Awareing

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 1:15:02

Over the days we've been looking at different aspects of the practice, basically examining different possible meditation objects. As we mentioned, one thing that characterizes satipatthana is that anything at all can be a meditation object. This is one of its characteristics that makes it impossible to really pin down.

Today and tomorrow we're going to approach it from a different angle. Instead of being concerned about the meditation object, we're going to look at the process of being aware of the meditation object. Remember we talked about this—we're always working with this dyad: there's awareness and the object of awareness, or we could say there is the process of awaring and there's what we are aware of.

Today we're going to have a look at the awaring.

We're going to do three little exercises and have a discussion in between them.

Let's start with the first one. If you get into your meditation posture and from there, settle awareness in the body. I'm going to mention breathing as the meditation object in these exercises, but I'm using breathing not because you're supposed to be using breathing, but as the generic meditation object. So if you have something else, just use that something else and translate in your mind. When I talk about breathing, I'm talking about whatever your meditation object is. But otherwise, just use the breathing if that's not a problem for you.

So, settle awareness in the body and begin to focus on the movements within the body that indicate breathing. Track the movements of your breathing. As you track the breathing, are you being distracted? And if so, how?

Rather than ask you what happened, I'd just like to make a comment. Or ask you, actually, would you regard this exercise as being pretty much kindergarten playtime—bleeding basic? Like, follow your meditation object. Are you being distracted?

I think it depends on what you make of it. What did you make of it?

"I was really interested to see that my breathing had changed from before. That was fascinating. And then really watching if distraction came in. I'd really been interested to see if it would."

"And did it?"

"No. There were things on the periphery but they didn't distract me. So it was really interesting to see like a challenge. So I enjoyed that."

Good. Anyone else?

"I noticed that after I was being distracted as usual by thoughts, but after you asked were we being distracted, the thoughts didn't actually—after that they didn't take my attention away. There were still thoughts but I was able to keep them within the awareness of the breathing and the thoughts together."

I mean, I managed to disturb your distraction. I distracted you from your distraction. It's a pity that from time to time I don't have that little reminder.

"I thought your question was interesting, Patrick, because in a sense it is the basic thing. To me that's the thing with meditation—in a way it's always the same thing but then it's always different too. And I found it very interesting to have the breathing and to be kind of noticing the distraction within the breathing, within the awareness of the breathing."

So the view has changed over the years.

"It's really weird. This time when you went, 'I'm distracted,' my mind went, 'Oh, okay then.' And it took it like a command. All right, then off we go. I don't think that's quite what you meant. That's what it took."

That's what the responses are getting at. On the one hand, this is going back to beginnings—really, really basic. But the view has changed as we practice. You notice that what we were doing there was following a meditation object and then following the mind that knows the meditation object. So there's the meditation object and it's doing certain things, but I'm also noticing the state of the mind that's doing the meditation. Is it distracted?

Is it not distracted? If it's distracted, how is it distracted?

So we've got two things. We have the object of awareness, we have the mind that is doing the awareing, and we're actually aware of both. Now this is very ordinary, but at the beginning it comes as a shock to the new meditator.

People often when they start a meditation practice report being shocked to discover how much they think. In fact, some meditators when they do their first retreat are absolutely convinced after several days that this meditation is making them think ten times more than they ever have before. They're absolutely convinced of it. Whereas the most likely explanation is they're just ten times more sensitive to the thinking which is already going on.

So as we do this practice, the mind becomes more sensitive and it notices more. It notices more about the meditation object, but it also notices more about itself, the mind which is doing the awareing.

My experience also is, if there's something particular I want to focus on, and I'm tested—like, I'm tested by this and this and this—are you really wanting to do this? So you uncover the relationship. It jumps out to be recognized.

So what we're interested in this morning is exploring the mind that is doing the awareing and checking that out.

Shall we have another exercise? We'll take it one step further. Again, establishing your posture and settling awareness in the body.

Begin to focus on the movements within the body that indicate breathing. Track the movements of your breathing. How is your breathing? Is it gross or subtle? Are the movements of the breathing high or low? Do they stay the same or are they changing? Are the movements long or short? Study the details of these movements.

How is the mind that is tracking the breathing? Can it follow the breathing without difficulty, or is it easily distracted? Is it interested or bored? Is it peaceful or agitated? Is it alert or dull? What is the state of mind that's tracking the breathing?

So do you see what we're doing in that one? Track the meditation object and at the same time track the mind, the condition of the mind that's tracking the meditation object. Could you do that? Is that possible?

"Yeah, no problem. I thought that breathing sort of fell into the background a little bit when I did that."

