Four Attachments

Pascal Auclair · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 1:06:48

So the way we habitually go about finding happiness is as worldlings, untrained hearts and minds. The way we habitually go about finding happiness is by the satisfaction of thirst—a thirst, a desire for something. And getting it is what we think of as happiness.

The Buddhist approach is very different. It's about non-thirst. And so the practice that we do here is to actually get interested, amongst many things, in thirst, desire, wanting to have, wanting to be or not be. We look at this, and maybe it is revealed to us that although it seems like it's talking about happiness—"When you get this, you will be happy, I promise"—although it seems to be talking about happiness, when we pay closer attention, what we find is a direct experience, an immediate experience of lack. Something is lacking here.

And so this subterfuge is revealed. Although it speaks of happiness and points towards it, the experience is more akin to the carrot for the horse—the famous carrot that dangles and keeps you going.

This is known to be the cause of our suffering: the desire, the taṇhā. There's another word that is also used: upādāna, translated as perhaps attachment or clinging. One literal translation is "fuel." So clinging or attachment as the fuel for suffering.

So tonight, in the true Buddhist spirit, I would like to present a list of a number of things. There are two variants: the number and the things. Tonight, the number is four—the lucky number is four—and the theme is attachment. So: the four different kinds of attachments.

The first time I ever practiced and learned about Buddhist practice was in Thailand. During that week of retreat, this teaching was given. And I found that particular list extremely practical, very useful for seeing how freaking out—another translation for upādāna—happens. Getting bugged by, getting tight around. Clinging happens.

So these four fields are: clinging about sensual desire; clinging onto views and opinions—can you relate?; clinging to rites and rituals, the classic naming of this third one; and then the last one, this month's or these six weeks' favorite, clinging to self or idea of self—or another Pali word, *moi*—clinging to things as "me" or "mine."

These are the four fields I would like to explore a bit tonight.

So the human predicament: we find ourselves here in this life, sensitive, with senses. It means we're constantly impacted, impinged upon. The human predicament is that we have senses, we're sensitive. So

we're constantly encountering pleasantness and unpleasantness.

And it makes sense that if you have sensitivity—many doors of sensitivity—and that there can be an experience of enjoyment of that sensitivity, it would make sense that one would try to accumulate or turn towards the pleasantness rather than the unpleasantness. And so there's this search that can happen for the pleasantness.

I was reading something that presented pleasantness and unpleasantness and neutrality as winds, coming back to the idea I've used before of these as bubbles. It was saying that to actually get all worked up and want to have pleasantness rather than unpleasantness, in this way that we go about a lot—it's a little bit like if somebody was fighting against winds. Wet winds or dry winds, cold winds or warm winds, wanting the warm winds to be cold or wanting the wet ones to be dry—it would be mad. Yet this is a lot of what we do in our life: try to make pleasant stay, or make unpleasant become pleasant.

So there's a lot of this happening. There's a system that I like very much to use to look at this.

It comes from a few different suttas of the Buddha where he talks about gratification, danger, and escape. In one sutta that I'm paraphrasing now, the Buddha—or rather, the Buddha-to-be, speaking about his earlier practice—asks: Why do I still do this? Why do I keep repeating this certain pattern? And the answer is: because I see only the gratification. If I saw the dangers, the drawbacks, the disadvantages of this, then it would be easy to find the escape, the freedom from this.

I think of it as a little system: gratification, danger, and escape.

The gratification or enjoyment is often very obvious. We say that with sense pleasure, the dangers are hidden—unlike a blazing fire or a very sharp weapon where you can see right away that the danger is obvious. But with sense pleasure, it's not clear because it's enjoyable. So we need, through this practice—to me, that's a lot of what we do—to become more realistic about that aspect, among many other aspects of reality: the unreliability of pleasure, of sense pleasure. That's one of the dangers that becomes more obvious.

Another of the dangers is the agitation that arises when we look for it. When I want pleasantness, there's a price to pay that comes with it—the agitation. And here in the silence of meditation, of the retreat center, it can become like an echo, a very strong echo. I find how agitated I get. Because getting what I want is hard. Not getting what I want is hard if I don't get it. If I get it, keeping it is hard. And when I lose it, that's hard too. So there's no point along the way where there might be enjoyment without stress also being present the whole time.

