What versus Why

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2010) · 1:00:16

As human beings, we seem to have a pretty strong habit or pattern around wanting to understand why things happen. This is a pattern that has actually served us quite well. So many things have arisen out of this quest for understanding why.

And yet we seem to be particularly curious about why things happen to me. We're very practiced at this particular exploration. It seems especially in Western culture, with the way psychoanalysis has permeated into our way of thinking, many of us have a pattern of wanting to understand why we are the way we are, particularly through thinking about our history, the causes and conditions from our history.

The way we have practiced this tends to be through thinking about, reflecting on, intellectualizing. Why am I the way I am? Why do I react the way I react? Why do I have these habits and patterns? And we understand this through thinking back to our childhood, to ways that we related to people, or situations that we were in.

This actually can be quite helpful at times. I'm not saying this is not helpful. For instance, if you're in a situation where you're meeting someone and there's a little bit of an emotional charge around this meeting, you might reflect on the fact that the person reminds you of somebody who you have a charge about, and that there's no need to have that reaction with this particular person. So you can mitigate some of your reactivity through this kind of reflection, through thinking back and understanding how our patterns and habits have come to be.

And yet we sometimes, I think, perhaps mistakenly feel that we should be able to control these reactions just through this intellectual process. Often this doesn't work very well. We think that because we know this person isn't the same person we have the charge about from our history, we shouldn't have this feeling. And yet we still do. We still have these reactions. So often this reflective process, this thinking back on why we are the way we are, doesn't touch into the deeper roots of our suffering, of our reactivity.

It can help to explore a different way to do this, and this is what we're doing here—exploring a different way to meet our suffering. Not through thinking about, but through meeting moment by moment what we're experiencing. Essentially, rather than thinking back about why we are the way we are, instead we look at what is happening moment to moment and come to an understanding through that process of looking at what is happening.

That's what I'd like to talk about this evening. I'd like to explore some words of the Buddha, who suggested that wise attention is one of the ways to meet our experience. I referred to this sutta the other day, but I'll

read some of the words to you.

He says: "An untaught ordinary person does not understand what things are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. Since that is so, he attends to those things unfit for attention and does not attend to those things fit for attention. This is how he attends unwisely: Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I become in the future? Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the present thus: Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?"

These questions, the way the Buddha describes the untaught ordinary person reflecting unwisely—this is reflecting through the framework of "who am I?" and "what am I?" How have I gotten here? What are the causes and conditions that have brought me here? How did I get here? It's reflecting through the framework of self and this penchant to ask why. Why am I the way I am?

The Buddha goes on to say that a well-taught noble disciple understands what things are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. Since that is so, she does not attend to those things unfit for attention and attends to those things fit for attention. She attends wisely: "This is suffering." She attends wisely: "This is the origin of suffering." She attends wisely: "This is the cessation of suffering." She attends wisely: "This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering."

I talked about this in terms of looking at experience through the framework of the Four Noble Truths. Not just the thinking-about process here, but the way this is phrased in the sutta—"this is suffering, this is the cause of suffering"—is pointing us directly to look at the present moment and understand what is happening here and now. Is it suffering? Is it the cause of suffering? Is it the ending of suffering? Is it qualities being cultivated that are leading to the ending of suffering, the path leading to the ending of suffering?

Looking at what is happening in the present moment through this lens of the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha says, is wise attention. Rather than reflecting on "why am I the way I am," look at what is this, now? Is it suffering? Is it the cause of suffering? This is pointing us directly into the present moment and is a great teaching for us.

Suffering occurs in the present moment. It does not occur in the past or in the future. If we are suffering over something that happened in the past, what's happening is that there is a thought in the present moment about that past incident, and the suffering about that incident is being reconstructed right here and right now.

I had a great understanding into this at one point. Some years ago, I was an actress in a play. One night on stage during a performance, I forgot my line. I tried ad-libbing so that the other actors on stage would know I'd forgotten my line, and hopefully at some point would jump in and rescue me. So I said a few

ad-libbed lines, and at some point I ran out. Nobody jumped in. There was this gaping silence. I looked out—it was like the invisible wall between the audience and the actors just dissolved—and there were all these people out there waiting for me to say something. It was very embarrassing.

