Wise Attention III

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:07:35

Tonight I want to continue and hopefully finish talking about the understanding and cultivation of wise or appropriate attention—really a key cultivation that the Buddha says takes us to Nibbana.

I want to point out again that wise attention, the whole concept, is rooted in the fact that we can train our minds and hearts. I know sometimes it can feel like we're the helpless victims of the waves of mental states and physical experience that go on in a retreat. Even when we've been practicing a while, suddenly out of nowhere things arise. Training doesn't mean you just want to say "okay, back" and it goes away, as we know. But it does mean that we can cultivate where we choose to let the attention dwell. And where we choose to allow the attention, the mind, mana, to dwell—that becomes the inclination, the habit of mind.

We've spent all our lives, or many of us have spent a great part of our lives—what have we been cultivating? Where has the mind been dwelling, left to its own devices? I'll just leave that question for you to look at.

So we can train the mind. And as I talked about in previous sessions, when the Buddha is speaking about this concept of appropriate attention in the sutta that we've been using as our base, it's in terms of starving to the point of the absolute uprooting of the deepest, most subtle tendencies or inclinations of our mindstream to move in the direction of craving for sensuality, of craving for becoming, for being, for ignorance. This is, by definition, the way the Buddha often describes the arhat—one in whom all these tendencies have withered away.

I'm just reminding you, in this review section, of a sense of how this moment of āsava, or this tendency, can suddenly spring up in experience. I've gotten to where I love to see it on retreat where it's relatively harmless and you don't get yourself into too much trouble.

One yogi was describing to me during a three-month retreat how she was very deep into the practice and felt that she was really quite mindful. The mind was fairly equanimous. One day after breakfast was over, she was walking past the food table at the retreat center on the way to wash her dishes. At the end of the food table was a bowl of fruit. She was completely full—not hungry, not worried about later, thought she was quite mindful. But there was this moment of just seeing the orange in the bowl. And the next thing she knew, her hand just reached out and grabbed it. Where did that come from? That's the level of āsava. It's subtle, but it can manifest not so subtly, even when it seems that we're really pretty together.

Or the aversive one—I think Sarah mentioned this in her talk, or someone did—in terms of not killing. We

can very deeply intend not to kill, but when you're just on that point of sleep and there's a mosquito buzzing around, and you kind of start, and there isn't a moment to consciously think "oh yes, I'm committed to not killing," and the hand just swats. And you feel terrible, but in that moment of swatting, that was the āsava, the tendency, just shooting up.

I say I love seeing this because if we're living or practicing under the sort of delusion that quite soon and quite easily everything's going to get calm and copacetic and this stuff isn't going to arise anymore, and then this happens, we get really discouraged. No, it's like, let's get real. Let's really see how subtle the tendencies are. Then, actually, I find much more appreciation—one, for why practice can be so hard. And that gives me more courage and more energy and more willingness to keep going. If I think it's just around the corner and one more experience and I've got it, then when what's just around the corner is a wave of greed or lust or self-hatred, we're ready to pack it in. But if we really see, oh yeah, it's just working on deeper and deeper levels—can I summon up the mindfulness, the wise attention, the energy to be here? That's how the mind is trainable. That's what we're doing.

Every moment of mindfulness is a moment of freedom from cultivating or strengthening greed, hatred, and confusion. And it is a moment of cultivating and developing wise attention, the factors of awakening.

As you remember, in this sutta about the exhaustion of all these tendencies, the Buddha spoke of seven different, very practical means in our experience—not just in deep meditation—that we can use wise attention, attention in relationship to what's happening, to retrain and redevelop the heart.

We talked about how the tendencies are abandoned by seeing, by insight, by that pure entry into emptiness of just perceiving what's here with nothing extra. We talked about how these tendencies are abandoned by restraint—satipaññā, mindfulness-wisdom at the sense doors. Not fearfulness of sense contact. Not walking around with your head in a bag, although you can try that. But just that moment of pure presence where the consciousness doesn't have to expand into proliferation and papañca and feeding, basically, the hindrances. That satipaññā starves the hindrances at that moment of sense contact.

And the third was how the āsavas can be abandoned by our wise attention to the attitude with which we use things. Remember how we relate to the way we use food, clothing, shelter, medicine—and for us as lay people, for some of us, how we relate to entertainment, going out, whatever. Remember, this is all in terms of not the outer appearance, but the intention with which we meet things. How we relate to these things—what relationship increases craving, hostility, confusion in our mind? What relationship decreases those things?

So you can't just say, "I know if I use less, I'll decrease craving." You might be increasing craving or decreasing craving, but making yourself totally crazed, increasing delusion. You can't just have a list and go—as I'm sure our venerable ordained sangha can tell us. Just having a list of precepts doesn't simply clean the mind of greed and craving, does it? Or does it? But it's a formidable list to use as a guideline to see how the mind is relating when it comes up against any of the precepts. We have our five, they have

their eight or ten, he has 227. It's something to be respected, taking that on.

