Wise Attention 3 of 3

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:12:02

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 arise on retreat. Even when we've been practicing a while, things can suddenly appear out of nowhere. Training doesn't mean you just once 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, well, 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.

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

I'm reminding you—this is the review section—of how this moment of asava, 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 described to me during a three-month retreat how she was very deep into the practice and felt she was really quite mindful. The mind was fairly equanimous. She watched herself one day after breakfast was over, walking past the food table to get to where you wash your dishes. At the end of the food table was the 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 asava. It's subtle, but it can manifest not so subtly, even when it seems that we're really quite together.

Or the aversive one—how 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 the mosquito buzzing around, and you kind of startle, there isn't a

moment to consciously think, "Oh yes, I'm committed to not killing." The hand just swats, and you feel terrible. But in that moment of swatting, that was the asava, the tendency just shooting up.

I say I love seeing it because if we're living or practicing under the delusion that quite soon and quite easily everything's going to get calm and copacetic and this stuff isn't going to arise anymore, then when this happens, we get really discouraged. No, it's like—let's get real. Let's really see how subtle the tendencies are. Actually, I find much more appreciation in myself, first, 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, "Well, it's just around the corner, 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 yes, it's 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 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—satipañña, mindfulness and 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. Then consciousness doesn't have to expand into proliferation and papañca and feeding, basically, the hindrances. That satipañña starves the hindrances at that moment of sense contact.

The third was how the asavas 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 laypeople, 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?

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 through it, as I'm sure our venerable ordained sangha can tell us. Just having a list of precepts doesn't clean the mind out of greed and craving, 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 precepts, they have their eight or ten, he has his 227. It's something to be respected, taking that on.

So those are the first three. I really think I'm going to get through four tonight, so I'll be a little more brief with the first three.

The fourth one is how these tendencies of mine, these habits, can be abandoned by endurance—that's the common translation at this point. But I prefer patience, because for me in English, endurance takes on the quality of something grim, aversive, "I'll get through it." Aren't your teeth kind of clenched when you're enduring? Whereas patience is an aspect of mettā.

When we talk about endurance, this is how the Buddha described it: "Here a bhikkhu"—or anyone practicing, that's you—"reflecting wisely, bears 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.

I don't want to spend a lot of time on this because we talk about it often when we discuss mindfulness. It's that quality of open-hearted presence within whatever the experience is—just being there with mindfulness without adding anything extra. Unwelcome words? Oh, unwelcome words feels like this. Racking, piercing, distressing, menacing to life, physical sensation? It 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 a 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 yourself and meet with the totality of attention whatever that arising experience is. Not in order to accomplish 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. 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 really 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. Where are we going to wake up?

So 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 a lot more. But the patience regards 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 is the other question.

I do want to read you this from Patrul Rinpoche, *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 a really difficult retreat, like I was a couple of years ago, these lines would come. It's not just like, "Oh, okay, I can keep going." It would totally open my heart and mind.

This is transcendent patience: to have patience when wronged by others. The second type 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, one of them fits anything that's 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," you're just there, moment to moment. And in that moment of cultivating that 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 one 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 actually 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 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—now these are my words, not the Buddha's—are just plain stupid, that we don't need to keep going back to over and over again.

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 in difficult conditions could be totally appropriate, because you're just looking at the 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 expresses this—knowing what's appropriate for deepening our understanding and practice, and what is more useful to avoid. It's really a parable, 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."

And the falcon said—not particularly proud—"Well, what's your natural territory?"

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 boastful but simply confident, let the quail go and said, "Go ahead, go to your natural territory, but I'll still be able to catch you."

The quail flew to this field and was standing by a clod of earth. The falcon went diving down toward the quail. But just before the falcon reached her, the quail jumped into the clod of earth, the falcon missed her and just hit the ground—and killed herself.

So what the Buddha is saying is: stay within your own reach, stay within appropriate territory. And he says that for monks, for those practicing, roaming outside of one's own pasture is getting really caught in sense desire. 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 this can actually be expanded in many ways 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 in each of your rooms. What's really helpful for practice?

Sometimes, I know, people can be confronted with something quite difficult in practice, internally or externally. Or when we go home again, we think, "Well, I should be able to be purely mindful no matter what the conditions are. 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 speak of this specifically, 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 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 suddenly and so strongly that the mindfulness simply does not have equal strength to the intensity of the terror that might arise with that memory.

