Papañca 1: Craving, Conceit, and Wrong View

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:16:24

I'd like to begin this session with a 15-minute sitting. It's a way of settling in and settling back.

Take a comfortable meditative posture and just quickly review some of the instructions that I gave a little bit earlier. Settling into the awareness of your body posture. There is a body. Sometimes by holding that bigger frame—there is a body—even when we become aware of the body breathing, we don't necessarily have to narrow our focus, although we could. It's possible to be with the breath within the context of that larger frame, the whole body.

What I've found, and many people have said it's been helpful for them, is that by being aware of the breath within the larger frame, it makes it easier to allow for the breath to settle into its own rhythm. There seems to be less tendency to control. So you can experiment a little bit as you settle into the awareness of the body—whether you keep that sense that there is a body and then simply become aware of the body breathing within that larger frame, or whether you narrow the focus on the feeling of the sensations of the breath. See which is more helpful to you at any particular time. If you feel that you are controlling or manipulating the breath in some way, that would be a particularly good time to enlarge the context, enlarge the frame.

Settling in, closing the eyes gently and softly. Relaxing the eyes, relaxing the jaw, the shoulders, the heart, the belly. There is a body. Sit and know you're sitting. Become mindful of the sensations of the body breathing. Letting the breath be natural, finding its own rhythm. Breathing in, know you're breathing in. Breathing out, know you're breathing out.

When you notice the mind begins to wander, getting caught up in thoughts, simply acknowledge that as thinking. Come back and reconnect with the feeling of the whole body sitting, with the sensations of the body breathing. If you become aware of a space between the out-breath and the next in-breath, that's a good place to rest in the awareness of the whole body. Sitting, sitting until the next breath comes by itself.

There is a body. As the body breathes in, know it's breathing in. As the body breathes out, know it's breathing out.

When you're ready, you can slowly open your eyes, reconnect with the world around you.

One of the challenges we face as lay practitioners living in the world is how we can integrate the Buddhist teachings of liberation, the Buddhist teachings on enlightenment, into the busyness of our lives. In the talks I'm going to be giving during this retreat, I want to do something a little different. I want to dive into the deep end of things. Some of these teachings may be familiar to some of you, and perhaps some won't

be. At first it may seem a little philosophical or conceptual or intellectual, but if you hang in there through the talks and through the question sessions, you'll see that these teachings have a tremendously practical application and implication in our lives. They are really the key to understanding how we create suffering for ourselves and others, and how we can be free.

Our inquiries often begin either as a conscious reflection or perhaps as a more underlying background motivation—wondering and investigating the question, who am I? When I think back to my very early introduction to the practice, I was still in the Peace Corps in Thailand. This was in 1965, '66. I was young, 21 or 22 years old, going through all the angst of being that age and trying to figure things out for myself. I remember one time I was teaching English in Bangkok. I was in my room just looking at the mirror, looking at myself, and this question arose—who is behind what I'm seeing? Who am I behind all the turmoil of the thoughts and emotions? The question was very alive: who am I?

But this "who" can be a very misleading question, because it is already predicated on a misconception. If we ask, who am I, we are already positing a belief in some self at the center of it all. At the center of this conventional world, we are positing this mysterious being at the center of things.

Of course, it's important to say that in ordinary ways of communication, this question of the "who" is completely appropriate. If we ask who's coming for dinner, we don't want a particularly long philosophical analysis of what we mean by "who." But from a Dharma perspective, when not rightly understood, this imaginary "who," this view of the self, is the source of much of the suffering in our lives.

So just a little teaching about this. There was a writer by the name of Wei Wu Wei. He was actually a Westerner, I think, who was living in Hong Kong. He clearly had some awakening experience, and he wrote many books under this name, Wei Wu Wei. The books contain a lot of short little aphorisms expressing his understanding. One of these aphorisms was: "Being attached to the view of self is like a dog barking up a tree that isn't there." So the question is, how long are we going to keep on barking?

In terms of understanding and investigating the nature of suffering and the nature of freedom in a deeper way, a more fruitful question than "who" is "what." What are the basic building blocks of our experience? And then what do we do with them? How do we relate to these building blocks of experience? And again, just as a side note, even though during these talks I'm going to be using the pronouns of I and you and me and we and they, keep in mind that the use of these pronouns is just a convenient way of communication, not that it reflects some essential "who" behind it all.