So those are the first three. The fourth one is how these tendencies of mind, the habits, can be abandoned by endurance. Endurance is the common translation at this point, but I prefer patience because for me in English, endurance takes on the quality of something kind of grim, aversive—"I'll get through it"—but aren't your teeth kind of clenched when you're enduring? Whereas patience is an aspect of metta.

This is the way the Buddha described it: "Here a bhikkhu"—or anyone practicing, that's you—"reflecting wisely. There's cold, heat, hunger, thirst, contact with flies, bugs, wind, burning and creeping things, rain, unwelcome words, and arisen bodily feelings that are painful, wracking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing, and menacing to life." He's moving way beyond that little knee pain.

Endurance or patience is that quality of open-hearted presence within whatever the experience is—just being there with mindfulness without adding anything extra. "Unwelcome words" doesn't lead to "I can't believe this" and on down the road. Instead: "Oh, unwelcome words feels like this." Racking, piercing, distressing, menacing to life—physical sensation feels like this.

Endurance also means connectedness of attention. Otherwise, it moves into that passive aversive avoidance: "Okay, I'll put up with this. In, out, in, out. Rising, falling, rising, falling. I'm being really mindful until it goes away." And then—ah—then you really open the field of attention.

Next time that really unpleasant noise arises or pain in your body, when it first arises—not when you're already beaten down and the mindfulness is very low, but when it first arises and you notice that "oh no, another hour of this"—just notice: it feels like this. Relax. Open your attention, open your energy field, open your cells and meet with totality of attention whatever that arising experience is. Not in order to achieve anything. Simply because that's what's arising. That's life. That's truth. That's the gateway to liberation in this present moment. It can't be anywhere else.

If you're waiting for this to go away before you pay attention, that is what you are strengthening in the habit of mind—waiting till it gets better. Well, as we all know, none of us are spring chickens here. We can really wait our whole life for it to get better before we truly commit to practice. And I don't think it just keeps getting better. I hate to tell you, especially body-wise, it just doesn't keep on getting better. So where are we going to wake up?

Patience can bring in a kind of resolve simply to be here. But the being here is just to open into the midst. We all know what that is; I don't need to talk about it much more. But the patience applies to both so-called external and internal phenomena. Some person acting a way we don't like. Our body-mind acting a way we don't like. Of course, who doesn't like it—that's the other question.

I do want to read you this from Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. He's talking about arousing bodhicitta, but he mentions three aspects of patience. These three lines have stayed with me when I'm in really difficult retreat. They would come to me—not just like "okay, I can keep going," but

they would totally open my heart and mind.

The first is transcendent patience, to have patience when wronged by others. The second is the patience to bear hardships for the Dharma, all the things that happen. And the third is the patience to face the profound truth without fear. Just calling up those lines when anything is going on that you don't like.

And just when you're thinking, "Oh yes, I can find the patience to bear hardships for the Dharma," and you're just there, moment to moment—in that moment of cultivating patience, what's withering? The tendency to aversion, the tendency to greed. What's strengthening? Metta, mindfulness, clear seeing, all the factors of awakening.

Now, the next one—you would think, why didn't he put this first?—is the tendencies that are abandoned by avoiding difficult situations. Of course there's an obvious reason why this isn't first: because we'd much prefer to avoid than to endure. And sometimes I think it's tricky both ways to know what's avoidable.

The Buddha says, "Reflecting wisely, a bhikkhu avoids a savage elephant, a savage bull, a savage dog, a snake, a stump, a cliff, a cesspool, a sewer. He avoids sitting on unsuitable seats, frequenting unsuitable friends"—so that wise companions in the life might believe that he would be more drawn into unwise action.

So what can be abandoned by avoiding really means using our wise discrimination to see what experiences are just plain dangerous, and what others—these are my words now, not the Buddha's—are just plain stupid, experiences we don't need to keep going back to over and over and over.

Say, for example, you're trying to sit outside because you think, "I need to be with nature," and it's lightning, and the mosquitoes are biting you, and you are filled with aversion, just filled with aversion. No mindfulness. It's getting stronger and stronger. Do you think this is helpful in that moment? What is being cultivated? We're not talking about a moment of aversion, but just feeding, feeding, feeding. There can be other times when being outside could be totally appropriate because you're just looking at fear, and by being there and noticing the mental state, calm and acceptance and equanimity are growing. It's really about looking at what's being fed.