For years after that, when that memory arose, the embarrassment came back with it. They were completely tied together. Then on one three-month retreat, that memory arose many, many times. I really got to watch the process of this embarrassment being created: the memory arose, and there was a reaction to that memory in the moment. It became really clear to me that the memory and the reaction and the embarrassment were different things. It also became clear to me that the embarrassment wasn't somehow intimately or integrally related to that memory. There was a definite sequence in the mind.

This was a great revelation—to see actually that the embarrassment wasn't somehow lurking, just waiting to pop up. It was recreated in the moment. Suffering is created in the moment. The conditions for experiencing that embarrassment did occur in the past: I was in the play, I forgot the line. But the suffering that was occurring on that three-month retreat was completely new—not unrelated, but created in the moment. I can think about that now without feeling embarrassment. It wasn't connected in some fixed way; there was simply a process by which the embarrassment was created from that memory.

So not only does the suffering occur in the present moment, I think as this example points to, the cause of the suffering—the wanting—also occurs in the present moment. Even though some of the events we may be responding to or reacting to happened in the past—the play happened in the past—the direct cause of the suffering in the present moment was the reaction in the present moment. The reaction to that memory: "shouldn't have forgotten that line," the not wanting to have forgotten that line, that clinging to wishing I had been a different person at that point. The craving, the wanting, also occurs in the present moment.

At one point in the earlier days of my practice, I had gotten into meditation through the breakup of a relationship and the strong emotions that were coming up around that breakup. The practice I engaged with was very much attending to my emotions in daily life. I was simply noticing how my emotional world was being experienced.

One of the emotions that seemed to come up regularly was loneliness. No particular surprise. And one pattern I noticed was that every night when I went to bed, loneliness came up. Again, this didn't particularly surprise me. I thought I understood why I was lonely at that moment—it seemed so obvious why it was coming up when I was going to bed at night. And yet I was just observing the emotions, just observing. That's what my practice was at that time.

At some point in this weeks-long exploration of looking at the loneliness, I began to notice that the loneliness arose while I was setting my alarm clock. I thought that was kind of odd. It was so clear—I was setting the alarm clock, and boom, the loneliness. There seemed to be some connection, but I didn't know what it was. So I just kept observing and began noticing the pattern of the loneliness arising when I set

this alarm clock.

One night, I think because my interest was somewhat piqued, I was setting my alarm clock—a little digital alarm clock—and while I was setting it, an image arose about my ex-boyfriend. We were together in Disneyland looking up at a marquee that had a digital clock on it. I could see that there was a link between the memory and my physical sense impression. And I could also see that the loneliness arising was a reaction to that memory—something along the lines of, "Oh, poor me, I'll never have such wonderful times as we had at that time in Disneyland."

The loneliness arose that night, but I was amazed. What amazed me about seeing that was that the why of why I was lonely was not related to what I thought it was at all. It didn't particularly have to do with going to bed alone at night. It had to do with a reaction to a memory about my ex-boyfriend, triggered by a physical sense impression.

But what amazed me even more was that the next night when I went to bed, setting the alarm clock, the memory obviously came back—it had become conscious to me. But the loneliness didn't come back. It was as if seeing how the loneliness had been created in this process had somehow dismantled it. I didn't know how that worked or why that had happened, but it seemed to be related to having clearly seen the links and the causes in the present moment of how the suffering of the loneliness was created.

I'm not saying I didn't get lonely again, but the regular every-night-going-to-bed-lonely stopped. That was a great relief, this little moment of seeing.

So in the present moment we can see how suffering is put together. We can see how our reactivity is created, the causes and conditions for it arising. And this seeing the present-moment causes of our suffering, how it's created in the present moment—this seems to have a deeper impact on the underlying tendencies towards suffering.

I hope this distinction between the why of the present moment and the why of history is clear. There are causes and conditions from history, things that happened. But present-moment suffering is occurring directly in the present moment through things happening directly in the present moment. And these things can be witnessed simply by looking at what is happening.

This exploration of what is happening—this is our path, this is our practice: to just have the courage to meet what is happening. This is much of what we've been talking about in the instructions: meeting experience directly, underneath the layer of concepts. Meeting our body sensations, meeting our emotions, the feelings. These are things we often want to understand the why of. An emotion arises—why am I feeling that emotion? Just looking at what. Here and now, in this retreat particularly, we have this great opportunity to just look at what.

