Attachment

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 55:40

Tonight I want to talk about, in an experiential way hopefully, something that I find really fascinating. I get really happy somehow talking about this. And the subject is attachment, or grasping. Not that grasping is happy, but I just find the exploration of it so interesting. It's really key to the nature of suffering and the nature of freedom.

Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche said once that Buddha nature, the essence of awakened enlightenment itself, is present in everyone, all the time. It can't be improved upon, it can't be changed, and you'll also be glad to know it can't be degenerated. We can't harm it, no matter what we do. Buddhas simply recognize what the rest of us ignore—the true nature of all of us.

In working with our meditation practice, it's really on the principle that what keeps us ignoring our true nature is that it's veiled by temporary obscurations, temporary things in the way. The example often given is the way that clouds hide the sky or seem to block the radiance of the sun, although actually having no effect whatsoever on the sky or the radiance of the sun.

Our conventional meditation practices, this is also from Nyoshul Khenpo, can work in two ways to uncover our true nature. One is by dissolving the obscurations, which then lets our innate purity shine through. And the other is by simply recognizing these obscurations for the ephemeral, impermanent, insubstantial phenomena that they are. In either case, letting us notice, revealing what has always been present—our Buddha nature, so to speak, or our innate purity.

The phenomenon of clinging, of grasping, of attachment, is in some ways one of the key obscurations that we get blinded by. So much so that the Buddha, in elucidating his Four Noble Truths—the first one I'm not allowed to talk about because it's the nature of suffering; that's all I'm going to say about suffering—the second one is that the innate cause of suffering is craving or clinging, strengthening into attachment. It's that important. It's that key as an obscuration.

So I want to explore it together.

Several people have commented either about yesterday or other times during this retreat, and at times not on retreat, where there's been a sense—whatever you want to call it—of just this pristine, total interconnectedness. No sense of self, no sense of separation from environment. Maybe just warmth, maybe just hearing, maybe just seeing. Just the sense of being—a totally interrelated, all-encompassing experience with actually no me, no other, no sense of separation.

That's not some unusual experience that's been somehow created out of the intensity of a meditation

retreat. It's not like taking a drug that can put the mind into some kind of altered perception that's dependent on the drug. This clarity, this state of just being but in vivid awakeness, is an intimation of the purity of our nature. And it's not that we've created it. It's just that for once there's a moment where it's not being obscured by the contraction of grasping, the contraction of wanting, the contraction of self.

Nisargadatta Maharaj said once that the obstacles to the clear perception of one's true being are desire for pleasure and fear of pain. Both of those can really come under attachment, under grasping.

So I want to experientially describe attachment or grasping—how it functions in our experience, how it affects our experience and obscures the truth.

Craving or wanting, which we've spoken about quite a bit in relationship to pleasant experience and the mind inclining towards it, could be likened to groping in the dark for something. The mind is inclining towards it. If we don't notice at that point what's going on, it just strengthens. And where we were just kind of groping for something, it's like—ah, gotcha. And then the whole train starts. That's grasping or attachment.

What is going on at the basic, very basic level of our moment-to-moment experience? You may have noticed that as complicated as we can make everything in our interpretations and descriptions, when you get down to moment-to-moment awareness, there are only six types of experience that we're having. Just flowing through over and over. We're just seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling sensation in the body, and mental experience happening in the moment. That's all. Over and over.

Broken down to that, there are the sense doors—those six. There's a sense object: a sight or a sound, a thought, whatever. And when there's consciousness, when those come together and there's consciousness knowing of it, that's called contact. Just a moment of seeing, a moment of hearing. And as we've said, then there's the pleasantness, the unpleasantness, the neutrality that comes with it. And following that, if we're not paying attention, the craving can come.

Or if it's unpleasant and we push it away, again it moves into grasping for something else. If there's just clear awareness, even in that moment of "ah, I kind of like that sound," that could just be it. It doesn't have to lead into a whole story and a whole field of suffering.

But when we're not really noticing—and this happens so fast and so frequently, quite a lot of the time—we're not really noticing, and it so quickly strengthens into this sense of attachment or grasping.

So just the thought comes up: a walk might be nice. That could be all it is. But without noticing it, there's a sense of "yeah, a walk would really be nice. In fact, right now I really want to go for a walk. I don't know if I can last through the rest of the sitting. It's really a mistake that I haven't taken a walk." And it can just lead us off into a two-and-a-half-hour walk.

