Patience in Mettā

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:01:59

In speaking with people over just the last few days, I'd say one of the themes I've noticed—not with everyone, of course, but running through a lot of the conversations—is a sort of underground, or not so underground, sense of discouragement, a kind of impatience manifesting in various ways.

Partly, people speak of really having deep insight into some of our very painful patterns of personality, or really experiencing on a deep level the dukkha of craving, or the pain and misperception brought about by self-judgment, just to pick two common ones. And despite this deep understanding, this seeing, it's still going on. It seems actually to be going on more than it was before, or more tenaciously, or they're seeing more subtle levels of it—which indeed can be discouraging.

Another way it's talked about is this: as mindful as I've been all this time, it seems that as soon as the energy drops or somehow the mindfulness goes away, in like a rush come our friends the kilesas, the torments. It's like, if that happens here, where the conditions are so supportive, and where I have such a relatively small amount of distraction, I might as well just give up. Because when I get out of here, it's just going to be so much more.

These are common kinds of themes that have been coming up. I don't know if you can relate. And I mean, those are perhaps accurate perceptions. But I would like to posit that the conclusion drawn—that it's hopeless—is not an accurate conclusion.

I want to talk tonight about really two aspects. The main thing I want to do is to shift our focus for a while from our obsessive attention to the kilesas to perhaps reminding us to also notice the pure aspects of mind, which are also getting stronger. We forget to look sometimes. But the first aspect I want to speak to is the impatience and the seeming strength of these torments of mind, how quickly they come flying up.

And I think that's true. When we first start practice—not even when we first start practice, I mean on and on and on—it's hard to appreciate. At least it is for me; it's always a new revelation to appreciate the depth and the subtlety of ignorance. I know this morning someone told me that Steve was saying, you know, we've spent at least however old you are now—that amount of your life, more or less most of the time—cultivating greed, hatred, and delusion. And that's only if we speak of one lifetime. But somehow we think that we just have to see it a few times in three months and it'll go away.

I mean, we really deeply believe this. It's like a betrayal somehow that this stuff keeps coming up. It's still for me—it's been twenty-some-odd years—and I'll think, "Oh no, again this. I saw it to its depths years ago."

The Buddha spoke of this as a causal condition for ignorance to arise in a moment. He calls it āsavas. A translation I like for it is "bias of mind" or "tendency of mind." What we're talking about with these is the subtlety—it's not the full-blown presence of the kilesa or the hindrance itself, for example desire. The āsava is this underlying tendency for becoming, or sense desire, or wrong view. It is the underlying tendency for this to arise in a moment when the conditions are supportive for it to arise—which usually means when we're not really present, when there's not mindfulness, when we're acting or responding to stimulus out of habit. That's often the supportive condition for these āsavas to burst into full flower, so to speak, as craving or as becoming.

The Buddha gives the example of a seed. Say it's the seed of a rosebush—the seed has the potential to become a rosebush, but only if all the necessary supportive conditions are present for that seed to become a rose bush. It's the same way with this concept of these biases of mind, these āsavas. It's not like no matter what happens, if something pleasant arises, we're going to be gripped in craving. It doesn't have to happen. But when the supportive conditions are there—wow, that's really nice, just imagine how it would be if I really... Unmindfulness, liking, not noticing, grasping—the supportive conditions—and craving arises. It's subtle. It's pervasive. It can be discouraging.

I remember once a couple of years ago I was sitting here in a pretty mindful space, not really spacing out much, just really watching. As an experiment, I was seeing just leaves of some tree, and I was noting "seeing," I was noting "pleasant," very peaceful, calm, nothing else arising. And I deliberately—it was almost as if I pulled the energy back from the knowing, from the noting, and quit being mindful on purpose.

It was really fascinating. Just like that came up, like a whole—like the armies of Māra—this whole slew of desire and fantasy, nothing to do with the leaves. I mean, it was just leaves on a tree. I don't even remember what the story was. But what was amazing to me was how fast and how strong these tendencies came shooting up into actualization in my mind at that moment.

