Right Intention

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 53:23

Joseph spoke last night about the nature of mind, of consciousness, remembering how our pure nature is clear, luminous, and spacious, and how the kilesas—greed, hatred, and delusion—are simply visitors that come and stay a long time and maybe go away.

As we know, what our practice is doing, our mindfulness practice, is allowing us to see the true nature of our mind more clearly, as well as the true nature of the defilements. A deep understanding of reality, which is what mindfulness is helping us to develop, is what uproots these kilesas altogether. Moments of mindfulness, moment after moment, recondition the mind so that the power of these kilesas is weakened.

Tonight I want to speak about another way of working with these strong roots of defilement—greed, hatred, and delusion—in conjunction with mindfulness. It really is a part of mindfulness, but it also includes a little reflection. And that's working with the concept or idea of right intention.

Right intention is the second path factor of the Eightfold Noble Path. The first part of the path is right view, right understanding. It's first because obviously if we didn't have at least some little bit of right understanding, there would be no impetus to step onto the path at all, and none of us would be here. Right intention is second. The third, fourth, and fifth parts of the Eightfold Path are right speech, right action, and right livelihood. So you can see that this factor of right intention is the crucial link between how we understand the world—right view—and how we then act from that understanding. The intention is what informs the action.

There are various translations of this path factor of right intention, just to give you a feeling for what it is. Right intention is often called right thought, sometimes right attitude, sometimes even right aspiration. In some way, it's a directing of mind, the application of the mind that's necessary in order to act. As has been said here often before, thought is the forerunner of all action. This is right intention, right thought.

We work with this on different levels of experience, different levels of application. There's application of right intention in just one single moment of noting. There's working with it on the level of seeing our thoughts, understanding the thoughts as the manifestation of the intention that's in the mind. And there's an even broader way of understanding it as right attitude—how we apply our attitude to situations that arise in our daily life. What's our intention? What's our attitude toward daily life situations?

I want to speak mostly about the second level, but just briefly about the first: in one noting moment, this path factor of right intention is what we've been calling right aim. That quality of aiming the attention directly at whatever arises in the moment. That willingness to aim and connect precisely with whatever it

is that's arising without hesitating, without choosing, without saying maybe this, maybe that, without going to the ones we like and avoiding the things that we don't like. It's this precise moving of the mind to what's happening, but with constancy, without hesitation, the same energy, no matter what's coming up.

You can see how this quality that we develop in moment after moment of noting and observing can have broad applications to how we meet situations in the rest of our life. Can we meet whatever situation comes up in our life with that same constancy, that same willingness to be open and give our full attention of mind to what's happening, simply because it's arising, without first deciding whether we like it, whether we wish it was something else? This is the broader application of right attitude. It's a willingness to greet all situations in life as practice, a willingness to learn from whatever is arising. It really changes our life when we work in this way.

Now, this middle level of working with right intention, with right thought: as I said, it's like the aim, the inclination of the mind. And this inclination, this thought, is the forerunner of all action. The intention is formed from our understanding. Obviously, a mind without understanding, or with what we would call wrong view—the thoughts that lead to that person's actions and speech are thoughts that are manifestations of greed and hatred and confusion. They lead to confused and painful actions. It leads to the state of the world that we're living in.

Just the other night, a couple of us were watching the news on TV. It was kind of scary. It was going on and on about the situation in the Middle East. There's not a war yet, but all these countries, including us, are moving hundreds of thousands of armies and tanks and airplanes and military supplies and weapons.

And there's all this rhetoric being thrown around. We were just watching it, and it's a total manifestation of insanity. You could really feel a sense of the kilesas running wild in the world. Every person they had on speaking, the different leaders—it was just amazing. But this wasn't just a movie. This is what's happening in the world.