And of course we attempt to be mindful, to be present, but what starts happening is it just begins spiraling 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 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 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—that's the tendencies running the show. That's the time to sit here and sweat, you know?

As Ajahn Sumedho said when he talks about patience—if you listen to his talks, practicing in Asia is great because you get endless, endless teachings 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 like this but about twenty degrees hotter and more humid. He said he was 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, "Oh, 'can't bear it' feels like this," and then you're just there again.

So patience would be the first line. Avoidance is later. But seeing what really does not contribute to practice—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, and the wind had come and just blown everything all over the place, topsy-turvy. Come in, close the windows, straighten up. And 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—we just let ourselves be bombarded.

I was reading this little section from him where he said that at that time in France, workers were demonstrating to have five fewer hours a week of work. He said, "But what are people going to do with those 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 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, you know, 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—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 space, 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.

does not endure a thought that is affected by sensual desire, by ill will, or by cruelty. He abandons it, removes it, does away with it, and annihilates 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." That language can certainly feed all too easily into getting out the hammer and whacking that thought—bad thought, bad thought, bad me, shouldn't have it.

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 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? A thought that might be the most cruel or lustful or aversive just comes up with nothing behind it—poof—and as Joseph says, "The sky is blue... 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—what comes to my 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."

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. 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 kind of 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 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. It's not going there, no.

A very clear example of this in my life was quite some years ago when I came down with an autoimmune disease that was going in a not good direction—one of those things that 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, 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..." Fear and distress and grief. These thoughts, always projecting what was going to happen or could be.

That went on for a week or two, seeing all the doctors. 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. I thought, "I don't know. I have no clue." And as soon as my mind was going, "It's going to be..."—don't know. Stay right here.

I remember 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 impatience. And that was a lifesaver. 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, 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 into aversion, you may notice it right away if you're 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.

This is extremely powerful. And there's a whole sutta, a different one, 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, and it's called The Removal of Distracting Thoughts. I'm sure a lot of you know it. 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.

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, ooh, ill will arising," 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 mettā for ill will. Not the phony, "Yes, I pretend, I accept." But if you're in ill will, I find mettā not to the person I'm feeling ill will for, but mettā to myself, feeling the ill will. Or if it's cruelty, compassion. Or if it's delusion, then actually reflecting on some inspiring dharmic theme can switch the train of thought. So one is changing the attention, substituting the wholesome for the unwholesome. I call it changing the channel.

The second would be with discerning wisdom—not so much thinking about, but by looking, noticing, and examining the danger in that unwholesome train of thought. 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. It got all this anger going, and self-righteousness, the whole thing. I kept practicing with it, tuning into the anger, until I really saw how just letting this run was feeding it. And it's so much suffering. 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. There was nothing wholesome. And whether I was right or not, who cared? What difference did it make? 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 what's actually being fed by doing that, 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 some dhamma vicaya, some investigation, to looking at and stilling the cause of these thoughts. 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. 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 is simply stilled, stopped.

And the fifth approach, which everyone always likes the most: if there are 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." The Buddha is basically saying you never give up. You never just surrender and say, "Okay, take me." You keep on trying—but with a wholesome state of mind. I will leave you to explore how that's possible.

I will end this section with how the Buddha concludes 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? "Having 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 an arahat. Wouldn't that be nice? Just that possibility—a master of the courses of thought. And remember, everything the Buddha says, "If it were not possible, I would not tell you to do so."

The seventh way—which is of course four talks in itself, so I can only highlight the main points. 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 will have a way of going in and popping up in your mind at the right time. So trust that. Please don't try to remember all of this, because that actually blocks the whole process of mindfulness and the surrender into the process.

So the seventh way is the āsavas or tendencies that can be abandoned by developing. What the Buddha is talking about developing are the seven factors of awakening, the bojjhaṅgas, the factors of enlightenment. On one level, these 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 quite a lot. However, they can come and go in strength and in balance relative to each other. 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: Is one really low? Are some really out of balance?

These seven are: mindfulness, of course, which balances all the others. Then there are three energizing factors: dhamma vicaya, or investigation of dhammas (this is not analyzing, and I'll explain each one); viriya, or energy; and pīti, or rapture. Those are the energizing three. Then there are three that are tranquilizing: samādhi; tranquility itself; and upekkhā, or equanimity. For those who get stuck always evaluating your practice by samādhi, you may notice it's one of seven. All seven are equally important, and really, when our practice deepens and develops, it's when all seven are coming into balance and strengthening together.

