The Nature of Awareness

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:02:06

The talk tonight is on the nature of awareness. I will be referring to the study guide if you have one handy and want to take a look at the quotes, as we will be using it a few times.

You probably know that after the Buddha's enlightenment, he debated whether or not to teach. He was inclined not to teach, saying, "This Dhamma that I have discovered is profound, subtle, and hard to understand." He didn't think people would get it. So the talk tonight may not be either profound or subtle, but it may be hard to understand. If that's the case, just let the energy wash over you. Take it energetically. Don't worry too much about the concepts.

As you all know, generally in Vipassana practice, we go through this systematic series of instructions that direct our attention toward what are called the objects of our sense experience. We typically start with sensations, breath, sounds, emotions, thoughts, feeling tone, intention, until we're quite comfortable relating with mindfulness to all of those different arisings. Usually then the retreat's over, right?

In this retreat, we are turning to this faculty called consciousness, or sometimes we call it awareness, which is what's responsible for knowing the sensations, breath, sounds, emotions, thoughts, et cetera. But in most Vipassana retreats, we don't get instructions on how to relate to this. So it's often new territory for us when we come into a retreat that is exploring consciousness, this fifth aggregate, vijñāna.

D.H. Lawrence commented that not looking at this property of awareness is like somebody who's sitting outside at night by a fire. They get fascinated by all the objects that the firelight is illuminating—the trees and the grasses and the logs and the limbs and the insects and the shadows, everything that goes on in the dance of the firelight. They're so entranced by the objects, they never think to turn and look at the light itself. It's the light that's making all this available, that's revealing it, that's illuminating it. And yet we can get so entranced by the different things that are showing up, we don't look back at the light.

So in this retreat, we're looking at this light that illuminates or knows all the objects of our experience. And that's really where the mystery lies. Fire is kind of a mystery and consciousness is definitely a mystery. Scientists don't have a clue how this happens. I don't think they even have the beginning of a clue about how it happens. But we know it. It's very close to us. It's always active and we can explore it in our direct experience even if we don't have a rational understanding.

As we talk about this factor of consciousness and awareness and the knowing, hold it, please, in the context that it's a great mystery for all of us. We almost can't get too specific in our descriptions of it, in our vocabulary around it, in our terminology, and any definition of it, because it's a vast, mysterious

thing. So we'll try to be somewhat precise, as precise as we can be, but just be aware that words can't nail down this factor because it is fundamentally a deep and beautiful mystery.

We may talk about it as consciousness, we may talk about it as awareness. Now I've mentioned before this word "awareness" is used in different meanings by different teachers. Some teachers, like Sayadaw U Tejaniya, will use it more to mean mindfulness. We use it, in this retreat, more to mean consciousness, so vijñāna as opposed to sati. But it's a slippery word, and the reason it's a slippery word is that there's no word in Pali that needs to be translated by "awareness."

The Buddha's language was pretty precise. If we can take a Pali word and bring it into English, we know pretty much what the Buddha was intending by it, because he used it so many times in so many ways and we get the sense of it. But this word "awareness"—it's a beautiful old English word. And because of its old English nature, it has a deep resonance for us. But it doesn't have a Pali equivalent. Therefore, we don't know what the Buddha would have made of it. And it's hard for us to be precise about it for that reason. That's why it can mean whatever a teacher wants it to mean. So Sayadaw U Tejaniya likes to use it to mean mindfulness. Guy and Sally like to use it to mean consciousness, more or less. We'll get a little more specific about that.

So in this retreat, we're mostly using awareness to point to consciousness, this bare knowing of sense objects. But I want to make this little distinction between consciousness and awareness the way I use it. I usually use consciousness to refer to the knowing of an individual sense object, a specific arising at one of the six senses. We'll even talk about eye consciousness, ear consciousness, smell consciousness, taste consciousness, body consciousness, mind consciousness. So there are these six classes of consciousness for the six kinds of sense objects.

