# Right Effort: Strive On With Diligence

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:00:46

I thought I'd talk a little bit about the potential of practice. I like the sense of potential of practice even more than the goal. The goal might be the same, but when I think about potential and the possibilities as I begin to understand them for this practice, I find it so exciting and so inspiring—that we could, in this very lifetime, be happy.

*In This Very Life* is the name of a book by Sayadaw U Pandita. Really understanding what that means about being happy—it certainly doesn't mean being pleased all the time. If being happy depended on being pleased, it would be really difficult to be happy, because much of the time it's hard to be pleased. Life is difficult in a body, in a relationship, in a world, on a planet that's in jeopardy. There are lots of things that we're not pleased to have happen.

And how to remain a person of faith, of confidence, prepared to engage oneself for the well-being of all beings in this world—with spirit, without despair, with contentment. A great deal of spirit and contentment for what is.

I think it's important to talk about the potential of this practice because, particularly for people who are new to the practice (and for people who are old to the practice as well), when we come determined to practice well and we listen to the instructions and all the techniques and suggestions—you could do this, you could do that—it's easy to get sidetracked into thinking that we're practicing here in order to become good meditators. That we're practicing to become good breath watchers or good walking masters or good mental noters. When we come to interviews, we talk about the difficulty with remaining attentive, resting in the breath, or remaining clear in mental notes. And it's possible to begin to think that we're doing this in order to get good at those techniques, and to forget that they are techniques—techniques to help in the process of seeing clearly. What we've really come to do is to try to wake ourselves up.

I have an image that I think about sometimes: how we're all just a little bit drowsy, but we don't know it because we think that asleep is asleep and awake is awake. When we are walking around on our feet and talking to people and operating heavy machinery, we tend to think of ourselves as being awake. I wouldn't think of driving my car asleep, or operating a lawnmower asleep. And yet there's a way in which we're not really awake. We're quite confused and befuddled and captivated and frightened by all kinds of mind habits that we've gotten so used to that we don't even know they're there.

A friend of mine said a wonderful line a few weeks ago. I met him on a trip I was on, and I've been thinking about that line ever since. He said, "I don't know who it was that discovered water, but I'm sure it wasn't a fish." I've thought about that so much in terms of the ways in which we get used to what's our

natural habitat of the mind. We think that's normal, or necessary, or usual, or awake.

You know when you're sleeping in the morning, sleeping, sleeping, and you think you've woken up but you start to drowse off again, and someone is talking to you? They say, "Wake up, wake up." And you say, "I'm up, I'm up. Look, I'm up. I'm really up." But you're really not. You're kind of falling back asleep. And they say, "You're not up." You say, "No, I'm up." I think that's what happens to us in the course of trying to wake ourselves up.

I'd like for you to think of all of the techniques that we do here—resting the attention consistently with the breath, bringing the attention consistently to body sensations and awarenesses as we walk, or eat, or take a shower, or make a salad, or vacuum the steps—as techniques to clear the mind so that we wake up and see clearly and understand what's true. So that in those moments of wakefulness, we will continue to make clear judgments about what's true and what's a wise response to what's true. So that in the moments that continue, we keep as much as we can a clear mind by not continually muddling it up.

I had an image one time. One of the teachers that I met along in my learning experience was a Sri Lankan monk who's been dead some years now. In the very last year of his life, in fact, he was teaching at a retreat at which I was a student in Southern California. I went in for an interview and told him my practice question at the time, which was that my habit when I sit is I like to go to sleep early at night. I like to go to bed when it's dark. My biological clock, I think, works so that when it gets dark, my energy isn't so clear. So if I go to bed early at nine or nine-thirty, I'll get up at twelve-thirty or one or two, and I'll be quite awake.

Particularly at that retreat center, the decision at one or two in the morning to go and sit in the meditation hall was more complex than here. Here you could get up, come sit in the hall, and if you found yourself asleep, you could go right back to bed. There, the meditation hall was at least a quarter of a mile from where our cabins were. It required getting up out of bed, getting dressed, going to the meditation hall. It was a decision to go. You didn't do it lightly.

