Wise Attention 1 of 3

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 56:57

Tonight I want to talk about the subject of wise attention, sometimes also translated as appropriate attention. It's the translation of the Pali phrase *yoniso manasikara*. I have a lot to say about this, and I'm going to indulge myself—this will be at least two talks, part tonight and part next week. I indulge myself because I'm always cutting things out when I talk about this subject.

In my opinion, wise attention, *yoniso manasikara*, is a key concept and a key tool, both in our *bhavana* practice, our meditation practice, and throughout our whole life. It's a key tool for how we can relate to our moment-to-moment experience in a way that's liberating. We can basically be in the same situation and, with wise attention, that situation can bring us to wakefulness, to waking up. Or the same situation can lead us into continuing the rounds of confusion. The key difference is the understanding, the actualizing in our own experience, of what wise attention and appropriate attention really is.

I want to be referring at various points to one of the suttas of the Buddha, which is really the one where he talks the most about wise attention, although he mentions it in quite some other places. This sutta is the second one in the Middle Length Sayings, the *Majjhima Nikaya*. It's called the Sutta on All the Taints, or all the *āsavas*. There's no good translation in English. "Taints" is kind of old-fashioned. "Stains," "cankers," "defilements"—we already get negative connotations. But the sutta is talking about how to basically uproot all our tendencies of mind towards suffering. And the key that the Buddha talks about in the sutta is this wise attention, *yoniso manasikara*.

So what is it? Appropriate attention is probably the better translation, but I'm so used to saying wise attention that I'm going to keep slipping into saying that, and also to avoid constantly inflicting the Pali on you.

The basic definition the Buddha gives is extremely pragmatic, as pretty much everything he said was. He's talking about these *āsavas*, these subtle roots of suffering, which I'll explain more in a moment. But he says—"bhikkhus" means monks—"I say to you that there is an exhaustion of these *āsavas*, an ending of these *āsavas*, in one who knows and sees, not in one who does not know and see. Who knows and sees what? Wise attention and unwise attention."

Now that's a very bold statement, as he was wont to make. He's basically saying that one who knows and understands wise attention and unwise attention comes to the end of defilements, of *āsavas*. And he defines it experientially: when a person attends unwisely, both unarisen *āsavas* arise—unarisen suffering states arise—and arisen suffering states increase. So it's a very practical definition. When one attends wisely, both unarisen suffering states do not arise, and arisen ones are abandoned.

Then one other line I want to begin with: he says that one who knows understands what is fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. Now to us, this "fit for attention" and "unfit for attention" comes through our minds in a very judgmental way. You turn it into your practice: "This anger is unfit for attention. This pain in my knee is unfit for attention. This personality pattern of pride and blame is unfit for attention. Something else should be happening." That is not what we're talking about. That is not wise attention, as I will hopefully make abundantly clear.

Just to define this word *āsava*, "taint," to describe what the Buddha is talking about: *āsava* is a word that means an influx or an outflux. It's like a pouring into our mental experience of the defilements or habits, the suffering habits of mind, from the very deepest or most subtle level. So it's the deepest habits of mind, the tendency for these deep habits to arise given the supportive conditions. These *āsavas* are what keep us spinning in the rounds of samsara, as I described how pleasant that is last week.

When the Buddha in the sutta speaks about the *āsavas*, he's actually fairly specific. Usually there are three, and in this sutta he names three specific, very subtle, pervasive, underlying habits that keep us spinning. One is the craving for sense pleasure. The second is the craving for being, the craving for becoming. And the third *āsava* is ignorance, which basically covers everything else. Ignorance, and sometimes wrong view, is also spoken about.

So wise attention—how we pay attention and what we pay attention to—means that we learn to pay attention in such a way that when we're present, paying attention, these tendencies for craving, for wanting to become something, for ignorance, for not knowing what's going on, these decrease with wise attention.