When there's not a clear understanding to direct our intentions, the intentions arise from confusion and greed and hostility. And it's scary. In our own little way, sometimes we're in the same boat. Not all the time, because we really have developed quite a lot of understanding, but sometimes. For example, the fan wars that Joseph was talking about last night, where two people came to blows over the fan being off or on. The window wars we have here, and the light wars. This happens every year—it isn't something unusual.

In those moments, our understanding isn't clear, and the forces of greed or confusion and anger are what form our intentions and actions. As someone said to me in an interview, "This is how world wars start." And it is. It's a direct correlation.

And the reverse is also true. As our understanding deepens and changes, this is reflected in a change in our intentions. Our intentions spring much more from non-greed, from non-hatred, from clarity. And

thus, again, there's a change in our speech and actions. So too here—there might be wars about the windows, but there are also so many loving and kind and generous thoughts and speech and actions going on here, in each one of you at different times. It's very important to be aware of this, to acknowledge it as well. This is a manifestation of right intention. It's a way we can see that our understanding is changing and deepening, through the way we're manifesting in action.

Full liberation, liberating understanding, is said to uproot these tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion altogether—meaning there wouldn't even be any more upcropping in thoughts of greed or anger or confusion. It would be quite a nice way to live.

Our mindfulness practice is what works with us on this level. The Buddha, it seems to me, was an eminently practical person, and he recognized that we can work in other ways as well. Working with the intention of mind, we can work quite consciously at times to redirect it. Of course, without mindfulness, we wouldn't even be able to know what the intention is, much less redirect it, so the two are working quite together.

Greed, hatred, and delusion—those forces surface in the form of thought. Thoughts of wanting, thoughts of dislike, thoughts of anger, thoughts of confusion or boredom. The mindfulness, the simple, bare, powerful mindfulness of that thought and the underlying force, is a real purifying power. It's what really weakens that tendency. In that moment of mindfulness, that tendency is actually not present.

But sometimes—and I find especially when it's not just every single greedy thought that comes up, but when you're kind of on a roll and there's an ongoing spate of thoughts that you recognize as greedy or aversive—sometimes it's helpful to work on the level of the thoughts and intention themselves when they're persistent. This works so that when we're having persistent thoughts driven by a kilesa, we can actively cultivate the wholesome counterpart. We can cultivate right intention. We're not really just helpless victims of whatever condition happens to arise.

In working with this, there's what's spoken of as threefold right intention. This deals especially with the unskillful roots of greed and aversion. These can be weakened, really counteracted, through cultivating threefold right intention. It's said that delusion, the unskillful root of delusion, is much more counteracted through understanding, which is what we're working on overall anyway. Actually, they all work together. But working specifically with this threefold right intention counteracts greed and aversion strongly.

So the first is the right intention of non-greed or renunciation, which obviously is the counterpart to greed. The second is the intention of goodwill or mettā, which counteracts ill will, anger, and aversion. And the third is the intention of harmlessness or compassion.

Again, a form of aversion, but more specifically counteracting the intentions of cruelty, harmfulness, or harmful thoughts.

This is based on a very practical principle. It's a kind of thought substitution, based on the principle that

these opposing intentions cannot coexist in a single mind moment. The Buddha often said that whatever one reflects upon frequently, whatever we let the mind dwell upon frequently, that becomes what the mind more naturally inclines towards. It's pretty basic.

As we develop subtlety in our mindfulness and self-knowledge, we discover that it's often possible to choose where the mind dwells—that we do have a choice when we work with resolution. We don't need to be enslaved by these ingrained habits of mind, simply responding with aversion if we're an aversive type, or responding with greed if we're a greedy type. If we're committed simply to look, to give our attention, and to be willing to bring up the energy to counteract, to work with right intention.

It's true that the force of habit is very strong. This is nothing new. The more we sit, the more we really get to know this on a deep level. That's what we're seeing here—that our mind might have a tendency to move with delusion, to move with aversion, to move with greed.