It's nothing to do with a value judgment of walk or not. The whole discussion of attachment and grasping

has nothing to do with the thing grasped at, but only with looking at the process of attachment and grasping itself. And as complex as the thing grasped at might become—a walk and my sense of union with nature, and after all I came here from the city and I should see it, and I haven't been over that ridge, and on and on and on—it all started just at that basic sense contact. No matter how complex any of our desires and fears are, it's starting at that basic moment of sense contact. Which is one of the reasons a meditation retreat can be quite interesting, because it gives us the chance once in a while to notice that moment, fast as it is.

This is from the Buddha, from the Sutta Nipata, which is one of my favorite books of suttas—it's sometimes quite poetic:

For some people, contact, the point where sense plus object meet, is enthralling. And so they are washed by the tides of being, drifting along an empty, pointless road.

He never minced words.

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 is, and so their craving ends. They realize the total calm.

He doesn't say get rid of it—simply understand our sense activity. And in the understanding, this getting lost in craving and grasping ends. We can experience the calm that is always accessible when we're not blinded by grasping.

For me, a large part of my practice over all these years has been an active inquiry into the nature and experience of grasping, of attachment, as it arises. Krishnamurti said once that unless the ways of desire are understood, illusion is inevitable.

So here we have a great laboratory. Just sitting, just walking—it's not too complicated—and we really have a chance to notice the moments when grasping arises. What's it like?

Take a sitting. Simply relaxed, alert awareness, whether it's tuned with hearing or the breath—doesn't really matter—but there's not the sense of tightness. Just awake. All the various six experiences are coming and going. There's hearing, there's internal images, there's sensations, there's thoughts, there's emotions, coming and going. And there can still be just this sense of spacious, alert presence. No problem.

And then suddenly, whatever it happens to be, some experience arises, just floats up: "I wonder if I should make that phone call." And it's grasped at. What does it feel like? What's the experience? How is it different from the instant before?

For myself, I feel it actually as a physical contraction around that "I should make the phone call," whatever it is. And from that moment, there's a strong sense of separation, a tension, a discomfort. What had been just what it is—actually no analysis, you wouldn't even say there was no sense of self or other

because you aren't even thinking about that—but from that sense of "I should make the phone call," it becomes a very strong sense of me versus what I need to do, versus what I want. The object grasped, the phone call, all the things. The sitting, which previously had just been what it was, fine, is now in the way. Where we might have been quite open and appreciative of whatever was happening, in the moment of grasping, that appreciation, that connection is not accessible.

Separation. Tension. Strong sense of me and other.

And if we don't notice what's going on, we tend to just focus rather on the thing we're grasping at. The whole story proliferates enormously. It's very seductive, this energy of grasping.

It's so easy to get drawn into this energy of grasping. Most of our training tells us that when you want something, if it's attainable, you're supposed to go get it. That's the obvious thing to do—it gets rid of the suffering of the wanting.

What we can do here, however, is shift our attention to what's actually going on when that grasping is present. We begin to see how it's the grasping itself that's creating the suffering, the separation, the lack of peace.

Sayadaw U Pandita, our Burmese teacher, said once that you can see ignorance manifesting in two different ways. One is that when ignorance is present in a moment, we don't see what is here—we simply don't recognize what is here clearly. The second way it manifests is that we misconstrue what we do see, and then we see something that actually isn't here at all.

This has many levels. Certainly on the ultimate level that I started with, we don't see our innate purity, and we do see a lot of separation and unhappiness and wanting. But even on a more mundane level, the way that grasping works when it arises in our experience and we don't notice it is exactly in these two ways: it blinds us to what is here—we can't appreciate what is here—and we can see something that absolutely isn't here at all.

A small anecdote. I was told at a retreat I was doing in California this spring by friends on staff that I wasn't allowed to tell this anymore, because they'd heard it too much. Well, probably not too many of you have heard it. Besides, I thought if Joseph could tell his chicken story, I could tell mine.

It's just a perfect little anecdote on a mundane level to see how attachment functions. I was at this retreat in California—it's in the desert—and I was sitting talking with another friend I teach with. Someone had come from outside to visit in the middle of the afternoon, quite hot and dry. We were having a very pleasant, relaxed conversation, quite appreciative, quite at ease, until this visitor said, "Well, I just had this great chocolate milkshake at this new place down the road."