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

He says: "Bhikkhus, whatever beings there are which assume the four postures"—in other words, whatever beings stand, walk, sit, or lie down from time to time—"they are all assuming those four postures based upon the earth, established upon the earth." They 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 sīla."

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.

Then, more specifically, the Buddha describes how wise attention works. 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 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.

Now, this is also very interesting. The bhikkhus ask about 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. And for each of the seven factors, as we'll briefly discuss, he gives not only descriptions but also, in the commentaries, lists of supporting factors that we need to give wise attention to in order to develop and increase each one. For every single factor, a key supporting condition is to avoid certain kinds of company and cultivate others. For concentration, for example, one avoids the company of unconcentrated, scattered, rough people, and cultivates being friends with wise, calm, concentrated people. This pattern holds for each of the seven factors.

So externally, the Buddha sees no other factor so helpful as good friendship. 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. This isn't good friendship in the sense of someone you call up to 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 form the foundation from which we can cultivate wise attention, from which the seven factors of awakening develop.

So let me briefly name the factors and some of the additional supporting conditions, though not all of them.

Mindfulness, of course, is the overbalancing factor. You can't really have too much mindfulness. And whenever you're out of balance and you don't know or can't tell 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 that image: you throw a cork on a river and it bounces around on the top; you throw a rock in and it sinks down deep. 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 what do we give wise attention to in order to feed each of these seven factors?

Well, 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. So we give wise attention to one moment of mindfulness, meeting what's happening right here—always the fallback, the most important. That's really one of the main wise attentions for mindfulness.

Beyond that, avoiding the unmindful and associating with the mindful supports mindfulness in the broader sense. And this applies to each of the seven factors: we give wise attention to inclining the mind towards that quality. For mindfulness, we incline the mind towards being mindful. Again, this points to seeing that we can cultivate and train the mind. You don't just sit here thinking, "Someday, some moment, I know mindfulness will arise. If I sit and walk long enough, somehow it'll come." Inclining the mind is really saying, "I'm making mindfulness a priority." You do little things like resolving, "I'm going 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 towards 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 whereby, when present, the mind lights up the field of awareness. It's like walking into a dark room, turning on a flashlight, and suddenly being able to see what's there. For me, it has 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, you suddenly notice a sensation. You're struggling, struggling, being mindful, and in that next moment—oh, tingling, coming and going, it's impermanent. That light of *dhamma vicaya*, of investigation, just lets you see clearly. It lights up the field of awareness, illuminates experience so that you can see its true nature 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—when 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 it's 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. There's no way I can name them all, but again: avoiding foolish people, being with wise people, cleanliness—keeping the internal sense bases clear, 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 struggle wears us down. Sayadaw U Pandita gives the example of 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 bringing in energy refreshes the mind so that—ah yes, it's been all 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, when 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 whole series of actual reflections that can help arouse the energy that gives the mind the freshness to be with what's difficult.

Such as reflecting on precious opportunity, sort of recognizing how fortunate we are. Reflecting on states of misery—when it's like, "Oh, this is just too hard. I don't want to do it. I just can't be with it anymore"—thinking 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, reflecting 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 a lot of reflection: remembering the greatness of the Buddha, of teachers, appreciating the people that we're practicing with. And again, inclining the mind towards resolution. Not just, "Ah, 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. There's rarely—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 is very light and agile. It was all this pain, and it was 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.

The body becomes very light. Often, besides this joyous interest, piti manifests as physical sensations—lightness, floating, and sometimes, I have to say, quite bizarre physical experiences. It can feel like way too much energy, completely out of bounds. You might literally be flipping all around the room. And you come in to see the teacher and they go, "Oh yeah, that's piti." This is piti, you know—enough already, it's out of balance. But it has a lot of physical, energetic manifestation. If you really look, you might think it's unpleasant, but when it's truly piti, it's not unpleasant. Your mind might be reacting, but if you look carefully, it's not unpleasant.

The proximate cause is—guess what?—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.

Right effort is defined as zeal or energy for the abandoning of arisen unwholesome states, zeal for the non-arising of un-arisen unwholesome states—was that too many "uns"? An unwholesome state has not arisen, and there's a zeal to keep it that way, basically. But the others are zeal for the arising of un-arisen wholesome states and 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.