Okay, so what is the "what"? What am I? What is the "what"? The Buddha laid out some very simple ways of understanding these basic elements of all of our experience. And then he talked about how we relate to these building blocks. This, of course, involves a little bit more complexity. How do we relate to the basic building blocks of experience that then go on to construct our lived reality?

There's one short discourse that the Buddha gave which is so simple and so radically profound. The name

of the discourse is called "The All." In it, the Buddha describes in six short phrases the all, the totality of our experience. So what is the all? The eye and visible objects, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and taste, the body and tactile sensations, and the mind and mental objects—thoughts and emotions and images. These are basically the six sense spaces and their respective objects.

This is not hard to understand or relate to. So far, so good. Moment after moment, what we're experiencing are either moments of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking and feeling. In a way, we could think of ourselves and our lives as a six-piece chamber orchestra playing the music of our lives, because it's only these six things that are ever happening. I find this particularly interesting to reflect on when I, or we, may be caught up in the complexity and confusion of our lives—just to reflect for a moment. It's only six things that are happening: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, and feeling. This is what's going on.

But this is the foundation of understanding. Here's where it starts to get interesting. Because how we're relating to these six basic building blocks, how we relate to them, becomes also part of the unfolding of our lives. And it either creates more stress and suffering for us, or more peace and happiness. So what do we construct out of these fundamental elements, these fundamental building blocks of experience? What do we construct out of them? And how does it all happen?

Here we're getting into the meat of the talk. The Buddha spoke of three powerful tendencies in the mind. In the Pali language—the language of ancient India in which the teachings have been preserved—these proliferating tendencies are called papañca. They build our experience of the world, these papañca, these proliferating tendencies. They build our experience of the world based on the mistaken view of self. So these very deeply rooted tendencies in the mind are constructing our lived experience based on a mistaken idea. And that's the cause of, again in the Pali language, what is called dukkha—the suffering, the confusion, the unsatisfactory nature of our lives.

So we want to explore exactly how all this is happening. These forces, these proliferating tendencies—and they're deeply conditioned within us, deeply habituated—these three forces are the tendencies of craving, of conceit, and of wrong view. I'm going to talk about each of these in some more detail and how they operate in our lives. Craving is something that I think most of us are easily familiar with. It's wanting, or desire, or thirst for something.

What's interesting is that craving is rooted in the sense of things being mine or belonging to me. We want things so that they can belong to me, so that they become mine. And that's what we crave.

I'll give you a very simple example of this kind of craving based on "mine" or "belonging to me." This is something that happened years ago on a retreat. I was at the Forest Refuge here at IMS doing my own retreat, and we all probably have established certain routines when we go on retreat. One of my things is that I have a favorite retreat sweatshirt—it's really comfy. So every retreat I'm on, I wear this sweatshirt.

I was doing walking meditation, and I felt like I was quite deep in my practice. As I was walking, I was reflecting on the Four Noble Truths and how craving is the cause of suffering, which is the second noble truth. And I thought to myself, "Joseph, well, if craving is the source of suffering, just stop craving. Just stop it." So that was my thought and my intention and my reflection.

And then in the very next moment, I started thinking about my favorite sweatshirt. I thought, "Oh, it would be nice to have it in a lot of different colors." And my mind went on this whole fantasy of getting the sweatshirt in different colors. So you see how craving is deeply habituated—even in the midst of sometimes what seems like deep practice and being on retreat, still it manifests. Craving based on the sense of mine, or having something belong to me.

That's the first of the proliferating tendencies, the papañca. And you can get the sense of what's meant by proliferating: I went from just enjoying my sweatshirt to all of a sudden wanting one in six different colors, and the mind just proliferates in that way.

The second of the proliferating tendencies is conceit. This is the English translation of the Pali word *māna*. It means something a little different than the usual English meaning of the word conceit, which usually suggests somebody being very puffed up, thinking very well of themselves. Here, in the Buddhist sense, *m āna* or conceit in its most fundamental meaning is that felt sense of "I am." It's like, "I am this." Which is very pervasive—we go through the day very much immersed in this feeling. It was expressed in an ad I once saw in the New York Times for a t-shirt, and on the t-shirt was emblazoned "Me, me, me." This would be an expression of conceit.