When our attention is unwise, when we're paying attention to the wrong thing in the wrong way—in the inappropriate way, better than wrong—then actually the feedback is pretty clear, because these asavas, these habits, get stronger. And we can experience this; we do experience this moment to moment. You don't have to be deep in meditation for four months to pick up on this. It does occur from time to time in all of our experience, no matter what we're doing. But the quiet and the subtleness of meditation, and for some of you who've been here quite some time, your minds are definitely noticing on this subtle level.

So the Buddha says, what's fit and unfit. But it's not that what is fit or unfit has a fixed determination—that a particular object or subject or sense experience or mind experience is in itself unfit. Take, for example, anger. It's not that anger is always unfit and that paying attention to anger is going to lead to an increase in the asavas, that it's unwise attention. No. It's indeterminate, because it's not so much what we pay attention to, but how we pay attention. And these two are, I think, the seeds of all our mindfulness and concentration practice, the seeds of all the skillful means that we employ to help us keep aware.

So how we pay attention. I want to now refer to, in terms of giving a feeling of this "how," the word that we're translating as appropriate or wise attention itself: *yoniso manasikara*. This is the way Andy Olenski,

the director of the Study Center, glosses this word, how he breaks down its different meanings. And while it's not exact as to what appropriate attention really is in our experience, I love this because it gives to me the felt sense of the quality of appropriate attention—of mindfulness, basically. What else are we ever talking about? What do you think appropriate attention is going to come down to? Mindfulness. But the quality of it.

Yoniso, he says, is from the word *yoni*, which is womb. And if you think of womb-like, he says, *yoniso*—nur turing, held in protection. You can think of *sati*, the word for mindfulness, being our protection from the arising of and getting lost in these suffering, unwholesome tendencies. So womb-like, *yoniso*, held in protection.

Manasikara is usually translated as attention. *Mana* means mind. *Kara* is from the verb meaning action—*kamma*, or karma in the Sanskrit, comes from the same word, meaning doing. So *kara* means doing or making. He puts that together as an active quality of mind, a mind that's doing something, that's action, that is present and nurturing—actively present and nurturing.

I get a sense from that, not like some driving force of mind: "Yes, it will be what I want it to be. Yes, this unpleasant thing should go away." But womb-like. Maybe it's because I'm a woman—although Andy did tell me this, I have to acknowledge. But it's a sense of holding experience with that accepting quality of attention, while being absolutely, totally present with the experience just as it is. Mindfulness.

So that's the quality of appropriate attention. And this is what we bring into our practice with that understanding, really looking in our experience. It's what we're always encouraging you to do around skillful means, so that it's not only what we pay attention to, but how.

Simple, obvious examples: the four foundations of mindfulness that Myoshin talked about last week. Bare attention to any arising experience. So take anger, since I've been using that—that's the quality of mind, the third foundation of mindfulness. In itself, it's indeterminate whether it's wise or unwise attention, appropriate or not, to really be present with the mind, with the anger, with the ill will. If the attention has this quality, this *yoniso manasikara* of sort of surrounding, seeing clearly, not feeding any other reaction or state of mind to it, just meeting that ill will with mindfulness, you can see in that moment it is wise attention. The ill will does not increase. It doesn't mean that it magically goes away either, which is what some people are looking for, or use that—"It went away, so I did it right." It's not that. Sometimes the ill will or the pain in the knee can last a long time.

But you can tell it might rise and fall within some moments. Yet overall, the sense of ill will or grasping or craving, the sense of being "I am such a horrible, angry person," or the total ignorance of getting really lost in the whole story—those do not increase. You can just be with ill will, rising and falling, a little bit caught, it lets go. And then when it ends, you really have that sense of being awake, being present. That was wise attention.

And of course, as we all know, unwise attention is either somehow meeting that ill will when there's already in the mind not that clear meeting—there's some other ill will, or there's some sense of identification, or there's some wanting, or there's just the ignorance of getting completely lost in the story about, "Yeah, well, that person is a jerk, and I should be angry," and then spiraling into "What's going to happen?" And what's the result of that? What's the effect? When we wake up from that, are we feeling really balanced and present and mindful? Probably not. Probably the tendency is that the next unpleasant thing that arises, the mind is just more ready to grab at it.