So if I just thought, "Well, that's what's going to happen no matter what," it would be quite discouraging. But I don't think that's the case. I know that's not the case. It was more an experiment to see what happens when conditions are right. And this tendency is, I think, much more pervasive and more subtle than we like to believe or like to give it credit for. It's also not personal, so we also like to blame ourselves for it every time craving or aversion or wrong view comes up.

But what it does point to, to me rather than discouragement, is the fact that ignorance is not unending. Ignorance is a mental factor that arises due to causes. And when those causes are not present in a moment, ignorance will also cease to be present. It comes and goes. It's not like the big bang—one day ignorance started and now it's here forevermore. The Buddha said that ignorance in fact is known as something that is conditionally arisen.

What we're doing here, besides learning to recognize the presence of ignorance and its manifestations as

wrong view, craving, and aversion, we're also learning the conditions both for the arising of ignorance, for getting caught in blindness. We're also learning the conditions for recognizing the truth.

We're learning this not intellectually, but experientially. We're discovering that mindfulness, equanimity, and wisdom are the causal conditions that allow us to open to what is really true—that allow us to recognize our true nature, the true luminous nature of mind. We come to know that truth which is not colored by these biases, these tendencies of mind.

I think it's really important for us to keep recognizing this aspect and not let ourselves drown in our reaction to how strong and pervasive these tendencies toward ignorance are. What we're doing is learning the conditions that let us open to truth.

In the process, another part of the discouragement is this: because we're seeing more clearly, that's precisely how we're able to be aware of how pervasive, how subtle these biases of mind are. Because of the strengthening purity of mind, I was able to deliberately do that experiment of pulling back the mindfulness and watching how these tendencies rushed in. It's because of the deepening purity, the deepening mindfulness, that we are experiencing the painful nature of these torments, these afflictions. And we're experiencing the pain much more consciously, much more fully, with a much more open heart and an open mind.

The result is that it hurts more. We notice it more frequently. And we get so enmeshed in this process that we forget to notice why it's hurting more. We only notice that things we never would have noticed two months ago are now agony. We think, "Is this what I'm giving three months of my life for? To find new and various and subtle ways to suffer?"

If we let ourselves rest in that concept, it is overwhelming. It's also not accurate. It's another filter—another filter on our perception that's distorting what we see, distorting how we understand our perceptions.

So I'd like to offer a suggestion. As we open to the truth of dukkha, as we recognize and learn to open to the torments—and we really are doing this, there's so much more equanimity, so much more wisdom, so much more ability to be with the difficult, even though you might not really remember what it was like two months ago—but sometimes we forget. We get so involved in noticing these difficult aspects that we forget something essential.

When you're being fully present with one of the torments, one of the difficulties, and it goes away, stay really present. Also notice that moment of anger vanishing, that moment of craving dissipating. Don't just go, "Oh great, now it's going back to the breath." Wait a minute. Just a second. Really notice the quality of consciousness free from kilesa. Notice the quality of consciousness in that instant of purity.

It might not be spectacular, and then we hurry back to the breath: "Let's get the concentration going now that the anger is gone." Give it a break for a minute. Notice what's happening in that moment of peace.

Begin to recognize the pure nature of consciousness. You don't have to be in such a hurry to get something else happening.

Along those lines, the rest of what I want to talk about tonight is just this: some reflections, some ways of talking about the manifestations of the pure nature of consciousness, of the purity of mind. There are many ways to speak about it, so I'm going to speak specifically in terms of the paramis, the perfections.

None of this is new. It's all reminders. I just want to balance our perception a bit.

Classically, in the Theravada tradition, when speaking of the luminous nature of mind, it doesn't really have any qualities. So in trying to talk about something with no qualities, it gets difficult. But I almost experience it as if whatever qualities we speak of are like reflections, manifestations of this luminous consciousness, not actually it itself.

Classically it's spoken of as non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion. That's the very—I don't want to say dour, but unexcited—Theravadan way of speaking about things. But these are much more than neutral, unnoticeable qualities.

