The Gratification, The Danger, and The Escape

Rebecca Bradshaw · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 58:54

Tonight's talk is titled "The Gratification, the Danger, and the Escape."

Tonight we're going to do a little bit of sutra study. The Buddha gave extensive discourses through his forty-odd years of teaching, and these discourses were committed to writing five hundred years after his death. For the first five hundred years, they were carried on through an oral tradition. When you read the sutras, they're often very repetitious—it's one way that things were remembered. I'm going to read several short sutras that are linked. I'll abbreviate some of the repetition, but I'll include some because it's also helpful for us in remembering ourselves. Then I'll talk about or explain these sutras in a little more detail.

First, I'd like to set the stage a little bit. The Buddha is sometimes called a scientist of the mind. In his teachings, he gave great detail about how the mind works and what the nature of this reality is. He talked often about what is called conditioned reality—the world as we know it, as we can directly experience it.

When the Buddha talked about conditioned reality, he broke it down in many different ways. One way we've already heard about is the five aggregates: form, feeling, perceptions, volitional formations, and consciousness. That's one way we can understand how the world is put together. In the sutra I'm going to be reading, he's explaining reality through the six sense bases and the six sense objects.

This is a little pre-sutra. It's not the one we're going to be studying mostly tonight. It's called the All Sutra:

Bhikkhus, I will teach you the all. Listen to that. And what, bhikkhus, is the all? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile objects, the mind and mental phenomena. This is called the all. If anyone, bhikkhu, should speak thus: "Having rejected this all, I shall make known another all," that would be a mere empty boast on his part. If he were questioned, he would not be able to reply, and further he would meet with vexation.

This is one way of describing the all. All that we can experience is the six sense bases and the six sense objects. The mind, when we talk about the mind and mental objects, includes thoughts and emotions, other mind states such as restlessness, concentration, and sleepiness, other factors of mind such as perception, recognition, intention, and consciousness—the knowing faculty of the mind. Can you find anything else besides these six sense bases and six sense objects?

Given that this is the all, the Buddha, in the sutra from the Book of the Six Sense Bases in the Samyutta Nikaya, the Connected Discourses of the Buddha, talks about how we can relate to our experience of the six sense bases and six sense objects in a way that brings happiness and peace.

I'm going to read the sutra first:

At Savatthi. Bhikkhus—monks, we'll just say serious practitioners—before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisattva, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me: What is the gratification? What is the danger? What is the escape in the case of the eye? What is the gratification? What is the danger? What is the escape in the case of the ear? What is the gratification? What is the danger? What is the escape in the case of the tongue, the body, the mind?

Then it occurred to me: The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on the eye—this is the gratification in the eye. That the eye is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change—this is the danger in the eye. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the eye—this is the escape from the eye.

The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on the ear—this is the gratification in the ear. That the ear is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change—this is the danger in the ear. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the ear—this is the escape from the ear.

And so on. The joy and pleasure that arise in dependence on the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind—this is the gratification in the six sense bases.

That the six sense bases are impermanent, suffering, and subject to change—this is the danger in the sense bases. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the sense bases—this is the escape from the sense bases.

"So long as I did not know as they really are the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of the six sense bases, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world. But when I directly knew all of this as it really is, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world."

These short connected suttas are another form of presenting the three noble truths, another way of presenting an understanding of reality leading to freedom. The question in this sutta is: How are we to relate to our experience, our lives through the senses, in a way that develops understanding leading to peace?

Let's take the three parts. We'll start with the gratification: "The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on the eye—this is the gratification in the eye."

So we have the six sense bases, and by extrapolation, the six sense objects: visual objects, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile sensations, and mind objects. In Buddhist psychology, the sense base plus the sense object plus the sense consciousness equals a moment of contact. We have the eye, we have visual forms, and we have eye consciousness. They come together, and that's what we call experience. Basically, this sutta is saying at the beginning that sense contact can be pleasurable—it can produce joy. Now, this isn't news to you. Because of this, there is some sense of gratification in sense contact.

