Practice in Daily Life

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 59:34

We're at a real transition point in the retreat right now. I noticed as I came into the hall that there were quite a few yogis huddled around the board looking at the schedule change for tomorrow. This is the outward manifestation of the shift that's happening. The schedule is going to be changing. Speaking is going to begin after three months or six weeks of being in silence. That's a huge shift.

It's an interesting time in the retreat. I'm sure many of you, if not all of you, have seen your thoughts shift to what's going to be happening next—future thoughts, planning. What are the next few days going to be like? What is it going to be like when I go home? Often at this point in retreat, people are wondering: How am I going to take this practice home with me? How can I bring some of what I've learned here into my daily life?

The structure of retreat is ideal for cultivating mindfulness. It's ideal for concentration and continuity of mindfulness. And our daily lives are not that way. The other night, Sally talked about the eight worldly winds, and we get blown around by all of those conditions—the conditions of praise and blame, gain and loss, pain and pleasure, fame and disrepute. Truly, this practice is going against the current of our culture. So it's challenging to bring this practice into our life outside of intensive retreat. That's what I'd like to talk about this evening.

This is a topic that I really love. It's been a very integral part of my own practice. In fact, when I began my practice, I wasn't at all interested in sitting meditation. I didn't even think I would ever do that. I thought, why would anybody do that? But I was having a great deal of difficulty, in particular with some overwhelming emotions, and I was very interested in understanding my mind. As I began my practice, I started looking at my mind in daily life using mindfulness techniques that I read about. At some point, after about three months of this—when I began to have some real insights into how my mind functioned—I realized that maybe the reason they call it practice is because it helps to practice sitting on a cushion, and then you can take it more into your daily life. So that's why I began sitting.

This practice of daily life mindfulness was my first practice, and I'd like to share with you some of what I've learned about bringing mindfulness practice into daily life through examples of ways that I've practiced myself. It's going to be a really practical talk.

In those first few months of my practice, I read a book by Joko Beck called *Everyday Zen*. I had another one by her around that same time called *Nothing Special*. In one of those two books, she talked about working at bringing our practice into daily life and said it's not such a good idea to think that you're going to be able to be continuously mindful throughout the day. Don't even try for that because it's just setting

yourself up for failure. She suggested instead picking a few projects—mindfulness projects to work on—where you could begin to see yourself connecting with those things.

I really connected with this idea of not trying to be mindful throughout the day. In my early twenties, I had read a book which many of you have probably heard of: Thich Nhat Hanh's *Miracle of Mindfulness*. I loved this book. I read it every evening before I went to bed and thought, wow, this sounds so cool, this mindfulness stuff. I'm going to do this tomorrow when I go to work. And the next time I would remember it would be when I picked up the book the next night. After some nights of that, I thought, well, obviously I can't do this. I put the book aside and didn't meet mindfulness again for another fifteen years.

But when I did meet it again, I was in a highly motivated state because I was in some very difficult emotional states that were making me almost non-functional at times. So I was very motivated to see what could be done. How could I meet these states of mind?

After reading these books by Joko Beck, I decided to pick two projects in my day. One was an emotion that was just completely out of control for me, one that was making my life quite difficult at times. It was a very strong anger that I was experiencing. The other was a very neutral experience that happened throughout my day. I was a Peace Corps volunteer at the time, working in the development bank in the country where I was assigned as a computer volunteer.

One of the things I did regularly throughout my day was to switch between DOS and Windows on the computer. So I picked this as my other project. I'm going to notice. I'm going to be mindful when I switch between DOS and Windows.

Now, I didn't know much about mindfulness at this point. I had had no instructions, no teachers telling me what to do. I had just read this book. So I didn't have a lot of tools for these projects, but just this idea of "be mindful." I didn't actually know much. But I began working with this.

With this neutral event, initially I often found that I remembered long after the event had happened many times. I would be going to bed at night and I'd remember: I had told myself I was going to pay attention when I switched between DOS and Windows, and I didn't remember it once today.

