Buddha's Advice on Becoming Free from Latent Tendencies

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2010) · 1:04:10

So as we have said in various ways this whole time, this whole week, all aspects of our path, all the different techniques and focuses of our practice, are really about freeing our hearts and minds from the influence, from the drive of greed, of hatred, of confusion.

Wisdom and compassion naturally arise when our mind isn't so obsessed with these things, when it's not holding fast to whatever it's holding fast to—holding fast to anything. As Joseph said last night in his talk, when we purify, when our own hearts and minds are purified or are not so enthralled to these kilesa, these torments, then wisdom and compassion are the natural expression, naturally arising.

Larry Rosenberg said once—I really like him, he cracks me up—that the best thing we can do for others is to develop wisdom and compassion, ease within ourselves. Then we stop bothering other people.

So tonight I want to talk about a specific sutta of the Buddha that I really like. It covers a lot of ground, showing how it's not only just the really focused meditation, but all aspects of our life, where we can be working with how our minds are either feeding the kilesa—how the way we're relating to our experience feeds wanting and aversion—or starving them. Feeding and starving is a metaphor that gets used a lot. All aspects of life are part of our path.

There's something called the three vaṭṭas, the three rounds of saṃsāra, or the three rounds of purification, depending on whether you want to look at it half full or half empty. The three vaṭṭas are sīla, samādhi, and paññā.

The first round concerns deeds and speech. When we act from kilesa, we experience the torment, the kilesa of transgression. We've actually transgressed to the point of acting, of speaking in a way that brings harm to ourselves, harm to another. And sīla is what protects us from the torments of transgression. Sīla, which of course requires mindfulness, requires paying attention, requires good intention, requires wisdom. When we are protected by sīla, we naturally experience freedom from remorse, because remorse comes. Many people have been experiencing just memories of even very small, unwholesome things said or done in the past. Not even giving yourself a lot of trouble about it, but just experiencing the remorse, the sadness, the pain of that. "Oh, yes, I didn't understand then. I could have acted better." We're free from that when we're protected by sīla from the torments of transgression, and we offer others the gift of fearlessness. That's one of the lovely things here—more or less we're giving each other the gift of fearlessness.

The second level of the rounds of saṃsāra is the obsessive kilesa, the obsessive defilements—when we're not acting on it, but just completely caught up in spinning. I don't know if you've ever had that experience of just spinning in greed or self-hatred. Take your pick from your choice of favorites. But obsessive really describes it. We're protected from that by samādhi. When the mind, the citta, the heart is collected—and you've all experienced that too, whether you want to acknowledge it to yourselves or not—when the mind and the heart is not so distracted, when the attention is more unified and collected, it's as if the obsessive quality of kilesa doesn't have room to get in. There are many levels of this purification, but that's one of the lovely things about a more collected, unified mind. It just feels so peaceful not to have all this stuff yammering at us all the time, not to be driven by that. So samādhi suppresses the obsessive defilements.

The third level of the round of saṃsāra is called the latent. Latent means underlying. It's not in evidence at the moment, but it could arise at any time. The latent is described as the underlying potential for kilesa, for these torments of mind to arise given the proper conditions. I'm not saying this to breed fear—not like, "Oh my God, I'm working this hard, but at any time it could attack me from any side." But haven't you sometimes noticed that? You notice this level more at this point in a retreat, when your mind actually is calmer and you're not as caught up in the huge stuff that was there in the beginning. People come and say, "Oh my god, I'm just seeing clinging all the time now." But it's on a much more subtle level. You walk into our favorite place, the dining room, feeling quite mindful, quite present, not off in a train of thought. And it doesn't take much, right? Someone gets in your way, someone slops some food, someone sits in your place, someone who knows what.

And sometimes the mindfulness is strong and no reaction arises. And it's like, wow, notice that. At that point, even the latent underlying tendency wasn't functioning. Wisdom is getting stronger.

But at other times, when you're just minding your own business and something happens—boom, a burst of anger so quick. Or a burst of greed so quick. Someone told me years ago about their experience. They were really mindful and had been working with greed, and it wasn't there. They were walking past, probably at tea time, walking past the food table with no intention to take food whatsoever, very, very mindful. And then they saw, as in a dream, as they walked past the bowl of oranges, their hand reached out and took the orange. Whose hand is that, taking that orange? Just small ways.

So this underlying potential—this is where we can get discouraged. But this is seen through by paññā, by wisdom. The Buddha said greed, hatred, and delusion, not totally. This is like the most subtle level. And this isn't abandoned completely through acts, but through wisely seeing.

So this latent underlying level is like a seed. And when the seed is there and the conditions are ripe, it can sprout. That's why so many times when you're reading the suttas and the Buddha's talking about his full awakening, he says it's cut off like a palm stump. No more can grow from it. He's kind of alluding to this. Nothing else can grow.

One of the definitions of complete, full enlightenment in the Theravada system is that these āsavas are

abandoned. Āsava is the word for these latent underlying potentials. It's not like something's really there. It's not sitting in you like a big ball of sludge. It's just that when the conditions are right, something could arise. So imagine that you walk into the dining room and the most annoying thing that always makes you crazy happens, and your mind just goes, "Uh-huh, may you be happy," and keeps going. Lovely. Imagine it was always like that. That's what they're talking about. It's possible. They wouldn't tell us we could do it if it weren't.