When I use the term awareness, I usually mean the broad field of consciousness that includes all six kinds of sense objects. This is often pointed to when we say, open your attention in a wide way and notice any of the objects that are arising. With awareness we can include all the different kinds of sense objects and still call it one big field of awareness. There can be sights and sounds and emotions and thoughts and sensations and smells and tastes, all of that within one field of awareness.

You get this sense when we were doing the pervading metta that there's a big space that we know and that things are happening within. So that's the way I want to use awareness—the broad field in which objects are known, consciousness is revealing objects.

Let's look for a minute at how objects come to arise within our experience. This means we're awake, we're having conscious experience, and all different kinds of objects are coming and going. This is the first quote from the study guide on page 6, quote number 25. This is from a famous discourse called the Honeyball Sutta, which we may take a closer look at later, but I just want to start with the first couple of sentences.

"Dependent on the eye and forms, eye consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact."

This is the fundamental definition of contact in the Buddha's discourses. It's the coming together of—in this case—eye, forms, and eye consciousness. This is repeated in the full discourse for all the other five senses. The coming together of the sense organ, the sense object, and the sense consciousness—that's called contact.

Then it goes on: "With contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels, that one perceives." This is also one of the discourses where it's clearest where the Buddha is using the concept of perception. The Pali term is saññā. So there's contact. From contact, there's feeling. Based on that feeling, we perceive what's happening. We perceive the sense experience.

What I want to come back to is this definition of contact: the meeting of the sense organ, the sense object, and the sense consciousness. Basically, if your eye is working and open and something is in front of you, the eye consciousness will reveal it. Similarly with a sound—if the ear is working and a sound arises, hearing consciousness will reveal it.

So if we have a sound that arises in your experience, you don't have any way to turn it off. It just arises spontaneously. What you're meeting there is the working ear, the sound, and hearing consciousness. In our direct experience, we kind of take the sense organ for granted, so we can set that aside for now. Ears and eyes are mostly working for us.

So there's the hearing consciousness and the sound coming up together. Don't think of this as two separate experiences, like the sound is over here and the hearing consciousness is over here. When the sound arises in your experience, both of those things are together. That's the meaning of the word contact—it's the meeting of the sound and ear consciousness. These two things are together.

But the nice thing is, it's one experience for us, but we can look at either the sound or the consciousness of the sound. One experience, but it's got two aspects, and we can choose which to look at. How does that work? One thing, two experiences.

If you look at this bowl, is it round or is it white? It's both, right? It's one thing.

It's a bowl. Is it round or is it white? It's both. So we could focus on the shape, which is the roundness, or we could focus on the color, which is the whiteness. They're both here together.

So when we hear the sound, two things are going on. The first is the bare sound, just that hmmm. The second is the consciousness of it, the knowing of it. It's in your experience. You're having a direct experience. You're knowing that sound. It's arising in consciousness.

So we can look either at the sound, which is what our traditional Vipassana instructions have told us to do for many years, or we can look at the knowing of it. It's a part of our experience. We can pay attention to that. And in this part of the retreat, that's what we're asking you to do. Pay attention to the knowing of it.

Now, if you pay attention to the knowing, does that mean you don't hear the sound? No. It's still there too.

They're together. But you could look at the sound or you could look at the knowing. Choice is yours.

So we're being instructed to pay attention to consciousness itself. Now, is this within the realm of Buddhist practice? Did the Buddha teach this? And if he taught it, why haven't we heard of it before?

It is in the instructions, in the Satipatthana Sutta. The Fourth Foundation lists a few areas that there are instructions to become mindful of, and in that list of topics are the five aggregates. They're the six sense bases and also the five aggregates. So in the five aggregates, the fifth one is vijnana.

So essentially, there is the instruction in the Fourth Foundation to become mindful of each aggregate, therefore to become mindful of vijnana. That's really what we're practicing. We're practicing mindfulness of consciousness.