And again, there are many possibilities. If you want to look up all these different supportive areas to pay wise attention to for each factor, 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 one, or feeling like you can't really sense a particular factor in yourself, it might be helpful to read what the five to eleven supporting factors are for each of them and explore those in your practice. See how wise attention can help to cultivate them. It's really quite scientific and accessible.

So again, as with all the factors, there's the inclining of the mind towards piti, which is the energy to be mindful, which leads to concentration. And when there's some concentration and mindfulness, when the mind has to be relatively clear of kilesas, 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. You can see how all of them—piti is hugely energizing, energy itself, and investigation as well—they need to be balanced with the three calming factors.

The three calming ones 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. Something the way Sayadaw U Pandita described it—I didn't realize this, but as soon as I read it, it makes 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 absorbed in 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 have control of our speech and actions. It's how here as a yogi you think you're being mindful, and suddenly you say something or do something and it just blurts out.

Or you just suddenly do something, and later you think, "How could I have done that? I knew better." We all do that. Or you find yourself acting out in unskillful ways, even when it's very subtle. This is a manifestation of restlessness. And tranquility—a 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. You can also, when you notice the mind is restless, 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—the factor of mind, of attention, which really stands on whatever is arising. Just right 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 could 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 is sort of like restlessness in reverse: when samadhi is 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—this is a real power of mind. This is a function of samadhi. It's one of the reasons why, when there's samadhi to whatever extent, there's such a sense of peace. We actually don't realize how distracted and scattered the mind is. Even as our practice is being developed, as mindfulness is being cultivated, the mind is still scattered, more and more subtly. With samadhi, all of a sudden, all that's brought together just in that one moment. It's peaceful. That's why tranquility and samadhi so go together.

And the last is, of course, equanimity—the mind that isn't pulled to and fro by either clinging or aversion. Again, I like the way Sayadawji describes it. He says it's actually a state of mind in the center, a balancing of energy. It's an energetic state where it's quite alert, but the energy isn't tipping towards and away, towards and away. You know how that is—just really balanced in the center. That's the state of equanimity. And wise attention to the continuity of mindfulness is what cultivates equanimity, because the continuity is what leads to the wisdom of really seeing pleasant, unpleasant, pleasant, unpleasant, pleasant, unpleasant—give it up—and the mind balances in the middle.

Obviously much more could be said about them all, but those are the seven. The Buddha himself talks about when it is useful to cultivate the arousing ones and when it is not useful.

For example—and I'm picking concentration because people really seem to get a bugaboo about it—they always think they need to cultivate concentration. Once in a while it happens, but rarely does someone come in and say, "I'm too concentrated, I need to cultivate investigation." Once in a while someone who's been practicing a lot does. But usually, no matter what's going on, we just want more concentration.

But if you're sluggish, if you're dull, if the energy's low, you might be really calm, and we'll say, "Get up, quit sitting, go walk." And you respond, "No, I'm calm, I'm peaceful, I'm concentrated." But there's absolutely no interest or clarity about what's happening. You need to really consciously bring wise attention to the energizing factors. You don't need to cultivate more calm. You don't want to get rid of the calm, but you need to bring up the energy.

And just the reverse. When you're really filled with pīti and rapture, and you're just going into rhapsodies in your mind about the beauty of the Dhamma and how exquisite it is and every new insight—guess what? When you come in and want to tell us all your insights, that's nice. But did you notice the sensation in your body? We won't go down that road with you.

It's because you need to cultivate calmness, steadiness, concentration, and equanimity. That was a nice insight. It's over. Back with Cleopatra. What's happening now? Equanimity.

And as I said, if you're ever in doubt, mindfulness is always cultivatable and useful as a balance. As you strengthen mindfulness with wise attention, you'll see more clearly how the others are out of balance.

I'll end with this one quotation from the Buddha about the seven factors, though this could be said about all of our wise attention—the image of the peaked house:

"Bhikkhus, just as all the rafters of a peaked house slant, slope, and incline towards the roof peak, so too when a bhikkhu develops and cultivates the seven factors of enlightenment, he slants, slopes, and inclines towards nibbana."

And one who cultivates the four foundations of mindfulness slants, slopes, and inclines towards cultivating the seven factors of awakening.

So let's just sit quietly for a moment.

Thank you for your patient attention.

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