion towards everything, towards your fellow yogis, towards the schedule, towards meditation, towards yourself. I mean, we can have a lot of aversion just about anything. So you can redirect your mind to the breath. Breathe in deeply. You can do it now, okay?

Redirect from my talk and come back to the breath, okay? Let us try it. Feel the body sitting here. You have done it.

This is like when you are talking with somebody. You are in the middle of a conversation and someone says, "Can I talk to you, Bhante?" So you say, "Okay, just wait. Give me a minute." And then you look at Annie—wow, wonderful meditation!—so you talk to Annie. And then you go back. You go back, and... what were you talking about? You have forgotten what you were discussing. Isn't it?

I think this has happened to you when you are talking to somebody and someone all of a sudden interjects. By the time you go back, it's not the same energy. You have lost the storyline. So it helps.

The Pali word for this is very interesting. The Pali term is *amanasikāra*, which is fascinating because the Buddha talked about mindfulness, and here he is talking about *asati*—which means "not mindful." So the literal translation is "pay no mind"—pay no attention to the unskillful state of mind. What I call redirecting your mind to something wholesome. In the bigger picture, it can be taking a walk. You simply get up and take a walk, and then come back. By the time you return, you feel fresh again.

So the fourth method that works also very well is retracing—going backwards to find the springboards. Why are you the person who is always having fear? Why are you the person who is always having anger? Who is having difficult, painful mental difficulties? You try to go back and trace the origins.

This happened for me in Thailand when I was meditating in the middle of a cemetery. I wanted to see ghosts. There are no ghosts in America—do you have stories about ghosts here? Not so much. In Thailand, many stories about ghosts!

I was meditating in the middle of the cemetery because I was very curious. I wanted to know exactly how a ghost looked. Every time I would ask friends in Uganda, they would say, "Well... somebody told me the ghost looked like this." I went to that person and they said, "Oh no, somebody told me the ghost looked like this." And I kept going and going but never found somebody who could tell me precisely how a ghost looked in detail.

So luckily, in 2007, I went to Thailand. A monk told me there was a place in the middle of the cemetery where I would see ghosts there. I said, "Let me test the Buddha's teaching. Let me go there. If a ghost is going to come, I'll go with my robes and follow wherever the ghost takes me." I was ready—due to my frustration in Africa that nobody had ever told me precisely how a ghost looked.

There I was, deep in the forest, meditating, when fear arose—because I already carried that fear within me.

Branches breaking, and I thought it was a ghost.

So what I did was retrace. Why am I having fear now? I started retracing, and I found out where the fear was coming from—it was aversion towards these lions and tigers eating me, breaking me apart. I had tremendous aversion towards tigers. And I kept investigating: why am I actually having all this aversion? I found out that actually I'm attached to my life. Maybe not surprised, but it's amazing how much we are attached to our life, even as a monk.

But I said, no, forget about it. If this tiger gets me, I've done a good job introducing Dhamma to my mother. She's a nun now. She'll be able to hold the fort. My work in Uganda is established. I'm ready to go with the tiger. Ready.

But again, it was not working. I was still unsettled. I asked, why am I unsettled even with this kind of acceptance? I found out—wow, ignorance. I'm ignoring the truth. Then I discovered I was worried about dengue fever and malaria, all mixed together. It's just amazing.

For me, there's something that has humbled me in life—it's the mind, how it works. The one thing that is very fascinating for me is how the mind works. It's a mystery. It's a mystery.

With all good intentions to face a ghost, I was racing through mind states one after another. But retracing actually helped me so much. I found out the root, the root of all this stuff, and I was able to drop the whole thing. I just dropped it. There was no fear. There was no aversion. There was no attachment.

Finally, the last method. This last method works very well, and I practice it to this day. It is called resolution—making a strong resolve. Wherever your mind states take you, every time you go through a painful mind state, you make note of it, and you make a strong resolution. In Pali, we call it *adhiṭṭhāna*. Adhiṭṭhāna means determination. Make a strong determination. Nobody is going to do this for you. You have to do it yourself. Make a strong determination.

When I was at IMS, someone sent me this card. I still travel with it—it's from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I received it in 2000 when I was at IMS. My friend from England sent me this card. This thing you see here, it has been with me everywhere I go. I read it and say, wow, this is what I need. This is what I need.

And I'm going to read it for you. Making a strong resolve works.

This is the fifth technique—the way to transform unskillful states of mind into skillful states of mind through strong determination every day when you wake up.

A Precious Human Life.

Every day, think as you wake up: Today, I am fortunate to have woken up. I am alive. I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others, to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

I put myself included—I don't want to miss the boat as a Theravada monk, you know. Mahayana, Theravada—to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, including myself.

I am going to have kind thoughts towards others. I am not going to get angry or think badly about others. I am going to benefit others as much as I can.

Every single day, as soon as I wake up—for me, this is like my meditation in the morning. I set up the stage for the day.

Here is a question: Are you going to get angry as the day opens? With this reflection, since the year 2000, I found out that yes, you will get triggers—this and that, big triggers. But you are going to remember. And as the saying goes, mindfulness is not difficult; what is difficult is to remember to be mindful.

That is the fifth method: strong resolution.

Thank you very much for listening. Let us sit together for a moment or two.

The arising of difficult or unskillful mental states is beyond our control. But mindfulness—right mindfulness—and wisdom can make a difference between being painful, being caught up in thoughts and difficult mind states, and being free from them.

May you have a pleasant and quick mode of progress.

Thank you very much.

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