Bias of Mind

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:08:58

I know there are times during the practice, or when we're talking, when we speak about just resting in awareness, or as with Joseph's talk the other night, just opening to the nature of awareness. It can seem so natural and simple. It can.

Or at times when you have an insight, really understanding deeply the pain of clinging, for example, and the heart and mind let go. It seems so obvious, really. It's not nearly as mysterious as we had thought.

And then what's also so easy and simple is how quickly that's gone. How quickly it can seem a distant memory. Or if not yet, the mind projects into the future. Some of the questions today reflected this a little bit: How can I maximize the potential to remember, to rediscover, to continue to understand selflessness or the nature of awareness?

So tonight I want to talk about a specific sutta of the Buddha's where he addresses both of these aspects. He speaks about the really subtlest, most subtle aspect of ignorance—the tendency, the potential for greed, for desire for being, for ignorance to arise in the mind. We're talking on very subtle levels, which is what you see in the practice. And he gives in this sutta seven different methods, all of which will be familiar to you, for the abandoning of these most subtle tendencies.

I like this sutta. It has a lot of information in it, and this talk is going to have a lot of information. Don't try to remember it all, please. Just sit back, let it come in. Most of it will be familiar, maybe just in a different framework, and use what is useful.

Talking about these subtle tendencies, it has come for me to mean recognizing that I must view the power of conditioning with deep respect. We may think if we see through greed 150 times, we get impatient if we have to see it again. But the power of conditioning is vast.

There's one conceptual framework I have found helpful in trying to describe what I'm talking about as these subtle tendencies, this possibility, this potential for delusion to arise. It's called the three levels or the three rounds of samsara.

There are three levels at which the habits of mind manifest. The first level, where unwholesome habits—we'll talk about unwholesome here—habits of greed, hatred, and delusion manifest, the grossest level is on the level of action and speech, quite obviously. What protects us at this biggest level from acting these out is sīla, is morality. This is really the place that sīla comes in, when we're really in the grip of greed or of anger. Just remembering: I really want that last cookie, but there's someone in line behind me and I've already had two. Just remembering sīla, and you can put it down. So that's called the level of

transgression—actually moving out and acting in an unwholesome way—protected by sīla.

The second level is when we don't actually act out. Say you want that cookie, you don't take it, sīla protects us. But the second level is called the obsessive level. I don't have to say any more, do I? Just caught up for the next three days in thoughts about that cookie and all the ways it goes. The protection on the obsessive level is said to be samādhi, where you can really see: okay, come back, come back, come back. The power of samādhi really cuts through that. Or when samādhi is really strong, this obsessive level doesn't arise at all.

Now the third, and this is what we're talking about tonight, could be called the latent level, the underlying level. We have to listen to this without getting discouraged. This is the level where there is the underlying potential for greed or for hatred, for a sense of self to arise when the conditions are suitable. It's like if a seed has been planted: if the conditions are suitable—the right amount of water and sunlight, the proper soil—it will sprout. So these latent underlying tendencies will arise given the proper conditions.

Now, what we're learning is the conditions aren't too esoteric. For greed to arise, we really only need a pleasant sense object and consciousness and lack of mindfulness and—boom—there you have it. I think part of why retreats can, at times, get discouraging is because we're seeing this. In our daily life we're so busy, we don't often perceive on this level. So it's actually really good that we're seeing it, but it is important not to get discouraged.

This level, the latent level, is protected by wisdom, by paññā. The Buddha often said that greed, hatred, and delusion—especially delusion—is abandoned not by actions but by wisely seeing. Seeing these conditions, seeing how when there's not awareness greed arises given something pleasant, aversion arises given something unpleasant—seeing that is the beginning of our protection, of our uprooting it.

The Buddha spoke often about these underlying potentials. The word I'm using tonight from this particular sutta is *āsava* in Pali, often translated as "canker," which is like a sore, or "taint," or "dye."

I'm just going to call it underlying potential or bias of the mind. And the three primary ones are those I mentioned: the tendency of the mind to move into sense desire, or being—becoming, desire for being—and ignorance, which covers everything else. These tendencies are not the states themselves. It's not the state of sense desire, the state of self-identification, so much as the underlying possibility. So that's what we're talking about—that potential.

There are many places where the Buddha, giving a definition of a fully enlightened person, describes them as one in whom these āsavas, these potentials, no longer exist. That's really quite interesting to me—also to even try and imagine what that could be like. No possibility of that state arising.

That's when it's helpful to remember the statement that I know has been said before, where the Buddha often said, "If it were not possible, I would not tell you to do so." It's important to remember that. He's not just talking through his hat. If it were not possible.