I read this little comic I got off a friend's refrigerator. It's called "What Is Your Philosophical Outlook?"—six little scenarios, I call it a right attitude quiz. Number one: "You wander alone down a crowded city street, jostled in the bustle, solitary yet surrounded," you think—and this is multiple choice. These people are: A, my brothers, my sisters. B, perverts, probably pickaxe murderers. C, I sure could go for a chili dog.

Two: "Amid the crowd, a stranger slowly turns. As his eyes meet yours, you muse..." A, I know what he feels. He feels hope. He feels fear. B, why is that pervert looking at me? C, maybe a pepperoni pizza with olives.

Then it goes on, further down: "Construction workers are tearing the street to rubble. How symbolic, you marvel. It reminds me of..." A, the path of life. B, the highway to hell. C, rocky road, my favorite flavor. Three basic types.

The habits of mind are strong. When we're not paying attention, that's what pops out. And when we don't notice that, that's how we act. But with our mindfulness, we're seeing this habitual inclination of mind, and with resolution, with a willingness to work with it, we can greet each moment as a choice, as a chance to learn, to grow, to come out of the dullness of habit.

I'm not talking about a sudden expectation of perfection—"I'm going to pay attention and from now on I'm never going to react from greed." But merely that we can have a choice in this one moment, that in this one moment there's the possibility of redirecting our intention.

So what are some ways to work with right intention, with redirecting the inclination of our mind?

First, intention or thought guided by non-greed or renunciation. Obviously this is to counteract the inclination, the intention of greed. Fred spoke quite beautifully the other night of renunciation, so I don't feel I need to describe it at length. But there is something that can help the mind incline towards

non-greed.

In addition to our mindfulness practice, there are three reflections arising out of our close examination and investigation of our mind-body process—three reflections that can be very helpful in inclining the mind to non-greed, to renunciation. I don't mean that every single time you notice a thought of greed you should start this whole period of reflection, because really, just stay with noting, stay with the mindfulness. But in times when you're feeling really caught, really caught up in it or overwhelmed, this can sometimes be helpful.

The first reflection is to reflect on our growing understanding of the unsatisfactoriness inherent in desire. Nothing new. But the more we practice, the deeper this understanding comes into our bones, really, into ourselves.

which is what being on retreat really is. It's a huge form of renunciation. This outer renunciation, I find, is a tremendous help in that it lets us sift through the barrage of desirable experiences that we have in our normal life and allows us to start to really experience more directly the nature of desire. When we're closer to desire, we start to really grasp the futility of it. Being on retreat, the outer renunciation actually helps us experience in ourselves the unsatisfactoriness of desire, which in turn leads quite naturally to a stronger sense of renunciation.

Two quotations that I love about the painfulness of desire. One is from Isaac Singer. He says, "Hell is made up of yearnings. The wicked don't roast on beds of nails. They sit on comfortable chairs and are tortured with desire." And then this is from Bashō: "Though I'm in Kyoto, when the cuckoo sings, I long for Kyoto." I love that one. Just the sense of it. Though I'm in Kyoto, when the cuckoo sings, I long for Kyoto. It's hopeless. Desire breeds more desire. It's almost like desire for the sake of desire when we're not paying attention. And it keeps us in bondage.

Sayadaw U Pandita says that pursuing sense pleasures is a form of self-oppression. It's so painful and so insatiable. The more we see this, the more we experience the suffering of it, the more we can come to know, as Nisargadatta says, "Nothing physical or mental can give you freedom. You are free once you understand that your bondage is of your own making and you cease forging the chains that bind you." Chains of desire. Simply, our practice is allowing us to see this on deeper and deeper levels.

Sometimes reflecting on this when we're feeling lost in desire can help the mind naturally incline towards renunciation. By renunciation, I don't necessarily mean forced giving up of outer things, but a turning away from the craving, a turning away from the desire for its gratification. As Suzuki Roshi said, "Renunciation does not consist in giving up the things of the world but in accepting that they go away." When we really accept that they go away, we really stop wanting them. It just naturally leads to more of a sense of simplicity, both inner and outer.