Well, fortunately, to my credit, this time I didn't say, "Obviously I can't do this." I just said, "I'm going to try again." And this is one of the keys to practice in daily life—this "I'm going to try again," just noticing when you have not been mindful and making the resolve to try again.

So fortunately I had this somehow. This resolve came up, and I just continued saying to myself, "I'm going to notice this. I'm going to pay attention to this." And when I look back on it, actually, that moment of remembering—that's the first moment of mindfulness beginning around that particular thing. So even though I didn't remember right while I was switching between DOS and Windows, even though I remembered when I was going to bed at night, that was the first stirring. The mindfulness was beginning in that moment of remembering.

It's just like coming back to the breath. Just like waking up and realizing, "Oh, I've forgotten. I'm not with the breath." In that moment there is mindfulness, and we come back. So in this case, I couldn't come back to switching between DOS and Windows because I was going to bed at night, but I made that resolve: I'll keep trying.

And what happened is that over time—over days, even weeks of making this resolve—I began to notice that I was remembering closer to the event. I would remember at the end of the morning, for example, right before lunch. "Oh, I forgot." And then it got to the point where I'd remember a few minutes after it happened, and I could begin to see—I actually could see—oh, this resolve is actually getting me closer to the event, this resolve to wake up for this particular thing. And at some point, I remembered right after it happened. Just right after. "Oh, it just happened."

The other thing I was doing in this whole exercise was that when I remembered, I was just noticing, "Well, I'm mindful now. I remembered now. What's happening right now?" Just taking that in, in a very light way.

And at some point, right as I was switching between DOS and Windows, I remembered. And right around that point, that event—the switching between DOS and Windows—became like a mindfulness bell for me. As I switched between DOS and Windows, it triggered the mindfulness to arise during that activity.

So this is one technique I really like to suggest to people in practice in daily life: picking something neutral that happens regularly throughout your day and resolving to pay attention to it. Bringing the mindfulness to that over and over again. And it will begin to function as a mindfulness bell for you.

As you are in that experience of whatever your chosen activity is, just in a very light way, notice what's going on. What's the attitude in the mind? What's the bodily posture? Is there tension? Is there tightness? And this is not something to try to hold on to. It's not like trying to grasp onto the mindfulness at this point and say, "Okay, now I'm going to stay mindful." Just in a really light way, noticing what's happening right now.

If you pick something that happens regularly throughout your day—I picked something that was happening every fifteen or twenty minutes for me during my workday—

It begins to bring a thread of mindfulness throughout your day—just a few moments of check-in, check-in, check-in to what's happening. So that's one way I worked with one of these projects.

The other project I picked was working with my strong anger. This unfolded quite differently. In this case, the anger was so powerful, so strong, and I was really out of control around it. The anger would just get stronger and stronger until at some point I would remember, "Oh, I said I was going to pay attention to this." And by the time I remembered, I was in a full-blown rage.

I remember the first few times I did this, it was like, "Oh yeah, I said I was going to pay attention to this.

What am I supposed to do with this? Wow, this is really unpleasant. Yeah, I'm angry." I had no tools about paying attention to the body. I hadn't had any meditation instruction at all, but I knew I was angry. I could tell the unpleasantness of it. But beyond that, I didn't know what to do. What does it mean even to be mindful of this? I really was kind of clueless.

But simply that recognition—anger, I'm angry, this is anger—just that simple recognition actually ended up being extremely powerful. Because over the course of several months of continuing to resolve to wake up for this anger, I noticed this interesting pattern: I began to wake up a little bit earlier in the process of the anger.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with the escalating nature of anger, how it can start and then, if we're caught in it or hooked by the story, it just gets stronger and stronger and builds. It's like the snowball effect of anger rolling. So I began to notice that I was waking up a little earlier in the process, that I would remember I wanted to pay attention to this anger before I was in such a full-blown rage. I remembered when I was more at a normal state of anger. And at that point I could again recognize, "Okay, I'm angry." I also noticed it wasn't quite as unpleasant as the full-blown rage.