Similarly, take something like simple shamatha, just being with the sensations of breath. Rarely would we say, "Well, sensations of breath—that's got to be wise attention." It can be or not. Even that is indeterminate. So when there's this simple, full attention of mindfulness with the sensation of breath, and you see what's being strengthened, what's being cultivated is non-clinging, non-hatred, non-delusion. Any moment of mindfulness, those three are present: non-clinging, non-hatred, non-delusion. Just one moment. That's why it's so powerful.

Also, you'll notice that over time of simple attention to one breath at a time, qualities of mindfulness, of samadhi, of tranquility, of equanimity are all being cultivated. And I would venture that most, if not all of you, have had the alternate experience of being really quite closely paying attention to the breath, but with what attitude? Not so much. There can be huge clinging in the way the attention is connecting with the breath—huge clinging. Wanting to stay there, wanting to get more concentrated, or aversion: "Let me feel this breath, please God, so I don't have to get caught in that obsessive thought again." Or trying to make it meet some idea, whatever.

But again, the feedback loop—whether it's immediately or five or ten minutes or half an hour or a day down the road—is that what begins to manifest? Frustration, craving, craving for sense pleasures, craving for becoming. "I want to become a more concentrated person." That's craving for becoming. Or just ignorance: "I'm trying as hard as I can and it just keeps getting worse, so I've got to try harder."

So you get a sense. Where we're working here, this yoniso manasikara, appropriate attention, is really the key, the tool, underlying all of our skillful means. That's why, on a retreat where we're giving instructions, or answering questions, we give an instruction and then someone asks a question and we give them a totally opposite instruction from what we just said in the morning talk. And then someone else comes into an interview and they're breaking themselves trying to meet that instruction, and we say, "Oh no, no, you shouldn't do that. You should do exactly the opposite." And then three days later when they come in and say, "Well, I'm doing what you said," we say, "No, no, no, now you shouldn't do that anymore. Now you should do this." Because the conditions are always changing. Nothing's steady state.

And so, remembering that our guideline isn't "Does it feel good?" or "This just feels so right, this just feels like what I need to be doing now"—you know, staying with the breath or noticing emotions or whatever—because sometimes that's just the path of least resistance. It's not about it being pleasant or

feeling good right now. It's really about keeping your kind of background attention, your sense of cause and effect, attuned to the subtle habits and inclinations of our mind. That's the level we're working on with wise attention.

So if you think you're practicing really clearly and over days you're just getting more and more and more lost and craving—I mean, we all have periods where craving comes up, that's part of practice—but I mean, over time, you see something seems to be going in the wrong direction. That's the time to look and see: Is there something I'm doing that's feeding this?

That's not wise attention. That's not skillfully inclining the mind.

Let me give a grosser example of these habits. It's gross, but it's also not. Sometimes when we talk about the āsavas on the level I'm describing—the habit of clinging, the habit of wanting to become, the habit of ignorance—it feels so subtle that we don't quite grasp what I mean. But let me offer one way it's talked about that illuminates the different levels.

There's a teaching about the three vaṭṭas, or the three rounds of saṃsāra. I got this from Beelin Sayadaw. They describe the three different levels at which these deep habits of mind manifest in our lives, and what protects us at each level.

The first level is called the level of transgression. This is where these deep habits of mind manifest in speech and action—basically, out of control. What protects us on this level is sīla, our commitment to ethical conduct. Even just the five precepts really protect us from speaking and acting out of these suffering states.

The second vaṭṭa is called the level of the obsessive defilements, the obsessive kilesas, which speaks for itself. Your mind gets really caught in obsessive thought, emotion, going over and over, and you're truly caught. What protects us there is samādhi. That's why, when we first begin to touch into it, samādhi feels so wonderful—all that stuff is suddenly at a distance. It's like, "Oh my gosh, I didn't know." It's like having such a nice bath of peace. The mind is just shutting up, even for five minutes, and you see how totally exhausting this obsessive level is.

