Miracle of Awakening

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 56:33

So it looks like you all survived the day, more or less.

I'm going to talk about a few different things tonight. Hopefully a theme will emerge—maybe, maybe not.

I want to start by reading something that, since it's Thanksgiving, feels to me like a beautiful expression of the real thing there is to be thankful for. It's from Shantideva:

As a blind person feels when she finds a pearl in a dustbin, so am I amazed by the miracle of awakening arising in my consciousness. It is the nectar of immortality that delivers us from death. The treasure that lifts us above poverty into the wealth of giving to life. The tree that gives shade to us when we roam about scorched by life. The bridge that takes us across the stormy river of life. The cool moon of compassion that calms our mind when it is agitated. The sun that dispels darkness, the butter made from the milk of kindness by churning it with the Dharma. It is a feast of joy to which all are invited.

That's our true feast of joy—the miracle of awakening that arises in each of our consciousnesses. And the real miracle is that it's an open secret to which every being on this planet, every human, is invited. What's more amazing is why so many aren't drawn to listen. But it's so immediate, so human, and this miracle of awakening is accessible to us not just here on some three-month isolated retreat but in all situations. It's part of our human condition. It's amazing.

I want to share an experience that in my life has served as a metaphor for this—both for the humanness of our quest, the humanness of awakening, and the fact that it is part of all life, accessible in all conditions. It's a metaphor, but it really brought this home to me.

The first retreat I ever did, my first introduction to Buddha Dharma, was in a town called Bodh Gaya in India, which is the town where the Buddha supposedly sat under the Bodhi tree and came to his full awakening. Now it's a real shrine. There's a descendant of the original Bodhi tree—at least they say it is. It's in a big park with a wall around it, and there's a large stupa right next to it. The tree itself has a little concrete platform built around it.

When I was there in 1971, it was still pretty much a dusty little village. I didn't go back for years and years. Then maybe five years ago, I returned to Bodh Gaya with some good friends. It's gotten much busier since then. I'm not a particularly devotional person or one who's given to visiting shrines, so my reaction surprised me.

Sitting there—actually it's pretty hard to sit directly under the Bodhi tree because it has a locked fence

around it, but you can sit near it on the concrete wall where pilgrims make circumambulations of the shrine—something hit me so powerfully. Oh, the Buddha's not some myth. This was a real guy. Maybe he was really sitting in this place. It's not a made-up story. And the potential for freedom is not some airy-fairy idea. It's as real as me sitting here now on this concrete wall.

It touched me so much. I was just weeping, which is also not that common for me. But just that sense of humanness and immediacy.

And the second piece of it for me was that this was happening in the midst of incredible hubbub. We're not talking about some esoteric peaceful shrine in the middle of a beautiful country village. Bodh Gaya is in the middle of one of the poorest states of India. It's really dusty and dirty. As you walk up, it's just the regular hubbub of a little Indian street.

But as you walk up to the shrine, to the park surrounding it, first of all there's a huge row of beggars sitting against the wall. And just before you get to that row, there's a guy sitting there selling little coins. He'll sell you a pile of nine or ten anna coins for a rupee—which is really ninety or a hundred annas to a rupee—so he's making ten annas off the transaction. Then you can give one of these coins to a beggar.

Now, a coin like this is basically useless. It's less than a penny. You can't buy anything with it. So you can purchase these and relieve your sense of guilt or whatever, creating some gesture of generosity, but you're not really doing anything for anybody. Someone told me that for these beggars, it's like their job. I don't know if this is true, but someone who lived in Bodh Gaya told me that some of them take a rickshaw from neighboring villages over to their begging spot for the day. I don't know if it's accurate, but that's the tone of things—this press of humanity getting in, getting out the door.

Once I was almost literally lifted off my feet just from the crowd of people trying to go up the stairs and get out the gate of the shrine. There was no particular panic. It's just a lot of people in a hurry to get out the door.