But we can notice it now—can notice the times it doesn't arise, notice the times it does arise with interest.

To describe these āsavas, this is from Bhikkhu Bodhi, who is quite the most well-known of the current interpreters and translators from Pali to English. He has a whole series of talks on each sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya. It's a lot of talks. And he's talking about this sutta, the three āsavas, the three poisons. They're defined as three specific ones, and it's not greed, hatred, and delusion for a change. It's a little more subtle, actually.

The āsavas, he says, are the three deepest, most fundamental tendencies or drives that can keep the process of saṃsāra in motion when we're not aware of them—the most likely biases of mind that arise when we're not paying attention, when we're just in robot mode.

And these are: kāmāsava, or sensual desire, sense desire; bhavāsava, which is attachment to being, usually translated as attachment to continued existence; and of course avijjāsava, ignorance, seeing things wrongly—these three.

One interesting thing Bhikkhu Bodhi said is that you'll notice dosa, hatred, is not listed as one of the āsavas. So for all you aversive types out there, this is finally one little piece of hopeful news—that hatred is not considered one of the qualities that binds beings to saṃsāra. He said it's not a wholesome thing, but it causes so much suffering that we see it more quickly.

So these are subtle: sense desire, bhavāsava, attachment to being, and ignorance. These are considered the three āsavas.

And again, it's not the state itself, but these tendencies, these seeds that could sprout given the right conditions—conditions which usually include not being present, not being mindful, include a mind that's confused.

I want to again mention that there are plenty of other wholesome seeds that are also easily sprouting given the right conditions. And that's what we've been cultivating here all this time. It's not just that we're in this hopeless round of samsara and might as well forget about it. We've actually been spending a lot of time—not just here, but through your whole spiritual path—recognizing the wholesome, feeding the wholesome.

You walk into the dining room, someone does something totally outrageous in your mind, and the

response is, "Okay, may you be happy." That's a wholesome response—wisdom, non-aversion, loving-kindness sprouting. Notice that. Or you walk into a situation where normally you'd feel really self-judging, really shy and embarrassed. You walk in and there's just nothing—just calmness. That's a big deal. That's a big deal. Notice that.

The sutta I want to talk about is called "All the Asavas." The Buddha actually lists seven different aspects that we can pay attention to. Very practical. It's nothing new, but I really like it because it points my attention in different directions, all of which are functioning to purify our heart and mind of these habits. It's not just "get into the deepest samadhi you can and stay there." That doesn't work. It's not just "stay there until you finally become an arahant." Actually, we can work with other aspects.

All of these are based in wise attention, which Sally talked about. In the sutta he says, "Bhikkhus, I say that there is an exhaustion, an abandonment of taints"—taints being one of the ways asavas is translated—"in one who knows and sees, not in one who does not know and see. Who knows and sees what? Wise attention and unwise attention."

This is a thread through the whole sutta. When one attends unwisely—and this is also the shorthand for wise effort—when we attend unwisely, it feeds an arisen unwholesome state. And the things he's going to talk about will just give us ways to look at that. Unwise attention even brings unwholesome states that aren't present into existence in the moment. When we attend wisely, if there are unwholesome states present, it starves them. It doesn't increase them. And wise attention can bring more wholesome states into being, and it doesn't arouse unwholesome states. Just stick with feeding and starving—that's easier. Don't make yourselves crazy with it.

The first of the seven I'll go through is asavas that are abandoned by insight. This is obvious—it's what we've been practicing here, seeing clearly the way things are. But what I want to highlight is his description of wise attention. He says that one who is unskilled in the Dhamma, undisciplined, does not understand what things are fit for attention and what things are not fit for attention.

This is a really interesting concept to me, because if you don't understand, you don't attend to the things that are fit—you attend to the things that are unfit. What tends to happen in my mind is to think there's a list of things that are fit for attention, and there's a list of things that are not good to pay attention to. But it's not that, of course. It's not in the object at all. It's not inherent in any particular thing that that thing is not fit for attention. The fitness or unfitness is obviously in the wise attention, the quality of attention itself.

This is what we've been saying all along in terms of noticing the attitude, the quality in the mind that's paying attention. And if you can't tell that, you can tell the effect. If what you're paying attention to—not just in the first moment, but over a longer period of time—if sense desire, wanting to be, and ignorance arise and get stronger, there's some way in how you're paying attention that involves unwise attention. If they lessen or don't arise, then there's some way you are paying attention that is wise attention.

I'll just briefly read how he describes unwise attention: "Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I? How was I? Having been what, what did I become? Will I be in the future? What will I be in the future?" You can get the drift. It doesn't seem like rocket science that this isn't really going in a helpful direction. But when we're in it, it's fascinating, isn't it? "Now let me just think about this. How will I be at the end of this retreat? What's going to happen?"