One of the beautiful things about mindfulness is anything that can be noticed in our whole field of experience, we can become mindful of. We can become mindful of any emotion. We can become mindful of any mood. We can become mindful of any flicker of feeling in the body. We can become mindful of the most subtle thought. We can be mindful of an intention that's just subtly forming. And we can be mindful of this quality of consciousness, although it is one of the most subtle things to pay attention to.

So if you've been having trouble as we've turned the corner into awareness, don't worry. A lot of people have trouble with this. And it can take days to land on finding this quality of consciousness. That's fine. Don't worry about that.

We could describe this kind of practice as mindfulness of consciousness. Some teachers talk about knowing your knowing. But that gets into the complexity of the word knowing, which I'll come back to in a minute. So we could talk about mindfulness of consciousness, but somehow I prefer the term aware of awareness. It kind of evokes that old English familiarity. So I like to talk about this practice as becoming aware of awareness. But if you ask me to be specific and put it in the Buddha's language, what we're practicing is being mindful of consciousness.

Why do we want to explore consciousness? Why is this interesting or valuable? It seems subtle, maybe confusing, maybe hard to get. What's the point? The objects were working pretty well for us. We learned how to liberate emotions and be with the unpleasant and develop a lot of equanimity and insight. Why would we turn to this elusive factor of consciousness?

Well, I'm going to suggest there's a little bit of a problem in attending to objects. The problem is that objects are sometimes pleasant and sometimes unpleasant. As we attend to them and focus on them and build our meditation practice around them, we are building on a foundation of shifting pleasant-unpleasant, pain and pleasure.

This poses certain challenges because unmindful attention easily leads into greed and holding on, on the one hand, or aversion and pushing away on the other. Now, of course, we're meant with mindfulness to

develop equanimity in regard to the pleasant and painful aspects, but that's a training. It's not always that easy.

So being involved with objects leads us into this dance with the pleasant and the unpleasant, which can easily lead to reactive formations of desiring or pushing away. And of course that leads into grasping, clinging, and therefore suffering.

Taking a look at consciousness or awareness really helps us not to get entangled with the objects. Why? Well, for one thing, when you connect with awareness, it's like connecting with space. It relieves some of the pressure and kind of takes a step back. As you connect with awareness of an object, you can feel yourself with a little bit more space around it. So that helps develop equanimity. But you're not cut off from the world—you're still knowing sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, mind objects, but you've got more space around them.

The second thing is, as you start to explore this quality of consciousness or awareness, it itself is free from the kilesas. Consciousness does not have qualities of like and dislike. Consciousness reveals everything equally. We could have a beautiful flute concerto in here, and you would hear that clearly. We could have a jackhammer ripping up the floor out in the lobby, and you'd hear that clearly. Consciousness doesn't care. So as we tune into consciousness, we are stepping into a sphere where the kilesas are absent. They don't rule. They don't play. So that's enormously helpful—to have a refuge where the kilesas are not active.

So consciousness and awareness are impartial. They're just like a mirror. They'll reflect anything that comes before them, and they're not harmed by it. This is tremendous.

And then as you tune into the nature of awareness, you'll also find it's not moving. As you connect with objects—any object in the senses—you'll find movement. You'll find change. You'll find variation. You'll find a dance. And that's fine. We can learn to work with that. We get insight about impermanence and unsatisfactoriness and uncontrollability. But in awareness there's an aspect that's not moving, that's still. And as we tune into that, we partake of that stillness. We feel that stillness, and that supports us.

So overall, this practice is meant to free us from the tendency to get entangled with objects through clinging, grasping, fixation, obsession, and suffering. It gives us another place to be that's not entangled but is still in touch. So we aren't disconnected from the world, but we're just not as caught up.

Here's another nice quote. This is on page seven, quote number thirty-nine. The speaker is a woman teacher from Thailand named Upasaka Ki Nanayan. She's passed away now, but she wrote a book—or her talks were collected into a book—called Pure and Simple, which is a very beautiful expression of deep dharma.

So quote thirty-nine: "The mind that's aware of awareness doesn't send its knowing outside this awareness. Nothing can be concocted in the mind when it knows in this way. In other words, an inward

staying, unentangled knowing, all outward going knowing cast aside."