And as you're sitting or walking around the stupa, there are pilgrims from all the different Buddhist countries—very touching. They come in huge groups from tour buses with loudspeakers, from Japan, from Thailand, from other parts of India. There weren't any American or European tour groups when I was there. People going around talking really loud. There was a whole group of Tibetan monks doing some kind of three-day chanting puja, sitting on the side with their horns—really beautiful. There was literally a mad Tibetan woman who would run around screaming and yelling at anyone who sat down. Starving dogs, all kinds of people coming and going. Hindus who would fish—they would take fish out of the lakes in the park and put them in little plastic bags and sell them to Buddhists, because then the Buddhists could earn merit by freeing the fish back into the pond. I'm not making this up.

So you can't really get into "Oh, how beautiful, how esoteric, how sublime." It's the whole show. And that's what became the metaphor for me. Sometimes, sure—it wasn't like that when Gotama was sitting under

the tree. But still, it was so powerful. And there was no sense whatsoever of seclusion from the world or any of the craziness of the world.

Again, it brought home to me that freedom, our potential for awakening, doesn't have to wait until we can do a three-month retreat, or until we've arranged the perfect circumstances, or until our mind is calm and quiet. There's nothing to wait for. There's no reason to wait. As Shantideva says, it's a feast of joy and we're all invited. All we have to do is accept the invitation. And it's so amazing how difficult, how scary it can sometimes be to accept that invitation—or when we look around in the world, how few people really do.

The other big thing to do in Bodh Gaya is hang out in the chai shop and drink chai all day. There's not really much else to do. So hanging out there, Joseph was commenting how the people that live there—the guys who run the chai shop—are good people. He's known their families for years. But they're not really interested in awakening. So many wonderful Buddhist teachers come through Bodh Gaya from all different traditions, and the people that live there are interested, they're nice, they like to meet the teachers. But there isn't this pull to really delve into the teachings, to awaken. It becomes so clear that even having the opportunity handed to us isn't always enough.

What that brings up in me is such joy and appreciation for all of us—that something in us has recalled us to our true selves, has awakened in us the willingness to really begin exploring, to come home again to what is true. You might not have known it before you came here, if this is your first retreat, but now you do: it isn't easy. It isn't necessarily fun. It isn't every moment a moment of the joy of the miracle of awakening arising in your consciousness. It is—you just don't notice it.

It's tough. Nisargadatta says that the search for reality is the most dangerous of all undertakings, because it will destroy the world in which you live.

I mean, it's true in a way. It's not that it obviously destroys the outer world or makes us unable to live in the normal world. But it subverts all our perceptions. It destroys the world in which we live by destroying our clinging to all of our previous preoccupations—all of our holding on to this constant birth and death of the self. It destroys our sense of what is true and who we are. And this, obviously, can be very unsettling.

But it doesn't mean—and I want to emphasize this—that once we awaken, we don't live a normal life. In fact, it might be more normal than ever.

This is from a Sufi master: "The true person of God sits in the midst of her fellow men and rises and eats and sleeps and marries and buys and sells and gives and takes in the bazaar and spends the days with other people, and yet never forgets God even for a single moment."

That's the difference.

And for some reason, when we're still in the grip of the constant rise and fall of the self, still clinging to

our old perceptions, it feels like the world we know will be destroyed. Opening to that insecurity can be so frightening, so threatening. We don't know that on the other side of that is a life so filled with joy that never forgets the truth even for a single moment—and yet is thoroughly in the midst of all beings, of all life. Not at all separated. In fact, more completely connected than ever.

The Buddha said once that what is beautiful in the world remains so, but the wise one no longer thirsts after it. Just a shift of perspective. And that main shift can come about through part of what we're observing here with our mindfulness.

When we begin to explore what we're calling this continuous "I," when we let go of that constant referral of every sense contact back to a sense of me—there's a sound, I'm hearing the sound; there's a thought, I'm having the thought—it's not even that gross as "the thought, I'm having the thought." But that moment-to-moment referral of experience back to some unquestioned sense of solid self.

One reason it can get so disorienting as our consciousness lets go of old perceptions and assumptions, as our mindfulness strengthens and we begin to explore more, is because we begin to see: it's not that there's some solid "I" that we have to somehow see and define and annihilate—and then we're scared, wondering what we're going to do when there's no I. But as we begin to look, we see it's more like there's this sense of the birth and death of a sense of me, Carol, separate. That birth and death of that sense arising and passing so quickly, almost moment to moment. Again, so fast we don't see it.