Just keeping that vow to come back, come back, I began breaking in earlier and earlier until it was more like just an irritation. I was beginning to see how the mindfulness was giving me some space around this anger. It was huge. It was huge for me not to be in a rage when thoughts around this particular person that I was angry with came up in my mind.

And then one day—this was a few months into my working with mindfulness in daily life—I was cutting an apple in my kitchen. I was fairly present. I think the techniques I had been using, noticing the switching between DOS and Windows, paying attention to the anger, had created a kind of base of general mindfulness. I was cutting the apple, and I noticed a thought appear in my mind. The thought was being with the person I was angry with at a fruit stand. I could see the connection between what I was doing, cutting the apple, and the memory.

And I could also see in that moment that I was not angry, that anger hadn't come up. But what I felt was this—it was like a freight train of wanting to jump on that thought and think more thoughts to become angry. I was kind of amazed. It's like, wow, the mind actually *wants* to be angry. But I also saw in that moment that I had a choice. I don't have to get on. I don't have to think those thoughts.

And I stood there waiting to get angry. Because I had never had this—in the last six months or so, or three or four months since I started this practice, I had not had this person arise in my mind without anger arising. So I thought there was no way to decouple them. And I stood there waiting to get angry, and I didn't get angry.

I was so blown away by that moment. That moment is the one that really convinced me of the power of mindfulness. This is a path. This is a path that we can use to free ourselves. It was so clear to me in that

moment—the freedom from suffering that was apparent in that moment.

This can happen in our daily lives. This kind of mindfulness can free us from patterns. We don't actually have to always be sitting on retreat for this kind of work to happen. It can happen in our daily lives.

I teach what I call a householder retreat, based on the model of the sandwich retreat taught at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center in Boston. It's a daily life practice retreat where we meet Sunday and Saturday for a half day and a day long, and then morning and evening every day during the week to support this practice of daily life mindfulness.

I encourage people in this retreat to pick some projects to pay attention to. I definitely encourage them to pick something neutral that happens throughout the day, and some other kind of project—something that either might be up for them, something they have some juice for, or just some other kinds of activities. There's so many things that we can bring into our practice. And it's helpful to make them practices, to pick things, to actually choose practices to do, as opposed to just saying, "Oh well, I'm going to be mindful." When we lose the structure of retreat, it's helpful to create some kind of structure in our daily life practice. So choosing some projects.

There's so many different things you could use. I've used quite a few of them over the course of my practice, so I'll just mention a few. Noticing getting up from my desk at work—the act of standing. Waiting for three rings of the telephone before picking it up. This one is good; I got it from Thich Nhat Hanh. It's a nice practice because when you actually pick up the phone, you're mindful and there for the person on the other end.

The whole process of going to the bathroom—you do that probably four or five times a day at least. Three or four minutes of paying attention to that whole process, from the getting up, the choosing, the knowing, the awareness of needing to do that, to the whole process of walking into the restroom, doing everything, washing your hands, coming out. I did this at work for a while. I had noticed that when I went to the restroom my mind was racing as fast as it had been before when I was doing my job. And I realized that it wasn't particularly necessary. So I started doing this practice, and I began to see that when I connected with my experience, in those three or four minutes after I came back from the restroom, I felt like I'd had a little mini vacation. Three minutes. I didn't actually need to be thinking about my work in that time. It's a great thing, this mindfulness.

Chores are a really great place to bring mindfulness practice to. And again, it's really helpful to pick something, to choose it, to actually say, "Okay, for the next two weeks, this is going to be my daily life practice activity." Chores, chopping vegetables, making your bed, brushing your teeth—all of the things that we do here in daily life that we've become familiar with bringing mindfulness to. It will dissipate as you leave the retreat. That's not anything you've done wrong; it's simply the way it is. But we can consciously choose to bring mindfulness to certain things. And with a resolve, with a determination, with patience, we can cultivate this mindfulness.