So to begin with, it's just noticing how these tendencies can arise—with humor, without taking it personally. Someone today gave me a great example. It happens all the time. He just got up from a rest, saw an orange sitting on his bureau. A moment of a couple of thoughts, not quite mindfulness, the hand reaches out and grabs the orange—I'm going to eat it. And as soon as he became mindful, which was like four thoughts later, he realized, "Oh, I'm not hungry. I don't want this." He just put it down. But in the moment of pleasant sight, not much mindfulness—yeah, I want that. It happens all the time.

What's also really important to notice is that however far along it is—right at that moment or many mind moments and manifestations later—the power of presence, the power of mindfulness, cuts right through that tendency. So as pervasive as these underlying potentials may seem, it's like, "Give me a break. You mean I let up mindfulness for two seconds and greed arises, sense of self arises?" There are times on retreat where I've just felt like I can't bear it. What's the point?

But it's important to also notice that the power of simple mindfulness can just cut right through it at any point. Truth, clear seeing, is always stronger than ignorance, stronger than confusion. It's learning to trust that, learning that it really is our protection—whether it's in the acting out, the obsessive quality of mind, or just in these simple underlying tendencies.

And to recognize also that every moment of mindfulness is conditioning other tendencies as well. It's not just that in that moment of mindfulness there's no room for greed to arise, but that moment of mindfulness is also strengthening wisdom, equanimity, concentration, clear seeing—all the wholesome qualities. So every moment of mindfulness really is, on many levels that we may not be aware of at that moment, deeply changing our conditioning. Thank God.

But the conditioning is deep. The tendencies are subtle. And we won't necessarily notice the effects at once. It can take who knows how long for these seeds to sprout.

I remember, a few years ago, I got a letter from a woman who had been here quite some years earlier on a special work retreat. She'd never, to my knowledge, done Vipassana practice before. And while she was very enthusiastic, I had this sense—could be projected—that she really didn't know what she was coming to or what she'd landed in, didn't really seem to get it, in my esteemed opinion, while she was here. And I didn't really think about her again.

Years later, out of nowhere, I got a letter from her—really a beautiful letter—just thanking me for being her first teacher, and that that experience of that work retreat had really resonated in her, had changed her life, had deeply connected her to the Dharma. I was just thinking, you never know. It was very beautiful to me to see that. And it was also a help for the judging mind. We just don't know what's going on with anybody. We don't know how the seeds are going in. Who are we to judge? The Dharma is growing in its own time.

If you could remember that about yourself, it would really help. A moment of mindfulness is very

powerful. And you don't have to wait for the day when these tendencies are completely eradicated before you begin to feel some confidence. You can notice—I'm sure each of you has had at least one moment when, without thinking about it, you walk into a situation or you sit into a situation

where normally all the conditions are there for aversion to arise. You know it normally would, or for greed to arise. And you don't have to talk yourself out of it. You don't have to pretend you're really being mindful and filled with mettā. The unwholesome factor just doesn't come.

You walk up, there's only two cookies left, there's four people in line behind you, you don't even think—you just walk past it. Greed does not arise. It can seem so insignificant that we don't recognize that what's happening in that moment was a prime condition for one of these underlying āsavas to emerge into the light of day, and it wasn't there. Ignorance was not present in that moment. That's very powerful. Notice those little moments.

If it were not possible, I would not tell you to do so. And we don't start from being totally deluded and jump to being totally free from delusion. It's a whole process. So appreciating it.

That's just a little synopsis of what we're talking about with these underlying tendencies. The three specific ones that the Buddha names again are sense desire, desire for being or becoming—really the sense of "I"—and the last one being ignorance, flat-out ignorance.

In this sutta, besides describing these tendencies, he talks about seven different methods, all of which I think we've touched on in the retreat. They're all part of practice, but not just the specifics of very intense silent mindfulness practice. It's also a way of stepping back and looking at the bigger picture. Some of these methods are very practical, things that we can use in our daily life, not only on retreats.

All seven methods for abandoning these tendencies are founded on the basis of wise attention. I gave a whole talk on that however many weeks ago, and I'm not going to obviously go into it in that much detail. But for those who weren't here—because I know all the rest of you remember it so completely clearly—wise attention can be spoken of in two ways. The Buddha speaks of it as knowing what is fit for attention and what is not fit for attention.

Now, to our minds, that implies some things are worth paying attention to—the things we like and that make us feel good—and some things are not worth paying attention to, such as all the unwholesome states and the ones that make us feel bad. That's not what he means. What is fit and not fit for attention is nothing intrinsic to the arising experience itself; it's in the mode of how we pay attention to what's arising.

For example, if anger is arising and we pay attention to it in the way of, "I am so angry. I am really such a bad person for being so angry. This anger is really unacceptable," on and on, really identified—that's unwise attention. Whereas if we bring attention to the experience of the anger itself, just what we've been saying with mindfulness the whole time, noticing it as it is arising in the moment—the experience, the thoughts, the sensations, the associations—but without identifying and without feeding it, that's wise

attention. It's not that anger is intrinsically fit or unfit for attention.