Non-greed, as I've spoken of before, is the quality of non-attachment, renunciation. It also has the more active aspect of generosity—thoughts and actions of sharing, of service. Non-hatred encompasses acceptance, compassion, metta, patience. Non-delusion is that brightness of mind, that clarity of perception you all know quite well, that allows for the arising of equanimity, of insight, of understanding. Because in that illuminated clarity, we just see what is, without all the extras.

What I'm going to speak about specifically tonight are two of the paramis: generosity and patience, which are spoken of as being the perfection of non-greed and non-hatred.

But first I want to share an experience, because sometimes I find in myself, or in talking with others, that speaking about the perfection of these qualities—or even the possibility of recognizing the purity of our true nature, or that word which to some people is almost anathema, enlightenment, because it sets up so much difficulty in comparing—becomes challenging. Sometimes I've found it difficult for myself or for others to not just think about but really open to the possibility of experiencing quite deeply, or recognizing very honestly, any of these qualities of awakening: metta, compassion, generosity, patience.

There can be this sense—again coming from the space I started talking about, where we're seeing how much craving there is, how easily anger and delusion arise—a tendency to say, "Yeah, great, in some other lifetime maybe. When I can go and renounce the world. Or maybe I can experience moments of purity here, but forget it once I'm back in New York City or Boston—it's out of the question." Sometimes even thinking about these so-called awakening qualities leads one further into comparison and discouragement.

An experience that's been a kind of metaphor for me, showing that this is not true at all, happened at the

first retreat I ever did, some twenty-something years ago. It was in Bodh Gaya in India, the little village where the Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree and came to his deepest realization. Now it's still a small village, but it's obviously a big tourist attraction, with a temple there and everything. I hadn't been back for a long time.

since that first retreat, and I went back maybe four years ago with some friends. I'm not especially a devotional type, so going to a stupa, a landmark like that, I wasn't really expecting anything. I just went because I thought it would be nice going back to Bodh Gaya, a nice idea. So I wasn't prepared for how powerful an experience that was for me.

And it was really along these lines of helping me wake up to the fact that what is true is accessible to us here and now, as we are now. They have a successor to the original Bodhi tree there, a descendant, with a big temple behind it and a fence around it. So you can't actually sit underneath it, except some of the people we were with got permission and they unlocked the gate. We actually did get to sit underneath the tree one day, which thinking about it now, I think would be very humbling. What right do I have, defiled as I am, to sit underneath this tree?

But the effect of being there actually had the opposite effect. This is just a dirty little village. This is a real place. And it made me get it that the Buddha was a real person who was struggling with the same things we are, who sitting under this tree came to this understanding in this human realm. It took it out of being a myth for me and into being reality. It really touched me very deeply. I found myself just weeping, which for me is very unusual in public. It was very moving. And I thought, wow, it's really possible. It's not just some story.

Being in Bodh Gaya went on as an even deeper metaphor for me, because it also took the sense of understanding who we are, of freedom, out of the idea of, well, only if I go and spend thirty-five years in a cave, or since I stopped being a nun, I might as well hang it up. I'm lost in the frivolous life again. It can't happen in the marketplace. Bodh Gaya itself served as a real metaphor that that's not so, because this temple is just in the middle of everything. Bodh Gaya is a dirty, dusty little Indian village with all kinds of things going on outside the temple grounds. But never mind even that—within the temple grounds, you're sitting around near the tree or walking around the stupa, and there are hordes of tourist groups coming in with microphones in all different languages—Japanese, Thai, Hindi, American—running around. There was a whole group of Tibetan monks sitting on the side doing some chanting ceremony for three days. There were starving dogs fighting. There's all kinds of noise from outside. There was a mad Tibetan woman who was just running around screaming and yelling at anyone who stopped for more than a moment. There are lines and lines of beggars leading up to the temple because it's a great spot for begging. In fact, I was told some of the beggars live in the next village and take a rickshaw over to work every day to do their begging. Honestly. It's a lucrative place. I mean, there are also beggars who are truly starving, but both exist there. And Sharon or somebody told you this story about how the Hindus catch the fish out of the ponds and sell them to the Tibetans, because then they'll go and release them back into the pond to

save them. It's quite a scene.