There's another sutta that I like very much that to me expresses this—knowing what's appropriate for deepening our understanding and practice, and what is more useful to avoid. It's a parable, really a simile, where the Buddha talks about a falcon who suddenly swooped down and caught a quail in the air. While she was carrying the quail away, the quail started moaning and saying, "Oh, stupid me, it serves me right. If I had kept to my own natural territory, the territory of my kind, today I would have been safe. But I went outside of my natural territory, and you caught me."

The falcon said—she was not particularly proud—"Well, what's your natural territory?" And the quail said, "It's a field that's been all turned up by the plow"—a bare field with many clods of earth, really bumpy and uneven. So the falcon, not out of pride or anything, let the quail go and said, "Go ahead, go to

your natural territory, but I'll still be able to catch you." It wasn't boastful, just saying, "I know I can still do it."

She let the quail out. The quail went into this field and stood by a clod of earth. The falcon dove down toward the quail, but just before she got there, the quail jumped into the clod of earth and the falcon missed her, hit the ground, and killed herself.

What the Buddha is saying is: stay within your own reach, stay within appropriate territory. And of course he says that for monks or for those practicing, roaming outside of one's own pasture, one's own territory, means getting really caught in sense desire. What's staying within our territory is the four foundations of mindfulness—sati at the sense doors, rather than just spinning our gears on wanting and reacting to sense pleasures.

But I think that can actually be expanded a lot in the ways that we practice. There's a reason we come on intensive retreat to such a conducive environment. It's a choice not to have CNN going in the corner of the meditation hall. There's a reason we don't have internet access data ports in each of your rooms. What's really helpful for practice?

Sometimes I know people—all of us—can be confronted with something quite difficult in practice, internally or externally, or when we go home again, and think, "Well, I should be able to be purely mindful no matter what the conditions. It's okay, I can do whatever I want when I go home, because if I really could practice, I could be mindful in any conditions whatsoever." Completely unrealistic.

And sometimes on retreat—the Buddha doesn't so specifically speak of this, but I want to bring it up—there can be times when what we need to avoid isn't so much an outer savage elephant or a cesspool, but something that's arising internally. For example, a sudden release of old traumatic memory that we weren't familiar with. Sometimes that happens, and it comes up so sudden and so strong that basically the mindfulness does not have equal strength to the intensity of the terror, for example, that might come up with that memory.

Of course we attempt to be mindful, to be present, but what starts happening is it spirals way out of control. And by out of control—first it feels out of control, that's okay. Way out of control is really where you've lost any mindfulness, except there's a thing in the back of your mind: "I should be able to get through this."

So it's push, push, push, and the whole thing is just getting more and more into the realm of feeding fear. Usually way before that time, the teacher is begging you—begging you on hands and knees—to sit less, not to push so much. And you're thinking, "That's because they think I'm a wimp, but I'll show them. I'll just really get through this." Right?

There are times when wise avoidance really means turning your attention elsewhere. Because in the moment, what's really being strengthened by the way you're practicing is willpower, terror, anger, or fear.

And you need to turn the attention elsewhere to rebalance, reconnect with mindfulness, reconnect with calm, reconnect with the wholesome energies, and then again come back and meet.

The whole field of skillful means is in many ways, I think, contained in this learning of when it's appropriate to avoid. But again, it's in the intention. You come in here and it's hotter than you like, and you think, "I can't turn on the AC, but I don't like to be with the heat, so I'm getting out of here." And the intention, if you tune in, is completely aversive. That's not skillful means. That is not abandoning the tendencies. The tendencies are running the show. That's the time to sit here and sweat.

As Ajahn Sumedho said when he talks about patience—if you listen to his talks—practicing in Asia is wonderful because you get endless talks about patience and avoidance. He was giving one talk about the endless heat in the hot season in Thailand, or the rainy season where it rains constantly but it's about twenty degrees hotter and more humid. He said he's just sweating through the robes day after day, just sweating through these thick robes. And then he said he'd finally think, "I just can't bear this. I just can't bear it." And then the next moment you'd find, well, you could really bear it a little longer.

Have you ever come up to that? "I just can't bear this." And then you go, "Oh, can't bear it. It feels like this." And then you're just there again. So patience would be the first line. Avoidance is later. But we must see what really does not contribute to practice. And of course, living much more simply, avoiding having sense pleasures hit you in the face every time you turn around—because craving is just so strong that we shouldn't expect we're suddenly going to be free of it.

Remember what Shankara said: that craving is intensified if we let our thoughts dwell upon sense objects and seek temporary satisfaction in the objective world. As Thich Nhat Hanh describes it, sometimes he would come into his house and find he had left all his windows open. The wind had come and just blown everything all over the place, topsy-turvy. Come in, close the windows, straighten up. He says we're like that. It's as if all our sense doors are the windows and we just walk around with them wide open saying, "Yes, everything, just come on in." "I should be able to be mindful of all of it." Or maybe we're not even trying to be mindful, but we just let ourselves be bombarded.

