Opening To It All

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:56:45

One of the great paradoxes to me in practice and just in living life on this earth is that in opening, we open not only to great beauty but also to great suffering. Somehow there's this incredibly sublime part of experience and a real unbearable part of experience, and we often experience both of them—often together, almost at the same time.

I thought of giving a whole talk that was just examples of this because as I considered it I could come up with one after the other, but I'll give just two.

Today, two different people in interviews told me about a little nest of baby birds. James and I went out and saw it in one of those really vicious looking cholla bushes. Buried deep down inside this forbidding plant is a tiny little nest with four tiny birds. Baby birds, so vulnerable and so tender—the miracle of birth, the real beauty of that—in the harshness, the forbidding climate of this desert. And knowing that the chances they'll survive are maybe fifty-fifty.

Another example, again from the desert: back to those baby bunnies. When they first came out, just barely alive, not really knowing—is this the life that's coming out of birth really going to be new life? Or are they barely alive because they're on the point of going back into death? It was such a unique space to be in, kind of witnessing this very tender borderline between birth and death and the beauty and the pain of that. Knowing that this is something that happens all the time, everywhere in life. It turned out to be death because the mother wasn't around for whatever reason, because the climate's too harsh, because the world is the way it is.

Nature has this incredible beauty and this incredible harshness—the sublimely beautiful and the exquisitely painful. Our life encompasses both. And what our practice is about is opening very deeply to both.

Because the suffering aspect, the difficult, painful aspect of life is so unbearable, and we have been so conditioned unconsciously to avoid this, to move away from this because it's so hard to open to—that's the reason it's the first noble truth that the Buddha felt necessary to proclaim: yes, life is unsatisfactory. For that reason, it can seem a great deal of emphasis in our practice is on seeing, accepting, really being fully present for that which is difficult, that which is painful.

There's no question but that everyone here has had ample opportunity to do that, even just today—probably even just in the extension of the schedule today. It might have brought up a lot more physical pain than you had before, maybe more emotional difficulty. Maybe things got so quiet that that

was really scary. There's endless variations.

It is necessary for us in our practice as in our life to really get in contact with the painful when it's what is happening in the moment. It's necessary because freedom from the suffering—not freedom from painful experience, but freedom from suffering—comes about through our directly facing, through our seeing it and understanding it for what it is.

But at times, it seems in practice, as also in life, we can get so focused on seeing these difficulties, on working with opening to the difficulties, really becoming aware of the manifestations of greed, of aversion or anger, of confusion, delusion, identification in the mind. We start to see them and we can become so aware of them that it can be really depressing, almost overwhelming, discouraging. We can lose sight of what we're doing here, lose sight of our inspiration, just seeing this seemingly endless array of painful, difficult experience.

So what I want to talk about tonight is the importance, yes, of seeing the difficult experience, but the importance of balancing it with appreciation of the pleasant, of the beautiful, of the sublime when that's what happens to be present in the moment. To be able to open to appreciation as well as open to suffering, and to see ways that we can sometimes get lost in the suffering—that our relationship to it can distort our perception of what's actually going on, even in the practice, even with our full best intentions to be present for just what is.

I think it's important to remember, it's something I reflect on, remind myself of from time to time, that these qualities of greed, of hatred, of confusion, of delusion—they are not our intrinsic nature. It's not the true inseparable nature of our mind and heart to be filled with greed and hatred and delusion. It's not an inseparable part of our experience.

The pure nature of our mind is clear and radiant, and often we lose sight of that. It's like these difficulties, these discouragements of the heart, these distortions of seeing are like clouds that come and cover the sun of the purity of our mind and heart. We get so involved in seeing the clouds, we become identified with the clouds, and we think that's all there is. In our experience sometimes that's all we're aware of, that's all we see. And so it's important not to lose track of the pure shining nature of the sun.

Our practice is about opening to both the sublimely difficult and the sublimely beautiful, and everything in between.

I want to mention some aspects of this pure nature of mind, simply so that we can recognize them when they're present, which sounds simple, but it's something we often forget to do.

In Buddhist terminology, these aspects of mind are classified as non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. It sounds kind of negative, kind of passive, but really they're much more active, experiential qualities of mind, very positive.

Non-greed encompasses the qualities of generosity, of outflowing energy of the heart, qualities of sharing, of sacrifice, even of renunciation, of non-attachment.

Non-hatred, again, is the active qualities of mettā, of non-discriminating loving-kindness, the active qualities of compassion, of forgiveness, of patience, of acceptance. All of that's non-hatred. It doesn't just mean we stop hating and go numb.

And non-delusion is when confusion is not present in the mind—there's a real brightness, a real clarity of mind, a clarity of perception. This leads to insight, to real equanimity, to real evenness with our experience, to understanding.

Now, all of these different aspects—at various times, we experience all of them. They're not highly esoteric, unobtainable qualities of mind. They're accessible to all of us. And at various moments when confusion or hatred or greed isn't present in the mind, we can experience and do experience these qualities. It's really important to recognize them when they're present. That's all. Not trying to make them happen and not looking for something, but just recognizing when—oh, clarity is present right now. Patience is present right now. Really important.

Sometimes even talking about these possibilities of clarity, of metta, of compassion, these possibilities of existing in these states—even that can sound discouraging to people. Because they think, well, yeah, that sounds really nice to have a mind of boundless metta, but I know what my mind looks like, and it's filled with boundless greed and selfishness. Forget it. It's way out of my league. And it's so easy to get into comparing—well, I could never... Now that person who is moving so slowly and mindfully, I bet they really have a lot of clarity, and I can just hang it up right now.

It can get really discouraging. It's important to remember when we're seeing a lot of clinging or anger or whatever it is that we think we're seeing in our mind, and we can't imagine the mind ever changing, ever being in a different state—that the mind can't know. The thoughts at that moment can only know what's already been experienced. They can't know what hasn't been experienced. And so those kinds of thoughts are totally unreliable, and there's nothing to base anything on. The heart can trust that it is possible and that we do have access to these qualities of mind.

I wanted to share an experience that has helped me in working in this way, because for me too, hearing about the possibility of freedom, of enlightenment, of living with a heart and mind really free from delusion and confusion seemed just too far away. Sometimes it was inspiring, but often there was a real sense of, you know, that's just so far from where I am.

Last year, I went with some friends to Bodh Gaya, which is a small village in India where the Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree on the night of his complete enlightenment. I hadn't been there for about eighteen years. There's a shrine there, a tall stupa inside a little park, and a descendant, supposedly, of the original Bodhi tree with a little fence around it. We went and sat under the tree. I'm not usually a person who is

very moved by shrines, but somehow the place moved me to tears.

