A Few More Steps On The Eightfold Path (Part 2)

Pascal Auclair · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 1:04:08

Tonight I want to continue talking about the Eightfold Path. If you can recall anything of what happened last week—it seems like a very long time ago, maybe. So many mind moments since.

A lot of what we're doing here is correcting the view, the understanding that we have about life. We go from a very distorted view of how things work, or a slightly distorted view, to more of a wise view of how things are. And we do this here, in the context of this retreat and this tradition, largely by looking at the three characteristics.

As you know, some things are green, some are blue. Some things are far, others are close. Some things are gross, others subtle. Some things I like, some things I don't like. Some things are thought, some things are seen or heard. Every phenomenon has specific characteristics to it. But all have in common these three characteristics that we keep naming again and again. Our practice is very much to highlight these three characteristics.

Somebody came for an interview today and said, "Everything is the same." And in my mind I thought, "Oh, they're seeing the three characteristics." Because they're not going to tell me some things are green and some are blue, some things are far and others near—rather, all things have this amazing nature to flee. In the end, the conversation went in another beautiful direction, but that was what I got from the first sentence: everything, in a way, is the same in the light of these three characteristics.

We want to highlight this here and there over the course of the weeks or months that we're practicing. We want to have a direct experience of this.

One way for me—one time that I know something switched in my mind about my understanding of one of these characteristics, of *anicca*, of the fleeting nature of experience—was when I was walking around the loop in winter. I was coming back towards this building, and I had been very mindful, very much in the body. At that point I was feeling the legs, the movement of the legs and feet. There was not much space in the street because of all the snow, so I was walking in the street. Suddenly there came this huge yellow bus, coming down the hill at full speed.

I was walking along thinking, "I'm not sure there's space for me and the bus." But I was feeling my legs. Actually, I was not thinking so much—I was just feeling my legs, hearing the sound, and the visual getting bigger and bigger, the sound stronger and stronger. And the fear—suddenly there was fear in the chest

area, in the face. There was a lot of fear. The bus was coming, and it went by just like that, really close. You know how sensitive we get on retreat.

The bus went by. And just after it passed, there had been the experience of fear—a very upper body experience, a lot of heat. And then suddenly I felt my feet again walking. I realized, "Wow, in that moment, in those few seconds, there was no bottom part of the body from the point of view of experience." I don't know—somebody from the outside might have said, "Yeah, the legs were still there." But the three characteristics are interested in phenomena from the point of view of experience, not from whether the legs were really there or not. Because suffering happens from the point of view of experience. It doesn't happen from, "Oh, you shouldn't be worried about this, it's going to be okay." No—suffering is in here. Maybe from another point of view there's a different perspective, but from the point of view of experience, there was the fleeting nature of legs in that case. The legs just reappeared, and suddenly I understood.

Sometimes the insight is inferential. This means we don't have to see it everywhere. We see it well enough, deeply enough, immediately and directly enough in one aspect, clearly enough—and my word "inferential" means I see how that is true for other experiences that are not the same. I remember that moment being a correction of what I was doing here. Of course, you know, the lectern is actually not going anywhere. It's impermanent in the sense that there was once a tree and somebody made something out of it—but this is in a way conceptual. What we're doing here is looking from the point of experience. I repeat this.

So then I was like, oh, okay, so I don't have to think about the lectern that one day is going to become something else or be put in the garbage or is going to break. I can just look at it, and maybe become aware that seeing is passing—that when I see it, I have to see it again and see it again. The seeing is not once and done. There's a flow in it. If my mind is quiet enough, I can start to see how everything is fleeting, even things that are not moving, that are not going away.

This was a place where there was a correction of the view for me. Things were impermanent from an experiential point of view. Another way to say it, perhaps—and I understood something I had read earlier, I think from Ledi Sayadaw somewhere—was saying that when the meditator sees somebody arriving at the back of the hall, this is an object, and if they think that a few seconds later what sits there is the same object, they're deluded. It's a whole other experience. So too, what is experiencing this here has changed.

