From Ignorance Come Impulses

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:01:43

This evening's subject is "from ignorance come impulses"—the first two links of dependent origination, which Sally explored last week. The traditional translation renders this as "ignorance gives rise to volitional formations" or "ignorance gives rise to mental formations." I prefer the term "impulses" because it captures the inner feeling of how these phenomena arise in the mind. The formations that emerge from ignorance possess an impulsive quality—they're not considered or deliberated, not held with wisdom, but simply arise in this impulsive, sometimes compulsive way.

The Pali formulation has a beautiful ring to it: *Avijja paccaya sankhara*. Pali is wonderfully succinct.

Avijja is ignorance—essentially not knowing the way things really are. In Sally's talk and the handout you received, this appears as the blind man at twelve o'clock in the wheel of existence. This is where everything begins.

I noticed someone wrote to Sally saying they'd posted the image of Mr. Yama on their mirror and were looking at it daily. The blind man sits at twelve o'clock, at the very center, the starting point of everything.

As a digression, I first encountered this painting when I was a monk in Thailand. It was quite remarkable because the image comes from the Tibetan tradition, yet I was practicing with a wonderfully eclectic Theravadan monk named Ajahn Buddhadasa. He had established a monastery called Wat Suan Mok in southern Thailand—"The Garden of Liberation"—a beautiful place to practice.

Ajahn Buddhadasa was one of the most open-minded Theravadan monks I've ever met. As a young monk, he learned Pali and read through the Buddha's suttas himself. He said this completely overturned the conventional interpretations he'd been taught in monk school. Because of his iconoclasm, he had difficulty getting along with some mainstream Thai monks until he became older and well-respected. But when I practiced there, he was established and respected, and remarkably open. He had built a special hall called the Spiritual Theater, where he displayed reproductions from all three traditions: Zen paintings, Tibetan thankas, and original Theravadan art. I deeply appreciated his spirit, and it's in that same spirit that we share this painting of the bhavachakra, the wheel of existence.

Avijja stands at the beginning, considered the root, the first link in the chain from which suffering arises. It's essentially synonymous with delusion when we speak of the three root poisons of greed, aversion, and delusion. Because it is a root in this chain, ignorance is considered one of the mind's deepest tendencies—one that doesn't leave the mind until full awakening. As long as ignorance remains, suffering will eventually result.

The second word, *paccaya*, establishes the connection between consecutive links throughout dependent origination. *Paccaya* means "conditions"—the first link serves as a conditional factor for the arising of the second. As Sally mentioned, it's not quite accurate to say it "causes" the next link—that's too strong a correlation. Rather, it provides the necessary condition for the next link's arising.

The third term is *sankhara*—the same word used for the fourth aggregate in the list of five aggregates. Mental formations, volitional formations, urges, or impulses. In the wheel of dependent origination, this is symbolized by a potter fashioning pots from clay. These pots, shaped from clay, represent the fabricated or constructed nature of *sankharas*—they're assembled through will, through effort.

The meaning of these two links—*avijja paccaya sankhara*—is that when ignorance is present in the mind, the mind gives rise to impulses that generally contribute to the perpetuation of suffering. These impulses themselves carry the quality of ignorance. The most common ones, as you can imagine, are the forces of greed and aversion—desire and hatred are the typical impulses that embody this movement from ignorance.

Sankharas, if you'll remember from the aggregates, refers to actions in three spheres: body, speech, and mind. We look at bodily actions, we look at actions of speech, and we look at thoughts and emotions. These are all included in the range of sankharas.

So when ignorance is present in the mind, you can expect that impulses based on greed and aversion will arise. Or another way to say it is that craving will arise. Ajahn Sumedho put it succinctly when he said, "Ignorance complicates everything." And this is the flavor of these two links.

Here's a simple example of ignorance complicating things. This is a true story. A robber went into a bank and approached a teller, handing them a note that said, "Give me all your money, I have a gun." The teller complied. The robber took the money, drove away, and went home. When he arrived, the police were waiting at his front door. How did they catch him so quickly? The note was written on one of his bank deposit slips, which listed his address. Ignorance complicates everything.