How many of you have already been thinking about—whether you're leaving tomorrow or in six weeks, I don't care—"How amazing am I going to be at the end of this retreat? How can I impress people with my incredible insight?" That's on a good day, in a good moment. In a bad moment: "God, how am I going to hide from people? I'm more of a mess than when I came. How will I ever..." It's the same thing. Not so fit for attention.

But let me give you another way, more basic, that I personally find fascinating—not just on the level of thought, but on the level of sense experience. Say there's a sound here in the hall, maybe a ticking clock. This happened years ago at some retreat. The clock we had up here ticked, and some yogi was telling me for days that this sound was just driving them insane, ruining their concentration, ruining their practice. The more they paid attention to how it was ruining their practice, the worse it got. They thought, "I'm being mindful of how upset I am and how this is ruining my practice." But really, the attention was unwise attention to the repugnant, the unpleasant nature of an object. Unwise because you just keep focusing: "This is so unpleasant. This is so unpleasant." And what's getting stronger? The aversion, the ill will is just getting stronger and stronger. But we think we're being mindful.

Sometimes we'll say turn back and notice the aversion in your mind. But sometimes that doesn't work. In this case, what worked was she just really connected to the purity of the sound itself—just hearing, just really dropped the resistance into hearing. And the whole rest of it dropped away. It was just hearing.

So sometimes you have to explore. Does giving full attention to that painful sensation feed the hindrances? And as you pay attention to the aversion in your mind, does the wise attention come back, do the hindrances get starved? Or does paying attention to the aversion just ramp it up, make it stronger? And if you come right into the sensation, does the mind calm down? Sometimes you have to explore.

This very handy measure of what's being fed and what's being starved—it's not about "I'm good, I'm bad, there's a right, there's a wrong." It's very experiential. You just pay attention to what's happening, not with judgment or "I'm good or I'm bad," just: "Let's do this. I'm paying attention to this. Look what happens. Whoa, whoa—maybe not so helpful."

In terms of these three āsavas, it's said that what feeds or sprouts the āsava of sense desire is attending to the gratification in sense pleasure. You get a sense of that? Not only is it pleasant, but all of these have a "me" in them. "This is really pleasant. And I'm noticing pleasant, pleasant..."

So how come all of a sudden I want more? And I'm noticing wanting. And it feels so nice. There's nothing

wrong with enjoying pleasant—there's not. But the gratification, unwise attention to the gratification rather than just being with the pleasant. Just being with the sensation itself, or with the sense of, "Wow, liking feels like this." This is subtle, but explore it.

What feeds the seed of being, the *asava* of being and wanting continued existence, is the same attending to the gratification—in what's called exalted states, the gratification in your meditative states that are really pleasant. And of course we're going to be gratified by it. We just need to really notice that.

It's actually called, in one form, the corruptions of insight. When there are stages, experiences in practice that are very pleasant, and the mind could be very collected, or whatever. Maybe it's choiceless, whatever. It doesn't matter what it is. But it's pleasant. The mind is pretty present. You know it's "good practice," whatever the heck that means. You're noticing pleasant. But there's just that subtle, "Yeah, now finally I've hit into the good place." And it's just that we're all going to get caught in it sometimes. Don't take it personally. But start to notice it.

The corruption of insight is when we don't notice it, and we can just be spinning in that for an extra period of time until it decays—which it will. And then you'll know you were caught because you're really, really bummed out. That's how you know you were caught. No problem, but we can see it sooner.

And what feeds ignorance, of course, is—they say—attending to any mundane thing, which is anything, anything that arises, in the wrong way. But that's actually just when there's delusion in the mind, when we see through the upside-down perceptions. When we're perceiving anything as permanent—the stuff we've talked about. Perceiving anything as me or mine. Perceiving what can't give us any lasting satisfaction as being reliable, trustworthy, somewhere I can rest and find my home. And the fourth one they always say is seeing what is not lovely as being beautiful, something to hold on to.

So any time we're perceiving in this inverted way, it's both a function of ignorance, but it also feeds further ignorance. You can see these are subtle.

Attending wisely on this one is what leads to insight. It's just simply this: noticing the attitude in the mind. Is there wanting? Is there aversion? Is there confusion? If you can't notice the attitude, notice what's being fed. Maybe not the first moment. I mean, if aversion's what you're noticing, and you can be aware of aversion and go, "Oh no," then aversion's getting stronger. That's wrong. But you can be with it. Be with it. And you can see it isn't really going crazy. You might see more of it, but it's not overwhelming you. Do you know the difference?

Just like I said in the beginning, as you're starting to see perhaps more and more clinging, and you think, "I should have less clinging after all this," but you're actually seeing much more subtle levels that we never even noticed before. And in the seeing of it, you're not being driven by it so much. The seeing, that wise attention, does actually keep the seed from sprouting. Mindfulness is absolutely our protection in this.

So that's the first one: abandoned by wise seeing, by insight.

The next four are the ones that are a little more specific. None of these are news to you, but I just want to point them out. The second one is abandoned by restraining. The Buddha says, "Here a bhikkhu reflecting wisely..." And he always says "reflecting wisely." There's just a sense that we can kind of use a little bit of our reflective mode just to notice what we're doing. When we notice we're getting caught up in a lot more sense desire, we can kind of reflect, "Hmm, what's going on here?"

