The Nature of Attachment

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 58:24

I'm sorry I had to cancel last night at the last minute. I appreciate your coming back tonight.

Tonight what I'd like to talk about is a highly unusual and original topic: attachment, or grasping. One of the things the Buddha said to himself during that period when he was trying to decide whether to teach—I love this quote—he was reflecting on how hard the truth is to discover, and he said: "Because this generation relies on attachment, this generation relishes attachment, delights in attachment, it's hard for them to see the truth."

That describes us at times pretty well.

What I mean by grasping is this: when we talk about craving, it's compared to the mind inclining towards something, groping in the dark to steal an object. Grasping is like, "got it." You've really grabbed it. It's taken a firm hold. In the chain of dependent origination, craving arises on contact with pleasant feeling when there's not mindfulness. Grasping is what develops in the next moment, and each moment of grasping strengthens the next—this really grabbing hold and not being able to let go.

So that cheery topic is what I would like to discuss tonight, and really in some ways on quite a fine level, on a microscopic level.

But I want to share something that helps put things in perspective. After some period of sitting, some weeks, as you've all been here now, we are working and seeing things on a very minute, very microscopic level. I love being able to talk about, for example, the arising of grasping as a moment-to-moment experience. But sometimes, often actually, people say after a period of practice that it feels so inward, so self-involved, that they start to feel disconnected or wondering if it's relevant—sitting here obsessed about attachment to having a certain seat in the cafeteria, for example.

The other night, there was a brief, maybe twenty-minute special. Some film crews had gone to Somalia, and it was quite affecting for me. They were filming and talking to people who looked like they were going to die the next minute from starvation. Very real. Just hundreds of these people—women, children, men. They were also filming how the whole famine there is not caused by drought or natural conditions. It's caused by people's greed and delusion. They filmed gangs of men with machine guns and anti-aircraft guns going around literally stealing food and blankets with guns, just ripping them away from starving women and children, then selling them on the black market for money, attacking relief warehouses with fifty machine guns. It's really amazing what's going on. And in the midst of it, lots of volunteers, many of them Westerners, just trying to help bring in the food, bring in some medical aid.

It was very affecting to me. And it had the effect, in my heart anyway, not of thinking, "Oh, what are we doing here obsessing about our minute little problems while this is going on?" Rather, this is what happens when we don't understand the nature of attachment. When it runs wild and blinds us in a huge way, it leads to this kind of thing in the world, all over the world. It's exaggerated, but the process isn't any different from how attachment or grasping arises in a moment of our experience—how it feeds itself when we're afraid of it or don't understand it.

I really feel quite deeply that what we're doing here is not irrelevant to that. It's a very deep way of learning that peace and freedom is accessible, learning how not to be blinded by grasping—and that's going to have a profound effect on anyone we come in contact with. I feel so strongly the connection: everyone here has such a commitment to understand this process in themselves, to know what peace is. We really are doing it for all beings. We're not irrelevant. We're not isolated. We're not just playing with mental ideas. What we're doing here is very real.

So, from the big perspective down to a much smaller perspective, let's talk about this experience of attachment or grasping.

In your experience, there's really only six things that happen: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, physical touch, and mental experience. That's it. Six objects just coming over and over and over. It's amazing what a big deal we make about it.

Any one of these six sense objects that arise—there's contact. There's the eye, there's a sight object, there's eye consciousness, contact, feeling. If the feeling is pleasant, there can be craving. If it's unpleasant, aversion. In the next moment, if there's mindfulness—if there's sati in that moment—then with the sati we understand the nature of the craving, the nature of the object of craving. In a way we see its impermanence, we know its ephemeral, non-satisfying nature. Wisdom arises in that moment and the craving dissipates. That moment might seem like nothing special—many, many moments like that in our life on this retreat.

But when the sati's not there, when the wisdom doesn't arise in that moment of craving, the next moment that's conditioned is one of grasping—that really grabbing hold of the experience. And that's what blinds us, where the mind gets fixated on a particular thing.

Something simple: there's a pleasant smell. We don't really notice the pleasantness. It's grasped at. The mind gets fixated in some fantasy of food, not really even noticing where that fixation began. This is the grasping that blinds us.

This is from the Buddha: "For some people, contact—the point where sense plus object meet each other—this point is enthralling. And so they are washed by the tides of being, drifting along an empty, pointless road. Nowhere is there any sign of broken chains. But others come to understand their sense activity. And because they understand it, the stillness fills them with delight. They see just what contact

does, and so their craving ends. They realize total calm."