When we act out of greed and aversion and hurt others, we might say we leave a karmic deposit slip with them, because in some way we end up hurting ourselves from that action. But as my friend Sylvia Boorstein says, "When we see clearly, we act impeccably." When wisdom is in the mind, when ignorance is weak, then our actions are clear. These impulses don't just run away with us.

On a personal level, we can understand these impulses and their impact. On a global level, we see that they are responsible for so much pain and suffering in the world—really all the pain and suffering in the world.

Two simple examples from our time. I'm sure you all remember the financial crisis that was underway when we started this retreat, whether you joined in September or November. The financial crisis was ongoing and came out of bad mortgage loans. I just read an example where a gardener in California

making $14,000 a year was allowed to borrow money with no down payment to purchase a house worth $700,000. This is such an amazing example of greed. Why would a banker do that? Because they make money off the loan, then they repackage it, bundle it with other mortgages, and sell it to some financial institution who bundles it with other kinds of investments and sells it to investors. So the bank has lost its exposure in that transaction and passed the risk on to somebody else. It's just unfettered greed at work that brought this crisis into being.

And aversion or hatred—one news flash that I'm sure won't surprise you is that the terror attacks have not stopped in Iraq. Almost daily we read accounts of bombings, suicide bombings, and people being killed. It's just the naked force of hatred, unchecked by compassion or reason, acting out unhindered on that big stage.

So in small ways, through our own machinations of greed and aversion, and on a global level, through the massive destructions that happen in the world, ignorance is giving rise to impulses unchecked by wisdom. This is the dynamic, as Sally explained, in dependent origination that keeps us on the wheel of suffering. We'll go into it in a little more detail further on.

Let's talk a little bit more about this quality of ignorance and how it works. As I think you know from Sally's talk, ignorance is not about the lack of facts. It's not that you don't know who the president of Zimbabwe is or you don't know how to conjugate verbs in Latin. That's not the kind of unknowing we're talking about. It's not knowing, as the Buddha said, the Four Noble Truths. It's not understanding really what leads to suffering and what leads to happiness.

Just to remember these Four Noble Truths: the first says that we need to fully understand the truth of dukkha—fully understand the truth of dukkha. That means to see all of the manifestations in our lives of this quality of unsatisfactoriness. Because we are not liberated beings, we have not fully understood the truth of dukkha. Even though conceptually we may know the first noble truth, we haven't integrated that understanding, so we haven't fully understood it.

As a result, we haven't relinquished—this is the injunction of the second noble truth—we have not relinquished the cause of suffering, which is craving. We can look in our own minds and see: Yes, I can check that out. It's true. I haven't completely relinquished craving yet. If we had, we would also be fully enlightened.

So that means we haven't yet satisfied the third noble truth, which is to realize directly for ourselves the end of suffering and the end of craving. We haven't fully arrived there, and so we haven't yet completely practiced the way to the end of suffering of the Eightfold Path.

Even though we can conceptually understand the Four Noble Truths, we haven't yet embodied the fullness of all their implications. This is a core meaning of ignorance.

We haven't come to realize the Four Noble Truths fully. Another way ignorance is understood in the

tradition is as not comprehending the three characteristics. We haven't fully appreciated the implications of impermanence. As with the Four Noble Truths, we haven't completely integrated the implications of unsatisfactoriness, and we haven't fully absorbed the teaching of not-self. These continue to cloud our perceptions—the fact that we don't clearly see these three characteristics.

As a shorthand for ignorance, the understanding I return to again and again when contemplating this topic is that we haven't fully grokked the teaching of not-self. That's what I hold for myself personally as the core of ignorance: we haven't fully grokked not-self. We still believe in "I." We invest in "I." We put energy into it. We care for it.

When we see through this "I," our motivations fundamentally change. One thing you've likely noticed from observing your thoughts for four or ten weeks is that most of them concern "I"—and mostly they're about how we can make things better for this "I." That's what most of our thoughts are about. They're mostly expressions of self-centeredness and craving, and the motivations in our lives tend to reflect this. They center around how "I" can make things better for "I."

When our understanding changes, our motivation changes. As a simple example in practice terms, the quality of bodhicitta—sometimes translated as the awakening heart—is a wonderful thing to bring into dharma practice because it begins to make even our practice not completely self-centered.