So when we're aware of awareness, we're not sending the mind out after sense objects and we're not getting entangled in them. So this is a place of freedom. This is a place of unentanglement, a place where we can rest. It's a place of peace.

Now, she uses this word knowing—unentangled knowing. And so I want to take a little detour for a few minutes to talk about this word knowing. And I'm going to summarize it.

In the Buddha's vocabulary, the fourth kind of knowing is wisdom, which in Pali is *paññā*. This is the intelligence that develops through training the mind. It's not IQ; it's not intellectual understanding. It's the kind of understanding that comes through our meditation practice, through our training in concentration, in mindfulness, in investigation. This wisdom sees things more clearly. It sees things as they actually are, rather than as we think they should be or as we wish they were.

Wisdom recognizes impermanence in our direct experience. It recognizes the unsatisfactory nature of clinging to things that are impermanent. It recognizes that there's no solid, unchanging self to be found anywhere in our experience. These are profound insights that come through the development of wisdom.

And then the fifth kind of knowing is what's called omniscience, or *sabbaññā* in Pali—literally "all-knowing." This is the knowing of a fully awakened being, a Buddha. This is the complete understanding that comes with complete liberation. It's the knowing that sees everything exactly as it is, without any distortion whatsoever.

So when we talk about knowing in meditation, it's helpful to be precise about which kind of knowing we're referring to. When Ayya Khema speaks of "unentangled knowing," she's pointing to a quality of awareness that doesn't get caught up in the content of what it's knowing. It's the knowing itself—clear, present, spacious—without being pulled into the drama of thoughts, emotions, or sense experiences.

This unentangled knowing is what allows us to rest in awareness itself rather than in what awareness is aware of. It's what gives us that place of freedom, that place of peace where we can simply be present without needing to fix anything, change anything, or go anywhere else.

The thought might be true or it might be false, but still we can make up these thoughts.

Then a step up from there is the knowing of mindfulness. We went through this in mindfulness of breathing. The Satipatthana Sutta says: "Breathing in long, one knows, I breathe in long. Breathing out long, one knows, I breathe out long." Here the term being translated as "know" is *pajanati*. One other translator translates it as "understands." So we start to see that within mindfulness there is an understanding of our experience. We understand our experience in a certain way, and this being with that is even more sophisticated than conceptual thought. It's a superior kind of intelligence to conceptual thought.

This understanding piece, *pajanati*, has the opening into wisdom—liberating wisdom. *Pajanati* is closely related to *sampajañña*. *Sampajañña*, clear comprehension, again gets the *ñña* on the end, which is another way of saying knowing. It's a kind of knowing.

The final category I'm aware of is what I would call insight knowledge or wisdom. Insight knowledge is referred to as *jñana*. Wisdom is referred to as *paññа*. So again, you get the *ñña* root in both those words. This is the whole purpose of insight meditation. The purpose of insight meditation is to generate these insights and knowledges. Classically, they're around the three characteristics or the realization of nibbana. These are considered the range of insight.

In the West, we extend it and include things like psychological insight: "Oh, I see, I reacted that way at that time because of an old karmic pattern which led me to reactiveness in that situation." We call that insight. Formally in the Buddhist tradition, insights are really around the three characteristics or the realization of nibbana. So in Buddhist terms, this is the highest kind of knowing because this kind of knowing leads to the end of suffering—insight, knowledge, and wisdom.

So there are these five different levels of knowing. When Upasika Kee says "unentangled knowing," I take it to mean consciousness or what we're calling awareness. She talks about "aware of awareness"—just this bare knowing. This is what we'll be cultivating in this part of the retreat.

Let's look into this quality of awareness a little more. It's not so easy to locate sometimes. And yet, it's always present, isn't it? Anytime you ask yourself, "Am I aware?" does the answer ever come back no? I don't think so. Yes, when we check, we are always aware. Awareness is always there with us. But it's hard to locate, it's hard to find.