It's actually much more simple than some solid thing we've got to get rid of. But on the other hand, it's so subtle that you can see why it can be hard to see through. Or more so, it's not even that it's hard to see through—but we see through it once and then we wonder why in the next moment it's back. "I really saw it that time. How many times have you had the experience of a new layer coming up? Oh no, I dealt with that one before. I saw it to the depths. I really understood it. Something's wrong—it's coming back."

It's because in some way we keep falling back into this sense of unchangingness, this sense of permanence.

So what we can begin to do with our mindfulness is not think about it, not analyze it—forget it, we do that way too much. But when there's just that subtle sense of me, don't try to figure it out. Just turn the attention back on what you're calling "me." It's almost like you can note it the same way you note any other sensation or thought or experience. For example, when I'm practicing and it's to the point where the noting is very, very steady, I've started to notice that almost every third note I make might be "self" or "me" or "Carol."

That's the note. But the perception that the note is arising out of is a different experience every time. And so that's why we need to turn around and look. We say, "Oh, there's me again. There's me again." But there's no "again." One moment it might have been a subtle sensation. Another moment it might have been just a sense of contraction. Another moment it might have been an image. Another moment it might

have been a thought. Another moment it might have been, again, a sense of contraction.

And as soon as we turn our attention to it, we see that this so-called "I" is vanishing. As soon as it arises, it's vanishing. And the next moment, another is arising. If you really look at it, you'll see that one, too, is vanishing. And the only reason there's continuity is because we don't really look, and we think, "Oh, that felt the same as the last one." Actually, we don't think that—we think it *is* the same one. That's what happens without mindfulness.

With mindfulness, when we turn onto the experience and really look at it, we see that all of this is contact, sense contact, knowing, feeling arising. And without mindfulness, there's some clinging, some aversion. It might be as subtle as that, or it might be ten miles down the road and worlds and worlds away from here, feeling much more solid. But it's all the same process.

I find it really fascinating to just keep turning around and looking at that. Not trying to get rid of something. Not on some big crusade to rid the experience of "I." It's not an enemy. It serves us well in functioning in life when we see it for what it is—just a sense, a contraction, a clutching of experience, a holding on and solidifying. It's what we call identification. All that's happening is just contact, sense experience, and knowing of it. Perception.

I just want to briefly mention, not really go into them, but to put it in your minds again because it's been talked of before: in this looking at the experience in the moment that's being grasped and experienced as "I," it's going to be one of the five khandhas—or skandhas in Sanskrit.

Just to mention what they are again: we might be experiencing a sense of body, body sensation. And as you know, probably all of you have had at times the experience where there's just tingling—there's no sense of anything else going on with it. Notice the difference between when it's just tingling and when it's *my* tingling. So that's one way: sense of body, when grasped, gives a sense of self.

It can also be more subtle. Not so much contracting around a particular sensation, but more around an image that we don't quite notice of the body. For example, there's tingling, and a mental image comes up of the knee, or a mental image comes up of the whole body. There's actually a kind of identification, a clutching around that image, which is actually mental. This isn't the body itself, but an image of it.

Or sometimes for me, there'll be a subtle felt sense, almost an imagining of my whole body, when if I'm really attentive there's just sensations. But then this felt sense arises of it landing in the body, or even looking in the mirror, or even remembering how I looked the last time I looked in the mirror as I'm sitting here. And that's actually all mental. That's actually not the body. But in a way, it's one of the ways that subtle sense experience can be clung to, and it gives us a feeling of solid body.

Of course, there are feelings—the second of the skandhas—the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, which we've talked about quite a lot. The clutching around any of that experience gives this real sense of separation between me and other.

Perception is the third. That quality of recognition, which includes memory. It's interesting to notice that the grasping of perception, the identification with perception—and again, this is so fleeting, but it can be so solid. Just for example: how much do you trust your perceptions? As I think I talked about once, the perception that we're unchanging is a total delusion. But on an even more noticeable scale, have you had the experience of really having a perception of someone else here who you don't really know? "That person is so arrogant. They're so angry."

They're so self-centered. They're so whatever. And then a couple days later, as the mental state affecting consciousness lifts, you look at that person again and realize, "Oh, I think maybe it wasn't them that was so arrogant and so angry and so self-possessed. Maybe it was me."