Notice that we can take that same self-centered craving and apply it to practice, becoming focused on my suffering, my happiness, my progress on the path, my delusion, my release, my wisdom. We can approach practice with the same gaining mind we have in daily life.

This beautiful quality of bodhicitta offers a way to begin undoing that self-centeredness in our very approach to meditation practice. We bring in the reflection that we practice to liberate our own minds as a way to help liberate the minds of other beings. It's the aspiration to reach our own awakening in order to serve others—to help pull them out of suffering into their own awakening.

If we can make this even a small part of our motivation in practice, even just a tiny flicker, it shows how we can transform self-centeredness in our very approach to dharma practice.

I discovered this in an interesting way during a retreat where we made this wish part of every sitting. At the start of each session, we would say to ourselves or chant together, "May I awaken for the benefit of all sentient beings"—some formulation like that. Practicing this way, day after day as the retreat deepened, that aspiration sank into me.

Simultaneously, we were looking directly at the factor of ignorance and wisdom in the mind. I began to see, as I examined ignorance and wisdom back and forth, how this quality of wisdom is shared among all humans, among all sentient beings. This wisdom, which is part of our essential nature, has the ability to free us and lead us to the deepest happiness.

As I reflected on this alongside bodhicitta, something in my entire outlook shifted. Up to then, my practice had only been about wanting to remove the obscurations that veiled wisdom in this mind. But as I tuned into the fact that this same wisdom was available in every human mind—just covered over by layers of ignorance—I saw the whole endeavor could be held very differently.

The practice became: what I'd really like to do is remove the obscurations to wisdom wherever they're being obscured. Seeing through the separation of individual bodies and recognizing the commonality of this universal wisdom we all possess, the scope became much larger.

I offer this reflection for you to perhaps bring into your own practice: setting the intention regularly that we practice in order to bring all beings out of suffering and into awakening, accomplishing that first step through our own awakening.

This quality of ignorance—where we're fixated on the idea of self and act on it repeatedly—strengthens our self-centeredness and binds us to suffering. To investigate this, examine your experience when suffering is present. Look at times when you're struggling and ask: what's the mind like in that state?

Whenever there's suffering, there's some misunderstanding. If the Four Noble Truths had been penetrated with complete understanding, that suffering wouldn't be there. So whenever there's suffering, there's some level of delusion, confusion, not seeing clearly—some obscuration of wisdom.

What is it like when the mind is in that state? Is it peaceful? Is the mind quiet? Is everything settled? Typically not. The state of suffering is usually one of struggle where thoughts tend to swirl. There's often an upheaval of thoughts and emotions—trying to figure out what to do, how to escape this predicament, how to solve it, whether it will continue forever, how bad it is, judgments about ourselves.

As this whirlwind of thoughts and feelings moves through us, the tendency is to keep grasping onto different ones: "Let's try this..."

Maybe this is the way out. I'll investigate this solution. Maybe this will work. Because we don't know anything else. So that in itself is a good example of the combination of ignorance and the swirl of formations. When we're in a state of delusion, that swirl of formations is all we kind of have to go with. Until we learn meditation practice and we understand how to be with that swirl with mindfulness, then there's another option. But for the untrained mind, being landed in that kind of confusion and suffering just tends to generate more thinking and more emotions.

The Buddha said that typically, for most people, suffering results in bewilderment or search. Bewilderment or search. And the search can be wise or unwise. It can be a search for happiness through sense pleasures, or it can be a wise search for happiness through an authentic spiritual path. But this quality of bewilderment is something that most of us can relate to experiencing. When these hard times come along, one of the qualities tends to be this factor of confusion, of a sense of being lost, of being separated from home, of not being able to find peace or a resting place.

This bewilderment is another synonym for confusion or delusion. The Pali word is moha, and the literal meaning—this is the third of the kilesas: greed, aversion, and delusion—moha literally means stupefied. So you might just reflect on that as you're in this state of confusion. It feels kind of stupefying. We really don't know where to go next. And then all the activities of greed and aversion are kind of supported by this confusion.