Really, here he's saying that because of understanding the nature of our experience, the craving ends. We realize total calm because of understanding. That's why I want to talk about this nature of attachment or grasping tonight—to help us continue to look at it, to understand it. Through that understanding, we touch the peace and calm that's always available quite naturally. We don't have to create anything.

Of course, often we're not going to notice this right at the point of contact. Quite often we wake up far, far along in the experience of grasping. Perhaps there was a pleasant feeling of warmth, clinging, craving that feeling, and then it gets into clinging, and the next thing you know you're in a long extended fantasy about a vacation in the tropics—what you're going to do when you leave here, on and on and on, really lost in it. You can see how it's blinding, but there's no sense of what's happening here, no appreciation for what's happening in the moment. And when we wake up, it's even worse to wake back up in Massachusetts when you've been hanging out in Bali for the last ten minutes.

When we talk about craving, how blinding it is, I use that quotation: when a pickpocket sees a saint, the pickpocket only sees the saint's pockets. A blinding quality of grasping.

This is the Buddha again: "There are many kinds of suffering in the world and all of them grow from the same source: grasping. When a person knows no better, she or he gives way to this grasping and slow and dulled goes through one misery after another."

He doesn't try to sugarcoat things. "So do not create this misery for yourselves. Use your knowledge to see how suffering begins and develops in attachment." See—over and over, he doesn't say hate it, fear it, get rid of it, pretend it's not happening. He's saying use your wisdom. See how suffering begins and develops in attachment.

This is Thich Nhat Hanh commenting on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, where it says, "When the mind is desiring something, one is aware: my mind is desiring." It's very simple. You don't have to be afraid of it. You're simply aware: my mind is desiring.

His commentary: "In identifying the mind of desire, in observing the nature of that mind and the nature of the object of desire, we will see the impermanence, the selflessness, and the interdependence of it, and we will no longer be dominated by that mind."

The attachment itself is ephemeral, has no inherent nature, arises because of conditions and ceases when those conditions change. With wisdom, with mindfulness, we see this and we can see through the attachment to the peace that the attachment blinds us to.

On an experiential level, how can we experience the nature of grasping? I love watching this happen in a sitting—unless I'm in a really judgmental frame of mind—because it's so interesting. We're sitting or walking or anything, but it's easier to observe in sitting relatively calmly. Appearances are arising and

passing. There's hearing and seeing and thinking and sensation and the breath coming and going. There's that sense of open, spacious awareness. It's peaceful. It's calm. No appearance is a particular problem.

And suddenly, out of this flow of changing perception, one perception arises. "Oh, the breath should be clearer," I thought. And that particular perception—the mind inclines to it and grasps. It's almost like a physical contraction in that moment. I can feel as if the consciousness, which has been open and spacious as the sky, suddenly becomes as contracted and small and hard as a little pebble around this thought. It could be anything. It doesn't have to be a thought. "I wonder what's for lunch," or "I want to hear that sound again," whatever it happens to be.

In that contraction, the mind is unbalanced. Almost physically, the body could feel unbalanced. There's a sense of solidification. And that one isolation and grasping and identification, not seeing, leads to a whole flow of constructs and story and endless suffering. In that moment of the consciousness contracting, there's immediate separation. There's an immediate sense of me or self, and other, the object grasped. Immediately there's a sense of there's a problem, where before there was no problem.

A simple example: if you've experienced the VR phenomenon—you know, Vipassana romance—you're just simply walking outside, minding your own business, lifting, moving, placing, noticing, hearing, smelling, feeling. And suddenly there's a sight. This person walks by, but the experience is simply seeing. And it's pleasant, and that's not noticed, and a craving arises, and there's a strong grasping. What is the experience in that moment where things have been quite peaceful? There's such a sense of self and other. A whole construct begins of me and them and what I want and what do they think about me and what do I think about them. I wish all these other people weren't here in the way. Everything has become constricted. It's extremely unpleasant. It can really feel like a prison. And one moment of grasping not noticed leads into stronger and stronger grasping—to get rid of the grasping, trying to tell ourselves to stop it. It just goes on and on.

Contrast that with the same kind of walking outside when the mind is clear, simply noticing the sensations, noticing the sounds. Clarity. A sense of peace. There's such an exquisite appreciation of whatever—just the sense of the foot lifting, a little caterpillar going across the driveway, the sound of the leaves. When things are so vivid and it's so exquisitely peaceful.