Wise attention has been, I think, in some ways underrated, because the Buddha says that unwise attention is at the root of our being caught in all these rounds of saṃsāra. It's really not paying attention in the right way to what's going on that keeps us caught, whereas wise attention is really what frees us. With wise attention, these underlying tendencies do not arise. The risen ones are abandoned.

All seven of these methods require wise attention. In a way, you could think of mindfulness as wise attention. That makes it simpler. And obviously, without mindfulness, we're not even paying attention to what we're doing, so any of these methods don't work because you don't even think to use them.

Wise attention is underlying, and the first method itself is actually abandoning these tendencies by wise seeing, wise attention again. So I want to say a bit more about it to give another example of how to pay attention in a wise way. And again, this is nothing new. If you can pay attention at the bare sense experience—sound, unpleasant—as opposed to all the stories and associations and judgments about the sound, that's wise attention.

A handy way to check, if you're not really sure—if you think you're paying attention wisely to all the stories about the sound and this and that, you think it's wise—

But another way the Buddha gave to tell whether attention is wise or unwise—and this is so practical—is that wise attention means if you're paying attention to what's happening in the appropriate way, to the appropriate thing, then any unwholesome states that are arising will diminish, and other unwholesome states will not come. So if you're paying attention to something and getting more and more and more aggravated, frustrated, angry, resistant—there's something you're not seeing wisely. You're somehow paying attention in the wrong way, or there's identification. That's unwise attention. You're paying attention, you might be really trying your best, but you're just getting more and more out of control. Either you're paying attention in the wrong way or to the wrong thing.

A lot of our advice as teachers, when we say, "Okay, you're really caught in the anger—it's time to move the attention away," that's looking at wise attention. The mindfulness isn't strong enough to be with the anger as it is, so you need to advert the attention elsewhere. This is an example of wise attention in action.

Now I'm taking a whole hour talk and putting it into five minutes here, so I'm just saying this as a reminder. But there are a couple of other things I want to say about wise attention, again from the suttas, that I didn't mention exactly in this way before—specifically how we attend in the wrong way with these three tendencies, these āsavas.

The Buddha says that what helps sense desire arise is this: when there's sense pleasure, it's not just noticing the pleasant, but your attention is really getting sucked into the gratification of that sense pleasure. This is subtle. It's not just noticing pleasantness. You might be thinking, "Oh, this is really nice, it's really pleasant, I really like it." You could even be noting that, but not quite aware of the personal

gratification. That's what really allows sense desire to keep blooming up—it keeps getting bigger.

The second one is very interesting: what helps the desire for being arise and increase. I think this is a limited explanation, but it's interesting. It's when we attend to the gratification in meditative states—and that's a very subtle one. Not just that they're pleasant, but that gratification, that sense of me having this exalted meditative state. And that's even gross; it wouldn't usually be that obvious. But attending to the gratification rather than just what's happening—that's what feeds this tendency.

The last one is if we attend or pay attention to anything arising through one of what are called the four perversions of perception, the four upside-down, incorrect perceptions. When we attend looking through one of these four inverted perceptions, ignorance arises and increases.

So the four inverted perceptions are: seeing what is impermanent as permanent; seeing what is painful as pleasurable (yes, you can relate to that—the first one is obvious, and the second one, is that obvious too?); the third, seeing what is not-self as self (clearly we do this all the time); and the fourth, perceiving what is—this is our very Victorian language—perceiving what is foul as beautiful.

That last one I personally have a harder time with than the others. The others, no question, I do them all the time. But "foul" isn't a word we'd use today. I'm sure they're referring to our lovely bodies, for one thing, and really seeing them as beautiful in a way that leads to attachment.

Let me give you an example of how subtle this can be. It's really interesting. When I was sitting on retreat, I think it was last fall, I thought maybe the first three or perhaps all four of these inverted perceptions were present. But it can be very subtle. I was on retreat and at a point where I was quite mindful.

And eating, and in that state where I was really noting pretty much everything that was going on, I would notice a series of thoughts—a quick thought, a quick image, a quick story—and there would be maybe four to six really quick thoughts before I would really see it and start noting again. As soon as I saw it and noted, it would fall away. There was no real clinging, and when I looked at the thoughts themselves, there was nothing particularly in them that seemed attractive or worthy of clinging. I got really interested. I said, so what's the hook here? I'm clearly aware there is some hook that's drawing me into these little thought stories that in themselves are nothing.

And when I really looked, I saw that with each thought, starting with the first one that came—because this kept happening—there was a very subtle sense of "I." That clutching, that contraction of me, just subtly identifying with the thought. And that was pleasant. I experienced that little "me" as pleasant. Of course, I wasn't even noticing the little contraction of me, never mind that there was some kind of pleasant feeling to it, or comfortable feeling, or something. That's almost going too far. And in not seeing that, the clinging, the sense of being, would build, and it would start going into one thought, the next, the next, the next. Again, as soon as I saw it, the whole thing would vanish.

