The Attitude In Awareness

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 55:20

This evening I want to talk on the topic of an attitude for awareness.

There are two things I want to touch on in this talk. First, I want to go over some of the specific terms and technical language that we'll be using throughout this retreat. Philip touched on much of that this morning and described them beautifully, showing how they relate together and impact our experience. I want to expand on that a little bit.

The second thing I want to talk about is how we approach our practice—the spirit that we bring to it. This is quite an important part of practice. This is not just a mechanical process of following instructions that lead to predetermined results. There needs to be an inner relationship to what we're doing. This is sometimes described as having the right attitude in meditation, or taking the right approach. So I want to talk about the attitude with which we can approach our practice. This applies not only to this particular retreat, where we'll focus a lot on awareness, but to our meditation practice in general.

One teacher described this kind of right attitude with three simple words: relax, observe, allow. I think these are three really good guidelines for us for this whole week together. So I'll talk about each of these aspects.

In relaxing, we are both intending to relax the body and intending to relax the mind, insofar as they will do that. Sometimes they will not do that. Learning to relax the body is something that in the West we spend quite a bit of time on. We have developed the technology of massage and hydrotherapy and reflexology and all those different kinds of touch to bring relaxation to the body. Even then there are some aches and pains and tensions that just won't release. But we generally in the West haven't had a lot of understanding of how to relax the mind. This is really where the heart of relaxation has to come from.

How can we relax our mind? There are many things that make the mind not relaxed. The challenges of daily life bring movement from within our own mind that lead away from relaxation. We have reactions of wanting or not wanting, of desire and aversion, and all those forces tend to make the mind tight and unrelaxed.

In our meditation practice, we can get tight if we're afraid of doing it wrong. Sometimes we think if we miss one moment or do one stretch of meditation wrong, we're never going to get it and we're going to be a bad meditator forever. So we can get tight around that. We find, of course, that we can make all kinds of mistakes in meditation and somehow things keep unfolding. It's sort of amazing that despite some of our bad habits, it doesn't actually stop the meditation from working. That's very reassuring to find out.

Sometimes the mind can become unrelaxed if we really want something special to happen. I had quite a lot of this in the beginning of my practice. I had a quality that's generally considered good in meditation practice, especially in the beginning—something that's sometimes described as zeal. I had a lot of zeal in the start of my practice, but I have to say it was a little out of balance. Part of it was that I really wanted some result, like enlightenment or liberation or something major to happen, and I was pressing.

This was pointed out to me not long after I'd moved to California. My wife and I moved there some years ago, and not long after we arrived, some of our friends in the Dharma community were going to see a psychic. So I thought, I'll go see the psychic. That's kind of what you do when you go to California. You get your driver's license, you go to see a psychic, and then you've really landed.

She and I went to see this psychic together and we walked through the door. As we walked in, the psychic sort of did this big recoil from me. He said, "Hold on, you want it so much. Don't you know that God comes to those who don't want him so strongly?"

That was actually a really good intuition about this zeal that I was approaching meditation practice with. I have to say, I'm glad that I had that zeal, especially in the early part of my practice, because it's a tremendous motivator. It fueled really good years of serious practice. So I especially recommend it to young practitioners—don't worry about having a lot of zeal. It can carry you a long way. But at some point, and when I saw the psychic it was probably a good point, we need to start learning to bring it into balance. Otherwise we can burn ourselves out with that kind of dhammachanda, desire for the Dhamma, in meditation.

So there are all these different forces in the heart and mind working to bring contraction.

Our basic sense of self-centeredness and self-concern works to contract us. And to undo that, we have to learn this quality of relaxing. Really, in essence, this quality of relaxing is about letting go—about not clinging, not holding on, not controlling. But it's not something that comes so easily, so we want to investigate it and incline in that direction often.

You'll often hear us in the instructions point to this quality of relaxing. We mean to relax the body as much as possible and to begin to learn how to relax the mind, to let go a little bit of the mind's tendency to grasp and control.

When we're able to relax, this sends a very important message throughout the system. It sends a message to the brain that says something like, "Things are all right. Everything is basically okay." If we can bring that quality of relaxation in, then the mind knows it, the brain knows it, then the body gets the message and everything can start to settle a bit.