The third level—and this is the āsava level—is called the latent level. Latent means underlying. It hasn't yet come to flower, but the potential is there. If appropriate conditions come together, then from this latent, underlying level, that kilesa will spring up. What protects us there is paññā, wisdom. They say greed, hatred, and delusion are not fully abandoned by acts, but by wise seeing.

Let me give you a simple example to hammer this in. Say you're doing your walking meditation very quietly, and someone just comes along, cuts in front of you, and bumps you into the wall—which of course would never happen here, because everyone is so sublimely aware. But in crowded retreats, it can happen.

Deeds or speech at the transgression level? Well, that's obvious. "You stupid jerk." Or even if you just said, "Excuse me," with all the venom you could summon up—that would be acting on the level of transgression. Our sīla protects us from this, never mind moving to acts stronger than speech.

The obsessive level? We don't say anything. You look like the perfect yogi. You didn't even notice them. But for the rest of the walking: "I can't believe it. I cannot believe that that person just walked in front of me. They don't respect me at all. Nobody respects me. And that really shows how nobody respects me. I'm not standing for it. I tell you, I'm not standing for it." You can take it from there—either it goes out into a long story of more suffering, or you repeat the same three thoughts over and over, which isn't nearly as interesting. You can't kid yourself that it's going somewhere. But it has that same depth of suffering.

Now, in both of these cases, if you have any awareness at all, you know you're suffering. It's scary, because sometimes you don't. Sometimes you think, "Yes, it's really right that I tell off this person."

That's appropriate.

But anyway, the latent level is really much more refined. You're walking and you're not spaced out at all. You're very present. And there could just be a moment of not quite mindful, not gross, but the person walks in front of you and the mindfulness just was away at that moment. And that latent tendency—even though you haven't had any aversion or desire going on for quite some time, you've been really mindful—all of a sudden it comes rushing up. Have you had that experience where you go, "Wow, where did that come from? I've really been very present. Where did that come from?" That's the "give me a break" level.

But that's the level of āsava that we're talking about here, where just the seed, the potential is there, the habit of mind, given the right conditions. It's like a seed that's been under the earth forever, and when it's watered and has the right sun, it can sprout. That's the āsavas the Buddha's talking about—just that subtle tendency. Not the state itself, but the potential for it to arise. So you see we're talking on a subtle level here. And I personally think it's the genius of the Buddha that he could not only experience this level, but make it so clear, talk about it.

You know how when you've been going in life and you've seen so clearly in practice, in your daily life, you've seen so clearly the suffering of clinging, or the impermanence, or a particular personality pattern—it's really clear how empty that is. "I don't need that anymore. I'm done with that," right? Famous last words. But you really have seen through it. It's not an illusion. And then we turn around in retreat or in life, five minutes later or five months later, and there it is, pops up in all its strong glory. And you think, "How? How can this keep happening?" I would be surprised if there's someone here who hasn't had that experience. Maybe I'm the only one.

Or when you think, "I've been practicing, I've been understanding a lot in practice, but in my life I seem to be getting worse. It seems like these patterns are coming up more and more."

On a little less subtle level—because most of us don't go through thinking, "Oh, I see the potential for the habit of becoming arising now," right? That's really not so much the way you're going to think about it. Clinging to sense pleasure is okay to name. But the habit of becoming, putting it that way, maybe we don't notice it. Let me put it in a grosser way. If you want to call it sakkāya-diṭṭhi, right? Personality view.

What is our personality view but simply our clinging to or aversion towards any or all of the particular habits of our thoughts about ourself, of our memory, the habits of our emotions, the particular personality traits or habits of response, reaction in particular situations? What is the sakkāya-diṭṭhi but a kind of solidifying, a clinging to, a making permanent in our mind any sum of these patterns? And suffering from that—suffering not from the patterns, but from unwise attention.