So that's the first reflection that helps with inclining the mind towards renunciation, non-greed. Another

reflection is just the reverse—not on the painfulness of desire, but on the benefits or the beauty of non-greed, of renunciation. We've all had moments of that here.

My strongest experience of it was when I was a nun in Thailand, after the aversive period I talked about before. When I had worked through that and settled into the experience as it was, it was an incredibly simple life. The conditions were no better. But the simplicity, internal and external—there was really nowhere to go. You get up, you take a wash, you go get your meal, you wash your dishes, you come back, you sweep out the ants, you sit, you take a walk, you sit. There's nothing really to look forward to. There's nowhere else to go. There's nothing very upsetting going on, apart from one's mind.

Really, the last few months of that was a period of such joy and peacefulness, springing out of the simplicity, both inner and outer. One of the most beautiful times of my life. It was not intense or ecstatic. There was nothing whatever to show for it, nothing to demonstrate what a better kind of person I was. But really seeing from that experience that where desire and needing and having things and wanting to get more things—whether material things or attainments or whatever—desire breeds fear and sorrow. The simplicity of letting go of that brings a real fearlessness and a joy.

Fearlessness because what is there to fear losing? There's nothing that one needs to hold on to, so there's nothing really to fear. And the joy, it seems to me, comes from this sense of nothing to hold on to and no fear—a real openness of mind and heart simply to what's there in the moment. The mind's not reaching out. Meal's over, that's it for the day. There's nothing to reach out to. There's nothing exciting going to happen. There's no diversion to go look for. And so the mind doesn't reach for it, and is really open and fully present in whatever's going on.

And there's not even a sense of mundane or not mundane—sitting or brushing your teeth or taking a walk, whatever. Each is equally important. One is equally open to it. It was really quite a beautiful experience and a powerful lesson for me in the joy of renunciation. And again, the renunciation is that the mind had let go of wanting. Several months earlier, in the same situation, there was not the joy of renunciation because the mind was wanting like crazy. So it's not just the outer circumstances.

On retreat here, I know we all have moments—more than just moments—of the same experience of the joy and the peacefulness of just being here with what is, and not wanting or needing anything that is not present in this moment. The power and the beauty of renunciation, of simplicity.

It seems to me that practice is just a continual deepening in letting go, in renunciation. Every time I sit a long retreat, I feel like a little more of Carol gets let go of. Enlightenment is like the ultimate relinquishment. We don't get something. It doesn't make us a more spectacular person—more ordinary, more nothing, you know. It's the ultimate giving up.

A third reflection that personally has been helpful for me in strengthening both of the other two—the joy of renunciation and the pain of desire—and just in general waking me up to pay attention, is simply our

willingness to be awake and present with what's going on in the world around us. In other words, it's our sense of commitment, a sense of commitment to waking up.

When we have that sense of commitment to wake up and pay attention, there are messages. Everything in the world speaks to us, can inspire us, can reawaken our understanding. As if we're being taught the Dharma constantly by whatever we come in contact with. You can see the Four Noble Truths at every turn. In the little chickadees that come and sit in your hand. And the whole story that goes on around deer hunting season—both sides of it. In the weather changing.

There's something from Thich Nhat Hanh, a little short piece saying this: anything can help you wake up. "When I'm alone and a bird calls me, I return to myself. I breathe and I smile. And sometimes it calls me once more. I smile and I say to the bird, I hear already."

Not only sounds, but sights can remind you to return to your true self. In the morning when you open your window and see the light streaming in, you can recognize it as the voice of the Dharma. That is why people who are awake see the manifestation of the Dharma in everything. A pebble, a bamboo tree, the cry of a baby—anything can be the voice of the Dharma calling. So we should be able to practice like that.

