Refraining From Ten Unwholesome Actions - Ill Will and Wrong View

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 59:25

Last week I began speaking about the ten unwholesome actions the Buddha said to avoid, both for our own happiness and the happiness of all others. It's almost as if he were putting up a warning sign on a beach that said, "Caution, dangerous undertow, take care." So it's the same thing when we're on the shoreline of the ocean of our activities. The Buddha is reminding us of these areas of danger—the activities of body, speech, and mind that lead to suffering.

I spoke of the three unwholesome actions of body, four of speech, and the first of the three unwholesome actions of mind. Tonight I'd like to continue and speak of the two remaining unwholesome, unskillful actions of mind that the Buddha said to avoid. Both of them play a tremendously powerful role in our lives. They're powerfully conditioned in our minds.

The first of these is the mental activity of ill will. As we know, it expresses itself in so many different ways: as anger, as impatience, as annoyance, as irritation. And in extreme cases, it expresses itself as hatred. All of these forms of ill will are conditioned responses to what we find unpleasant in our experience. They arise in situations when we don't get what we want, or when we do get what we don't want.

It would be interesting to look at all of the times ill will or aversion is arising in the mind and to really see that it comes down to just these two things. We're not getting what we want, or we are getting what we don't want. We can see ill will and aversion arising in these situations in fairly predictable ways. This is not some kind of hidden, subtle truth we have to investigate. It's all pretty obvious if we're paying attention.

It's very easy to see the arising of ill will in one of its forms in relationship to physical pain. When we feel sensations as being unpleasant—getting what we don't want—our habitual response, as I'm sure you've noticed, is usually some kind of contraction. We pull back from it. We don't like it.

This is very different from an interaction I had with Munindraji, my first teacher. The first year I was in India, between different practice periods I was going into Bodh Gaya to the bazaar to have a cup of tea. One day I was having a really bad headache, and Munindraji came by. Chatting a little bit, he asked how I was. I said, "You know, Munindraji, I have this really bad headache." His response was, "Oh, I hope you are enjoying it." Not quite. But it was interesting that that is another possible perspective.

We can take our more usual response—the contraction of our energy system when we feel ourselves

pulling back—and that contraction becomes a very useful signal that some form of aversion is present. We can really take it as feedback, and it awakens us to the fact that there's some ill will in the mind. So it's very obvious in relationship to physical pain and unpleasant sensations.

Ill will can also arise when we think about painful or unpleasant past situations. There's a thought or an image in the mind of someone or some event, and if it was an unpleasant encounter, very often just in having the thought or seeing the image, we get annoyed, we get angry, we get irritated. It's almost as if we were back in the situation again.

But it's really interesting to watch carefully what actually is happening in that moment, because what's really happening is that we're getting angry at a thought. As Munindraji said, in one of his very great teaching lines, "The thought of your mother is not your mother." It's a thought. But we have these thoughts, and because we're not aware in the moment that it is just a thought, we get pulled right into the content, the story, and then all the attendant emotions arise.

Even more unbelievable is that we can have thoughts about things that haven't even happened yet. We're imagining something might happen in the future, and we can play out a whole story of what's going to happen and get furious. What is going on? Mark Twain captured this very cleverly, as was his wont, when he said, "Some of the worst things in my life never happened."

Being on retreat is a perfect time to observe this phenomenon—to see when ill will arises around certain people or events, how much of it is about just the memory of something that happened, which is just a thought now, and how much of it is about something we imagine might happen in the future. It hasn't happened; it's just a thought now. If we can see this, it really is a way of unhooking ourselves from this addiction to the habit of ill will.

I find it particularly illuminating to watch this process in walking, whether it's walking meditation or maybe going for a walk. When we're walking and we're more or less present, there's a very simple, easy connection with the reality of our experience. We feel the movement of the body and the touch; we may be aware of the rain or the sun or the environment. There's a real connection with where we are. And I'm sure you've noticed this many times: we can be walking, connected, fully present, and then some thoughts come into the mind, and we just get pulled into them—pulled into this mind-created world with all of the emotions that might come with it, often, or at least sometimes, ill will or aversion.