What's the difference? It's simply that the mind, the consciousness, is free from attachment or aversion—really two sides of the same thing—in that moment. It's not a peace that's created. It's that the attachment is so blinding that we can't recognize or touch this peace which is always present, here and now. It's always what is true and accessible. It's the attachment, the grasping, that blinds us to this. It's attachment that gets us thinking we have to do something special to know what it is to be peaceful, to be free, when really it's always available. It's the absence of being caught in attachment itself. It's not the situation.

Here I will dredge up an old story that I haven't told for a few years, but it's a good grasping story about

the difference between when grasping is present and when it's not.

A few years ago, I was in a relationship with a man who was living in England. I was working here and had gone over there for a week. It was one of these special week-long tickets that you can't change—if you miss it, you just lose the money. Plus, I had to be back here.

We were in London the night before my flight. He doesn't know London. Neither of us knew London. He's American. We were staying at a friend's apartment, but the friends were away, so we didn't have anyone around who could help us.

We get up in the morning. It's all fine. I'm getting ready to call a taxi to go to the train to the airport. No problem. And he got it in his mind that he really wants to drive me to the airport so we can have more time together. He really got it in his mind. It was very strong grasping. I was saying, "Well, you don't know the way. I don't know the way. And it's really easy to take the train."

We spent the next hour—when we could have been enjoying each other's company—arguing about this. Finally, I just gave up. He was just so strong. I could really see the grasping quality. I said, "Okay."

Now, of course, it's late because we spent all this time arguing. The only map we had was one of these London A to Z guides, which has a page for each block or something. Very detailed, but if you don't know how to get from A to Y, it really doesn't help to have all these pages in between because you don't know which to use. So that's what we had, and we're trying to figure out how to go. We're in the car. I'm looking at the map. Get on this street, and then I have to find the next page, and by the time I'd find it, we'd be off of the next map already. We were really quite late.

Now, I was really grasping: "I have to make this plane." That was the thought in my mind, totally grasped onto. This time together was really pleasant, I can tell you. So I was wildly looking through this. He was driving like a maniac. We finally got on the right motorway, got partway out, and hit a total dead-stop traffic jam. Neither of us knew if we'd gotten off there where to go to take a shortcut.

I was in a total frenzy, just totally gone in this grasping, really suffering. And suddenly, when we hit this traffic jam, it all blew up in a bubble. I thought, "Oh, I'm going to miss the plane." It really hit, and the whole grasping just dissipated. Confronted with the facts, there was nothing to grasp. It completely dissipated, and in an instant I was quite relaxed. I was looking around going, "Oh, look at all these cars. Well, I've never missed a plane internationally." I was quite in a pleasant space again.

Nothing had changed except the grasping had gone away. All the suffering wasn't about missing the plane or him having a different idea from me. It was because of the grasping in the mind that blinded me to anything else.

To go on, I ended up not missing the plane. I used to not say this, but then people would really ask me the next day what happened. We got to the airport with like ten minutes to make the plane, and then all the

grasping came back. Everybody was in my way. I ran to the head of the immigration line, pushed myself in, ran to the plane. I was the last one on. They shut the doors, and we sat there for forty-five minutes.

This is life. But it was such a clear experience of: it's not the situation that's suffering, it's the grasping.

I saw this guy a year or so ago, and out of nowhere he said, "Remember our ride to the airport?" I said, "Yeah, I use it in a Dharma talk." He said, "Well, do you tell my side?" So I'm probably not telling his side.

When we begin to investigate the nature of attachment, of grasping, in this way, for one thing it's fascinating. But for another, we can't help but see how often it arises and how easily the mind is seduced. And so I want to say about this: the importance of patience, equanimity, and non-judging. We're here to explore, to discover, not to judge ourselves for what we're seeing, because it's the nature of our human condition. We're all in this together.

There are a few areas where I find it helpful to identify this process of attachment where we so easily get lost. Traditionally they talk about four areas. I'm really only going to talk about two tonight.

The first kind of grasping they talk about is the obvious one: sense pleasures. This is a definition of sense-pleasure grasping by Ledi Sayadaw, who was a Burmese meditation master from early this century: "Laying a firm hold on something, it implies the inability to shake off a thing even after experiencing great pain due to it and perceiving its many harmful consequences."

This is really, to me, one description of grasping at sense pleasures. Just a little thing, like I sit down and start eating ice cream and keep going until I finish the carton. I know this is having a painful effect on me in the here and now. And the grasping just keeps feeding on itself if I don't stop to look at it.