As I sat there, I felt the reality of the Buddha as a human being and of the understanding that he had come to. It moved out of the realm of myth for me, of some distant unachievable thing, to—oh, this is real. This is a real human being who sat under this tree and came to very deep understanding and freedom. And so it is a real path and a real possibility, and I'm also a human being. It just demythologized it and made it seem possible. Rather than feeling discouraged, I felt a great deal of energy and inspiration—not to get somewhere, actually, but just to stay on the path and really put my energy into investigating, into practice. It was very energizing and inspiring.

Being at this temple also served as a metaphor for me in another way. The thought that often comes after thinking, well, okay, so the Buddha was a human being, he could do it, fine—he was an ascetic, he spent his life as a monk. And monks and nuns can go off and really come to understanding. But what about me in the middle of the marketplace, with a family and a job, and I'm so busy?

As I say, being in Bodh Gaya was a metaphor. This shrine in the middle of this little dirty, noisy Indian village is not some sublimely peaceful place. Again, it's the sublime and the ridiculous and the excruciatingly painful all at once. The power and inspiration of this place was beautiful. It touched me very deeply. It was also somewhat ridiculous. There were hordes of tourists coming, different nationalities, shouting on loudspeakers, coming up and staring at you, just chattering and touring around the stupa. There was a group of Tibetan monks—this wasn't ridiculous, it was just noisy—sitting on the side of the hill for three days, chanting and blowing their long pipes. Actually, that was quite inspiring, but really noisy. There was a crazy Tibetan woman who would run around just ranting and raving at anyone who was sitting there. And all the noise of the village, and all the people in the village who weren't the least bit interested except to try and earn some money off the visitors who were coming.

There were, again, the sublime and the painful and the ridiculous. As you walk in, some young men would run up with plastic bags full of little fish that they'd try and sell to you.

I found out later what was happening: there's a lotus pond in the back, and because the Tibetans have such reverence for life, these young Hindu men would go and catch the fish, then sell them to the Tibetans, who would buy them back and put them back into the lotus pond because they didn't want them to die. It's so sweet. And it's so human. We're like those fish—just going back and forth. That's their life.

This place has become a metaphor in my mind for all aspects of life. The practice, the journey toward understanding, is not necessarily about removing oneself or separating from the various aspects of life. Even the Buddha, after his enlightenment, spent forty-five years until his death extremely engaged, teaching anyone who wanted to be taught, very busy. Far from withdrawing, this metaphor enables me to come back and be in life more fully engaged.

Because one knows that it's impermanent, one comes back with more wisdom, more understanding, able

to see the whole play of impermanence and recognize that there's nothing solid. But that's no reason to withdraw. In fact, one can engage even more fully. You're not so fooled as to take some aspect of the show as the thing that's going to make you really happy for the rest of your life. You just know that isn't true. But in this moment, this aspect is beautiful and worth your full and total effort and energy.

In that way, going to Bodh Gaya helped me not to feel that the sense of talking about the possibility of freedom, talking about these clear, clarifying qualities of mind—rather than having that be a far distant goal and something discouraging—is actually accessible in this moment. And that's all there is: this moment.

Something I've noticed in myself and in talking to people is another thing that sometimes happens in speaking of these powerful, uplifting qualities of mind. After practicing for some time, it's almost as if we sometimes discover we're more afraid to open to qualities of deep mettā or compassion, appreciation, a deep love of the Dharma. Sometimes it's as if we'll be experiencing that, and it's harder to fully open to and trust these experiences than it is to open to pain.

Just a few things I've noticed about why that could be. In myself, sometimes there's an almost instinctive distrust that the experience is real. "This couldn't really be compassion. It must be masquerading as compassion. I can't really trust it. I can't really trust that this is joy, that this is real rapture, love of the Dharma. I'm just kidding myself." And so there's a subtle pulling away.

Watch the tendency to discount the validity of clarity of mind when it's present, thinking it's some incredible esoteric state. "This couldn't be it." We always think it's going to be something more extreme than it actually is.

Another thing I experience in holding back from opening to these qualities—maybe even stronger—is that there can be such a deep poignancy to it. In really opening, there's that part of the mind that says, "Yeah, but I'm going to get attached, and it's going to go away, and then I'm really going to suffer. So I'll just hold back altogether." It's the poignancy of life. It's the poignancy of those little birds—incredibly beautiful. But should I never go see them because I know they're just going to die there in that cholla bush? What's the point? Forget it.

We do the same thing to ourselves. "I'll just stay with the knee pain. What's the point of acknowledging this joy? It's just going to go away and I'm back with the knee pain." So we hang out with the knee pain.

Just watch that. Can we learn to trust in the experience of the moment, in our ability to deal with that experience? Yes, grasping might come in, and it definitely will go away. And if grasping is there, you might suffer. But can we trust enough to open and experiment and explore? Allow yourself. Notice the holding back. Allow yourself to experience these uplifting qualities of the mind and heart. Consciously acknowledge their presence. If attachment starts to come in, if grasping comes in, okay—notice that.

The experience has now changed, as you knew it was going to, from rapture to attachment. That's fine. Be

mindful of that. And if you don't notice the attachment, at some point you'll notice the quality of the experience has changed significantly. Okay, it's gone. Be with what's happening now.

But we don't have to be afraid of fully opening to these experiences. What we can find actually in the doing of this—in the fully opening and seeing it pass—is that I have actually learned to open and appreciate much more fully something *because* I know that it will pass. Because I know that it will pass, and if there isn't that clinging, that fear, then all the energy, all the attention is just there very fully with the experience, just as it is. Nothing extra, nothing else to want, nowhere else to go with it, and okay when it goes away. It allows the appreciation to be experienced in a much deeper way. It's very sweet.

Now I'm moving from talking about the sublime back to the painful. It's always shifting back and forth.

How is it that even when we've had experiences of these strong positive qualities of mind, or deep understandings of impermanence—knowing that we really do know how we want to live, that there is another way to live, that we can have real moments where we know we're not separated from each other or from the earth—or when we really understand the pain that comes from clinging and grasping, we really know that, not just intellectually... how come then we continue to be caught in confusion? We'll see clinging really clearly, get up, walk out, and get lost in a frenzy of wanting a certain thing for lunch. How can that happen?

And this can be very discouraging. We walk out, the clouds come back again, and we immediately think that's all there is. The sun is long forgotten.

Partly, we tend to think sometimes that because we've seen something a couple of times, we ought to be able to just drop it, and then we feel very defeated when it's not quite that easy. I want to talk a little bit about the power of our conditioning, because it's enormously strong. I think we need to understand this in order to respect it—not to feel discouraged or defeated, but rather just to understand the nature of what we're working with. And not to feel that we're doing something wrong, or there's something wrong with us, because we keep falling back into old patterns even when we think we've understood them and are ready, more than ready, to move out of them.

The conditioning I'm talking about here is really the tendency to avoid, to deny what is difficult—in other words, aversion or hatred. The tendency to cling to, grasp after, get attached to what is pleasant—that's what we call greed. Or the tendency to space out, be bored when something neutral is happening, or to get identified—that's what we call delusion or confusion.