Reflecting wisely, one abides with the eye faculty restrained, and then all the faculties restrained—the nose faculty, the ear faculty, all of them. While taints and the fever of defilement might arise in someone who abides with the eye faculty unrestrained, there are no taints or fever of defilement when one abides with the eye faculty restrained.

So what does restraint really mean? It doesn't mean going around blindfolded, with earplugs, not letting anything in. I have a friend who tried that once. But that's not exactly it. Rather, it's mindfulness and wisdom—*sati-paññā*—right at the sense doors. When we're with seeing and we have mindfulness and wisdom at the sense door, we've talked about this a lot, so I don't have to go into great detail. You know the seeing—you see seeing, you see form. When we don't have that presence, it becomes judgment and the whole story, that whole *papañca* within two seconds. Hearing—you meet hearing directly, like that woman with the ticking clock. When she was right there with *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom—oh, hearing, unpleasant—right at the sense door. It doesn't have to go into feeding the *kilesas*. It doesn't have to go into all that *papañca*.

I want to read from the Buddha, this great sutta that perhaps many of you are familiar with, where he makes an analogy of the six sense doors. We all know what the six sense doors are, including the mind. He makes an analogy of them to six animals that live in different domains: a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey. Six very different animals. He says if you tied each of those animals with a rope, and then took the six ropes and tied them together in the middle so those six animals were all connected to each other in a circle—it would be wild!

Then he says these are like the six sense objects. He says, "Monks, when those six hungry animals are all fighting against each other, when they grow weary, whichever one was the strongest—they would all have to give way to the strongest, and they'd be pulled along by whichever animal was the strongest, going to look for its food."

"In the same way, monks, whenever a bhikkhu, a bhikkhuni, or a layperson fails to practice and develop mindfulness of the body, the eye struggles to draw them towards attractive objects while unattractive objects are repellent. The nose, the ear, taste, the mind—the mind struggles to draw one towards attractive objects of thought while unattractive objects of thought are repellent."

Do you get a sense of that? We're walking around and all our sense faculties are competing—which is the most attractive? Whichever one is strongest pulls us that way. Or which is the most repellent? And whichever repellent thing is strongest pushes us away, whether it's a thought or a physical sensation or a

sound.

"This, monks, is lack of restraint at the sense doors." The sense doors are all just open. We go toward the pleasant or away from whatever is unpleasant, and it just pulls and pushes us around like that our whole life.

So what is restraint? "In this, seeing objects with the eye, a bhikkhu is not drawn to attractive objects and is not repelled by unattractive objects. Truly this mindfulness is this protection, this equanimity at the sense door. He remains with firmly established mindfulness as to the body, his mind being boundless, unrestricted. He knows in truth that liberation of the heart, that liberation by wisdom."

Just being present with mindfulness and wisdom at the sense doors, not pulled toward the pleasant and repelled by the unpleasant. Present with pleasant and unpleasant, but not this sense of the eyes being open thinking, "Just let me see what I can see." Not doing walking meditation looking all around. Not straining to hear—"What's that? What's that bird in the distance? What's that sound? Maybe there's something interesting." Or "What's that thought? Let me examine my thoughts. Which one is the most repellent? Let me get all caught up in that."

Then he says if, instead of having them just looped together, you took a really stout post and tied each of the animals to the post, they'd all pull on it. And when they got tired, they'd calm down and lie down.

So that post is mindfulness.

Mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of the four foundations of mindfulness. Wise attention, really.

So this is sense restraint. And it's true we might make choices—not to just say, "Let me see if I can meet all pleasant and unpleasant objects with a calm mind, with sati-pañña. I'll just open everything up." Thich Nhat Hanh says you don't have to throw open all the windows and let in everything and try to be balanced in the middle of it. So here we do practice some restraint, but not because things are bad—rather to strengthen the sati-pañña, the mindfulness-wisdom, at the sense door, to learn how to do that.

We've been talking about this a lot, so I don't think I have to go into it too much more. When we don't have that presence, we're off in the papañca, the reaction. But one other hint I did want to give from the Buddha that I also think is interesting.

On restraint, again on a subtle level, he's talking about seeing here, but it could be anything. On seeing attractive forms with the eye—and in this we don't have complete sati-pañña at the sense door, but we're sort of mindful. We can see. Say there's a person here that you find really attractive, really beautiful, really handsome, and you keep getting drawn into looking at them. So you're sort of mindful—"Oh yes, seeing, pleasant"—and you're falling into it, but you're not completely mindless.

Then the Buddha says: on seeing a form with the eye with real restraint at the sense doors, one does not, in that form, grasp at all the features, grasp at all the signs. You don't go into it so deeply.