You probably know that in Buddhist thinking, there are three personality types defined by greed, aversion, or delusion. Obviously, we all have all three, but as individuals, one or the other may predominate in our minds. So if greed is predominant, one could be called a greedy type, a desire type. If hatred or aversion is predominant, one could be described as an aversive type. If delusion is predominant of the three, one can be described as a deluded type. And then you can just look at how those personalities relate to the world to understand the mental effects of that particular kilesa.

What I find interesting is that all three of these are basically just different strategies for relating to suffering—the unsatisfactoriness of conditioned phenomena. The greedy type relates by trying to bring more and more pleasure in. If something has a pleasant appearance, let's keep it close so that our moment-to-moment experience is filled up with pleasant things. That's the first strategy.

The aversive type looks at the world and sees what's threatening and tries to keep that at bay. So the aversive type perceives the unpleasant, threatening phenomena and tries to push those away or create separation from the unpleasant. That's the second strategy.

The third type, the delusion type, tries to create a fog around themselves so that nothing very much is felt. The pleasant is not felt so directly, and the unpleasant is not felt directly. Rather, everything's happening at a distance, so it doesn't touch very deeply.

If you get delusion types talking about their life experiences, it can be quite funny at times. Sally runs a program in California called the Dedicated Practitioners Program. It's a combination of study, meditation, and experiential exercises, and as part of the study, she gets groups of people to come up on stage and talk about what it's like to be a greedy type, an aversive type, or a deluded type. And the comments are funniest with the deluded types.

One of the teachers at the retreat—I'm not going to name names—was self-confessed as a classic deluded type and gave an example where his wife asked him to pick up a shopping bag and take it back to the store because he was going by, to exchange it or return it because it wasn't what she had wanted. In order to jog his memory, because she was very familiar with his deluded type nature, she put the bag in front of the front door so that he couldn't get out the door without tripping over it. So he wakes up in the morning in a little bit of a hurry to get going, walks to the front door, gently picks up the bag, puts it to the side of the door, opens the door, and walks out. That's a deluded type. They just don't get the message.

Sharon Salzberg has told in many talks about her delusive temperament. One story that I love—I'll

mention briefly in a very condensed form—she was teaching a three-month course one year and had driven to her home the night before and left her car in the driveway. She got up the next morning to come over to sit and do interviews. As she walked over, she didn't see her car and thought, "That's funny. Didn't I park my car here last night?" So that's the first sign of delusion: not being able to quite remember if you parked your car there or not. She came over and walked in the building and saw someone who might know where her car was and said to them, "I can't find my car this morning. It's not where I left it last night."

And his first question to her, knowing that she was a deluded type, was, "Are you sure?" And she said, "Well, the car is pretty big. I think I would have seen it if it was there." But his very raising the question caused her to doubt whether the car was actually there or not. And that's another movement of the deluded mind. It turned out that somebody else had borrowed her car without telling her. So everything was okay.

In delusion, we don't really stay in touch with our own experience, so we don't stay in touch with others' experience. And that's why delusion becomes a support for actions of greed and aversion. There's an element of denial at work. We don't see the impact of the wanting and disliking in our own mind, so we don't see the impact of our actions on others that are affected by it.

How to Come Out of Delusion

The simple practice of mindfulness is the direct path out of delusion. It's said that the proximate cause of non-delusion is wise attention. So every moment of connecting clearly to something that's real in the present moment is undoing the delusive tendency of mind. So that's one of the powers of this mindfulness practice.

But I want to look a little more deeply into the interaction between ignorance and sankaras. And I want to do it through looking at what we could call three levels of obscuration in our experience. How did we get to where we are? How did we get in this situation?

Developmentally, it could be described as something like this. At some point in the past, who knows when, we lost touch with the mind's essential nature, which you could call emptiness or you could call nirvana—that which is beyond change. We lost touch with that. And instead, we substituted for the direct seeing of emptiness; we substituted the sense of self as the core of what we take to be our identity.

When we create a sense of self in a world that is manifold, we also create a sense of other. So this is the fundamental, or you could say the first level of obscuration. We lose touch with our essential nature of emptiness, and we create a fictitious duality between self and other. And in that, we establish the I.