So there's craving, one of the proliferating tendencies, and conceit, this deeply felt sense of "I am." And then the third proliferating tendency is called wrong view. In the Buddhist teachings, wrong view refers to the deeply held belief that there is a self—some unchanging, enduring being at the center of it all. That being to whom everything is happening.

So: craving, conceit, and wrong view. Just as a reminder, conceit is more the felt sense of "I am," and wrong view is the belief that there is a self at the center of it all. In the teachings, these three tendencies are usually expressed as "this is mine," which is based on craving; "this I am," which is based in conceit; and "this is myself," which is based in wrong view. "This is mine, this I am, this is myself"—these are the three expressions of papañca.

It would be helpful in understanding the practical application of all this to distinguish these tendencies one from the other and to begin to get some sense of how they are functioning or manifesting in our lives. Because these are the different ways we construct and strengthen the sense of self in our lives. And the clearer we are about them, the easier it is to see and disentangle from them.

To give you a sense of how important this is on our path of practice and liberation, I want to read a short teaching from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who was one of the great Tibetan meditation masters of the last

century. This is what he said:

"The idea of an enduring self has kept you wandering helplessly in samsara, in this round of existence, for countless past lifetimes. It is this very thing now—the idea of an enduring sense of self—that prevents you from liberating yourself and others from conditioned existence. If you could simply let go of that one thought of 'I,' you would find it easy to be free, and to free others too."

I hope you get a sense of just how crucial it is to unpack this notion of self and the different ways it manifests through the papañca, through the proliferating tendencies, in our aspiration to be free—to both free ourselves and to help free others.

We can see how each of these three tendencies works and how they differentiate themselves in some very ordinary experiences in our lives. I hope examining these will help clarify the meaning of each tendency.

For example, how do we relate to the body? Right here, we can begin to see the difference between craving—"this is mine"—and conceit—"this I am." In considering the body, we probably wouldn't say "I am the leg" or "the leg is me." But we would commonly refer to it as "my leg," as if it belongs to this imaginary me. The leg is mine; the leg belongs to me. And so that entails whatever craving or desires we have about the leg being this way or that way.

As we extend this to how we relate to the whole body, it gets a little interesting because at first it's possible we might think or say, "Well, I am the body." But certainly as we age, we have a very different experience of it. It's quite common as we get older to feel that who we are, the sense of "I am," hasn't really changed at all, even as we see the gray hairs and the wrinkles. Internally, we may feel we are the same person, the same "me" that we were twenty or thirty years ago. And so when we see the body age so visibly and even feel the effects of aging, we might often wonder, "How did this happen?" It seems so strange because internally, we may not feel that we've aged at all. So again, it's more likely to see the body with this perspective as belonging to me, rather than it being who I am.

Particularly with the sense of the body being mine, the body belonging to me, it's so clear how many desires and cravings arise from that sense—"my body" and all the craving and desire that arises—wanting the body to be and to look a certain way. Probably a good part of our lives revolves around thinking about and trying to satisfy these cravings.

Just as an extreme expression of this, I once saw an ad in some magazine featuring a beautiful person, and the caption was, "I don't let anything stand in the way of my pleasure." As if the fulfillment of all our wants and cravings is the main purpose of our lives. It would be interesting just to notice and reflect on how central this motivation is in our own lives, even if it is expressed a little more subtly. How much of our lives do we spend trying to fulfill the desires and cravings related to "my body"?

Here there's another really interesting discernment that we can begin to investigate in our lives, because it actually can save us a lot of stress. Unexamined, we often equate pleasure with desire. In another caption I

once saw, it said, "Increase your desire"—as if that will actually bring us more pleasure. If we haven't really investigated, we think and equate desire with pleasure, and we don't see the stress involved in the wanting, in the craving, in the desire.

So just as an experiment where you can check this out for yourself—and as with all the teachings, I think this is important to say: there's no suggestion that you should hear this and just necessarily believe it all. It's all an invitation to investigate for yourself, to explore, and to use these suggestions to help in that investigation.

One exercise in meditation would be really interesting. When you're sitting and some desire arises, and you may be caught up in it—maybe it's desire for food, or a sexual fantasy, or your next vacation, whatever it may be—there's some desire arising in the mind and you're caught up in it. Then at a certain point, the desire will pass, because everything does pass; everything changes. Just notice what it feels like in that moment when the desire passes. We're caught up, we're lost in fantasy, desiring, wanting, and then at a certain point the desire goes. Right in that moment, pay attention to what it feels like as the desire passes away.