These tendencies are so deep that a great deal of the time they're not even conscious. We're not sitting here consciously thinking, "Oh, that's nice, maybe I'll get attached." It's very deep and unconscious. That's why the Buddha said that one of his main impulses to teach, when he first came out of his deep enlightenment—he looked around and at first said, "Ah, I'm not really so inclined to teach. These people are too far gone. It would be too troublesome for me." Various beings came and begged him to teach. But

one of the things that really aroused compassion in his heart was that with his eyes of wisdom he could see all around the world, and he saw that everyone—not just many people, but everyone—wants to be happy in this world. And we're so confused that we're doing just the things that will bring us more unhappiness in our efforts to be happy. This is because of the power of the conditioning of these tendencies.

I read a book a couple of years ago called *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception* by Daniel Goleman, a psychologist and also a practitioner and meditator. In it he reports some scientific experiments that I found fascinating because they show the depth of this unconscious conditioning in our minds.

The psychology of self-deception is about ways that our mind can block the conscious knowing of certain stimuli in our environment—not only the conscious knowing of the stimuli, but even the conscious perceiving of certain stimuli that might be anxiety-provoking. Or also, if we have a kind of preset to see a certain thing, a kind of tunnel vision, somewhere in the recesses of the mind stimuli are blocked out and we don't even perceive them consciously.

Let me explain some of the experiments he used to demonstrate this. This is both a physical process and a mental process. He began by talking about how, on just the physical level, in situations of extraordinary danger and stress, the receptors that feel physical pain can somehow just stop working—physical pain actually goes unperceived consciously. The example he gave was of a man who was being mauled by a lion, was conscious during it, and survived. In describing it, he recounted the experience quite fully, saying he just wasn't feeling pain at that time, though obviously his body was being ripped apart. It seemed to be some kind of survival mechanism, because he was able to stay conscious enough to somehow get away.

This same process of selectively deciding, on an unconscious level, what we're going to perceive in our environment and what we're not going to perceive operates often in ways that are supposedly meant to protect us from anxiety, or to help us move in a desired direction—tunnel vision.

One experiment involved a group of subjects who were told to watch a short video of a very fast basketball game. Their task was to count how many times the ball was passed—a very specific task requiring real focus. At some point during these few minutes, a woman in white with a white parasol went strolling through the basketball court, entering one side of the film and exiting the other, very nonchalantly.

What's so interesting is that nobody commented on it. At the end, they just reported how many times the ball was passed. When they were asked about the woman, they all said, "What do you mean? What are you talking about? That never happened." When they went back and were shown the video, of course they were astounded. How could they have possibly not seen that? It's so incongruous, so obvious. That's tunnel vision. What our expectations are can really determine what our reality is in that moment.

The other experiment demonstrated aversion—things that provoke anxiety. They had a series of tests where people looked at different drawings and later had to remember what was in each drawing and describe it. But they also had some fancy machine that could register for each person exactly where their eyeball looked in the picture. The pictures would have, say, one part that was just normal—a man reading a newspaper—and another part that was quite incongruous with that, perhaps sexually suggestive.

If the person later only described the man reading the newspaper, if he didn't remember the sexually suggestive part consciously—somehow that was an anxiety-provoking thing for him—they could also register that his eyeball had never even looked at the half of the picture that was sexually suggestive. I thought, now that's really weird. Not only did he not consciously take in the stimuli, but somehow there was some previous information so the eyeball knew not to even look there. It's really interesting to me.

Sometimes this tendency has served us in a functional way—as in blocking out pain so we can function, or as a child blocking out memories of abuse because you couldn't keep living with the same people if you remembered that. But a lot of the time it's not serving a life-supporting function. We're actually prisoners of this unconscious tendency of mind, these habits of mind.

Prisoners because what we are perceiving in a certain moment as reality, what we're taking to be what is—our experience—is often actually inaccurate, because it's seen through these distortions of mind: the distortions of wanting, the distortions of pulling away, of resisting, of denying, the distortions of confusion. We have these big blind spots sometimes in our understanding of our experience. Selective memory, selective perception, this unconscious selecting of what not to notice.

This book fascinated me because it's showing in a very data-oriented way how much our experience of what's going on can be skewed by these deep-rooted tendencies of mind—the tendency to avoid, to deny, to block any stimuli that's threatening. We can even deny the actual sight of something that we're looking at, actually deny that that's what's happening.

Once I was in the hospital and I'd been there a few days. The doctor came in and was doing a somewhat painful procedure, and I was over the edge. It was really hurting and I was crying. He looks at me and goes, "What's the matter with you? This doesn't hurt." Just flat denial. And we do that a lot.

The filter of denial, of aversion. The filter of greed, of tunnel vision—seeing just what our mind is set on and everything else is in the way. You know when you're walking down the street and you're hungry, suddenly all you see is restaurants, whereas before you never noticed them. Or here, when you're walking in the desert and it's really beautiful, but suddenly the bell rings and you're really hungry and you want to get to lunch. What was filled with appreciation is now just ground to get over till you get somewhere else. And the people who were your brothers and sisters are now in the way. Tunnel vision—it skews our perception.

The third factor is identification: taking any facet out of our experience as being permanent and really

identifying with it, making it solid. For example, the thought goes by, "I'm really stupid." We take that thought out, really identify with it, give it power, and then take in, perceive only what corroborates that experience—that I am stupid. Anything else, that I'm not stupid, that I did something really bright—it just kind of doesn't make it in through the perceptors. But anything that corroborates "I am stupid"—yeah, right, that's true, I'm really stupid. Identification.

All of this filtered, skewed perception is delusion. It's how we stay out of touch with reality. It's why we don't know what's going on sometimes. It's why we can feel so confused. As long as these filters are operating and we don't know it, as long as they're operating and we can't see them, can't know that they're there, we'll continue to live in confusion. We'll continue to suffer.

So that's why we can so easily fall back into the same old patterns. Not that we're doomed to be stuck forever, but the habits of viewing life through these filters are so strong.

They've been conditioned so deeply, they're even unconscious, so that when we're unaware, when we space out for a while, that's what springs back up again.

Here's a simple example. We can know very deeply that we're not separated from the environment, that our actions impact on the environment, that we're part of the earth, and that we really want to act in accordance with this understanding. We know it deeply. And so, for example, thinking, "Okay, there's a water crisis. I won't take long, hot showers. That's just really inappropriate and disconnected." And that can be true, and we know it.

But in a moment of inattention, when we're unaware, all of the old habits spring back up and we can find any reason—it skews our vision. So suddenly what was a long shower, well, that's not so long. That's not hurting anybody. It doesn't matter what I do. That's not going to affect anybody else. Or we just space out completely and after twenty minutes think, "Oh yeah, right, I wasn't going to take long hot showers anymore."

It's not bad. It's just how these tendencies spring up when the mindfulness isn't present and skew our perception of things.

