An Attitude of Mindfulness

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 52:25

This is quite a baptism you're getting today with the rainstorm. But I think there's something about the elements whipping it up for us that speaks to the purification, the degree of purification that you'll be receiving from the retreat. So I think it's actually a favorable omen once you get dry.

Tonight I want to talk about two different things. I want to discuss the technical aspects of what we're doing here and why we're doing what we're doing, because I find on the first day of a long retreat, I always forget if I'm sitting and give myself about twenty other different things that are much more important that I should be doing instead. So I wanted to remind us of what we're about here.

But before I do that and get into some of the more technical aspects of the practice, I wanted to talk about the spirit that we bring to undertaking meditation. You could say the attitude that we approach our practice with. This attitude that we approach with is probably even more important than the technical details of how we carry on the practice. So I think it's really helpful to try and reflect on our attitude at the beginning, because if we set that straight, then the other things tend to fall into place a lot more easily.

So on the spirit of Dharma practice, Suzuki Roshi, the founder of San Francisco Zen Center, had a wonderful reminder. He said, we want to be serious, but we don't want to be too serious. Because if we get too serious, we lose the joy of discovery that the practice is all about. But if we're not serious enough, we don't quite apply ourselves well. And we'll see this kind of balance running throughout Dharma instructions, and I'll touch on it a couple more times in the talk.

At the beginning of a long retreat, it tends to draw dedicated people, dedicated meditators, who often have a lot of zeal. And so at the beginning of a long retreat, some people may approach this kind of experience with an eye toward achieving something—something great, enlightenment, or seventh jhana, or some experience of bliss or deep peace that we remembered from an earlier retreat. We're very fired up, and we're going to make our way straight there. We know it's just around the corner if we just push a little harder. We're going to get there.

But that kind of pressure that we put ourselves under eventually ends up making us feel tight, tense, and it wears us out. I brought a lot of this attitude to my early years of practice. And I remember some years ago going to see a psychic. I'd been in California for a while, and that's what Californians do. Every once in a while, you should do it, like renewing your driver's license—check in with a psychic.

So I went to see this psychic in San Francisco that a number of my friends had recommended. And I went in to see him. And almost the first thing that he did and said, he sort of drew back in his chair, sort of

recoiling from my energy. And he said, "Wow, you are in such a hurry to get there. Don't you know that God comes more often to those who don't want him so badly?"

And that was a comment that I really took in and reflected on because I've always had a lot of zeal for practice and the journey and the exploration that sometimes gets a little too goal-oriented. That's what he was picking up on and reflecting back to me.

So this kind of attitude where we definitely want some specific experience, we want some form of outcome, some special state to happen, will eventually tie us up in knots and tire us out. But if we're too loose also, then the path just doesn't unfold. There's a temptation on a day like today to say, "Wow, it was such hard work to get here. Now I've gotten here. I think I'll go to bed till the rain's over. And wake me in a few days. And when the sun comes back out, I'll check the hall out again. But this is too much today."

So that kind of attitude doesn't really bring the energy that will let the path open up for us. Somewhere in between, we have to find the proper attitude, this balanced attitude of interest and engagement, but at the same time, moment by moment, feeling a sense of peace or ease.

So one teacher expressed this right attitude in a very short phrase, which I like a lot. He said the practice is "relax, observe, allow." That's it. Relax, observe, allow. And this is a really nice summation of what we're about here.

So the first part, relax—you've heard us mention this quite a few times already. It really is key to the unfolding of mindfulness. When we relax, we're sending a strong message to our whole system. And the message is: things are okay already. When we can relax and be comfortable with the present moment, we don't feel under any kind of pressure. We don't feel we have to change anything or make anything happen. That very inclination of mind that says relax, I believe, sends a strong signal to the whole nervous system that says, "Okay, calm down, no fuss, no worries, just be here."

Things don't have to be perfect for us to relax. We can relax if things are just kind of good enough.

This has become a new mantra for me in practice: "Maybe this is good enough." And if I can relax in it as it is, it's good enough to start meditating.