Can you imagine how much calm it takes to see this, how things are changing? You can say, no, it's the same person that was there and here, but the experience of seeing there and the experience of seeing here is very different. Or the experience of thinking about this person afterward. If I'm a little deluded, I'll think, oh, the person who entered, sat there, and that I'm thinking of right now—it's one permanent thing. Well, it's not. One is an image in the mind, another one is an experience here in time, and another one was an experience there in time. So that's how minute we get with the impermanence of things.

I'll name just another one here. For me, a correction that happened was in the woods in the back there. It was also in winter. I walked in the woods just behind the dining hall on the other side next to the annex. I step a few feet in, and the forest, the trees are very beautiful there, the way there's space in between each. There was a unique event that happened right there that I recognized as being unique. There was just the right amount of light, snow, sun, wind—there was this movement of snow going in all directions. I don't know what the wind was doing, but it was not going in one direction. It was kind of going in all kinds of directions, and with the light hitting the trees and creating shadows and light, and the snow appearing and disappearing in the shade and in the light—there was this amazing thing happening. And there were kind of swirls, I think, of snow. A few swirls.

And I was like, wow. There was really a connection with this event. This event was an experience of beauty for me, from this point of view of pure beauty. And it lasted for a few seconds. And there was a correction of view for me in the sense that this was about the most beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life. In terms of visual, that's about as far as it will go in this lifetime. I'm using thoughts now, but while I was there, it was like, this is absolutely unique—a nature thing. And in the seeing of this, I said, wow, even this doesn't completely do it. It doesn't completely provide. I could not have imagined this much beauty. It was there, given completely. And it could not swallow me, or me swallow it. There was just an event happening and then it passed.

It was fleeting, and the samsaric nature of it was that—I don't know, it felt like there couldn't be a merging, there couldn't be a disappearing in it. There could just be seeing amazing beauty and being touched by it. And something in my view of beauty got corrected—that it could provide, that if I could find the one beautiful thing and keep it, then my life problem would be solved. That got corrected.

These are very personal insights, by the way. But it says that when the view gets corrected towards more wise understanding of the nature of things, then naturally what will arise in oneself will be renunciation—a letting go of false expectation, as I would word it tonight—a deep letting go that is known as actually very beautiful. It is a beautiful mind state.

And so it says that for oneself, this is what will arise: renunciation. And for all beings, self included, the arising of kindness and compassion will be released.

What I find extraordinary on this path is that when there is the correction of the view, of the understanding of the world, it leads to the heart being freed. It doesn't lead to "Okay, so nothing's going to provide, it's all fleeting." It doesn't lead to cynicism. It leads to release, to a heart being unhindered, we could say, and being able to meet the world fully with care.

So in my own words, perhaps, I was just talking about the first two steps of the Eightfold Path—right view and right intention—how right view will lead to wise intentions of renunciation, of caring, of compassion and kindness.

Now I'll open a parenthesis. I don't know how long it's going to be, but it seemed important, so I will. I'm not in charge.

This last summer, there was again this amazing theater festival that I think I mentioned to you, one that we have in Montreal where they bring the best plays that can be moved to Montreal for us to see. This summer there was one play called—I'm going to translate the title from French, which was originally in Italian because it was an Italian play—the title would be something like "On the Concept of the Face of the Son of God."

You have to imagine this huge stage, the biggest theater in town, enormous in length and height. Romeo Castellucci, the director, is one of the most interesting thinkers in the theater world globally. He had studied at some point at the Beaux Arts, in art school. Going through his materials many years later, he found this painting of the face of Christ that for him represented pure beauty—he had never seen anything more beautiful than this painting. He thought, "What could I do with this? I want to do a play with this. I want to do something about this."

What he came up with was this: "This is the most beautiful thing. Where could I bring beauty from the most ugly thing and put them together?" Shit is ugly. Everything about shitting is ugly.