And then three steps, five steps, a hundred steps later, it's like we come out—oh yeah, I'm just back, I'm back here. All of that was just in our imagination. We were lost in this mind-created world.

To observe this over and over again—our connection with being present, our connection with reality, everything is fine, and then we're lost. And then at a certain point, depending on the strength of our mindfulness, we're back again.

There's an old Zen story which provides a useful note for this phenomenon. It's the story of an old Zen

hermit who was living in a cave and was also a fantastic artist. He spent years painting a tiger on the wall of the cave, painting it so meticulously that, as the story goes, when he finished, he looked at it and got frightened.

That's what we're doing. When we're getting lost in these mind-created worlds, it's like looking at a painted tiger. We're creating out of our imagination a little world, having all kinds of feelings about it, and it's just the brushstrokes of our mind. When we see this, a good note to remind ourselves might be "painted tiger." Just "painted tiger"—it reminds us that that's all it is.

Aversion or ill will can arise in relationship to physical pain. It can arise when we remember unpleasant past interactions or imaginary future ones. We can also see aversion arising in relationship to different situations on retreat. Retreat is a hotbed for ill will. When we are feeling a little discouraged or grumpy, the smallest thing can provoke aversion in us, where we project our discouragement onto others.

Then there's the phenomenon which is so common, especially in a group this size: the Vipassana vendetta. There's somebody here, some yogi—you don't like the way they walk, you don't like what they wear, you don't like how they move. They take too much food, whatever. The mind just starts obsessing. It just picks out this person, and very likely you have not even met them. You know nothing about them, but the mind is just making up this whole story. It's sort of the counterpoint to the Vipassana romance, which is the desire side of things. So watch out for that. If you find you're obsessing about another yogi's behavior, you might just note "Vipassana vendetta"—this is ill will arising in my own mind.

Ill will also arises when we personalize difficult situations that are really impersonal. How many times have we been in airports? We get to the airport two hours early, and then we see on the board: flight canceled. And if we don't get irritated because of our profound wisdom, we can certainly see it around us. People get so angry, so irritated. It's not that it's not a frustrating situation—it is. But it's completely impersonal. It has nothing to do with us. It's not directed at us. But we personalize it, and because we personalize it, we give tremendous power to the ill will.

One example of personalizing what's impersonal—and which will be of particular benefit during this retreat—is a story told about Ajahn Chah. At one point he decided to go on retreat by himself. He had this little meditation hut outside a village. This story comes from a book by Ajahn Amaro called *Small Boat, Great Mountain*. The villagers were partying at night, and there was loud music through the loudspeakers. Ajahn Chah was getting a little irritated, especially because he was the teacher for many of these villagers. I can just imagine what was going on in his mind: "Don't they know that I'm here sitting? Don't they have any respect for their teacher?" On and on.

But then—and he was a very wise man—this is the account in the book. He said, "Well, they're just having a good time down there. I'm making myself miserable up here. No matter how upset I get, my anger is just making more noise internally." And then he had this insight: "Oh, the sound is just the sound."

It's me who is going out to annoy it. If I leave the sound alone, it won't annoy me. It's just doing what it has to do. That's what sound does—it makes sound. This is its job. So if I don't go out and bother the sound, it's not going to bother me.

It's just so true. And you have this enormously gracious gift of sounds to work with during this retreat. And it really is a gift, because it is possible to come to this place of understanding. It's just as Ajahn Chah said: sound is just sound. It's just a phenomena. And if we're not bothering it, if we're not reactive to it, it's totally fine. It's just another experience happening.

Sitting here in the morning and sometimes hearing a little bit—it really hasn't been too bad yet. Yet. Yet. I actually have been enjoying watching the mind settled in its own place, and the sound is in its own place, and there's no problem.