Or vice versa—if you're filled with metta, our perception of people is one of friendship. People look beautiful. We see the light shining out of their eyes. We see them as walking embodiments of truth. Which we are. But generally, if someone at any of those moments came up and said, "Do you think your perception could be a little off?" we'd probably fight to the death. "No, I know what I'm seeing, and don't take it away from me." Solid clinging.

Consciousness, the fourth skandha, is that quality of knowing. Hearing and the knowing of it. Seeing and the knowing of it. The awareness of it, you could say. Again, very subtle to notice. It's sort of like a foreground-background shift. We're more aware of, or in some subtle way tuned in more to, the appearance that's arising—the sound, the sensation, the thought, whatever—and not quite as tuned into the knowing quality. But sometimes that knowing quality is very vivid. Yet again, rising and falling so rapidly with each new sense contact that first it's even hard to notice, and then it's hard to see that it's coming and going. So that sense of continuity gives a sense of solidity, and there can be a subtle clinging to that. Subtle clinging to the sense of being the knower. A subtle clinging to the sense of being the witness. It's tricky.

The fifth skandha is called sankaras, or mental formations. This includes everything else—emotions, thoughts, everything. One I'd particularly like to point out is intention, because you can see how that arising of intention is so easily clung to and identified as self. "I'm getting up. I'm going to generate metta. I'm reaching." Who's deciding to do this? Who decided to come here? It's very easy to identify with intention.

I'm just mentioning these. I don't want to engender a lot of thought. But if, in that moment of realizing there's an "I" in the picture, you simply turn around and see what the "I" is emerging out of in that particular moment—I wanted to bring these up as possibilities. They're called the five skandhas of grasping, really. And again, it's not that if there's no grasping in that moment, they all fly apart and we're not a human being anymore. But the sense of permanence, that sense of referring everything back to some unchanging thing, comes when there's grasping at these experiences.

Sometimes that sense of contracting around, identifying with a personal experience, a sense experience, is

obvious and easy to see—and can even be quite funny, how it just arises out of nowhere. Sort of like the miracle of awakening. Sometimes the miracle of a solid sense of self just seems to arise out of nowhere.

One time I was doing a self-retreat in a very beautiful hilly area in California. I was sitting up on the side of a hill on a bench, looking out from pretty high up, in one of those states where the mind just feels open and clear, experience just arising and passing, no contracting, no sense of me. Some turkey vultures were flying out of nearby pines and whizzing past really close. Far out, just appreciating whatever was arising. This went on for some time, and there were more and more of them—five or six flying around. I thought, "Wow, this is far out."

And then suddenly—I guess what I first identified with was seeing, and then there was a thought—I realized they were circling. And I realized they were circling me. I had this moment of total panic. I had to hold myself back—I just wanted to stand up and scream, "I'm still alive!"

It's funny when it's so solid, so quick. And it's always right after you've been sort of thinking, "I'm so free. I'm so open."

But other times the sense contact that gives rise to that grasping contraction of self is so fleeting and subtle that we don't even notice the contact, and we wonder why the self seemed so solid. It really takes a situation like this, perhaps—of silence, of some kind of development of mindfulness and concentration—to even notice these subtleties.

I think it's very interesting. Last year I was sitting, and this is where I first really saw how this could work. Out of just such a little nothing experience—I was doing walking meditation, nothing special, just present. I had a turtleneck on, and I just kind of ran my finger under my turtleneck. That contact somehow gave rise to an unclear, physical memory—how to say it—almost like a physical memory of myself, not even very formed. It wasn't something I could have put words to at all, but it was just this feeling of myself. And then it gave rise to a stronger image of myself walking, and then another memory of myself, this time more solid, and then a sort of projecting out: "I wonder what I look like walking back and forth like this." I think I was bouncing up and down, wondering if I looked a little weird. And all of a sudden I realized there was this solid construction. Just from a very, very subtle experience.

That was very interesting to me. There's nothing to fight or hate about that, but it just gave me some information about how it can seem so empty, and suddenly the awareness of that emptiness seems to have vanished. In its place, there's this sense of Carol again doing her little dance. Very quick, very subtle movement. And in the seeing of it, it all just fades away again, no problem.