For some reason, that particular idea just hit us. My friend and I looked at each other. We didn't have to say anything. We both knew: we've got to go now. And really, we stopped being interested in the

conversation. We were answering in monosyllables, just kind of wishing the person would leave so we could go get a milkshake. Not noticing this process at all—it was all in hindsight. Because if you notice, you can say, "I don't really need this."

Anyway, we jumped in a car because we had to be back for the next sitting, and went flying down to this place, which had literally closed ten minutes before. So we're like, "Oh." But this is where the energy of grasping is really seductive—it feeds on itself. One moment feeds the next. Instead of the sensible thing, which is just to go back and give it up, we said, "Where on this road could we get a milkshake?" It's one of these strips. We've been up and down it hundreds of times. We should have known.

So I was driving, and we're driving in a frenzy. My friend is looking, trying to see where there might be something. He looks over and says, "Over there—Yogurt Cafe!" I looked. I said, "That says Urgent Care."

It's embarrassing, but true. And that didn't even stop us. We kept looking. We didn't find anything. We came back.

And then, poof, it was over. But this is precisely what's so scary about it—because it's so obvious. How much of the time is this going on when it's *not* so obvious? A lot. Really a lot.

So grasping distorts what we see. It brings us a sense of separation, an inability to be connected and appreciative of what's happening now. And it seriously impairs judgment. That's the very nature of it.

One of my friends spent some years with a Chinese Taoist master in Colorado, and he's always telling me different little lines this teacher used to say. One that he repeated often was, "Stop this slavish behavior." And that's exactly what we're doing when we're in the grip of grasping—we're slavishly following this mental state that says we can do anything to get whatever it is we want.

I'm using simple examples here. Of course it's much more complicated in our actual lives. And it's really important to understand that looking at the pain and confusion that comes with grasping is in no way a negative evaluation of whatever the particular object is. It's *how* we're relating to any object that's blinding us.

So if we could really use the rest of our days here as a laboratory to explore this phenomenon of clinging and grasping when it arises—and probably it might even come up once or twice tonight before you go to bed, you never know, certainly a few times in the next days—just see if you can remember, which is not our natural conditioning, to turn the attention away from whatever elicited the grasping and onto the actual experience arising in the moment.

Notice the physical clenching. Notice—don't believe me—look and see if you feel a sense of separation. Look and see: what does it really feel like? What's the relationship to the environment? What's the relationship to other people? What's the relationship to the object that's grasped?

And it's not about trying to talk ourselves out of it—"Oh no, I don't need this, I can do without it." Really

look at the clinging, look at the grasping, because that's how we learn about it. Let ourselves experience it quite fully.

And you can also see that it's nothing to be afraid of. The experience of clinging is simply another arising appearance. It doesn't have to be so overwhelming. We don't have to get so wrapped up in it. We can turn our awareness to it, and in this way see through this obscuration as simply another ephemeral appearance that doesn't have to have this power to make us slaves.

In trying to turn our attention to this area of attachment or grasping, it's often spoken of in four different areas, just as a way to help us tune in—some more obvious than others—to places where we might not even recognize that clinging is going on.

The first and perhaps most obvious area where we get caught in grasping is around sense pleasures. Most of the examples I've been giving have been sense pleasures. It's kind of concrete, kind of obvious. We all do it.

It's interesting, because the moment we're caught in thinking, "This rice cake at tea is really going to be the thing that makes me happy"—no, it gets that bad sometimes on a three-month course—or this walk, or this swim, or this whatever. Not that it won't be pleasant. But as soon as the grasping is in the mode of "This is what's really going to make me happy," clearly it stems from

that stems from — first, the delusion that there's a "me" in the first place, but I'm not allowed to talk about that too much either. That will come up tomorrow. And second, the total denial of impermanence. The notion that any particular impermanent, passing experience is going to really make us happy — this is such a way to keep us suffering.

In our society, at least here, I actually think it's a misfortune for us because we are just bombarded by sense pleasures, the possibility for one after the other. And even though we might choose to live quite simply compared to the rest of our culture, it's really easy. I find myself, if I come back from Asia or even from England, when I come back to the States — I live relatively simply, but within a few days I'm just overwhelmed by the potential for pleasant sense experience.