So I'd get up and go to the meditation hall filled with zeal and wide awake. I would sit down, and five minutes later I'd start to become sleepy and drowsy. Then I'd wake up and sit a little bit more, then become sleepy and drowsy again. I'd wake up, walk a little bit, sit a little bit, and become sleepy. I spent the whole night sitting, walking, sitting, sleeping, sitting, sleeping, walking, sitting, sleeping. I continued because I was up and there.

I told him my story and asked, "Do you think it's a total loss? Do you think I should stay in bed and not come down at all?"

He said, "No, I don't think so. I think you should get up and come, even if you keep falling asleep." He said, "What matters is not that you fall asleep, but that from time to time you wake up, for however long." And then he said, "Keep in mind that every moment of mindfulness erases a moment of conditioning."

That was so inspiring to me. That was one of those lines that carried me through years of practice: every moment of wakefulness erases a moment of conditioning.

I had this image that somehow my mind was a giant blackboard, all scribbled up with conditioning—whatever that was—scribbled up, not clear. Every moment in which I was mindful was like erasing some of that scribble on the blackboard. Whenever my enthusiasm or energy or effort was flagging, I would remind myself that I didn't know how much scribble I had left. For all I knew, I could have very little scribble left, and maybe I just had to erase a little bit more on that blackboard and I'd be completely awake. It also contributed to my effort and zeal to think that I had to have the erasing factor happening more than the scribbling factor—that if I erased more persistently than I scribbled, I would eventually erase the conditioning.

It's amazing to think that one line U Sivali said to me a long time ago was really so effective in my practice. I love to share it with people. His legacy goes on, and he continues to teach people. You'll tell it to somebody, and they'll continue to teach people with it.

What we are doing here with all of these techniques is trying to wake up. We're trying to see clearly. We're trying to cut through the habitual fog of hindrances and difficult mind energies and confusions that keep us from seeing clearly, knowing clearly the truth of the moment.

I like to think of the definition for mindfulness as "unwavering truthfulness"—a phrase I read recently in one of the commentaries on the Zen Oxherding Pictures. I like that phrase so much: unwavering truthfulness. Being able to stay balanced and know what is the truth of this moment, the whole truth of this moment. This means knowing not only what's happening, but also what I feel about it, what my response to it is, what the impulse of the heart is in response to it—either a neutral response, or liking it and the impulse to reach out and get more of it, or not liking it and the impulse to wish it would go away.

We see the impulse to disturb the mind with wishing to have more or wishing to have less, and we develop clarity around those impulses that allows us not to waver. Unwavering awareness: this is the truth of this moment. Along with it comes seeing clearly what the potentials are, what choices I have in this moment. Given this is the truth of the moment, what are the possibilities? And given the possibilities, what is the wisest and most compassionate response?

This isn't to say that we're unwavering in our response. Sometimes a wise and compassionate response is to move toward pleasant experiences, to rest in them and enjoy them. Sometimes when experience is unpleasant, it's possible to move away from it with ease and balance and grace. And sometimes it's not possible—and to be able to say, "I would have liked more," or "I would have liked less," but it's not possible, so I'll rest.

To be able to see clearly: what's the potential of this moment? What are the possibilities? What can I do that's wise and skillful, that does not create confusion in the mind? That's really, for me, the fullest way I

think about mindfulness.

When I think about that, it seems to me so much the definition of freedom—the freedom of choice—to be able to see clearly what the possibilities are, what would be wise, and to be able to choose that. In that choice, we're choosing not only this moment of freedom but also a kind of conditioning of the next moment. It's a right effort moment. We can only really act in this moment, but how we act in this moment conditions moments to come.

I want to talk more about right effort as we go along.

is the dynamics of the mind in terms of its psychological patterns. Each of us thinks in a certain predictable kind of habitual way. Each of us has our main stories that are the stories of our life that cycle through predictably. Some of which—I remember thinking of some of them as kind of "oh dear" stories that I go to a retreat and think, "I only hope that I do not think about this and this. If I don't think about this and this, I'll be quite content. But if I think about it, I won't be quite content." And that is about as effective as telling someone, "In the next two minutes, don't think anything about elephants." Because as soon as you say that, and a person has the alarm, "Uh-oh, I might think about elephants in the next two minutes," there's no way that you can possibly not think about elephants in those two minutes.