This is a kind of happiness we're all familiar with, a kind of happiness we can experience associated with sense pleasures. We see the colorful fall leaves and feel a certain happiness. We drink a warm cup of tea and feel a certain happiness. The warm breeze touches our face, and the pleasure produces some kind of happiness in our minds. This kind of happiness is readily available if we pay attention. Many moments of our day we can experience this kind of happiness if we're present to notice the beauty and the pleasure in this world.

Meditation actually helps us access this kind of happiness by training us how to be present, teaching us how to connect with our senses. That's basically what we do all day here—we learn how to bring our attention back over and over again to being present through some sense experience, whether the experience of hearing, seeing, smelling, or the mind.

As we're here for a longer period of time, we find that meditation opens up our senses. As the mind becomes purified, there's less clutter, and we're more able to enjoy the simple pleasures of life—the many-layered smell of the fall air, the brightness of the leaves, the sound of gentle rain falling. We're more able to be here for these experiences rather than being scattered and inattentive. We find that our senses become more sensitive, more refined. We can appreciate subtlety: the richness of the bell tones, the richness of one mouthful of rice, the different flavors from the beginning of the mouthful to the end. Some of you may be finding that your senses have become more refined than you would actually like them to be—sounds can seem louder, for example.

So the Buddha did recognize that experiences can bring us some level of happiness, that sense pleasures can bring us some joy, some comfort, some gratification. Raised as a prince, he knew about this in the extreme. It's said that he was raised in a fairly wealthy home and had many sense pleasures available to him—many comforts, a life of extreme comfort. This is really the conventional understanding of happiness in this world. Most people, when they think of happiness, this is what they're thinking about.

But the Buddha saw that this didn't solve the problem of human existence. Even though he had the extreme of comfort and sense pleasures, he determined that this wasn't the answer to this conundrum of how we find true happiness in this world. So we're going to have to look a little deeper. We can't just leave the subject there.

The Buddha continues in the next part: "Bhikkhus, I set out seeking the gratification in the eye, the ear, the six sense bases. Whatever gratification there is in the six sense bases, that I have discovered. I have clearly seen with wisdom how far the gratification in the six sense bases extends."

We start to get a sense that there is some limit to the kind of happiness we can have through sense pleasures—that there's some gratification in sense pleasures, but it only extends so far. The Buddha said that he had seen how far this gratification extends.

So he goes on further to explain where the problem lies. He says: "Bhikkhus, if there were no gratification

in the eye and the other sense bases, beings would not become enamored with them. But because there is gratification in the eye and the other sense bases, beings become enamored with them."

Because there is pleasantness and gratification, we become enamored and attached. We fall in love with sense pleasures.

I think it's interesting that the word here is "enamored." It has a kind of mindless sense to it, a sense of getting lost in it. Like when we're in love, infatuated, we're rather blind. We see the good and we completely ignore or don't even see the faults. We don't even want to hear about the faults. Have you ever tried to tell someone in love that the person they love has faults and limitations? It's hopeless. We don't want our bubble burst. That's what being enamored does to us. We become entranced.

This blindness around sense pleasures is encouraged by Western society, and I think particularly American society. As an American, that's my sense—we worship sense gratification. Ajahn Sumedho said, "I was brought up in America, the land of freedom. It promises the right to be happy, but what it really offers is the right to become attached to everything." America encourages you to try to be as happy as you can by getting things. It seems like we've raised sense gratification to an art form in this country. And I also think it's based on our economic system that runs on encouraging sense pleasures and sense gratifications.

So we're all deeply conditioned—both internally through deeply rooted tendencies of mind, and externally through our economic system and our society—to seek this gratification of sense pleasures.