An example with a beautiful person: Maybe there's some woman you think is beautiful. You go, "Okay, beautiful, falling into it." The grasping at the signs would be, "Well, look how nice the hair is. Look at the clothes. I love the way she walks. Oh, doesn't she seem dignified?" And so you're sort of present—you see what I mean?—but really kind of getting seduced into looking at all the nice things about it. That's sucking us in, feeding the sense desire, the details that catch our attention. Not that we hate those, but we just come back: okay, seeing, mindfulness-wisdom, right at the eye, seeing pleasant. It's contact. Seeing. Like Joseph says, just not hating or pushing away, but just explore that difference between it all being out there and just wisdom-mindfulness being here. Keeping it simple really helps in terms of restraint.

As they say about Thich Nhat Hanh: don't throw all the windows open. It doesn't mean we don't appreciate the beautiful. But again, Thich Nhat Hanh has a great line where he says we can tell the difference between obsessing and getting lost in sense pleasures and appreciating what is beautiful. And what's the difference? It's back to the wise attention.

He says—I think I have it here—"We have to distinguish between indulging in sense pleasures and the joy and happiness that we experience when we are mindful and at peace." How to tell the difference? "Attachment to sense pleasures brings about suffering and entanglement"—basically what's being fed: more wanting, more desire, more discontent, both in the present and in the future. "The joy and happiness of a peaceful mind brings neither suffering nor attachment in the present or in the future, for ourselves or for others."

That happiness can sometimes arise from being with a beautiful, pleasant experience. But it just doesn't have the Velcro. It doesn't lead to further wanting, further wanting to be. So that's all I'll say about that.

Oh, just this last line from Ajahn Chah: "When the nose smells an odor, let it be. Leave it at the nose." You can take that with any of the sense doors. Just let it be. That's all it is. Hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, thought. That's all it is. So that's back to that whole papañca talk we'll have to go into more.

The third category, and I like this very much too—in the sutta it's translated as taints that can be abandoned by using.

It's really about attention to the attitude with which we use things—with which we use food, with which we use clothing, with which we use what supports us for a safe and comfortable life.

Here's how the sutta describes it: "A bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, uses a robe only for protection from cold, for protection from heat, for protection from contact with gadflies, flies, wind, burning and creeping things." So the Buddha's not saying you've got to go sit in an anthill. You can protect yourself. "And for the purpose of concealing what disturbs conscience."

The same with alms food. This is actually something that monks say when they are about to eat their food: "Reflecting wisely, he uses alms food not for amusement or for intoxication or feeding vanity or for making yourself beautiful, but for the endurance and the continuance of this body, for ending discomfort,

for assisting with the holy life, considering, 'Thus shall I terminate old feelings'—like old feelings of hunger—'without arousing new feelings'—new feelings of greed—'and blameless shall live in comfort and health.'"

Nothing wrong with eating to be comfortable. Nothing wrong with wearing clothes to protect ourselves. "I live in comfort and health." The same with using a resting place—for the purpose of being comfortable, for the purpose of your retreat, for the purpose of protection. The same in terms of using medicine, using it in a way that's for the benefit of good health.

So it's quite sensible to be comfortable, to not have difficult feelings of hunger, of being bothered by insects, or conscience, or to support good health. For us as lay people, it's the same. Of course we use more things—it's not that we need to restrict ourselves to the four requisites—but to really look with wise discernment at the way we use things in our life. What's feeding greed? What's letting greed be abandoned? What's feeding more a sense of me becoming? What makes life just be more simple and a joyful flow?

I find it a really fun thing to play with—attention to the attitude with which we use things. Certainly now, it's been a long time, but in terms of the whole environment... And this is not to say, "Oh, I shouldn't use things," and then the attitude with which you're using things is negativity. That's also not helpful. But to see: do I take more than I need? Not as a should—that's not it—but really looking and seeing.

Here on retreat is a great place to explore this. I think I talked about food the other time, because that's such a big arena on retreat. But just noticing—I noticed in myself the "in case" mind. Let me just take a couple extra pieces of fruit, in case. And not only do they rot back in the room, but noticing what's being fed in the mind. It wasn't long before I could see it's feeding anxiety. "Should I take more? Should I take... am I going to be hungry later? Should I eat more now, even though I'm not hungry now?" And when I realized I'm not hungry now, just don't eat now. So what if I'm hungry later? Big deal. I'm a little hungry—so what?

It's so much more simple. It's so much more peaceful. Life is just a flow. You eat when you're hungry, and then when you're not hungry, you stop.

That's actually one of the things with the ordained sangha—they can only go out for alms once a day and can't keep food overnight. When I was a nun in Thailand, nuns don't have the same rules, and you could keep food overnight. I had several male friends who were monks in one monastery, and I ended up with this giant white tray with a moat around it—because ants would get in, so you have to have water all around it—filled with all these extra fruits and extra sweets that I could then go and offer to my friends the next day. It was anxiety-producing, complicating. It's just so simple when we take what we need and let it go. When we're not afraid of being a little hungry later—I'll have something to eat tomorrow.

Or for me, I'm always worried when I go somewhere: am I going to be cold? Extra blankets. I go running

around the place, collecting all the extra blankets. When if I was cold, I could simply go find an extra blanket.

I really don't need to go collect all the extra blankets. Maybe I don't even use them. Notice what's being fed in the mind.