Anything you want to eat, you just have to go out and get it, or you can get it frozen at the health food supermarket down the road. Anything you want to see, any game you want to play, anyone I want to talk to anywhere in the world — I can just pick up the phone. Anytime I want to take a walk, it's just endless. Anything I want to buy, anything I want to wear, it just goes on and on and on.

And what this does is that instead of really being able to see the suffering, the discontent that comes from the wanting, it's just so easy. As soon as one wanting is satiated, the mind immediately jumps to the next. And if it can't get that, it just makes a little lateral trip and gets something else. It never has to last without sense pleasures in our culture for too long without finding some kind of substitute.

It's too bad for us because it makes it harder to see the point that the happiness of getting what we want isn't getting the thing we want. It's the fact that in that moment, the grasping has stopped. It's this peace that comes from the ending of grasping. But unfortunately, we associate it with the rice cake or the orange or the new relationship or the ice cream milkshake or whatever it is. And since that one did such a good job, maybe I should have two. I should have one every day. We can just keep expanding.

I think it's for this reason the Buddha — again, he could get pretty intense — talked a lot about the dangers of sense pleasures. I'm just going to say a little bit. I'm not going to go on as strong a riff as he does. I just want to give you an idea.

These are some of his examples. Sense pleasures are a piece of raw flesh, a piece of waste meat of a butchered animal that a bird might pick up in its beak. That's not the worst. Sense pleasures are a pit of burning charcoal into which we may be pushed and burned to death. Sense pleasures are a poisonous snake, dangerous beyond measure.

Actually, these next ones I relate to more. Sense pleasures are a dream, short-lived and not real. Sense pleasures are borrowed possessions — they do not belong to us, and we cannot hold on to them. That's actually more my experience. But I wanted to put out how dangerous the Buddha says it is.

In my understanding, it's not a value judgment on pleasant experience. It's not a value judgment on eating nice food or having a relationship or whatever. Rather, it's to alert us to how seductive this energy and the pattern of grasping is, and how easily we can get drawn into trying to satisfy our yearning for inner completeness by trying to fill it up, pulling in pleasant things from the outside. It's like trying to quench thirst with salt water. It doesn't work.

There's a kind of intensity of pleasure that can come from satisfying a sense desire. And I've noticed in myself that sometimes, at first, the idea of the peace that comes from the absence of grasping doesn't quite feel like it would do it. It's not quite so intense. It doesn't have the charge of the next, more intense sense experience. I think, at least personally, that can be another seduction that keeps us from seeing that it's the grasping itself that's the real suffering, that's the real obscuration.

So play with it. Here again, in this laboratory of being on retreat, when you're sitting — or maybe more when you're walking, because when you're walking and a really strong sense of something you want comes up and you feel it really turning into grasping, whether it's a phone call or having a cup of tea or taking a walk or taking a shower, it doesn't matter what it is — if you're walking, there's this sense: "Oh, I could go do this now."

It's a good thing to do. Just stop a minute. Don't say, "No, it's bad, I shouldn't do it." But stop and really let yourself, as I was saying, be with that grasping, with that whole attachment. Just feel like you're going to die from wanting whatever it is. And just stand there with it, as spacious awareness as possible, feel it in your body, notice the thoughts, let it be, and notice as it dissipates. And it definitely will dissipate, since it's

also impermanent.

It might be intensely uncomfortable, because all our conditioning tells us you're not supposed to be with this. But just hang out with it, and then notice what's the experience when the grasping is completely gone. I know for me, if I tune in, it's really the peace of non-grasping. And in some ways, the same peace or even a more profound peace than if I went and did or got the thing that the grasping was about. It's reconnecting again to the peace of completeness that grasping only obscures.

So use it, and use the little things. Don't pick the most difficult time in your life, but just the little things, and watch it. I play with it a lot in my day-to-day life sometimes, when I'm not totally obscured by delusion. I do it a lot shopping, going in, looking at clothes, and this desire will come up, and I'll just walk out of the store and watch it. Of course, it helps that everything's so expensive I can't afford it, but that's another thing.

Just play with that and go out and let the desire come and go and see: my happiness is not dependent on having this thing. And there's not a negativity in that. This is not a judgment. It's just giving yourself a chance to play with this to see we don't have to be driven. The peace of not grasping might not have the oomph, but it's a lot more stable even though it's subtle.

Sometimes we get entranced, not even by the thing that the grasping is after, but the actual energy, the movement of mind, of grasping itself, is somehow entrancing, enthralling. There's a haiku I really like. I think it's by Basho. It says: "Though I'm in Kyoto, when the cuckoo sings, I long for Kyoto." You just get lost in that longing without any sense of where you are.