The second piece then is observe. Once we find ourselves in a somewhat relaxed place—it doesn't need to be perfectly relaxed, just incline the mind in that direction—then we start to get interested or curious. Okay, what's going on? What's happening now? What's happening in the body? What's happening in the mind? What's happening in the environment? We bring that kind of awake attention to our experience.

This interest of observation is what starts to burn through the fog of the mind's wanderings. We realize that once we get interested in observing, we cut through the tendency to drift away into analyzing or planning or past or future or fantasy. And we develop an interest in how things are right now. It's that interest that keeps connecting us to the present moment.

So we observe our body and how we're relating to it, our mind and emotions and how we're relating to them, the environment and how we're relating to them. I want to talk in much more detail about this activity of observing, but just for now, as I'm sure you already know, this is the central thing that we're doing.

Then the third part of the string—relax, observe—is allow. This means that whatever our experience is in that moment, we let it be just the way it is. In the observation, we don't try to make it turn out a certain way. That would be like Edison doing his experiments on the light bulb and trying to read the data in an unbalanced way, or Einstein looking for confirmation of the general theory of relativity and interpreting the data in a distorted way that came in from the experimental physicists who followed up his predictions. We don't want to put a thumb on the balance pan. We want to see it just the way it is. So we want to allow things to be the way they are.

We learn fairly soon in meditation we can't control very much anyway. Everything arises from past causes and conditions, and in this moment they couldn't be any other way than the way they are. When we try to change them, which we do continually, this is not a random or occasional activity. It is more or less our constant activity that we start to see as we observe. We're always trying to make things turn out a certain way. We want the body to feel a certain way. We want the mind to behave in a certain way. We don't want thoughts to arise. We want the attention to stay steady, and so on.

Over time through meditation, we may get a little bit of skill in this area of control. But it's very limited. And ultimately, we realize we don't have the ability to influence things in a very big way. We find that our tendency to exert control so continually carries a high price. And the price is our freedom. We give away our peace of mind by always trying to structure the outcome.

This is not a small thing. You probably know the term samsara, which refers to the round of continual birth and death that human beings and all other sentient beings are engaged in, a round that eventually brings us into intense forms of unhappiness. The Tibetans say that this round is sustained by our tendency to correct. So this ongoing attempt to adjust things to be exactly right is the essence of samsara. It's the essence of this round.

So what's the essence of peace? Allowing. This is the way out. This is the way into release—allowing things to be the way they are.

We want to find an attitude that can align with this understanding. And the fortunate thing is that there's a very nice and simple way to check our attitude. In sharing this, I want to acknowledge a debt to the Burmese teacher Sayadaw Utejaniya, whom a number of us have practiced with over the last year and longer in some cases. So I'm going to share a little bit now of what we've learned from Sayadaw Utejaniya.

He said the question we need to be asking in order to find this right attitude is: In this moment, is there greed, aversion, or delusion in my mind? These qualities—greed, aversion, and delusion—are what are

called in Pali kilesas, sometimes translated as poisons. The Buddha called them the roots of what is unskillful, the roots of what leads to suffering.

The troubles of our own life and the troubles of the world are all due to the presence in human minds of these three factors. So is there greed, is there aversion, is there delusion in our mind in any given moment?

Fortunately, Sayadaw Utejaniya also gave us an easy way to answer this question. He said, am I wanting something to happen that's not happening? If so, there's greed in the mind. Am I resisting something that's happening? If so, there's aversion in the mind. Am I not knowing what's happening? And if so, there's delusion in the mind.

Now, delusion has many layers. This is not the entirety of the meaning of delusion, but it's a way in for us and a way to check. So notice: Do you want something to happen that isn't happening? Are you resisting something that's happening? Are you not knowing what's happening—meaning, is the attention lost in some string of thought?

The recommendation is that as you're paying attention to any object within the field of your experience, very frequently during your sitting, during your walking, in the informal times of practice throughout the day, you turn your attention back and check on your attitude. So throughout the day, the phenomena of your experience are anchoring your attention in the present moment. But your investigation is always partly directed to this question of: Where am I coming from? How am I approaching this moment? How am I relating?

Because truly, what is happening in our experience is not as deeply important as the way that we're relating to it. And this is the way that we learn about how we're relating, moment after moment.