He says—and I was just reading this little section from him—that at that time in France, workers were demonstrating to have five hours less a week of work. He asks, but what are people going to do with that five hours? Go home and watch something stupid on TV that just increases agitation or boredom because we're so afraid to be alone.

So when the mindfulness isn't that strong, when the energy is low, when the mind is agitated, then we shut the windows. We come to somewhere like this where we're not continually bombarded, to cultivate the wholesome factors, to learn how to do that. And then when we go out, why is it so agitating? One of the reasons, when you leave a retreat—sure, partly it's the concentration—but partly our sense doors have gotten so cleansed, so much more purified. We're so much more sensitized to what's actually coming in. And it's appalling, the experience internally.

Once I left a retreat and stopped off in Walmart. I tell you, it was like a vortex of suffering walking into Walmart trying to buy some stupid thing. Oh, wow. Now, I'm not saying we're practicing to be unable to function in the world. No. But it's to learn how to use wise attention, to make our choices about when to open the windows—or when we have no choice but they're open, how to be mindful, how not to just let that sweep us away. And so for practice, we need to have some more protected environment, some way of avoiding, so we can learn how the mind works.

The sixth one the Buddha speaks about is tendencies, āsavas, habits of mind that can be abandoned by removing. He's speaking particularly about thought here. And again, it's interesting because we sometimes take this in an inaccurate way, one based in aversion. He says, "Here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, does not endure a thought arisen that's affected by sensual desire, by ill will, or by cruelty. He abandons it." Now, this language is why we tend to take this a little unhelpfully. "He abandons it, removes it, does away with it, and annihilates it."

So that language can certainly feed all too easily into "get out the hammer and whack that thought." Bad thought, bad thought, bad me, shouldn't have it.

Now, I don't need to tell you that this is not what the Buddha is talking about. But it's very interesting, because what he is pointing to, in my understanding, is on a more subtle level of wise attention. On the level of thought, we certainly are not always so balanced in our mindfulness and concentration that we are able to see each thought just as it arises when it has no energy. There are times like that, right, where even a thought that might be the most cruel or lustful or aversive just comes up with nothing behind it. Poof. Like Joseph says, "And the sky is blue, you know, I really hate everybody and everything, and the sky is blue"—and they're equally empty. Nothing to do about that. No need to do anything.

But there are times when a thought comes laden with the intention, the motivation of ill will, cruelty, self-hatred, confusion. We may not notice it at the beginning, but whenever we notice it, this is where he's talking about wise attention. Not to endure it, not to be—what comes to mind is Larry Rosenberg, who is hysterical, mimicking a kind of New Age way of dealing with kilesas: "We must massage our kilesas. We must be kind to our kilesas." No, no, the Buddha is not saying, "Oh yes, nice ill will, you know."

There's a point where, with a balance of wisdom mind, again as satipaññā, we can summon up resolution and clear seeing in relationship to these really harmful—harmful to us—unskillful trains of thought that, left alone, are the patterns feeding the tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion. And it's really talking about resolution. We really can see that thought and go, "No, not now." Not in the beginning of a retreat when we're bombarded, no. But when there's a certain degree of mindfulness and balance—and this comes and goes, as you know—we often just sit back and wait a little more than we need to. Because we can have such a tendency to get into self-judging, sometimes I think we're a little leery of calling on resolution. And we just turn into mushy meditation.

Resolution is a powerful force in the mind. "No, not now." Like if you get into some kind of VR—Vipassana

Romance or Vendetta—where every time you think of or see the person, there's craving or aversion. Or you don't even see them, you just think about them. It's so unpleasant. And it's so draining. People do often feel quite victimized by that, or fall into hatred of it. But you can really say, as soon as you notice it, at whatever point, "No, not going there." It's not "bad me, ugly me." Not going there, no.

A very clear example of this in my life: quite some years ago I came down with some autoimmune disease that was going in not a good direction. One of these things where nobody really knew how it would go or how bad it could be. It could have gotten really quite crippling. In the early days of it, when the mind would start going, "I'll never be able to take a walk again"—at that point I couldn't walk very well—"I'll never be able to blah, blah..." Fear and distress and grief. These thoughts always projecting what was going to happen or could be.

That went on a week or two, seeing all the doctors—and it doesn't help, that train of thought. Really, because they give you a list starting with the worst possibility and then going down from there. But after a while, I saw the mind doing this, and I thought, "I don't know. I have no clue." And as soon as my mind started going, "It's going to be..."—I don't know. Stay right here.

I remember once leaning down to wash out a bathtub. It was really hard to lean down, hard to reach, painful. And the mind started... No. Don't know. Right here. Just feel stiffness and patience.