Anyway, it's a very useful example of how very often we personalize what's impersonal. We take it personally and then get annoyed or irritated or whatever it might be.

Another way ill will or aversion can arise is when there may be unnoticed emotions underneath the ill will that are feeding it. Because we're not noticing those, the ill will is nourished. Maybe underneath some feelings of anger or ill will there might be a feeling of hurt that's unacknowledged, or there might be a feeling of fear that's unacknowledged. And as long as we're not seeing that, it just keeps feeding the more surface manifestation of anger or irritation.

I had an interesting example of this quite a few years ago. I was teaching a retreat for lawyers and law students. It was very interesting. In the course of some of the group discussions—this was a very bright group of people and somewhat intense, and the law students especially, it's pretty rigorous—they were right in the middle of the intensity of their studies. One of them, I think a second or third year law student, was talking about the dynamics when you're in that adversarial position, speaking about anger and ill will. And he made this remarkable comment. He said, "I have to feel the anger in order that I don't feel the fear."

That was just so interesting. For him, that was the only alternative. In order not to feel the fear—which he took as being a weakening of his ability to be present and to work—he needed to get angry. We just talked about that a bit and explored the possibility, another possibility, that it's actually okay to feel fear. That in the acceptance of the fear, it's even easier to act and to manifest, because we don't have this internal conflict going on.

So it's just an example of how there can be an underlying emotion which keeps this unskillful state of ill will and aversion strong in our minds.

Given all of these forms and expressions and situations where ill will and aversion arise, and recognizing how unpleasant it usually is, I think a question of interest is: what is the great seductive power of this mind state? You can kind of understand the seductive power of greed. Even though it's unskillful, it's often

associated with some pleasure. Ill will, hatred, anger is almost always associated with unpleasantness. So what is it that seduces us over and over again into feeding this mind state?

Often the seductive power of anger in all its different forms is that very sweet feeling of being right. I should be angry. I should be annoyed. I should be irritated. Look at what's happening. Look at what that person is doing. There's that kind of upwelling of self-righteousness that somehow energizes us, and we feel strong and right.

The Buddha captured this so well. He described it this way: anger with its poisoned source and honeyed tip.

It does have a honeyed tip, and that's what seduces us. And we often don't see its poisoned source—what that mind state is actually doing to us.

So the question is, how do we avoid getting caught up in this unwholesome action of mind? And how do we abandon it or let go of it when we do get caught up?

There are many ways of working with it, and you have been working with it for the past four weeks. Sometimes simple recognition and mindfulness is enough. We're being mindful, we recognize anger arising, we see its conditioned, impermanent, even selfless nature—like watching a movie in the mind. We're just watching it. We're not pulled into it. We don't get caught up in the story.

There's a Tibetan teaching which highlights this possibility: "If you don't cling, whatever arises is naturally freed." That's a beautiful teaching. If you don't cling, whatever arises is naturally freed. Because everything is coming and going by itself. So if we're not grasping at the ill will or anger, we're not identified with it, we're not clinging to it, it may come up because of certain causes and conditions, and then it's naturally freed. It disappears.

But sometimes we may recognize that ill will is there, and it doesn't dissolve. It's not naturally freed in the moment. So here we might want to apply some of the teachings of the law of dependent origination, both in understanding how the ill will arises and how we can cut the chain.

What's the condition for ill will? An unpleasant feeling. So we can turn the mind, after we recognize the aversion, to the unpleasantness—whatever it may be, the unpleasantness of a thought, the unpleasantness we feel in a sensation. We turn our mindfulness: "Oh, unpleasant, unpleasant." And if we're truly mindful of the unpleasant feeling—and the noting is a big help here—in that moment of being mindful of the unpleasant, the aversion is not arising. We've cut the chain.