It's like the story of Nasruddin sitting there eating a whole basket of hot chilies and tears just pouring down his face. Someone comes along and says, "What are you doing that for?" He says, "Well, I'm waiting for a sweet one." And we keep doing that. "Well, I've done this a hundred thousand times and it hurt, but maybe this time it's really going to make me happy." I just keep coming back to: in my mind, there's pleasant sights, pleasant smells, pleasant sounds, pleasant touch, pleasant taste, pleasant mental objects, and that's it. So what? Why do we keep needing new ones? But we do.

Once I went to U Pandita complaining about something that was going on in my practice, and he just said to me, "So what do you want? Different things to note?" It just really reduces it. Oh yeah, that's all it is. What difference does it make?

The Buddha spoke often, very graphically, about the perils of sense pleasures. Some of the more accessible ones: they're dangerous because they're like a dream—when you wake up, they're gone. Or it's something that's borrowed—you just start to get into it and the owner takes it back.

But the danger, the perils—we want to emphasize—it's not saying that pleasant sense experience is bad or that we have to be afraid of it. The Buddha went through extreme asceticism, and that was not what he

was advocating. He was advocating the middle way. But I think it's important for us to really notice what the peril, what the danger is of sense pleasure. It's not the sense pleasantness itself, but simply that the tendency to grasp is so strong. The idea that somehow this one is going to do it is so seductive that we so easily get lost. And that's dangerous to us because, in that getting lost, in the grasping as it strengthens itself, it keeps us looking in the wrong direction for peace. We're looking and waiting for that sweet one instead of seeing that peace is available right now if we'd stop looking so hard.

I think one of the reasons we don't get it is that in our day-to-day life, we don't really look that hard. Our culture especially, but all cultures in some way, we're just bombarded with opportunities for pleasant sensory experience. As soon as one sight doesn't do it, we can go to another one. As soon as one taste doesn't do it, we can go to a pleasant feeling or a pleasant sound. You can come and sit here and go on endlessly into pleasant thoughts. So if we don't look, somehow the rapidity of the movement hides the fact that the search itself is the suffering. It hides the dukkha, the same as when we move our body, it hides the unsatisfactoriness of the senses until the body starts to hurt.

On retreat, the simplification is really helpful, because the possibility of sense pleasure is so amazingly reduced. This is a kind of choice of renunciation. And the mind might go crazy at first. The first week is really hard. The mind's just kind of fighting and wanting more sense things and more things to do. And then it settles down.

The renunciation of simplicity helps us to look. Because what do we see when the mind settles down? The grasping doesn't get any less. It just changes its object. Where before we were grasping for something really important—your husband or wife or children or cats—something really major in life, now it's down to an orange instead of an apple. But the strength of the grasping is no different. This is what's scary. It can be for anything.

But the other side of the simplicity of retreat is that because the object of our attachment can be so greatly reduced, almost to the point of the absurd, we can't hide from the intensity of the attachment. It really makes us look. Because at some point we all wake up and go, "Why have I spent half a day filled with craving and anger because I had to sit in a different seat than usual?" And we all do it.

So the retreat is a wonderful opportunity to really notice what's going on. When you're caught in grasping, notice what it is arising from. You can trace it back and see it's coming from one simple sense experience—a sight or a sound or a feeling or a thought—that this simple contact has given rise to this whole series of grasping moments. That's fascinating to me.

And the other thing we can do is to know that when we're really gripped with attachment, we don't have to do anything about it. Our whole life is spent doing something to get out of that feeling. Here we can see, "Oh, I don't have to avoid this. I can just sit here. I can just stand here. I can just lie here." Whatever's going on when we notice it, we really bring awareness to the process itself—to see how one moment of grasping, when we're not aware of it, really feeds the next, and how much the strength of it grows through one

moment conditioning the next.

We can sit there and see how, if we're just noticing, noticing with a calm attentive awareness, sooner or later that grasping, that attachment, dissipates by itself. And notice the experience when it's dissipated—because we see that the peace, the happiness that we thought we could get by attaining the object of grasping, when that grasping dissipates, that peace is right here. That's what we were looking for all along.

When we meet and explore grasping with sati, it allows for the peace that's camouflaged by the grasping to again be acknowledged, recognized, touched. And that's a wonderful experience, because it's the wisdom, the beginning of the wisdom, that helps us know we don't have to spend our lives running around driven by this energy of grasping or craving.