There is a deep reason in the Dharma why we can trust and what we can trust in. I want to relate this koan that comes from a Chinese Chan master many centuries ago. His name—which I'm not sure of the pronunciation of, but I read it as Shi Tou—was a Chan master some generations after Hui Neng, who I

think was the fifth Zen ancestor and author of the Platform Sutra.

Shi Tou was in a dialogue with a seeker who was coming to him for advice and teaching. This seeker came to him and said, "What am I supposed to do?" And Shi Tou's reply was, "Why are you asking me?" So we might use this too during this retreat, so be forewarned.

He says, "Why are you asking me?" And the seeker says, "Where else can I find what I'm looking for?" And Shi Tou replies, "Are you sure you've lost it?"

"Are you sure you've lost it?" is another way of saying, "Are you sure you're not complete and whole and perfect just as you are?" It's a profound pointer to the basic nature of our own minds that each of us has, embodies, is. This basic nature, of which awareness is a direct expression, has a quality of awakeness, of purity, of never having been stained or corrupted.

As we start to trust in that and feel that, then we know we have something we can really trust in and relax into. The discovery of this is really the grounds for a quality of—we could call it—faith. The Pali word is saddhā. Faith is kind of a mixed word for Westerners because often we take it to mean belief, but it's maybe better translated as trust or confidence.

We discover this quality in ourselves, this basic goodness and purity, through our direct experience. Awareness plays a vital role in that. Awareness sort of leads us into the knowledge of that and the experience of that, the trust in that. Once we know that that is there within us, that's what we can relax into. We realize we don't have to make something up to make ourselves different than we are. There is this basic goodness, this basic nature that we just have to relax into, and it will hold us, it will support us, and it will respond with loving kindness, with compassion, with understanding, with insight.

I think for all of us on the teaching side, this quality of exploring awareness has been so helpful because it's led us into a trust in this basic nature. We'll talk more about that as we go through the retreat.

Sometimes we might describe it as relaxing, sometimes we might call it letting go, we might call it dropping. Another nice phrase is just settling back into the present moment. As we stop trying to make anything special happen, we can just settle back into the way things are right now. In that settling back with presence, with awareness, this nature will start to reveal itself, will start to be felt.

Once we touch this relaxation, the next word in attitude is observe. Observe is not my favorite word for this, but it's not bad. We could also say pay attention or be mindful or be aware. Observe is a nice short way, but observe sometimes feels a little too dualistic—like I'm removed and I'm going to watch from a distance something that's happening. Maybe a better word is feel. Feel into, sense, soften into our experience.

At any rate, once we relax, then we want to start to pay attention. What is our experience? What's happening? We learn to pay attention to many different aspects of the experience we're having. The key,

of course, is that it's happening in the present moment. This is what we want to learn from—a present moment experience. And again, we have many tendencies that take us out of that.

There's this New Yorker cartoon that sums this up really well. It's got three panels.

The cartoon depicts something profoundly true about human consciousness: whatever we're doing, it's so easy to find ourselves somewhere else entirely. When our experience becomes this fragmented, we start to feel scattered and incomplete. We lose the collectedness of samadhi, that gathering together of awareness that has been mentioned. As we learn to collect our attention in the present moment, however, we begin to experience a quality of wholeness—being fully together here and now—which allows us to genuinely learn from our experience.

This quality of observing requires first arriving here, gathering ourselves so we can truly give our heart and mind to learning from our present moment experience. The result is profound contentment, happiness, and satisfaction. I don't believe it's possible to find genuine satisfaction while living in that fragmented way, where half our vital energy is lost to past or future. But when we call that energy back into the present moment, contentment and fulfillment naturally arise.

A visitor once came to see the Buddha and his community of monks and nuns—I believe it was a king, one of those who maintained strong relationships with the Buddha and supported the monastic community. He told the Buddha, "I've visited many different spiritual teachers and traditions, and often I find people arguing, quarreling, being disputatious. The atmosphere feels very disharmonious. But when I come here, your people are orderly and quiet, and everybody looks so happy. Why are your followers so happy?"

The Buddha replied simply: "Because they abide in the present. They abide in the present."

This ability to abide in the present removes much of life's complication and restores tremendous energy, bringing great joy and happiness. Thoreau captured this beautifully in *Walden*: "I feel a little alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily without getting there in spirit. What business have I in the woods if I'm thinking of something outside the woods?"