A way I think about this is that the pleasures at the sense doors—the five senses, and the sixth, the pleasure of nice ideas, beautiful ideas. I want beautiful ideas. I want to think about fantasies, for example. They're pleasant. The words that come to my mind are *low-quality happiness*. It's kind of cheap happiness. Maybe it can be instant gratification, available quickly in some instances, but it's very cheap because it's

unreliable, it's changing, it's conditional. It depends on many things to happen.

There's one little story I like to tell about this. It's kind of dramatic, but maybe that's just my way—to highlight one version of how pleasantness is conditional.

Not this summer, but the summer before, I was with my partner. And we had the chance to go to the countryside to spend the day. We were going to a place with a river in a park, kind of a forest, and there were waterfalls there. At that exact time of year, the water is falling at just the right volume, the right pressure, so that if you get the right angle—and that's a fun part of it—you can actually go under the waterfall. You're hidden under it, and there's a wall of water in front of you, and the light is diffused. There were several of these waterfalls you could go under.

So we were there, my partner and I, and it was beautiful—very green, a beautiful day, warm sun, refreshing water, going in and out. Very, very pleasant at the sense doors.

At some point, my partner was sitting on a rock with the light falling on him, and it was very beautiful, and I find him beautiful, so I took the camera out to take a picture. I like to take pictures, so I spent a few minutes there, trying this angle, adjusting for a few seconds.

On the other side of the river, there was a group of young men. And for them, there was just a little too long of a man taking pictures of another man. There was something they recognized there. We hadn't kissed—we knew about that. But the picture-taking got their adrenaline and testosterone going. So they started to shout things. Because of the waterfall, we couldn't really hear, but it was pretty clear what was going on.

And it was very interesting to see how suddenly the enjoyment, the pleasure in the greenery, the sun, the waterfalls—the pressure hadn't changed. There was no cloud that had come. It was still beautiful, a chlorophyll-suffused environment, very green.

But the capacity to enjoy it—completely gone. Unreliable.

I told you it was going to be dramatic. But that's part of reality, apparently.

I can say also that as a white male, I'm not exposed very often to this kind of danger, this kind of oppression. I've been very much spared from that. So it was very triggering in a major way.

The idea I want to give here is the idea of the low quality of happiness that we can have from the senses, the pleasure at the sense doors. Then there's a different kind of something that has more value and more depth to it. And I could see that at that moment at the river—maybe not in the first few minutes, but soon enough—there was a gathering of something in the heart-mind that was of greater value. There was some clarity in the heart and mind. There was clarity about hate and how the message of hate that was given should not be believed in. There was clarity that was protective. There was a level of freedom that one could gain access to.

It was a completely different aspect of reality, where it was suddenly very clear that if one is to put some eggs in some basket, that would be the basket to put the eggs in. Do you follow me here? That the looking for pleasantness didn't have so much depth as clarity about the world—clarity about what one can or cannot be, about nonviolence, about the value of nonviolence and understanding. Maybe I don't find the right words tonight, but I bet you can make your way into this.

And I can use the same example, I'll try, to say how latent tendencies that we have in the mind—latent tendency to greed, wanting the pleasure; latent tendency to hate what is unpleasant—these tendencies have an impact on perception. The senses that are such beautiful doorways for understanding and liberation, for wisdom—this is what we're using here. We're using the senses to find the way towards freedom for oneself and for others. But the latent tendencies of the mind can actually hijack the senses, so that the senses become slaves, if I can use that word, to these tendencies. So that the eyes, the ears, can become radars looking for satisfaction, looking for pleasantness. And we live in that often—or looking for something to push away. Perception is distorted by these tendencies of mind, so that I go around, and because there is this looking for pleasure, there will be a projection. "Oh, pleasure is in this." It's not inherent in this thing, but the mind will project it.

One very classic example is the Vipassana romance at the retreat center. The mind will project onto something complete satisfaction—the soulmate. "This is the person." Or, "This will solve my boredom, my solitude. This person." And suddenly there's this... I remember one yogi one year describing—it was good because they could see their mind—they were saying, "This person that I zeroed in on, the mind is projecting so much happiness. I see us traveling in India together for years and years, having kids and the whole thing." And I was like, "But in India, you guys are going to get sick?" And he's like, "No. It's all going to be pleasant. Nobody's going to get sick, and it's going to be beautiful and comfortable always."