Sometimes I think that the peace of non-grasping is more subtle at first than the kind of intense gratification that might come from sense pleasures, any kind of sense pleasures. It takes the quietness, the calmness of mind that you're all developing here to really appreciate how much more exquisite and subtle it is. But when we touch that, actually, sense pleasures lose their pull. It's a kind of natural renunciation.

I remember one retreat where I'd been for weeks going through all this kind of grief about the end of a relationship—oh, actually it was that same guy—even though I knew I didn't want to be in it anymore. Going through, going through, going through. And then I just got into that place of non-grasping that is so peaceful and lovely and calm. At some point, the thought of sexuality came up, and it was totally unappealing. Just really gross compared to—I don't mean that in a judgmental way, but gross compared to subtle in comparison to that calmness, that peace of equanimity.

We don't give ourselves the chance to recognize that a lot in our daily life. Here, you're all touching moments of that over and over. Please recognize them, acknowledge them when they're happening.

One other thing that I think lends to the seductive quality of grasping at sense pleasures is that when we're not examining craving, as the Buddha said, there's almost a sense of pleasantness. He says, "craving accompanied by delight." That feeling of just one more fantasy. It's so pleasant.

There's a poem I love that to me evokes this feeling, by a Japanese woman from about the year 1000 named Shikibu, from the ancient court of Japan: "Although I try to hold the single thought of Buddha's teaching in my heart, I cannot help but hear the many crickets' voices calling as well."

So we don't have to be afraid of the crickets' voices. We just have to recognize them for what they are. We don't have to cultivate fear or aversion to pleasant sense experience, but we can see the difference between attachment and appreciation.

The Buddha says, "What is beautiful in the world remains so, but the wise one no longer strives after it."

With the clarity of non-grasping, we really can appreciate what is beautiful in the world. Knowing that it

will pass, there's no need to strive after it.

Suzuki Roshi says that renunciation does not consist in giving up the things of the world, but in accepting that they go away.

When we see contact clearly, the nature of sense objects and sense desire, when we are open to exploring the quality of grasping and how it leads to suffering, this sense of natural renunciation arises quite spontaneously.

The other area of attachment I want to talk about tonight is grasping or attachment to views and opinions, which is a really interesting one to me. The Buddha speaks about it quite a lot.

That could be described as the tendency of mind to think, "This alone is true, everything else is false." Unfortunately, we don't usually think it quite so clearly, so we're not so aware there's a view forming. But any view or opinion that we're grasping onto, that we're not seeing as a view, is of course blinding. It limits our world. It limits the possibilities because we don't even let in the facts that don't fit into our view. We only perceive what fits.

Remember when I talked about that basketball video and no one noticed the woman in white? It doesn't fit in with anyone's view of a basketball game, that that should be happening. So we limit the possibilities of what can be perceived, of what we can know about life.

We see this everywhere. Such suffering is created by this attachment to views, by holding these views to be some kind of absolute truth. Right now, you're lucky you're missing the presidential debates that have been going on. It's really been something to watch. There's no sense—debate is a joke. There's no sense that there's any kind of open communication happening. Each person gets up and lays out their views. The other person gets up and lays out their views. There's no sense of meeting. There's no sense of actually hearing. There's such a rigid clash.

People go to war about such differences of views, of holding on to such an idea. When one is listening without subscribing to any of the views particularly, what one hears—or what I hear—is, they don't sound very different. What are they fighting about? There's much more agreement than there is disagreement, but it turns into this rigid conflict.

Most of us can probably see at some time the way that we are rabidly attached to some opinion that we have, such that if it's challenged, we get really angry or frightened. It can be about anything—politics, the environment, our spirituality, religion, medical things—and we'll hold on to our view in spite of the evidence. It gives us some kind of security.

One example—and I'm bringing this one up on purpose because I don't know if it's controversial, but it might touch things in people—I read a book recently going through the history of the discovery of AIDS and the first few years of how it developed in this country, both in the gay community and other parts of

the country, and how the medical establishment reacted, how the government reacted, how the newspapers reacted, how the blood banks reacted.

It's so interesting because all of the different groups had their own particular views that they were grasping onto and protecting much more strongly than wanting to listen to the evidence that was coming out. The government didn't want to spend money on it, didn't want to hear it was a crisis, and basically held views like "It's only gay people and Haitians, we don't need to worry about it." The media, in a way, treated it the same way. The doctors were squabbling amongst themselves about whether it was true or what wasn't or who was going to get the credit. The discovery of the virus wasn't really talked about in the American media for a year because it was discovered by some French people, and the Americans wanted the credit. The gay community—a lot of them didn't want to hear about how it was spread through sexual activity because of the view that they were just coming into a sense of sexual freedom and not wanting to be told how to behave because it was moralistic. And on and on—the blood banks didn't want to hear that it was contagious and kept putting out the blood for some time after the facts were really out.

