Tracking Experience

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 1:11:55

Tonight I want to explore the central practice of satipaṭṭhāna, that of tracking experience. On a previous night we looked at the udesa, the introduction to the discourse, and we got as far as the one-way street and Nibbāna. Today we'll move on and examine how the Buddha summarizes the basic practice.

He's talking about the practitioner surrendering longing and sorrow for the world. She lives tracking body as body, feeling as feeling, heart-mind as heart-mind, phenomena as phenomena, ardent, clearly understanding and mindful. So there are four satipaṭṭhānas: body, feeling, heart-mind, and phenomena. The Buddha repeats the same sentence for each one, and as we mentioned, repetition indicates importance. This sentence is crucial.

What it's all about is what the Buddha calls anupassanā, usually translated as "contemplating." So contemplating body as body, mind as mind. But I prefer to translate it as "tracking." In Pali it's anupassanā. Passanā means seeing, and anu is a prefix denoting "along." When we see something, the relationship is direct and immediate—there it is. But "seeing along" implies following it over time, tracking it.

I don't like using the word "contemplating" because it could possibly imply thinking about something. This is not thinking about. Rather, it's following something, tracking something over a period of time.

There are two aspects to this practice. First, direct the mind towards an object of experience. Direct awareness and then ground it on this experience. Mindfulness has this very earthy, grounded quality to it. We ground awareness on something, creating a very direct encounter with the experience.

The object of awareness could be anything. For example, it could be a very specific object that we think is really important and that our guru says you must become intimate with in order to become enlightened—breathing, for instance. It's the generic meditation object. Or body sensation, or whatever. Alternatively, it might be grounded on the awareness itself, rather than the object of awareness. This is more like a space within which experience comes and goes, things arising and passing within a broader space.

But whatever it is—whether obvious like the body, extremely subtle like awareness itself, or anything in between—the first move is to directly ground awareness on something. This is central.

Then extend that encounter continuously over a period of time. This is the second aspect, the tracking aspect. If I'm going to track something, follow it, that implies time. The word mindfulness itself implies time. Mindfulness, remember, is a translation of the Pali word sati, which literally means memory. How

can you have memory without time?

When we track something, we don't track it just for a moment. In one moment it doesn't go anywhere. Tracking something requires cultivating an ongoing relationship over a period of time. This is central to this practice.

When we track something, it's not up to us where it goes. Our job is to follow it. This again is a fundamental principle. This is what I like to call the "follow that car" principle. You know in the movies when someone leaps into a taxi cab and says "follow that car." The taxi cab driver is excited because he's been waiting for this for twenty years because he's seen all the movies. So off he goes. Imagine you're the person who's just leapt into the cab and you're sitting beside the driver, following that car.

You've got to follow that car. And fortunately the taxi cab driver seems very skilled, weaving in and out of traffic. So you're settling back and relaxing, no problem. And then at a certain corner, the car you're following turns right, and without hesitation, your taxi cab driver turns left.

Now, at this point, would you be a happy chappy? Would you be content? Would you be thinking of the large tip you're going to give this taxi cab driver? No, you might be, in fact, irritated. You might even remonstrate with the taxi cab driver.

But the taxi cab driver could explain he's got perfectly good reasons for turning left. The taxi cab driver might be a hippie and it just felt right to turn left. He just wanted to express himself. He just felt that his inner dolphin told him to. Or it could be that he was absolutely dead set certain that car was going to turn left. He was absolutely certain of it. It just took him completely by surprise when it turned right. Or he could say, "Look, the view this way is much more interesting. It's terrible that way. It's much better this way." He could have all sorts of reasons like this, but would you find them convincing? No. The instruction is simple: follow that car. That's it.

Satipatthana works in exactly the same way. When we're tracking experience, we don't care where the object goes or what happens to it. That's not our business. Our business is to follow it and to understand whatever happens to it. That's all.

And although we might criticize the taxi cab driver, in fact as meditators we behave like that taxi cab driver pretty much at almost every intersection.

So this practice has a degree of unpredictability built into it. It's simply part of its nature. If you've got just a single meditation object to follow, well that's hard enough and that's unpredictable enough. But when the basic principle is it doesn't matter what the object is—the object could be body, could be feeling, could be mind, could be phenomena, roughly speaking everything—the unpredictability becomes massive.