But I thought I would say something more about the terrain of waking up—ways in which we can see waking up happening as we sit here day after day, just doing these simple techniques of keeping the attention as gracefully and as steadfastly and as easily as we can on quite the simple truth of every moment.

We leave the attention resting in the breath not because the breath is magic, but because the breath is here. When we sit here quietly in a quiet room with our eyes closed, not moving, if there is not another compelling experience happening in the body or in the mind, the breath is what's most predominant. It's the most likely place for the attention to naturally rest. It's actually, I think, not so much a question of resting the attention in the breath as much as the attention rests in the breath when everything else is quiet. It is where the attention rests.

I have very much the sense—not that I bring the attention to the breath, but that the breath presents itself to me as the prominent experience of the moment. It's quite a restful way to practice, just to wait for experience to present itself, not to reach forward for it. Here's this breath, here's this breath, here's this breath.

And with the extra effort of these first few days of choosing—when there's a choice, there's some awareness of breath and awareness of thoughts and awareness of moods and awareness of other things as well—choosing that awareness when we can, because breath is for the most part plain and neutral. Resting in a plain and neutral repetitive event is a way of building a certain amount of composure in the mind. And so when we talk about the balanced recognition of the moment as being what mindfulness is,

that balance depends on a certain amount of composure in the mind. We build a certain amount of balance, concentration, composure through resting the attention in the plain event of the moment.

The plain event of the moment when we sit is the breath and the rest of the body sensations that are part of it. The plain event of the moment as we walk are the sensations in the feet and the sensations in the body. People especially new to practice sometimes don't quite understand the walking practice. It seems a little contrived and sometimes a little slower than people are comfortable with. So I'd like to remind you that all of the practice—sitting and walking and eating and doing your job, and going from place to place, and showering—are all different positions in which we practice resting the attention in a composed way in the principal experience of the moment. When we walk, the main experience is sensations in the feet. When we eat, the main experience are the experiences of moving the arm and tasting the food and swallowing and smelling and looking at it and delighting in it.

And so resting, letting the attention rest in those principal experiences that are right there, just being with what's here now—itself clears the mind of all the fogs and disturbances and confusions that come and go. And there are ways that we can tell as we practice day by day here that in fact the mind is becoming clearer, waking up.

Here are the ways that you can tell. One of them is quite simple, and it has to do with enhanced sensory awareness that just happens by itself as we sit here day after day in this quiet environment with a simple life, without continuing to overstimulate our mind and body. People begin to notice that sense experience is clearer, so that colors sometimes look a little sharper and sounds are a little sharper. Shapes seem to stand out sometimes a little sharper. Smells get a little bit more intense—sometimes they're quite wonderful, smelling a meal all the way down the hall. I used to be able to tell, as the days in a retreat center went by, that in fact the mind was a little bit clearer because I could smell the lunch further and further down the hall. Could smell the oatmeal from really far away.

I was always quite delighted to find that, but when you think about it, there needs to be a more profound reason to practice than smelling the oatmeal from down at the end of the hall—although it's quite interesting to do that. And it's not always delightful either, because if you spend a long time in a retreat center, there are days when the windows have been closed in here for a long time and you come in and you smell the fact that a hundred people have been in here all day, and that smell is more prominent to you. So it doesn't make only wonderful smells more keen; it makes all the smells more keen.

So we wake up to body sensations. It can be really quite lovely, but it's really just what it is. I thought if my taste was really waked up that everything would taste wonderful. And a dry apple is a dry apple. As a matter of fact, there's a certain way in which we're probably more aware it's a dry apple when we're waked up than not. And that's really just the first level of hints that the mind has become a little more clear. Aldous Huxley used to call it cleansing the doors of perception.