When we practice like that, anything wakes us up to seeing the truth. And then it's quite easy to work with our intentions of mind. The mind quite naturally inclines towards non-greed. It's not a struggle.

So that's the first right intention: intentions of renunciation, non-greed. The second is intentions of goodwill—really mettā—counteracting ill will or aversion. This is thought that's guided by mettā. Or in a broader context, openness to whatever circumstance presents itself. Just complete openness.

One way we have of cultivating this, which we've been doing through the whole retreat, is the practice of mettā itself. It's a very deliberate cultivation of this right intention of mind. It's a very deliberate sitting down and calling up intentions of loving-kindness to ourselves and to all other beings—really working with, transforming our intentions of anger and ill will. We've all worked with that a lot this retreat.

Another way that I find helpful is just to look at, to understand our intentions and to work with them—to look at how we relate to what is arising, back just on this moment-to-moment level of experience. Not even thinking of the thoughts, but seeing what is our attitude in one noting moment to what is arising. Realizing that this attitude is going to be our attitude to larger situations in life as well. I don't mean to imply we always have the same attitude, but: Are we open, willing to learn from whatever's coming up?

Whether it's anger or pain or boredom, or do we tend to meet it with resentment, with ill will or self-pity or blame? All of these ways that we can be with something in the moment while simultaneously pushing it away, resisting, blaming ourselves—all of this is a manifestation of the intention of aversion, the intention of ill will.

We can counteract it with metta. Not necessarily thinking thoughts of metta for all beings, but with that

attitude of metta, of loving-kindness, of acceptance for just this one arising experience, whatever it is.

Thich Nhat Hanh again, taking anger as an example, though it could be anything—the experience of anger and how to generate this sense of goodwill towards anger when it's arising in our practice: "I have to deal with my anger with care, with love, with tenderness, with nonviolence. We do not need to consider anger, hatred, or any other experience as enemies we have to fight to destroy. Because that would be like transforming yourself into a battlefield, tearing yourself into parts. If you struggle in that way, you do violence to yourself."

So can we bring metta, intentions of goodwill, to whatever experience is arising in this moment? Knowing that difficult experiences, difficult situations, are not in the way. I know we've said this a lot before. It's so hard for us to believe it. They're not in the way—they're stepping stones. They're opportunities for growth and self-understanding. We need them. Not only are they not in the way, but we need them. They're a vital part of practice.

You know the story about Gurdjieff, who had a community in France—a large group of people who lived there and paid to live there and all worked together. There was one older, crotchety man who lived there and just drove everybody crazy. He was nasty and ill-tempered and very unpleasant to be around. And people responded in kind, of course. Eventually he left. I guess it just got too unpleasant for him, the way people were treating him. Gurdjieff went after him and begged him to come back, and in the end agreed to pay him to come back. When he showed up again, everybody said, "What is he doing here? Why did you go and get him?" And Gurdjieff said, "We need him. He's a very important part of this community. We need him to grow."

We all need what's going on, much as we might wish it were otherwise. So can we bring an attitude, an inclination of mind, of metta, of goodwill to whatever it is that's arising in our experience? Can we meet our life with this openness of heart? In that way, whatever is happening becomes the vehicle for growth and self-transformation.

This is my favorite clipping of what's possible when we're working with meeting whatever arises in the moment with this attitude of openness of heart. It's about a woman who was seventeen and clinically depressed when she was misdiagnosed as schizophrenic and placed in a state mental hospital. She remained inside for another seventeen years. Now, fittingly for a woman whose antidotes to adversity are perseverance and forgiveness, she's returned as a full-time administrator at the same hospital.

She says, "I wouldn't have grown one bit if I didn't learn to forgive. If you don't forgive your parents or your children or yourself, you don't get beyond that anger." She says it wasn't deliberate—she shows not a trace of resentment or anger over her misdiagnosis and seventeen-year hospitalization. "It wasn't deliberate on the part of the doctors in the hospital. Not much was known about panic disorders back then. A person who had panic disorders was identified as a little bit crazy."