You might notice this phenomenon during walking meditation or simply walking in nature. Are we really here where our body is? This is the training of meditation—we go off again and again, and gently we bring ourselves back. We'll unfold these instructions day by day, learning to pay attention to many aspects of our experience: objects like breath, body, and sounds. In this retreat especially, we'll focus on the quality of awareness itself—this knowing element that recognizes all phenomena will be central to our exploration.

The third element, "allow," means that in meditation, whatever is happening in the moment, we let it be as it is. It may not be what we wanted or what we would have ordered, but it's what's happening. We work to bring our heart into alignment with the way things are. We come into the present to see reality clearly, and this quality of allowing brings our heart into harmony with that reality.

In the present moment, things couldn't have unfolded any other way. There are countless causes and conditions that have led this moment to be exactly what it is. For it to have emerged differently, all those causes and conditions would have had to be different. So in any given moment, that moment has unfolded in the only way it could, based on past conditions. Our meditation practice then becomes: How do we respond to create the next moment skillfully, wholesomely, in ways that bring satisfaction, happiness, and freedom from suffering?

One of the students at Spirit Rock shared a lovely dialogue with her teacher. She said, "People often ask how I am, and I've learned to reply, 'I couldn't be better'—because it's literally true. In this moment, I couldn't be better. If I could have been, I would be. But this is what is in this moment."

This moment couldn't be different. Yet so often we fight with that reality. Of course, when you fight with reality, you know who wins. But we frequently do resist the actuality of the present moment. This message of "allow" invites us to let our heart and mind soften and open to the way things are right now.

It's important to note that this describes an inner relationship—

This is not saying what action you should take back in the world to address social injustice, unfair circumstances, damage to the earth, or harm to others around us. That's a different movement entirely. But learning this inner quality of allowing enables us to settle with greater peace into the reality of the present moment, and that settledness provides a wiser foundation from which to choose our response.

If something needs to change externally or internally, we come from a place of settledness and equanimity in order to most skillfully make the next step. For instance, in meditation on a day like today, you may have observed many moments of not wanting to accept things as they are. The first day of retreat often brings considerable friction with the way things are.

Someone's in the shower when I want to be there. What's served at lunch isn't what I would have ordered. Someone is making noise in the meditation hall behind my seat, and I really want things quiet. A back pain arises after forty minutes of sitting, and I really don't want to feel it. Many different things arise, and our habitual response is to push against what we don't like and try to make happen what we do.

It's fascinating to observe the mind and its activity from this perspective, especially on a day like today. You may see that you've been quite busy trying to make countless little adjustments—just to feel a bit better, just to get ahead in the lunch queue, just to make things a little quieter in the hall. We're constantly adjusting our experience.

When we first notice this habit, it doesn't seem like a big deal. It's just a little habit of mine. Everyone does it. It's natural. We like some things, dislike others. But we don't initially notice the effect this has. We're trying to control our experience, and there's always a price for attempting control. That price is the surrender of some freedom.

As we examine this habit of adjusting, making things a little better, putting off discomfort just a bit more, we begin to see it keeps the mind perpetually busy and prevents us from settling into a deeper peace that embodies allowing. In the Tibetan tradition, they teach something profound about this pattern.

You've probably heard of samsara, the wheel of birth and death that according to the Buddha we cycle through again and again. It can be understood as many lifetimes of being born and dying, or as a moment-to-moment phenomenon throughout each day where we take birth in different personalities, psychological states, and physical conditions—all lasting briefly before dying off as something new emerges.

However you understand it, Buddhist philosophy holds that this cycle, this incessant wheel, is wearying. Through repeated birth and death, one grows tired of the struggle inherent in that cycle. Finding freedom in relation to changing situations is discovering nirvana in relation to samsara—one of the fruits we might discover through meditation practice.

In the Tibetan tradition, they teach that what keeps the wheel turning is trying to correct things. The essence of samsara is our attempt to correct it. Here lies a profound pointing: this quality of resting in peace, where we release control, can lead into the dimension of nirvana—deep, satisfying peace.