This unpredictability in turn requires a degree of flexibility in the meditator. You can't afford to be rigid in what you're doing. Maybe it might work in some other form of meditation practice, which is just do this

one thing: here's your meditation object; every time the mind wanders away, just come back to it. You can afford to be rigid maybe, and it might even pay off to some extent. But with this practice, it just doesn't work. It's a complete schmozzle.

So the attitude of the practitioner: it does not matter what happens. And this is really important. It genuinely does not matter what happens. What matters is that we are aware of what happens. That's the key point.

Now the forms that this practice takes are multiple. Let's just take a single lineage, the Mahasi method.

So you start with Mahasi himself, then his students, then his students' students. Let's stay several generations down the line, but stick to his students and his students' students.

These days, on one side, you have Sayadaw Tejaniya. For Tejaniya, he really doesn't care what it is that you're mindful of. What he's interested in is the mind which is mindful. He's really interested in that.

With Tejaniya, if you were doing a retreat with him, and let's say you just got really fed up with sitting in the hall and meditating, and you decided, "I think I'll go to the pub." So you wandered off, went down to the pub, sank a few—or possibly more than a few—weaved your way back to the center, and then went into the interview and explained what you had just been doing, he wouldn't bat an eyelid. But what he would want to know was: What happened when you did that? What happened in your mind when you did that? What was the experience of getting really fed up? What was the experience of heading to the pub? Were you mindful of downing those beers? How did consciousness change? How did the body change? What happened when you came back? And he would be genuinely interested.

He's quite strong on the principle that it doesn't matter what the object is. It doesn't matter what the experience is. It doesn't matter if you're inside the meditation hall or outside the meditation hall. What he's interested in is the mind which is aware—what's happening in that mind.

On the other end of the spectrum, you have somebody like Sayadaw Upandita. When I was working with him back in the day, we had the standard instruction: primary object in the sitting, rising and falling of the abdomen; secondary object, whatever else happens. But in practice, you'd give essays on the rising and falling of the abdomen and brief mentions of the secondary object. He was very fixated on rising and falling of the abdomen. Great precision and detail. I used to write little essays on it. I couldn't do it now—well, I suppose if I tried, but I don't think I ought to try. It's pretty intense.

There's one of the classic Upandita stories about a meditator who went there and in the course of meditating had some profound spiritual awakening experience. He was overwhelmed by gratitude and joy to the old guru that under his beneficent guidance he had had this experience. At the next interview, he was explaining all this to Upandita and expressing his gratitude and so on. Upandita heard him out, waited until he stopped talking, and then said, "This experience that you had—did it occur on the rising or the falling movement of the abdomen?"

The guy says, "I don't know."

And Upandita says, "Please, be more mindful," and throws him out.

Radically different approaches, even in the same lineage using the same method. There's tremendous flexibility built into this because satipatthana is so universal. You cannot pin it down.

This is bound up with the fact that, as the Buddha emphasizes, satipatthana is meant to be our normal dwelling place. He calls it the gochara. I like the word gochara. It's a technical term, and roughly translated it means cow paddock. Gochara—G-O-C-A-R-A. Go is cow and chara is where one wanders. So a cow paddock.

And satipatthana is our cow paddock. In other words, our territory, our own base. This is where we live.

Let's say I'm a dedicated practitioner, and let's say I'm a dedicated Mahasi-wala, and let's say I'm going to really crack this rising and falling of the abdomen, and let's say I throw myself into it with absolute dedication. The fact is, I am a visitor to that cushion and to the rising and falling of the abdomen. No matter how dedicated I am, I cannot live there. But satipatthana is meant to be someplace where we live. So it has to be more than a meditation technique. There's more to it than that.

Basically, satipatthana is about cultivating a particular relationship to experience—all experience, any experience—in which the nature of the experience itself does not really matter. What matters is the quality of our presence to the experience.

And this relationship requires that the practitioner develop three qualities: ardency, clear understanding, and mindfulness. "Here a practitioner, surrendering longing and sorrow for the world, lives tracking body as body—ardent, clearly understanding, and mindful."