The way we dress—not externally, not that there's some judgment about dressing—but I remember one retreat many years ago in Australia with Sayadaw U Pandita. For some reason, the room I was in, some weird place, had this giant full-length mirror. Not a great idea on a retreat. And I had this one dress. I don't know why, but I really just liked it. I liked the colors in it, the flowers. It was bright. You just need something bright somehow on a retreat—or so I told myself.

And I would notice there's nothing wrong with a dress, but every time I wore it, I couldn't walk past the mirror without looking. And then you don't just look at the dress. You look at yourself, and then the complications, complications. I like it, I don't like it, how do I look, how could I get more, maybe I shouldn't wear it—yada yada yada. Completely unnecessary.

The time that I was a nun for a year, we wore white in Thailand, and I had three outfits: one to wear, one to wash, one to be drying, and one to be dirty. And it was so great, so wonderful, just not to have to get involved in all this complexity, all this complication.

I remember when I came back home and was living upstairs here. Not long after, I had this image in my mind of standing with my closet door open, trying to decide what to put on that day. Like, oh my God. This is really—it's just so complicated. It's so much suffering. Such a waste of mental energy. Obviously I got over it, but just to experience the possibility of that, how burdensome it can be.

So just notice that, how it complicates. And something Ajahn Sumedho said once—he was saying that the mind states of contentment and gratitude are really supportive states for awakening. This sense both of restraint and also of paying attention to the attitude with which we use things, seeing what's feeding greed and putting it down—not because it's bad or good, but because who needs the greed? This leads to contentment, and contentment leads to gratitude. Instead of not having enough stuff or not having the right food or not having enough blankets, it becomes: wow, I not only have a bed to sleep in, I have a blanket, and there's heat. I'm not in a tent in the mountains in Pakistan two years after an earthquake.

And just not feeding in these simple ways—seeing that it's much more powerful than just not feeding greed. It actually strengthens the wholesome, the beautiful states. It gives space for them to come up. So that's just something I found really powerful.

The next one is called Enduring, which I like to think of more as patience. "Here, a bhikkhu reflecting wisely bears cold, heat, hunger, thirst, and again, contact with gadflies, flies, wind, burning, and creeping things"—you get a sense of their life. "He endures ill-spoken, unwelcome words and bodily feelings that are painful, wracking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing, and menacing to life."

So patience. But you'll see from the next one, which is actually avoiding, that the Buddha is not being absolute about having to be patient no matter what. It's with wise discernment. But generally, the sense of endurance, the sense of patience—well, we've talked about it a lot. It's an aspect of not bringing anything extra, not bringing ill will, not bringing negativity. Just, okay, this is how it is right now. Reflecting wisely, can I be with this difficult experience without adding anything extra?

Even though I go to Pakistan in the cold winter in tents—but as we've said, even being here, on the physical external realm, you have to put up with things that aren't the way you'd have them at home. Maybe now you've adjusted a lot. Hopefully you're tasting a little bit of the joy that can come from the simplicity I was just speaking of, the gratitude and contentment. But still, we've had to bear with, to be patient with—or unpatient with—things. Physical experiences. People not acting the way we want. Not getting what we want. God knows our meditation doesn't go the way we want a lot of the time.

And seeing how patience is just this willingness to be here. Not because you should. Not because that's the right thing to do to be a good meditator, but because we're not feeding then these underlying tendencies—to wanting to be something better, to wanting sense pleasure, to ignorance.

It's like, okay, this is how it is. Not just because I have to get through it, but because patience is actually a way to strengthen wisdom, to cut through the habit of feeding the kilesas. It's not just, "Okay, I'll be patient until something better comes along." It's a very proactive, powerful way to strengthen wisdom. It's a major axis of practice.

I'll give some examples from Asia, because Asia is wonderful to practice in—great just to have examples like this. But the point is not about war stories, about what tough times we went through. That's not the point. What's energizing about it is being with the difficult experiences. And they're difficult to me because I'm not used to them. For the people that live there, they're less difficult, but they're also difficult. The Buddha's talking about gadflies and creeping things all the time.

What's energizing is that learning—that a situation which had been so unpleasant, so difficult, so overwhelming—when we start to meet it with patience, with patience instead of aversion, instead of trying to fix it. And that's the real American mind: "Let me just fix this. We could get rid of all this stuff." No. You run into that all the time in Burma and Thailand. I was a nun in Thailand. "Let's just do this. We could fix it. We could get rid of this." No, this is just how it is. "No, we could have better food. We could do that." This is just how it is. "Why is everyone being so obstructionist?"

But you realize, no. It's actually very powerful practice to be in the same situation a few months later and be absolutely happy with the same circumstances.

I'll give a couple of simple examples. I was in Bangkok in the hot season. In the nun's clothes, you have like three layers—an undershirt and a long-sleeve blouse, and then another thing that goes over it, of course polyester, because that stays unwrinkled, which is somehow very important. And in a little kuti with a tin

roof. So when the sun comes up, you're baking in there. It's like an oven. And there's nowhere else to go. There's no fans. There's no electricity most of the time. You think, "Well, this could be air-conditioned." This was a very well-to-do temple. "We could have some AC in here. We could have some fans." Forget it.