Let go of the why and just look at what is happening. Images, thoughts, emotions also arise in the present moment and can be experienced as simply what is arising in the present moment.

There's a distinction between seeing an arising of a thought or arising of an image or a mind state as something that's just happening in the present moment, and seeing our experience *through* that thought, seeing our experience *through* that mind state.

In terms of supporting our ability to see thoughts and images as arising experiences in the present moment, one of the tools that has been most helpful for me is to acknowledge the arising of that thought through a noting of how that thought is appearing. What I mean by this is that thoughts will appear to us in various ways—we have some experience that we consider a thought. Sometimes it sounds like we're talking to ourselves; we hear our voice in our minds. Sometimes it sounds like somebody else is talking to us. Sometimes it sounds like there's a radio playing and it's somebody else we don't even know, and they're talking about things we don't even care about.

In these experiences, the thought is arising automatically, almost as if it's being heard. And so we can use that to support us in connecting with the *how* of that thought, the how that thought is being known. Note "hearing." Or sometimes thoughts arise as images—we see an image. I have found that using "seeing" as a note when I'm experiencing thoughts in that way directly points to the process by which that thought is coming into being through the seeing realm. Even though I know it's not that I'm actually seeing, when I use that note—I know it's not that I'm actually hearing—it just seems to point to the thought as an arising experience, as a *what* is happening in the moment, as opposed to the content of the thought or believing the thought. So that can help us connect to that part of our experience also as just an arising *what*. What's happening right now? There's an image arising. Seeing.

Another way to look at what's happening in the present moment addresses something we can sometimes miss. The attitude that Rebecca was speaking about the other morning—the attitude with which we are looking at our experience—sometimes is a major part of what is happening that goes unnoticed by us. We're looking at our experience through a lens of frustration, or we're looking at our experience through a lens of wanting, and it's not really noticed that we're doing that.

A tool that can support us in helping to reveal other things that might be going on is to simply check in: What's the attitude? What's my relationship to this experience? This serves as a means to help us widen the lens to see more of what is happening in the present moment. This points to seeing an additional lens through which we're looking at experience, or a kind of larger layer of experience that perhaps hadn't been noticed.

This points to the way that we do sometimes recognize that our experience is layered—that habits are layered on top of other habits, emotions on top of beliefs and other emotions. There's a layering process that we often experience and see. We begin to really see this in the present moment, looking to our experience in the present moment. We see this layered nature of our experience.

For instance, you might notice a common pattern arising. You see that there's a kind of fear very deep, and then there's anger on top of that fear, and then resistance on top of that anger, as layers of experience.

Having a sense that there are these layers to our experience, we often think—I've seen in my own mind and in talking to people—we often think that the way to meet that experience, or that the most important part of meeting that experience, is somehow to get to that middle layer. If there's fear in the middle, and then anger kind of outside of that, and then resistance outside of that, what I really need to pay attention to is the fear right in the middle. That's the way we think, because we understand that it's at the core.

But jumping over the other things that are actually happening in the present moment—the resistance, the anger—diving into the middle somehow is jumping over what's actually going on. So it's not actually helpful to dive into the middle, even though we might have seen this pattern many times and know that there's fear underneath. If we are doing that and ignoring these other things in the outer layers, it's almost a violence to our minds to try to force ourselves into something when there are these other things actually happening.

So it's helpful to just notice the obvious of what is happening in the present moment. Just what is obvious. What's obvious in the body, what's obvious in our thoughts, what's obvious in our emotions. What's obvious is resistance. Resistance is what's happening right now. There's no need to push in to some idea of what we think is happening underneath.

Sayadaw U Pandita talks about investigation as being like a process of polishing a bowl, rubbing. Taking a soft cloth and rubbing is how you polish a bowl.

So this is how we explore our experience. We meet it with this kind of gentle, soft contact rather than with a chisel trying to chip it apart. The continuous contact of our mindfulness with our experience, the continuous contact with what is happening, begins to melt the layers and can reveal layers underneath other layers. Just noticing moment by moment what is happening.

I had an experience of this, seeing how these layers can be so layered, on one retreat at Spirit Rock. I was doing walking meditation, and during this retreat—it was a long retreat and I had been doing quite a number of long retreats at that time—I was experiencing a lot of doubt, a self-doubt about whether I should be doing this. Should I be doing all of these long retreats? And the story was kind of like, "Well, I'm not worthy here somehow," something like that.