The reason is, awareness is what's holding objects. So awareness can hold an object like a sound, but can a hand hold itself? Not really. So awareness is always holding objects, but it's hard to hold. You can't get a hold of awareness itself. You can't grasp awareness, but we know it because it's working. It's functioning. It's revealing things. It's happening all the time. We're always aware—if we're awake.

So awareness isn't a thing. Consciousness is not a thing you can pick up and hold. Consciousness is the holder. But it's there. So we have to intuit it. We have to feel into its activity. We have to feel into its presence, its action. This is what Ajahn Chah said about not grasping awareness.

He said, you're riding on a horse and you're asking, where's the horse? We're riding awareness all the time.

This insight comes from Ajahn Sumedho. It's just like the question, can you see your own eyes? Nobody can see their own eyes. I can see your eyes, but I can't see my eyes. I'm sitting right here. I've got two eyes and I can't see them. But you can see my eyes. Looking in a mirror, I can see a reflection, but that's not my eyes. It's a reflection of my eyes. But there's no need for me to see my eyes because I can see.

It's ridiculous, isn't it? If I started saying, why can't I see my own eyes? You'd think, Ajahn Sumedho is really weird, isn't he?

So we can't grab hold of it, and yet it's so near. It's so close. It's so fundamental to our every moment of waking experience. If it ever seems like you can't quite connect, just ask, am I aware? And just stay with that. Yeah, I feel it. I know it. I'm not in any doubt about that. So just stay with that sense.

There's another quote from the study guide on page 10 that I really like. It's quote 62. This is by a man who took the pseudonym Wei Wu Wei. He was an Englishman living in Hong Kong. His real name was something like Terence Gray—I can't quite remember. He got into Zen and must have had some realization because he wrote all these pithy Zen-like sayings, but he made them up himself. He had some real insight. And this is one of his pithy sayings. He's not alive anymore, but he wrote several interesting books.

He says, "What we are looking for is what is looking."

That's why we can't grab hold of it. What we're looking for is what is looking. That's consciousness. That's awareness.

So we say that consciousness or awareness is the knowing—knowing of sense objects, knowing of phenomena, in this most basic sense of registering, revealing the sense object. Don't think of it as an object in itself. It's more like an activity. Knowing is a verb. And I think it's best to think of consciousness or awareness as an activity. It is doing knowing. That's its function. It's revealing, it's illuminating, it's showing the experiences of our senses.

Now, Joseph Goldstein gives a nice instruction related to this. He says, try putting it in the passive voice. Normally we might say, "I'm knowing sensations." But what if you just say, "Sensations are being known?" He said, try that. He came upon this, I think, when he was doing walking meditation. In walking meditation, there's often this tendency to think that there's an observer in the head who's looking down on the legs and feet and the sensations as you're going along. You sort of locate the eye up here, but the object is down there.

So when you rephrase it as "sensations are being known," you can take out that sense of the separate observer. You're just with the sensations in the legs and feet and the knowing of them. There's no distance. So it can be skillful. Try it in walking meditation sometime: "Sensations are being known."

Think about this passive voice construction. We could say, for instance, "The bell is being hit." And then we could ask, "Hit by what?" We would say, "Hit by the striker." We could say, "The cheek is being stroked." Stroked by what? By the hand. We could say, "The paper is being cut." Cut by what? By the scissors.

And then when we say "sensations are being known," look in your experience—known by what? What is

doing the knowing of the sensations? Do you find that actor performing that action? You might say consciousness, but we just went through consciousness as a verb—it's the knowing. What's doing consciousness?

What happens in your mind when you ask that question? Does it kind of bring it to a stop? It does, doesn't it? And in that stopping, that's a nice meditative place to be, because you're not conceptualizing. You're not scrambling for an answer. You're just open, receptive, interested, present. That's not a bad place to meditate from.

There was a Zen teacher who established a big center in Providence, Rhode Island, named Seung Sahn. He was Korean. He came to the three-month course one year toward the end and gave a dharma talk. It was the funniest evening I've ever spent in that meditation hall—he was a very engaging speaker. Seung Sahn had a saying that he liked to mention to people, a core teaching: "Only keep don't-know mind. Only keep don't-know mind."