So if you can get it, it's quite subtle. But somehow there's the permanent, because there's no "me" if it's not

permanent. There's really perceiving what is totally painful—the sense of me is nothing but a burden—and I was perceiving it as pleasant. "Oh yeah, nice. This nice sense of me, so comfortable with this." And not-self is self. What is foul is beautiful—I wasn't as aware of that one, but whenever we're looking, perceiving experience through the veil of one of these four inverted, upside-down perceptions, that's a moment when ignorance arises and increases.

Remembering that why seeing cuts right through. You don't have to think about it. It's like if in that moment I had stopped and said, "Well, which of the four inverted perceptions am I looking at right now?"—off into another unwise attention, which is thinking and analyzing and wondering, in the past, in the future, and at least skeptical doubt, or what the Buddha called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views. Stay out of the wilderness of views and just bring your attention back to what's actually happening right now.

Okay, that's enough about wise attention. So, wise attention: abandoning these underlying potentials through seeing. The second way is abandoning through restraint at the sense doors.

Now again, we've spoken about that a lot. I just want to refresh your memories about how that works in terms of not allowing these underlying tendencies to flower. Obviously, restraint doesn't mean we don't look, we don't see, we don't smell, we don't touch, we don't think. But it means, using Buddhadasa's term, to bring sati-pañña—mindfulness and wisdom—into the mind at the point of sense contact. So we know what's what. So that at the level of perception, there's clear awareness. You smell a pleasant smell, there's the perception "it's pizza," and it ends there. It doesn't go into whatever your whole field of proliferation in papañca is about pizza. You end up in Sicily, you're watching The Godfather. I don't know what your particular things are about pizza. It doesn't have to go that way.

Papañca is the word, and proliferation is the best definition of it. One of the commentaries describes it as the proliferations of mind that assail a person, that obsess a person, that torment a person. If we can bring mindfulness and wisdom in at the point of "pleasant smell, that's a pizza"—release. That's what we mean by restraint at the sense door. Just being right there, as Ajahn Chah says: when you smell a pleasant smell, leave it at the nose. Could we only do that?

There's one other point I find interesting. I don't know if I'm getting too detailed with this tonight, but I thought this is very interesting. As a help for understanding when we're present with our perception at the sense door, how to not let the proliferation grab hold and take over. The Buddha is talking about restraint. He says, "On seeing a form with the eye, one who is practicing restraint does not grasp at the signs and features." These are the particular words he uses, and I'll explain them. So then either desire or aversion doesn't take over.

Now what they mean by not grasping at the signs and features: say there's a form, a person that you've previously thought of as beautiful or attractive. The sign would be the most distinctive, apparent perception that one sees about that person. So, for example, there's just visual form seeing, and

immediately there's the shape of that person. Maybe that's the sign, the first distinctive thing that hits your eye, your perception. The unmindful, unrestrained sense door would be this grasping.

"Oh, that's such a beautiful form." Grasping right then. And that's where the whole proliferation begins—either going into desire, if that's the particular bent, or aversion, either at them or at yourself for not being as beautiful, or whatever comparing gets going. That's the sign.

And then the features would be, once that sign is grasped unmindfully, all the other little facets that feed it. So you start with the form, and then you go, "Yeah, they're so beautiful, and look at their hair, and the way that they dress, and they walk so gracefully," and yada, yada, yada. The whole proliferation gets grasped at and going—the details that catch the attention.

But when that first perception is met with mindfulness at the sense door, that's restraint. You're not saying, "No, make craving not arise." You're just seeing form, form, pleasant. It doesn't have to go any farther.

So the first is abandoning these tendencies through wise seeing. And again, it's not "I am going to rip out this tendency, root it up, extirpate it." It's not a sense of "I'm abandoning." It's just that they lose their potency through wise seeing, through restraint at the sense doors.

The third one I find quite interesting, and we're moving into the bigger picture here. This is wise attention to the attitude with which we use things, with which we use the requisites for our life. Now, the Buddha was talking to monks and nuns, but it's the same for us. What's the attitude with which we use food, with which we use clothing, with which we relate to shelter?

We can use whatever we need with care, with simplicity, taking just what we need for comfort—not having to be some kind of harsh ascetic, taking what we need, but not out of a kind of greed: "I better take extra in case there's not more later." Not out of fear, not out of a sense of "I need more now because there's not enough to go around, too bad for you."

You can see on this planet what's happening to the environment. If we all just related to using what we need with this wise attention, with a sense of paying attention to the attitude with which we use what we need, this planet would be a vastly different place. I don't think we'd be having all the environmental problems that we're having.