My own experience has always been that in that moment of the desire passing, it feels like a tremendous sense of relief. It feels like the mind, the heart, has just been let out of the grip of something—and there's such ease in that letting go. Right there, we can begin to see the stress involved when we're caught up in wanting and craving, and the ease and peace when the mind is free of that.

So we can see this a lot with reference to craving associated with the sense of the body being mine, the body belonging to me. We also claim ownership—"it's mine"—with much of our inner world: my anger, my thoughts, my happiness, all of this belonging to me.

This sense of ownership, this beginning to solidify our sense of self through desire and craving and "me" and "mine," starts really young. This sense of possessiveness starts really early in our lives. Just imagine a group of kids playing with some toys on the playground. Maybe parents are urging their children to share their toys and coming up against perhaps an occasional heartfelt wail: "But it's mine!" The child is claiming that ownership, resisting the urge to share.

So you can see, this is not a superficial conditioning. This goes very deep in the way our hearts and minds have been programmed.

The Buddha also spoke of more subtle kinds of craving, and this has particular application in our meditation practice itself. The Buddha called this kind of craving "craving for becoming." When we believe this mind and body to be mine, that they belong to me, then all kinds of cravings arise—we want to become, we want them to become this or that. And so craving for becoming is very much involved in this process.

One aspect of this, which we're all familiar with in our meditation practice and in other aspects of our

lives as well, is that wanting energy of expectation. Just think of times in your practice when things are not flowing along smoothly, when it feels like we're struggling to meditate. Usually we see struggle as a problem, but actually the feeling of struggle, the sense of struggle, is really not a problem. It's actually tremendously helpful feedback. Because what struggle means is that something is going on that we're not accepting. If we were accepting it, we wouldn't be struggling.

It might be discomfort in the body. It might be a restless mind. It might be a lot of disturbing sounds. A difficult emotion. Something is going on that we're not open to. And when we're not open to it, then it becomes fuel for the craving and expectation of wanting it to be different. So we want to take this time of expectation, really investigate the struggle that may be fueling it, and see that the feeling of struggle is actually good feedback—reminding us, "Okay, what am I not accepting? Can I open to that?" And then seeing how the non-acceptance is just fueling all kinds of expectations.

These can all come down to one really deeply rooted tendency, a conditioning that is pretty universal. In one way it gets to the very heart of our practice: namely, because of the sense of the mind-body being mine, we want what's pleasant and we don't want what's unpleasant. This is how most people live. And they would also feel, well, this is quite natural. Of course we want what's pleasant and want to avoid what's unpleasant.

But for those on the path, really investigating, trying to explore in a deeper way what the causes of suffering are in our lives and what the possibility really is for peace and ease and freedom—we want to bring our mindfulness, our awareness, to see that in a very fundamental way, there's more distress in wanting to get rid of unpleasantness than in simply feeling the unpleasantness itself.

For those of you who are somewhat experienced in practice, you may well have had the experience over time of gradually developing that equanimity where we're open to what's pleasant and we feel that, we're open to what's unpleasant and we're okay with that, without reactivity in the mind. We begin to experience for ourselves—this is no longer theoretical or some conceptual teaching—we really begin to experience for ourselves the ease of that non-reactivity, the ease of non-craving, the ease of coming out of or disentangling from this particular proliferating tendency.

Now, this doesn't mean that we don't respond to what we're experiencing. It's not like we just think, "Oh, whatever," and we're not engaged with the world. That's not what I'm suggesting at all. The question is, can our response and our engagement come from a place of wisdom rather than the conditioned reaction of craving? Rather than just, "I want what's pleasant, I don't want what's unpleasant," caught up in that reactivity—can we respond to the situations around us with greater wisdom?

Because obviously we need to take care of our bodies and we need to take care of our minds and we need to take care of the environment, both physical and social. There are definitely times when it's important to set boundaries, or when we're simply satisfying basic needs. All of this is both necessary and appropriate. We don't want to be using dharma terminology for what has been called spiritual bypass. "Oh, there's no

one here, so nothing matters." Or, "Everything's empty, so making wise choices is not important." That's an incorrect understanding of all this.