And I remember seeing the sun coming up in the morning and just going, "Oh... another day." And there's nowhere else to go. Nowhere to go. Where are you going to go? Go out in the sun or into your kuti. That's it. There was nowhere. And it just wore me down. And the food was making me sick.

Then I went up to the forest, and that was cooler. Then it was cold. I could kvetch about that. And on the tin roof of that forest monastery, the jungle—those jungles are incredibly loud. You think it's loud here. And this one didn't even have loudspeakers like someone was talking about.

But just the sounds in the jungle, and the tuque lizards, and there's snakes all over the place, and the bugs—the tuque is incredibly loud. And then it came to be mango season, and I had a mango tree right over my kuti. Tin roof, you know, very loud. And the mangoes would drop off when they were like hard little rocks. So I'd be sitting there, mindful mind, and—*whang!* I'd jump about ten feet. Mango, mango—*whang!* And that would just go on sporadically. You can't time it, you know—for days.

What are you going to do? You have two choices. One of them leads to a lot of suffering. The other one is patience. This is how it is right now.

This is Ajahn Sumedho again. I would call this wise attention; he's calling it metta. I'm calling it wise attention. An attitude of not dwelling on the unpleasantness or faults of any situation, inside or outside of oneself. One is not blinding oneself with an ideal—"Oh, everything's perfect, everything's lovely." Not that. But instead, one is witnessing the unpleasant in a situation, a thing, a person, or in oneself without creating anything around it. You simply don't let the mind go into thinking, "I hate it, I don't want it." Just not creating anything around it. This is wise attention. This is patience.

And as I say, the mind truly relaxes around experience. It's not just like, "Okay, I can bear it." That's not patience. It's really this open, connected, relaxed state of heart and mind that truly accepts what's happening. And really, I came to be—in many moments—truly happy and at peace in situations that just drove me crazy. And not just for a couple of days it drove me crazy. I'm talking a few months. To really see that it really is not the external situation.

And I guess what was great about practicing in Asia was that you've made the commitment, so you stay there. And to stay there, you either have to deal with the stuff or just be in an aversive snit the whole time. So it forces us to look at this.

I want to mention three aspects of patience on arousing bodhicitta from Patrul Rinpoche. I don't want to talk about them at length, but I would remember these three a lot when I'm on retreat. It inspires me. All of these three are to help arouse bodhicitta.

The first: patience when one is wronged. Patience when wronged—in other words, not giving rise to anger.

The second: patience to bear hardships for the Dharma—which you're all doing here when you're sitting there and your body is hurting and you say, "Let me just be with it a little longer." Patience to bear hardships for the Dharma.

The third: patience to face the profound truth without fear. That doesn't mean fear doesn't come, but it means we're willing to gently, gently reconnect again.

Patience when wronged, patience to bear hardships for the Dharma, patience to face the profound truth without fear.

The next category—and this shows to me the practicality of the Buddha—is taints that can be abandoned by avoiding. By avoiding difficult, painful, unwholesome things. And this, I think, is so practical, not idealistic.

The things he says to avoid are obvious, but aren't there times we can get in our practice when something is just so intense, or you're hurting your knees sitting, and you think, "No, I need to be with anything." You're having extreme pain, and there's this idea in the mind: "If I was a good practitioner, my mind just wouldn't move. It just wouldn't move, no matter how intense the pain is, no matter how much I enjoy something. Therefore, I'm not going to avoid it. I'm going to go right in."

So the Buddha says: here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, avoids a savage elephant. Okay, he's talking about big things—a savage horse, a savage dog, a snake, a stump.

A stump, I suppose, so you don't fall over it. A bramble patch, a cesspit, a sewer. Reflecting wisely, he avoids going to unsuitable places or frequenting unwholesome companions.

In a way, it's sensible. The kind of idealistic thing is "I should always be the wise companion, and I can be with whoever, and they're not going to bring me back to being more greedy or being more aversive because I'm stronger than that." Well, we're not always stronger than that. It's really about noticing without any kind of self-judgment what's feeding the hindrances, what's starving them.

What we avoid may not be a savage elephant, but it may be a savage elephant in your mind. You know how we've said sometimes a huge emotional storm can come, and sometimes there's enough mindfulness to be with it. It's intense, almost overwhelming. But in not a really long time, you can see that while it doesn't go away, there's some balance. You can tell there's a little bit of mindfulness present—maybe not a lot, but a little.

But then there are other times when it's so strong you're just completely swept away, can't be present. It's just getting stronger and stronger and stronger—the fear, the aversion, the grief, whatever. And we'll say, back off. You need to turn the attention elsewhere. This is really helpful and supportive. That's what the

Buddha is saying. Not just to think, "I should be able to be with anything." No. What's helpful?

The energy of the fear is so much stronger than the energy of mindfulness. Then redirect the attention to something that can help balance, that doesn't keep feeding the fear. That's unwise attention at that point. You keep paying attention to the fear, and it's getting worse and worse and worse, and then everything looks dreadful, and you're afraid to step outside, and you're afraid to open your door, and you're afraid—wait a minute, I need to redirect my attention. This isn't wise attention here.