Just some really simple examples. Am I wanting something to happen? I was sitting the other day in meditation and I noticed that I was looking for my body sensations to line up in a certain pattern that I associated with ease and comfort. I was trying all sorts of little shifts of attention and focus and energy to make that happen. And I realized this isn't helpful. This is just acting out greed. It's not practicing mindfulness so much as it's practicing greed.

That insight spelled itself out in my thought as "I can't control the body." When that insight spelled itself out—I can't control the body—all of a sudden I stopped trying. At that moment, the mind relaxed and then the body relaxed. It didn't line itself up in the pattern I was looking for, which was interesting. But it found its own configuration, its natural way of being, which was even more suitable. Because, of course, the body knows how to take care of itself if we just let it.

Or, am I resisting something that's happening? First days of retreat are usually really great opportunities to look at the mind that resists because there are the old companions of physical discomfort as we sit hour after hour, restlessness of mind that doesn't want to stay in the present moment, sleepiness which dulls

our body and dulls our observation and makes us want to just curl up in bed—not to mention dealing with adjustment to the new facility, wondering what work meditation is going to turn out to be like, when we're going to get to take a shower during the day, whether we're going to get to sleep at night with all these new people around us, and all of that going on.

So you can just begin to notice when the resistance is present that it's there. It's not that it's wrong or that we need to judge ourselves for its being there. Simply the act of noticing will start to interact with these forces of greed, aversion, and delusion. And eventually it's the noticing, the clear paying attention, that starts to purify them from the heart and mind.

So we aim to have our meditation practice be one that our good friend Sylvia Boorstein calls "meditation without agenda and without struggle." We don't come into meditation with an agenda of something specific happening that we want to see happen, and we don't struggle with things the way they're turning out. We find that way of allowing things to reveal themselves just the way they are.

I'd like to talk now in a little more detail about this middle step of observation, which is really the heart of our meditation practice. In order to talk about it in some detail, I want to explain some of the terms that we use and how we use them.

When you reflect on your basic situation as a human being or as a sentient being from a Buddhist point of view, I wonder what occurs to you or how you would see it. What's our fundamental human situation that applies to all of us—all human beings that live, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, as well as unawakened beings? What's true for all of us? What makes up a sentient being?

One way that the Buddha described it is that we are continually experiencing phenomena of six types corresponding to the six sense doors. As long as we are awake—and I just mean that in a physical sense, we're not physically asleep or unconscious—we're going to be seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching through the five physical senses, and through the mind door, we're going to be thinking and feeling. Thoughts and emotions are primarily what make up the activities in the mind, which is considered the sixth sense in the Buddhist teachings.

This is true for all of us. Do you have a choice about this? Could you decide to just throw an inner switch and turn off hearing or turn off feeling body sensations?

Not really. These things just happen. Sometimes they're pleasurable, sometimes they're unpleasant. And that revolving door of pleasant and unpleasant is essentially what creates all the turmoil in our hearts and minds, because we don't want that constant change. We want some security.

Nonetheless, all sentient beings are subject to a continual exposure to experience at all the six senses—sometimes pleasant, sometimes not. Being sentient means that we're registering them. We are very sensitive, sentient beings. So the appearances at the six sense doors impact us in their pleasant and unpleasant aspects. They impinge on us, and there's no way to stop that.

Sometimes this is experienced as quite a frustrating situation, a desperate situation—that we are vulnerable in that way to the impingement of all these experiences and, as the Buddha pointed out many times, always at the mercy of aging, illness, and death. So this is our basic experience as human beings.

All these things are happening, and because we're sentient, we're experiencing them, or you could say we're knowing them. Knowing not in any verbal or conceptual sense, but knowing in the sense of receiving, feeling, sensing, experiencing, directly having the impact of them.

This bare kind of knowing, which just receives sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental events, is what in Buddhism is called consciousness. The Pali term is vijñāna. And this is the basic ground of our experience. This is the field that our meditation is based in—the field of the six types of knowing and their sense objects.