But not even looking at the really big scale—just beginning to explore here in our lives—we can see in little ways: How are we relating to the food? And this is not to get into judgment, thinking "I'm taking more than I need" when you're really in the grip of craving and you can't stop it. Pay attention. Just pay attention to that. But there are plenty of times when we're really not paying attention, and we could, to the attitude with which we use things.

When we do pay attention and just take what we need, when we don't let ourselves be run by fear and

greed, it brings such an ease and simplicity into the way one relates to one's life, to the environment, to our requisites.

A little example: when I'm on retreat, usually I just take what food is there. Somehow over the years it's gotten to be not such a big deal. Every now and then I'll think, "I better take an extra banana because some mornings there's not a banana and I really like bananas better than oranges." And I'll take that banana. It's never anything but trouble. It sits in my room. I don't remember to bring it up to breakfast, or there are bananas for the next ten days, or I don't actually want the banana anyway. And then the next day I save extra peanut butter. I have to figure out what to put it in and where to keep it and should I bring it up and then what will people think of me? It balloons into so much grief. It's so much trouble.

If I just forget the banana and take what's there, there's just space. There's ease. There's going to be something to eat tomorrow. So what if it's not a banana? It's so much easier. Or saving five blankets because I know I'm sensitive to cold and it might get cold. And after three months, I haven't used four of them, but I might need one.

Shuffling them around the room and figuring out what to do with them and feeling guilty—just looking at how we use stuff.

And it might be that you have low blood sugar and you do have to save something from tea because you need a little snack at ten at night. That's fine. The Buddha, talking about the different requisites, speaks about reflecting wisely on using food—not for amusement or for vanity. That could mean not eating to look good, but also not *not* eating to look good. Not for embellishment, but for the endurance and continuing of this body, for ending discomfort, and for support of the holy life. And he says then, the person is considering, "Thus shall I terminate old, unwholesome feelings without arousing new ones"—in other words, without getting into massive craving—"and shall live in comfort and health."

There's nothing wrong with a level of basic comfort, using what we need to maintain a level of comfort and health that supports us in our path of awakening. That's useful. And whatever is true, we need wise attention to see what's true for us. What's true for me and what's true for you of what we need to eat can be vastly different, and it doesn't matter. That's why comparing is such a useless waste of time. Not that we can drop it, but it is.

Really looking at the attitude with which you use things—this wise discernment, this looking at what really supports my ease and comfort and my path of awakening—that brings such a simplicity, such a sense of trust. I don't have to save the banana. I don't need ten rice cakes back on those back shelves. There'll be something. I can let go into the Dharma and trust the arising moment. It's a very powerful way of paying attention.

When we're operating in that way, when we're paying attention to the attitude, then the underlying tendencies of greed, holding on to sense of self, the fear that comes with ignorance—they just don't have

the chance to arise. Whereas saving the thing with the idea of "I won't get hungry later" is actually setting the conditions for all these unwholesome potentials to arise. So explore that while you're here. But obviously, it's the same in our life. And this is a way that we can really use our daily life to support the purification of our heart and mind—paying attention to how we use things.

The next two we've talked about quite a bit. I'll just say a little. The next one is removing these underlying tendencies through what the translation calls "enduring." I'll use patience as an aspect of mettā. But we've talked ad nauseam about this. It's basically that the patient heart and mind is the one that is present and spacious and able to be here without reacting when we don't like what's happening.

The Buddha gives examples—and you can really hear how they lived, the forest life. He gives the examples of what can be abandoned by enduring: "Here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, bears cold, heat, hunger, thirst, contact with flies, wind, burning and creeping things. He endures ill-spoken, unwelcome words, and bodily feelings that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing, and menacing to life."

Enduring is not gritting our teeth with low-level aversion and saying, "I'm sitting here until the bell rings and I can move." Enduring, as we know, is really the patient quality of mind that's open, present, non-reactive. And we've talked a lot about that.

But notice the next one, and these two kind of pair together in my mind—it needs wise discernment to tell which is which. Because the next one is removal by avoiding. First there's enduring, but then there's avoiding. And this is where we need to use wise discernment—that those things which are really unsupportive, unskillful, or downright dangerous to our practice or our life, if one can, one avoids them. This is a way of helping us to abandon the tendency for these difficult states to arise.

Now again, his examples: "Reflecting wisely, one avoids a savage elephant, a savage bull, a savage dog, a snake." We're talking a different culture here.

A stump. A chasm. A cliff. A cesspool. A sewer. Frequenting bad friends or unwholesome companions.

Here, sometimes the savage elephant might be something in your mind. It might be a person. Say, sometimes you know a little thing gets going with someone—not just that you get on each other's nerves, that happens—but sometimes you get a nice little thing going with someone here. You start kind of looking at each other, or you start joking in a silent way, something that feels good, but actually, if you pay attention, it's taking you away from being present. It's not that the person or you are bad, but that's something to avoid.