So maybe you want to stay infatuated with sense pleasures. Maybe you don't want to hear the rest of this sutta. But when we tell that infatuated person of the danger, they would usually avoid a lot of pain and suffering if they listened to us, no? So maybe we should continue with the Buddha's discourse and see what he would like to warn us about.

Another way we can think of this investigation into the dangers of the six sense bases is that it's about developing a mature love for this world. When we're enamored or infatuated with the sense pleasures of this world, we're not completely in touch with reality. We see only part of the truth and we avoid the whole story. But a mature love must see both the beauty and the limitations of the other, of this world. A mature love sees and accepts things as they are. This is a stronger and more enduring love than infatuation.

So as we look at the limitations of the gratification of the things of this world, perhaps our love of life as we experience it can become more mature.

The next part of the sutta asks: What is the danger of the six sense bases? What is the limitation that the Buddha saw?

"That the eye is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change. This is the danger in the eye. That the ear

is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change. This is the danger in the ear." And so forth with the six sense bases. "That the mind is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change. This is the danger in the mind."

One of the basic truths about life and the core teachings of the Buddha that you've been hearing about in recent weeks is that conditions in this world are constantly changing. Anicca—impermanence. All that we can experience through the senses is fleeting.

When we're enamored of sense pleasures and they change, as they inevitably will, how do we feel? We try to hold on, and that very state of holding on is contraction and suffering. And we can't hold on to anything. Life is a flowing river and you can't stop the stream.

The constant flow of change in this world is described very beautifully in a book called *Zen Seeds: Reflections of a Female Priest*, written by a lovely Japanese nun named Shundo Oyama. In a chapter called "Hearing the Voice of the Valley Stream," she writes:

"The water of the valley stream is always flowing. It races on and on, not pausing for even an instant. Its sound to me is the sound of time. The water of time glistens on the riverbed of the universe. Though theirs is a much slower flow, stones, trees, houses, and towns are flowing too. Human beings and all things that have life flow. Thought and culture too flow."

That all these appear to be unchanging is an illusion. When we listen subconsciously to the sound of flowing water, does it not seem to create a rhythm? Yet not a single drop of water passes over the same rock twice, and the murmur of water rushing over a rock is constantly changing. Sameness is but an illusion of human ears, eyes, and mind. Water that has once flowed along a riverbed can never retrace its course. Human life is no different. It is only our mundane eyes and minds that see yesterday as being the same as today. Enlightened eyes and minds should recognize that each moment has a form different than that of any other moment. What is there that we can hold on to? It runs through our hands.

I'm sure you've been seeing this here over these weeks, over and over again. Just watch your mind. Does it stay the same from one moment to the next? Watch the day unfold. Watch your body closely and notice it changing.

Here's a little Suzuki Roshi quote. A student said during the question and answer time following a lecture, "Suzuki Roshi, I've been listening to your lectures for years, but I just don't understand. Could you just please put it in a nutshell? Can you reduce Buddhism to one phrase?" Everyone laughed. Suzuki laughed. "Everything changes," he said. Then he asked for another question.

I lead a meditation group at a college nearby, Mount Holyoke College, and one week I was talking with the students about change, about this being the basic truth we need to understand in Buddhism. I said, "Okay, everything changes—so what? Why is that so important? So what?" And one of the young women answered in a way that I enjoyed. She said, "Because that's pretty much the way things are, and if you

have issues with this, you need to deal with them."

I think we all have issues with this, and that's what we're doing here. We're dealing with them.

So we know that everything changes. The world is in constant flux. But it's our most basic delusion to hide from this fact. We really don't want to see it. When we look, it seems pretty obvious, right? But we need to see and accept anicca, impermanence, change, deeply if we're going to have peace of mind in this world, if we're going to live in harmony with the way things are, if we're going to love this world with wisdom. We need to see it happen moment after moment after moment.