That's what the Buddha is really saying. And sure, we make choices too here. We've avoided in the way we've set this place up. We're not in the middle of Times Square. We don't have TVs playing like they do in the airport, CNN news running 24-7. In fact, we go to great pains to keep you from finding out anything that's going on, to support the practice. We're avoiding. We're not saying you should be able to do this anywhere, anytime, and if you can't, it's just because you're too weak. No, we're saying what supports our wise attention here?

So we don't have super comfortable accommodation, but it's comfortable enough. We don't have incredible rich gourmet food, but we have really good food—almost on the edge of too good, almost on the edge of too much, of feeding greed. So wise avoidance. We're not saying, "Why don't you go out shopping when you're feeling a little bored?" I think it's good we're in Barre. If you've gone shopping there, you know. Once will do it. You have to be in a really bad way to think of something in Barre that you really want. You can do it, but...

I mean, I've whipped up things, even not on retreat. I make it up in my mind. "Oh, I remember that aisle in the supermarket, that row that has this thing." I did that the other day. I completely made it up. The supermarket didn't have that thing. It never had had that thing. It didn't even have that whole category of things I was looking for, which was cake pans. I envisioned the whole row in my mind. Driving around like an idiot looking for this stuff. So save yourself. You don't need to do it.

Wise avoidance really supports our practice.

The seventh method is developing the seven factors of awakening, which Guy has fortuitously already talked about. When the seven factors of awakening are developed completely, we are awakened—that's why they're called the seven factors of awakening.

The sixth method is called removing. The way it's described is that reflecting wisely, a bhikkhu does not endure an arisen thought affected by sensual desire, by ill will, by cruelty. He abandons it. This points to a very important sutta called "Two Types of Thought," which I find really fascinating. It's one we use a lot, where the Buddha is talking about before he was a Buddha, when he was practicing—he's talking about his own early practice.

He said, "What if I divide my thinking into two types of thinking?" One is thinking that leads to his own affliction—thinking colored by sense desire, by ill will, by cruelty. The other type is the opposite: wise

thought, where sense desire changes to renunciation, to non-greed; ill will changes to non-ill will or mettā; cruelty changes to compassion.

But what's interesting is how he describes working with this. He didn't set up these two categories and then say, "This is good, this is bad, it should be like that, I hate myself whenever these bad ones come." He walked, and with this interest, with the wise attention I've been talking about, he said, "Just let me notice what happens." And this is where, if we can just notice, we see for ourselves that the abandonment of the unwholesome ones comes naturally from wisdom, because they cause us suffering.

So he said, "Let me notice. As I remain heedful, thinking filled with sensuality arose. And I noticed that thinking filled with sensuality, sense desire, has arisen in me." Noticing how it behaves, he said, "I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, to the affliction of others. It obstructs discernment, obstructs clear seeing. It promotes vexation. It doesn't lead to freedom. And as I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, it subsided."

He didn't say, "I took out the whip and hated myself." As he was noticing it leads to affliction, it subsided. As he noticed that it leads to the affliction of others, that it obstructs discernment, promotes vexation—it subsided. And then whenever thinking imbued with sensuality had arisen, he would look at it this way with wise attention and abandon it.

Sometimes it just goes by itself. And sometimes, as we've seen more clearly with these types of thoughts—ill will thoughts, cruel thoughts—we know sometimes we can't abandon them. We try to get rid of them with aversion, but that's not looking in the same way. When we just look and see, "Oh, when I follow this thought, this is what happens," and we see that clearly without negativity, without taking it personally—actually, we can bring in a quality of resolution and say, in the common parlance, "I don't need to go there."

I experienced this very clearly quite some years ago when I first came up with a condition that affects my joints—it's actually the reason I sit like this. When it was first happening, people didn't know what it was, and I was getting much more ill, much less able to move than I am now. Of course there was all the fear about the future. I was seeing doctors all the time, and they were always giving their wonderful ideas about what horrible thing it could be.

I could notice—because this went on for some months—I really saw in my mind. I remember one time I was going down to try and clean the bathtub, and it was really hard to get up and down, really hard to stretch like that. My mind goes, "Oh my God," and this fear arises: "I'm never going to be able to take a walk, I'm never going to be able to do this, I'm never going to..."

And I saw my mind start, and I just thought—I saw so clearly, I was so grateful for the Dhamma, for mindfulness to watch thoughts. I saw those thoughts, and I said, "You know what? One, who knows? And two, I don't need to go there. I really don't need to go there. Just come back and feel the arm moving on the

tub. It's a little stiff, it's a little sore, and that's all that's happening."

And I really could do that over and over. It was amazing freedom—not feeding the fear, not feeding the aversion, not feeding the wanting for something to be different. And it wasn't the whip. It wasn't "you're so bad." It's wisdom.

You all have that ability—when we look and just see what's feeding these āsavas, what's starving them.

This is just a really helpful tool: feeding and starving, not taking it personally, whether we're on retreat or in our daily life.

So let's just sit quietly for a moment.

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