Sometimes I found it helpful to back up even one more link, because I've had the experience of noting either on the pleasant side or the unpleasant side—"unpleasant, unpleasant"—and still it's not quite enough. There have been times when I've backed up a link and made a double note: "Contact, unpleasant." Because contact is the link before the unpleasantness. Contact means that contact with whatever the

object is—an image, a thought, a sensation. So we're acknowledging more fully what actually is happening. There's contact, in the contact we feel it as being unpleasant, and then if the mindfulness is not there, aversion arises. So that double note has really served me well when I felt caught. Contact unpleasant, or contact pleasant on the other side.

There are so many useful suggestions for practice. One teacher said, "You have to accept and watch both pleasant and unpleasant experiences." Let me repeat that: You have to accept and watch both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. You only want pleasant experiences. You don't want even the tiniest unpleasant experience. Is this fair? Is this the way of the Dhamma?

It just highlights the truth of things. Life contains both what's pleasant and unpleasant, and that's just how it is. So our practice needs to be willing to open to the unpleasantness. Here, instead of falling into that common habit of resisting what is unpleasant and trying to keep it out, we really take the opposite strategy and welcome it in. Unpleasant? Fine. Can I feel that?

Another Reason I Don't Keep a Gun in the House:

The neighbor's dog will not stop barking.
He is barking the same high rhythmic bark
that he barks every time they leave the house.
They must switch him on on the way out.

The neighbor's dog will not stop barking.
I close all the windows in the house
and put on a Beethoven symphony full blast,
but I can still hear him muffled under the music,
barking, barking, barking.

And now I can see him sitting in the orchestra,
his head raised confidently as if Beethoven
had included a part for barking dogs.

When the record finally ends he is still barking,
sitting there in the oboe section, barking,
his eyes fixed on the conductor who is
entreating him with his baton,
while the other musicians listen in respectful
silence to the famous barking dog solo,
that endless coda that first established
Beethoven as an innovative genius.

The barking dog solo. Can we let things in? When we let things in rather than trying to keep them out, the

barking dog becomes a work of genius.

There are times, though—many times—when we don't remember to be mindful of the unpleasantness, when we don't let it in, when we get caught up in that conditioned reaction of ill will, annoyance, irritation. Here it becomes extremely helpful to check the attitude we have about the aversion itself. Because very often our attitude toward the aversion is actually what's feeding it. Besides that honeyed tip of self-righteousness, which might be our attitude toward the situation, there might well be feelings of aversion or self-judgment toward the aversion itself, toward the ill will. We don't like it. We feel anger toward it, or anger toward ourselves for having it. Here we're trying to practice letting go of ill will through more ill will. It's not such a helpful strategy.

So we need to keep checking the attitude in our mind at those times when the process has already progressed—when we haven't caught it earlier on, when we haven't been mindful of the unpleasantness and let it in, and the aversion has already arisen. We need to check that attitude so we can become mindful of the aversion rather than feeding it with more ill will.

Thich Nhat Hanh expressed this wise attitude so beautifully. He said, "If you keep breathing, mindfulness particles will infiltrate the anger. When sunshine penetrates a flower, the flower cannot resist. It has to open itself and show its heart to the sun. If you keep shining your compassion and understanding on it, your anger will soon crack and you will be able to look into its depths and see its roots."

It's such a beautiful reminder that even when this unskillful state has arisen—ill will, anger, aversion in any of its forms—we can bring love and compassion to it, which are really contained right within the mindfulness. And as we do, we're not fighting it; we're opening to it. And there's the opportunity to really understand it.

I think it's also important to acknowledge that at times, powerful emotions—anger included—are telling us something important. There's often an important message contained in the emotion. They may be conveying information about a situation. We might feel anger arising at injustice toward people around us or injustice in the world. Anger may arise in a situation where appropriate boundaries need to be set, and that's the emotion that arises to awaken us to that fact. The challenge for us is learning to understand the message of the emotion without drowning in it, without getting lost in it, and then acting it out in ways that may be unskillful.