And so the play that he made—which was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen in its commentary, in its teaching—placed this great, huge picture of Christ taking up all the space. We can have all kinds of different relationships with Christ, of course, because of history and what happened, but you could just think of a human being that has clearly, when you look at this human being, the only thing you can see is compassion. There's this kind of ease, spaciousness, a loving, compassionate look in the eyes of this being. So that takes the whole of this space.

And the play—you see the inside of an apartment that is white, very designed, you know, white sofa, white table, everything white, very sleek. There's an old man sitting and trembling a little, sitting on the sofa, and his son, probably in his fifties, preparing to go to work. You understand that it's the son just because of the age, and you have a sense that this is what's happening. The old man is sitting in the sofa with nightclothes, pajamas or something like this.

Just as the son leaves—you can understand it's the morning, he's going to work, the cell phone, the tie—the father goes, "Ah, ah, ah, ah." And the son looks and there's shit everywhere on the sofa. Even in the play, they offer you the smell. It comes with a sulfuric, bad smell.

And nothing else is happening. It's just the son removing his sport jacket and starting to clean the father and saying, "It's fine, it's fine, it's okay." And the father is crying, "Oh my God, oh my God." He's cleaning the father, and just as he goes back to work, because he's kind of cleaned the mess—"Ah, ah." And the second time. The whole play is just this happening over and over again.

What you start to understand at some point is that the beauty is... First, you have always Christ looking at

you as an audience. You're looking at the scene, but you have this compassionate being looking the whole time. This message is so powerful that it's not about the situation. It's about the quality of the mind. And the son goes in and out of loving the father and being compassionate, to being exasperated and confused—and the love between two human beings.

To me, that was an amazing teaching on what beauty truly is, what real aesthetic is. I had heard that before, that perhaps aesthetic is something of the mind, some beauty of the mind that is the deepest kind of beauty. In that play from Castellucci, where there were very few words and a lot of shit, I couldn't believe how much beauty was brought forth—in the smell, in the visual.

To me there's a link between this event and this play, the situation and the play, and the way we're invited to live our life, or what we're doing here on retreat. How can we bring forward the most beautiful quality of the mind in the midst of whatever shit everyone finds themselves in the middle of? Because surely there is some of that happening as you're here—the confusion of the mind, too many people, whatever it is.

Anyway, so that's a free-flow parenthesis offered to you.

You'll do what you want with it. It felt like something—I don't know why I wanted to bring it here. I think because there's something raw about it. And we sit here in the rawness of our nature, and how we find balance, equilibrium, and beauty in the shadow side of the soul, if I can say so.

One thing I want to tie into tonight's talk is a teaching about... I want to say this is a path where there can be a lot of beauty and joy. I think I started by putting the shit out there to say that even in that, there can be amazing beauty and joy and connection and grace.

So the first two parts of the path are right understanding and right intentions. And then the three next that we talked about some last week were wise speech, wise action, and wise livelihood. They're part of the section of the path called sīla, ethics. And this is another place of joy, because it says that this practice of right speech, wise action, and wise livelihood can bring this feeling of what we call the bliss of blamelessness—which feels good. Knowing that through my action I'm actually protecting, not hurting, is something that feels good, very important on the path. There are many aspects of the path that are made to feel good so that we can actually walk it.

So this is one of them. The work on ethics is good for this psychology, to be sitting with blamelessness. It feels good in this psychology. It feels good in the community—this work on ethics that we're doing and this commitment. It's good for the community, small community, global community. It's also good for the karma, for the good fortune of the future, it says. That being harmless now is going to create a lot of joy for the future. Not just now, but in the future.

So personal, community or social, future-oriented happiness, and also spiritual happiness, because this is the ground on which we sit, we could say. If the ethics is not clean, it's very hard to learn meditation

because the mind is agitated, spending a lot of time justifying itself, explaining, avoiding. So maybe that's as much as I'll say about that.

And of course, there's this beautiful line that I read one time in a book from a Burmese monk. He was saying, "I have hurt other people. How could I not have in this life? It's not possible not to. But I practiced dhamma. And that makes me feel good. I'm reorienting my heart-mind." And that is enough for him, that he knows he's doing this. Spending the amount of time that we're doing here, there's a lot of correction on that level happening.