I found that the yogi jobs here on retreat were a great support for the transition to daily life practice. Whatever yogi job you've had here—chopping vegetables, cleaning the bathrooms, vacuuming, sweeping, whatever it is—when you go home, that might be one thing, one of the tasks you choose to have be one of your projects. I've learned so much about mindfulness in daily life through the yogi jobs, just ways to be present.

It doesn't have to be the kind of really detailed, precise mindfulness. Sayadaw U Tejaniya speaks about a fifty-fifty mindfulness: fifty percent of your attention on what you're doing and fifty percent of your attention on the awareness of what you're doing. It can be really light. Know what you're doing while you're doing it. It doesn't have to be broken down into the impermanence of every single movement. Just knowing you're pushing the vacuum cleaner while you're pushing it, and a sense of whether there's tension or ease.

I'd like to restate one of the pieces I said a little bit earlier. When you choose to do some of these practices, you're not going to remember right away. You're going to forget.

When you first remember that you've forgotten, that doesn't mean you've failed. That's the first moment of success. That's the first moment it begins. So just resolve again: I'm going to do this. I'm going to keep trying.

For me, this practice of cultivating mindfulness through these projects has been very helpful. You can pick something for a couple of weeks or even a month and then move on to another thing. I find it helpful to keep refreshing or picking new projects because the old ones get a little stale. We kind of think we've figured it out and then it gets a little bit lost. But in picking new projects, I find that the old ones don't completely go away. If I picked going through doorways for one week and turning on light switches another week, when I'm turning on light switches, I'm also noticing the going through doors. So it begins to thread this mindfulness throughout our day to do this kind of practice. This has been the foundation for me of just beginning to get mindfulness into daily life.

Another area I have worked with for practice in daily life has been around the paramis. We've mentioned these a couple of times. These are qualities of mind that we cultivate as we practice the path—the qualities that the Bodhisattva was said to have cultivated for many, many lifetimes before he became the Buddha. The stories of the Buddha cultivating these qualities are told in the Jataka tales, a few of which you heard last night. These qualities are cultivated as we practice, they are said to be necessary for awakening, and they are also the qualities of the awakened heart: generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolve, loving-kindness, equanimity.

In Asia, these practices are considered to be the realm of daily life practice. So these are really good qualities to look at in our daily lives. There are two basic ways to work with any quality of mind, and for the paramis these approaches are very helpful. One way is to find ways to practice cultivating the quality of mind, the parami itself—the generosity, the virtue, the loving-kindness. Another way is to look at its

opposite, what gets in its way. Look at when we're not feeling kind, when we're feeling impatient. Looking at it from both sides.

One of the first ways I began working with these qualities was simply to help myself remember to pay attention to them—to remember the qualities themselves and highlight them in places where I might otherwise forget. So I took little pieces of paper and wrote the paramis on them and put them around my house in places where they might be helpful. Truthfulness went on the telephone. Generosity went on the door as I walked out, to remind myself to bring a generosity of heart to the people I met. Equanimity went on the computer. Patience went on the bathroom mirror because I noticed that impatience arose frequently when I was brushing my teeth. Little things just to help me remember the qualities in places where they would serve me.

With the paramis practice, I find creativity is really wonderful. For instance, loving-kindness has a very formal practice of cultivation with the phrases. We have been working with some of those practices—the loving-kindness practice, the mudita practice, the compassion practice, the equanimity practice. We can use these practices in our daily life, not simply on the meditation cushion but moving out into the world. At one point, I decided I would use the Safeway as my metta monastery. Every time I walked into the Safeway, I would just start wishing loving-kindness to whoever I saw. There's a lot of suffering in the grocery store. It felt like a really good thing to do, to bring that quality into the grocery store. So we can be playful and creative with these paramis.

Come up with your own practices.

Generosity. My teacher Gil Fronsdal likes to suggest putting a $20 bill in your pocket with the intention of giving it away, and then watching what happens around that exploration. See where there's resistance, what judgments come up around it. When you finally choose to give it away, what is that inspiration? What is the motivation?

So creativity—we can get really playful with coming up with ways to cultivate these qualities. And then again, sticking to them for a little while. When I practiced the Safeway meditation, I think I probably did that for a couple of months, just using that practice.