So I find it fun to explore, fun to play with. Gross or subtle, it doesn't really matter. But knowing this, it's not something to fight or to be afraid of. Yes, sometimes fear comes up when our little cozy sense of security and permanence gets threatened. It does bring up fear. That's okay. That's just fear coming up. But in the bigger picture, sometimes not out of fear, but often people will say, "Well, who wants to live like

that? Detached and dispassionate and not part of things." Again, that's not how it is. It's just the reverse. It's not about a gray, empty life.

Nisargadatta again: "The world, the sense of self, by its very nature, is painful and transient. But when you see it as it is, you divest yourself, you rid yourself of all desire and fear. When the world does not hold and bind you, it becomes an abode of joy and beauty. You can be happy in this world only when you are free of it."

Happy in this world. Free of it doesn't mean rejecting anything. It really means liberated from our enclosed and resistant sense of self and liberated into a life of real beauty and joy. It's really a movement from a life of clinging and fear and trying to control what can never be controlled into a life of faith, of deep trust and deep surrender. And scary as that might be, or difficult as it might be for us, it's so miraculous.

I think everyone here has touched that somehow, somewhere, over and over—or none of us would be here. No one comes and does something like this just because you don't know what else to do for three months.

So in a way, it's the movement of faith that allows us to begin to open to the miracle of awakening. And it's the retouching of that truth that lets us move deeper and deeper into a life of faith, a life of trust and surrender. I read somewhere—I don't remember where—a definition of faith as "the drive towards that which cannot be described." I really like that: the drive towards that which cannot be described. It fits with my personal relationship to the experience of faith as trust. Trust in that which cannot be described or defined or known or owned or contained.

Sometimes two types of faith are spoken of, and I want to mention this briefly. The first sort of reawakening to our true nature, this recalling of the beauty that we really are, is sometimes called bright faith. We might be inspired by anything—by another person, by something we've read, by just seeing another yogi here, by hearing a story of some master in the world, whatever. That first recalling of what we really are awakens a kind of brightness in the mind, a joyous confidence, a real energy. You know, you really have this sense: "Yes, I'm going to do this. I'm really going to commit my life, whatever form it takes." And that's wonderful because that's what gets us going. It can be reconnected with, reawakened throughout our life.

In fact, in times here when you're really feeling like faith is gone and you don't know what you're doing here and your practice is dead—the second type of faith is verified faith, which really deeply arises from your own experience. And you might think, "I never had any experience that any faith could arise out of." But you can reconnect, you can find ways to reconnect with so-called outer inspiration to reignite this bright faith, to recall ourselves again to the miracle of awakening. And that again can give us the energy to come back to our own experience, which will open into verified faith.

For me, over and over, talking to yogis, to you in interviews, it awakens a sense of bright faith in me—so much to see just the light of truth, the light of Dharma, kind of shining out from everybody. And it wouldn't be in the moments you might think, either. But just to see how the truth works its magic, no matter how hard we try to stop it. We do everything we can not to just be with what is. But the Dharma is stronger than we are. So it just shines out. And every day something happens that wakes up again in me deep appreciation and love of the Dharma and total awe of how it works, of the mystery.

You can see it in other yogis here. Sometimes when you just don't have the juice, you see someone working really hard. Or it can be tuning into someone who's in difficulty and seeing that they're really meeting that difficulty with fortitude or with their own faith. Or a sudden spurt of compassion comes up in your heart where you least would have expected it. Whatever it is, just know that this tuning in to whatever inspiration awakens the bright faith can be a way back into the trust to drop into your experience.

And out of that will come what's called verified faith, which is intuitive experience, real understanding that comes from your own experience, whatever that experience might be. It might be one of impermanence. It might be just emptiness, interconnectedness. It might be of the power of metta, of non-separation. It might be just a moment of suchness standing in the snow—whatever it is. A sense when again we touch the possibility. And when that's been touched for ourselves, it's called verified because if someone comes up and says, "No, that's not so," you don't even want to argue. It doesn't matter. We know. We know. It's not of the mind, but we know. And no one can take that away.