So first I talked a little bit about the paññā, the wisdom section of wise understanding and wise intention. Now just a few words on sīla—wise speech, action, and livelihood. And now I'm going to spend the rest of the time talking about right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration as part of this samādhi section, the development of the mind, if you will.

There's one place where the Buddha says, and I think Winnie read that earlier in the retreat: to abstain from all evil, to cultivate the good, and to purify the mind. This is the teaching of the Buddhas. To abstain from all evil relates to the sīla section, the ethical section. To cultivate the good relates to the samādhi section, what I'm going to talk about now. And to purify the mind relates to the wisdom aspect—the purifying of view and intentions.

So right effort—Winnie talked about this a whole evening, and she was speaking about the four endeavors: the effort to abandon the unwholesome, the effort to avoid it from arising, the effort to make arise the good, the wholesome, and the effort to cultivate it, maintain it. I'll say just a few words, little thoughts I had about this to add here.

There are two qualities that I wanted to mention that are very important on the path. You might have heard about them: hiri and ottappa. As I was saying earlier, on the path there are many qualities of mind that we will experience that are pleasant, that are beautiful. These two are beautiful, but not pleasant. They translate as shame of wrongdoing and fear of wrongdoing. They're known to be the two guardians of the world.

How it works is this: at the thought of doing something that might be hurtful, there might be two emotions that I feel, and it's good to recognize them and value them when they're there. There might be the idea of seeing myself do this and the personal shame of doing it. You know when you shrink from something—"I could take this, nobody would know, and it's all fine"—and there's a kind of heat that can come with it? If I did that, how I would feel after.

So that's the shame aspect. And the fear is related more to the external—how it would impact others, how they might judge me if they saw me, or the difficulties that could arise.

I think these two are very important in our practice to recognize because sometimes we bypass them. Maybe some of us will say, "Oh, but that doesn't count," because first, it doesn't feel good. But when these

arise, it might be something to actually value, to say, "Oh, look at this. This is an indication, an inner indication—careful here, let's bring mindfulness to the motivation or intention." That can be a good way to actually abandon something that has a life in how greed can be driven. Suddenly this emotion comes in and it can help us readjust. Not to fear or despise these emotions, but to learn to recognize—oh, this is actually good. Not pleasant, but good.

Another thing that came to mind for me about abandoning unwholesome states—I think we've talked here about RAIN, the acronym: Recognition, Allowing, bringing Interest, and Non-identification. There's another one that I use sometimes. It's very different. It's ABC.

It came to me one day while I was listening to a talk from Ayya Khema, a wonderful teacher. She was talking about when there's something unwholesome going on in the mind, and we've explored it a lot, we pretty much know it—that it's totally okay to actually acknowledge that it's there, be blameless, and then change. I was like, "Oh, ABC!" Acknowledge that it's there. Blamelessness—no one is guilty of this, but it's not wholesome. And then Change, switch.

Actually, that's something I use a lot in my practice to actually abandon. I don't need to experience all the states of mind. And some I can't abandon—they have their own life, of course. But there's a way where I can go in a direction. The mind can pick up something, and it could go in a direction, and there's a point of option there. Sylvia Boorstein has another way to put it. She has two lines: "Don't pick this up. Don't pick this up." And "Put this down. Put this down." If it's too late for the "don't pick it up," then it's "Put this down. Put this down, honey. Trouble."

We can do this with ourselves. Say, "Thank you, but no thank you. I know clearly that this is not helpful." It might be self-judgment, judging of others, going towards fantasy.

Then there's avoiding the arising of unwholesome. I want to name again sense restraint. To me, it shows in the same way. I remember thinking, "If I look, I'm going to see. If I look up, I'm going to see who's walking there, then I'm going to have opinions about..." And so to keep it extremely simple.

To me, the most profound expression of sense restraint is this teaching that the Buddha gave to Bahiya. I don't know if you know the Bahiya Sutta. The most profound teaching—probably makes it into the ten best profound teachings—but to me it talks about sense restraint. That's what I hear in there.