One of my favorite practices that brought both mindfulness and loving kindness into my day regularly is that I take a walk. I take a walk most days when I'm at home in California. I've not been able to do that here so much—the weather is not quite so friendly as it is in California. On this walk, I would tend to take it at about the same time of day, and I would see the same people. I would try to be generally mindful on my walk, but I really wanted to be present when I passed somebody. That was my practice: to be present and to connect with whoever I met.

Sometimes the person clearly didn't want to say hello or look at me in the eye or anything. I certainly didn't want to push it or make them uncomfortable, so in those moments I would just do metta for the

person. But over the course of weeks and months, as I took the same walk and began seeing the same people, they became familiar with me and I became familiar with them. We began exchanging a smile and a hello. Just practicing with that connection, that kindness, that openness—the metta quality of simply connecting with somebody—I began to experience a lot of happiness in that connection. It was quite astounding, actually.

I remember this one older man who had to shuffle along, kind of unsteady on his feet, and he had the most beautiful smile when I met him. He looked just radiant when he smiled. As I continued this practice, when I would see him, I would begin to feel happy just in anticipation of his smile. Then I began to check into how long the happiness lasted—not trying to hold on to it, but just curious. I noticed that it lasted thirty or forty seconds after seeing him. This great upwelling of joy and appreciation and happiness and connection. Thirty seconds for a smile. It was such a joy to bring that into my day.

Play with it.

Observing the opposite quality of mind is also very interesting in terms of looking at these paramis. For a time, as I was paying attention to these paramis, I noticed that patience was one that I did not seem to have very much of. So I started looking at impatience—just noticing it, noticing when it came up, noticing what it felt like when it happened.

I began to see there were kind of two flavors of impatience. There was the impatience to get over something unpleasant, and the impatience of wanting to have something pleasant that I was expecting or anticipating. There was an impatience around brushing my teeth, a sense of, "I've got better things to do than brush my teeth." It was everywhere, actually. When I began looking at it, I began to see how pervasive it was throughout my day, coming up over and over again. It could be just little tiny things, but just this movement of impatience.

One day, about two months into this practice of looking at impatience, I was walking down the street and I felt this surge of impatience come up about—I don't know what at the moment—but just the surge of impatience. And the very next moment or thought was, "I've been looking at this impatience for two months. When is it going to go away?" Oh, there it is again. More impatience. I just had to laugh. It's like, oh well, this is just the mind.

Looking at all of these things from both sides is very helpful in our daily life.

Another practice I'll describe now involves working with the paramis, though it's more generally applicable, actually.

It's a reflective practice. We can use it to reflect on our relationship to these qualities, our relationship to these parami qualities. But it can also be used to reflect on pretty much anything in our daily lives in a meditative way. So it's an actual reflective practice, but it uses a meditative stillness to hold the practice. This practice was taught to me by Ajahn Amaro.

The practice is to basically settle and still the mind for five minutes or so. Quiet the mind. Pay attention to the body, the breathing. And have a topic before you sit down—pick a topic that you want to reflect on. Have a phrase in your mind, a word that you want to use as the seed for that reflection.

If you want to reflect on these qualities of the paramis, at one point I did this with the quality of virtue, of sila. I wanted to understand or to reflect on what the benefits of sila were. So that was the phrase I chose, the question I chose in my mind: What are the benefits of sila?

Settle your mind for about five minutes and then drop the question into the meditation. Simply ask the question in words in your mind. And then the practice is to not think about the answer, but to simply see what bubbles up. It's kind of like dropping a stone into a clear, settled pool and watching the ripples. Drop the question into your meditation and see what happens. What does the body do? Do thoughts appear? Just notice what happens. And then let go of that. Don't chain off of that. Don't think about that in the moment. Just come back to the silence, back to the breath, back to the body. Drop the question in again. See what happens.