Once we've established the I, then we have to defend it against the other. Or we use the other to feed it, nourish it. On the one hand, it sets up protection from what is unpleasant or threatening. On the other hand, it sets up a wanting to feed or nourish with what's pleasant.

Of course, the problem with that is that this activity is unending. Once we've established the I, it can never be fully protected once and for all, and it can never be fully fed once and for all. So we have to keep recreating, sustaining this sense of I. This basic ignorance and the fictitious creation of self and other embroils us in an unending activity of protecting and feeding. So this is the first level of obscuration: the false sense of self and thereby also other.

The second layer of obscuration that comes up is as we engage in this ongoing activity, this endless activity, we're developing it through these twin forces of greed and aversion. So on top of the basic ignorance come the feeding and protecting activities of the mind.

Once we get involved in this approach to the world, which seeks to feed and protect through liking and disliking, that becomes the basis for all the other emotions. All the afflictive emotions—pride and fear and jealousy and loneliness and grief and anger—all come out of different combinations of greed, aversion, and this basic ignorance.

As we involve ourselves, we commit to this feeding and sustaining project, we start to generate all the afflictive emotions. In one Buddhist tradition, they say there are 84,000 of these. But that was a long time ago. Now there are at least 168,000, I'm sure.

All of this is built up on having constructed an identity as self. And you take a look at the way that normal life is experienced by most human beings across the globe, and you see that the content of their minds is filled with this kind of activity. It's filled with this unending flow of self-referencing thoughts and afflictive emotions over and over and over again. And this is the state that we find ourselves in when we sit down in meditation and start to take a look. That's why one teacher said, "Self-knowledge is not good news."

So this is the second level of obscuration. This swirl of emotions and grasping and clinging creates a sense of confusion in the mind, and we can no longer see clearly. As you know, when greed and aversion are active, we don't see things the way they are.

But then this leads to the third level of veil or obscuration. As we're tormented by these afflictive emotions generated in response to the world, the other, we start to act in ways that are unskillful. When we act out of greed without considering it, we harm others. When we act out of aversion or hatred without considering it, we harm others. These forms of harm create another layer of obscuration, which we could call the obscuration of actions or karmic obscurations. When we've been involved in unskillful actions for some time, they create an additional clouding in the mind.

In the first place, we're generally not very happy to admit what we've done. We're not willing to see the effect on ourselves and see the effect on others. So there comes another layer of denial or delusion about the truth of our own actions and their impact on other people.

This is the fuller picture of where most of us are when we enter meditation. We have the initial veil of losing our essential nature and the misunderstanding of self and other. Built on that, we have these

formations of greed and aversion and the manifestation of the afflictive emotions and the confusion they bring. And on top of that, we have the layer of unskillful actions that we may have committed in our life when we didn't really understand.

Because in hurting others, of course we end up hurting ourselves. Deep down in the unconscious, there's some part of ourselves that knows that duality has never been true. There's some part of the mind that knows that self and other is a false distinction. And so we know on some level that hurting others is hurting ourself. And it's certainly true karmically.

I want to read from a sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya. This is Majjhima 46, where the Buddha draws out the effects of these unskillful actions. And if you look closely, unskillful actions will come either from aversion or from greed. These are the two motivating forces that lead to unskillfulness.

Some obvious examples coming from aversion are killing beings who have annoyed us—a simple example of just squashing an insect, a bigger example of the violence of murder and killing of human beings that is in the world coming out of hatred. On a more mundane level in our daily lives, angry speech comes out of this motivation of aversion and is one of the most hurtful things that goes on in our daily lives.

The Buddha talked about these kinds of actions as painful now and ripening in the future as pain, and they're supported by the ignorance that doesn't understand how this works—the false sense of duality, the distancing ourselves, the disconnection of delusion that doesn't feel what's going on in our own mind and doesn't feel the impact on others.

"Now bhikkhus, one who is ignorant, not knowing this way of undertaking things that is painful now and ripens in the future as pain, does not understand as it actually is: 'This way of undertaking things is painful now and ripens in the future as pain.' Not knowing it, not understanding it as it actually is, the ignorant one cultivates it and does not avoid it. Because they do so, unwished-for, undesired, disagreeable things increase for them and wished-for, desired, agreeable things diminish. Why is that? That is what happens to one who does not see."