None of these words are accidental. These discourses are very tightly composed, and if the Buddha is using a specific word, he's using it for a purpose. So let's examine these three qualities: ardency, clear understanding, and mindfulness.

The first, ardency, is atapa in Pali, derived from the verb tapati, meaning "to burn." So atapa literally means heat, referring to the passion, commitment, determination, and effort required for this practice. This naturally brings us to the question of right effort, one of the factors in the Eightfold Path.

Now, again, satipatthana is something meant to be lived—something meant to become our normal, habitual dwelling place. If that's the case, then this passion, commitment, determination, and effort cannot mean strain. If we are pushing and straining, at some point we will collapse. We simply cannot maintain it. Then perhaps we pick ourselves up and push again, only to collapse once more. This creates an on-again, off-again relationship to the practice, which doesn't work.

Effort, or vayama, is the usual term—though I don't think there's any exact equivalent in English. Effort is

reasonably close. Vayama represents the active or doing aspect of the practice: what one does, the project, the whole sense of something to work at.

In the Eightfold Path, when the Buddha talks about meditation practice, he mentions right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Concentration is not active—it's peaceful, still, calm, receptive. At the other end you have effort, which is the active part. Mindfulness sits in the middle as the balancing factor. So effort represents the active aspect of the practice.

Sometimes instead of vayama, the Buddha uses virya. Both come from the same root: vir. Words from this root indicate strength, commitment, determination, perseverance, and courage. In yoga, for example, you have virasana—vira asana—the posture sometimes translated as "the posture of the hero." A vira is a strong person, a hero. When Sayadaw U Pandita talks about effort, he calls it "heroic effort" because he's emphasizing that root.

If you examine these factors, you'll notice something important about mindfulness: we can have too little mindfulness, but we cannot have too much mindfulness—it's impossible. With effort, however, we can have too little effort or too much effort. So effort behaves quite differently from mindfulness.

When the Buddha talks about right effort, he compares it to music, creating a sense of harmony. The classic story is his encounter with Venerable Sona. Sona was an aristocratic young man who got religion, ordained, and became a bhikkhu. In his lay life, he was an accomplished musician who played the vina, a stringed instrument.

Sona was one of those eager young men who wanted to race to full enlightenment as quickly as possible, and he habitually made way too much effort in his practice. Apparently, the breaking point for his fellow bhikkhus came when they noticed blood on his walking track. They brought in the Buddha, who spoke to him.

When the Buddha approached him, Sona was actually getting disheartened and thinking of quitting. Despite putting in incredible effort, he wasn't making any real progress and was becoming very discouraged—it was all too hard.

So the Buddha spoke to him about his practice of music when he was a layman. The Buddha asked him, "When the strings of your vina were too tight, was it well-tuned and easy to play?"

Sona naturally replied, "No."

"When the strings were too loose, was your vina well-tuned and easy to play?"

"No."

"When its strings were neither too tight nor too loose, but adjusted to a balanced pitch, was your vina well-tuned and easy to play?"

Yes.

So effort is like tuning the strings of an instrument. And what you're looking for is a balanced pitch. The Buddha goes on to say, "So too, Sona, if effort is too forceful, this leads to agitation. And if effort is too weak, this leads to stagnancy. Therefore, Sona, resolve on a serenity of effort. Attain balance of the faculties there. Take up the meditation theme."

I love this expression, "serenity of effort." We wouldn't normally think of combining those two qualities. But the Buddha is saying that's precisely what we need, because we need the balanced pitch—the sound has got to be just right. Not too much of this, not too much of that. So establish a balanced attitude and then follow the theme of the music.

The theme, of course, varies depending on the conditions. The music that we're playing when we do the practice changes from day to day, hour to hour. But whatever tune is being played, effort or ardency represents the tuning of the instrument. If the tuning is just right, then the music can be played harmoniously and without strain.

So effort is crucial, and one way of learning to discern when we're making right effort is basically through sustainability. What can I sustain throughout a day? What relationship to experience can I sustain throughout an entire day?

On a few days we've been doing exercises in the morning where we're looking very closely at the elemental quality of the experience—sensation, breathing, and so on. Could I maintain that all day long? No. At least I couldn't. I could do it when the mind is really clear and sharp.