When I did this with sila, I chose to do this for about ten minutes a day, asking this question about what the benefits of sila are. After that ten minutes, I had a pad of paper next to me, and I wrote down what I had experienced. No thinking about it particularly, just noticing, writing down what I had noticed. I noticed loneliness. I noticed contraction. I noticed an opening. I noticed a feeling of flow. Whatever it was, these thoughts—I just wrote down what I had experienced. Then after a couple of weeks of that, I reviewed my notes and began actually thinking about what I had seen, bringing the thinking process in.

This kind of practice can be used to explore our relationship to the paramis, or it can actually be used to explore our relationship to anything that we want to bring a meditative, reflective quality to—a choice that we have to make. This kind of practice can be very supportive for that.

So, cultivating mindfulness in our day, bringing awareness of the paramis. The third piece I'd like to talk about is intention. We've talked about intention here quite a bit. It's that subtle movement or energetic impulse that precedes any act of body, speech, or mind. We can know we're going to move before we move. We can know we're going to speak before we speak. We can know we're going to think before we think, or know that we're inclining toward an emotion before the emotion appears—as I described in that example of the anger, seeing the memory, seeing the inclination toward the anger, and seeing the choice.

We can see this in our daily lives as well as on retreat. It's more difficult, I grant you—quite a bit more difficult—but it is possible. So it's a really good place to explore. Now the intention itself, as we've mentioned, is neutral. It's a neutral event. But accompanying it are the factors of mind that give it its direction and its momentum.

Whether they're wholesome or unwholesome, this gives the intention its karmic quality. The karmic results of the intention arise as a result of whether there are wholesome or unwholesome factors in the

mind accompanying that intention, and whether we act on it.

So as we know, as we get in touch with that intention, as we get in touch with knowing what's going to happen before it happens, we can see the motivation as well. In that moment of knowing "I'm going to get up to get a glass of water," I can know the motivation. The motivation might arise for many reasons. It might be simply because thirst has arisen, or it might be because I'm really frustrated with what I'm doing and I just want to get away from my computer right now. So in that moment of seeing "I'm about to get up," we can see the motivation. Very, very helpful information.

One excellent place to practice with this is in the area of speech. I know everyone in this room has probably had the experience of wishing they could have taken something back that they had said, of realizing just after something came out of our mouth, "Oh, I shouldn't have said that." So paying attention to speech is a very large area that we can work with in our daily life. And it's come up in the questions a few times, bringing awareness to our speech. It's extremely challenging. At least for me, it has been one of the most challenging places to bring mindfulness to.

Much of the time, we speak kind of automatically without even knowing what we're going to say, much less do we have any sense or idea of how it's going to impact the person we're speaking to, or understand the motivation behind what we're saying. One of the most powerful ways to break into this is to pause before you speak. That in itself is challenging—simply remembering to pause. If you can remember to pause before you speak, you have caught the intention to speak. You know you're going to speak before you speak. In that pause, you will probably know what you're going to say before you say it. And you will also probably have a sense of why you're going to speak. So this simple practice of pausing can reveal many things about our speech to us.

Getting in touch with our motivations for our speech can really be humbling. We really begin to see how often we speak out of wanting to make ourselves look good, or wanting to subtly put somebody else down, or even outright hurt somebody. Most of the time, though, it seems—at least in my experience—it seems to be with this little bit of "me, me, me," this motivation to present myself, to make myself appear a certain way.

So beginning to see this with this pause, just noticing this pause—when you break silence tomorrow, I highly recommend this practice. You have enough mindfulness to do this. Really, I highly recommend this practice. And notice, you can even remind each other about this when you start talking to each other: "Let's try this. Let's try doing this pause."

It can be, as I mentioned, kind of humbling. The first time I tried this with one friend, we sat down. We were having a meal together, and we decided we were going to work this way with each other in our speech. And I saw a thought. I saw I was going to say something, and I saw the motivation. I thought, "No, I'm not going to say that. Unwholesome motivation." The next thing arose—nope, not going to say that. Next thing—nope, not going to say that. At some point I had to say to him, "I'm sitting here ruling out

things to say because of unwholesome motivation." So it can be interesting. It's helpful to do this with another practitioner when you try this, because it can put some gaps in the conversation.