I saw the movie *Shadowlands* some months ago and there's just one line in it that really hit me. The character playing C.S. Lewis was teaching a class and talking about the chivalric ideal of love, which was—I'm paraphrasing—that the perfect chivalric ideal of love is one that is absolutely unattainable, so that you have this perfection of longing for the rest of your life. And I thought, oh my God, what a way to live. To have the mind actually turn that longing into an ideal to be strived for is really very telling of how we can get so far afield from being able to recognize what is true, by confusing the longing itself for happiness.

This doesn't mean, and I really don't feel the Buddha was advocating, that we adopt a kind of grim negativity to any sense of pleasure or joy, or that we become grim ascetics. Sometimes, and I've experienced it in talking with people, and sometimes in Thailand, some of the monks or nuns can take the rules that are set up—which are very much made to strip away the possibility of getting caught in sense pleasures—and turn them in a way that becomes this grim fear of anything pleasant. Where a monk gets into this state of fear and negativity to even see a woman, or vice versa. And I've seen some people eating one meal a day, supposedly for restraint and renunciation, who could pack in more in twenty minutes than you would think is humanly possible. Mounds of food. It's really awestruck, actually. I don't think that's exactly restraint of the senses and really cultivating freedom from grasping.

Again from Thích Nhất Hạnh, on how to strike that balance: "We have to distinguish between indulging in sense pleasures and the joy and happiness that we experience when we are mindful and at peace. Attachment to sense pleasures can bring about suffering and entanglement, both in the present moment and the future, for ourselves and for others. The joy and happiness of a peaceful mind bring neither suffering nor attachment in the present or in the future, for ourselves or for others." Two quite different things.

And again, when there's not grasping, the appreciation for what is, for the beautiful, is actually much more poignant. The grasping actually blinds me to the real connected appreciation. The Buddha said once that to a wise person, what is beautiful in the world remains so, but the wise one no longer strives after it. It's not that we cease to appreciate, but with just the willingness to restrain the instant gratification, we can open up a whole new world of appreciation, of joy, of presence and connectedness.

So that's sense pleasures. The second

field of grasping, as it's spoken of, is called grasping at views and opinions.

This one I find very fascinating, and usually most of us will hit some point where we rapidly disagree with it—when we begin to hit the view that we're really attached to.

View, in this context, means the tendency of the mind to think, "This way of looking is true and everything else is false." It's obvious when we know that's what we're doing. Where it's much more insidious is that a lot of the time we don't even know we're holding a view or attached to a view. We just honestly, deeply think this is how it is. And that's when it's really threatening.

When we're attached to a view, obviously, people with opposing views come into conflict with each other. When we're attached to a view, it really limits our world because what we tend to do in the attachment to a view—certainly we use views, but in the attachment to one—we tend to not let in any perceptions that counteract our view. We say, "This is true," and when someone comes and says something opposite, my mind immediately goes, "Well, what do they know? They don't know about this. I know. This is true."

This is something you must run up against all the time in the work that you do. It might be easier for us to see how other people are attached to their views and how their views are so clearly incorrect and based on false information. The challenge, of course—I don't even need to say it—is how closely are we willing to inquire into what's a view for us?

The real damage, the real dangers that can come in this world from rabid attachment to views and not knowing it are obvious. I don't even need to mention it, but I'll take just one example from a book that I read, just because it's so heartbreaking. Many of you may have read Randy Shilts' book *And the Band Played On*—how the whole AIDS epidemic began to be investigated and discovered and gradually mushroom out of control. Again, being aware that anything I read, the person writing—and Shilts was incredibly, incredibly clear—is also going to be slightly distorting information through their own view. It's

just what we do.

But anyway, even within that, to see in the whole process of the disease first coming to light and the investigation of what it could be and starting to make the links between people that had it—how the information that was coming out of it being sexually transmitted, of it growing in logarithmic proportion, really scary. There are sort of a couple of heroes and heroines in the book, the people who were really discovering, just scientifically collecting the data and trying to put it out. And every single group that was at all involved was somehow being threatened in whatever particular worldview they had and not being able to let it in.