So whether your pattern is in times of difficulty strong self-pity, or feelings of worthlessness, or feelings when things aren't going your way of blame thrown out on other people, or just being really cranky and aversive when you're tired. You know you get tired and up comes aversion when you've been so present and kind all day. Or just really getting so high when there's a lot of sense pleasure, just loving the sense pleasures and at some point getting really lost in that until you see how you're putting your whole life around having more and more. Or "I'm an athlete" or "I'm an introvert" or "this is what happens to me in this situation"—whatever. We all have our own. We all have many, many particular habits of emotion, of the descriptions of thought that we buy into and have repetitively about ourselves, particular responses.

The thing is, none of them are steady state. They're all different habits and patterns coming and going, coming and going. Have you had anyone that stayed steady all day? I mean really. Don't just say, "Oh yeah, right, it did." I mean really stayed steady all day. No breaks, no gaps, no fluctuation. I doubt it.

We actually compound our suffering through what the Flight of the Garuda, a Tibetan text, describes as "our pernicious habitual pattern of solidifying reality." We take thoughts about ourselves, patterns of emotion, habits of reaction, and completely solidify them: "Yes, this is me. This is who I am. This is what always happens in this situation."

Well, it does happen often. That's really a manifestation of this level of asava—a very deep and subtle inclination or habit of mind.

Give me a particular circumstance where I'm not very aware. I'm a cranky-at-night person when I'm tired. Give me a particular evening when I'm tired and not aware at all, and anything just mildly approaching unpleasant, and crankiness will arise. Now, for years I didn't really understand that. The crankiness would arise and I'd act on it. I'd say something unpleasant, or just feel really unpleasant and get restless and do more things, punch out more action to get away from it—which, when you're cranky, just makes everything worse.

Now that I know it much more clearly, if that situation arises—because that inclination, in the right circumstances of no mindfulness, is still there—it can still arise. But as soon as the crankiness arises, I

meet it with wise attention. "Oh, crankiness. It feels like this."

At that point, it's not sakkāya-diṭṭhi anymore. There's not a sense of grasping, of making it me, of identifying with it, of turning it into becoming. "I am becoming a cranky person. I am becoming a worthless person, an athlete, an introvert"—or whatever. A good meditator, a concentrated person, whatever your sakkāya-diṭṭhi has been in the last half hour. It can come and go just like anything else.

We don't have to stop those thoughts, those emotions, those patterns. Simply the solidifying, the grasping around them—that's unwise attention. We notice it, but lightly. "Oh, crankiness feels like that." That's wise attention. That seed doesn't go any further.

So what's really inspiring to me—and I know people use this quotation from the Buddha a lot—is that he often describes or defines full awakening, or an arahant in the Theravada model, as someone who is free from all the asavas. Meaning that in such a person, even in any condition, those tendencies have been erased, basically. They've been exhausted—I think "worn out" is the better expression. So that even if I was incredibly tired and incredibly busy and something really unpleasant happened, crankiness just wouldn't arise. It couldn't arise. You see why that's the definition of an arahant.

But the inspiring thing is how often the Buddha says—and he says it in terms of this—"If it were not possible, I would not tell you to do so": to apply wise attention.

I say that first because now I want to go back to the subtle level of asava, where we can really begin to play with how it works. Not getting down on ourselves or discouraged, but just playing with how strong and sudden this uprushing is. Asava really means something like "influx." And sometimes it really feels like this—just this uprushing of kilesa out of nowhere. But also, how in a moment of mindfulness, it can be gone.

An example: On one retreat I was sitting—I'd been practicing, I don't know, a couple of months. I was very deep in. Mindfulness was really pretty steady and strong. It was in between sittings, and I remember I was in my room, looking outside at a tree leaf. I was just right there noticing it. Seeing, seeing leaf. Vibrant color. Seeing pleasant. Seeing pleasant. Because by that time, the mind was just noting every moment—that was simply what it was doing. And it was so alive, you know, very connected.