This is where mindfulness is so powerful in working with these filters, because it's the tool that counteracts the unconscious self-deception by shining the light of awareness on whatever arises in our experience. And that's just what we're doing here. Whatever arises—not discriminating, not just going to the pleasant or just going to the unpleasant, not choosing—but shining the light of mindfulness on whatever presents itself in a strong way in our experience. We're developing the ability to be with our experience whatever it is, just as it is. And because we're not trying to change it, we're not trying to avoid it, we're not trying to turn it into something different—because we're allowing it—we begin to see in our experience how these filters themselves are working.

We begin to not only see the world through, say, a veil of confusion or anger, we start to actually be able

to see the anger or the confusion or the greed itself. When we're seeing these filters, not fighting or denying them but seeing them, they're no longer so much coloring our world. We're not so much looking through them as if we're blind to them. We know them for what they are. Our perception is no longer so skewed. We know they're clouds, and we know they're clouds, and that's okay.

When these habits of mind become conscious, it cuts their power enormously. And that's just the power that mindfulness has. In a moment, it's bringing consciousness, awareness, to a veil like this, if that's what's present in that moment. It's a very powerful purifying force, mindfulness.

And it needs patience, because these tendencies of mind are strong and a couple of viewings isn't going to uproot them completely—at least for most of us. So it needs a lot of patience. But it's really helpful to know, to reflect on, that each moment of seeing is a moment when that habit isn't operating. It is a moment of weakening the tendency for it to arise in the next moment. In a way, a moment of mindfulness is a moment of freedom, because we're free of these patterns of mind of greed and hatred and confusion. And that moment might not seem ecstatic or really special, but it's really important.

And it's important to notice, again, these moments. Not just noticing the moments we're caught in the tendencies, the habits of mind—notice the moments when we're not caught in those, when there's mindfulness, when there's calmness. It's really important.

One other thing that sometimes happens—actually, most of the time happens with all of us—as the mindfulness gets stronger and we actually do begin to come out of our blind conditioning and we start to see these habits of mind, these filters, is they start to seem so prevalent sometimes. People often say, "Since I started meditating, I'm just so much worse. I think I'm much more neurotic than I ever was before. So much greed. I'm so aware of grasping. I'm so aware of aversion. I didn't used to be this way."

It's important to notice this. It's another way of kind of drowning in the suffering aspect, of getting lost in the clouds, seeing only the disturbances. Seeing in this way—thinking that I'm worse, that it's getting worse, that I have more greed than I ever used to have, that I'm more neurotic than I ever used to be—it's another veil, another skewing of perception, like a real identifying with the negative. It's happening because what was unseen before is now becoming conscious. Before, we didn't feel like we were filled with greed because we never saw it.

Now we're seeing it right, left, and center. And we think that if we see it, it should go away. But as I said, it's really strong, so it doesn't just disappear like that. We're seeing it, and the awareness is really lighting up the causes of suffering. This is an important, vital step in our becoming free of it. And it can seem overwhelming. It can become a veil to our experience because, again, we're identifying with it. We're identifying with "I'm such a greedy person" or "I'm more neurotic than I used to be"—identifying with seeing all the negative tendencies and not noticing when they're not present.

Thich Nhat Hanh has a great way of talking about this. He says that yes, to see and understand suffering is

absolutely necessary. But we don't need to use it to create unnecessary suffering out of that. And this is what we're doing when we're going, "Oh my God, look how much greed there is in my mind." We're creating unnecessary suffering in that moment.

His example—I love his examples, they're just so simple and down to earth. If you have a really bad toothache, you're very aware of suffering in that moment. There's no denying it. You can't get away from it. And when it finally stops, it's so pleasant. It's really almost blissful. And there's a real awareness: there's no suffering, this is a happy moment. How much of our life do we not have a toothache? And how often do we appreciate that?

It's like that with these other aspects of our mind too. We focus in on the difficulty. We forget to notice when it isn't present. We think, "Well, that's just kind of blah." But actually, not having a toothache is really a nice experience. If I pay attention to it, it's not boring. It's not neutral. It's really nice.

So this is a way in life, as in practice, that we isolate the negative, the glaring, the difficult, and discount or ignore what is pleasant or positive or enjoyable.

I often notice this in myself. If I do something that people observe and ten people come up and say, "Oh, that was really good, Carol," and one person comes up and gives me some negative feedback—who do I believe? There's no question. All those first ten people are completely discounted, and the eleventh one? Well, that's an accurate description of what happened.

We do this all the time. Out of the flow of our experience—of thoughts, of emotions, of sensations—we isolate one, we identify with it, we kind of pull that one out, give it a lot of energy, and that's the one that fits our filter at the moment. That's the one we believe.

So if you're in a space today of "I'm so lazy," or "I'm really greedy," or "I can't concentrate," or "I'm just stupid"—which thoughts are drawn out and identified with? The ones that match the filter. And if we're not aware that that filter is just another thought, another feeling, we stay caught.

So today, how many thoughts and emotions have come and gone in your experience? How many? You couldn't even begin to count how many thoughts have come and gone. Which ones did you hook onto? Which thoughts and feelings are defining, right now, your perception of today's reality?

We all do this. But just to be aware that we're doing this.

So today—are you rebellious? Are you spaced out? Are you a basket-case yogi? Are you doing really terrific?

Are you scared? Which perceptions has the mind hooked onto and made a solid reality out of?

Of course, you can do this just as well with the pleasant as with the unpleasant. And once we've done it with the pleasant, we're not so aware that we're suffering from it. We're not so discouraged about

practice. We think it's great when we're doing that with the pleasant. It's when things are unpleasant that we want to pack it in. So that gives us the motivation to really investigate.

When you become aware that you're holding such a self-definition—"Boy, I just can't concentrate," or "I've just been so angry today"—when you become aware of that, it's a clue to begin to look very carefully at your moment-by-moment experience. And what one usually finds is that experience really isn't nearly as solid as you think it is.

"I'm so angry. I woke up really grumpy today." Yeah, and I was grumpy for a while. And then I went out and saw that the morning was really beautiful and appreciated that for a while. And then I got kind of spacey and wondered if I should walk or sit. Went to breakfast, enjoyed that. But then the person ahead of me was really rude in the way they served themselves. "Boy, I'm really angry today."

And it goes like that. You'll see that there were various moments, maybe a lot of them, where a lot of anger came up. But also a lot of other moments where the whole range of other experiences arose—from bliss to boredom to mindfulness to concentration to sleepiness. And somehow the definition has been anger, because we isolate, identify with, kind of cling to this negative experience. We make a bridge with our thoughts between separate moments and create one solid umbrella to cover the whole day or the whole last three hours.

So just to begin to notice this. As we see that moment by moment it's changing, that what we're calling "I'm so neurotic, I'm so much worse, I'm so filled with greed" isn't so solid as we think. It's coming about because we're seeing more clearly. But as Thich Nhat Hanh says, yes, we can feel and be with the anger, but also begin to see more clearly the moments of calm, the moments of contentment, the moments of peace, the moments of just neutrality. Really, really important.