Uchiyama Roshi, a Zen master, described practice as active participation in loss. How do we deal with this constant loss of impermanence, of change? It takes strength to explore this. The rewards, however, are great. The Buddha said seeing this is the way to liberation. In Chapter 20 of the Dhammapada, he says, "Everything changes, nothing stays the same. Having gained this awareness, one is freed from suffering. This is the way of purification. All conditioned things are subject to change. Having fully learned this insight, one is freed from suffering. This is the way of purification."

As long as we don't see clearly this truth of impermanence, of constant change, as long as we don't experience it deeply with mindfulness, we will believe that we can find happiness through holding on to pleasant sense experience—by increasing pleasant experiences and decreasing unpleasant experiences—and we'll expend our energy resisting life. We'll take refuge in trying to control life and get caught in this dangerous place.

This struggle is the suffering of attachment. It's a state of contraction, of control, of restlessness. It's really a fight against life as it is, against the truth, the truth of anicca. It's obviously not a state of peace.

The late Ajahn Chah, meditation master in the Thai forest tradition that we've mentioned several times, describes the state one lives in when there's an inability to accept the flow of change.

He uses the image of a river again. "It's like the water of a river," he says. "It naturally flows down the gradient. It never flows against it. That's its nature. If a person was to go and stand on a river bank and seeing the water flowing swiftly down its course, foolishly want it to flow back up the gradient, he or she would suffer. Whatever he was doing, his wrong thinking would allow him no peace of mind. He would be unhappy because of his wrong view, thinking against his dreams. If he had right view, he would see that the water must inevitably flow down the gradient. And until he realized and accepted that fact, the man or woman would be agitated and upset."

Kind of like us. We're agitated and upset because we don't understand and accept the way life flows. Our attempts to control the world can bring some temporary gratification, but ultimately this is going to fail as a strategy for happiness and peace because everything changes and we can't stop this flow of the river of change. We can't make pleasantness stay. One sitting you feel great, the next you're restless. You eat lunch, and it's great, and then it's gone.

I remember my first retreat here, every morning thinking about lunch. You know how it gets limited, what's happening around here, so thoughts about lunch can become rather important. I'm not saying I spent all morning thinking about lunch, but it was certainly somewhere I would go when I needed somewhere to go in my mind. And so I'd think about lunch all morning, and I'd go to lunch, and I'd eat lunch mindfully. And then at the end of lunch, I would look down at the plate and think, what was that all about? It's gone. Lunch is gone. And I did it day after day. It was amazing.

So our attempts to hold on to pleasantness come up empty and bring agitation and restlessness. Here's another story from an Ajahn Chah book:

The previous Sangha Raja, the supreme patriarch of the monastic order of Thailand, once went on a tour of China where someone offered him a very beautiful teacup. It was unlike anything he'd ever seen. He thought, "Oh, the people here have real faith in me to offer me this beautiful teacup." And as soon as the teacup was in his hand, immediately he was suffering. Where should I put it? Where is the safe place to keep it? He couldn't stop worrying it would break. Before he had that teacup, he was fine. Once he had it, he wanted to show it off to the people back home in Thailand. He put it in his bag and kept telling everyone to watch out that the teacup didn't get broken. "Hey, careful, please." Everywhere he was watching out for it. He had nothing but suffering. Before, this suffering didn't exist, but now there was this heaviness of having the teacup.

So he boarded his plane back to Thailand. When he arrived, he warned the novices, "Be careful, don't let the teacup break." You lay people, watch out. There's something fragile here. This went on all the time, suffering because of attachment to the cup. Finally, one day, a long time later, a novice picked it up and it slipped from his hand and broke. What relief the Sangharaja felt. "Ah, I am free!" Suffering all those years.

In his typical manner, the Buddha set up the problem very clearly. The danger is that we become attached to sense pleasures because of the gratification they bring, but they're impermanent, not reliable, always changing, and we suffer when we try to hold on. Now he goes about telling us how to resolve the problem: "The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the eye, this is the escape from the eye. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the ear, this is the escape from the ear. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the six sense bases, this is the escape from the six sense bases."