The story of Bahiya was that he thought he was awake, and somebody very generous told him his four noble truths—somebody told him generously that he actually was not awake. Told him the truth. Bahiya really wanted to be awake, and he was told where he could find a great teacher, so he went to see the Buddha. He walked for a great distance to get to the Buddha. When he got to where the Buddha was, the Buddha was just about to go on alms round and would never give teaching on that occasion.

Bahiya said, "Please give me a teaching."

The Buddha replied, "No, I'm going on alms round. Come after, and I'll teach you."

But Bahiya persisted, "No, please, please, you have to give me something. I walked all this length to see you. I want to hear something, even something very small, from you now."

And the Buddha said a second time, "No, I can't give you a teaching now. It's not the appropriate time."

And Bahiya said, "We have no idea what's going to happen. You cannot not give me a teaching now. Anything can happen in the next few moments. So you have to."

Because it was asked the third time, the Buddha said, "Okay, I'll give you a teaching."

I'm going to read you just what he said, and that solved the problem for Bahiya:

"Then, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized—then, Bahiya, there is no you in terms of that. When there is no you in terms of that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress."

Should I add something after the Buddha? It's a strange situation to want to talk after the Buddha. The profound beauty lies in the simplicity of this. In my wording: in the hearing, just the hearing. This is so simple. In the feeling, just the feeling. Abandoning everything else, and how it becomes extremely simple and natural to be here.

So in the effort: abandon the unwholesome, avoid the arising of the unwholesome, cultivate the wholesome, and maintain the wholesome.

Maybe I'll switch now to the seventh step on the Eightfold Path—mindfulness. We've talked a lot about this, but there are a few things I wanted to say.

One thing you might want to do, if you have a pen and paper when you go back to your room tonight or tomorrow morning, is to write a definition of mindfulness for yourself. Maybe later, at your next interview, you could read it to your teacher as a base for clarification. This is something I've seen done with students a number of times, and it's been extremely powerful for people—to write their definition of mindfulness and then enter into conversation about it. Just do this and see what mindfulness is for you, then talk with your teacher about it. It's a little thing to do.

Here's a question for you to reflect on for just a few seconds: What is the difference in the mindfulness of these four cases? Mindfulness of a thief robbing a house. Mindfulness of a surgeon performing surgery. Mindfulness of a climber climbing El Capitan at Yosemite. And mindfulness of a practitioner at the

three-month retreat at IMS in 2012. What are the differences in mindfulness among these four? Is it the same thing, or different?

I'll let you think about it for a moment.

Although we cannot know exactly what's happening with each one of them—I'm giving very little information, I'm not telling you if the climber is a Dharma practitioner or if the surgeon is, I'm not saying much, just throwing clichés out there—but still, as part of the Eightfold Path, it's not just mindfulness. It's wise mindfulness. Wise or right understanding, right speech or wise speech. It's this word in Pali: *samma*. *Sammādiṭṭhi*—wise view. *Sammāsati*—wise mindfulness.

My understanding, quickly, would be that the difference between the practitioner on retreat and the three others—if they're climbing for the joy of climbing, or doing surgery with the intention of saving and improving a life but with attention focused on the technicality of what they're doing, or the thief being led by greed—the difference is that in the mindfulness we're practicing here, there's the *sammā*, the wise. The way we're applying mindfulness is in terms of clarifying life, reducing suffering, and liberating the mind. The endeavor—maybe that's the word—is what is called noble because it can free the mind for oneself. The mindfulness exists in that context.

Why do I bring this? Because at this point in the retreat, I would want us to know this while we're being mindful. So when I'm making my bed in the morning, it's not so much that I'm mindful making my bed. That's one level of being attentive. But what is the quality of mind that is making the bed? Is it a rushing-forward quality, or is there investigation there? What are the qualities present?

There might be different things arising, but in terms of Dhamma, I want to be aware of what is liberating, what is entangling. If I'm in an entangling mind state, I want to be aware of it. So it's not so much that I made my bed mindfully, but that the Dhamma was there, within it. I don't know if I'm explaining this right.