Realizing that pleasant and neutral objects are equally valid objects of attention as difficult and painful ones. Not more valid—I mean, we've spent a lot of our lives chasing the pleasant. There's a reason we're kind of afraid to fall back into that again. It is important to open to the difficult. But when the difficult isn't present, it's also important to open to what is present—if it happens to be pleasant, if it happens to be neutral.

Mindfulness is non-discriminating awareness. Totally non-discriminating. The same as the quality of mettā. In a way, that quality of soft, connected openness and acceptance that we bring to whatever object is arising in our attention in a moment—in a way, that is the quality of mettā. Nothing is shut out of it. Nothing is more important than anything else. All equally valid, because in this moment what's presenting itself is the truth of this moment. It can't be otherwise.

So that's our life experience, moment to moment. Anytime we look, it brings the excruciating, it brings the sublime. It's our experience on this earth, our experience of nature, our experience of mind and body when we just sit here for an hour. It's peace, real peace, freedom. It's being able to be with all aspects of

life—the sublime, the incredibly painful, and everything in between. Appreciate the beauty, open to the suffering through our own experience. And from this can arise great compassion—great compassion for ourselves, for each other, for the earth.

Practice is not about attaining or coming to some perfect, unchanging state of bliss, some perfect place that is free from pain. That isn't here on this earth, in these bodies. It's about a process of relating to life, to all of life, to this moment of life, however it presents itself—the painful and the beautiful—with a fresh, open, and loving mind. Even incredible suffering can open to equally incredible beauty.

I just want to close by reading a quotation from Alexander Solzhenitsyn, which to me demonstrates this. He speaks a lot in his books about the Gulag archipelago, the labor camps under Stalin. It's three volumes. It goes on and on. Things that are unbearable to think about, the way people were treated and the torments and hardships that people went through in these camps. And through it, over and over and over, he recounts cases of people growing incredibly spiritually, of incredible beauty emerging in the human heart through being in and opening to these experiences that would seem from the outside to be completely unbearable.

I couldn't think of something that's more unbearably painful and more exquisitely beautiful than this power of love and spiritual opening and compassion that comes in a human heart that's been through immense suffering. And to me, that's what our practice is about—opening to both.

He says, and he himself spent ten years in these prison camps, so he's talking from what he knows:

"Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties, but right through every human heart and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains an unuprooted small corner of evil. Since then, I have come to understand the truth of all the religions of the world. They struggle with the evil inside a human being, inside every human being. It might be impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to transcend it within each person."

So that's what we're doing here by opening to the beauty and the pain. We can learn to transcend it in our own heart, and in some ways I think that's one of the strongest gifts we can bring to the world and to each other, because from that space we can then manifest in as many different ways as there are people.

So tonight is the third day of practice for many of you and the thirteenth day for quite a few others. As is customary at this time in a retreat, at the end of this initial settling-in period, there's often a talk about difficulties—working with all the sufferings and difficult energies that come in practice.

For those who've been here for a longer time, you'll probably find that even though you went through a

talk on the hindrances early in the last retreat, it will still be relevant—unless you've gotten rid of all of them. You're just perhaps dealing on a subtler level, but it's the same movements of the mind towards or away from, or getting disturbed and confused by certain emotions and moods that take you over and prevent clear seeing.

So I want to talk about that tonight and also include in this talk honoring the fact that tomorrow is Earth Day. And that's quite a thing to reflect on. The planet for one day will jointly and directly acknowledge the fact that it's suffering, and that if we can bring some compassion and wisdom, perhaps we can come to an end of that suffering, or at least move in the direction of lessening it.

The hindrances, these difficult energies which you've probably heard of before many times, show us the first noble truth of the teachings that the meditation is based on—that there is suffering. It's true, isn't it?

Someone asked Ramakrishna why there's so much suffering and confusion and evil in the world. He said, "To thicken the plot." Who knows why there is all of this suffering? It does make things interesting. It's not just boring meditation when your shoulder is screaming out or you've got confusion and heaviness. Something else is there to be dealt with.

The first time I led a retreat, a weekend retreat, I had been teaching for a while and was encouraged to lead a weekend. One of my good friends was taking part in this weekend, and I really wanted her to have a positive experience. Well, around Saturday midday, as often happens after the initial glow of excitement of coming into the practice, she was having a terrible time and came to me saying, "This is awful. Why are we doing this?"

I tried to think of how I could help her have a pleasant experience with the meditation. I suggested she might take a walk or do a few other things. But it was weighing on my mind: "Gee, I'm really putting her through some real terrible stuff, and is this right?"

After about an hour or so of this, I remembered that the first truth of this teaching is there's suffering in life. I said, "Oh yeah, there's no getting around it." You really have to see that if you're going to understand what this is about.

What we do with the suffering by our reactions, our response to the problems that come up, will either create more suffering or can lead to wisdom and growth and an opening of the heart. The more we understand these forces, the less we're run by them.

The more we understand suffering, the less we're afraid to touch it. So the meditation is taking a direct look at our difficulties, being willing to wake up to them and see them clearly, name them clearly, so that they don't get us from behind, ambushing us. Or we don't spend our time trying to run away from them, hoping that sooner or later they'll pass.

This is from *The Power of Mindfulness*. Nyanaponika says, "There is an element of truth in the word magic

of primitive man. Things that could be named had lost their secret power over us—the horror of the unknown. That ancient belief in the magical power of knowing the name appears also in many fairy tales and myths where the power of a demon is broken just by facing him courageously and pronouncing his name. To know the name of a force, a being, or an object was to primitive man identical with mastery over it."

And in a way, that's what we're doing here when we bring to light these various problems that arise. We name them so that they lose their magical power over us. We see them clearly.

There's such a strong conditioning to turn away in the face of our difficulties, to find some way to make ourselves feel better. This is contrary to most of what we've been taught our whole lives: get out of the unpleasant stuff and go towards something that's a bit more fun or entertaining. But if we can open to our suffering, it deepens our compassion and our wisdom.

How do we react in our lives out in the world when we see something that's quite unsettling—an accident or a severely disabled person? You notice that clenching up of, "Ooh, I can't let that in. It's just too painful." Not that that's wrong. It's just important to see that this reaction closes us off from our connection to life, to others, and to ourselves—to the suffering in ourselves.

Yesterday, I met somebody, quite a remarkable woman. Carol and I both met her. This is the continuing saga of the bunnies. The other night, Jack mentioned that there were these baby bunnies being born. Well, it seems that the mother wasn't around, and there was a litter of four. One of them died, and then we saw a second one die. Adrienne and her partner Elliot found an animal rescue unit nearby in Morongo Valley and took one of the other bunnies over. We hadn't discovered the fourth yet. And they met this woman who they talked a bit about and said, "She's a pretty interesting person." Sounded really remarkable. I said, "Boy, I wish I would have gone." Then it turns out there was a fourth bunny. So we had our chance.