Her recovery was painful and gradual as she overcame a catatonic despair that often left her unable to eat or move. She contemplated suicide more than once and went through immense suffering even aside from the hospitalization—a ten-year bout with cancer, the death of her husband whom she married when she got out, the death of her brother. And still she spends her life trying to help other people. She says, "Everybody has problems. Life is not trouble-free. I try to help people see that. The mental health issue is only one aspect of suffering."

There are powerful possibilities for all of us when we cultivate the intention of goodwill, of openness, of forgiveness. This woman wasn't stuck. It was a long, painful, difficult process for her, and probably for us as well. We're not stuck either. It doesn't mean we're going to suddenly say, "Okay, fine," and forgive every horrible thing that's happened, suddenly be free of anger. For all of us, it's a gradual process.

But our willingness to redirect our inclination of mind, our willingness to be open to the situation and experience goodwill—it won't always be possible, but that willingness opens up to us a whole different way of being, a whole other possibility of how we can relate to our life, how we can live. So we become, as Don Juan talks about, a warrior who sees everything as a challenge, while an ordinary person sees everything as a blessing or a curse.

Cultivating intentions of goodwill, of metta, of openness—simple openness and acceptance of whatever might be arising as our path at this moment. And that really leads into the third aspect, which is closely linked: intentions of non-harming.

In fact, often our openness to the situation and our working with understanding and forgiveness will lead us into compassionate action. Intention of non-harming, counteracting thoughts and intentions of cruelty or harmful thoughts, is basically thought guided by compassion. Again, we've been working with that in a very directed and formal way when we work with compassion meditation, very actively wishing that all beings, or any one specific person, may be free of their suffering.

Really it's the contemplation of how all of us, all beings, wish to be free from suffering, and yet all of us, all beings, still suffer. Often that contemplation alone is enough to arouse these intentions of non-harming, of compassion. We don't have to go far to observe this desire to be free from suffering and the experience of suffering nevertheless.

I want to talk a little about how intentions of compassion can start right here, right where you're sitting, with compassion for yourself, with compassion for what you are experiencing in any particular moment. Thich Nhat Hanh says, "If you cannot be compassionate towards yourself, you will not be able to be compassionate to others."

What we're doing here, this practice, the work, the hard work that you've all been doing—it's incredibly difficult. As Stephen Levine writes, "We experience many forms of hell as we watch the mind and body." And we do, all of us here. We're meeting our demons over and over, whatever our particular demons

might be, whether it's anger, fear, loneliness, boredom, lust, sleepiness, impatience, resistance—the whole list. It's really hard and it's really painful to meet these demons over and over, whether we judge them as petty or whether there's some grand grief of the universe. It doesn't matter.

Can we work to cultivate the intention of compassion toward this suffering, toward ourselves in this experience? We can notice how the intention of our mind expresses itself, whether it's the intention of compassion or the intention of harmfulness. Ways we can notice it before it's even a clear thought is sometimes just in the tone of the note, the tone of the noticing. Noticing anger with that real harshness: "Boredom." "Resistance." "Grief again." "Boredom." You're all quite familiar with this. Just noticing the tone of the note—it's manifesting from an intention definitely not of compassion toward the experience.

And then, as a friend was talking about in an interview, we can go on to notice the tone of the running self-commentary. Maybe you don't have running self-commentary. I have running self-commentary that goes on when I'm sitting—the self-judgment that arises when we experience a painful state. Is this self-commentary compassionate? "Oh, you're really doing a good job. That must be really hard for you." Or is it, "You stupid jerk. You're angry again"? Just noticing this. When we experience these incredibly painful physical and mental states and then we blame ourselves for it—noticing this in the mind.