And in just a moment, there was this slight—so slight—backing off of connected attention. You know, where you're going "seeing, seeing, pleasant, vibrant, seeing, pleasant..." and then just... "ahh." A kind of settling back. Delusion, for a moment.

You don't even look around, but you just kind of disconnect. You don't even have time to space out, but there's this disconnection. And it was as if—I don't want to be discouraging, it's just how I saw it happen—in this moment, it really was like this huge influx of craving. Just wanting. "Oh, it's so beautiful! How can I have more?" And it just started going down the road of papañca, of proliferation, in that amount of time. It was really amazing. Memories, pleasant memories, desire—my whole life in about a

tenth of a second. At which point I just noticed: "Oh my god. Pleasant. Memory. Seeing." And then it was gone.

But I remember that moment so vividly because it was visceral, a feeling sense of really how powerful the underlying tendency can be at certain times. Not always—but at certain times.

It's also a good example of how yoniso manasikara, appropriate attention, totally connected and non-judging and not adding anything extra—in that moment of sati, of mindfulness, with non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion present—the whole kilesa, the whole āsava of sense desire just stopped. And in that moment, it's gone.

We're talking about a habit of mind, an underlying tendency. But it's not like there's some big glob of āsava sitting there, this mass of sense desire that you have to chip away at until suddenly it's all gone. We tend to think, "I'm working on my conditioning. I have this much left to go." It's like if you have the habit of smoking. When you're not smoking, you're really not smoking, right? There's not some little smoker in there puffing away that's just going to suddenly come out and you notice it. You're either smoking or you're not. So it's the same—you're craving or you're not.

Working on these two levels of practice, obviously in daily life and at retreat, means working a lot on the level of acting and speaking and the obsessive patterns. But it's also working very much on the latent level. It's just something we don't notice or think about or pay attention to as much. But every moment of mindfulness is not only not watering—the double negative, you know what I mean? In a moment of mindfulness, we're not watering the seed of the latent tendency. It doesn't have a chance to sprout. And also, what we are doing is planting the other seeds—the seeds of the habit of non-greed, non-hatred, full attention, non-delusion. And that then becomes the stronger tendency.

Until finally, the āsavas—those little seeds of unwholesome tendency—wither away from lack of being fed, from deep seeing, understanding, insight. They stop being fed and finally wither away altogether.

And it's important, I think, to really understand and trust this. Because as your practice, not only here but in life, as your dedication to paying attention to what you're doing here and off the cushion gets stronger, you're going to start to notice—you already are—the subtle levels where these āsavas are manifesting in a much more subtle way than we would normally have noticed.

And so it seems like we're not getting any better and maybe even getting worse. We fail sometimes to notice that we're not screaming and yelling and hitting and blaming. We're just walking very peacefully and having a little spurt of, "Oh my god, I can't believe it." And then it goes away and we're back to being mindful. It feels just as jarring. We don't really realize, because we're so in it, how much more subtle a level we're working on, and how the noticing of it and the immediate bringing in of yoniso manasikara eradicates it in that moment. How really powerful that is. It's important to really give that credit.

Here, one way you might notice from time to time—because this does also happen—is that when you walk

into a situation or a condition arises that is absolutely ripe, all the conditions present for your prime tendencies to emerge—blame, self-judgment, comparing, worthlessness, desire, whatever it is—and you're not trying not to have it happen. You just walk in, and the person who so far has never been able to walk across your field of vision without some nasty judging thought arising in your mind—suddenly they walk across and, without any premeditation, mettā arises. They walk across and you think, "Oh, they must be really suffering. May they be happy." Where did that come from? It must be that deva behind me saying it, because it sure didn't come from this mind and body!

Or you walk in and somebody does something that would normally send aversion flying, and there's just space. Nothing happens.