Another thing that becomes clearer, just presents itself as clear—you don't need to look for it—as time

goes by and as we steadfastly just do this practice of attending to the breath and attending to the walking and attending to the eating and the most simple parts of our experience,

And to know that there are stories of our lives that are painful and grievous and tangled and fretful and worrisome—and they will, if they're part of our lives, come up. To have the understanding that such stories could arise, and that the possibility exists for us not to entertain them very long, not to be trapped by them—I'd like to tell you that this is one aspect of right effort in practice.

At the same time, there is real value in seeing what these stories are. We wake up to our psychological selves and say, "Look at that, I'm still really reactive to that. Look at that, I'm still held in the sway of this story. Look at this, this is still paining me." And it's fine to learn that. There really is no part of truth that is not valuable. The truth of the dry apple, the truth of the sad story or the grievous story—those are all truths that we are well off to know.

I think we come here principally to discover, in some very deep and direct and intuitive way, what the truths of all experience are. As I was thinking about this talk, I considered speaking about the truth of the sense experience moment, and the truth of our psychological individual lives, and spiritual truths. I don't want to present them hierarchically, because truth is truth and all truth is valuable. And yet there's another part of me that feels that ultimately, seeing those truths of all experience—which we might call the spiritual truths or the truths of life—are perhaps hierarchically more important. Everything is important, and I think that the key to freedom is a direct and clear realization of fundamental truths. And everything else counts too.

As we see the truths of our stories, one of the ways it becomes possible to hold them without so much grief or pain is to know their temporal nature. Just the sense of "uh-oh, here comes my story again" is a reminder that the story isn't there all the time. So when it arises, we can acknowledge it and know it and even know the sadness or pain we feel about it.

We have emotional systems, we have nervous systems, and they vibrate. I imagine they vibrate—I can't see them—but I feel that they vibrate when I think about something about which I feel a lot of pain or grief. I feel shaken in my being.

I think one of the great rewards of this practice has been the experience, over time, that it's possible to be shaken in one's being, to hold that, and then have it pass, and then have the next experience. This has been really important for me to discover in the years of my practice, because I know I imagined, when I began, that if I practiced hard enough and meditated well enough, I would come to the end of pain. Of course, that's not true. We don't come to the end of pain in our lives. In bodies, in relational lives, alert to the truth of the world—I actually come to think that not only do we not come to the end of pain, but maybe we feel it more clearly. And maybe, in fact, that's really the cause of our deepened capacity for compassion.

What's been truly important for me to realize is that it's possible to hold pain, that it's part of the capacity of the heart to be present for pain—sometimes to be present for it without struggle, and even to be present for it with struggle.

I love to think about the notion that the end of suffering is possible, and that if we had enough clarity of vision and enough balance of heart, pain could come and joy could come and the mind would be so thoroughly deconditioned from reactivity that it wouldn't interact with them. We would have pain and we would have joy, but not suffering—which is the struggle with pain and joy. But I'm not there yet, so I don't know that for sure. I know it as an idea. It's an idea that I love. But it's been a very great source of freedom and excitement and indeed liberation to know that it's at least partly possible—that I can struggle less and suffer less.

I thought for a while that if I told people this, it would sound like sour grapes—that not being at the end of suffering, I would say, "Well, it's all right to suffer less." But it's terrific to suffer less. Wonderful to suffer less. We'll just suffer less and less and less, and that will be wonderful.

One of the things people see about their psychological patterns is the normal pattern of dynamics, the habitual pattern of dynamics of the mind. When they come to see that clearly, it begins to be possible to disidentify from it, to not take it so seriously. It's rather like the fish discovering that it swims in water. We say, "Oh, this is water." Beginning to see the dynamics of the mind, we're able to say, "Oh, this is my pattern. This is just my pattern. It's back again. That's interesting—look at that, still here. I still do that same pattern that I used to do and that I learned to do, that maybe I learned as a result of my childhood, maybe I learned from my parents, maybe I learned from my community. Maybe it's genetic, maybe it's karmic—genetic would be karmic anyway. Maybe it's all karmic: my genes and my family and my group."