So then he continues with a simile of pain now ripening in pain later: "Bhikkhus, suppose there were a bitter gourd mixed with poison, and a man came who wanted to live, not to die, who wanted pleasure and recoiled from pain, and they told him: 'Good man, this bitter gourd is mixed with poison. Drink from it if you want. As you drink from it, its color, smell, and taste will not agree with you, and after drinking from it, you will come to death or deadly suffering.' Then he drank from it without reflecting and did not relinquish it. As he drank from it, its color, smell, and taste did not agree with him, and after drinking from it, he came to death or deadly suffering. Similar to that, I say, is the way of undertaking things that is painful now and ripens in the future as pain."

This is one way that we do unskillful actions based in hatred or aversion. There's another way that we do unskillful actions which is based in greed. Some simple or obvious examples of that are overindulgence in

drugs or alcohol and violating the precept on sexual misconduct drawn out of sexual desire.

So the Buddha talked about this as actions that are pleasant now but ripen later in pain. And here's the reading from the same sutta on this quality:

"Now bhikkhus, one who is ignorant, not knowing this way of undertaking things that is pleasant now and ripens in the future as pain, does not understand as it actually is: 'This way of undertaking things is pleasant now and ripens in the future as pain.' Not knowing it, not understanding it as it actually is, the ignorant one cultivates it and does not avoid it. Because they do so, unwished-for things increase for them and wished-for things diminish. Why is that? That is what happens to one who does not see."

And he offers a simile for this way of undertaking also: "Suppose there were a bronze cup of beverage possessing a good color, smell, and taste, but it was mixed with poison. And a man came who wanted to live, not to die, who wanted pleasure and recoiled from pain. And they told him: 'Good man, this bronze cup of beverage possesses a good color, smell, and taste, but it is mixed with poison. Drink from it if you want. As you drink from it, its color, smell, and taste will agree with you. But after drinking from it, you will come to death or deadly suffering.' Then he drank from it without reflecting and did not relinquish it. As he drank from it, its color, smell, and taste agreed with him. But after drinking from it, he came to death or deadly suffering. Similar to that, I say, is the way of undertaking things that is pleasant now and ripens in the future as pain."

This is the way that ignorance compounds with greed and hatred and leads us into greater suffering, greater delusion, greater confusion.

This is sort of summed up in a quotation which I've seen attributed to the Buddha, but I can't find in the suttas anywhere. But whether the Buddha said it or not, it has a lot of wisdom: "Thoughts give rise to intentions, which express through actions, which are repeated in habits, which harden into character. Therefore, watch closely the thought and let it spring from love for all beings."

So what we see is in these three levels of obscuration, there's the core layer of self, there are the afflictive emotions built on top of that, and then expressing through unskillful actions on top of that. And this is what creates the bondage that untrained human beings find themselves in.

I hope you'll get from this accounting the kind of sense of the restless swirl of energy that comes out of ignorance. It swirls internally, and through this greed and aversion in relation to the world, we mix it up with all the elements of the world and swirl it with our actions as well.

This is another quote from the Buddha: "This samsara, the round of death and rebirth, this samsara is without discernible beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, clouded by ignorance and driven by craving." So these two go together—the not seeing and then the craving, the wanting—that keep us on this wheel, that keep us bound.

So how does the path work? I think this is really fascinating. The path works from the outside in. It starts at the outer layer of unskillful actions and then moves to the layer of afflictive emotions and then moves to the false creation of self down to the essential nature of emptiness. And this is reflected in the way the gradual path is commonly described as the practices of sila, samadhi, and paññña—ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom.

As we enter the path, the first thing we do is learn the five precepts. Annie's going to talk about this in more detail, I think, tomorrow night. The beautiful thing is that the Buddha has laid out a very clear directive for us to clear away this outer layer of karmic obscurations, the obscurations brought on by unskillful conduct. As those begin to thin, that is a level of development that's referred to as purification of conduct, and that's the area of sila. I won't go into more detail on that tonight, but just understand that it works on the formations of body and speech. That's the area of the precepts, the practice that starts to undo those knots of karmic obscuration.