So there's a foreground-background. It's not that they're both equally there. It's just that you foreground one, but there's others in the background. Then you can foreground the other one, and the first one's in the background. But they're both there?

"Yeah, yeah. It was a subtle shift, shifting back, but it was still there. It sort of broadened out to sort of take in more of the mind and what it was doing."

So it involved a broadening out of the field, not being focused in.

"My mind is like lint. After a while the mind is lint with the breath, and then there's sort of that awareness watching it."

"The breathing initially is different to that later on. That's what I noted, that at first it's quite sort of labored almost. And then I started to go to something what I would describe as pranayama. It's like the three-step breath and then roll out. That happens to me frequently. I get that quite often. And then after that, there is a phase where the breath becomes really deep. And that's when the mind is lost at peace, becomes very quiet."

So before then, when the breath is labored, what's the mind like?

The breath is labored, the mind is labored. But then the minute that sweeping rhythm takes over, the breath comes together somehow and everything settles.

When the breath is labored, the mind is laboring. Indeed. So you have the object, the mind that knows the

object, and also the relationship between them—a connection, things happening between them.

Doing this practice involves an opening out, not being tightly focused on the object. I'm opening it out so I'm getting a sense of more around the object. The body served well as the object initially, but since the body isn't my primary object at the moment, I shifted to feeling, which is what I'm working with. Then I found that feeling is a bit more subtle than the body. It was too much to have two really subtle objects—the mind is subtle and the feeling is subtle—going at the same time. That combination just slid out and dissipated into distractions.

So I came back to the body as the grounding object, and then I could keep the object and that awareness together. But not if it was a more subtle object.

Many years ago, John Hale tried to explain to me the nature of the first insight knowledge, the first vipassana ñana. He explained it through this little thought experiment.

Imagine, he said, this practice is like you're in a room that looks out over a garden through a big picture window, and you're looking through the window at the garden. Your teacher is beside you, urging you on. The teacher says, "Look out there and tell me what you see."

"Well, I see the garden."

The teacher is not satisfied. "Look more closely. What do you see?"

"Oh, I see a rose garden."

"Look more closely. What do you see?"

"I see a bed of roses."

"Look more closely. What do you see?"

"I see a single rose bush."

"Look more closely. What do you see?"

"I see a single rose."

"Look more closely. What do you see?"

"I see a rose petal."

"Look more closely. What do you see?"

"I see a dewdrop on the rose petal."

"Look more closely. What do you see?"

"I see the window."

What we're working on now is learning to recognize the window. And the window can be the hardest to see because it's the most obvious. The window is, of course, awareness itself. Awareness is the medium through which we look out at the world. It's so obvious that it's easy to miss, but it's an essential aspect of the whole thing.

If the window is dirty, the view changes. If the window is wet, the view changes. If the window is colored, the view changes. If the window is clear, it seems to disappear.

But it's still there. And as the practice develops, we begin to notice the window and we can even pay attention to it.

This is bound up with what we discussed when we started the retreat—how the two basic movements in the Mahasi approach are noting and noticing. When I note something, I am deliberately aware of it. I aim my awareness, choosing to be aware of this particular thing. For example, we talk about the grounding object or the primary object. I deliberately aim my awareness and make that particular experience the center of my field of awareness, bringing it to the foreground while everything else goes to the background.

This is the foreground-background structure we've been exploring. What I'm noting, the point of interest, becomes the foreground. The background is still there, but the interest lies in the foreground. So I am noting the grounding object or primary object, and I am noticing everything else.

Another way of looking at it: we do the noting—noting is active, it's what we do in meditation practice. We don't do the noticing—noticing is receptive, we receive what's happening. It's the difference between sending awareness out to the meditation object versus allowing the meditation object to come to us. These are the two basic movements, though there are different combinations and balances between them.

Usually when people start meditation practice, what's emphasized is the noting: ground yourself on this, do it. The quality of effort and determination is quite strong. But as the practice develops, the noticing also becomes stronger because the mind becomes more sensitive and receptive.

Some approaches to meditation emphasize the noticing, the receptivity. Some approaches actually use that as their grounding object from the very beginning—practices like Dzogchen, Mahamudra in the Mahayana, Shikantaza in Zen, open awareness as discussed in Theravada.

It's interesting how fashions change. When I first went to Malaysia some years ago, it was all Mahasi, Mahasi, Mahasi. Every student I interviewed came from a Mahasi background. Over the past few years, it's all open awareness, open awareness, open awareness. The Mahasi Method is just so twentieth century—really, why would you bother? Presumably one day the fashion will change again.