But to be able to say: this is my karma in this life. I have this particular way that my mind processes experience. And that's okay. I don't really need to struggle with it too much. I can be alert to it so I don't get trapped by it and confused by it. But it can just come and go.

Someone told me a story not so long ago about something that had just happened to her. She had a tumor removed from her abdomen, and when it was removed, she received a diagnosis a day later that it was malignant. She said, "I wanted a second opinion, so I had it sent to a major metropolis near where I live." She explained that it took a number of weeks because they had to reprocess the slides and hold a tumor board meeting.

She said, "During those weeks, I had such incredible alertness. I practiced with such dedication. I was diligent. I was disciplined. In spite of the fact that I was very dismayed to find that I had been diagnosed with a malignancy, I was awake and clear, and I had a certain amount of joy in the clarity of my practice." And then she said, "Just yesterday, I got a phone call from the pathology department in this major metropolis—it's not malignant." She paused. "And I feel like I've fallen right back to sleep. All my zeal is gone."

It was wonderful. First of all, she was supremely happy, as was I, that the tumor was not malignant. What I told her was, "Give yourself a little slack. Probably you're a little tired from this three-week ordeal. Maybe you could actually take a little rest for a day." But it would be wonderful to cultivate the kind of zeal that the Buddha suggested. The Buddha suggested that we should practice as if our hair were on fire. Isn't that a great image? If your hair were on fire, we would really practice.

But in a certain sense, our hair is on fire. It's a very short life. I've gotten old incredibly quickly. We all have. I began to practice twenty years ago and it seems like yesterday. I got married more than forty years ago, and that seems like yesterday. The sense I have from this is that I'm quite likely to wake up tomorrow and find that I'm eighty. And we all will. We'll find that our whole life has collapsed, disappeared. Doesn't it seem that way to you? That the whole life has disappeared? It has disappeared. There is nothing of it left—only memory traces. And here we are with very limited time left.

So how do we practice with zeal that's not fatiguing? Some people I interviewed today said, "I feel like I'm striving too hard. Maybe I shouldn't strive." Actually, I'm going to look over and see if I see a reaction from Joseph and Sharon, because we always say to people, "Don't strive." But I said, "Strive." I think it's good to strive. I don't think it's so bad to strive. What I think is very bad is to demoralize yourself about how badly you're doing. I would like to suggest that we strive, but not demoralize ourselves.

The very last thing the Buddha said was, "Strive on with diligence." His very last words: strive on with diligence. I find it very heroic.

On top of that confident diligence, Sharon told a wonderful story last week, so some of you who were here will remember it. It's a very important story about her beginning her metta practice with Sayadaw U Pandita in Burma. U Pandita asked her, "How do you think you're going to do in this practice?" Thinking that perhaps it was hubris to say she was going to do great, she said with all humility, "Well, I'm not sure. Maybe I'll do well. Maybe I won't do well." And he in essence said, "That's no good. You have to say, 'I'm going to do great. I am entirely confident.'"

Why not? None of us is trying to do anything that is beyond possibility. We're not trying to do anything outrageous. We're not even trying to become anyone that we aren't. We're trying to remember who we are. It's as easy as that, really.

When you think about the definition of the Brahma Viharas—really the essence of who we are—balanced, friendly, generous, compassionate, responsive—as being the essence of who we are, the natural condition of the mind. Not the condition of the mind of special people, but the condition of the mind itself. And for each of us, the task is to cut through all of the confusion that keeps us from being in touch with that, from remembering that.

In addition to thinking of this practice as waking up, I like to think of it as coming home. Truly coming home to ourselves in the fullest way. Waking up to ourselves, waking up to all the hidden things, waking

up our bodies so that we feel fully. And just as I was mentioning before, not to underestimate how lovely it is to have our senses be fully awake. Here we are in a body—why not have it be an awakened body? And here we are, emotional beings with psychological systems—why not be awake to the dynamics of our psychological systems? To see: these are my stories, these are my tendencies, these are my traits, these are my mind filters, these are the hidden secrets that I keep in the shadow.