That was a lifesaver. I mean, that was absolute—just this resolution. You don't need to endure or allow those thoughts to keep going when you have sufficient mindfulness to see it. But it takes that willingness to, just every single time you notice, say, "Okay, no, not now. I've got to have that orange? No, not now."

Wanting feels like this. It's not saying I don't feel wanting—it's just not going into those thoughts.

Play with it. When you notice it starting to move from balanced resolution to aversion, you may notice it right away if you're really present. It has a whole different contextual feel. If you don't notice it right away, believe me, you'll notice it soon enough, because you're feeding the aversion and you'll end up frustrated or in self-judgment or angry or lustful or whatever. Rather than judge that, you start right then: "Ah, lust feels like this." Each moment's a new moment.

But this is extremely powerful. And there's a whole sutta, a different sutta, that I wanted to talk about, but I'll never get through the factors of enlightenment, so I'm just going to mention it. It deals directly with the tendencies abandoned by removing, which is called the Removal of Distracting Thoughts. I'm sure a lot of you know it, where the Buddha lists five different methods for dealing with basically distracting thoughts—thoughts that are coming in and taking you away from meditation. And again, it's so practical. He realizes everyone isn't sitting in such sublime mindfulness that you barely have to advert attention to the thought and it goes.

I'm just going to mention the five without elaborating, in case something hits you. The first one—all of these are for when just sati, mindfulness of the thought, isn't enough. When you say, "Oh, ill will arising. Ill

will arising. Ugh. Ill will arising. Ugh." And finally you really have to do something else or it's taking over.

The first is to simply move the attention away from the unwholesome by substituting a wholesome thought—in this way, substituting metta for ill will. Not the phony "yes, I pretend, I accept," but if you're in ill will, I find metta not to the person I'm feeling ill will for, but metta to myself feeling the ill will. Or if it's cruelty, compassion. Or if it's delusion, then actually reflecting on some inspiring dhammic theme can switch the train of thought. It goes into a lot of detail. So one is changing the attention, substituting the wholesome for the unwholesome. I call it changing the channel.

The second one would be with discerning wisdom—not so much thinking about, but by looking, noticing, and examining the danger in that unwholesome train of thought. So for example, anger or ill will. I remember one retreat I was sitting where somebody called me out of retreat when I was on staff at IMS to discuss some business that could definitely have waited three days. And that person definitely knew better than to do that but was just in his own little world. And it just got all this anger going, and self-righteousness, and the whole yada yada. And I kept practicing with it, tuning into the anger, until I really saw how just letting this run like this is feeding it. And it's so much suffering. And it's dangerous, because what's happening is feeding my belief in my righteousness, feeding the tendency for anger to take over, feeding all these unwholesome thoughts about a really good person. It was nothing wholesome. And whether I was right or not, who cared? What difference did it make? And in the scheme of things, it was such a little thing.

So having some reflection through experientially tuning into the dangers of just going after that pleasant fantasy every time it comes up—not the dangers of being a bad person, but actually what's being fed by doing that. And what's the ultimate outcome of feeding that craving, that ill will? That's how we're going to be in life.

The third, when these two don't work, is to just try to forget those thoughts altogether—not even substituting something wholesome that's relational, but just going to something neutral. When we say "steady the mind," just come back to the breath. Just forget it and come back to the breath, or go to hearing, or go to body sensations. Just advert your attention elsewhere.

The fourth is to give, again, some dhamma vicaya, some investigation to looking at and stilling the cause of these thoughts. So for example, you keep getting into pleasant fantasy, pleasant fantasy. You notice it and are present, but you don't see how you're getting into it. And you look a little closer with investigation and see—oh, an image.

It's pleasant. You didn't notice pleasant, and you're off. Noticing that cause with mindfulness right there—that just stills the whole thing.

Or for me, I notice with anger, when I really get to feeling it, underneath it there's some hurt. When I'm able to just feel the hurt with mindfulness, that whole train of angry thoughts just is stilled, is stopped.

And the fifth, which everyone always likes the most: "If there's still unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then with the teeth clenched and the tongue pressed against the roof of the mouth, he should beat down, constrain, and crush the unwholesome state of mind with a wholesome state of mind."

But what he's basically saying is you never give up. You never just go, "Okay, take me." You keep on trying—but with a wholesome state of mind. I will leave you to explore how that's possible.

And I will just end this section. This is how he ends the sutta: "This bhikkhu then is called a master of the courses of thought. He will think whatever thought he wishes to think, and he will not think any thought he does not wish to think."

Can you imagine? Wouldn't that be something? "He has severed craving, flung off the fetters, and with complete penetration of conceit he has made an end of suffering." So that's a definition of arhat. Wouldn't that be nice? Just that possibility—a master of the courses of thought. And remember, everything he says: if it were not possible, I would not tell you to do so.