During one walking meditation, this pattern, this doubt, just kept coming up. Should I be here? Should I be doing this? And it was so strong that I realized I needed to explore it. So in the walking, I began by stopping and recognizing, "Okay, the thoughts are not present right now. I'm just meeting the experience." My intention in this walking was to stop as soon as I saw any thoughts arising. As soon as I noticed a thought coming up, I'd stop and take note of that thought.

As I did this, several layers were revealed to me as I just kept looking at what thought was happening right now. Notice that, keep going. Then what's the thought that's arising?

I started by noticing these thoughts about doubt—doubt about doing these long retreats. Then the next

thought that was obvious when I stopped and checked in was fear, somehow, that I'm not good enough, that I'm not measuring up, that I'm not a good enough yogi to be doing all of these long retreats. Underneath that, the next thought that came up was something like, "I'm not worthy to be dedicating my life to this. Not worthy to leave my job to do this." I had taken a long sabbatical and was living on savings. Not worthy to leave my job for this.

The next thought was insecurity—what's going to happen about my financial situation? And underneath that was aversion: "This is not acceptable. I have to have control over my finances." And underneath that was this sense of vulnerability. When I hit the vulnerability, I could just be there with that. It was like, "Yeah, this is true. This is true. We're vulnerable."

I didn't really know that this whole pattern of thought around "I shouldn't be doing long retreats" had anything to do with thinking about my financial situation until I started looking moment by moment at what was happening, what thoughts were arising, what was going on moment by moment, looking at experience.

Having this sense of these layers of experience, it's often helpful to not make assumptions about what might lie underneath the layers. That gets into the territory of "why" again, in a way. What's happening? I'm feeling disconnected and lonely. And what underlies that? Why am I feeling disconnected and lonely? Making assumptions about that is generally not so helpful. These assumptions may or may not be true.

It's quite amazing how our minds work. If we make assumptions about things and believe them, we will start finding out that they are true. We will gather the evidence to prove that they're true, whether or not they actually are true. They become self-fulfilling prophecies in a way when we look at our experience through assumptions.

So if you notice assumptions in your experience, at least try to hold them lightly—kind of like the assumption I made about going to bed lonely at night. I thought I knew why that was happening, but I was willing to just meet the experience as it arose.

We do have a tendency as human beings to create meaning, and I think this is where this tendency to create assumptions comes from. We want to understand what things mean. "I'm having this emotion, and this means..." "I'm having this thought, and this means..." And again, this can be a self-fulfilling prophecy, this kind of creation of meaning.

There's a beautiful poem about this tendency to create meaning. It's by Fernando Pessoa, a Portuguese poet who wrote under various heteronyms—he created different identities and wrote under each one. This particular poem comes from his Alberto Caeiro identity:

The mystery of things, where is it?
Why doesn't it come out to show us at least that it's mystery?
What do the river and tree know about it?

And what do I, who am no more than they, know about it?
Whenever I look at things and think about what people think of them,
I laugh like a brook cleanly plashing against a rock.
For the only hidden meaning of things is that they have no hidden meaning.
It's the strangest thing of all,
stranger than all poets' dreams and all philosophers' thoughts,
that things are really what they seem to be, and there's nothing to understand.
Yes, this is what my senses learned on their own.
Things have no meaning. They exist.
Things are the only hidden meaning of things.

We also have a strong tendency to create meaning about our practice. Things happen, and we tell ourselves what they mean. We find ourselves not wanting to practice, and we think, "This means I'm a failure. This means I really don't want to practice. This means I'm not serious about practice." But not wanting to practice is simply a mind state arising in the present moment. That's all it is. It was such a huge relief to me when I recognized, "Oh, not wanting to practice is arising." It doesn't have to have any meaning attached to it. It's just not wanting to practice. It's actually a wonderful mind state to learn to recognize and simply note.

Another thing we make meaning about is our wandering mind. We're practicing along, and suddenly our mind starts wandering far more than it did yesterday. We think it means something like, "I must not be trying hard enough. I'm not practicing diligently enough."

I had this experience during a three-month course where the practice had been moving in the direction of more clarity, more ability to stay connected with the breath. It had been going quite well, I thought. And then one day I sat down and all I was doing was thinking. I was amazed.