When you pose a question like this—"sensations are known by what?"—it puts us in a place of "I don't know." That's a good place to meditate from, and it's a good place to investigate from.

One answer, one possible answer, is that this is an invalid question. There's nothing behind the knowing. You're just mixing up the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha spelled it all out clearly—there are the five aggregates, consciousness is the last one, and there's nothing else there. So that's one school of thought on this question.

But another school of thought says that there may be an agent behind consciousness that we might call mind—something more ongoing that's doing the knowing. The knowing of objects is very fleeting, comes and goes, arises and passes with the object. So the knowing, the consciousness, is clearly impermanent. When the object goes, the consciousness goes. But maybe there's some agent behind there doing the knowing. Let's call it mind, for want of a better word.

This has been a question in Buddhism for a long time. There's a very nice story from the Chinese Chan tradition. Bodhidharma is the teacher who, as legend has it, went from India and carried the Buddha's teachings up into China a long, long time ago.

When we look carefully at awareness itself, we discover something quite profound. The story about Bodhidharma illustrates this beautifully. He was a very hermit-like teacher who, according to legend, went into a cave and stayed there for nine years, facing a wall in meditation, refusing to give any teachings. People would come pleading for instruction, but Bodhidharma just kept facing the wall, offering nothing.

Finally, one person became so determined and desperate for teachings—a man named Huike—that he cut off his arm, tossed it into the cave, and asked for instruction. Please don't do that here—if you want teachings, just write us a note and we'll find a time!

He threw his arm into the cave and shouted to Bodhidharma: "Your disciple's mind is not purified. I beg you, master, pacify it."

Bodhidharma calmly responded, "Show me your mind and I will pacify it."

Huike replied, "I have searched long for this mind, but I have never been able to find it."

And Bodhidharma said, "There—I have pacified your mind."

It's just like the question "known by what?"—it stills the mind. Huike was looking for his mind, couldn't find it, and that brought him stillness. He could simply rest there. Actually, according to the story, he was awakened at that point—that's how these tales always go.

We have a quote in the study guide from a nineteenth-century Tibetan lama named Shabkar, a wonderful writer and practitioner. He says: "When you look carefully, you won't find the merest speck of real mind you can put your finger on and say, 'this is it.' And not finding anything is an incredible find. Friends, to start with, mind doesn't emerge from anything. It isn't anywhere. It has no shape or color. And in the end, nowhere to go."

When we turn to awareness and look for this factor called mind, the not finding anything is significant. What this not finding means is that mind is empty—it's not a thing, not substantial. But you also couldn't say there's nothing there, because it keeps functioning. It keeps revealing the phenomena of the world. So you can't say it doesn't exist, but you also can't find it as something substantial, as a thing.

Its basic ability is knowing—we could also say cognizing. But it's also empty. You can look at this in your own experience. When we went into the Pervading Metta meditation, if you felt that boundless quality of space, you could sense that most of it is just open. When you look around this room tonight, there are people and things, but much of the room is open space. As you let your awareness fill the room, you realize that much of your awareness is open space—nothing in it, not full. There are some things in it, but it's not full.

This opening to the vast emptiness of awareness points out a fundamental feature of it. In this expansive view, this is sometimes called big mind. As Suzuki Roshi says in quote 61: "Big mind experiences everything within itself. That everything is included within your mind is the essence of mind."

To experience this is to have religious feeling.

Based on this term "big mind," the meditation practice called Big Mind was developed by Joseph, and we'll introduce that in a couple more days—the Big Mind meditation. The feeling that everything is happening within your own mind is to have a big mind.

This vastness reveals an emptiness that is like space. We say the space in a room contains all the physical elements that are in the room. And the space of awareness includes all the arisings that come moment

after moment at the six sense doors. They don't fill it up. There's always room for a new arising. If the mind were full, I'd hit that bell and it wouldn't arise because the mind was jammed up with too much other stuff. But there's always room for one more. That's the basic emptiness of awareness.