The last one, which is of course four talks in itself, so I can only just highlight—and I know this is a lot of information. Please don't try to remember it all. I'm just hopeful that any particular piece that is concurrent with something happening in your practice right now or in the next days has a way of going in and popping up in our mind at the right time. So trust that. Please don't try to remember all of this, because that actually just blocks the whole process of mindfulness and the surrender into the process.

So the seventh way is the asavas, or tendencies, that can be abandoned by developing. And what he's talking about developing are the seven factors of awakening, the bojjhangas, the factors of enlightenment.

These factors of enlightenment, on one level, are spoken of as coming to full perfection in a completely awakened person. But the Buddha is also quite clear that as we practice and develop the four foundations of mindfulness, simply by steadily cultivating the four foundations of mindfulness, we cultivate and bring to perfection the seven factors of enlightenment.

These are seven factors of mind that all of you are experiencing from time to time—not just from time to time, but a lot. They can come and go in strength and in balance relative to each other. And it's a very useful kind of self-guidance in terms of your practice. If you're feeling off, just run through the seven and see if one is really low or if some are really out of balance.

So these seven are: mindfulness, of course, the balancing factor of all. And then there are three energizing factors: dhamma vicaya, or investigation of dhammas (this is not analyzing, and I'll explain each one); energy, viriya; and rapture, piti. Those are the energizing three.

And then there are three that are tranquilizing: samadhi, tranquility itself, and equanimity, upekkha.

And for those who get stuck in always evaluating your practice by samadhi, you may notice it's one of

seven. All seven are equally important, and really when our practice deepens and develops is when all seven are coming into balance and strengthening together.

As the Buddha said, the proximate or immediate cause for each of these seven is wise attention, appropriate attention. And that's what's so fascinating. I want to read you a couple of things about wise attention, what all seven are based on.

He says, "Bhikkhus, whatever beings there are which assume the four postures"—in other words, whatever beings stand, walk, sit, and lie down from time to time, they're all assuming those four postures based upon the earth, established upon the earth, right? Couldn't do it without the earth.

"So just as the postures are based upon earth, a bhikkhu cultivates and develops the seven factors of enlightenment based upon virtue, established upon sila." So the very first requisite is virtue, morality, purity of action and speech.

It doesn't mean you never did anything bad, but really reflecting on this when you're practicing is the foundation for the cultivation of the seven factors.

More specifically, the Buddha speaks about wise attention as an internal factor. He says: "As to internal factors, I do not see any other factor that is so helpful for the arising of the seven factors of enlightenment as this—careful attention." No other internal factor is as important for the arising of all seven as careful attention. When a bhikkhu is accomplished in careful attention, in all the ways we're talking about, it is expected that he will develop and cultivate the seven factors of enlightenment. It just follows.

And this is also very interesting. "Bhikkhus, as to external factors, I do not see any other factor that is so helpful for the arising of the seven factors of enlightenment as this—good friendship." When a bhikkhu has a good friend, it is expected that he will develop and cultivate the seven factors. By good friend, he basically means someone wise.

For each of the seven factors, there are also lists of supporting factors in the commentaries that we need to give wise attention to in order to develop and increase each quality. In each case, one supporting factor is to avoid certain kinds of association. For concentration, for example, we avoid the company of unconcentrated, scattered, rough people and cultivate being friends with wise, calm, concentrated people. This applies to each of the seven factors. So externally he sees no other factor so helpful.

Being here, when we talk about Sangha as a refuge, we mean not only the Sangha of awakened noble ones but our friends, our colleagues on the Dhamma path. It's not good friendship like the person you call up and pour your heart out to. It's association with the wise, association with the mindful, association with the virtuous.

How fortunate are we in this world. Given the world as it is—it's the same as when you came here, not much better, not much worse, about the same—to be able to associate for such protracted periods of time

with good friends is incredibly fortunate. Use that. It's the base. That and virtue is the base from which we can cultivate wise attention, from which the seven factors of awakening develop.

So I will briefly name the factors and some of the additional supporting conditions.

Mindfulness, of course, is the overbalancing factor. You can't really have too much mindfulness. Whenever you're out of balance and you don't know what's going on, you're always safe to come back to mindfulness. As you know, that's the quality of clear seeing—knowing what's happening, not superficially. There's an image of throwing a cork on a river and it bounces around on the top. You throw a rock in and it sinks. That's mindfulness. You all know mindfulness; we've talked about it a lot.

Remember when we talked about feeding and starving the hindrances with wise attention? It's just the same with the seven factors. So feeding each of these seven factors—what do we give wise attention to? The first cause for mindfulness is mindfulness itself. One moment of mindfulness is really the immediate cause for the next moment of mindfulness to arise. We give wise attention to one moment of mindfulness meeting what's happening right here, always the fallback, the most important.