Fortunately, I had enough experience not to create the meaning, "This means I'm a failure, this means I'm not trying hard enough." I decided instead to simply look at what was happening. What is actually happening? How are these thoughts coming to be?

What I began to notice was this: I would sit down, pay attention to the breath, and I could connect with it very clearly for about a second. Then the sensations of the breath got really subtle—so subtle that I could hardly notice them anymore. That's when the mind would wander.

This kind of thing actually happens to us quite often. As our practice begins to deepen, we carry an assumption about what we're paying attention to: "This is what my breath feels like, and this is how I pay attention to it." Yet as we pay attention to the breath or other experience, that experience can shift. It can change. And if we're trying to pay attention in a certain fixed way, there's going to be a disconnect, and the mind may wander.

This is what I discovered in that experience—simply trying to meet that subtlety. What I learned in subsequent retreats was that it doesn't have to be a problem. At first, I was actually trying to grasp at those subtle sensations: "What are they? What is that feeling? How is the breath so subtle?" I was trying to force the mindfulness into them, and that wasn't particularly helpful either.

But at some point, one teacher—I think it was Sayadaw U Pandita—when I reported that the breath was getting so subtle I couldn't notice it, simply said, "You can just notice 'subtle breath.'"

I thought, "Oh." I hadn't thought of that.

And so I began using that as the note: subtle. Breath is subtle. I didn't actually have to try to figure out what the subtlety was. It's just subtle experiences.

Sometimes when the mind is wandering, it may mean that you're getting caught in something or other. Check into your own experience. Sometimes if the mind has been settling for a while and suddenly starts wandering again, at least in my experience, it has signaled sometimes a shift in the practice. There's something new to connect to, something new that's happening that the mind just isn't quite familiar with connecting with.

So letting go of the idea that it means something—either that it means the practice is going well or the practice is going horribly—and just noticing what is happening. Be on the lookout for "this means" in your thoughts, and just connect with what is happening, no matter what. The way through our experience is just to notice what—what—what is happening. It's very simple. It's not so easy, but it's very simple.

This practice—there's really only one instruction. That's all we do. Wherever we are in our practice, just meeting what we are noticing in the present moment and noticing how we're relating to it. It can be that simple.

Looking at the moment, looking at what is happening—as I pointed to earlier—it begins to reveal the cause and effect nature of the unfolding of our experience. And this happens kind of automatically in a way. We don't have to try to see the cause and effect experience. Just by seeing a thought arise, a memory arises, a thought about that memory, a belief about that memory, and a reaction to that—just by watching what is happening, we understand how the causes and conditions are in play in the present moment. So we don't really have to try to see the why of the present moment. We just need to connect with what, what, what is happening.

I'd like to give an example from my own practice that ties a lot of these types of whats and whys together—the different kinds of whys: the why of history, the intellectualizing why, the why of the present moment. It's a pattern that for me was very strong, one that happened repeatedly. It was a strong pattern, I think, from very long ago in my past, and it was a pattern of self-hatred and unworthiness.

I had a sense, a kind of intellectual understanding. I had done some therapy and had talked about this a

lot, done the intellectual thinking about why this pattern of self-hatred was there. And through that process, I had come to the understanding that there was a particular relationship it was probably connected to. I didn't have any direct evidence for that, but it just made sense. It made sense based on what the therapist said and what I had said. It just seemed to make sense. So that's kind of that intellectual understanding that we often meet our experience with.

Then on one three-month course, I got to watch this pattern. I had been watching it on many retreats, but on this three-month course it was particularly strong. At some point I realized I didn't want this. I fought it for a while. I mean, you've got a long time on a three-month course, right? You can think, "Yep, I don't need to pay attention to that. I'm going to pay attention to arising and passing. I'm going to pay attention to just physical sensation. I'm not going to pay attention to this feeling of self-hatred."

But it was pretty strong. It kept really coming back. So it was like, okay—I surrender. This is what my retreat is about. Somehow I had the belief, a meaning I'd put on it, that this was a lesser kind of retreat, this retreat about self-hatred. But I did just start observing it, watching the experience as it arose.