Now in my case, my biorhythms are such that I'm very slow to wake up in the morning and my energy peaks mid-afternoon going into early evening. This is why if I'm doing a stretch in the morning exercises and it's lasting a long time, just check and see if I am in fact awake. Because sometimes I just fall asleep during them.

So when I'm going to do the detail exercises, I'm much more likely to do it in the period mid-afternoon to mid-evening because I'm awake then. But in the morning basically my meditation consists of staying upright without falling asleep. I find this quite a challenge.

So it varies in any given day from hour to hour simply based on biorhythms. And then there's how long into the retreat it is. Well, the effort that I make at the beginning of the retreat is very different from the effort that I'm making towards the end. It changes. It becomes more refined. Overall, the mind becomes more refined, so the nature of the project necessarily changes.

And then there's the movement of the moods and emotions, and then there's whether or not the body is sore and how it's sore, and then there's all these other factors. So it keeps changing and the way that I relate to the practice has to keep adapting. It's not making the same amount of effort all the way through.

In fact, one of the reasons why "effort" is a poor translation is that viriya or vāyāma have both a subjective and an objective side to them. Objectively, it's energy. Now sometimes the mind has a lot of energy, and sometimes it does not. And that's just an objective fact.

If the mind has this much energy, and I'm practicing with this much effort, this is a serious problem. I'm just going to tie myself up in knots. On the other hand, if the mind's got this much energy and I'm practicing with this much effort, equally, I've got a problem. Stagnation.

So, finding the balance. And I'm not in control of the amount of energy. There are some things I can do to improve it, but in any given moment, it is what it is.

Subjectively, this factor of samma-vāyāma is what we call effort. Now that's subjective. Regardless of the conditions, what's my relationship to it? And for me, effort is essentially choice. It's a choice made now to be aware of this. And it's a simple binary.

I either make the choice now to be aware of this, or I don't. And it's very simple. But the problem with it is that I have to make the choice now. And then I have to make it now. And then I have to make it now. And then I have to make it now. This is where it becomes difficult. I can't make the choice at the beginning of the sitting and think that that will somehow sustain me throughout. It won't. So right effort is a very interesting one.

Now to ardency. There we have mindfulness. We're changing the Buddha's order a bit. He says ardency, clear understanding and mindfulness. But I'm looking at ardency, mindfulness and clear understanding.

Mindfulness—*sati*—is at the center of this practice. As we've already talked about, it's essentially remembering awareness. It has two flavors: remembering I am already aware, and remembering to be aware of this.

We can see these flavors in our relationship to distraction. Sometimes when we emerge from distraction, we come out of it with the realization: "Oh, I'm distracted. I'm thinking, for example." This is remembering I am already aware—in brackets, of this distraction. This flavor of mindfulness is particularly relevant in everyday activity. Mindfulness remembers: right now I'm seeing, right now I'm thinking, right now I'm hearing, I'm moving, I'm touching, I'm reaching, I'm happy, I'm sad, and so on. Something is happening right now, and this flavor of mindfulness is remembering, "Ah, this is happening." Of course it doesn't matter what's happening—it could be anything.

You notice that sometimes when we emerge from distraction, at the very moment we realize we're distracted, the distraction itself vanishes and awareness goes immediately and spontaneously—bang—back to the meditation object. Has that ever happened? This is that second flavor: remembering to be aware of this, my meditation object. This is the flavor we find particularly when we do formal meditation practice. We're training ourselves to remember this.

If I'm sitting and my meditation object is the whole body, or it might be the breathing, or body sensation—whatever—I'm training myself to remember this particular experience. These are the two flavors of mindfulness.

To return to that basic principle we've already discussed: fundamentally what's important is the tracking, the remembering—not what we remember. That's of secondary significance. The practice is reminding ourselves of our awareness, reminding ourselves I am already aware, reminding ourselves to be aware of this, not to forget this meditation object.

As practitioners, we face practical questions: What should I be mindful of? And how should I be mindful of it? These are craft decisions—the decisions we make as we learn a craft, and through these decisions we become better at the craft. It's like a carpenter reaching for the right tool to do this particular job.

In that action there are at least two aspects. First, the awareness of reaching for the tool, the touch of it, the awareness of using it. Here the quality of awareness itself is central, and mindfulness serves the purpose of clarifying and stabilizing the mind, making that awareness clear and continuous—the awareness of the activity itself, using the tool.