Or perhaps there's a sense that "I" am making the bed. Or there's a sense of "Oh, no—the hand is moving." Just being aware of this, there's a sense of self. For me, that would be Dhamma happening, wise mindfulness. "Oh yes, there's really a sense that I'm doing this"—or not. There are several ways to talk about making the bed. There's an added value here. We know why we're doing this: to free the mind.

I'll read you a poem from Paul Reps. I think this speaks to mindfulness, to wise mindfulness.

It's called "Grass Blade Experiencing":

This is the law.
No sames.
No same leaves, pebbles, person, places, times, faces, grasses.
Whoever disobeys the law gets bored.

When I first started approaching this practice, I had a teacher who was, I think I told you, disguised as a drama teacher. The one thing he repeated the most over the years, the thing that had the strongest impact on me, was when we were in class—before doing a scene or after doing a scene—he would just stop for a second. I studied with him for many years, so I would see him regularly in class. I was in that room a lot, like us here. And he would say very often, he would just say, "Hey, we've never been here now before. We've never been here now before. It's the first time we're here now."

Because there would be a way the mind would just become habituated, used to being there. "I know, I know that class." And he would say, "No, we have never been here now before. This is a completely new experience. Don't become general or superficial about this, or used to this. This is completely new."

I heard him say that so many times, and that's one of the most valuable things I've ever heard. To me, it points to this practice of mindfulness. It's not "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm mindful of walking, yeah, yeah, yeah." No. I've never been here now before in this body. I've never felt fear now before. I've never anything now before. This is completely new. Assuming that I know this is complete delusion, from my point of view.

"I've never been here now before." This teaching also highlights impermanence—how things are constantly passing away, and how our looking must be fresh all the time to be real, to be in sync with reality.

Christopher Titmus, another teacher here, would speak about reestablishing memory. He would say that when you look in an ordinary way, you see a plant—"Plant. Oh yeah, I know that kind of plant." But he would invite us to reestablish memory, to have a new version, a recent version of that plant. See it anew.

I'm mixing different teachings here, but for me there's a connection. Eugene Cash, a teacher I really loved, used to sit every year with his daughter—she's perhaps in her twenties now—and they would sit on the sofa next to each other. He would say to her, "I am not your father." Not in a soap opera kind of way. And she would say to him, "I am not your daughter." Just to cut through the habituated way of seeing the other. When you hear that—"I am not your daughter"—then you have to look again. So who's there then?

To me, this is the mindfulness we're practicing. I've never been in this body now before. I cannot say, "Oh yeah, this body. I know this body. I know how it feels. This is how it feels." No. This is a completely new experience. This is very central to this practice. It's the only way into insight. We're not going to get insight by being superficially there—"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm kind of there."

As you know, *sammā sati*, wise mindfulness, is often equated with the four foundations. The body as a field of awareness includes posture, breath, and the activities of the body. There are also the elements—other ways to investigate the body, but these are the main approaches we use here. The second foundation is *vedanā*, the feeling tone.

We've talked about this extensively, but I want to add something tonight. You know about the threefold division: pleasant, neutral, unpleasant. But there's also an extremely important sixfold division. You take

the same pleasant, neutral, and unpleasant, but divide each into two categories. Classically this is described in particular terms, but I'll offer my version: liberating or entangling. Worldly or spiritual are two other ways to express this.

It's important to begin distinguishing between the two. There are pleasant feelings that are onward-leading, liberating on the path. And there are some that are entangling. The entangling ones arise when there's pleasantness and clinging comes with it, without mindfulness. But there's a whole category of spiritual pleasantness—qualities of mind that the Buddha said we don't need to fear, don't need to avoid, because they're onward-leading.

This includes the joy of renunciation, the joy of insight—the *vipassanā* joy when we realize, "Oh my God, *a nicca*! I just felt it!" When our experience matches what we've been hearing again and again, and suddenly we experience it directly for ourselves.