So the mind does that—can hang on like this to experience, or find something to hate, maybe even the enjoyment of hating. The pleasure at the sense door is unreliable. It's conditional. It's also that because of the enjoyment itself, the danger is hidden. It's the addiction that can come because of the enjoyment. So one has to be very mindful.

When encountering pleasure.

At the time of the Buddha, there was a belief that pleasure was the problem. So you would have to stay away from pleasure at all cost—eat little, don't lay down, because if it gets pleasurable, you're going to be stuck.

In my understanding, one of the Buddha's contributions to spirituality and freedom was recognizing that it's not the pleasure itself. It's the addiction, the compulsion, the clinging, the freaking out, the getting obsessed—this is what we have to care for.

The way I present this, with the word "danger" and this image of licking honey on a razor's edge—I

remember hearing that about sense pleasure and thinking, "Wow, this is heavy stuff." And so just to remind us: what really hurts is not the pleasure itself. It's the clinging. We bring attention to this in our practice. Where is the clinging? Not the enjoyment itself that is the problem, because that's one of the wins. It will come, enjoyment. And it's possible to meet it.

The best strategy to meet it, and to meet life, I think, is with mindfulness. Because if there is the presence of pleasure and there is a knowing of its impermanent nature, then it can come through and be felt very fully. Whereas when there is clinging, it's not possible to actually enjoy something, because the mind is bugged by fearing losing.

Perhaps in our practice we can notice the absence of clinging or wanting, the absence of desire for sense pleasure when it's present, and feel the freedom in that. And that experience of non-clinging sometimes is in the midst of neutrality, in the midst of unpleasant, or in the midst of pleasant experience—the mind can meet pleasantness in a very balanced way, and actually get intimate with the experience at the sense door.

Philip Moffatt has an equation that I like. His equation is: pleasantness times attachment equals suffering. So your pleasantness on a level of one to ten, times your level of attachment to it from one to ten, equals the amount of suffering there will be. You could do the same with displeasure plus the amount of reactivity, the amount of not wanting.

All the teachings from my teachers keep coming into my head. I hear Christina Feldman sitting here and saying: to the amount that we're attached to pleasure, to the same amount—and it's not possible to do otherwise—to the same amount we will fear displeasure. That is not a fun situation to find oneself in. Fearing, wanting, fearing, wanting.

A lot of what we do here is actually find balance and intimacy in the passages of feeling tone at the sense doors.

One way I've been taught to think about this: what are the ways we deal with these tendencies of mind, the tendency to look for pleasure, the tendency of greed, the tendency to reject what is unpleasant?

The first kind of baseline—please be here for this one, I think it's very interesting—the first line of defense, I'll call it, is sīla. Knowing that in this psyche there will be confusion, there will be the presence of greed, of believing that the pleasantness I'll get from this will solve my problem. Knowing that there's confusion about what leads to what and what leads away from what, then I have a first line of defense called sīla.

I say, although I might want something very much, I'm going to give myself ethical rules that I'm not going to break. So I'm not going to take what is not offered freely. Although I might want something, really believe this is what I actually need, I'm not going to break that line. This is my outside line. There'll be confusion in here, but it won't leak outside in this dramatic way. Or because I want something so much, or want to promote myself in some way, I'm going to tell something that is not true—so I say no, I'm actually

going to stick to honesty. That's a line of defense against these tendencies of the mind.

The second line of defense we work with here is samādhi, seclusion. By developing concentration, what happens is that during the time of concentration, when it's well established, the hindrances are gone. I'm secluded from the hindrances. There is not the wanting for something else. Full attention is given to breath, to sound in a sustained way, to ease of the mind, to some object—fully given to it. During that time there's not "but I want something else" or "I don't want this." This has gone.

We can have this experience sometimes for a few seconds, sometimes for longer on retreat, where suddenly we're secluded. It is so good. It is so—here's another way to live, where there's not this constant wanting. Not "what I want is just a little bit more comfort, or just a little bit more this," or the mind a little like this. It's just: wow, this is like this right now. Sustained attention, concentration, can bring seclusion from this wanting that is so bugging us.

And the third line, which is perhaps the most important one, is paññā—wisdom, the uprooting of any confusion about sense pleasure.