And I thought, there's no sense of let's remove ourselves from the hubbub of life. It's all right here. It was a wonderful metaphor that reminded me it's not about having to disengage from being human, from all the beauty and total insanity that's part of life in this world. It was very inspiring for me.

That particular experience gave me more faith that it's okay to open to these supportive, these awakening qualities of experience. And again, I find—in talking with people I find—that tendency in ourselves to not trust when we've experienced generosity or metta or non-delusion, clarity. People so often say, "Yeah, well, I was compassionate then, but you should see how I feel now. I was loving, but that was only for a minute, and since then I've been lost in anger." We're so quick to try and knock it away, to deflect these really important experiences—important because if we would really recognize and honor them, they can help us to recognize what is really true. Instead, we're in such a hurry to move on to how defiled we are.

Another thing I've noticed is that when we do truly open to compassion or peace or patience, there can be a kind of poignancy, because what comes in so soon is, "Oh, this is so nice, but there's no way it can last." People are saying, "Now there's only a little more than two more full weeks of intensive sitting. How am I going to hold on to this? It's almost like I don't even know if I want to feel it because then I just start suffering because I'm craving for it." This poignancy of the ending of things. Although we know that it's not the case, that of course it's going to end—every experience is going to end, every physical and mental state is going to end—that's not a problem. In fact, when we know from the outset that whatever we're experiencing is of course going to end,

it allows us to experience it much more fully, with a much greater depth of appreciation for it just as it is, without needing it to continue for our happiness. It's really quite wonderful, and in itself it deepens and opens our potential for resting more easily in the natural state of awareness—instead of being so afraid to touch it that we run back to our familiar pain.

I'm not talking especially about an ecstatic high. That's kind of another way we get sidetracked. That's why I'd really suggest you just keep looking at those moments. Notice, feel the quality of those moments when you're not caught in kilesa. Don't get distracted by looking for something with fireworks. Just notice those moments of purity.

So that was the introduction. I can see I'm not going to make it through this whole thing. We'll edit as we go along. Maybe we'll talk about one parami tonight, I don't know.

To continue, I wanted to talk about these qualities in terms of the paramis, which I know has been spoken of a little before. Paramis are often translated as perfections or noble qualities, described as perfections of character or conduct—especially the perfections in the bodhisattvas or the noble ones. I see the paramis as a reflection in action, a reflection in character of the true understanding of our nature, of what we really are, of truth. As this reflection of the luminous, pure nature of mind, it manifests in our daily

activities as something you can get a handle on. You can notice your conduct. You can notice your character. It can serve as a radiance back to the luminous pure nature, if you want to put it that way. But it's also a way to work in relational activities—to notice these perfections of character or conduct in our activities, in our relations to each other.

I want to list the ten paramis, not for you to remember or hold onto intellectually, but just so you can recognize them experientially when they arise. They're not just some offhand experience. The first is generosity. Then sila, or conscious conduct. The third is renunciation of attachment. Fourth is wisdom. Fifth is energy. Sixth is patience or perseverance. The seventh is truthfulness. The eighth is resolution. Ninth is metta. Tenth is equanimity. You'll recognize that many of these have been ongoing themes we've been speaking of.

On first hearing or looking at the list, I wondered, what about compassion? That's not on the list. I thought that was the other wing. But quite interestingly, in looking at the commentaries about the paramis, it says that all the paramis, all ten of them, have the characteristic—in other words, what you can tell about them—of benefiting others. And that the immediate cause for a parami, for any of the ten to arise, is compassion and skillful means. So what that's saying is that intrinsic to all of these paramis is compassion and skillful means.

Tonight I want to talk more about the paramis of generosity, and hopefully patience—we'll see.

Generosity, as I say, is related to non-greed, which is non-attachment. But generosity is a movement of that, like a spilling out, the generous giving out of energy and connecting with the world around us, connecting with others, really moving out of being enclosed in ourselves into an active state of interconnectedness.