I think it's interesting that the word "escape" has been chosen. Escape implies that we are caught and we get free. This is interesting because craving has been described as shackles in the heart.

Craving binds the heart, clenches it like a fist. It's like living in a dark prison. And we don't see this when we are enamored with sense pleasures. We're shackled and imprisoned by our own craving.

As you know, a corollary of attachment is aversion. It's a flip side of attachment, but they're both rooted in an inability to accept things as they are—impermanent, suffering, and subject to change. One craves to obtain and keep that which is pleasant. The other tries to get rid of that which is unpleasant. These are

two control strategies that we use to try to manage the world so that it will be comfortable for us, pleasant for us. It's an exhausting and hopeless task. There's no rest with this task.

So the way out of our predicament is by abandoning our craving and our attachment for the sense bases and sense objects or sense pleasure. Now he doesn't say we have to get rid of sense bases or the corresponding pleasure. He doesn't even say that we shouldn't enjoy sense pleasure. But we do need to work with our attachment if we want to be free. We can understand this on a couple different levels. We can understand it on the level of craving for sense objects, for sense experience. And we can understand it on the level of the creation and attachment to self, which is part of this craving.

So how are we to do this? How are we to deal with craving and aversion? How do we abandon them? The rest of the sutta gives us some hints:

As long as I did not directly know as they really are the gratification, the danger, and the escape of these six sense bases, I did not claim to have awakened. But when I knew directly all this as it really is, then I claimed to have awakened.

To know directly is to experience for ourselves. So we pay attention to how we respond to our experiences through the sense doors. We pay attention to pleasant and unpleasant experiences and how we react to them. Not to have someone explain it to us, not to have an intellectual understanding, but to see for ourselves. And the only place we have to see is in our own experience.

Several years ago when I was in Burma—and I want you to know when I tell Burma stories, I sometimes talk about some of the challenges of Burma. I just want to clarify from the start that Burma is a great place to practice. Just so you know that. So I had, as I mentioned in one of my previous talks, a little kuti on a ridge, a little hut on a ridge. And on one side of the ridge there was first one carpentry project going on and then another one. So there was sawing and hammering, not too many electrical tools, but occasional electrical tools, and basically sounds that I didn't find very pleasant. On the other side of this ridge was the cistern where the water was pumped up from the river and pumped into this big cistern. And so it sounded like a waterfall, the water falling into this big pool or reservoir.

I had so much fun sitting in front of my kuti, noticing what I did with these two different experiences. I've learned a lot working with sounds. It's one of the places where I can get caught. So I would notice the carpentry sounds. I would notice unpleasantness. I would notice aversion when it would arise. And then on the other hand, I would notice the sound of the waterfall, and I would notice the pleasant and craving when it would arise. And then I would notice also when I could just hear the carpentry sounds—unpleasant, but there was no problem. Or when I would hear the sound of the waterfall—just pleasant, but no craving.

So I just got to explore: what does the mind do with unpleasant and with pleasant sense contact? What's it like when we're mindless? What's it like when we're mindful? This is the kind of exploration that we get to

do. And this is how we see directly for ourselves the gratification, the danger, the escape.

So we use the tool of mindfulness in our investigation. Being with our direct experience—what is our direct experience of the senses? Do we see how they change? Do we experience their arising and passing away?

Do we notice if craving and aversion arise? What does that feel like in the body or the mind? How substantial is our desire, our craving, and our aversion? What happens when we turn mindfulness to it? This is the kind of exploration we're doing. How seductive is it?

A few months ago, I was teaching a retreat with Patricia at West, and we had some really great brownies. She remembers this. We had these great brownies. I love brownies. Chocolate—anything chocolate, I love chocolate. So we had these great Ghirardelli, however you say it, really good chocolate brownies.