It's horrendous. But it was fascinating to me because everybody who was at all involved was holding on to some kind of view, and in the meantime a crisis developed. This is how we are. None of us are outside of that. Our views are more important, when we're holding on to them, than knowing the truth.

It can stop your mind, how strange or unsettling it is when we come up against some kind of evidence that we can't ignore, that shakes a view we don't know we have, that we're really grasping.

A friend just told me this story I like. A Tibetan Lama, Lama Gendun, was giving a talk to quite a large group of people. He was talking about, in their language, a pure land. It's a place where one can be reborn, a happy realm, a practiced realm. Amitabha Buddha is there. It's a great place to be reborn and practice and be happy. He was going on and on about it, describing it in detail, all these tiny little details. Finally, the people in the back of the room started to snicker. "Where is he coming off talking about all this? He's really in delusion." He just stopped and looked at them and said, "Well, you might not think I know what I'm talking about, but I've been there."

It just stopped. Everyone just kind of stopped. Doesn't fit in with their view of what's possible or what's true.

Can we just begin to notice a view as a view? That's all. Notice when grasping or attachment to a view is arising. Then we don't have to be so gripped by it. Then we can continue to be open for discovery, open to see what is true in this moment, what is actually happening, not colored by our views and opinions.

One of the things the Buddha says about views a lot is how holding to views brings us into conflict—conflict with others, conflict with ourselves. Just talking to people this last week, I can see this happening so much. We all do it in practice. We set up a view and immediately grasp it and then start suffering because our practice does not match the view that we're holding onto.

Anything that's said in the instructions, anything that's said in a talk—the mind just somehow, this particular line comes up, that grasping takes place. "Right, that's what noting's supposed to be like. Right, that's what the breath's supposed to be like. This is what spacious awareness is supposed to be like." And it's not what my practice is like. Immediately there's comparison and suffering.

It's really funny in a sad kind of way to see how we create so much suffering for ourselves. People will come in and say, "I'm having too many emotions. Clearly my practice is no good." The next person will say, "I'm just not having any emotions. I must be suppressing. My practice is no good." Someone will say, "I'm just too much on the breath. I don't have spacious awareness. My practice is no good." The next person will say, "I'm hardly ever with the breath. I only have spacious awareness. My practice is no good."

We just take whatever form of view and immediately we're in conflict. This comparing mode—comparing is actually the quality of conceit or māna: better than, less than, or equal to. But if we watch what the comparing is arising out of in our practice here, it's grasping at a particular view. So it's not to hate the view, but to see a view as a view, to explore it.

I find it fascinating to do because I'll say, "Oh, that's the view of what practice is supposed to be like. Just relax." And the next minute, whatever starts happening in my mind goes, "Oh no, this is how it's supposed to be." And it might be five minutes or it might be five days before, "Oh, that's another view." Okay, see through it.

This is from Nisargadatta Maharaj: "The state of craving for anything blocks all deeper experience. Nothing of value can happen to a mind that knows exactly what it wants. Because nothing the mind can visualize and want is of much value."

This moment-to-moment mindfulness, just pure being with present experience, is a constant challenge to our unacknowledged views. That's one of the reasons it can be so difficult, really noticing what's happening moment to moment. It doesn't fit—or rarely—our ideas about what's supposed to be happening.

When we're in a struggle like that, just check and see: Is there a view here? Is there grasping?

It's not to say that views are bad or opinions are wrong. We need them in life in order to vote. We need to have a view and an opinion. But we need to know that that's what it is and not hold it as the absolute truth. If I felt my vote was the absolute truth, I would have had to commit suicide twenty years ago because no one I vote for ever wins.

One of the wonderful things about retreat is our views do start to break down. Our view of ourselves as a solid body—is that our experience? I defy anyone to actually look and say their experience is, "I'm a solid, separate body." You see it breaking down, like with a lot of people being sick now. You come in, your experience is a sensation here and an emotion there and a heaviness here. A lot of times people can't put it together because the views, the concepts, are falling away. That's wonderful in retreat. That's what

retreat is for.

Now, out in life, sometimes we need to be able to put the concept together and go, "Oh, I think I have the flu," or "I think I have bronchitis, I should go to a doctor." That's quite helpful. To know that that's a view, that's an idea we've built up around certain sensations. It's knowing how

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