Just two things to notice about this: It happens all the time involuntarily, and it doesn't take any particular intelligence to be receiving this. We receive it. Small children and babies receive it. Presumably dogs and cats and all the creatures in the animal realm receive some form of these six sense objects. So it doesn't take any intelligence. Consciousness is a mental faculty of knowing experience that's quite automatic.

The next level up in terms of mental cognizance—a step up from consciousness—is the quality that we call mindfulness. Mindfulness, as you well know, is what our meditation practice is all about. So what is mindfulness? It's more than consciousness, because the understanding is that we have the capacity to be mindful, but it's not always there. So unlike consciousness, which is always present as long as we're awake, mindfulness is not. It's sometimes there and it's sometimes not there. If we want it to be there more, which is considered generally a good idea in Buddhism, we have to make a little bit of effort. Consciousness doesn't require any effort.

So what is mindfulness? Let's call it the quality of mind that knows what our experience is in the present moment. Let's take that as at least a working definition for mindfulness as we'll be exploring it together during this month: knowing what our experience is in the present moment.

For instance, if you're breathing in and you know that you're breathing in, you're being mindful. If you breathe in but you don't know you're breathing in or anything else, you're not being mindful. If you have a strong pain, let's say in the knee, and you recognize it as a painful body sensation, you're being mindful. If you have a strong pain but your attention is somewhere else, you're not being mindful, at least of that.

The word that we're translating as mindfulness in the Pali language that the teachings came down in is sati. The original meaning before the Buddha started teaching was simply remembering. Now this is kind of curious—how does this connect with mindfulness? A nice word that kind of connects the two is the practice of recollection. When we come back into the present moment, we're kind of recollecting what's going on. We're recollecting why we're here. We're recollecting that we're a human being engaged in understanding our experience. So the sense of remembering is remembering to come back, remembering

to come into the present moment.

This kind of knowing that happens in mindfulness is a step up from consciousness in both the effort required and the intelligence required. We have to be a little bit smart to know, oh, that's an in-breath. That's a body sensation. That's a sound. That's a mood of sadness. So there's some intelligence going on in mindfulness that is not found in consciousness.

We could say that consciousness reveals the experience, while mindfulness understands what it is, or understands what's going on. It's considered, for example, that dogs don't have the capacity for mindfulness. They certainly have the capacity for consciousness and activity, but they lack this capacity for mindfulness. I would suggest, although I don't know, that small babies or infants also don't have the capacity for mindfulness. They're very present moment oriented, but they lack this capacity to understand what they're experiencing because they're just completely involved with the experience.

Joseph Goldstein has this nice analogy that he calls "black lab consciousness" to illustrate the difference between consciousness and mindfulness. You ever watch a black lab go about its business? Labs are pretty impulsive creatures. So there's a smell. Do you imagine that the lab goes, "Hmm, I'm receiving a smell through the nose door of consciousness. That's a pleasant smell. The image of meat is arising in the mind, and the image of my food bowl is arising in the mind. Those have a pleasant feeling tone, and I'm starting to feel a desire. Therefore, would it be skillful to walk over to my food bowl and see if someone has deposited some meat in it?"

That doesn't seem to be the way that black labs function. It's more like: smell, smell, smell, desire, desire, desire, go, go, go, go, go. The black lab is kind of running on autopilot, lacking this capacity for self-knowledge, understanding, and reflection.

Truth to tell, it's not just the black lab that is operating in this way. When we look at the chaos in the world and we see the vast reach of greed and hatred, we realize that a lot of the world is running on autopilot in this same way, too—to not very wholesome outcomes. The difference for us is that we have the capacity to know smells and pleasantness and images and feelings, whether it's desire or aversion or whatever, and then to make choices about action based on what's going to be skillful. This is a higher level of intelligence than simple consciousness. This is the role that mindfulness plays.

Another way mindfulness is sometimes described is by comparison to a movie. When you go to a movie and you're sitting there, you may be very engaged in the playing out of the movie—in the images, the characters, the story, the plot line. And in that engagement, you may not be thinking at all of past or future or life outside. So in a way, you're quite present moment oriented. But how often do you remember that you're sitting and that you're in a movie? Sometimes it doesn't happen very often because the movie is so compelling.