From that place it becomes possible to move more and more into this trust of the unknown. And we're all living in the unknown anyway—mostly we try to control it. A life of faith, to me, is really moving into that with trust. Not to confuse it with getting more knowledge, trying to understand things, trying to be able to explain everything. The way it's been for me is the more I practice, the more I look, the more I see that I don't know anything. And I know even more of nothing than I thought I did twenty years ago, or last year. And it gets more and more okay not to know anything.

There's a science article from the New York Times—it's talking about astronomy. This is from a few years ago, but I heard an update on the radio the other day, and the update wasn't very different, so I'll just read this. Astronomers discovered the largest galaxy ever. It includes more than one hundred trillion stars, measuring more than six million light years in diameter—sixty times the size of the Earth's galaxy, the Milky Way. Sixty times the size of the galaxy we're in. This new galaxy is located in the center of an even larger clump of galaxies, a cluster of one thousand galaxies called Abel 2029. Somehow, okay, if we name it, we've controlled it.

But then it goes on to say—this is just the introduction—that they hope further study will provide clues to a mysterious substance called dark matter. Since there doesn't appear to be enough matter in the universe to account for the gravitational forces that would be necessary for all this clumping of all these galaxies,

scientists propose the existence of vast amounts of invisible matter that escapes detection because it emits no radiation. In other words, they're making it up. They have no idea.

According to this theory, 99% of the universe consists of this missing matter. So confronted with this, the more we look, the more we see – it's a total mystery. A total mystery.

And the attitude that really makes life with this knowing possible is one I encountered in a book I read once. The author called it radical acceptance. He says that radical acceptance is radical acknowledgement of the presence of truth at this very moment. The only thing to do is to do nothing but accept truth in all things, at all times, in all forms, in all ways. Radical. To let go, to accept, it is necessary only to give up your fears. Only. But it's radical.

Can we accept truth in all forms, at all times, in all ways? Whatever is manifesting, can we accept that radically as an expression of truth here and now? Sometimes. And when we can't, when we feel that resistance, just looking and seeing – what have I been resistant to today? What hasn't been acceptable as an expression of truth in this moment? And it can be really obvious or it can be really subtle.

I know there can be ways that one feels one is accepting, but there's a certain not giving in to the mystery, to the unknowing, that actually manifests as resistance. I remember one retreat I sat where I was having wave after wave of grief and sadness. It went on for days and days to the point where this one mental image would come up and I'd go, "Oh no, it's starting." Then I'd start noting, and I really felt like I was feeling it, accepting it. I was noticing all the images. I was saying, "It's okay, it can be here." But very subtly underneath, a certain lack of trust, a certain feeling that if I was doing it right, it should go already. And really under that was more – it was okay in this moment, and I knew that, I was there with it in this moment. But a subtle fear of what might happen in the next moment. Just this settling, this "what if it gets worse?" – even though I'm totally okay with how it is now. It's not really a problem.

This radical acceptance, really living in trust, is knowing that willingness to be totally okay with what is just as it is now, knowing that we never know what's going to happen in the next moment. We have no idea. I mean, we think we do. We think I'll keep talking and the bell will ring and we'll walk out and you'll do walking. And often what we think will happen sort of happens in the big picture, so we get this delusion that there's some kind of order and we can plan things. But we don't really know what's going to happen in any moment.

When you sit down to a sitting, you have no idea what's going to happen in that sitting. Can we sit down and just say, "Whatever happens in this moment, I surrender to the Dharma," and just let it happen? It's hard. Just this subtle expectation, trying to arrange experience to meet our expectation, is a movement away from this living in unknowing. Manipulating meditation. Somehow trying to hide the fact that we don't have a clue. If we could just surrender to not having a clue, it's actually not a problem. It's kind of exciting. It's interesting.

But on the way there, it's scary. And the mind so much doesn't like this constantly shifting ground, the sense of uncertainty. It's so easy to fall into expectation – whether it's expectation trying to recreate an experience you had before. Do you ever find yourself doing that? Trying to figure out just the right amount of sleep. Exactly this amount of sleep and eating these certain things. And at this time of day I had this perfect meditation. How was I sitting? How did I hold my hands? How did I move my head? What was my attitude?

And you find yourself falling into patterns, into rhythms, trying to recreate, to manipulate what should happen. This comes out of fear, out of controlling, out of this trying desperately to hide from the vastness of the mystery.