If we knew someone else were suffering in the same way that we are, would we treat anyone else so harshly? Often when I realize I'm caught in this sense of self-judgment, I'll pretend that the person next to me is going through all the stuff that I know I'm going through. Do I hate them for it? Really not. A really strong sense of compassion comes up. But when it's myself, the tone is just this running sense of hatefulness.

We can work with this really consciously when we become aware of it. We can deliberately cultivate the intention of compassion toward our experience, toward ourselves. Soften the tone of the note. It really makes a difference—from "Anger!" to "Anger..." It really changes things. Soften the running commentary. It can move from—I used to have a note I called "traffic cop." That was my running commentary: "Get back to the breath. Pay attention to that sensation. Get out of that thought."

And it was quite a common note—that inner traffic cop voice.

But it can change, you know. It can soften into something gentler: "It's okay. Okay, there's thinking happening. That's okay. Oh, you haven't been with the breath for a while. That's okay."

It really changes things. This shift in inner speech is the manifestation of the intention of compassion. It transforms the whole tone of our practice. And then we can learn to greet even our deepest demons with compassion for the suffering that's being engendered.

I love this story of Milarepa, the great Tibetan yogi. It's a beautiful personification of meeting our inner demons with compassion. This is from his years of retreat up in a cave—an outer personification of an inner process.

Mila's mind became blissful and he carried some wood back up to the cave. When he arrived there, he found in the cave seven metal demons with bodies the size of thumbs and eyes the size of cups. Some were making fire, some were bringing water, some grinding tsampa, and some sat performing various magical tricks. As soon as he saw them, he became frightened. He meditated on his deity, uttered a subjugating mantra, performed a gaze, and aroused the deity's presence. He then meditated on compassion and friendliness, but was unable to pacify them.

He thought, "These might be the local deities of this place. Although I have been here for months and years, I have not praised them or given them any torma." So he sang a song of praise to that place. After the song, three of the demons who were performing magic went away, but Mila was unable to make the other four go away.

Realizing that the four demons were magical obstacles, he sang a song of confidence in his experience and view, ending it with: "It is wonderful that you demons came today. You must come again tomorrow. From time to time we should converse."

Three of the demons vanished like a rainbow. The remaining one performed an imposing dance, and Mila thought, "Ooh, this one is vicious and very powerful." So he sang a song of the view, the pinnacle of realization, ending it with: "A demon like you does not intimidate me. If a demon like you could intimidate me, the arising of the mind of compassion would be of little meaning. Demon, if you were to stay here longer, that would be fine with me. If you have friends, bring them along. We'll talk about our differences. I feel compassion for this spirit."

And he prays: "Lord Vajradhara, whose essence is Akshobhya, grant your blessing so that this lowly one may have complete compassion."

Thus Mila sang. And with friendliness and compassion, without concern for his body, Mila placed himself in the mouth of the demon. But the demon could not eat him and so vanished like a rainbow.

So can we place ourselves with great compassion in the mouths of our demons? With compassion for the demons and compassion for ourselves. No difference.

I think that's enough. I just want to end by saying that obviously working with cultivating these right intentions—intentions of renunciation, of mettā, of compassion—is an ongoing process. It's a lifetime practice. Our habits of mind are very well ingrained. But they're habits, and they can change. They're not our intrinsic nature.

And as long or as difficult a practice as it might seem, what else in our life is so worth doing? Is there anything more important to spend our life doing? Not only for ourselves, but more and more we see it's for the happiness and peace and well-being of the whole planet.

I want to close with this from the Dalai Lama:

"Through inner peace, genuine world peace can be achieved. In this, the importance of individual responsibility is quite clear. An atmosphere of peace must first be created within ourselves, then gradually expanded to include our families, our communities, and ultimately the whole planet. In order to create inner peace, what is most important is the practice of compassion and love, understanding and respect for human beings."

Developing such attitudes as love and compassion, patience and understanding between human beings is not merely a source of personal happiness, but has become a condition for human survival.

So let us sit together for a few minutes in silence.

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