But then we come through that and we still find internally the mind is stirred up with the afflictive emotions and the reactive impulses of greed and aversion. So the tool to work with that is samadhi. Through moment-to-moment attention to something that's actually happening, we undo the delusive nature of mind by connecting with reality as it is, and we collect the attention in the present moment, stepping outside of these forces that are looking to feed and sustain with pleasure and protection.

Stepping outside those, collecting the mind, the mind attains a stability in the present moment and a level of peacefulness. We come out of that swirl of the afflictive emotions and the reactive formations of greed and aversion. We discover that peace is available in the present moment. And it's the development of this moment-to-moment mindfulness resulting in a collected mind that starts to deliver us from the veil of the second layer of emotional affliction.

Then as that weakens—as the Buddha said, "tranquility is for the abandoning of desire"—as the force of desire weakens and we come into the present moment, then we're able to see more clearly. The mind is not all swirled up. We've worked against the grain of delusion to see things the way they are. And that starts to open the door for wisdom.

So the third factor of the path, paññña, or wisdom, starts to undo this fundamental ignorance grounded in the belief in self. We start to see with our wisdom eye all things are coming and going, not just within the body, which we take to be me or mine, but outside as well. We see that events inside and events outside are all held within the same kind of consciousness—consciousness of external, consciousness of internal, are all happening in just the same field.

So this sense of a belief in the absolute division between inner and outer, between self and other, starts to get chipped away at. We start to see all phenomena coming and going on their own, none of them to be taken as I or mine. And this was pointed to in that beautiful teaching to Bahiya where the Buddha said, when you see in this way and you don't establish yourself in inner or outer, you will be neither here nor

there nor in between.

So the mind starts to become clear of this fundamental delusion of self and other, starts to emerge from the basic level of obscuration or ignorance. This level is called the purification of view. I think I forgot to mention the second stage is called the purification of mind. So, sila deals with purification of conduct, samadhi deals with purification of mind, and paññña deals with purification of view.

Now we understand things arise and pass on their own. There is no one at the center to whom they're all happening. And as we understand that, a great letting go takes place. We see that the world is essentially uncontrollable. The strategies that we had for just collecting to ourselves continuous pleasure, pushing away from ourselves anything that is unpleasant, is basically futile. In the end, that kind of control doesn't work.

And we see that the aftereffect of being so stirred up in this ceaseless self-referencing activity is basically more trouble than it's worth. We feel the burden of it, the pain, the exhaustion of constantly trying to feed and defend this poor self, this poor isolated self.

But we find in ourselves the capacity for trust, for relaxation, for surrender, with a full presence of what's true, not denying any of the arisings or any of the passings. And this is why the Buddha said that vipassana is for the abandoning of ignorance. We see the delusion of self and other. But this is not the final step.

Wisdom has to take one more step before it's complete. And that is the penetration to the third noble truth.

The Buddha taught dependent origination to show the creation of suffering with ignorance as its root, but he taught it even more importantly to show the end of suffering. As he said, with the end of ignorance comes the end of formations. With the end of formations, the other links also cease, and with that, so does the final link of suffering.

So not only does ignorance cease formations, but the cessation of ignorance leads to the cessation of impulses, especially these untrained impulses of greed and aversion.

You can take a look at this in your meditation experience. What is it like when the mind is filled with wisdom? When you're truly in a state of understanding, seeing the impermanent nature of things, seeing the selfless nature, seeing the unsatisfactory nature—what are the qualities of mind at that point?

People describe it in different ways. There's some sense of peace. There's some sense of spaciousness. There's a sense of non-clinging, a sense of release or freedom, a degree of courage, a willingness to open, acceptance, loving-kindness, joy, interest. All these are qualities of the wisdom mind, or you might say the awakened mind.

But for the awakening to really take place, there has to be the penetration to the third noble truth. The

third noble truth says that there is an end to suffering reached through the end of craving, and this is equated to nibbana.

This is from Sariputta, one of the Buddha's chief disciples: "The destruction of lust, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of delusion—this is nibbana."

Or as the Buddha put it: "This is the peaceful, this is the sublime—that is the stilling of all formations." That is, in Pali, *sabba sankhara samatha*. All sankharas go to tranquility. "The stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbana."