At some point—and I don't even remember clearly how this connection was made—there was a very clear connection made to that relationship. Perhaps it arose as a thought in the moment, clearly linking. This is sometimes how this connection can get made. We can see how a history is connected to a present moment pattern through an arising of a memory in the present moment and seeing so clearly that pattern unfolding as a result of that memory. I don't remember how it happened for me in this particular case, but I did see very clearly that the pattern of self-hatred in my experience was directly related to this relationship.

And in that moment there was a huge kind of release and opening of compassion for this person and their relationship. There was a sense of understanding that happened.

Now I would call this a kind of psychological insight. It was really clear to me how my history connected with the arising pattern in the present moment. And there was an opening around it. It did feel like there was a shift somehow. Actually, I thought, "Oh, maybe that's taking care of the self-hatred." I was actually shocked when it came back the next time. "Oh, I thought I was done with this."

And actually, that psychological insight—the strength of the self-hatred was just as strong. I was shocked.

But there was a shift, and the shift was that what I think that psychological insight had helped me to see was that the pattern in my own mind, the pattern of self-hatred, was related to causes and conditions. It wasn't my fault. It was kind of just a product of the relationship and me and that person and the way we interacted. So there was a little bit of a lessening of the *me* in the pattern, but the pattern kept coming up very strongly.

The shift that I noticed after that point was that it was no longer quite so scary to be with it. I could actually meet the feeling much more clearly. I could start really looking at the *what* of that self-hatred

without flinching.

One night—the pattern would come and go on the retreat, it would be there sometimes, it would not be there sometimes—on one dharma talk, actually it was a Q&A Joseph was doing, he answered a question about particularly sticky patterns. He gave an instruction that had been helpful for him that I had not heard before. The instruction was that when there's a really particularly sticky pattern, it can be helpful to make a double note on the arising of the experience. The note would be "contact"—that is, the actual meeting of the experience—followed by the feeling tone of that contact.

I had heard this instruction, and as I was leaving the meditation hall that evening and walking up the stairs out of the walking room, the self-hatred descended. I felt powerless to do anything about it. But I had this really strong determination to just meet it. So I went back to my room and I sat. I just paid attention to that experience, and I used this double noting that Joseph had suggested.

Every time there was any kind of a movement towards "you're no good," a thought like that arising in my mind—contact, unpleasant. I just noted it as soon as I could, just trying to meet the arising of that experience with "contact, unpleasant." Just noting it, noting it, noting it.

At some point that evening, the arising of that experience, noted clearly, was just seen as a thought. "This is just a thought. This is just an empty phenomenon arising in the mind." In that moment the self-hatred vanished and bliss flooded the body. The next thought was, "Ah yes, and this too is impermanent."

The bliss kind of diminished and there was just much more of a sense of balance. There was a kind of recognition in that moment that there'd been an insight, but that it didn't necessarily mean the pattern was gone—it had been seen through in that moment. And yet that moment actually had a very deep power of cutting into that pattern.

I would have described it as a very deep rut in my mind before that moment. After that moment it was more like the rut was a wide bowl. It was very easy to get out of it. I attribute this to actually this moment of seeing "you're no good" as a thought and a belief arising in the moment.

There's the thought "you're no good" and there's a belief in that thought. This is actually an interesting phenomenon to check into—thoughts versus beliefs. The thought "you're no good" can arise in the mind, and without any belief, that thought vanishes. That's what's happening now. That's the way I experience this. Those thoughts still arise; there's not belief in them. And that, I think, is what allowed that rut to become more of a wide bowl.

So looking into the *what* of experience can cut very deeply into these conditioned patterns that we have.

It can take a lot of courage to stay with our present moment experience in the face of strong suffering. And yet this is the way that the mind can understand and let go of that suffering.

This same practice of just meeting what is happening not only frees us from the reactivity that we're so

tossed about by, but it also allows us to deeply see into the nature of experience. That moment of seeing, "this is just a thought"—that was a vipassanā insight. The vipassanā insight into just an arising experience. That's the insight. Those are the insights that cut into our patterns and habits. Those are the insights that free us.

And it doesn't matter what you're paying attention to. It really doesn't matter. We think we have to somehow get rid of all of these patterns of self-hatred. I certainly thought I did in order to have a deep insight. I thought that self-hatred has to be gone first. But no, insight can come in the midst of that pattern. Deep recognition into impermanence, unreliability, not-self—these are the insights that free us, just by noticing what is happening moment by moment.

So let's sit for a few moments.

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