One night they were out after dinner, and I didn't want to have one at that time of the evening because I was afraid I wouldn't sleep. But I did want my brownie, so I wrapped it up and took it back to my little cabin to save. When I got to the cabin, I thought, well, maybe I'll just have one bite. Eventually, I ate the whole brownie. Afterwards, I thought, wow, I've been bested by a brownie. I was just kind of fascinated that craving for a brownie could overcome my resolve not to eat it.

So the next night, there were still some brownies. I said, okay, this time the brownie is not going to win. I wrapped up a brownie, brought it back, and I just watched my mind want this brownie. Just a bite, you know? And I didn't eat it. I saved it for the next day. I was fascinated by that exploration and also by the feeling of power of not having the brownie win the second time around.

There is a certain strength that we learn when we don't have to be run around by craving, when we're not addicted to craving. But as you can see from the story, we really just want to investigate. I didn't beat myself up for the brownie winning the first round. I was just interested. I thought, wow, that's pretty fascinating.

We grow in wisdom as we do these kinds of explorations. A retreat is an excellent opportunity because there aren't as many ways to escape the wanting and the aversive mind, so we get to sit down and look at it. Charlotte Joko Beck called retreat "controlled suffering." Thomas Merton said, "Those who are drawn to solitude don't suffer less, but suffer more effectively."

That's what we're trying to do here—suffer effectively, which means learn. Learn from our suffering.

We do this investigation with mindfulness. We observe our conditioning. We notice our crazy monkey mind grasping at pleasantness, pushing away unpleasantness. We watch how we get ensnared. We watch how the brownie wins. And then mindfulness is our protection. We see that if we pay attention, sometimes the brownie doesn't win. We start to be able to see through our attachments and our aversions.

Don't underestimate the simple power of observing—seeing that you don't have to obey every whim of

your mind. You don't have to believe every story your mind tells you. Seeing that it comes and goes on its own. It's not me or mine. This way we develop wisdom.

Today I was looking at a Shambhala Sun publication, and there was something that Leonard Cohen, the singer-songwriter—he spent a number of years in seclusion with a Zen master—was talking about meditation. I just want to read a paragraph. It kind of fits in, but not totally, but I loved it so much.

He said, "What happens in meditations that last ten, fifteen hours"—like you guys, a typical day—"is that you run through your top ten erotic fantasies, ambition fantasies, revenge fantasies, global ratification fantasies. You run through them all until you bore yourself to death, basically. And the faculty that produces opinions and snap judgments and unrealistic scenarios for your own prominence, after you run through them for a number of years, they cease to have charge. They bore themselves into nonexistence."

It's true. We almost have to get bored of this pattern of conditioning, going through it over and over and over again.

In this part of the sutra, the Buddha spoke of the abandonment of lust. Lust is our desire, our craving—not just sexual lust, but in a greater sense, lust for sense pleasures. To abandon means to leave aside. It doesn't mean we have to get angry about our desire or craving, or get mad at it, or make it bad, or reject it. Simply leaving it aside, learning over time not to get caught in it.

Charlotte Joko Beck says, "We never lose an attachment by saying it has to go. Only as we gain awareness of its true nature does it quietly and imperceptibly wither away, like a sandcastle with waves rolling over." It just moves out, and finally—where is it? What was it?

So we look at the nature of attachment. It's like poking holes in a piece of fabric, as I mentioned in another talk. We poke holes in the fabric of craving, and eventually we can see through it. We start to see that we don't have to identify with our reactivity, that it arises because of conditions and passes away when those conditions change. We don't have to take it so personally. And then our attachments become more transparent and lose their power to seduce us.

At Savatthi, early one morning, Alavika the nun put on her robes and, taking her bowl and outer robe, went into Savatthi for alms. When she had gone for alms and returned from her alms round after her meal, she went to the Grove of the Blind to spend the day. Having gone deep into the grove, she sat down at the foot of a tree for the day's abiding.