The spiritually pleasant includes the bliss of blamelessness I mentioned earlier. There are so many such experiences. Mostly the path is made of pleasant feeling tones when the right qualities are present—contentment, seclusion, when the hindrances subside. When desire, aversion, agitation, sloth and torpor, and doubt are gone, that experience of being secluded from these mind states is extremely pleasant.

Pīti, the ecstasy or joy or enthusiasm—some kind of curious energy, an involvement and engagement in the practice. These are good to recognize on the path when they're there. And the highest one being the release, the great understanding.

Within this division of pleasant, neutral, and unpleasant, there is a neutral one that we could surely place in the spiritual category: upekkhā, the equanimity we talked about. This evenness of mind. The mind is so balanced that it has a quality of neutrality to it. And so that is a neutrality that is onward leading.

To name also an example of the unpleasant that is onward leading would be hiri and ottappa—these two qualities of moral shame and moral dread. Not pleasant, but onward leading. Or sometimes when there's a discovery, like having some kind of insight about a pattern, an unhelpful pattern—it's not good news. One sits there thinking, "Oh my God, again this thing is so active." It's not pleasant, but it's honest. It sees clearly. It may be unpleasant, but one can recognize: okay, it's unpleasant, but onward leading because it can be seen clearly. It's better that it's seen than hidden and doing its thing.

In this way, we can start to recognize this. What I would also include is when something is pleasant at the sense door and could lead to the tendency of clinging—wanting more, wanting to keep—but it's met with sammāsati, with great mindfulness, and this leads to a beautiful release, allowing the pleasant to be there without clinging. Then we can put it in the category of liberating. When we meet the unpleasant, the neutral, and the pleasant with mindfulness, and it doesn't lead to the usual tendency, then this is onward going. One can recognize this and appreciate it, if that speaks to you.

Perhaps just to finish, I'll tell you a little story, simply because it happened in this hall. One time I was sitting during a retreat, in roughly that seat there. I had wanted to do the three-month retreat, and they told me I had to have sat a retreat here before. So I asked what the next one was and signed up. I found myself on that retreat.

I was sitting there and the sammāsati was not strong, to say the least. Actually, some of you might remember if you came here a long time ago—there used to be a red carpeted stage that extended a little bit in front like this. I was in the front row. The teacher was giving a talk, not unlike this one, and it was going on and on, way past the one hour. I was sitting there and the sound started to seem really, really loud—the volume seemed excessive. I was thinking, "This is way too loud. It's actually going to pierce my ear. I have to do something about this. Will they stop? They're not stopping. I can't believe this. This has been going way too long. This is dangerous for my health. I have to remove myself from this room now."

But I was in the front row, in the middle. And I kept thinking while the teacher continued offering the Dharma. At some point I thought, "I have to save my life." And so I stood up. I had no presence—I was not in the first foundation of mindfulness, not in body awareness, nor in hindrance awareness. There was not much going on at any level.

So I just stood up to leave, but I had not noticed that my legs had become completely numb. I had just enough energy to raise my body. The next thing that happened was that I fell flat on the floor with my chin on the first red step. It made a tremendous bang. The teacher very generously asked, "Oh, what's going on?" And to add insult to injury, I called out, "It's too loud! It's too loud!"

Really, really, to cover the noise in the room—of which there was none. And I was lying there. Actually, at that point I think I was crawling out in this direction. And the teacher said, "Is it too loud?" Very much concerned for the yogis. And all the yogis went like this, shaking their heads. And by that time I was on all fours and left the room.

So I was not, as I was crawling there, on the Eightfold Path. I was on the Deluded Path.

And so it is said that to meet life, the best strategy to meet life is through sammā sati. Right attention is the best way to avoid the unwholesome and the maturation of the unwholesome.

And you know, we fall, and we stand up again, and we start from fresh. That's the beauty of it—that we can always start from fresh and find wisdom in any of the phenomena of life at some point down the road.

So maybe we'll just finish with a little moment of silence.

May we all find great ease of mind and spaciousness of mind. May we be able also to offer this to others.

Thank you for listening.

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