Another way to think of this emptiness is that nothing is stuck in the mind that's been there from the very beginning. It's like all the furniture in this room. Once this room was built and they took the construction equipment out and people walked in, it was empty. There were no chairs, there were no cushions, there were no people, there was no Buddha statue. But little by little, they brought all of those things in and the space of the room started to get filled up. But in this room, because of the original emptiness, everything could be taken out again, right? All the furniture could be taken out of this room and then it would be back to its original emptiness.

The mind is the same way. Nothing is stuck there. Nothing is there from the beginning. So anything that has taken up a home within the mind can be taken out again. This is tremendously freeing. Any concepts you have about yourself, any judgments about yourself, any old karmic patterns, any afflictive emotions that have taken root, any kind of suffering at all wasn't there from the beginning. And because of that, it can be moved out like furniture. That's the liberating potential of our dharma practice. That's the liberating potential of understanding the emptiness of awareness. Nothing in the mind is fixed or stuck there.

All different forms of suffering have come about because of particular causes and conditions. And because they've arisen due to causes and conditions, they can cease when the causes and conditions change. That's what dependent arising says: when this arises, that arises; when this ceases, that ceases. Anything that's arisen can also cease. And that's why we can move from the truth of suffering to the end of suffering. That can cease.

When we discover this empty nature, that in itself is freeing. And it produces a lot of faith. We can see the original emptiness of mind. We know nothing is fixed. And then we just have to do the work, which is not easy. But we recognize that emptiness. We recognize it can be done.

There's one important difference between the space of awareness and the space in the room. The space in the room doesn't know the chair, doesn't know the bell, doesn't know the person. It's not conscious space. The space of awareness knows bell, chair, person. Awareness has a greater property than physical space. Awareness has emptiness and it has knowing.

As you feel into it—somebody mentioned this in an interview—the empty space and the knowing are not separate with awareness. They can't be separate. They can't be separated. In the empty space, there is knowing. Joseph sums this up nicely. He talks about the cognizing power of emptiness. As you get in touch with the empty space that you feel internally, it already knows. It knows whatever appears. It's the cognizing power of emptiness.

So there are basically these two qualities that are together in the mind.

There's emptiness on the one hand and there's awareness or knowing on the other. These two are joined. They're not separate and they can't be separated. They're united. They are a union. This is the description of the mind. The mind is a union of emptiness and awareness.

This is not just your mind or my mind. It's every mind. It's the human mind. It's the turkey mind. It's the duck mind. It's the mosquito mind. Every sentient being has this empty knowing combination. And this is to be developed.

Another quotation from the study guide appears on page ten. The Buddha is giving meditation advice to his son, whose name is Rahula. I'm not sure what age—I think Rahula was quite young when he was getting this advice. The Buddha said, "Rahula, develop meditation that is like space. For when you develop meditation that is like space, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as space is not established anywhere, so too, Rahula, develop meditation that is like space."

Space is not established anywhere, awareness is not established anywhere. That means it's not solid. It's not graspable. It's not a thing. It's not established. This is unentangled knowing. Arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts do not invade the mind and remain. This is what awareness opens the door to for us. That's why it's such a refuge.

On another couple of pages, Ajahn Buddhadasa has a very nice way of saying it. On page twelve, quote number seventy-four, he says, "We should call the mind emptiness, but because of its awareness we call it mind." This cognizing quality is what makes mind.

In our meditation, we want to move in the direction of recognizing this union. We want to find awareness, which takes practice, but you can do it. Asking the question, are you aware? The awareness will be there, will be felt. Can you turn to it and see that it's empty?

This will take some investigation. When I first started doing this, I had to ask a lot of questions, which don't help the meditation, but I had to go through it. I turned to awareness—yes, I got awareness. I'm aware, I'm knowing things. I definitely know I'm aware. Is it empty? I'd say, okay, it's wide. There's a lot of space in between the arisings. I guess it feels spacious and that space is kind of empty. Is there a self congealing there? Oh, I don't know. It's not too much of a self there. It's kind of empty in that way.