If you think of attachment, you can feel how it's this state of mind that compulsively refers everything back to myself. What can I have? What does this mean to me? What do people think about me? What's going to happen to me? Everything that happens, we refer back to how it's going to affect me. It's a very contracted, separate, closed state.

Non-attachment is not only free of that constriction, but the energy that goes into holding that—and it's a huge amount of energy—is then free to turn back out to others, to sort of spill outwards into the movement of generosity. So with the arising of non-greed come natural generous impulses in any of a variety of forms. You all see that here. You see as the retreat goes on, people are doing all kinds of sweet little generous acts for each other, or just having generous thoughts.

A generous thought is also the same intention. And so it shows that generosity, this *parami*, arises and is strengthened quite naturally by our mindfulness. Each moment of mindfulness in which greed dissolves—that compulsive referring back to "I"—that moment of purification allows for the potential of generosity to arise in consciousness.

As with all of the *paramis*, as with everything, we always come back to say that mindfulness practice is one of the strongest protections we have, and really the most powerful way that allows all these qualities to develop naturally—or really to be uncovered, I would even say, more than developed.

We can also see how the practice of generosity itself is a very powerful practice, not only to develop the feelings of generosity, but actually as an opening into wisdom, into understanding, into interconnectedness. In fact, as you know, often when the Buddha spoke of his teachings, he broke them into three very basic practices: *dana*, which is generosity; *sila*, which is moral conduct; and *bhavana*, which is mental development.

Generosity doesn't have a specific form, of course. They talk of threefold generosity. The first is giving of material things. The second is giving of fearlessness, which I think is very interesting—giving of fearlessness described as protection of beings from harm. One very powerful way we have of giving fearlessness is through our moral conduct. It's often said that through our conduct of non-harming, we are giving other beings the great gift of fearlessness in knowing that we will not harm them. And the third is giving of the Dhamma, in whatever way that manifests in us.

Of course, working with Dhamma as practice, it's not so much in the observable results, but it always comes back to intention—the intention in consciousness, the intention in the mind that gives rise to the thought, the speech, or the action of generosity.

In this country, *dana* isn't so culturally instituted as a practice. When I was a nun in Thailand, I think one of the most profound learnings I had was on the power and the beauty of the practice of generosity, because it's part of the culture there around the practice of Buddhism. It was really very profound for me. It's very strong in the culture.

Being there as a nun or a monk, you're completely supported by people in the temples. Even as a lay person, you can go to pretty much almost any temple in the country—and there are thousands and thousands of temples—and no matter how poor or how crowded, you just walk in and say you want to practice and you're made welcome. You're given a place to stay, you're given food. If you need some supplies and they have it, they'll give it to you. And there's not the slightest ounce of begrudgingness about this. It's done with so much openness and so much joy that it really blew me away.

Even when I first went to ordain, I went to a temple north of Bangkok, a very rich temple where the abbot was old and revered and well-known. I mean, I was just somebody who walked off the street. He didn't know anything about me. And he was showing me around a little *kuti* I could stay in—the abbot himself, which he didn't need to do—and it was very dusty. He said, "Oh, it's so dusty, you know," and he starts trying to clean it up for me. Very pure, just: let's make this as nice as possible. And it continued like that however long I stayed, anywhere I went.

I was in one small temple in the north that only had about six little *kutis* for women, a serious practice

temple, and the *kutis* were all filled with Thai nuns. On any day, unexpectedly, any number of people could show up and want to stay. Once about ten women showed up, which is a lot when there are only six huts. The head nun, every time this happened, in an instant she'd give up her hut, put as many in it as possible, and go stay in the cave or stay in the woods with such joy. And then all the other Thai nuns would pack in as many as they needed to in each *kuti*. And me being the honored guest, they never put anyone else in my *kuti*, even though it meant they were sleeping four to one of these tiny little huts. It was really beautiful.