Carol and I went over and met this woman, Judith Lindley, who runs the animal rescue unit in Morongo Valley. What this is, is some space that they got which is kind of like a junkyard, filled with old beat-up trucks and machines that aren't working—really an out-of-the-way space, not a place that you'd pick for setting up your dream home. Along with all the machines and the broken-down vehicles were forty-two cats, forty-two bunnies plus the babies, twelve dogs, six chickens, two donkeys, and a pony with one eye missing.

These animals, most of which were disabled, were taken in because other people didn't want them. Some had lost legs, some were blind. They were, as Mother Teresa would say, the poorest of the poor. She took them in.

She lives there with her seventy-five-year-old husband—she's in her forties, I'd say. He wasn't there, but he's this linebacker of a guy, she says, who goes out and finds work and odd jobs and fixes beat-up cars and trucks and is really strong. He looks about fifty-five. They have three kids: an eleven-year-old, a

five-year-old, and a four-year-old. She has another child, twenty-one, who's living nearby with a family of his own, plus people who are passing through whom she takes in. There were about three or four elderly people there who didn't have a home.

She hauls in fifty gallons of water each day. There's no water on the property, but it takes about fifty gallons to meet all the animals' needs. She's supported just through donations plus the odd jobs that her husband finds.

She's a very happy person. Incredible. She said, "Oh, come look at the cats."

And here's Jasper. Come on out, Jasper. And here's Justin. And here's... She named every single one of them. She's been doing this for quite a few years, living out in the desert like a bodhisattva. How she responds to the suffering around her was very inspiring to me—responding with joy. That possibility is perhaps in each of us.

Getting back to our practice today: What sufferings have you been working with? What difficulties have you been encountering? And how have you been meeting them? How have you been relating to them? Wishing they'd change? Or with somewhat of an opening, a willingness to learn from them?

In practice, there are five classical hindrances—difficult energies that color our experience and keep us from seeing clearly when we don't recognize them. That's why they're called hindrances: they hinder clear seeing. But if we can start to wake up to them with understanding and wisdom and kindness, they don't have to be difficulties or hindrances. They become the richness of our practice. They're what one teacher called manure for enlightenment.

So I'll go through them briefly as they relate to our practice, and then talk a bit more on a global scale about these hindrances at work and how we can work with them.

The first is the difficult energy of attachment—wanting in the mind. Wanting things to be more fun or different than the way they are, wanting the next bit of entertainment. It runs the gamut from a mild fantasy to a deep obsession. Whether it's lust or greed or whatever it is, your mind can find anything to latch onto when there's this feeling of incompleteness.

The problem with this wanting mind is that it keeps us looking outside of ourselves for completion. Somehow this moment isn't enough, and so if I had something out there, then that would satisfy me. But whatever it is that you can find or that you think will satisfy you, it won't do it. Has anything done it so far? Has any gourmet meal or great sexual experience or new car or new house—has anything done it to the point where you say, "I don't need anything else"? Probably not. Because when you get it, it starts to grow old and doesn't have that same attraction and novelty. The energy of wanting keeps us looking for things, and it can be any kind of strange thing.

This is from Ajahn Sumedho. I've been reading a bit from him this retreat. He says, "You'd be surprised at

some of the forms that greed takes for monks. As a layman, you can spend time trying to seek out suitable objects. You can form material possessions. But because monks live a celibate life and have very few possessions, we find our greed accumulates over things like robes or alms bowls. I became obsessed with robes for the first few months—the color of the robe, believe it or not. At the monastery where I lived before, they wore robes of a bright knock-your-eyes-out kind of orange, and it just wasn't my color. When I went to Wat Pa Pong, they wore a kind of ochre yellow or brownish colored robe, and so I developed a great desire for this kind. First, they wouldn't give me one. I had to wear one of those knock-your-eyes-out orange robes, and I became very greedy to get new robes, big robes. The robes in Thailand never fitted me properly, and at Wat Pa Pong they made them to your size. You'd have tailor-made robes. Finally, after a month or so, Ajahn Chah suggested that a monk make me these robes, but then I became obsessed by the color. I did not want it too brown, and I did not want it very much red. I went through a lot of sorrow and despair trying to get the right color for the robe."

A new robe, a new piece of clothes, a sweet meditation—then everything will be okay. You think you'll get one that'll last? No way.

The second hindrance is the opposite of grasping, of wanting: aversion. Not liking. Annoyance, irritation, aggression, rage.

The whole gamut—the mind that pushes away from things. Again, it keeps us from seeing clearly because we're contracted in that state, and there's a great turbulence in our beings. Have you noticed it? What have you gotten annoyed at or irritated by today? Notice how it keeps us from being here in the moment.

In some ways, aversion is not quite as seductive as desire, as wanting, because it's painful after a while. But it is so painful that sometimes we don't even want to let go of it, just because we don't know there's another way. We're so familiar with that reaction of "this is not fair." The Buddha talked of it as holding on to a hot burning coal and not realizing that you can let it go.

The third energy—or I should say lack of energy, difficult energy—is that of sluggishness, laziness, dullness of mind, sloth and torpor as it's called classically. It's very hard these first few days especially, because we don't operate on our own energy when we first get here. It takes time. Coming from a very busy life, you start to nod out when you don't get that extra stimulation. Or when what you're looking at is pain in the mind or pain in the body, it's not so much fun, and so we can have a tendency to check out. "I don't think I want to see that." Not necessarily consciously, but the mind has a way of blanking out when things aren't so delightful.

As you have noticed, this can be very frustrating and also keep you from putting any commitment into your practice. "Well, maybe I'll just take a nap." Sometimes that can be appropriate if you feel quite depleted or exhausted. But often, if you just reinforce leaving when you're getting sluggish or you're not so clear, you won't be willing to stay with things when they're not bright and alert. So that sluggishness, that laziness or dullness of mind—it's difficult to work with.

The fourth energy is restlessness, which includes agitation, nervousness, worry, anxiety, guilt. If you're replaying old memories again and again, it creates a kind of skittishness that keeps us from being here with presence in the moment. It can be very superficial, that scatteredness of one thought to the next, jumping around, often about the future or about the past. Sometimes the energy when we first come to a retreat is still jiggling around from the busyness of our lives. We sit down and our outsides can look very still, but inside we're still just jumping around. It takes a little while for it to settle.

Then the fifth energy, which is the doubting mind. "I can't do this. This is too hard. I don't know if this practice really works. I don't know if the teachings are the real way." Again, it's very heavy. It keeps us from having the confidence to put forth the effort.

The way that we can work with these energies is to open up and experience them fully, as we will start to do formally in the instructions tomorrow. We can incorporate the qualities of wanting, of aversion, of worry and restlessness, of the doubting mind, even of dullness of mind, as objects of meditation. And the key is being willing to acknowledge that they're here, not trying to set some comfortable place up so that we don't have to touch them. Each time we can touch them that way, we're not quite as afraid of them, and we see other possibilities of working. This is a learning process. One moment at a time. One encounter at a time.