One beautiful aspect of the awareness we're exploring—which Philip hinted at this morning when he described it as mirror-like—is that it doesn't care what it reflects. So often we care deeply. We want pleasant experiences and resist unpleasant ones. But awareness truly doesn't care. It reflects the beautiful, harmonious, peaceful, and pleasing with the same accuracy as it reflects what's difficult, conflicted, or painful—whether physical, emotional, or external.

Awareness possesses this capacity to accurately reflect anything that appears before it. As we let our attention enter that realm, our being begins to absorb some of that impartiality. We start to inhabit that dimension that's equally at home with both pleasant and unpleasant appearances. The more we surrender to that quality of awareness, the more our being discovers that peace, trust, and refuge Leela described last night.

This quality of awareness and its inherent peacefulness and impartiality becomes a living refuge, an actual sanctuary for us. As Chan master Shito taught: "Your essential mind is absolutely still and completely whole, and its ability to respond to circumstances is limitless."

We begin to trust it not only as our resting place for peace and contentment, but also as our capacity to meet the world skillfully. By resting in awareness, we don't lose touch with any of our senses or our connection to the world. Rather, it enriches our connection to the world.

And awareness also has this beautiful quality of responsiveness, that it can meet the situation with what's appropriate—love or compassion or happiness or patience, all the paramis. So this is the practice of right attitude: relaxing, giving ourselves to the observation, wanting to learn from our experience and allowing

things to be the way they are. This is our platform for exploring the objects of our experience and the quality of awareness that comes.

Now I want to look at some of the key terms we'll be using and try to get a little more precision about our definitions. I think we've all been using them in a consistent way so far, but let's examine more deeply what we actually mean by these terms. I want to particularly look at the words consciousness, mindfulness, awareness, and attention.

Before diving into definitions, I want to say one of the things I really appreciate about retreats is their simplicity. We have a very simple lifestyle here. We eat and we sleep and we walk and we sit, we spend time in nature, we open our eyes, we close our eyes. A very simple life that's really common to all humans. And that kind of simple life brings us back to some basic questions. One of the questions I like to think about is: what is our most basic situation as human beings? And how do we find freedom in relation to it?

One way of framing this is through a short poem from Rumi, where he wrote: "Where did I come from and what am I supposed to be doing here? I have no idea." That's kind of our existential situation, isn't it? As adults, we start to wake up. We're here. Why are we here? What am I supposed to do? I don't know. This body and mind didn't come with a user manual. They didn't tell us at birth what we were supposed to be doing with our human life. What are we supposed to do?

One of the things that I like to feel into when I'm on retreat is what does it mean to be a sentient being? We are all sentient beings like the birds and the chipmunks and the people who are driving by on the road. What does that mean? Well, I think sentience means that we are experiencing things. We are knowing things. We are conscious beings. If you think of it, basically what it means is as long as we're awake, things are happening and we're aware that they form our experience.

So in the present moment, you're feeling body sensations, you're seeing the room, you're hearing my voice, you're having a certain mood, and some thoughts are going through your mind. All these experiences are just going, going, going. We don't have to do anything particular to make them happen. In fact, could you stop them? As long as we're awake, some form of that is just going to keep going, going, going, whether we want it or not. That's what being sentient involves. We're constantly being bombarded, you might say.

The Buddha described this in a beautiful little discourse called the Discourse on Totality. He started this way: "Bhikkhus"—a word that's usually translated as monks, but it really means committed practitioners, those who are exploring the nature of their experience like you are—"I will teach you the totality of life. Listen, attend carefully, and I will speak."

This is a pretty bold claim, isn't it? I'll teach you the totality of life. You think about the twentieth-century intellects. Marx didn't say that. Einstein didn't say that. Freud didn't say that. Here's the Buddha 2,600 years ago: I will teach you the totality of life. Listen, attend carefully.

What is the totality of life? It is just the eye and sights, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and sensations, the mind and objects of mind. This is called the totality of life. Anyone who attempted to describe a totality beyond this would not know that of which they were speaking.

So I love this passage because it directs us to what I would say is the Buddha's map for us. This is a certain map we call the map of the sense doors. In Buddhism, they are considered to be six sense doors—the five physical senses and the mind, which is another door primarily bringing through thoughts and emotions.