The clarity—the complete clarity—that sense pleasure is not providing anything sustainable of depth. Let me know it as it's here. The quality of the mind suddenly becomes so much more important than what is being felt. The quality of responsiveness, of appropriate response. Knowing deeply that some things cannot provide, and finding peace with that.

So that's just the first of four—sensual pleasure. I moved away from it a bit and back and forth, but that's a field anyway.

The second one I want to talk about is views and opinions. How the mind, on retreat and off retreat, can cling to views and opinions, and the suffering in that.

It's very interesting that this follows talking about pleasantness and unpleasantness, because in the Buddhist teachings we're invited in a very sober way to look at our views and opinions and see if they're really based on reason and great understanding, or if they might be a little more shallow and based on feeling tone. Apparently, if we research this well, we might find that many of the views and opinions we hold are basically just starting from pleasantness and unpleasantness.

"It should be warmer in here." You have a view, an opinion, that it should be warmer in here. How would that come about? "This person should breathe differently. It's not a good way to breathe for them. I should actually write them a note, or offer my wisdom around breathing." How would that opinion come about?

Even sometimes, getting news, I can see how my view about peace is so shallow. It's not based on compassion, on being touched by suffering and how that suffering could be relieved—if there is war, for example. Sometimes it's just this reactivity to unpleasant images or ideas. There's no depth to it. Although it might look like a beautiful view and opinion, it has no depth. It's just simple reactivity to vedana.

That's something I find very sobering to come back to sometimes. What's the feeling tone aspect of this view, Pascal? And see what can be revealed in there. That can help release some of the clinging sometimes. "Oh, unpleasant feels like this"—and open the door to access something deeper.

In my practice for many years, clinging to views and opinions was not in my field of awareness so much. Then a few years back, I did a long retreat, a little bit like this one. In the mid-course of the retreat, there was a changing of teams, a change of teachers.

To contextualize it even more: in the first part of that retreat, I had been doing the Brahma Viharas. I was practicing mudita for several weeks, and I had gotten very cozy in my little mudita world. I had one person to whom I was wishing that their happiness and good fortune increase and never wane. One sentence, several weeks. It was a very beautiful world I was in, very flowing, because the person I had chosen—I had made a really good choice. It was somebody with beautiful qualities of heart and mind. When I was saying, "May your good fortune increase," I was thinking a lot about their qualities. "May they increase and never cease." It was unimaginable that their qualities of mind would not continue to be cultivated, given the way they lived their life. There was no way their good fortune—their inner good fortune as I was thinking about it—would diminish, because of how they lived. And so it was very easy, and I was very protected. There was a lot of concentration.

Then the new team came, and with them, I decided I would do vipassana—looking at reality—in the second part of my retreat. The team of teachers arrived, and they were not the other team. I started having opinions about them. Very strong opinions about how they should be, what they should talk about, how they should do this and do that. It was kind of unnoticed at first. Actually, I got pretty desperate and pretty stuck. One day I sat down to meditate, and I was in such a bad state because of my views and opinions.

I thought, "Next week, in a few days, in the local paper, you might find on the front page: 'Yogi Found Drowned in Their Opinions.'" Literally death by opinions—self-imposed—because it was so incredibly painful. And even more so because I was very sensitive from the practice I had been doing. It's as if somebody had removed my... I was regressed a bit, you know, like we can get on retreat—we can become very young. It felt like I had a blanket; I was secluded from the entrances with my concentration blanket, and I had my metta teddy bear. And suddenly somebody had taken my metta teddy bear and my blanket, and I was like this trembling creature, and there was this new team of agitated beings.

Luckily, one of the teachers—who was not my assigned teacher—just from a question I asked in the hall, got that this person is not well. They need a rescue. They need a buoy or whatever you call it. They're drowning in their opinions.

And so I met with this person, and they said, "This is what's going on. You don't have to show me all the letters you wrote—I'm sure you wrote a few. We're going to go very slowly out of this." This teacher was very helpful, and I found my way out.

After this experience, I was shaken deeply around opinions and how opinions can create such suffering for self and eventually for others. I became very aware of this. And of course, I still get caught in opinions. Even just a few minutes ago, before coming here, I heard myself say something. The saying was fine, but the tightening around it was very surprising. Suddenly I noticed: here's an opinion I'm clinging to, because there was a tightening in the heart.