One of the most challenging of all the Buddhist teachings—because this particular teaching has so many ramifications—is the Buddha's reminding us that one hundred percent of our suffering comes from unskillful states in our own minds. Not eighty percent, not ninety percent—one hundred percent. All of our suffering arises from defilements in the mind.

But there is such a strong tendency for us to blame others for our suffering, to blame others, to blame situations. It's not to say that situations don't cause a lot of pain in our lives, but if we're suffering, that has

to do with how we're holding it.

A little humorous example of this: Years ago, I was in a relationship and we were having a small argument. My friend said, "Stop making me feel aversion." And I started to laugh. She didn't like that—my laughing didn't help. But it just struck me as so funny.

Stop making me feel this way. Nobody makes us feel any way at all. How we feel is up to us, and realizing that is tremendously empowering. But it means we take one hundred percent responsibility for how we feel.

There is a teaching of the Buddha which highlights this, and it also highlights the enormous challenge of this. It is not easy. This is a very high bar of understanding and of practice. But I love it because it sets the bar. Even if we're not there yet, it shows us the direction.

This is an amazing teaching. The Buddha is talking to the bhikkhus, and bhikkhu, as you might remember, means everyone practicing on the path. He said, "Bhikkhus, there are five courses of speech that others may use when they address you. Their speech may be timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, connected with good or connected with harm, spoken with a mind of loving-kindness or with a mind of inner hate." These are all the ways people might address us. "Herein, bhikkhus, you should train yourself thus: our minds will remain unaffected. We shall utter no unskillful words. We shall abide compassionate for their welfare with a mind of loving-kindness."

Just imagine the situation. Somebody is speaking to you at a totally inappropriate time, speaking lies, in a harsh tone of voice, wanting to do you harm, with a mind filled with hate. "Herein, bhikkhus, you should train yourself thus. Our minds will remain unaffected." Isn't that amazing—in that situation, to even hold that possibility? "We shall utter no unskillful words. We shall abide compassionate for their welfare with a mind of loving-kindness."

This is such a stark example of the Buddha reminding us that ultimately how we feel and how we respond is up to us. It doesn't matter what the other person is doing, what the situation is. This is a challenge, but it's helpful to keep it as a possibility in practice. This is the direction.

We have spoken so much on the unskillful state of ill will. The last of the three unskillful mind states—covetousness, which I spoke of last week, and ill will—is what the Buddha called wrong view. There are many aspects to wrong view; this is a big topic. Tonight I want to emphasize just two of the most important aspects.

The first aspect of wrong view to consider is the belief that there are no results from skillful or unskillful actions. Basically, wrong view is not understanding the law of karma—that all of our volitional actions of body, speech, or mind have consequences, that they bear fruit both in the present and in the future. This wrong view is very powerful because when it is present, the belief that actions don't have results, it's like trying to navigate through life without understanding what brings happiness and what brings suffering.

With wrong view, there are so many missteps and wrong directions.

This is what the Buddha said about wrong view: "Bhikkhus, there is no single factor so responsible for the suffering of beings as wrong view." That's how important this is to understand—no single factor so responsible for the suffering of beings as wrong view. When this is the mind state, when this is the quality, the factor in mind that's present, we don't stop to consider in the moment of acting that our actions are going to bring results. And this is not so uncommon. How often do we really stop and consider when we're doing something—is this action skillful? Is it unskillful? Where is it leading? Do I want to go where it's leading? When wrong view is present, we don't even consider that.

The Buddha gave so much importance to understanding this law of karma. He called it the light of the world, because it highlights the importance of understanding our motivations. This is something we really have to practice bringing into our lives—looking at our motivations, discerning whether they are skillful or unskillful, knowing that they have consequences. Karma is a very big topic, and Guy is going to speak in much more detail about it tomorrow evening.