This is the range of our experience, and our meditation is to become familiar with all of this. That's why we give, in a standard vipassana retreat, so many instructions about how to pay attention to sights and sounds and sensations and breath and thoughts and emotions. This forms our world. This is where we get caught and suffer. This is where we can find release and freedom as we learn to relate wisely.

So I'll suggest—not right now, but later—take a look at this list, the six sense doors and their objects, and ask: is there anything else in your experience that's not covered in that? Or does that in fact describe the totality of life for you? It's something to reflect on later.

In this passage, one of the things that makes up the totality of life is mind—mind and objects of mind. Objects of mind, you can think of basically as thoughts and emotions. But what is this thing called mind?

Mind in this passage refers to that which knows all the other things. Mind knows sights and sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, thoughts, and emotions. Or we could say that's an aspect the Buddha called consciousness. The word he used in Pali is vijñāna. This is such an important word that we'll probably refer to it again and again, and it's useful to know in this retreat. Vijñāna relates to knowledge or cognition—the ñā syllable means knowing or cognizing. It's the heart of vijñāna.

So it's the mind that knows all these different objects. Another way to say it is that we're conscious of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, thoughts, and emotions. This is the activity of consciousness that knows these sense door objects in their most basic nature.

For instance, when we look at the eye door, what are we actually seeing in a moment? You might see this more clearly if you close one eye. If you look out, what we really see are just patches of form and color. That's the data in the eye door. We've learned that that's a woman, that's a man, that's a cushion, that's a floor, that's a wall, that's a lamp. But the basic eye door data is simply patches of form and color. In that very simple, primitive, uninterpreted way, that's what the eye door reveals.

Similarly, the ear door can reveal sound, but the conscious knowing of that sound doesn't interpret it as bell or bell that ends a sitting. That's an addition. That's in the realm of what we could call perception. Consciousness reveals the sound. The perception or interpretation explains it or recognizes it.

So vijñāna is this quality of our mind. It's really the essence of our mind's activity that's knowing and presenting to us all the different objects of experience at these six sense doors. That's what consciousness

does. It presents the world to us in this very bare form. It's pre-verbal. It hasn't been interpreted. Just the bare sense data. This is vijñāna.

It's happening all the time as long as we're alive and awake and the sense doors are working. If your eye, ear, nose, tongue, body are working, these are going to be happening. We can't decide not to feel them. We can't decide to turn them off. Also, this consciousness doesn't require that we be particularly intelligent. It's happening all the time quite automatically.

We have it. Do animals have it in your intuition? Are animals conscious? Yes, they're probably having these same experiences through their sense doors. Babies?

Are babies conscious? Can they see and smell? Yes, they respond to these things. It looks like they're conscious also.

So consciousness is in all living things, all sentient things, let's put it that way. Worms have this, sloths have this, the Buddha had this, Einstein had this, the birds have this. Everything that is sentient has this quality of consciousness.

Now let's talk about mindfulness. Mindfulness is another step up, you could say, in intelligence—in relating to the objects of the senses revealed by consciousness—because mindfulness understands what they are. For instance, consciousness reveals the sound; mindfulness recognizes it as hearing or as a sound. Consciousness reveals a pain; mindfulness understands it as sensation with unpleasant feeling tone.

It's very interesting that the central discourse of the Buddha's on mindfulness is called the Satipatthana Sutta, Foundations of Mindfulness. The word in Pali for mindfulness is *sati*, which originally meant "remember." So I think of it as remembering to notice what's happening, remembering to be in the present.

In the Satipatthana Sutta, as the Buddha describes the four foundations, there's a word that recurs again and again. Every time he describes how to do mindfulness meditation, the word he uses is *pajanati*. *Pajana ti* is related etymologically to the word *sampajanya*, which you may have heard before—it's usually translated as "clear comprehension."

For instance, when the Buddha says, "Breathing in long, the bhikkhu understands, 'I breathe in long.' Breathing out long, the practitioner understands, 'I breathe out long.' She understands the mind affected by desire as the mind affected by desire. She understands the mind unaffected by desire as mind unaffected by desire," and so on.

Everywhere the Buddha describes this practice of mindfulness, the word he uses is *pajanati*, which gets translated as "understands." This is very interesting. Mindfulness requires this understanding, which means there has to be an intelligence behind it. There has to be a certain amount of intelligence to

understand our experience in the framework of the four foundations, which develop the quality of mindfulness.