Then there's the choice of what tool to reach for in this particular set of circumstances. Which tool will fit this particular job, and how to use this particular tool? This is what should I be mindful of, and how should I be mindful in this particular set of circumstances.

There are different techniques we can use, and each morning we're experimenting with a different one. It's not that there's one right technique. It's not that we're going through a curriculum where once you tick all the boxes, that's it. We're simply playing around with different possibilities to get a sense of what's available. Because each of us, in the course of a lifetime, will face every conceivable experience being thrown at us.

So how do we work with it?

This brings us to clear understanding—*sampajañña*. This is all about the craft, about learning the craft and the wisdom that comes from the craft. The Pali term *sampajañña* is based on the root *ñā*, to understand or to know. Another root based on that same foundation is *paññā*, wisdom. *Sampajañña* is a kind of ground-level wisdom, a practical, ground-level wisdom. And it's associated with the recursiveness of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is more than simple awareness. It entails awareness of my awareness. It's not simply that I'm aware—I know that I'm aware. I know what I'm aware of. So mindfulness is found in that recursiveness. *S ampajañña*, clear understanding, monitors and watches over the flow of experience.

We've been talking about the craft of meditation. This always involves what the Buddha calls *yoniso manasikāra*, which can be translated as appropriate attention. Sometimes you see it translated as

methodical attention, or wise reflection. There are two different aspects of *manasikāra*. One is conceptual, which involves reflection—the thinking about. For example, the kind of *yoniso manasikāra* that you would apply in a dharma talk. You're paying attention to the talk; it's conceptual. You're trying to understand it. And for the Buddha, this appropriate attention includes asking the right questions. It's an active engagement.

But then you have appropriate attention in a situation which is not conceptual, such as the meditation practice. This is all about the craft of meditation—how we construct our attention.

Sometimes it's appropriate to focus in very closely on a meditation object. Sometimes it's appropriate to step back from it. Sometimes it's appropriate to be very active, to go towards the experience, to engage it. Sometimes it's appropriate to step back and let the experience come to us. Sometimes it's appropriate to focus in on a very small object. Sometimes it's appropriate to open out and make the object very big, even bigger than the body. Sometimes it's appropriate to make more effort. Sometimes it's appropriate to make less effort. Sometimes it's appropriate to be still—standing, sitting, lying down. Sometimes it's appropriate to move. Sometimes it's appropriate to note pain and not try to avoid it. Sometimes it's appropriate to note something pleasant, to ease and soothe the *citta*.

There are all sorts of decisions that need to be made and all sorts of possibilities. This is all about learning a skill, and it's clear understanding that enables us to do this—this monitoring of the experience, what it does, how it behaves over time.

We're learning a craft, and it's a craft that is learned through trial and error. That's the only way to do it. In the beginning, what predominates is the error. This is completely normal. Mistakes and experiments play a really important role.

When we come to meditation practice, when we begin, what's our condition? Well, according to the Buddha, the fundamental condition of the human mind is one of delusion. And delusion has two aspects: ignorance—don't know—and a more positive state of misinformation.

I think I know, but I'm wrong.

So this is delusion, and this is the normal human condition—the package that we bring with us when we start a meditation practice. Looking back on my own experience, I see it very clearly, but as a teacher I really get to see it. It's astonishing how we come to a meditation practice with a whole number of assumptions about what it is and what's supposed to happen.

People turn up having never done a meditation retreat in their lives. They've either never meditated before or hardly ever meditated, and they walk into this retreat. Within one or two days they're really upset because what's supposed to happen isn't happening.

What? How on earth do you know what's supposed to happen?

"Well I do. I'm supposed to be calm and I'm not supposed to be thinking. My mind should be a blank."

What? It's astonishing—the absolute determination that even beginners have to cling ferociously to a fixed view and opinion of what their experience should be, when a moment's reflection reveals that the data upon which this judgment is based is non-existent, necessarily non-existent.

One time, a particular meditator was doing a retreat with John Hale, my old friend and teacher, and he was complaining to John in the interview: "I'm just not making any progress, I'm not making any progress."

John's response was to ask the question: "How would you know?"