But if I bring them out of the shadow, then I can address them. Not only be awake to them and know the truth of them, but if they're in the shadow because they're hard for me to see, because they're unskillful traits, after the initial dismay of seeing what's there, I can address myself to them so that I don't do them anymore. I can make those choices. What we are awake to, we are free to change. In moments of awakeness, there's tremendous freedom.

All the spiritual traditions that I know have stories about seekers who hear about a hidden treasure somewhere, a great jewel in some faraway place. And usually in these stories, regardless of tradition, the seeker travels over large distances and against all odds, finally arriving somewhere only to have someone say, "You made a terrible mistake. That very treasure is hidden under your bed at home." And then they go home, and sure enough, they dig under their bed, and there it is.

What if we discover, in fact, that the very treasure of our essence is right here at home? That it isn't a question of acquiring it, but a question of seeing through all of the delusion that prevents us from feeling it?

I remember that one of the things that was inspiring to me in the very beginning of my practice was the fact that my teachers all looked like regular people. Mostly they were younger than I was—plain people with plain lives. It was very inspiring to me because I knew that they had regular lives with regular stories and regular troubles, just like everybody else. And yet they seemed, in a way that I wasn't, happy. The notion that it was possible in this lifetime—aware of pain and dealing with pain, having a story like everyone else—to nevertheless be content in it, active in it, engaged in it, but not frantic, not trapped, was so inspiring to me. And I had tremendous confidence that I could do it, just because they looked plain. I thought, if they can do it, I can do it, whatever it is. Because at that point I was very much confused about how this all worked. I kind of understood the instructions, but I didn't understand how they worked. I got it about the technique—do this or do this or do this.

It was really important for me to learn, as time went by, how these different technical instructions—bringing the attention to the breath, for instance—actually related to cutting through the fog of confusion in the mind and allowing me to feel, for any amount of time, peaceful or happy. My zeal then increased about practice. It's very hard to do this practice if you don't really know where you're going with it. It's a tremendously odd thing to do.

I sometimes think to myself, what if a person from another planet—or even a person from this planet who never heard of this, who doesn't get it—came and looked at us? We look odd. Everybody's sitting here all

day long, everybody absolutely blank of visage. You can't tell a thing about what's going on with people. It's amazing to think that this is such a passionate practice and that inside everybody's experience are enormous variations of experiences happening. I look at everybody and everybody looks the same. I have no hint of whether in that person's experience at this moment there is tremendous serenity or a tremendous explosion or absolute restlessness, or whether they're fast asleep, or what is happening.

If someone were to look at us, it's odd—to sit and to walk and to sit and to walk, and especially to walk in that slow way. It's odd to keep your eyes averted. It looks so unfriendly.

I've sat in the dining room here, depending on my mind state, at a time when my mind was one of despair or discouragement, and I look around and think, "Everybody looks like a zombie. Nobody home. This is the most dreary thing I've ever seen. We've all gone mad." And then the very next night, with a new mind state—peace or happiness or ecstasy happening within me—I look around at those very same people, the very same faces, the very same mode, and they look gorgeous.

Everybody looks like a saint. Everybody looks wonderful. I'm completely in love with everybody. And they're the same people. I've manufactured the experience entirely with my mind state.

To begin to see this, and to recognize that the phrase which enjoyed some popularity during the New Age era—"we create our own reality"—is actually true. Not in any magical way of making the sun rise in the west instead of the east. Any number of people tell me they have meditated fiercely for years, waiting for the relationship of their lifetime. They read all kinds of things that said if you wish it, it will come. And it hasn't come. That kind of reality I'm not sure we can create.

I think we create the reality of our mind states, and our experience then is a reflection of that mind state. The truth of our experience is really an internal truth, and everything else appears the way it does as a result of our internal truth. And I think we have a choice about that mind state.