This is another aspect of cognition, but it's a higher level functioning. In fact, you could say we've looked at three different levels of cognition. *Vijnana* reveals the pure sound before words—maybe it's F sharp or something on a scale—it reveals that pure pitch. The next level up is perception that recognizes it as, "Oh, that's the sound of the bell." So there's a recognition factor based on memory. The next step up is mindfulness that understands that this is a sense object arising at the hearing door.

That's mindfulness. It knows it as an object of the six senses arising at one of the sense doors. You don't have to go through that thinking every time, but essentially that's what mindfulness is doing. It's locating it within the framework of the Buddha's map, the totality of life—the six kinds of sense objects and their doors.

This intelligence is the opening to wisdom. This factor of wisdom is so important in the Buddha's teachings because it's only wisdom that can liberate our hearts and minds. We can get peaceful and still just through meditation training, but it will end when we get up off the cushion and encounter the world, unless it's accompanied by understanding, by wisdom. So mindfulness is the entry gate for wisdom to come in.

The word is *panya* in Pali, for wisdom. One of my teachers in Thailand, Ajahn Buddhadasa, liked to pair these two words, and he didn't often refer to it as mindfulness—he called it "mindfulness-wisdom." What we're developing here is mindfulness-wisdom, and he called that *sati-panya*. He regarded it as a native quality of our mind. *Sati-panya*.

So mindfulness has this quality of intelligence that understands things in the context of the Buddha's map. As we practice mindfulness, we're waking up that wisdom factor in us. That's so key because it's understanding that liberates the heart and mind—understanding of how we suffer and how we release that suffering.

Krishnamurti had a book with a lovely title pointing to this called *The Awakening of Intelligence*. That's what we're doing in every moment of mindfulness practice. We're awakening this native intelligence that will liberate us.

So I want to contrast this quality of mindfulness and the quality of consciousness.

Consciousness is happening all the time. Even if you want to, you can't turn it off. And there are many times we would like to. I flew from San Francisco to Boston the day before the retreat started. I would have loved to turn off consciousness for about six hours. I couldn't do that. So consciousness is always there.

Is mindfulness always there? Was your mindfulness there uninterrupted today? No. Mindfulness kind of comes and goes. There are times that we're really in the present and knowing our experience,

understanding our experience. There are many other moments when we get carried away by a thought train or we feel very sleepy and too dull to really notice what's happening. So mindfulness comes and goes.

Generally, does it take some intention to be mindful? Yes. Consciousness is happening spontaneously, doesn't require any effort, can't stop it. Mindfulness isn't always there and usually needs a little bit of inclining the mind in that direction for it to be activated.

Dogs have consciousness. Does a dog have mindfulness in the way the Buddha uses it? If you have a dog and it's dinner time and you go over near the bowl and you pull out a can of dog food and you bring out your can opener and you go "rip, rip, rip," does your dog perk up its ears? Usually then they come right over to the bowl and they want to see what's in there.

Does the dog ever go, "Hearing is arising at the ear door. Perception is telling me that that's the sound of the Friskies can being opened. A pleasant aroma is arising at the nose door. Perception is telling me that that's the chicken flavor for tonight. A thought arises that my bowl will soon be filled with food. So the question arises, should I walk over thoroughly mindful to my bowl and check out whether the food is there yet?"

That would be a mindful dog, but usually that's not the way dogs work. They just go, smell, boom, and they're there, or hearing, boom, and they're there. So dogs are driven by many things—hunger or fear or loyalty or affection—but they don't stop to notice the motivation or the force from outside. The understanding in Buddhism is that the dog does not have the ability to develop mindfulness. But we do.

What about babies? Are they mindful? Sadness comes up. Does the baby know, "Oh, this is sadness"? When the breast comes near, do they know, "Oh, this is desire"? Probably not. Are they in the present moment? Yes. Is the dog in the present moment? Yes.

So we can be very present moment oriented, but not have this quality of mindfulness active, at least in the way it's described in the Eightfold Path, this quality of samma-sati, right mindfulness. This is the understanding of consciousness on the one hand, which all sentient beings share, and mindfulness on the other, a higher level of intelligence which humans can develop but not all beings have.