The other critical aspect of wrong view is the one that is the root cause of so much suffering in our lives. This is the deeply conditioned idea and view and concept of self. When we're not looking deeply

into our experience, into the nature of our experience, and simply live in the world of surface appearances, what happens is we create a reference point for all experience—a someone to whom all experience is happening. We're creating this notion of a self behind experience, to whom it's happening.

How much of our sense of self comes from a superficial perception of the body? It seems so solid. And it's the first reference point—who are you? This is me. It's so easy to identify with the body as being self.

Some years ago, I saw an ad in the New York Times for a t-shirt, and the writing on it said, "Me, me, me." I mentioned this in a talk, and sometime later a yogi gave me a present of a t-shirt that said, "Not me, not me, not me."

When we really investigate and examine the body more closely, we see that it's a composite of so many different interrelated systems—the skeletal system, the muscles, the organs, the circulatory system, the nervous system. There are so many different systems going on. But if we saw the liver or the bladder, we wouldn't say, "Oh yeah, that's me." We wouldn't be identifying with it. But we wrap it all up very nicely in skin. We create this very nice package. And then it's very easy, as we all know, to get attached to it. We get attached to our own body. We get attached to these other nice packages that are out there. How attached would we be if we had x-ray vision and could really see what was going on?

One of the important consequences of taking this body as being self is the fear of losing it and the fear of death. And of course, if we look on an even deeper level, on the cellular level or on the atomic level, there's almost nothing here. I read someplace that if all the space were taken out from the material elements that make up the body—if all the space were removed—all that would remain would be the size

of a particle of dust. So what is it that we're calling self? It's because we don't see that clearly, we don't see that deeply.

As we know from our experience, particularly in meditation, wrong view of self happens when we get lost in and identified with thoughts and emotions, with all the internal stories that arise—stories we tell about ourselves, stories we tell about others. As I mentioned earlier, the thought of something is not the thing. It's a thought. But when wrong view is strong, when we're not being mindful in a clear way, we're not seeing that all of these passing thoughts don't belong to anyone.

There's a wonderful little Tibetan image. It says that thoughts that wander through the mind are like clouds in the sky—they have no roots, no home. I love this image because I love imagining clouds with roots. What would the sky look like if every cloud had a root? It's ridiculous. But that's what we're doing with our thoughts. The thoughts are cloud-like. They're just arising in the open sky of the mind. With wrong view, we're rooting them. And that's where the sense of self is born.

As a little experiment in undercutting this habit of wrong view with regard to thoughts, maybe for ten minutes or so in your next sitting, just imagine that every thought that arises in your mind is coming from the person next to you. You'd probably relate to it in a very different way. Of course, it might activate cowboy dharma—"Stop it!" But it's just a way to play with the understanding that thoughts are arising out of conditions. They're just like clouds in the sky. And through practice, through mindfulness, we can see their impermanent, empty, selfless nature. We free ourselves from this deep, deep habit of wrong view.

We also strengthen the sense of self—activating wrong view—when we create a felt sense of self every time we identify with some emotion. "I'm angry, I'm sad, I'm happy, I'm excited." Or with other mindsets: "I'm mindful, I'm concentrated." This is our usual way of relating to the mind, and it's so ordinary, so commonplace. How are you feeling? I'm angry. How was your sitting?

I was concentrated, or I was not concentrated. This is our ordinary way of relating. And as conventional expression in communication, it's fine. The problem is we believe it. We are identified, very often.

Ledi Sayadaw, the great Burmese master, just nailed the importance of seeing this correctly. He said, "All those deeds, words, and thoughts are egocentric—I'm happy, I'm sad, I'm excited, I'm restless, I'm whatever, apparently good or bad. The delusion of a self in them renders them all unwholesome. They are stumbling blocks to insight knowledge. They are detrimental to one's realization of nibbana. Attachment to the deluded 'I' in all actions is what draws you into the floods of samsara."