So that moment of recognizing, "Oh, I'm in a movie"—that's a moment of mindfulness. The rest of it is

engaged consciousness. It may be involving, but it doesn't have that capacity of reflective awareness that's mirroring what our activity is.

Also, what happens when a moment of mindfulness comes into you during a movie? What happens to your level of engagement with the plot and the characters and the story when you recognize, "Oh, this is just a movie. I'm actually just sitting here and it's a movie"? For me, what happens is I lose a little bit of the grip of the drama that's being played out on the screen because I realize it's just a story.

A similar thing happens when we start to apply this factor of mindfulness in relating to our own lives. We lose a little bit of the grip because we start to see how the story, how the drama is being created. So for those who are very attached to the drama of their lives, I don't really recommend mindfulness. It tends to interrupt that kind of fixation.

So mindfulness is this quality of stepping back a little bit and taking a big picture view and knowing what our experience is in each new moment. This is the practice that we want to come back to again and again and again.

Now, what do we practice that on? As we just talked about, consciousness unfolds this whole range of sense appearances at all the six sense doors. Any of those appearances can be excellent grounds for mindfulness. Any of them. So body sensations, sounds, sights, smells, tastes, thoughts, emotions. That's the primary range that we direct our mindfulness to.

Sometimes in Vipassana retreats, the idea of meditation gets really closely connected with the breath. And I've had people say to me on Vipassana retreats, "Well, I was with the breath for a while, but then I got distracted by some sensations in my body. I lost the breath, so I guess I stopped meditating." So please understand that Vipassana meditation is in no way synonymous with the breath.

Fundamentally, the object that we pay attention to doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all. What matters is the factor of mindfulness. This is what we're trying to preserve.

So it actually doesn't even matter if the experience that you're having is pleasant. Sometimes people think, "Oh, in order to have a good sit, my body has to be really fully relaxed. No tension anywhere, no holding, no what are sometimes called energy blockages, no obvious experiences of contraction. Only then can I really meditate." Not true.

A good sit is not equal to "body was comfortable, mind was not moving." Sometimes those things can happen and we're almost asleep. So that's not what constitutes a good sit from our point of view. What constitutes a good sit is the frequency that clear seeing of mindfulness is arising at. How many moments are coming where you really know clearly what's happening in the present moment? That's the continuity that we're looking for.

Experience will sometimes be pleasant and will sometimes be unpleasant. Don't think you have to wait for

a pleasant experience for the mindfulness to develop. Sometimes some of the greatest learnings can come from times of difficulty, whether emotional pain or physical pain. Mindfulness can grow very strong from those experiences. So the object is not so important. The factor of mindfulness is the important thing.

Also, don't imagine that it has to be very detailed or that it always has to be getting to just the minutia, the exact minutia of how many different sensations are unfolding in the rippling effect of one in-breath in the abdomen. "I have to see 17 different sensations in the abdomen." Not so.

Joseph Goldstein's first teacher was an Indian man named Munindra-ji. And one of Munindra-ji's favorite instructions to new meditators was this: If you sit and you know that you're sitting, the whole of the Dharma will unfold for you. This is enough mindfulness. If you sit and you know that you're sitting. I mean, just tune in right now to how difficult is that—to sit and know that you're sitting? It's a pretty easy thing to become aware of.

So, all the different objects of our conscious experience are good grounds for mindfulness to develop from. How do we choose?

This brings in the next term that I want to mention, which is the term of attention. When we talk about attention, what we mean is the focus we bring that lands on a certain part of our experience and leaves the rest what we might call in the background. So generally, in every moment, there's one aspect of the experience at these six sense doors that's kind of being highlighted, and you might say brought into the foreground. This is the quality of attention. It's doing that highlighting and picking out, selecting from amongst the myriad things that are going on in any given moment.

Attention can be directed by choice. So for instance, I could ask you just in this moment to bring your attention to the sensations in your sitting bones as they contact your chair or cushion. And generally that's a fairly easy thing to connect to. I could ask you to bring your attention to the sound of my voice as it's registering in a musical pitch, high or low kind of frequency, just paying attention to the pitch of my voice. I could ask you to bring your attention to the object of sight, which is the statue of the Buddha behind me on the altar.