A passage that I often read about this learning process—"Autobiography in Five Short Chapters" by Portia Nelson.

Chapter one: I walk down the street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I'm lost. I'm helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter two: I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again.

I can't believe I'm in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter three. I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. It's a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.

Chapter four. I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

Chapter five. I walk down another street.

It takes time. And what we're doing here is, little by little, living more in chapter three—where we fall in from old habits and we wake up and say, "Oh, I do have a choice." Not that I need to blame myself for falling in, but I have some options whether or not to stay in here and feel that life is unfair or feel totally overwhelmed, or to wake up and say, "Oh, this is just the confused mind. This is just the doubting mind. This is just the angry mind." Wake up to it, understand it with care, with compassion. And then, as soon as that understanding comes, not be caught by it.

There are ways you can work with each of these energies besides the basic mindfulness, but mindfulness is the key. Feeling it inside fully. How does wanting feel? Is there a tightness? Is there a clenching? Is there a disturbance that contracts? How does hatred and anger or annoyance feel? Get to know it well. It's an old companion. And it's not just in your mind. You've got a lot of company. That's why these are classical hindrances. It's part of being human.

When we can go from the level of "my problem" to the commonality that we share in working with these difficulties, then we don't have to take it so personally. It's okay. It's just the mood coming to test us, teach us.

We practice not just for easing our own pain, because we're not separate from the rest of life. You know how easily you're influenced by someone around you. Well, we all influence all aspects—the people around us, the beings around us—by our actions. Our responses have effects on the whole of life. And the meditation starts to awaken us to the fact that we are not separate. We can't divorce ourselves from life. We can't come to a retreat and say, "Okay, well, I hope the rest of the world gets together, but I've got my own problems." You can do that for a little time, and this is a training period. But if we go with that attitude, then we cut ourselves off from opening in a much deeper way to what love is about. The love that has the barriers lifted between us and all beings.

This is from Thich Nhat Hanh, from *Being Peace*. He says, "How do you expect to leave everything behind when you enter a meditation center? The kind of suffering that you carry in your heart—that is society itself. You bring that with you. You bring society with you. You bring all of us with you. When you meditate, it is not just for yourself."

You do it for the whole society. You seek solutions to your problems, not only for yourself, but for all of us. It's a wonderful way to practice. And when you see that, then you see that the suffering inside of you is not so different than the problems and the suffering that we're all dealing with.

If you're a mountain climber or someone who enjoys the countryside or the green forest, you know that the forests are our lungs outside of our bodies. Yet we have been acting in a way that has allowed two million square miles of forest land to be destroyed by acid rain. We're imprisoned in our small selves, thinking only of the comfortable conditions for this small self, while we destroy our large self.

One day I suddenly saw that the sun is my heart, my heart outside of this body. If my body's heart ceases to function, I cannot survive. But if the sun, my other heart, ceases to function, I also immediately die. We should be able to be our true self. That means we should be able to be the rivers. We should be able to be the forest. We should be able to be a Soviet citizen. We must do this to understand and to have hope for the future. That is the non-dualistic way of seeing.

We're one organism, this planet—the Gaia principle. Actually, there's a beautiful book that's just come out called *Dharma Gaia: Buddhist Perspectives on Ecology*. If we think of the planet as one organism, then

humanity is the consciousness of that organism, the thinking mind. We are the way that the planet knows itself. As Brian Swimme says, it is self-reflexive awareness that allows the planet to know itself, and through that self-reflexive awareness, we can understand that we are alive.

That's something quite special when we think of all the different kinds of beings on the planet. Perhaps a few of them have that capacity; it seems like many of them don't. And just as within us there can be forces of destruction or the possibility of awakening, that larger mind of humanity as a whole can be involved in forces of destruction, or we can awaken.

Like our own predicament, where we often need suffering to wake us up, this is what the planet is going through. It's unfortunate, it seems, that it has to be that way. But often it's the suffering that brings the sense of urgency, that sees we'd better wake up or else we're all going to be in a lot of trouble. The Buddha said suffering, the first noble truth, is what wakes most people up to look for an end to it—if we can process it wisely.

So again, as with our own hindrances, the way to wake up is to see how our global hindrances are causing suffering. Those same forces—desire, aversion, laziness, restlessness, doubt—they have their roots in our minds.

This is from *Staying Alive: The Psychology of Human Survival*, a book written by one of the meditators here on this retreat, a very powerful exploration:

It's no secret that we've reached a critical time in our history, a time that may decide the fate of both our species and our planet. It is a time of paradox. The evidence of human genius and inspiration is all around us, but so too is the evidence of ignorance and idiocy. On the one hand, we possess scientific, medical, and psychological resources undreamed of only decades ago. We've gone to the moon, fathomed the intricacies of the brain, and sent probes to the farthest reaches of our solar system. On the other hand, millions of people starve, our ecosystem is endangered, and nuclear arms threaten global suicide. In short, we possess unprecedented opportunities yet also face unprecedented threats.

Moreover, for the first time in millions of years of evolution, all the major threats to our survival are human-caused. Problems such as nuclear weapons, pollution, and ecological imbalance stem directly from our own behavior and can therefore be traced to psychological origins. That means the current threats to human survival and well-being are actually symptoms—symptoms of our own individual and shared mindset. The state of the world is therefore a creation and expression of our own minds, and it is to our minds that we must look for solutions.

Looking at how these forces, these hindrances work: greed—it's not hard to see that greed is probably the main problem, because it leads to a lack of respect, a cutting off of sensitivity to the larger well-being. Whether it's the rainforest being cut down, or fuel consumption, or using up fuel that produces wastes we don't want to look at—"Oh, no problem, we'll just find a place to ship them off to"—that's a lack of

acknowledgment of the fact that we're all sharing this house together.

Aversion, which also takes the form of aggression: in our relationship to the planet, we've often had a "man versus nature" stance. We will conquer nature. That's rather silly when you think about it. We're part of nature. Why would we want to conquer it? And that same aggression leads to the development of all the weapons that deplete our resources and threaten us.

Sloth and torpor, the lazy mind. We know the answers and may even have a sense of urgency, but we often don't act accordingly. Well, someone else will do it. Or we pretend that it's not really a problem. We can probably all get in touch with the ways we're lazy about waking up to the problem and doing our share.

Restlessness, worry, and fear that immobilize us—or guilt over our past actions, or blame. It's their fault. No, it's their fault. Not my fault. That worry or fear can really keep us from acting because we simply give up. Oh, forget it. We can be paralyzed by it. This is also closely connected with the doubting mind, doubting that anything can be done. Forget it, it's too late. We're just on a downward roll.