This practice of bringing attention to that aspect of reality—our views and opinions—from the Buddhist perspective, is meant to bring freedom, to bring ease of mind, release, dispassion. So it's interesting to view the opinions we have in that light. Is this bringing calm to the mind? Is this view bringing calm? Is this view liberating or entangling? This is an interesting way to look at a view or opinion we might have.

And this inquiry might reveal views that are actually even more dangerous than just clinging to a view—clinging to an *unwise* view. In Buddhism, we talk about wise view and unwise view. Clinging to a view is painful. Clinging to an unwise view—for example, the view that this action of mind or speech or body will have no repercussions whatsoever—this is not the training of the mind. The view that things don't have consequences can be very dangerous, because it makes me lose the wisdom I have gained. Remember when I said that when there's an afflictive tendency of the mind that is active, we lose the wisdom we have cultivated? It's with mindfulness that wisdom can be brought back.

So if I'm under the influence of greed, I might really think—and it happens all the time in this society we live in—that there are no consequences. "Just take this. I deserve it. There are no consequences to it. It's not mine, but hey." And suddenly something is revealed later: there was a consequence. It had an impact on the safety of others, or on the way people perceive me.

Clinging to a view of permanence, a view of satisfaction, the view of self, of "selfing"—"It's really, really *mine*. It's my bicycle"—and then it's gone. If there's a real clinging to a wrong view, the pain is going to be doubled.

This is what we're doing here: clarifying views about the world, learning also the pain of clinging to a view. And sometimes—I think I said this before, and I really believe it—soaking in clinging a little bit more so that I can really feel the *ouch* aspect of it, the devastation of clinging. Not rejecting clinging so quickly. It holds a lot of information. When I'm in it, let me bring mindfulness there and see: being uptight about this, that they should have done that...

There's one particular view I had at some point, unnoticed. I'm bringing back the idea of the disease I live with. For many years, I would spend time thinking, "If I didn't have that, I could so easily travel."

Let's say that was one of the views. I could travel in India because my medication would not need to be refrigerated. And my immune system would be stronger, so there wouldn't be so much danger of visiting countries where my system is not adapted to. And if I didn't have this... there was a view of this other life without the HIV. And it seemed actually that it was giving me a rest from my life. I could sit on the

cushion, like you are, and take a little break and just think of my life if there was not that.

And one time, because of a prior moment of mindfulness, there was suddenly a moment of just coming back from that view, from that trip. And I saw that this was actually not helpful. Although it seemed like something good—a fantasy that was good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end—it was actually not. Because compared to my imagined life, my real life was miserable. My real samsaric life was definitely failing compared to that made-up, fictional generation of the mind.

And so this view got corrected. Oh, this is not for my benefit. This is not for my benefit. I can let go of that view right then and there.

And then the little funny part about this is that I had this kind of fantasy, this little thing I saw—that I would actually marry my life. So I imagined a wedding setup where I was there with my life and I was committing to my life, saying, "I'm not going to look at other people's lives and want their life. When I go to bed at night, I'm going to cherish my life. And when I wake up in the morning, I'm going to cherish my life again. When I walk in the street, I'm going to walk with my life. For better and worse, or however we say it, I want to commit to this life." And there was this wedding of moi and my life.

And it brought some ease into my life. There was a level of acceptance, a better view of what was happening in this life and how one could be committed to that version.

The beauty of it came out in another way that I often thought about. I had this image of a spear, a long spear. Every time there was something wrong—hyena, spear, subterfuge. So it felt like I was living with a spear on the side. I would want to have a normal life, just go through a door, get inside the car, but there's a spear coming out of the side, so I have to go in the doorway this way. I want to get in the car like a normal person, but I have to go like this because there's this spear. It would always be in the way somewhere.

But then—how can I live my life with a spear? Is it possible to live a whole life accommodating, giving space to that thing? And actually, yes. Actually, there's some beauty in it. How can one have gracefulness with a spear on the side? And actually, yeah, it's possible.

So you see how the view changed—that there should be another life, or if there was another life.

In these four categories of sense pleasure, views, rites and rituals, and clinging to notions of self, attachment to self—there's this division in four, but in actuality they're often mixed together. So if somebody comes in late, you might think about rites and rituals, this convention that we come in time for the sitting. You might cling to this because they're destroying my concentration—so there's a little selfing in there. And it's about sense pleasure, that it was quiet here and I liked it. So in actuality, it might be more mixed than the four divisions suggest. As I'm talking, I'm aware that we could have put maybe that example in another of the categories.