So we can choose to direct the attention to any of the experiences that are presenting themselves. Most of what meditation techniques are about in our tradition is what do we choose to pay attention to? That's really all that it is. I've probably been taught twenty different ways of relating to the breath based on how I pay attention. Do I pay attention at the belly, at the chest, at the nostril, just below the nostril? Do I count? Do I notice "in, out," along with that paying of attention? Do I experience it through the whole nose down to the belly? Do I experience it through the whole body? What do I pay attention to with a single breath? There are many, many ways to do that. And then we open up the field more widely to body sensations and emotions. Thoughts and the techniques ripple out.

From our point of view, all the techniques that we know about and that we may share are fine. Again, the

important thing is not where the attention is directed, but is there mindfulness? As the attention lands somewhere, is there a knowing that in that moment that's what your experience is?

So sometimes it's very helpful to choose to bring the attention, say, to the breath for a period of time. Especially in the early days of the retreat, you may have found it helpful in the past. You might like to do it now. Stabilize the attention where the breath is clear. It might be in the belly. It could be in the chest. It could be at the nose. It could be the whole breath. If you like to practice that way, that's fine. Or you can let the attention sort of float with the whole breath as it comes in and as it goes out. The way that Howie instructed this morning is a way of grounding the attention in the whole body and feeling the breath's impact throughout the body.

What's interesting is that where we place the attention starts to affect the factors of mind and body. If we place the attention in a very narrow way, it tends to strengthen the factor of concentration. But that can bring a little bit too much tightness because it takes effort to keep the attention fixated. If we let the attention go out very broadly, for instance to sounds, it tends to bring in a sense of ease and relaxation through that kind of spaciousness. We'll talk more about these different ways, but just know that where we put the attention starts to shape our experience in certain ways, but none of them are the heart of the practice. The mindfulness can come from any of these.

The last thing to say about attention is this: when it is somewhere—and it always is somewhere—take the time to connect to that experience. That means the attention has landed. Give your interest to that so that it really comes alive for you with mindfulness, so that you really know your experience there.

For instance, when you're feeling the breath, try to feel it really wholly, wherever you're feeling it. Really make that experience fill the frame so that you're not feeling divided—half with the breath, half with the sound, half with the thought. But be wholehearted in your attention wherever it is. And it's this kind of giving of yourself wholeheartedly that makes the meditation start to become vital.

The other name for this factor of connecting is aiming. It's a translation of the Pali word *vitaka*, which is a factor of concentration. You call it aiming or connecting—establishing a firm relationship. That means bring your awareness close to the place that it's landed so that you really feel it directly.

Sometimes we use the word observe or watch, but it's a little misleading because you can think that, oh, it should be at a distance. I want to sort of stay back here and the object's over there and I always want to maintain this distance. That's a little misleading. *Feel* is sometimes a better way of saying it. You want to kind of feel where the attention has landed. Let all of your attention go into that so you know the characteristics of what's being felt.

The characteristics of an in-breath, for instance. Let yourself feel it directly, say in the abdomen. Let the awareness mingle with those sensations so that you know it very directly. Then two things start to happen.

The first is you know the individual characteristics. You'll know whether that breath is fast or slow, long

or short, rough or smooth. You'll know that without any special effort because you're so close to it. Just like you know if a good friend has brown hair or gray hair, has wrinkles or not. You know that just from being close to them.

As you pay attention to the individual characteristics of these objects that you meet, what also starts to slip in almost unbidden is your understanding of the universal characteristics of those objects. So you start to notice: Oh, every in-breath that I'm with has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Every out-breath has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Every emotion that I feel started sometime, lasts for a while, and then goes away.

All my experiences that I've seen since I've been in this retreat are temporary. Even the great, blissful, pleasant, peaceful sittings that I have—they go. So maybe all these experiences, all the arisings at the six sense doors, maybe they all pass. Let me keep looking and see.

And if they do, none of them is capable of a lasting satisfaction. But I keep trying to hold on. Why do I do that? Holding on makes me tense.

What if I let go?