The government didn't want to acknowledge the ramifications and the immensity and didn't really fund research for years and years. But also the different scientists were at war with each other because having the recognition of having discovered the virus was more important than getting it out and getting the healing going. The newspapers, based on their view of what would attract readers, didn't really print much about it for quite a while—because people weren't that interested in reading about gay people and Haitians. Look at how much room they decided to give the whole thing with O.J. Simpson. Unbelievable. That was their view of what would sell papers.

And in the gay community, for example in San Francisco, having—as Shilts described it—just come into a real sense of not being so oppressed and being able to express their sexuality openly and freely, they got incensed at the word coming down that this was sexually transmitted and that they should close the bathhouses. "Absolutely not—this is just sexual oppression." They wouldn't hear it for quite a long time. And the blood banks also refused to hear it for years and continued to send out contaminated blood because it would be too expensive to screen it all. It's heart-rending. And that's just one example.

As I was thinking about this today—thinking how horrible, this could have been stopped—there's underlying even my reaction a view: that somehow disease isn't supposed to happen, that people are not going to get sick and die, that somehow that's going to be prevented. There's a little hit in that moment of me not really accepting the inevitability. Which doesn't mean for one minute that we shouldn't do everything we can. I don't mean that. But just really looking clearly: where are my views getting in the way of just seeing what is so?

I think that's a real challenge for me. I think it's a real challenge for all of us in opening to what is really true. It means really looking. And it's extremely unsettling.

You can know when you're really hitting something—that we don't even know is a view, as I said, we think it's true—you can know when you're beginning to get some information that doesn't fit with our views because it's scary, it's unsettling, or we get really angry, or we find ourselves getting defensive, or simply wanting to dismiss it out of hand.

A friend told me—he has been with a lot of Tibetan teachers—about this one time where a Rinpoche was

giving this whole long talk to a big group of Western students about the pure land, which is a realm, a higher realm than our human realm that coexists with us now, a very happy realm where the Amitabha Buddha lives and teaches. He was describing this realm in intricate detail, on and on, the way any of us could describe this ranch and the people here and what goes on and what it's like. He was that detailed, going on and on. And then my friend said he noticed the teacher beginning to see the students kind of rolling their eyes, getting like, "Come on, why doesn't he get off it?"

He just looked at them and said, "You might think I'm making this up, but I've been there."

Can we even let that possibility in? What does the mind do with that? And that's a nice example—that's a nice one to let in. There are a lot of not-so-nice ones.

As we begin to look, we can see how what we don't even realize are views—the way we think the world is, the way we think experience is or how it should be—is based very much on our own particular perceptions of our own experience.

As a simple example, last night Joseph and I were having a little conversation, in the course of which he said to me, "Well, do you have a lot of emotions in the day? Like, how many emotions do you have in a day?" Without even really thinking, I said, "Oh, thousands." Then I said, "No, that's too many, but hundreds—oh, definitely hundreds." And I just went back to the last sitting and started reeling off, you know, twenty, twenty-five that had just come and gone in that sitting alone. No big deal, just arising, passing, arising, passing.

And he couldn't really think of any. Good. No comment.

But that's my point. There's not a right or wrong about that—although we certainly have opinions about it. The experience forms the opinion, and that will form our view about certain aspects of life. For example, a relationship. It's just how it is. If we can know, "Well, that's a view, that's an experience"—there's no problem to it. When there starts to be a right and a wrong, when it starts to come into conflict, then we can see we're taking some particular momentary experience and making it a thing, how it's supposed to be.

You can notice that a lot in practice. Mostly I notice the mind likes to have somewhere to rest. "This is how it is." It's uncomfortable to be in that "who knows?"

A lot of meditation practice—I find it fascinating to watch—either I'll hear some instruction, and immediately the mind makes up some construct: "Well then, this is how I'm supposed to be with the breath," or "This is what a sitting is supposed to feel like," or "This is what open awareness is," or "This is what freedom is." The list is endless. And then our experience either matches that or doesn't, and we suffer. Or we have some kind of "Ah, this is how concentration is supposed to be." Finished.

And I watch that happen over and over. I'll watch my mind congeal an attachment to a view and think,

"Ah, that's a view. Look at that." It dissipates. And the next instant—"Ah, but now *this* is how it's supposed to be." Just kind of retreating one step back, but wanting somewhere to rest, wanting it to be clear. "This is the nature of reality. Give me a list."