I would think back to when I was on staff, and I thought: was I ready to give up my room so another yogi could come and stay when the place was full? Did the idea even cross my mind? It's very beautiful to see.

I could go on and on, but my whole year there was just the experience of one act of beautiful generosity after the other, none of it forced. Really seeing how it works in people—because generosity kind of drives away, doesn't leave room for unwholesome states. To give, you have to first look at your attachment to something and let go of it. And then in the giving there's some affection, some *metta*, some caring, a real unity. It brings a real brightness, a joy, like sympathetic joy.

You could see that in the generosity of the people I met in Thailand, over and over and over—a happiness and a joy that arose in their consciousness in the process of their acts of generosity. That was really beautiful and very deep and profound. It's something I see on occasion here, on occasion in myself, but not in such an ongoing, spontaneous, and really deep way as I experienced in Thailand.

You can also see how in the act of generosity it strengthens our understanding of interrelatedness. In the giving, you can't give without a receiver. You can't receive without a giver.

Giving is an openness into our interrelatedness with another person. I think that's one of the reasons it's often suggested that if you're having difficulty with somebody, you give them a gift. This doesn't mean throwing them some piece of junk that you don't want anymore—"Here, take this." We're talking about real, deep, genuine giving, true intention of giving.

The teachings say not to give with resentment. As stated in the commentaries, "Do not give detesting the gift or those who ask for it." That's not the intention of generosity. When we're giving with pure intention, there's that volition to give up whatever it is completely, without any expectation of return.

Just in that moment—and don't use this as another club to beat yourself because you're not a hundred percent pure in your intentions of generosity. It's a practice.

Some of the teachings from Sayadaw U Pandita speak about how to work with an act of giving as a conscious practice for opening our own understanding. First, in an act of giving, really give attention to the volition, to the intention, so that it purifies through our intention. In other words, if we're giving and we see that we're really giving because we want something back, the noticing of that in itself can be enough to purify the intention.

Also, as we're giving, we can see the clinging we have to whatever it is we're giving, whether it's our time or a thing. In that seeing of the clinging, we allow that clinging to dissolve, giving the gift freely.

And then something I learned directly from U Pandita is, if possible—but not here, please, until the retreat is over—to give directly, hand to hand. I had given him a book that I knew he wanted, and it had been passed to him while I was sitting. When I went over, he made me sign it, and I just kind of put it down. He said, "No," correcting me. He made me pick it up and give it to him hand to hand, really looking at each other.

There is such a different depth of power and presence in the act when it's done in that way. I really felt full faith and confidence in the act of giving, being fully present for it, and also much more aware of the interrelatedness of giver and receiver—that both are present. The sense of the metta moving back and forth, so that you really couldn't tell whose was whose, made the whole act so much more alive, so much more profound. It was really quite a beautiful lesson.

At the same time as giving, we give with the mind really focused on the act of giving—in other words, just being really present. Not just "here" and then "now I'm going to go do whatever I want to do, glad that's over with," but being really present.

This next point I thought was interesting because it acknowledges the momentariness of all experience: after the act of giving, continue to be aware, mindful of the intention, of the volition, because of course it can easily change. We all know that—giving with the purest of intention, and ten minutes later the thought comes up, "Oh gee, I wonder if I should have given that. I could have really used it." Just to notice that. Of course things change, and again, in the noticing is the purification.

Also, to be aware of the broader context of giving—I think this also comes in with purity of intention. In other words, giving what is really useful and what is helpful. The commentaries go into long lists of the kinds of situations and things in which you wouldn't give. For example, you don't give something harmful, even if it's what the person really wants.

It reminded me of when my sister was very severely ill and was in intensive care in the hospital, on one of these respirators for days. She couldn't drink; all she could have was ice chips. I've never been on one, but apparently it's just torment—your throat is dry and horribly unpleasant, and all you want is something to drink. And that's the one thing you can't have. I just remember her begging, pleading. It was really heartrending.

That's an extreme example, but in that instance, it's not compassionate and it's not a true act of generosity to give water when she's going to choke to death on it. You give what you can—the ice chips that would be helpful. Or you give compassion, or you give love in that instance. You give what is helpful, and that's the true giving.