And then we find that letting go is the sure path to peace, not holding on. And we get more trust in that. That's all from observing the individual and then the universal characteristics as awareness meets the features of our experience. This is where wisdom starts to build.

This is the last term I want to mention tonight. Really, what we're practicing for is the development of wisdom. Stillness and peace and pleasant body sensations and times without thought or disturbing emotions are wonderful, but they don't in themselves liberate. What liberates is understanding.

As we understand the changing nature of experience, we tend not to hold on. And it's the letting go that opens us up to seeing clearly and to liberating insight. It's the understanding of how a painful emotion is put together that lets us just see it as an impersonal mechanism triggered by a memory or an association or an event, stirred up by obsessive thinking, blaming thoughts, fearful thoughts, felt through the body and reacted to with negativity or aversion to the unpleasant body sensations, and then eventually passing away in its own time.

We start to see the impersonal unfolding of all these events. And in seeing that, we can't hold on so strongly anymore. We start to see how they play out just out of their own nature and causes and conditions. Wisdom is the aspect of mind that frees us. So all of the peace and calm and pleasantness that we develop here is really in the service of supporting insight or understanding.

One of the most helpful supportive conditions for wisdom, apart from mindfulness itself, is this factor of interest. If we become really curious about our experience, that keeps our attention there quite effortlessly.

It's fun to watch after the rain goes through—which it will eventually, trust me—the deer will start to come out. There are deer all over this town and these lands, and I've seen so many yogis, and I've done it so many times myself, just stand by the side of the road for a while to watch these groups of deer. You see the mother deer and the younger deer, and you can just watch for a long time how that community hangs out together, how the younger ones follow the mother, but the mother is always keeping a sense of where the younger ones are. And if they're not following along, she'll give them some kind of signal to get them to come.

You get to see how relatively unscared these deer are who've grown up on this property because there's no aggression and no hunting here, and how they don't get very ruffled when people come relatively close to them—much closer than Sally and I can get on our home lot, which is only a few miles from here.

When you have that interest in the deer and you have that kind of love for them, for their beauty, your attention is held there without any kind of effort at all. This love for seeing nature, when you bring it into meditation and you fall in love with the breath, you fall in love with the sensations of the body, there's a quality called rapture, or in Pali, *pīti*. And when that's there, that joy, that enthusiasm for the practice, everything picks up and goes on a great momentum. This love for what we're seeing and what we're doing.

And then we look in the mind and we say, is there greed? Is there aversion? Is there delusion? No. There's none of those. There's non-greed, there's non-aversion, there's non-delusion. Then check out how that feels. We're seeing clearly and we're open to things just the way they're unfolding. How does that feel? This is the path.

It's said that a moment of pure mindfulness is a moment free from greed, aversion, and delusion. So this is the path of mindfulness. It is the practice.

Yet I'd also like to read you a quote from Sariputta. Sariputta was one of the two chief disciples of the Buddha and said to be the foremost disciple in wisdom. He was asked by another monk of his time, "What is nibbana?" Nibbana, you know, is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path, the place of unconditioned freedom and unshakable peace.

Sariputta's reply was: "The destruction of greed, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of delusion—this is called nibbana."

Sound familiar? Non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion. These are the qualities that we discover as we apply mindfulness again and again and again. This is the purification of heart and mind.

So you might say that as we tune to the right attitude—the attitude that is free of wanting to shape our experience but is directly in touch with it—we experience, you might say, the foretaste of enlightenment. We experience the essence of freedom. Right attitude is a factor of the path, but in this way, you see, it's also the goal.

So when we find that place where we can look with interest and curiosity and love without trying to shape things in a certain way, it is the path, but also we start to feel, oh, I've arrived.

This is also the goal. We've reached that point of real rest and peace.

Then as the path and the goal come closer together and our whole experience starts to be in tune with right attitude, it's in tune with the unconditioned. It's in tune with nibbana. We let that unfold until the mind just falls into that dimension.

At the end of our talks, we'd like to just sit for a minute in silence just to let the words settle. So let's just take a minute of silence sitting together, please.

[Silence]

"The destruction of greed, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of delusion—this is called nibbana."

Thank you for your attention.

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