So what is awareness? It's kind of interesting, isn't it? This is an important point. There is no word in the Buddha's language, in the Pali language, that needs to be translated as awareness. The words he used are viññāṇa and sati—consciousness and mindfulness. There's no third word that we need to translate as awareness. So that's kind of interesting.

Is awareness more like consciousness, that it's happening all the time and quite unprompted? Or is it more like mindfulness, that it's there some of the time and not there others? I'll give you my opinion. You can find your own, but I'll give you my opinion. Sometimes it means one.

and sometimes it means the other, and sometimes it means somewhere in between. So it's a wonderful word in English because it sort of spans this range.

For instance, if I say, "Are you aware right now?" Yeah, if you're awake, you're aware. If somebody is thinking, when you are thinking, do you lose all awareness? No, you're aware of what you're thinking about. What you're thinking about may be the square root of 16 or something, but you're aware of something. You're not aware that that's a thought, but you're aware of something. So in that way, it's used like consciousness.

But then it could also be used like mindfulness. Like I could say, "When you said that to me, were you aware of your motivation in saying it?" And then it means, were you mindful? Did you know what motivation was present when you said that?

So in this way that it kind of slides between these two, it's a beautiful word. It's very expressive. It's a really nice English word. We're using it as the theme of this retreat. But also be aware that it's not very precise in the way that the Buddha's language is. Vijnana, very precise. Sati, mindfulness, is very precise. Awareness is kind of slippery.

And so this richness of the term awareness can actually help us, can help our intuition settle into kind of both aspects of what are going on. There's the knowing of individual things happening quite spontaneously, and there's this intelligence that can meet them and understand them. And both of those are pointed to by this term awareness.

So there's a little potential for confusion here, but I hope you won't let it worry you too much. As you use the word yourself, look into what you mean by it. Are you leaning more toward the spontaneous knowing of things like consciousness? Are you leaning more to having this wisdom factor like satipanna of mindfulness? We will use them in both senses. And so that ambiguity is kind of just part of the retreat. We're quite comfortable with it. And so I hope you will be too. And it's very interesting to keep looking into these, you could say these two aspects of the English term awareness. It's a beautiful term and really helpful to us.

So we'll be presenting lots of different meditation objects at the six sense doors, and then we'll keep wanting to turn and look back at this quality of knowing of them, the consciousness and then the higher level cognition of mindfulness, both of which we might describe as awareness.

So as we've said a few times today, don't worry too much whether you're with the sense object or you're tuning into the knowing of it, this consciousness factor that's receiving it. Because either way, the quality of mindfulness will be activated. And the quality of mindfulness opens the door to understanding and liberation. So either way is fine. And we'll sometimes talk about the objects and we'll sometimes talk about the knowing or the consciousness of them. And either way, the practice will be going great.

So don't spend too much time sort of spinning around about, "Am I with the knowing or am I stuck in the

dreary old object?" Those dreary old objects work just fine for us. So we'll go back and forth and we'll get more fluency in that going back and forth.

So I'll just close with this little quotation from, actually it's from Sariputta. He was asked at one point, "What is nibbana?" You probably know this term—nibbana is the ultimate goal of the path of mindfulness. It's a state of deep and complete peace and the end of conflict, inner conflict. And he said, "Nibbana is the destruction of greed, the destruction of aversion, and the destruction of delusion. This is called nibbana."

So these qualities, when you start to look at the nature of awareness itself, these qualities are absent in this pure nature of awareness. So as we tune into this knowing faculty, with its associated wisdom, we are stepping out of the samsaric forces of greed, aversion, delusion, and inclining the mind toward the goal of the path—this ultimate peace of nibbana. That is what we are doing moment by moment. So as we rest there, as we find out how to rest there, we get a little bit of a taste of that peace already, and it's leading into its own deepening.

So this will be the path of practice for this week. And if we understand in this way, we kind of bring the path and the goal together. Resting in this place of knowing is free from greed, aversion, delusion, and it leads onward to the full purification, the full liberation of nibbana.

This is our direction for the week.

At the end of the talks, we'd just like to have a little bit of quiet time, a minute or two, just to let the words settle. So we'll just sit for a minute or so together in silence, please.

Thank you for listening.

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