Also, allowing oneself to receive in the same focused, present, allowing way is equally powerful, and I

think it's vital. It's really a way of looking at the purity of our intentions of giving. If we can only give but we can't receive, it doesn't work that way.

For instance, one of the other powerful lessons about being on the receiving end in Thailand—knowing how we live here and how poor the people were there, and how much they were giving. I knew I could write home and have anything I wanted or however much money I wanted, and these people were really sacrificing to give me food. It's hard, given our conceptual framework, not to feel totally rotten about myself, completely undeserving.

Now, there are a couple of mistakes in that. One is taking it personally. The giving is not personal. It's supporting the Dhamma. It's supporting anyone who practices and carries on true intention of spreading and supporting the Dhamma. It's not "I like you as a person" or "I don't like you as a person," so "I support this one and not another." It's not personal.

And it's also seeing that in blocking—by not receiving really deeply and genuinely and openly—we block the flow of generosity. There was so much joy coming to the people from the giving. It was wonderful to watch. And if I were to say, "No, I won't take that," you can feel how it just stops the energy. Or if I say, "Well, I'm not deserving of that"—that's just a way of... It's really, in a way, a giving to receive when what you're receiving is being given with such pure intention.

Notice it here, even in our culture, in one common way: in receiving compliments. Never mind thanks, but how...

how hard it is for some of us to just really let someone say something very positive about us. We say, "Oh, well, you know..." We turn it away, we're incredibly uncomfortable, we want to list all the reasons that's not true. It stops the flow of interconnectedness. It brings us into feeling quite separate.

To receive with the same purity of intention is equally a part of this movement of generosity, of non-attachment. And of course, giving—I'm not just talking about things. It includes service, giving of our time, giving of our care, any way in which this movement of non-attachment, of generosity, moves out to others.

The second parami I want to talk about is patience. Patience is said to be the perfection of non-hatred in character and in conduct. And I can really feel how that's the case. It has the characteristic of acceptance, obviously—this quality of acceptance, a kind of equanimity. But it really means enduring difficulties, harmful or difficult situations, whether brought on by other beings or by internal formations.

So sitting here, you know, it's being patient not only with the external situation but with all the internal difficulties as well. It's not a state of endurance tinged with aversion—"Please God, let me get through this until something better comes my way." That's not patience. Patience is the state of consciousness, the act of consciousness itself. It's not only the span of time that you can be with something, but it's that momentary arising of consciousness that is dominated by non-aversion or acceptance, again accompanied

by compassion or skillful means.

And what I think is really interesting is that another immediate cause, the proximate cause for patience to arise, is seeing things as they really are. Patience isn't just something we do because we can't do anything better—"I'll be patient until I can get really clear and mindful." Patience arises from seeing things as they really are. I don't think we should underestimate the importance of the consciousness of patience in opening us to wisdom and to truth.

Again, I don't know why I'm in Thailand tonight, but Thailand was also one of my best teachers in learning patience. Because aside from how beautiful and generous everyone was, it was a very difficult experience. I went there to practice with the idea that I would do a long period, a couple of years, of intensive practice. I had places like IMS or similar retreat centers in England as my model—long, quiet, peaceful. Forget it.

I thought I'd be out in the woods, a real nature retreat. Instead, I spent months in Bangkok in this temple where I ordained, which was actually very nice for Bangkok but incredibly noisy. Loudspeakers blaring all the time. Three in the morning, a hundred roosters decide to wake up every single morning. People everywhere, hordes and hordes of tourists.

Even when I got to the woods, the temples would have people come in on tour buses because it's sort of like their parks. They come on Sunday, have picnics, wander around, look at the monks and nuns, take pictures of you as you're doing walking meditation—right in your face. And incredibly hot. Incredibly hot. In Bangkok during the hot season, I'd wake up and see that ball of sun coming up over the horizon and think, "I can't bear another day." It would just go on and on. Finally I got out to the country, out to the woods, to this little temple I was telling you about, way back in the forest by a riverbed.