The Buddha's teaching on the third noble truth was: this third noble truth is to be realized. That means his instructions to us as practitioners is: your directive is to realize in your own practice the truth of the end of suffering, the end of craving, that is nibbana.

In our tradition, this direct realization of the element of nibbana is what's considered an enlightenment moment. And when such a moment takes place, it's said that one has entered the stream. And then with further practice, further realization, full awakening is possible. In fact, it's said to be inevitable at a later time.

So the key of this transformation is the direct realization of this unconditioned element, or nibbana. Sally and I were listening to teachings from the Dalai Lama this summer, and in the Tibetan path, he formulated it in a very similar way. He called it the direct realization of the ultimate nature of reality. Because nibbana is the one element that is unchanging in our makeup, that is what's viewed in the tradition as the ultimate nature of things. So it is the direct realization of that that constitutes this awakening.

Now the Buddha, when he described this quality of stream entry in the suttas, tended to put it in this language. He'd say of one for whom that event had just taken place: "The spotless, immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose. All that is subject to arising is subject to cessation."

So in our tradition, this realization of nibbana has become associated with this term cessation. And most accounts of enlightenment report that some kind of cessation happens with stream entry. At that moment, some kind of cessation happens.

So what ceases? At the very least, sankharas cease forming. There is the stilling of all formations. *Sabba sankhara samatha.* All sankharas go to tranquility.

In most accounts, there is the sense that the sankharas have ceased so completely that there is no possibility of disturbance in the enlightenment moment, no possibility of the mind being disturbed because the sankharas are so completely absent. And that's why this kind of experience is often described with a sense of unshakable peace, unshakable peace.

This peace is generally reported by those who have discovered it as the highest happiness, because the

mind is beyond any need of feeding or protection, because it is dwelling in this peace that is beyond comprehension, beyond possibility of disturbance.

Some beings have realized this peace. Some beings have found it. And some beings can transmit it.

Some years ago, I went over to Nepal to spend some time practicing with one of my Tibetan teachers, a young Rinpoche there named Soktse Rinpoche. And while I was practicing there, he had a visitor who was one of the most esteemed masters in his lineage. His name was Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche.

Rinpoche had taken up residence there but was not teaching. But my teacher said if I'd like to meet him, he would make it possible. And I said, "No, I don't need to meet him."

I was sort of thinking, you've seen one Rinpoche, you've seen them all. Then I reconsidered. And I said, you know, if it would be okay, I would like to meet Nyoshul Ken Rinpoche. And my teacher said, okay, I'll arrange it.

So I was brought into his presence. He was sitting up ready to receive me. He was with his wife and a couple of attendants, and my teacher was there. We just had some chat through my teacher who translated. I was actually offering him a dana on behalf of a friend who knew him.

The moment came for me to offer the dana. So I went up and made three bows to him. I held the envelope out with my hands and reached up for him to take it. And as I reached up, I looked him in the eye.

As I looked him in the eye, something shifted. He seemed to go into his meditative state, and what I felt was his eyes moved slightly apart, and then everything stopped. He became completely still inside.

Looking into his eyes at that moment, I felt it wasn't accurate to say his mind had gone still. Rather, there was no mind there to go still or active. And as I was looking into that stillness, I just felt drawn further and further in, and I felt actually like I was falling into the unconditioned. I was falling into the stillness of the unconditioned.

And then something came back in me, which was a sense of self. I got nervous. I felt too exposed somehow. He was completely unguarded, undefended, looking right into the center. And I felt exposed in his eyes. And it broke the spell for me. I must have drawn back, and then he went back into a more normal look, and the moment was over. I felt if I could have just gone on looking a little longer.

I'll just close with this quotation from the Buddha on Nibbana:

"One who is dependent has wavering. One who is independent has no wavering. There being no wavering, there is calm. There being calm, there is no desire. There being no desire, there is no coming or going. There being no coming or going, there is no passing away or arising. There being no passing away or arising, there is neither a here nor a there nor an in-between. This, just this, is the end of suffering."

Let's just sit for a minute, please.

There being no wavering, there is calm. There being calm, there is no desire. With the cessation of ignorance comes the cessation of formations.

Thank you for listening.

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