When we read the Buddhist discourses, we see that the Buddha was often quite fierce in highlighting what's right and what's wrong, what's skillful and unskillful, what's wholesome and unwholesome. So we want to have that discernment—but can we be responsive rather than reactive? Acting from a place of discernment and wisdom rather than the conditioned reactivity of craving.

So I've talked quite a lot now about the first aspect of papañca, which is craving, born from the notion "this is mine, this belongs to me"—whether it's the body belonging to me, our thoughts and emotions belonging to a me, or external things belonging to a me. This is the proliferating tendency of craving. And I think it's not hard to see how this force of craving just builds our world and the world that we inhabit.

The workings of the second aspect of papañca, conceit, are a little more subtle and in some ways more pervasive.

Although the conceit, again, remember, it means that sense of "I am, I am this." Usually in the Buddhist meaning of conceit, "I am" refers to the comparing mind—when we compare oneself with others as being either better than, equal to, or worse than someone else.

But conceit also manifests as thoughts of "I am" over time. For example, any thoughts of "I was this in the past, I am this now, I will be in the future." You can see that these thoughts, which are very common in our lives—memories and plans, reflections on the present—if we're not careful in our mindfulness and awareness, they just reinforce this sense of "I am."

Generally, this papañca of conceit is so deeply rooted and so pervasive that it's really the backdrop of how we interpret our experience in the world. It's just so common that we don't even pay attention to it. Just as an example, we go through the day: "I'm walking, I'm eating, I'm doing this, I'm doing that." Unthinkingly, we're not even paying attention to it. Yet just in that way of understanding and expressing things, we are again reinforcing the notion that there is this mysterious "I" behind it all, to whom experience is happening.

What's so striking to me is that it is so ordinary. We don't usually take the time to investigate what is the "I" that we're talking about.

I'd like to give two examples of this. The first shows the proliferating tendency of "I am." The second really highlights the suffering aspect and the potential for freedom when we understand it.

This past winter, I was on a self-retreat at home here in Barre. As most of you probably know, New England winters can be really cold. I was doing walking meditation outside and it was freezing—a burning icy wind, and my face was burning. It was really unpleasant. The way I started thinking about it, quite subliminally, was: "Oh, I'm really cold. I'm really cold. This is painful." Of course, that would be a

conventional and convenient way to express what was going on. But there was really something deeper happening.

Instead of the simple awareness—"there's cold" or "there is unpleasantness," noting the unpleasant feeling of it—the "I am-ness," "I'm so cold," quickly morphed into several minutes of Hawaii fantasies. "If only I could be walking, doing my walking meditation on the beach in Hawaii..." I spent a couple of minutes indulging in that fantasy. But it was all arising out of that proliferation of the tendency, the conceit, "I am." "I'm so cold. If only I were in Hawaii, things would be so much more agreeable."

You can see how deeply embedded this particular tendency of "I am" is in our lives. It's just the ordinary way we view our experience. But it's not the most liberating way of viewing our experience. In fact, it entangles us in all kinds of suffering.

The other example, perhaps even more impactful than a few minutes of Hawaii fantasy, is how the conceit—this papañca of conceit, "I am"—has to do with self-judgment and self-criticism. In teaching for so many years now, over fifty years, and hearing so many meditators come in and describe their experience, it's striking. I see in my own experience in life just how striking the depth of this conditioning is—the pattern of self-judgment. It's a lot of suffering for us.

I had a revealing experience of this on my last retreat, which reinforced something I had observed before, but it really stood out. It was highlighted in this one particular example. I was on retreat doing quite intensive practice. Then one day—I don't even remember the exact details—I just frittered away some time. I spent an hour or so doing something, I don't even remember what, but it wasn't meditating, and it wasn't even being particularly aware.

At a certain point, I became aware of this and I saw my mind become quite self-judgmental. "Oh, you wasted all this time, such a terrible yogi," going on and on. I wasn't feeling good. It really created a down mood in myself, this self-judgment and self-criticism.

But then something very interesting happened. It was really quite amazing. As soon as I could see all of these self-critical, self-judgmental thoughts as a manifestation of māna, of conceit, of "I am"—

There was a lot of I am-ness in a negative way. So it was the working of conceit, of papañca. And the proliferating aspect was so clear because it created a whole self-story around that particular self-judgment, with a strong sense of I am-ness running through it.