It sounds idyllic. The forest is not quiet. The forest is so loud I could not believe it. So many insects and lizards and snakes and bats and birds and monkeys. Incredibly loud. You can't imagine it if you haven't been sitting there, waiting for mangoes dropping on the tin roof like explosions during mango season.

One night there was a strong rain and the river, which was really low, rose about five feet. It was a river with woods on each side and then sheer cliffs going up, so the sound just reverberated back and forth between the cliffs. I remember thinking—literally—that I was going to lose my mind that night from the noise of the river. I was losing it. I was losing it in aversion. I thought this stuff was an obstacle to my practice. There's no way to practice in this kind of environment, never mind the bugs and the ants, and poisonous—I could go on forever.

So this was two or three months or more into my stay. When I finally got it, I said, "Oh, these things are not an obstacle to my practice. My reactive mind is an obstacle to my practice." If I didn't start paying attention, I could see that what I was really cultivating was aversion. I could spend years cultivating aversion, or I could start to work with patience. The choice was mine.

It made a huge difference to see that. I mean, it didn't make it more pleasant—I didn't like the conditions

any better—

But as that reactivity that made everything a struggle began to fall away, there arose this quality of simply being with whatever it is that we cannot change.

Now, the Buddha spoke also of skillful avoidance. Patience doesn't mean enduring a really harmful situation that you can actually do something about. For example, if there was a particular food that made me violently ill and there were other things to eat, it wouldn't be patience to think, "Well, I'll just eat this food along with all the others and be violently ill." That's not necessary. Sometimes we get a little confused and think that skillful discernment means we're not being patient. But that's not the case.

It's with the things we can't change that patience reveals its true nature—pain in your body, having the flu, the person next to you who moves a lot, an unexpected message from home that stirs up a whole whirlwind in your mind. With situations we cannot change, this quality of patience is not just a way to help us get through to something better. It is the quality that arises because we know what's true, and it allows us to deeply open into the truth of who we are instead of looking for something spectacular.

I want to read something Ajahn Sumedho says about patience, about this sense of not looking for something spectacular. Ajahn Sumedho is an American monk who practiced for many years under Ajahn Chah, the great Thai forest monk, and now has a monastery in England.

He talks a lot about being patient in Thailand, about how hard it was and how he eventually stopped wanting to be really interesting and fascinating. He realized that was a waste of time, sweating in a kuti in Northeast Thailand. He started looking at the water buffaloes and thinking, "There's the most stupid-looking creature in the world—a Thai water buffalo." So he would sit there trying to tell himself, "That's what I need to do. Be like a Thai water buffalo." He'd just sit and create the image in his mind of a water buffalo—becoming more stupid, more dull, more patient, and less fascinating and clever and interesting.

He's talking about this quality of patience, not just getting through something, but how it opens in us quite deeply the truth. He says:

"Buddha wisdom is a very humbling wisdom, and it takes a great deal of patience to be wise like the Buddha. Buddha wisdom is not a particularly fascinating kind of wisdom. It's not like being a nuclear physicist or a psychiatrist or a philosopher. Buddha wisdom is very humbling because it knows that whatever arises passes away and is not self. So it knows that whatever condition of the body and mind arises, it's conditioned, it passes away. And it knows the unconditioned as the unconditioned."

And this is the part I think is interesting:

"But is knowing the unconditioned very interesting or fascinating? Try to think of knowing the unconditioned. Would it be interesting? You might think, 'I'd like to know God or Dhamma. It's going to be

an incredibly fascinating thing to know—something blissful and ecstatic.' So you look in your meditation for that kind of experience. You think that getting high is getting close. But the unconditioned is as interesting as the space in this room. The space in this room—is it very interesting to look at? It's not to me. The space in this room is like the space in the other room. The things in this room might be interesting or uninteresting or whatever—good, bad, beautiful, ugly. But the space, what is it? There's nothing you can really say or think about it. It has no quality except being spacious."

And to be able to be really spacious, one has to be patient.

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