So I want to talk a little about right effort. I didn't understand it for a long time because I thought right effort was simply trying hard, making as much effort as I could. A rather bland definition. But the Buddha gave a particular definition of right effort: to make the effort to be aware of the presence in the mind of wholesome mind states—mind states that lead to happiness—and, aware of their presence, to cultivate them, to keep them in the mind. Aware of their absence, to cultivate them. And to be aware of the absence in the mind of unwholesome mind states—mind states that lead to unhappiness—and make some effort to keep them out. And aware of the presence in the mind of unwholesome mind states, to make an effort to exclude them from the mind.

This sounds perhaps to people just beginning practice like a contradiction. Wait a minute, that doesn't sound like those instructions I heard about just being alert to whatever's there, trying to maintain balance in understanding and knowing and accepting that this is the truth. But that's only half of it. Obviously it requires balance in knowing this is the truth of the moment. But then, in that balanced moment of

recognition, there is complete freedom, and we can choose where we bring our attention in the next moment.

My teacher Sharon used to end interviews with a particular salutation. I'd be on my way out the door, hand on the doorknob, and she'd say, "Remember, Sylvia, be happy." I thought it was just a pleasant way to end an interview. Subsequently I realized it's an instruction. An important instruction.

I realized this because I would be going about my practice, doing whatever I was doing. There's a way in which you're going along—aware, mindful, present. And then all of a sudden some drama starts in the mind. You don't notice it starting. The mind gets all tied up in the drama. It carries on, frightens, confuses, and by and by, the mind getting tenser and tenser, a certain amount of suffering is present. And by and by, there's an awareness of the presence of suffering.

Often I would become aware of the presence of suffering because the voice of my teacher would float through my mind and say, "Remember, Sylvia, be happy." And I'd think, I'm not happy. But that moment is a moment of mindfulness. It's a moment of alert clarity about my situation. It was a moment in which I felt almost like free fall—you know, when people talk about jumping out of an airplane before you open your parachute. Free fall. You can direct yourself.

That moment of alertness: Hey, I'm not happy. That's the truth. And I'm awake. In that moment I get to choose. In that moment I can take a breath. Just that breath. In that moment I say, I'm awake, I'm unhappy, here I am, and I'm putting my foot down with complete clarity. That's all I'm doing—putting my foot down. Then I'm putting the other foot down. Then this foot. Then this foot. Moments of clarity about putting the foot down

are moments of clarity, just like moments of clarity about anything are moments of clarity, which are moments of presence and moments of happiness.

And in that moment of waking up, there's no custodial care that you need to do about what already happened. You used to think you had to tidy up the mess that you'd made in the mind. And it's a terrific piece of news to notice that you don't need to tidy it up. It disappears because it's nothing anyway. It just disappears. All you have to do is let it go and it's gone like bursting a balloon. It's not there anymore. In that moment is a moment of freedom, a moment of choice, a moment of moving forward.

This is going to be an end to the story for some of you. A little bit of true confessions too.

Those of you who were here last week will know that I said parenthetically, as part of the talk, that for one reason or another there had been a lot of grumbling in my mind that day. I told it in terms of what I hoped would make the point that from time to time the mind grumbles. And what's important is to know that the mind can grumble away and you can keep on anyway. I didn't stay in bed because my mind was grumbling. I think I probably was pleasant to people even with my grumbly mind. I showed up for all my interviews. I even gave a talk that night, mind grumbling away, but I did it anyway. And I probably gave

that talk and mentioned it parenthetically just to make the point that we don't need to be held hostage to grumbling.

I'd like to make a further coda on that. I'd like to end the story. Because I really didn't make enough right effort, and I didn't have to spend the day grumbling. At the time I had said—though I didn't tell the complete truth, or maybe I didn't know the complete truth—I said my mind, for whatever reason, was in a grumbly mood. This is the reason it was in a grumbly mood.

I've been away from home for more than a week, a long time. And I will have been gone almost three weeks by the time I go home. I call my husband every night about ten o'clock, which is seven o'clock in California. In the beginning I said, "Why don't you fly to Barre on Saturday? Valentine's Day is a week from this Wednesday. Why don't you fly to Barre on Wednesday and then stay until Sunday, and we'll fly back to California together. You've never been to Barre. It's been my home for twenty years. It would be good for you to see it." I gave a lot of reasons why that would be a good thing to do. It's Valentine's Day.