But what was so amazing—and this is really what I'd like to encourage you to investigate for yourself—as soon as I could name the defilement, as soon as I could identify that particular tendency as māna, as conceit, the whole thing simply fell away. I settled back into the present moment and continued with my practice.

I find it helpful to use the Pali word because, in a way, it highlights the impersonality of that tendency. The

māna itself is not self. It's just this particular tendency in the mind of "I am-ing." As soon as I could name it—"Oh, that's just māna"—and see it in that way, I was no longer caught in the story. I was back in a place of ease.

The important point here, and it has quite a general application that can be so helpful and freeing: when we're in some state of suffering or discontent, if we can see the particular defilement in the mind that's causing the suffering—whether it's conceit, craving, aversion, whatever unwholesome tendency—if we can actually name that particular mind state and see it clearly, it extricates us from identification with the whole story. It frees us from that web of proliferation because we're seeing the root cause underneath the proliferation. "This is just māna, that's all it is." And in that moment, we're no longer caught.

This is often represented in the Buddhist texts through the figure of Māra—not māna, but Māra, who is the embodiment of ignorance. Māra often manifests as some being coming to test the Buddha or the great disciples with some temptation or another. And they will say, "Māra, I see you." In the moment of saying this, Māra disappears.

We can apply that very same energy to our own experience of difficulty or suffering. If we can connect with the particular mind state that's causing the suffering, that's what takes us out of the story—the proliferation of I am.

It's so interesting: when we focus on the content and the story that arises in these situations, it's incredibly seductive because we're the star of the show. There's a sense of I, and it could be a farce or it could be a tragedy, but that's what makes it seductive. Yet really what's happening is that we're just proliferating the I am into existence.

When we can see this clearly, we come back to what I mentioned at the very beginning of the talk—we reconnect with the basic building blocks of experience, those six basic building blocks. This was expressed in one very powerful discourse the Buddha gave called the Discourse to Bāhiya.

There's a whole background story, but to abbreviate: this man Bāhiya came to see the Buddha. He had traveled a long distance, very much on fire with wanting to be free. He met the Buddha while the Buddha was out on alms round and asked for the teachings. The Buddha said, "Please wait, come back to the monastery, I'll be glad to teach you." But Bāhiya was insistent. He said, "No, please teach me now. You may die, I may die. Teach me now."

So there's the Buddha in the middle of the street with his bowl, needing to express the most liberating of teachings in just a few short phrases.

He said: "Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus. In the seen, let there be just what is seen. In the heard, let there be just what is heard. In the sensed—that is smell, taste, and touch—let there be just what is sensed. And in the thought, let there be just what is thought."

In that way, the mind becomes free. We are not caught up in papañca, in the proliferating tendencies around these basic elements of our experience. In seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mind objects—let there be just what there is. This opens up the gateway to ever-deepening Dharma understanding.

Of course, as my first teacher Munindraji would often say, "It's simple, but it's not easy." These proliferating tendencies of craving, conceit, and wrong view are so deeply habituated within us. They ensnare us again and again in these constructed worlds of I, me, and mine. So we need to see how they're operating.

We need to explore and investigate what we might call the mechanics of our lives—how we're creating our worlds and creating our experience. As the famous Indian poet, philosopher, and author Tagore said, "It's very simple to be happy, but it's very difficult to be simple." I think that's very reflective of our path. It's not complicated. It's very simple—simple, but not easy.

One of the most common manifestations of conceit, which I mentioned earlier, is the comparing mind, where we evaluate ourselves in relationship to some other person or to some idealized presentation of someone. A good part of our consumer society runs on this mental stage. We see some ad showing a totally perfect being enjoying some product, and the suggestion is that if only we had that object, we would enjoy the same happiness as this perfect being who is obviously enjoying it. Of course, on a rational level, we know this is ridiculous, and yet it works on us. How much of our society is based on that kind of consumer craving—thinking that comparing ourselves to somebody who has these things will also make us happy?

I think most of us have at least made some beginning in seeing through this, but it would be worth paying attention to because it's pretty deep and often subliminal. Perhaps on a more subtle level, and a more deeply impactful level, it would be very illuminating to watch our minds as we meet or interact with different people. How many quick little comparing judgments are we making? It could be about appearance, personality, intelligence, skills—almost anything. It could even be about how mindful one is being, comparing ourselves with others. There's this strong tendency to evaluate ourselves based on these comparisons, and we feel either less than, equal to, or more than, with all of the attendant emotions.