And it was not a rhetorical question.

So when we start, we don't know what we're doing—quite literally—and therefore we make mistakes, obviously. And mistakes are really valuable. That's how we learn. If we didn't make them, we could not learn. We don't learn and then do things. We learn by doing things.

So we start doing it and fall over ourselves again and again and again, and we learn if we are paying attention to the whole process. And this is where the clear understanding comes in. I bump into a wall. Okay, that's not the right direction. I'll try another direction. I bump into something there. Okay, I've got to be more careful in the way that I steer.

Or I like to look at it as we're on the path—it's supposed to be the right path—and I'm proceeding along this path. On either side of this path there's a very steep ditch, and every now and again I find myself lying in the middle of it, staring up at the sky, or alternatively face down in the mud. At this point I know that I've left the path. And this is useful information. This is data which can be employed for useful purposes.

So this is the learning process. Nothing is ever wasted, and this is all part of clear understanding.

We monitor our own experience, both ourselves individually, but also in relationship to the tradition—what we read, the dharma talks, the discussions with teachers and with fellow meditators, especially more experienced meditators. We get a sense: this person might—well, this person definitely knows what they're doing.

So we apply our intelligence to the process. You could say that mindfulness, *sati*, is essentially presence. *Sa mpajanya* is intelligence. So this whole process, this whole practice, we could sum up as the practice of intelligent presence: to be present, but to do it intelligently.

So we don't simply blindly obey orders. We monitor what's going on, we check, we ask questions. We look for the patterns, and in this way we learn a craft.

So looking at our sentence that we're examining here: "A practitioner, surrendering longing and sorrow for the world, lives tracking body as body, mind as mind—ardent, clearly understanding and mindful."

Surrendering longing and sorrow for the world. We'll just briefly go through the rest of this. First, this refers to the loss of emotional balance. The term translated as "longing" is *abidja*, which indicates a leaning out towards something. And the shadow of longing is sorrow. If you have one, you have the other. If we want, then we don't want.

If I want this, I don't want that. If I'm happy when this occurs, I'm sad when that occurs. So longing and sorrow naturally pair off. This pairing is essentially shorthand for all the emotional entanglements we become lost in.

The Pali word is *abhijjhā*—A-B-H-I-J-J-H-Ā. The word for sorrow is *domanassa*—D-O-M-A-N-A-S-S-A—which generally means any kind of non-physical pain. In normal contexts it has a broader meaning, but here it's specifically paired with *abhijjhā*. The prefix *abhi* is not a negation, but rather a heightening, as in *abhidha mma*.

Think about the work we do on posture. When the body and mind are perfectly balanced, we feel completely at ease. If the body is in right posture and the mind is in right posture, we simply feel completely present. Then something happens—something disturbs us and we lose that balance, and we lean out. It might be physical.

Have you noticed that sometimes when you're sitting and caught up in thinking, when you come out of it you notice that the body has moved? With me, I'll be sitting and fall into thought, and when I emerge, I find myself leaning forward like this. All the energy has gone up into the head. There's a loss of balance in the body itself, which reflects the loss of balance within the mind. The body leans out.

Or we lose balance in the mind. The mind is present, and then suddenly it slides out. Sometime later we wake up to find ourselves either in the past or the future. Again, it's this same loss of balance—a falling over.

This is longing and sorrow for the world. The practitioner is asked to surrender longing and sorrow for the world. This is an ongoing process. It's not that first we surrender longing and sorrow for the world and then we do the practice, although some early translations gave that impression because of the various possibilities of translating that particular construction.

In early translations you see it rendered as "having surrendered longing and sorrow for the world," which gives the impression that first you drop the longing and sorrow, and then you start the meditation practice. It's a phenomenally awful translation. It just makes you stop. When I read it, I think, "Oh, forget about it." I can't even start—the bar is set so impossibly high that no one could meet it. You have to do it before you start. It's just poison. But it's grammatically valid to translate it as "surrendering longing and sorrow for the world."

There's a similar instruction with some practices—an instruction to "put aside worries and concerns," putting aside those things, then establish your awareness on an object. It could well be the same

construction. The instruction is practical, giving you directions for what to do when you sit down to practice meditation.