Then Mara—our friend Mara—wanting to arouse fear, horripilation, and terror in her, wanting to make her fall away from seclusion, approached her and addressed her in verse: "There's no escape in the world. There's no escape in the world. So what are you trying to do with solitude? Enjoy sensual delights. Don't be someone who later regrets."

Then the thought occurred to Alavika the nun, "Now who has recited this verse, a human being or a

non-human one?" Then it occurred to her, "This is Mara who has recited this verse, wanting to arouse fear, horripilation, and terror in me, wanting to make me fall away from seclusion."

Then, having understood that this is Mara, she replied to him in verse: "There is an escape in the world, well touched by me with discernment—something that you, evil one, don't know. Sensual pleasures are like swords and spears, the aggregates their executioner's block. What you call sensual delight is no delight for me."

Then Mara, sad and dejected at realizing Alavika the nun knows him, vanished right there.

We just need to recognize Mara when Mara appears in the form of attachment, aversion, craving, ignorance. Obviously, this isn't a small task or a necessarily easy one. You tell people you're going for three months to observe the reactivity of your mind, and most of them aren't going to jump up and down begging you to bring them along. But that's because they don't see that this is the way to become more spacious and peaceful and ultimately free.

We see our reactivity towards our sense experience, our clinging and identification with sense experience, including the mind. And we also see the freedom from non-clinging to any of it as me or mine. The Buddha called this the way to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world.

There's a beautiful chant that sums up this understanding: "All conditioned things are impermanent. Their nature is to arise and pass away. Understanding this brings the greatest kind of happiness, which is peace."

As we meditate more, we discover that the joy and happiness we conventionally think of are actually somewhat gross in texture. We begin to see that a mind at peace is the happiest kind of mind, as the Buddha said. A mind that is free, free of clinging, free of our addiction to pleasure—this is the happiest kind of mind. And we have to learn this over and over.

Another quote by my favorite teacher, Charlotte Joko Beck: "Practice has to be a process of endless disappointment. We have to see that everything we demand, and even get, eventually disappoints us. This discovery is our teacher."

Trungpa Rinpoche said, "Disappointment is a good sign of basic intelligence. It cannot be compared to anything else. It is so sharp, precise, obvious, and direct."

It's like lunch every day. I had to see day after day after day that lunch wasn't going to do it. That wasn't what was going to make me happy.

Every moment of non-clinging is a moment of freedom.

In the Shorter Discourse on the Destruction of Craving, the Buddha preaches to a deva who wants to know how, in brief, a bhikkhu is liberated. And the Buddha says: the bhikkhu becomes learned, learning that

nothing is suitable to settle in. He becomes learned, learning all things thoroughly and accurately, recognizing all things. When a bhikkhu sees, abides seeing that nothing is worth adhering to, he directly knows everything. Whatever feeling he feels, whether pleasant or painful, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant, he abides contemplating impermanence in these feelings. Contemplating thus, he does not cling to anything in this world. When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he personally attains nibbana.

So in our investigation, we circle back to the world of our senses, the world as we experience it, and we explore how we relate to this world and the pleasures it provides. Our love for the world matures as we learn to accept inevitable change, as we understand the limitations of sense pleasures. We learn that we can experience life with an open hand rather than a clenched fist. We have tastes of a mind that is free of the shackles of craving. We know directly, as they really are, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of this world of our senses.

I'd like to end with a poem from Han Shan, a Chinese hermit poet—one of his Cold Mountain Poems. Cold Mountain is a place of happiness beyond conditions, beyond addiction to pleasure. And the six doors in this poem, I think you can guess what they are:

Cold mountain is a house without beams or walls.
The six doors left and right are open.
The hall is blue sky.
The rooms are all vacant and vague.
The east wall beats on the west wall.
At the center, nothing.

Borrowers don't bother me.
In the cold, I build a little fire.
When I'm hungry, I boil up some greens.
I've got no use for the kulak with his big barn and pasture.
He just sets up a prison for himself.
Once in, he can't get out.

Think it over.
You know it might happen to you.

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