I have a good friend on staff at IMS. He's always coming and saying, "You know, I just want the list, Carol—the ten things of how it's supposed to be and what do I do and what's freedom. Just give me the list." He's joking now. He wasn't the first time. Now he's joking, but it's sort of how our minds are.

The Buddha talked really a lot about the dangers of attachment to view and how much conflict it brings. I just want to read this one little last paragraph about it: "For one who is free from views, there are no ties. For one who is delivered by understanding, there are no follies. But those who have grasped after views and philosophical opinions, they wander about in the world, annoying people."

He thought he wasn't a funny guy.

Again, I'm not saying we don't use opinions. We have to function. We have to vote in elections.

We all have our views of what's important to do in the world, of how to work with the environment, our political views, our views of who we are, our views of family. And they're important. We need to use views to function, absolutely—but not to be attached, not to hold those views as truth.

The underlying view—this is actually the fourth field, and I'll just mention it now—the underlying view that is the delusion leading to all of our grasping is the view of a separate, abiding self. For most of us, this is something we can't actually get to, realizing it's a view, because it seems so experientially solid: our solid body, our emotions that feel like who we are, our thoughts, our experiences, our families, our relationships. I'm not going to talk extensively about this because it's very complex. But just to point to the fact that even the sense of self itself is simply a view. It's that radical—the willingness to let go of all views and rest nowhere.

Are we willing to abide free from any view whatsoever, even for an instant? It's incredibly freeing. The thought of it can be really scary. And it's radical. The Buddha went that far in saying that even his own teaching is not to be clung to, is not to be attached to, is not to be used as a view. That can kill it.

There's a very famous parable he gave, the parable of the raft, where he talks about being on the side of a river that's very stormy and dangerous, wanting to get over to the other side, which is calm and peaceful—this being our spiritual journey. You build a raft, put it all together, make this really nice raft. It's very helpful. We need it. It takes you across the river. And then what do you do? Do you look at it and think, "This is a great raft. It's beautifully made. I think I'll carry it on my back for the rest of my life"? You don't. You leave it. You let it be. And he says that's the same with his teachings.

Here is Thich Nhat Hanh paraphrasing: "I've given you this teaching on the raft to remind you how necessary it is to let go of all these true teachings, not to mention those which are not true." Don't hold on

to anything. And he defines *true*, by the way, as not believing what he said but investigating, inquiring, and experiencing for yourself what is true peace and happiness and what is suffering—never going just by belief or just by assuming it's so because someone said it.

The same thing applies to technique. This is the third and final area, and I'm just going to mention it. A field of grasping is grasping at rituals, grasping at rites, grasping at the idea that some particular set of things we do is going to bring us freedom, is going to make us perfect. It takes real dedication, real commitment not to be blinded by our views in whatever form, not to be blinded by grasping.

Thich Nhat Hanh sometimes might sound a little flowery or nice—notice the happiness and all—but I always feel underneath a real strength: *this is how it is*. He says, "We are not determined enough to liberate ourselves from our deepest suffering. We remain attached to words and ideas, both in our study and our practice." The way we are with our breaths, the way we practice loving-kindness meditation, the way we recite mantras, the way we do any practice—all can lack in skillfulness. We can get caught in the forms. It doesn't matter what; we can get caught in the forms. It's not easy to give rise to awakened understanding.

And as I've said, it's not that we can assume we've seen through it once and attachment will not arise again. It happens on a moment-to-moment basis. It's the nature of grasping, of attachment, that when it arises and we get caught in it, it obscures the recognition of our innate purity.

But it's also true that this recognition, as Khenpo says, is the borderline between Buddhas and beings. This moment of recognition is the great crossroads, he says, at which we find ourselves every moment of our lives. Every moment is a potential opportunity to either get caught in our attachment—our views, sense pleasures, technique, sense of self—or to recognize what's actually going on, to recognize our innate purity.

And if we wake up from a whole nightmare of being caught in some story or some grasping or some suffering—never mind. Because this moment is again the great crossroads at which we find ourselves.

I feel like we never need to despair. We never need to be frustrated or give up. But we can never take it for granted. We can never think, "I've seen it once, finished. Now I'm just going to float in the bliss of nirvana from now on." In that moment, attachment to views arises again. In that moment, we can see it again and be free from it.

As Nisargadatta Maharaj says: "Nothing physical or mental can give you freedom. You are free once you recognize that your bondage is of your own making, and you cease forging the chains that bind you."

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