Putting aside is acceptable—it's when it says "having put aside" that creates problems. You have to successfully put it aside before you can start. But "putting aside" works because you do it over and over. It's part of the process.

Certainly what I'm emphasizing here is that the surrendering of longing and sorrow is part of the ongoing process itself.

The key point is that the surrendering of longing and sorrow is not a preliminary activity before we begin the real practice—it's part of the whole process. It's like what you were saying with that expression: it tells you what to do. What should I look for? Longing and sorrow for the world. And when I get caught up in it, what should I do? I should let go of it. Let go, let go, let go, let go, let go. That's sort of the ultimate result of the practice.

And you can also use this as a measure of progress: Am I making headway? Well, to what extent am I surrendering longing and sorrow for the world? Again, it's an ongoing process.

This text wasn't written exclusively for monks and nuns, but rather for the bhikkhu. Bhikkhu in the sutta context means any meditator, any committed practitioner. We know that in the Buddha's time there were lay practitioners of satipaṭṭhāna, including very accomplished ones, because they get mentioned by name. There was a flourishing lay meditation culture at that time. In one of those lists—there are lists of excellent practitioners, excellent male lay practitioners, excellent female lay practitioners—I've looked for my name but couldn't find it. Must be an inadequacy of the translation.

So, longing and sorrow for the world... the practitioner lives tracking body as body, mind as mind. Now this tracking body as body, mind as mind—again it's the relationship. It's the Buddha hammering this direct relationship: body is just body, this sensation is just this sensation, that's it. This thought is just a thought. That's it. This emotion is just the emotion. End of story.

So we're facing it directly, but recognizing it's just what it is, not adding anything extra. And when I do add something extra, because I have longing and sorrow for the world, then it comes back to: it's just longing, it's just sorrow. That's it. That's all it is. So again, it's hammering this direct relationship with the experience—a relationship which becomes one of complete simplicity. We'll talk about that later on.

In conclusion, it's all about mindfulness. Mindfulness is memory. The opposite of memory is forgetting. When we practice, we find that we forget again and again. We forget and we wake up in our stories, we wake up in longing and sorrow for the world. This happens again and again and again, and it's natural that this happens. It's our habit to forget. This is a habit we've been working on for decades, so we're going to forget many times. This does not matter. What matters is the remembering. That is what matters.

For example, as meditators we often have this attitude: I'm meditating away, I fall into some kind of distraction, and sometime later—could be a nanosecond, a second, a minute, an hour, a day, a week, a month, whatever—I suddenly remember, "Oh, I'm supposed to be meditating." And at that point, often what we will do is start to flog ourselves: "Oh, dammit, forgot again. This is ridiculous. I've been doing this for years. I still fall into the same bloody habit. Oh, this is hard. This is way too hard. I think I should take a break. I think I should give up the whole bloody thing. It's just hopeless." Five minutes later: "Well, I'd better get back to the meditation."

Now, let's say I've had this amount of time that I forgot. Then suddenly I remember, "Oh, I'm distracted." This period, I can't do anything about it. Then I remember, "Oh, I'm distracted." And then: blah, blah, blah, blame, blame, blame, complain, complain, complain. There's another gap here, and this one is all my own loving work. It's completely unnecessary.

When I wake up, when I know, "Oh, I'm distracted," that is mindfulness. Sometimes people talk about...

And Hogan's son instantly said, "But that's not Zen."

Now Zen people never do that. They never ask what happened next. Because in Zen, it's all about now, now, now, now. There is no next.

So it was interesting to me to see the difference in emphasis. In Soto Zen, there's this very strong emphasis on the immediacy of this moment. In Theravada practice, there's more emphasis on tracking the flow of experience over time. But I think both are necessary.

If you're only in the immediacy of this moment, you don't learn much about how your mind works. You don't start to see the patterns. You don't develop that wisdom that comes from understanding the mechanics of your own experience.

But if you're only tracking over time, then you miss the intimacy of direct experience. You become too much in your head, too analytical.

So we need both. We need the immediacy of mindfulness in this moment, and we need the broader understanding that comes from sampajanya, from monitoring how things unfold over time.

This is why when I'm distracted and I suddenly know I'm distracted, that's already mindfulness. I don't need to get back anywhere. But then I might also step back and ask: How did that happen? What led to that? What's the pattern here?