When we talk about avoidance as a skillful means to help abandon the tendency toward ignorance and greed, we can get into such a macho attitude: "I should be able to be mindful in the middle of everything. I should be able to be with the most difficult circumstances. And if I'm not, it's because I'm not good enough. I'm wimping out."

But look at the environment we've set up here. We're begging you not to get your mail, not to make phone calls, not to talk to each other. We don't have news bulletins or the BBC set up in the lobby telling you what's going on every night. It's a really protected environment. Does that mean you're all a bunch of wimps because you can't do this in the middle of Fifth Avenue in New York City? We really need to look at what supports our awareness. With wise discernment, when we can make a decision to avoid something, please do so. There will be plenty that we can't avoid, and that's when we use patience or endurance.

When I was in Thailand for about a year as a nun, these two were a really rich area of exploration—finding the wise discernment to walk the difference between what I really could avoid and what I couldn't avoid but wished I could. At first I saw that I really had to learn patience, because there's so much that's difficult. You go to Asia thinking, "I'm going to have this silent retreat in nature." Forget it. Half the time I was in Bangkok in the middle of the hot season—extremely unpleasant. Take my word for it. And I like hot weather.

When I finally got out of Bangkok, the food was really difficult for me to eat. I hadn't eaten meat in probably fifteen years, and all the food had greasy meat in it. And when I finally got to a lovely little temple in the jungle—you think the jungle is silent. Go sit in a jungle. It is so noisy. Snakes all over the place, poisonous snakes just flopping down on the roof. Incredible insect life. Not to mention the tourists who come to the temples for picnics. You're just doing walking meditation, you turn around, and there's someone with a camera right in your face the second you turn around. "Oh, let me take a picture of the cute nun." How to develop patience! I spent months cultivating aversion until I finally noticed: I think maybe I have a choice here. Did I come to cultivate aversion? No, I don't think so.

Patience—a mind like the earth that doesn't react no matter what's thrown on it—that's the way of peace. And once there is that patience, then wise discernment arises about what actually could be avoided.

For example, I didn't particularly like any of the food, but some of it really made me ill. That's appropriate to avoid if you have the choice, without making trouble. As a nun, you can't ask for something special. Or I found that I could put a sheet over the door of my kuti so tourists didn't come and just stand there staring in to see what the cute nun looked like when she was meditating. That's quite okay—avoiding something that's just going to bring up the tendencies. But when you can't avoid, there's patience. Both are very skillful and very helpful.

So we look at that here, and again, with wise seeing and skillful means, it's always arising from the intention.

Avoiding is not from the intention of hatred. It's from the intention of clear seeing. Oh, when I keep going into this situation, I get lost in anger. I go to this walking place, somebody else is there, I get lost in anger. You do that ten days in a row and you think, maybe I'll go to a different walking place. That's skillful avoidance. It's not from aversion.

So let's see if I can name these: wise seeing, restraint at the sense doors, how we use things, patience, wise avoidance. The sixth method is called removing. Again, I think we need to use different words for this. But it's when restraint at the sense door didn't quite happen and a strong, unwholesome state of mind and heart has taken hold, has taken root. It could be a strong, greedy series of thoughts, a really self-centered series of thoughts, aversive, fearful—whatever it is—that we can actually abandon continuing to feed the habit of these tendencies arising by, quote, removing the unwholesome emotion or train of thought.

Now that's not what we think about when we first start practice, which is literally removing, done with a lot of aversion. It's the basic mindfulness we've talked about all along.

I'll take anger again since we've talked about it. Bringing awareness to the anger itself, to the thoughts that are feeding it—but I am right. Isn't that one of the biggest hooks to keeping anger going? They are acting like a jerk. It isn't appropriate in this environment. Somebody really does need to do something. And no one but me is noticing, so I need to do something. The practice is to bring awareness in at the point of what is allowing these tendencies already arisen to increase.

Joseph calls this the sword of wisdom, where you can really bring in the mindfulness right at the point of those thoughts and go, okay, that's enough. Not "that's enough, I hate it," but that's enough—with great determination you just bring your mindfulness in at the point of that thought the second you notice it, and again and again. I call it in my mind, when I have some strong thought like that going or strong emotion, being really ruthless with awareness. Ruthless in that that thought, the little tendrils of it, do not get to slip by.

An image that's sometimes given, although it's slightly unwise because there's a little aversion in it, is the cat waiting at the hole for the mouse to come out. If you take away the wanting to pounce and kill, take that part away, and just have that clear attention—not hating the thought, but it's not going to slip by—the sword of wisdom, that quality of resolution, of clear mindfulness, that's removal at that point. It just doesn't keep expanding.

Now, as we all know, that takes great delicacy. And again, the intention cannot be coming from fear or hatred or self-judgment. Because first, it won't work. The fear, the hatred, the self-judgment just gets stronger. If you pay attention, you'll notice that. But every moment that we're mindful, even though it seems the thoughts or the emotion keeps going, that moment of clear recognition is actually cutting the increasing of that underlying tendency. Again, you don't always notice it right away. If we're not mindful, then it's just like a snowball getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

So that's one way of removal: not giving room to expand the unwholesome thoughts, the unwholesome mental states.