I don't know, years ago. I think it was the first three-month retreat I ever sat. I'd sat a lot before, but not in that form with these people. I didn't know who anybody was. So I was kind of just checking it out and making up my stories about people. And there was one guy who I somehow decided was some really enlightened guy. I didn't even know who he was. The reason I had this story is because he would always come to lunch really late, like twenty minutes late, and just come in and take whatever and sit down and eat. And I thought, wow, he must be so free. He must be this amazing guy. How can you come to lunch late when it's the only thing going on in the day and the food might run out? You know all the riffs.

And I remember one retreat, I don't know when, sometime later, I didn't even notice it. Halfway through the retreat, I suddenly became aware that I wasn't even thinking about the food. And I myself was coming twenty or thirty minutes late. Something would be run out. I didn't care. It wasn't any big renunciation. I really didn't care. And that was the sense of, just in that particular moment, the particular asava not arising, not being there in that moment. I'm not saying it doesn't come up other times, but you can see those conditions that just couldn't bring it up anymore. And that, for the most part, has stayed steady around that on retreats unless I'm having a really bad day.

But just to see how it's nothing to take credit for because it's so clearly not you. You can feel how that particular tendency just gets exhausted from not being fed and from insight, from understanding. So it's important to notice that in yourselves as well.

So the Buddha talked about in this particular sutta—that's why I said it might be three talks; I didn't even get to the sutta yet—he talks about seven different ways to cultivate wise attention, yoniso manasikara, and to extinguish, to uproot the asavas in our life. What I love about this sutta is that some of the seven are really fairly specific to bhavana, to meditation on the cushion like we're doing, but not all of them. Some of them are quite applicable to how we relate to situations in our life. So it's both a very precise view, but also stepping back and looking at our relationship to experience in our life, our relationship to food, our relationship to environment, our relationship to mental states—as well as in the meditation.

So that's the next thing I want to talk about. Obviously, I'm only going to talk about the first one tonight. I might not even finish the first one. But just again, to lead into that, to emphasize again that unwise

attention is at the root of our spinning in the rounds of samsara. That, you could say, is the proximate cause, the reason that we keep getting catapulted into the rounds of samsara. It causes craving and ignorance and becoming to increase. Wise, appropriate attention is at the root of liberation. Unarisen asavas do not arise and arisen ones are abandoned. That's very interesting—unarisen ones don't arise and arisen ones are abandoned. That's what the Buddha talks about in this sutta.

I'll just read you the seven ways and then say a little bit about the first one for tonight. These are the seven ways. Asavas can be abandoned by seeing, by insight. The second one is asavas are abandoned by restraining, restraint at the sense doors. They are abandoned by using, by attention to how we use things, use our requisites. They're abandoned by patience, or enduring in this translation. They're abandoned by avoiding things that are harmful. They're abandoned by removing—in other words, not allowing unskillful, harmful states to continue. And they're abandoned by developing, specifically developing the seven factors of enlightenment, the seven bojjhangas.

So those are the seven areas that he talks about that I'll go into a little tonight and the rest next week. Abandoned by seeing—I want to read you some of what he says. This is what he goes into in quite some depth in this sutta. He starts by saying that an untaught, ordinary person—is that puthujjana? Yeah, puthujjana—who has no regard for noble ones and doesn't understand the Dhamma and is undisciplined in it.

This person does not understand what dhammas—what things—are fit for attention and what are unfit for attention. Since that is so, he does not attend to the things that are fit for attention, and he attends to dhammas that are unfit for attention.

Now let me give you an example of how the Buddha speaks in this sutta. This is how one attends unwisely—and I like this because it cracks me up. He puts it in quotations: "Was I in past time, or was I not in past time? What was I before? How was I before?" Past time could be another life, or it could be the last sitting, right? "Shall I be in the future or not? How shall I be in the future? What shall I be? Having been what in the past, what shall I be in the future?" Or else he is perplexed about the presently existing time: "Am I, or am I not? How am I? How did I come to be here? Where will I be going?"

Can you relate?

When he attends unwisely in this way—and this is quite bare, but it can be anything—how was I so angry before? Am I going to be angry like this in the future? How could I have done that in the past? I can't believe I acted like that. I wonder if I'll do that again. But now that I've practiced so much, I'll probably be in the situation very differently. And we make the whole thing up. This is what the Buddha is talking about right here.