So these are a few thoughts about views and opinions.

I'll talk now about rites and rituals, and I make this much larger. The way I think about that category is rites, rituals, conventions, and norms. I make it very wide—how we can cling to conventions and norms.

I spoke last week about the two realities, the conventional reality and the ultimate reality. I always liked the idea of conventions. I come from the world of theater. In the theater, conventions are very, very important.

So we'll agree that we're brother and sisters. We have this big fight and everybody in the audience agrees that we're brother and sisters. "Oh my God, the way he talks to his sister." And then everybody goes back home. And if Rebecca was to call me after the play and say, "Pascal, you're my brother. I can't believe you talk like..." I would say, hold on. This was a convention. This was an agreement. This is a theater convention. This is very important. You leave it there when it works. We agree on that, but it's not ultimately true. It's just good for the moment it lasts.

Why do I like convention in the theater? One example that was so delightful for me: there was this play happening in summer in my country where I lived. We have a lot of mosquitoes, and I think there are some here too. There's a culture that when you come in, you close the door because the flies and the mosquitoes come in. And in that play, it was really fun because every time—it was a family, and the mother was inside—and every time one of the kids would come in, there was a little recorder there. They would press play and you would hear wind and things like this, and they would not press stop. So the mom would say, "Close the door!" And then they would come back to the side of the stage where they came in, they would press stop, and the sound would stop. So there was a convention. This is the door. The door is a recorder making the sound of outside. And even in the winter, there would be something more stormy. And every time somebody would come in the play, they would never close the door. And the mom would always say, "Close the door! The flies!" They would go back. And I was sitting there thinking, ah, I love conventions. Because here are nine hundred people who agree this is a door. But we all know it's not a door. But this is delightful. It's conventions.

And so this applies also in the life we live, where there are conventions that we agree on, but they're not ultimately true. It's just agreement. I give you this example. One time I was on retreat and we had a little group meeting like we sometimes have on the shorter retreats. A group of us came together with one of the monks who was leading the retreat. And one person who was there said, "I'm really bugged because I own a restaurant in town. And every few weeks, there's somebody who comes and does graffiti on the window of my restaurant. Graffiti is illegal. This is my restaurant. What am I supposed to do with this? This is bringing suffering to me."

And so the monk said, "Hmm, now I think it's important that you bring the two realities together. You balance the two realities. That's how you might be able to relieve some of your suffering. Conventionally, we all agree that there's a law. You don't paint on walls. There's an agreement. But it's conventional.

Anybody can break it at any time they want, you know? And your restaurant is also a convention. You go to a lawyer. They write papers. And we all agree, when you have these papers, this is your house. But it's not possible to own anything, really. So if you bring a little bit more of the ultimate reality back into your conventional, and you see the nuances of both, maybe you're going to let go of the clinging to 'it's really mine.'"

It's really the law. You see? So we can cling to conventional reality in a way that is out of proportion, not balanced with the ultimate.

Was it this week or last week that Joseph used this idea of coming back to sit here and suddenly somebody is in your seat? That's a place where you would really want to bring back ultimate reality. Ultimately, it was agreed that it was mine, but this is shaky. This is conditional. It's not stable, grounded, permanent reality. It's a reality that is movable. And so we need to bring attention to this.

To me, the rites and rituals—I include in this the conventions, the ways of doing things. There are also the norms. How we can cling individually, or as groups, or as a society to norms, really reminding somebody of the norm.

There's Rita Gross, the Buddhist author. I remember her writing a little article in Inquiring Mind where there was this paragraph that stood out so strongly for me. She was writing, "Although I clearly have a female body—there's no doubt about this—people always assume that either I have children..." It's not a given that she has children, could have children. The form doesn't say that. Ever wanted children, likes this or that—it doesn't come with the shape. That this person has this kind of temperament or likes this and not that. And constantly she's reminded that when you have this form, this is what you like, this is what you don't like. People assume that her partner will be of a certain sex. But the form doesn't say that. There's a kind of norming that she's reminded of constantly, and the clinging to this.