So I would ask those questions and investigate and find that it was actually empty the way it was supposed to be. But it took me a while to have confidence in that. After investigating it again and again and again, I could turn my mind and recognize awareness and it was really clear it was also empty. I could turn to awareness and also see its emptiness and I could see those together.

Once I could do that, then I developed more and more ability just to rest in that. That knowing of the union of awareness and emptiness. Awareness and space, if you like.

Now, there's one other thing that happens when you can recognize the union of emptiness and awareness.

And this is explained by Shabkar on page 11. This is the quote we mentioned at the very beginning of the retreat—one of my favorite quotes in the study guide. It's quote 67. I'll read the whole thing, but there's one sentence I especially like.

"Not being fixed is something. Mind is beyond presence and absence. It neither comes nor goes, gets born nor dies, is illuminated nor obscured."

Does your study guide read differently? Does it say "neither illuminates nor obscures"? Yes, I think that's a mistranslation. I checked another source that I regard as more reliable, and they put it differently—"is neither illuminated nor obscured." So I'm going with that version.

And then this is the key phrase: "Mind's nature is vivid as a flawless piece of crystal, intrinsically empty, naturally radiant, ceaselessly responsive. Stripped bare of samsaric error, mind itself is surely and always Buddha."

This points to that unstained purity of awareness that's not touched by the kilesas. The basic nature of mind is not contaminated. It's not touched by greed, aversion, and delusion. Its nature is vivid as a flawless piece of crystal—intrinsically empty, that's the emptiness piece—naturally radiant. So "radiant" is the aware piece, as though the light of the mind is illuminating the phenomena, lighting up and radiating all the phenomena that arise.

Sometimes this is called radiant, sometimes luminosity, sometimes clarity, sometimes cognizance, sometimes awareness. These are all synonyms for the lighting up of phenomena.

When you have these two together—the emptiness and the cognizance—you open into the third quality, which is "ceaselessly responsive." What this means is that when you can touch that empty awareness, all the treasures of the heart start to come through. The treasures of the heart are the beautiful qualities we've been exploring, that you've known from your meditation: loving-kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity, wisdom, patience. You can go through the whole list of paramis. They start to come out of this empty awareness because part of emptiness is non-contraction, non-self, non-clinging, non-grasping.

When the heart is contracted with kilesas, you won't be able to clearly see the empty awareness. It's not empty—it's full of self at that point. When that clinging, grasping fixation is released, you can see the emptiness, you can see the awareness, and that's when the heart qualities come through.

So when the heart is not constricted by grasping, then it opens up and responds with all the treasures, all the beautiful qualities that are potential within us. As we connect with the empty awareness, the doors are open for these beautiful qualities: peace, contentment, joy, love, compassion.

This is where the practice of awareness leads us—into this state of freedom.

So we want to develop first the recognition of emptiness joined with awareness, and then start to notice how the unburdened heart responds in that situation.

I'm just going to close with this quote from Rumi. It's called "Tending Two Shops."

Rumi says: "Live in the nowhere that you came from, even though you have an address here. That's why you see things in two ways. You have eyes that see from that nowhere and eyes that judge distances, how high and how low. You own two shops and you run back and forth. Try to close the one that's a fearful trap, getting always smaller. Checkmate this way, checkmate that. Keep open the shop where you're not selling fish hooks anymore. You are the free swimming fish."

Let's just sit for a minute.

Mind's nature is vivid as a flawless piece of crystal, intrinsically empty, naturally radiant, ceaselessly responsive. Stripped bare of samsaric error, mind itself is surely and always Buddha.

So we have about thirty minutes for walking meditation, then the final sit with chanting at nine. Tomorrow in the instructions, we'll look at some specific ways to get in touch with this empty awareness as a unity. We'll look at that in terms of meditation.

Thank you for listening.

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