When one attends in this way, one of six kinds of view arises, and they're all different views of self. The view "Self exists in me, for me" arises as true. Or the view "No self exists for me" arises as true. Or the view

"I perceive self with self" arises as true and established. Or the view "I perceive not-self with self" arises as true and established. Or the view "I perceive self with not-self" arises as true and established. Or he has some such view as "This is myself that speaks and feels, that experiences now here and now there, good and bad, the ripening of kamma," and it goes on and on.

"Now this view is called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. No untaught ordinary person bound by this fetter of views is freed from aging and death, from sorrows and lamentations. He is not freed from suffering, I say."

Do you get a sense? Unwise attention leads us into the thicket of views. The thicket of views is not always quite so baldly stated as that in our minds. But just that—even if it's not put into discursive thought—the sense: "I am like this." Or "Oh, now I'm really having a good sit." Or "This is how I've always been and this is how I always will be." Or "Oh, it's like that, but now I'm going to be like this. When I leave retreat and I'm just a walking bodhisattva, it's going to feel like this."

Any of this stuff—the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, unwise attention. It doesn't mean we're bad. It just means we suffer. And the more we pay attention to that with clinging, with belief, the more we're feeding that habit, those asavas.

All we need to do is turn around. How do we pay attention wisely? How do we uproot the asavas by seeing, in this first example? You can probably guess. Mindfulness. Sati. Bare attention—in other words, paying attention to what's arising totally without adding anything extra. Nothing. Just totally present, without creating a story, without mistaking perception for something else. Just being here.

An example from Krishnamurti—I just thought I'd move out of Theravada for a minute.

This is Krishnamurti: "When you look totally, you will give your whole attention, your whole being, everything of yourself—your eyes, your ears, your nerves. You will attend with complete self-abandonment, and then there is no room for fear, no room for contradiction, and therefore no conflict."

When you attend totally, there's no room for asava to arise. There's no room for confusion.

This simple example I use a lot: someone told me in a long retreat there was a repetitive sound in the meditation hall. I think it was like a clock up at the teacher's place ticking. And they said, "I was really experiencing deep samadhi, long sittings, and this sound just ruined it. I got completely lost for sittings after sittings, for days, in aversion. It ruined my samadhi. I was thinking, I can't believe they let that be here in such a deep retreat." It must have been a three-month retreat.

And finally—like, duh—they thought, "Oh, what's happening? Hearing, hearing." Even that clock's ticking and making such a lot of noise—unwise attention. Total attention is not just "hearing over there, it's unpleasant." Total self-abandonment into hearing, just as it is. And then if it's unpleasant, total

self-abandonment to that. If aversion arises, a thought—"I can't believe it"—total self-abandonment to that.

And then she said, "The sound wasn't ruining my samadhi. My attachment was ruining my samadhi. My mind."

This is from the Buddha, from the Sutta Nipata. Someone asked the Buddha, "What is the state of peace?" He says, "Dry up the remains of your past and have nothing for your future. If you do not then cling to the present, then you go from place to place in peace."

Total presence. Don't bring in the past, don't bring in the future, don't cling to present. And that can just be in a moment. That's not something we have to hope for down the line—just that moment of wise attention. Yoniso manasikara.

Then he goes on, kind of to the arhat level: "There is a greed that fixes on the individual body-mind"—that sense of me, sakkaya ditthi. "When that greed has completely gone, then, Brahman, there will be no more inner poison drives. And without these you are immune from death."

So we just start in the moment. Just this moment of total attention. No past, no future. No clinging to present. No descriptions of present. No interpreting present. Just this moment. Yoniso manasikara. Then you can go from place to place in peace.

So I'll stop there for tonight and continue here next week.

Dry up the remains of your past and have nothing for your future. If you do not cling to the present, then you can go from place to place in peace. That is the state of peace.

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