There are other ways. One approach—and this a lot of people have been asking about in interviews lately, just trying to get clear on when this is skillful—is almost like thought substitution. It's one of the ways that

we can use our training in the brahma-viharas. Take metta. Metta really is the wise intention, the second step of the Eightfold Path, that counteracts the unwise thought of ill will. And applied skillfully, it's really a way of, quote, removal.

Let me give you an example from my experience of skillful and unskillful application. Take ill will—the turning in on yourself kind, worthlessness, self-judging, I'm no good, the whole pattern, if you should happen to have that, however it particularly goes for you. So I see that arising in me, and using metta skillfully means first recognizing that pattern, letting myself feel it, really acknowledging it. I have been watching this pattern for close to thirty years now.

I'm really familiar with it now. I haven't had a surprise in how it works for quite a while. So when I notice it, I really acknowledge its presence, feel it fully. And then it's like saying, "You know, I really don't need to dwell here." In a very clear way, I really don't need to dwell in this pattern, this state of mind. It's like changing the channels—I think I'll change to the metta channel—and I start doing some metta.

Now, I'm not really in aversion to the state, to the self-hatred, and that's what's important. I'm just seeing it. It's what it is. I don't need to go there. And I start doing metta, and usually by about the second set of phrases, I'm really then on the metta channel. The first set of phrases feels, you know, not really true, a bit phony. But by the second set of phrases, the unworthiness isn't there, and the metta is present for that moment.

We can really do this with all the Brahma-viharas, but the key to the skillfulness is that you're not doing the metta out of a fear or hatred of the other state. And you'll know if that's the case because it won't work. If I'm really in self-hatred and it's like, "Oh God, I can't bear this, I don't want to feel this anymore—may I be happy?"—that's not going to work. Or when you're really angry at someone and you say, "Oh, may I send them metta, may they live in peace"—you know it's phony. You have to acknowledge what's really happening first. But you don't have to indulge in it. You don't have to dwell there.

I love that one line of the Buddha's: "What the mind dwells upon frequently, towards that it will naturally incline." And we have a choice a lot of the time where the mind will dwell. So this is a way of removal of unwholesome thoughts that is really very skillful if you can do it without the aversion or without greed—switching the channel to the Brahma-viharas.

There's a whole sutta actually, a different one from what I've been discussing, called the Removal of Distracting Thoughts. The Buddha gives five ways, and all of them assume that just being mindful and noticing the thought, it didn't poof away. We're assuming that to begin with.

The first one is just what I was describing—changing the channel. The second is for when that still doesn't work. You switch to metta, and you're still caught in "I hate myself, I hate everybody, I hate myself, I hate everybody." So you can examine the danger and the suffering of those thoughts. Or if it's clinging and you're really caught in wanting something, examining the danger and the suffering in that. Sometimes

that will remove it.

The third, if the first two don't work, is to try to forget those thoughts and give your attention to something else. This is a bit like what I said under avoidance. You're really caught in desire, in lust, and you can't get away from it. Looking at it, you're just getting lost. So you move your attention elsewhere. Go back to the breath. Count the breaths. Do walking meditation and just feel the feet. Get connected to something else.

If that doesn't work, the Buddha says, then try to give attention to looking at what's causing those thoughts. This might take a little bit of active investigation, but sometimes when you get to the root of what's causing it, that causes the thought to cease—the removal of it, so to speak. For example, I know that if I'm caught in an anger loop and I'm really noting the anger, I come back, I know the sensations, I'm really there, but it keeps zooming up—I know I'm not really seeing what's at the root of it. And sometimes if I really go in, I'll find, for example, hurt.

And once I see the hurt, oh, that's at the root of it. The other story goes away. I can be with the hurt. That's an example.

And then the fifth—I'm just including this because I want you to know it wasn't easy then either. If none of these other methods work, and mindfulness of course didn't work, if there still arise unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then—and I'm quoting—"with the teeth clenched and the tongue pressed against the roof of the mouth, one should beat down, constrain, and crush the unwholesome state of mind with a wholesome state of mind."

You can tell he was from a warrior class. But I'm sure we've all been there. May a wholesome state arise. So that's removal.

And the last approach, coming full circle again back to meditation and wise attention, is developing and cultivating the seven factors of enlightenment. If you've been attending the talks by Sayadaw U Pandita, that's what his teachings have been about throughout this retreat. Obviously I can only mention them briefly, but I will mention them.

The seven factors of enlightenment, which all have to come into balance, are: mindfulness, and then the three energizing factors—investigation of dhammas, energy or courageous effort, and rapture. The three calming ones are concentration, tranquility, and equanimity.