Both perspectives are valid. Both are part of the complete practice. The immediacy gives you the direct taste of awareness. The broader view gives you wisdom about how your mind operates.

And this is really important to understand, because otherwise we can get into this game of constantly trying to get back to something, as if mindfulness is somewhere else. But mindfulness is right here, in the

knowing of whatever is happening now.

And at this point, Hogan could no longer control himself. He said, "No next. Just this!" It was like—biff! It would be interesting to watch a conversation between him and Upandita.

That response is very, very Zen. But Upandita's question is very, very Theravada. Theravada emphasizes development over time, how things unfold over time. In Zen, they don't give a damn about how things develop over time. They just want bang, right now. So it's like two sides of the coin.

And I think you need both. One of the weaknesses of Zen, for example—in Theravada, we really emphasize process over time, and we also really emphasize ethics. Because to see how ethics works involves process over time. I did this, and this is the result. It's not a good idea. In Zen it's all "just this, just this, just this," and they're notoriously weak on ethics. They got into a lot of trouble in America, and I think there's a connection between the two.

But for me, you do need both of these views. Sometimes what I'm saying belongs to this broader view of process over time, taking this wider perspective. And sometimes it's "just this, just this." This emerging out of distraction, I think, is a classic "just this" part of the practice—the opportunity to actually apply that, where it's very fruitful to apply that.

"Is that where we find our habits?" someone asked.

Well, that's where we discover what they are and what they do, what the effects are, how they shape our life. Then the immediacy is in the moment that the habitual tendency arises—bang, gotcha. Then I can do something about it. But that understanding will come within that broader context. Otherwise, I don't know the significance of it. I don't even know what to look for. I haven't trained myself to catch it because I don't know that it's significant. But because I've learned over time that it is significant, then I'm alert to it.

So that waking up moment, coming back—that's the moment that's really crucial because I'm coming back from something that maybe I habitually do. And that coming back is the arising of mindfulness. Now, mindfulness is unattached. It's not mine. It simply arises through causes and conditions. If I'm cultivating it, I'm cultivating the propensity for it to arise. So when it arises, this is a matter of celebration. To know that I'm distracted is a matter of celebration, because it means that my training in mindfulness is showing fruit.

"Is it possible that that beating up thing—oh bad me, bad me—that that's just yet another habit?"

Oh yeah, definitely. Some individuals are more inclined to it than others, and some cultures are more inclined to it than others.

"As a culture, do you think there is a general obstacle to practice because of our attitude to going somewhere—like the sense of achieving or just journeying through life?"

I think our culture is very goal-oriented, but that can manifest across many different aspects of society, for different individuals.

"Do you think, as a general cultural attitude, that's a difficult obstacle?"

I think preoccupation with goals is a problem. The Buddha emphasizes direction rather than goal. It's part of the whole idea about path. Is it going in the right direction or the wrong direction?

So for him, if I'm going in the right direction, I don't have to worry about the goal. The important thing is to set the direction.

But I don't know that our culture is any more goal-oriented than others. When I teach in Malaysia every year to Chinese people, they're pretty goal-oriented too. But they have a much easier time with meditation practice than we do.

Why? It's a very good question. I do have a hypothesis.

My hypothesis is that when the typical person in our culture looks inside themselves, they feel that at the very bottom of it all, I am fundamentally alone. And I think in Chinese culture in Malaysia, when they look inside themselves, they know fundamentally I am not alone. And I think that makes a huge difference.

They have a stronger sense of ancestorship and continuation. The whole family network and community network that hangs off that is so much stronger and more palpable.

The first time I realized this was when I was teaching a retreat with forty or fifty people, and at least a third of them were related to each other. They were actually related to each other, not just sharing the same last name. They come in family groups. There's this old woman sitting up the back with a middle-aged woman and a slightly younger woman beside her. Over there there's a husband and two daughters. In the meditation hall, this family networking is something you would never see in an Australian hall. You would never expect to see it, but there it's just routine.

How would that make meditation easier? The sense of not being alone eases the citta. Overall, they find concentration a lot easier than we do. They develop concentration much faster.

Anyway, we're speculating on psychology. We've wandered off the point, so maybe we should call it a night. Thank you very much.

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