That's one aspect of it. There are so many other norms. Here in this room, there are many norms. When we can see how we cling to norms or conventions like this, or when another does—these things have to be seen internally and externally. We can see also the suffering when another group clings to a norm. Like me at the waterfall—that was a place where norming was happening very strongly. You know, men don't take five-minute pictures of other men. It's not okay. So we can see, we can be alert to how norming happens.

To me, the beautiful practice is to become aware of norms and see the way that I buy into them, or the way that they're useful, or the way that I can cling or others can cling—and then have the freedom to follow the norm or to veer from the norm.

The freedom that we're looking for is not going to be only personal, psychological—I don't know how to put it. It's going to be also societal. It's going to be about the way we live, the way we promote freedom, defend freedom, offer freedom and protection, and the way that it's cut for some groups, the way it's cut

for some targeted groups of us. You see the clinging, that rite and ritual clinging, in religious beliefs—how there can be so much clinging and so much suffering that comes in the world around that area. That's one thing we want to become aware of also and find freedom in.

There's a beautiful saying—I always forget the source, so I should just say some really wise person once said, and they happened to practice Buddhism also, Tibetan Buddhism more particularly—"Although my view is vast as the sky, my attention to details is as refined as a particle of barley flour." This speaks to having a wide view while also knowing conventions, knowing when to respect them, knowing how to be with them in a very precise way.

So although it's conventional that this is my chanting sheet and that one is your chanting sheet, although it's just conventional reality—it's not ultimately true, and I see that, my view is vast as the sky, you cannot own a printed sheet of paper with a chant on it, it's not possible ultimately to own paper—conventionally, I'm very detailed. I really respect your things in this way.

How can we play that dance freely and gracefully? Knowing the world of convention, knowing how to respect the convention so there's no hurt being done, or knowing how courageously to sometimes break the conventions because of a greater good or something like that.

So I'm saved by the bell around selfing. It's a very wide subject. Maybe I'll just do a few quotes to finish around this last one of selfing, on which we've already spent some time. But it's something we could spend much more time on. This is from *The Island*:

Trying to find a "me" without a world that burdens it is like trying to run away from your own shadow. No matter how fast you run, the effort is bound to fail, as the one form generates the other. When there is this me-clinging, this identification—sometimes not subtle at all, but sometimes extremely subtle—when there's a me-making, suddenly there is a world. There's me, other, and this appears viable. But it's going to take a lot of work. It's going to take a lot of defending, a lot of strategizing. This view, this separation, is very painful. Part of what we're doing here is to release some of that view, some of that extra charge that has this me-ing, this owning.

This is the Buddha: "I am—this is a conceived idea, a made-up idea, generated in the mind, a fiction. I will be—this is a conceived idea. I will not be—this is a conceived idea. Conceived ideas are a disease, a boil, a dart." It's laid out pretty plainly, I would say.

Here's another version: "Ninety-nine percent of our thoughts are about me, and there isn't one. No wonder we're stressed out." That's Wei Wu Wei.

Seeing how this arises, this owning, this me-ing—perhaps you can identify the separation that comes with it and feel it, the texture of being separated from the world. Sometimes I think of it as a tapestry. In the tapestry, there is a unicorn or a woman playing a harp, and we really think there is a unicorn standing there independently. But when you start doing vipassana, mindfulness, you begin to see how when you

pull on a little string, the harp is coming, the woman is coming, the unicorn is coming. They're all enmeshed together. It appears like there is a unicorn standing out, but when you sit here and start to see how conditional things are—how this could not happen without this, and this, and this that is happening—you realize that nothing you experience is outside of the world. It's totally enmeshed in it. You begin to see how much part of the tapestry you are, and that there is just a conceiving, a delimiting, and that's very arbitrary. This is mine, but this is not mine. This is yours. This is not yours.

It's important in our life, as we grow, that we make this differentiation. That's part of evolution. As a baby, we need this. But as a spiritual being, this we can let go of slowly—this way of dividing reality. And perhaps move on to something else: What's here? How to take care of it?

The Buddha: "If it were not possible to free the heart from entanglement in greed, hatred, and fear, I would not teach you to do so. Luminous is consciousness, brightly shining in its nature, but it becomes clouded by the attachments that visit it."

of the lovely clarity of mindfulness that you can let go of grasping after past and future, overcome attachment and grief, abandon all clinging and anxiety, and awaken an unshakable freedom of heart—here, now.

Thank you for listening.

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