Mindfulness you can never have too much of. It doesn't ever go out of balance. And that's the first. The proximate cause, the immediate cause for mindfulness to arise—guess what? Mindfulness. One moment of mindfulness, however weak, helps the next moment of mindfulness to arise and be a little stronger. So we just start with mindfulness.

I want to give a very brief description of each of the other six.

Investigation, dhamma vicaya, is not thinking about things. It has nothing to do with thought. It's a quality,

a mental factor, that lights up the field of awareness so that whatever's arising can be seen clearly. It dissipates confusion. It illuminates whatever's arising. Sometimes actually literally as if a light, but not necessarily—it's as if everything is a fog and suddenly, ah, that's wanting. A moment of investigation. For all the other six besides mindfulness, the direct cause for their arising is wise attention. Wise attention is very powerful.

The next is viriya, or courageous effort. If you think of it in the way Joseph talked about it—as courage rather than huge energy—we can find the courage to just meet what's happening. That's courageous effort. The amount, the degree of it goes up and down. But the courage to come face to face with what is. Persistence or endurance.

And the third energizing factor is pīti, rapture. It's a mental state that has the characteristics of happiness, of a real delight in what is happening. It manifests as a genuine interest, that kind of delight. Wow, my feet are killing me—how fascinating, you know? It doesn't really matter what's going on. Delight and satisfaction. Those times when you're just really interested. There's a lightness in the mind and a lightness in the body. And it doesn't really matter what's happening if you're satisfied with it. That's part of rapture. Rapture can also color other mental states that are happening so they feel very satisfying. Oh, this sense of ease is so great. It just colors everything.

And it has a real bodily quality that goes along with it. When there's rapture in the mind, this delight, this satisfaction, the body also feels light, kind of agile, supple. It's not a problem. You don't feel like you're dragging the factors around with you. It feels like the body can do whatever it needs to do. It's not troubling you too much. And often there are a lot of physical sensations with rapture, often weird ones that you would never think of as having anything to do with rapture.

Shaking, floors undulating, or just a kind of whiteness, or bugs crawling all over—so many weird things can arise. But the mental state of rapture is this suppleness, this delight, this interest in what is happening.

Rapture then leads directly to the beginning of the calming factors, the first of which is tranquility. Tranquility or calm—cool calmness, it could be said. It really means non-agitation of mind and body. The heat that comes from restlessness and anxiety and suffering and all of that energy—tranquility takes that away. It's that state when the mind and body are just really calm and not agitated. That's all, really. It's very cool, obviously pleasant, a sense of ease.

The next calming factor is concentration, which we've talked about a lot. Again, its quality is collectedness of mind and attention, steadiness on whatever's arising. It doesn't have to be long-term concentration. If you're doing absorption practice, it stays steady on one object. In vipassanā, that steadiness is on changing objects. So there's a moment of steady concentration, attention sinking into what's happening. The next moment is a different arising appearance, but there's that same steadiness—concentration arising moment to moment to moment. It's not one continuous thing; it's arising moment to moment. But even though the objects are changing, concentration can arise steadily without a break. Steadiness of

mindfulness is what leads to this steadiness of concentration.

The last of the calming factors is equanimity, or upekkhā, which we know is the non-reactive quality of mind—very connected, very non-reactive. But there's another way of thinking about it in relationship to these factors of enlightenment: it's a balance of mind that actually balances all the other energies. For example, when wisdom and faith are out of balance—this has been talked about—there's a lot of energy when faith is out of balance, but you can be so energized you don't know what's happening. When there's too much wisdom, you're thinking and analyzing and thinking about the Dharma, but you're not actually present. When they're balanced, equanimity is there—this energy that's in the middle and balances all the other factors.

What it feels like is a sense, a state of ease, when the mindfulness is just going on by itself. Everything feels balanced and easy. The mind isn't getting caught up, going to one side or the other. That's another aspect of equanimity.

So I name these factors so you recognize them. They all need to be balanced, which happens naturally through our mindfulness practice. But knowing what they are can be helpful. Occasionally, when you're feeling really out of balance and can't figure out what's going on, sometimes it helps to just mentally go through a checklist of the seven factors of enlightenment in a very calm way. Sometimes you realize, "Oh, there's no calm going on right now. There's no tranquility. I'm really alert, things are really interesting, but I'm totally agitated with it." Oh, that's interesting—and then the equanimity begins to kick in, begins to balance.

So that's the seventh method.

As for how to cultivate the seven factors, I'll close with this quote from the Buddha on how it all works together:

Mindfulness of breathing, when developed and repeatedly practiced, fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness. The four foundations of mindfulness, when developed and repeatedly practiced, perfect the seven factors of enlightenment.

It happens by itself.

The seven factors of enlightenment, when developed and cultivated, fulfill true knowledge and deliverance.

It all starts with awareness of breathing, with wise attention.

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