And he said, "I'll think about it."

Every day I would say, "So are you coming to Barre?" And he'd say, "I'm thinking about it."

On the day of the grumbly mind, I said to him, "So are you coming to Barre?" And he said, "No. I thought about it, and I decided not to come." So I said, "Oh, I wish you would have come." He said, "No, I thought about not coming." I said, "Well, all right, I'll be home on Sunday." And I hung up the phone.

This was early in the day—I'd called him about something else. And I had the thought: *He doesn't love me. If he loved me, he'd come to Barre.*

At the time that I had that thought, I completely knew that it was nonsense. Complete nonsense. He loves me, fine. But the mind makes up a thought, and then it continues that thought. I knew it was a not-true thought, but there it was, and then it continues. It talks to itself, and it says, *So, I don't have to call him tonight. I mean, he'll notice that I didn't call him, but I don't have to call him.*

What's more, I don't have to call him tomorrow night either. Of course I'll call him on Friday, because I always call on Friday evening, but it would really be mean of me not to call before Friday evening, so I'll call Friday late afternoon. But I don't have to call tonight, certainly, and I don't have to call tomorrow. Let him stew a little bit.

And this whole conversation is happening while he doesn't have to come—he thought about it, he doesn't have to come—but I'm definitely not calling him tonight, so he'll get the message.

This grumbling continued. In the meantime, I had interviews with people, and some of you may have been among the people I saw that day. You probably thought, "She seemed pleasant as ever," but meanwhile, the grumbling was continuing over here. And it was taking a certain toll. I didn't feel good.

I mentioned it probably that night to Sharon. I said, "Well, I don't know if I'm going to give a good talk because my mind has been grumbling all day long." And it's debilitating to have a grumbling mind. It just grumbles along all day.

So I came and gave a talk. It was whatever it was, probably reasonably all right, but grumbly. Then I went back after the talk to the study center where I was staying, and I phoned him.

The thing is, I knew all day long I would phone. There was never a moment in which I sincerely thought that I would not phone. I knew this was just an extraneous tape loop running the whole day. What I didn't do is stop doing it.

And I could have. At any time during that day, since I absolutely knew I was going to call anyway, I could have said, "Why are you doing this to yourself? Why are you doing this? You're not happy. You're not comfortable." It was as if I had gone into a movie that was a bad movie, strapped myself into the seat, and determined to sit through several showings.

It's not necessary. Right effort would have been stopping the movie right away—saying to myself, "This is nonsense, don't do it." Every single time the tape loops, it's a habit. It's a completely ridiculous habit. I don't know why the mind does that sort of thing. It's not pleasant. It's not comfortable. But so often we do things that are not pleasant and not comfortable simply because we are not making enough effort not to do them.

It would have taken a moment of effort. I could have said to myself, "Sylvia, remember, be happy. You're not happy. Don't do it."

That same awareness—"my mind is grumbling"—which I went around with all day, it's a moment of almost-mindfulness. It's kind of in the ballpark of mindfulness. But if I had really been alert, it would have been, "My mind is grumbling, and it doesn't have to. You have a choice."

Instead I was partly grumbling and partly seduced by the grumbling and partly fatigued by the grumbling. That's not clear seeing. It's not really mindfulness.

I tell you this story because sometimes people get into a mood. Tomorrow night probably someone will talk about the different kinds of moods and difficult mind states that predictably come and go. So this is kind of an antecedent thought for working with those moods. Moods come and go. They come predictably. They come with all kinds of causes—sometimes a thought, sometimes a telephone call, sometimes "No, I'm not coming." Sometimes they just come because of the phase of the moon, who knows why.

But we don't have to act on them. We can notice them. We can really see them clearly. We can recognize: this is here. It's an unskillful mind state. It's conditioning more moments of cloudiness. It's unwholesome. I have a choice.

So I'd like to tell you: strive on with diligence. Make a lot of effort. We could be happy in this very lifetime.

The Buddha taught that seven days of unwavering mindfulness—guaranteed.

So let's sit for a minute.

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