That's a very striking teaching because it's pointing to a very ordinary pattern of our lives, one that's well established. But it's a powerful reminder that this is where we have to look, this is where we have to investigate, in order to free ourselves from this habit of wrong view. In all of these rising states of different emotions and mind states, in all of them, the "I" is extra. We're not pushing away the experience. We're not pushing away the emotion or the mind state. There's a full experience of it, but we can

experience it without adding to it that identification, claiming it as I or mine.

Moods and emotions are like great cloud formations. Some are heavy and oppressive—big stormy clouds. And some clouds are light and very airy. They all arise when the conditions come together for them to arise, and they pass away as the conditions change. This is the same process with our own mind states. The great liberating insight that frees us from wrong view is that there is no underlying "I" or self behind all of these experiences to whom they're happening. It's love that loves. It's fear that fears. It's anger that angers. Each mind state, each emotion is just manifesting its own nature. This is the unfolding of our lives. With wrong view, we identify with them. With right view, we don't.

Sometimes Dharma teachings come in unexpected ways and unexpected places. I'm a great reader of spy books and detective stories, because I've learned so much from them. So I want to share with you something from a great detective story. It's actually about a Buddhist Thai detective. It's by the author John Burdett, and the name of the book is *Bangkok Tattoo*. You could get enlightened listening to this:

"You see, dear reader, speaking frankly without any intention to offend, you are a ramshackle collection of coincidences held together by a desperate and irrational clinging. There is no center at all. Everything depends on everything else. Your body depends on the environment. Your thoughts depend on whatever junk floats in from the media. Your emotions are largely from the reptilian end of your DNA. Your intellect is a chemical computer that can't add up a zillionth as fast as a pocket calculator. And even your best side is a superficial piece of social programming that will fall apart just as soon as your spouse leaves with the kids and the money in the joint account, or the economy starts to fail and you get the sack, or you get conscripted into some idiot's war. To name this amorphous morass of self-pity, vanity, and despair 'self' is not only the height of hubris, it is also proof, if any were needed, that we are above all a delusional species. We are in a trance from birth to death. Prick the balloon and what do you get? Emptiness. Take two steps in the divine art of Buddhist meditation and you will find yourself on a planet you no longer recognize. Those needs and fears you thought were the very bones of your being turn out to be no more than bugs in your software."

I need to wrap this up. Our practice with this unskillful mind state of wrong view is so powerful—the creation of the sense of self, and understanding how it's created moment to moment. It's not that the self is there and we have to get rid of it. It's not there in the first place.

We simply need to stop creating it in each moment by identifying with what's arising. So it's really very simple, although not always easy.

The Buddha summed this up in one very clear teaching to his son, Rahula. He said that every aspect of mind and body should be seen with perfect wisdom: "This is not mine. This is not I. This is not myself."

We can use these words as a reminder throughout the day. It's a kind of mantra of liberation. With whatever arises in the body, in the mind, in our experience—with whatever arises, sometimes or often

remind yourself: this is not mine, this is not I, this is not myself.

It was really out of his great compassion that the Buddha pointed out these ten unskillful mind states, the ones to avoid: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, harsh speech, gossip and backbiting, useless talk, covetousness, ill will, and wrong view. He's reminding us—and we can each verify this for ourselves, it's not a question of belief—it's testing this out and seeing in our own lives that these actions undermine our happiness and cause suffering to others and to ourselves.

It's also recognizing that in the course of our lives, and over perhaps many lifetimes, we have all committed many of these unskillful actions, and will undoubtedly at different times continue to do so. So it's not to set this up as a vehicle for self-judgment. Even the Buddha in his previous lives as a bodhisattva committed many of these unskillful actions. This is part of our life. It's part of our development.

But once we understand these teachings and endeavor to put them into practice, then we are really on an upward trajectory. And as Thich Nhat Hanh so aptly put it: happiness is available. Please help yourselves to it.

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