But all of this falls away as soon as we recognize this comparing mind. "Oh, this is just *māna*. This is just the conceit 'I am,' the comparing mind." We see it, and it no longer has a hold on us.

So we've talked about craving, and we've talked about conceit. The last of the proliferating tendencies the Buddha called wrong view. As I mentioned, this is the deeply conditioned belief that there is a self—meaning some core, unchanging, underlying being that is the "who" of "who am I?" We don't quite know what it is, and yet we still believe it to be at the center of our existence. While conceit is the self-sense "I am," wrong view is this deeply embedded belief. And this belief conditions a good part of how we move in the world.

The Buddha was very strong in his teaching about wrong view. He said he sees nothing more harmful, no mental state more harmful, than wrong view—because everything stemming from this belief in self leads us in the wrong direction. It leads us in the direction of more suffering, more stress, more unease.

This has been a lot. Hopefully you've gotten some sense of how these three aspects of *papañca* work. *Papañca* again means the proliferating tendencies of mind. It's not just that they're unskillful in themselves—they have the power to proliferate. Somebody once called them the imperialistic qualities of the mind; they try to take everything over. So hopefully you've gotten some sense of how these three different aspects are manifesting and working in our lives: "this is mine," "this I am," "this is myself."

One big question remains: given the great conditioning power of *papañca*, these proliferating tendencies that construct and reconstruct our lived experience out of the simple building blocks of our experience, what is the remedy? How do we free ourselves? That will be the topic of the next talk.

Just a couple of words here. First, take a moment—maybe take a few deep breaths—to let all this settle.

I realized, as I mentioned, that I'm diving into the deep end of things—getting to the heart of what causes suffering in our lives. And then we'll be talking about the possibility of freedom.

Tomorrow's session will be a question and response period, so on the unlikely chance that you have some questions about all this, please email them through the link on the retreat website.

Before ending, the next session in the schedule is a walking period. There will be more detailed instructions on walking practice, but I thought I would describe it in the most simple way for those who are new, so you can begin to explore walking meditation. I can't emphasize enough how hugely helpful it is.

Sometimes people think of walking as a kind of second-tier meditation—the real meditation is sitting, and then walking, and then, oh yes, be mindful of everything else. Sometimes I like to suggest that people actually reverse that order and give most importance to being mindful of daily activities, then the walking, then the sitting, just to counter our perhaps usual way of thinking about it. I've experienced so many insights in walking practice. I would like to really encourage you to spend some time developing it.

To begin, find some space—it could be inside your apartment or house, or outside. You don't need a long space. Perhaps a hallway or room, seven, eight, nine, ten steps in length. That's really all that's needed, or it could be a little longer if the room is there. This is your walking path, and you're walking back and forth. Walking meditation is not the same as going for a walk, which of course is fine to do as well, but walking meditation has a little more formality to it. We create a walking path.

You can begin by simply walking at a slightly slower than normal pace. If you were noting, for example, it might just be "left, right, left, right" or "stepping, stepping, stepping, stepping," just like that.

The important thing in walking meditation—and it's also true in sitting—is this: very often in meditation

discourse, we use watching language: watch, notice, observe. That has a certain value, but it's more valuable, I think, to change the language a little bit in terms of understanding how we're practicing—to feeling language. So instead of observing the movement as if you're up in the head somewhere, looking down, even if you're not literally looking—but the sense of looking at or observing from outside—just change it to feeling language. You're walking and simply feel the movement. It's almost like you're doing Tai Chi or yoga. You're in the body, feeling the sensations of movement and touch from the inside, rather than trying to observe as if from outside.

This will make a huge difference. When I discovered this, it transformed my walking practice and made it very enjoyable and very easeful. You're just walking, taking a step, feeling the sensations of movement and touch. You could even note "movement and touch." Then in the course of the walking period, experiment with different speeds. As I say, you can begin at a slightly slower than normal pace, and then if you like, after a little time, you can begin to slow down further. Just play with different speeds.

I would really encourage you to do this. It opens up a whole new world of insight.

Thank you very much for your attention. I hope the content was not too overwhelming, but we'll explore it more both in the question period tomorrow and then in the talk the following day—actually how to free ourselves from these papañca, these proliferating tendencies that so imprison us in the sense of self.

Thank you, and have a good day.

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