Additionally, we avoid the unmindful and associate with the mindful, developing mindfulness in the broader areas. Each of the seven factors ends with this instruction: give wise attention to inclining the mind towards that quality. This really shows us that we can cultivate and train the mind. You don't just sit here and think, "Someday, some moment, I know mindfulness will arise. If I sit and walk long enough, from somewhere it will come." Inclining the mind means making mindfulness a priority. You do little things like saying, "I'm really going to try to be so mindful just this one stretch of walking," or "I'm going to be as mindful as possible as I get up from sitting and move out of the hall." Inclining the mind with that resolution and interest toward mindfulness is enormously powerful wise intention.

The second factor is Dhamma-vicaya, or investigation. This is not thinking about things. It's described as the quality where, when it's present, the mind lights up the field of awareness. It's like walking into a dark room and turning on a flashlight, and you can suddenly see what's there. It has, to me, a quality of interest that's not thinking about things, but in shining that light of mindfulness, it really allows discerning insight to arise.

For example, there's a sensation, you're struggling, you're mindful, and in that next moment—oh, tingling, coming and going, it's impermanent. That light of Dhamma-vicaya, of investigation, lets you see clearly, lights up the field of awareness, illuminates so that you can see the true nature of experience in that moment. It dissipates confusion.

It's an energizing factor. I find for myself it's one I often forget to look for, but when things are feeling flat and I think, "Well, everything's going okay, but it's so... what's the matter?" I'll look and see there's not that investigation. I'm kind of meeting experience with mindfulness, but just like, "Oh yeah, oh yeah." And you can just bring a little interest and it lights up the field in that moment.

The first cause of investigation is, guess what, mindfulness—active mindfulness that connects with the moment of experience so that there is direct perception. And this, again, requires wise attention directed towards mindfulness. So really, you see, if you're having wise attention towards mindfulness, there will be mindfulness, which will also naturally lead to dhammavicaya, investigation of states. It happens by itself.

And again, there are additional supports to which we can direct wise attention. I cannot list them all, but among them is avoiding foolish people, being with wise people, cleanliness—keeping the internal sense bases, keeping yourself clean and orderly, and keeping your environment clean and orderly. Very interesting, but it tends to help the mind light up. And again, a total commitment, inclining the mind in the direction of interest.

The third is virya, courageous effort, which has the characteristic of supporting us. Its function is to support us and give us a kind of refreshment of mind that helps us be with the difficult. Difficult pain or emotional material wears us down. Sayadaw U Pandita gives the example of a house, an old shack that's falling apart, and you prop it up with strong boards so it comes back erect and is strong again. That is how virya works. It's not just that we're a whirlwind of energy. But to bring in energy refreshes the mind so—ah yes, it's been withered, but you come back up again and can be with what is difficult.

When the energy is low, or when we're really feeling worn down and the mind is withering away, he gives a whole series of additional supports. Of course, wise attention and commitment to energy is the first cause, but he gives a series of actual reflections that can help arouse the energy that gives the mind the freshness to be with what's difficult.

Such reflections include contemplating our precious opportunity, saying how fortunate we are. Reflecting on states of misery—it's like, "Oh, this is just too hard. I don't want to do it. I just can't be with it anymore." And then you think about what the alternative is. Sometimes it's, "Okay, I think I'll pay attention now." Reflecting on noble ones, teachers, awakened ones, people that really inspire you. Reflecting on appreciation for the support that allows us to practice—the support of staff, the support of dana.

This isn't just for ordained Sangha, but for all of us. When I was a nun, I reflected on how I was fed and clothed and housed by people who loved the Dhamma and wanted me to be able to practice. We can turn that into a guilt trip in the West. It's not a guilt trip. It's a profound, energizing reflection. Like, "Yes, what an opportunity. It's so beautiful, this dana." And that brings a natural energy. Not a should, but you become filled with energy. "Okay, I can sit with this knee pain, this self-hatred, another couple of minutes"—whatever.

So there's much reflection: remembering the greatness of the Buddha, of teachers, appreciating the people we're practicing with. And again, inclining the mind towards resolution. Not just, "I can't do it. It's too hard." But really saying, "Okay, just one more step." That's all we need. One more breath. One more moment. Not the whole day. I don't know if I can ever think of a time when I couldn't have really honestly said, "I can be with this one more breath, one more step"—if I'm just willing.

And then there's piti, or rapture. Rapture is a funny word in English. Piti is a mental state. It has the characteristic of happiness, delight, satisfaction. When piti is there in your experience, you're really into it. You're interested in what's happening. There's a lot of energy. Piti actually manifests a lot as energy.

The mind feels very light and energized. The body becomes very light and agile. There was all this pain, everything felt heavy and cramped—and then all of a sudden you're just sitting there and you go, "What happened?" Same position. You can even find that same sensation that was just driving you nuts, but it just doesn't matter anymore. The body is very light.