This practice of looking at our intention—speech is one powerful place to explore it. But if you're doing some of these other practices that I recommended or suggested, like picking something that you do regularly throughout the day—clicking send for an email, something that you do regularly—opening doors, extending and bending your arm—if it's some kind of action, you can begin to see the intention associated with that action. So when I was playing with standing up at my desk at work, I got to the point where I knew I was going to stand. I could see that I was going to stand before the standing happened. I could see the intention to stand. I could see why I was going to stand.

Most of the time it had to do with something around work—I need to go get a copy from the printout. But we can begin to connect with this intention on a regular basis and connect with observing the motivation that goes with it. So this is not simply a practice that is accessible to us on retreat. It is possible to experience and see these things in our daily lives.

Another large area of practice in our daily lives is around sila, around ethics. And this is one way to work with motivation, to work with seeing our intention. The way I like to work with the five lay precepts in my daily life is to use them as mindfulness bells, kind of as I was describing these other activities. If I'm making a movement towards wrong speech, if I'm making a movement towards killing an ant, looking at what's going on—it's kind of like a wake-up bell. What's happening? So looking at the motivation if there's a movement to break one of these precepts.

Working with these precepts, I'm sure you've all noticed that they're stated in the negative—actions to avoid. Refrain from killing, refrain from stealing, refrain from sexual misconduct, refrain from lying, refrain from intoxication. But they're also paired—I think Guy mentioned this—with a positive quality, a wholesome quality that is cultivated as we refrain from the action. Refraining from killing is paired with compassion. Refraining from stealing with honesty and contentment. Refraining from sexual misconduct is said to be related to fidelity. Refraining from lying to truthfulness. Refraining from intoxication is cultivating clarity of mind or heedfulness.

There's a mutual connection between our mind and our body. The act of abstaining from certain actions through the precepts has a rebound effect on our mind. And the point of interconnection between the mind and the body is this intention and the qualities of motivation that go with it. So in the intention to refrain from killing, there can come along this intention towards compassion.

I saw this myself, actually. At one point, I was really working with the ants in my kitchen and not wanting to kill them, so I had this elaborate way of working with the ants when they came in. I would corral them with soap so they wouldn't go outside the line, and I'd slowly work them back to the hole that they were coming from. After a while, I noticed I got a little impatient, and I'd start scooping the ants up and putting them by their hole so that I could move them along a little more quickly.

I began observing the ants pretty carefully as I was doing this. And I saw at one point near the hole where they were coming in, one of the ants on its back legs, with its front legs up in the air, doing this scanning of the environment. I could just see the panic. Maybe this is anthropomorphizing, I don't know, but it seemed like there was this kind of alarm going on in the ant population around this event. And I just felt so much compassion. It was quite startling to see that. Just this act of wishing to not kill them brought a connection between me and these beings.

Sometimes people question, particularly in California where I live, why these precepts are stated in the negative. Why can't they be stated positively? California is a really happy place—we talk about vowing to cultivate love and generosity. So sometimes there's that question about why they're stated in the negative.

I read a wonderful response to this question that I'd like to share with you to close this evening. It's written by Bhikkhu Bodhi, who is one of the main translators of the suttas—a wonderful, thoughtful being:

"One reason why the precepts are worded in terms of abstinence is that the development of positive virtues cannot be prescribed by rules. Rules of training can govern what we have to avoid and perform in our outer actions, but only ideals of aspiration, not rules, can govern what we develop in ourselves. Thus we cannot take up a training rule to always be loving towards others. To impose such a rule is to place ourselves in a double bind, since inner attitudes are just simply not so docile that they can be determined by command. Love and compassion are the fruits of work we do on ourselves inwardly, not of assenting to a precept. What we can do is to undertake a precept to abstain from destroying life and from injuring other beings. Then we can make a resolution, preferably without much fanfare, to develop loving kindness and apply ourselves to the mental training designed to nourish its growth."

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