Expectation is really a way of searching for somewhere to rest, coming out of this constant shifting ground. And it's another form of control, a sense of self. Sometimes the expectation, the preset idea, almost determines what we experience. So watch out what you're expecting.

One of my teachers—he's so kind of earthy—he said, "Expectation is like garbage on your head." He says, "You become what you think. If you think garbage, what do you smell? Garbage." He goes on to say, for example, the thought "I'm not free, I can't know freedom, I'm hopelessly trapped" can set up that expectation, and that's what we find.

So just being aware—to stop looking for answers, stop seeking for explanations, stop trying to recreate the familiar—that's really moving into a life of trust and faith. A true warrior is willing to step into the mystery every moment. But the fact is, we are anyway. There's nothing we can do to change it. It's just a difference of: can we do it with grace? Can we really just let go and dance with the changes? Or do we get caught in the resistance and the fear?

This is another science article from the New York Times. It's about spiders. They're talking about how in 1884, after the huge volcanic explosion of Krakatau that just blew up the whole island—all life killed, scorched—nine months later, scientists were exploring to see how life would start coming back. And the first life they found was this tiny spider. And they wondered, how did a spider get here? Because they can't fly, right? And there was no other life there.

Apparently, a lot of kinds of spiders, at some point in their life, do something called ballooning. On the tip of a leaf, they attach their little strand of spider web and just let it out and fly with that web. It says they can go—not just baby ones, but really big spiders—they can occasionally reach thousands of meters of altitude and travel hundreds of kilometers before they come down. Clearly, they're not directing it with a rudder. It's like, just let go and fly. They could come down anywhere.

I don't think that's so different from our life. The difference is just how much resistance there is to the willingness to let go and fly. And that's not always in our control. There's something about the mind that really doesn't like insecurity. Something in the psyche is deeply wounded by this.

A few years ago, at a retreat in Yucca Valley in California—some of you were there—we had a couple of earthquakes. Not huge ones. The second one was scary for some people, but they weren't huge, and there wasn't really any damage. But for the next two days, hundreds and hundreds of aftershocks, just every few minutes that first night. I didn't actually find the earthquakes that scary; I'd never been in one before. But after two days of aftershocks every five minutes, there's something deeply unsettling about that. Not just to the mind, but visceral to the body. Just as soon as you settle down... and you never know if you have to run outside because it's a big one. Of course the radio always says, "Twenty-five percent chance of the big one in the next thirty-six hours." I don't know why they do that. It doesn't help much.

The sense of growing insecurity, and the mind just frantically wanting to find some solid place to rest—the mind and the body. You can imagine what a world of good it did for the yogis on that retreat. But it was fascinating. The psyche hates it, but it's fascinating to see the resistance that comes up. But that's really how it is all the time. And it's not the unknowing, it's not the mystery that's the suffering.

You know, it's the resistance that's the delusion. It's the trying to steer things in some weird way that we think we want it to go, trying to desperately grasp on, to know what's going to happen—when if we could just let go from that leaf and let the wind take it, there's really not a problem.

There's a beautiful passage from Suzuki Roshi that captures this perfectly:

"While you're practicing zazen, you may hear the rain dropping from the roof in the dark. Later, the wonderful mist will be coming through the big trees. And still later, when people start to work, they'll see the beautiful mountains. But some people will be annoyed if they hear the rain when they're lying in their beds in the morning, because they don't know that later they'll see the beautiful sun rising from the east.

If our mind is concentrated on ourselves, we'll have this kind of worry. But if we accept ourselves as an embodiment of the truth or Buddha nature, we will have no worry. We think, now it's raining, but we don't know what will happen in the next moment. By the time we go out, it may be a beautiful day or a stormy day. And since we don't know, let's appreciate the sound of the rain now.

This is the right attitude. If you understand yourself as a temporal embodiment of the truth, you will have no difficulty whatsoever. You appreciate your surroundings and you appreciate yourself as a wonderful part of Buddha's great activity, even in the midst of difficulties. This is our way of life."

If you can appreciate yourself as the embodiment of truth even in the midst of difficulties—even for one moment—it can change everything.

So let's just sit for a moment.

Thank you for listening.

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