Often piti, besides this joyous interest, manifests as physical sensations—lightness, floating, sometimes really quite bizarre physical sensations. It can be like way too much energy, out of balance. You might find yourself literally flipping all around the room. And you come to the teacher and they say, "Oh yeah, that's piti." And you think, "This is piti? Enough already!" It's out of balance, but it has a lot of physical, energetic manifestation. If you really look closely, you might initially think it's unpleasant, but when it's truly piti, it's not unpleasant. Your mind might be reacting, but if you really look, it's not unpleasant.

The proximate cause is—can you guess? Wise attention. Wise attention to wholesome feelings, wholesome thoughts associated with Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Actually, this is one of the definitions of right effort. If you read or hear the way the Buddha defines right effort, it's actually exactly the same as wise attention.

The four right efforts are: zeal or energy for the abandoning of arisen unwholesome states; zeal for the non-arising of unarisen unwholesome states—meaning an unwholesome state has not arisen, and there's a zeal to keep it that way; zeal for the arising of unarisen wholesome states; and zeal for the continuance and strengthening of arisen wholesome states.

So wise effort and wise attention isn't just about getting rid of what's unwholesome. It's about recognizing the wholesome and giving that attention. That's also wise attention. Giving attention to the wholesome when it's arising is one of the things that leads us into piti, into rapture.

Again, there are many possibilities. If you want to look up all these different supportive areas to pay wise attention to for each of the factors, Sayadaw U Pandita's book *In This Very Life* is a great resource because it's all collated there in the chapter on the seven factors of enlightenment. Trying to remember it all isn't helpful, but if you're exploring a particular factor or feeling you can't really sense a particular one in yourself, it might be helpful to read what the supporting factors are—between five and eleven for each of them—and explore those in your practice, seeing how wise attention can help cultivate them. It's really quite scientific and accessible.

So again, as with all the factors, inclining the mind towards piti—which provides the energy to be mindful, which leads to concentration. When there's some concentration and mindfulness, when the mind has to be relatively clear of kilesa, that's when piti can arise. There won't be strong piti if the mind is also

wracked with greed or aversion or delusion. They just don't go together.

So those are the three energizing factors, and you can see how all of them—piti is hugely energizing, energy of course, and investigation is also energizing. They need to be balanced with the three calming factors.

I'm going to go a little bit over tonight. I won't go too much over. But if you're really hurting and can't sit anymore and want to leave, it's okay—it won't hurt my feelings. Let me briefly name the other three, since I won't be here next week to finish.

The three calming factors are tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Tranquility is very important. We often don't recognize it. It has the quality of non-agitation of body and mind, of coolness. It takes the heat out of the restlessness of mind. I think perhaps we don't quite recognize the power of restlessness. The way Sayadaw U Pandita described it—I didn't realize this, but as soon as I read it, it made total sense—restlessness, the scattered mind, is a very powerful state. It has the quality of being able to infect

other mental states that arise at the same time. He gives a specific example of samadhi, of concentration. You could be quite restless and there's samadhi, but it's infected with that restlessness. So it's not really wise samadhi. The mind can be very focused on something but jumping all over the place.

When there's this restless quality that infects other mental states, that's when we don't really quite have control of our speech and actions. This is how, as a yogi, you think you're being mindful and suddenly you say something or do something that just flirts out. Or you suddenly do something and later you wonder, "How could I have done that? I knew better." We all do that. Or you're just acting out in unskillful ways, even though it's very subtle. This is a manifestation of restlessness.

Tranquility—that cool calmness, non-agitation of mind and body—cools this out. Again, wise attention is the proximate cause: wise attention to wholesome mental states, wise effort. When you notice the mind is restless, you can give attention more to singularity of experience rather than running after the restlessness. Give attention to calmness. Just be with the breath, for example. Just feel the stillness of your body and don't let yourself move. Let that stillness of body bring in stillness of mind. Incline the mind towards peacefulness. We often don't recognize the restlessness and let it run the show.

Samadhi, which is not necessarily extended in time, has the quality of non-scatteredness—that factor of mind, of attention, which really stands on whatever is arising, just right there with that sensation of breath, that emotion, that image. It's just right there without wavering at all, even if it's just for a moment. It sinks into it, still, calm, stays there.

Samadhi can be on changing objects, so it doesn't have that sense of absorption in one thing, which is also samadhi on an unchanging object. But when there's samadhi, even though the arising and passing objects are changing, each moment of mindfulness has that steadiness, that immovable quality, that really connecting and sinking in.

One other interesting aspect of samadhi—it's sort of like restlessness in reverse—is that when samadhi is present in the mind, it has the function of collecting together whatever other mental states are arising simultaneously. When we talk about the collection of mind, the unification of mind, it's a real power of mind. This is a function of samadhi.

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