And just as within ourselves, the awareness practice needs to be turned toward these difficult energies from a more global perspective. The Tibetans talk about transmuting the energies—our neurotic energies into sane or enlightened energies—taking the basic energy that's present and, by applying awareness, wisdom, compassion, and a real intention to change, allowing transformation to occur. We can contribute in a very meaningful way.

When we look at each of these energies—attachment, the wanting, and so forth—we can see that when we bring understanding, the understanding of the suffering it causes, there can be that same energy transmuted into generosity. With the wanting mind, we begin seeing that as we take more for ourselves, there's nothing left for anybody, including ourselves. We start to wake up and see: we'd better share this wisely, or there won't be any for me either.

The aversion, the anger, the hatred, the sense of separation—little by little, we can actually see it over the last few years, miraculously starting to give way to a new way of relating. Perhaps with a bit more concern and sensitivity for others. Perhaps with a bit more compassion and loving-kindness, seeing that we'd better do something quickly, otherwise we might not have another chance.

Laziness, when we really look carefully at the choices and we're willing to touch the suffering that laziness causes, can give rise to commitment and perseverance. The restless mind that's immobilized by fear—the antidote to restlessness is focus, concentrating that energy, channeling it into meaningful, purposeful activities. The doubting mind—the antidote is faith. And it seems simple to see that if we keep on giving up hope, there is no hope. If we throw in the towel before we try, then no possibilities remain.

That's why it seems so important to find whatever way we can to be inspired and let our faith grow. Because that enables not only us to hold the vision, but to share it with others, so that it can awaken faith

in them. And it can in turn affect all others. It's contagious, that kind of faith.

Earth Day tomorrow is a bit like a one-day retreat where we hold the vision—a kind of world retreat that lets us all stop and take stock, acknowledge really what our situation is, and commit, focus, align our purpose.

It's interesting looking at Time magazine this week. They've got quite a big spread on it, all these activities going on. They say that in one recent poll, some eighty percent of Americans said they would support more strenuous environmental efforts regardless of the cost.

Just to get a sense of some of the activities: A Bangkok bash, where Thailand's top rock band headlines the "We Love the Forest" concert. A Tokyo happening, where visitors to the Earth Day Festival at Yume no Shima—Dream Island, a park built on what was once a trash dump—can take in a concert or play, watch milk cartons being turned into postcards and cooking oil into soap, or tour two nearby garbage processing centers. The Kenya countdown, where the Evangelical Fellowship of Kenya will launch its campaign to plant one and a half million trees with the help of churches and schools. Peak performance: to demonstrate that the environment is a common cause, fifteen American, Soviet, and Chinese climbers hope to reach the top of Mount Everest on Earth Day. Those who get there will place satellite calls to heads of state, then pick up garbage and gear dumped by previous expeditions. In Rome, pollution protests—Rome's nature lovers plan to put their bodies on the line when they stage a sit-down, maybe even a lie-down, along one of the Italian capital's traffic-choked central thoroughfares. Survivors can attend a concert in a nearby piazza. And just lots of television shows. It's quite far out.

Now, of course, as many of these global events sometimes can bring up this sense of skepticism: a one-day retreat is not enough, as you've probably seen in your own practice. It's just the start. Here's a commentary on Earth Day: "Instead of making hard choices, it's easier to blow off steam. April 22nd will offer people an opportunity to purge accumulated anxiety over wounds to Earth's life support systems."

Worn out by weeks of buildup and an accompanying media blitz, many people will return to business as usual on Monday, hoping not to hear the "E word" again for weeks.

And so that's the challenge to the globe and the challenge to us. Not just one encounter—"oh yeah, I saw it, okay, enough"—but each time you see it, being willing to open up to it. Just like seeing here on the retreat, each encounter is a new opportunity that we can have to wake up.

So as we practice, we can practice with the understanding that we affect and we're affected by all of life around us. We're not separate. We can see the impact that each of us has on the global community. We can acknowledge how deeply the roots of confusion are, both within us and within the collective humanity. And we can see, as we practice here, just doing our sitting and walking, our moments of mindfulness, each little moment of mindfulness as we deal with these challenges in practice—our efforts that we bring here to bring wisdom and compassion and purify ourselves for our own peace, our own

inner peace—they're a contribution, they're a gift that we give to the planet.

And so let's not underestimate each moment of mindfulness. Let's be willing to open up to all the pain and the suffering. Because that is what leads us to the end of suffering.

A retreatant shares that she felt shocked about extending the sitting, that it took her over, and she felt angry.

This retreat was set up for people who've done ten-day retreats before, and that's what we want to honor. Part of deepening practice is extending sittings at times. But you can go at your own rhythm. You don't have to stay in the hall or feel that you've got to be in a prison. When you feel that you've had enough and you're losing your perspective and balance, then you can leave.

Another retreatant asks about the balance between needing to do things about the unacceptable state of the world and accepting it.

Well, it's kind of the same in our own process. When there are things inside of you that need to be changed or that are important to bring another way to, the first piece is to accept that that's there with some understanding, with some openness and compassion. But that doesn't mean sitting back and just letting them go on. It means bringing a commitment to wake up to those things.

It seems the same way with global problems, to me anyway. First there needs to be acknowledgment. Where are the roots of these problems? Can I open up to see the fear and the greed and those things? And not so much blame the perpetrators of those things, including myself, but do what I can in my way without polarizing, without making somebody evil—just seeing that the real villain is ignorance. The real villain is not seeing clearly. And so you do what you do with commitment and without attachment for fixing it up fast. You just do your part. Just like each time, each encounter with the angry mind is that one drop in the bucket. As the Buddha says, drop by drop, we do our part.

If we get too attached with fixing it up and rescuing it out of a sense of fear, then it's a very exhausting and frightening kind of task. If we can bring a sense of caring and compassion and steadfastness, then there's a possibility of a bit more effective action that can inspire others.

So, no paper napkins tomorrow.

When you're walking in the desert, if you see things that were contributed by human container disposal and so forth, you might pick them up. I joined a co-op recently, and the latest little brochure has a line of recycled paper napkins, recycled toilet paper. So you can actually get paper napkins that are made out of recycled paper. I suppose the napkins here are supplied not by us, but we could say we're bringing our own if you don't get recycled napkins.

Can you recycle them again?

I've been sticking them in my pocket and using them instead of toilet tissue.

Let's sit for a few moments.

One announcement before we do the walking, and that is just a reminder about the precepts that we all took as we started the retreat: non-harming, non-stealing, being in our own process, not communicating with others sexually—physically or verbally—honoring the silence, and refraining from intoxicants.

Please, let's make this a retreat where we bring our commitment to the practice and give it as a gift to everyone practicing together.

So there's about thirty minutes for walking. We'll ring the bell just about five minutes before, and we'll have another sitting at nine o'clock. Then there'll be a late night sitting tonight as well, with a reading.

Thank you.

Tomorrow morning the schedule is the same as usual up till nine. We'll post the new schedule and re-announce it at the sitting between eight and nine tomorrow morning.

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