The teacher having a big influence in Malaysia is Ajahn Dtjanissaro. At Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary,

the abbot Bhante Aggacitta and his second-in-command Bhante Kumara are both now practicing Ajahn Dtjanissaro's open awareness style, so it's particularly prominent there.

Noting makes the mind stronger and sharper. You'll notice those exercises we did early on were all about precision aim—send your awareness to precisely this, not that, but this. Noticing makes the mind more sensitive.

Noting is closely linked to effort, obviously. Noticing, I think, is closely linked to vedanā, to feeling tone. It's about cultivating sensitivity. Remember when we talked about vedanā in terms of phassa, contact, which refers to the activity of the six senses? Each sense for the Buddha is a particular kind of sensitivity. Mind—the word the Buddha uses is mano, which is cognate with our English word "mind"—mano is a sensitivity. The noticing is all about cultivating that sensitivity, making it more receptive, more sensitive.

So, as the practice develops, we start to work on – well, rather, we have more options available to us. Do I emphasize the active, or do I emphasize the receptive? Or do I have a mixture between them? And when do I move from one to the other?

The noting emphasizes the object of awareness. The noticing emphasizes the mind that's doing the noting. And of course, the object might be the mind. So I'm noting a mind state, but there's a mind that's doing that. And I could be noticing that mind. Is this making sense?

This is the kind of arena within which we play, and we can play different styles depending on circumstances. But I think that one aspect of this is, over time, becoming more sensitive to the mind which is doing the practice. This plays an increasingly important role.

Last night when I was talking about how we can approach the practice simply as a set exercise where I'm just obeying orders, I might be so fixated on the noting that I completely cut off from the mind that's doing the noting. This does happen. It's possible, for example, if we have an aversive mind – and I won't name any names, I won't confess to this – but if we have an aversive mind and we're diligently noting, we can use the meditation as a way of burying the aversive mind.

I don't know if you have, but I've met long-term meditators who are quite dedicated and quite skillful. And they're the kind of people that I would not like to meet alone on the street on a dark night, because I would not like to be there when the lid blows off. I just get this sense, it's like their meditation practice is keeping the lid firmly closed. Pressure cooker. Some people can do it because they have good concentration power. But sooner or later that lid's going to come off, and I would much rather not be around when it comes up. But if you've been around the traps long enough, you probably have met somebody like this.

Samadhi, concentration, has this effect. One image the Buddha uses is this: he says concentration is like a pool of water choked with water weeds. You have a big earthenware pot, and you put it on top of the water and it just floats there. But it starts to absorb the water. The more water it absorbs, the heavier it

gets. And the heavier it gets, the more it sinks. So you look into the pot – ah, the water is completely clear. But just outside the pot, it's a complete mess.

Samadhi suppresses the defilements, the kilesas. That's its job. That's what it does. And it's possible that if we're so focused on pounding away on the meditation object, that we can actually bury all the problems that brought us to the meditation in the first place. But sooner or later that pot is going to disappear and back it comes again.

So I think an important part of this whole thing – we'll be talking about it as becoming increasingly intimate – is moving towards the receptivity, the sensitivity, the noticing. It plays a very important role. And it's clearly obvious in daily activity, for example. That's one area where its role is so clear, because I'm not actively doing something there. I'm not doing a set meditation exercise.

*Question**: Do you have a note that you use to note them? Do you have to notice them? Like this morning, for example, I was coming out of meditation and walking, and I noted "knowing, knowing" as I was walking, which is sort of cognitive. You're using a cognitive strategy for a vedana experience. I noted that it was interesting because I was becoming cognitive about the feeling experience of knowing.

This is part of the inherent recursiveness of awareness – the awareness of the awareness. One of the ways in which it's spoken of is this metaphor of light. So the light illuminates everything, including itself, in a sense. It's just a question of where I look. Wherever I look, it's illuminated, including the light itself.

This approach—this direct awareness practice—is actually found throughout all the traditions, though in the West, some schools seem to have cornered the market in terms of marketing. Mahamudra and Dzogchen practitioners, when you read their literature, write as if they've invented something entirely new.

I often listen to John Dunne's talks—he's a guest teacher at Upaya Zen Center, which produces some truly fascinating content. Dunne is both a Buddhologist and academic in Buddhist studies, specializing in Tibetan Buddhism while maintaining his own practice within that tradition. He's deeply connected with cutting-edge neuroscience and contemplative research—the Mind & Life Institute, the Dalai Lama's scientific dialogues, all of that territory.

When he teaches meditation from the Tibetan Mahayana perspective, you'd think listening to him that the Tibetans invented everything—as if the Buddha knew nothing about these methods, but fortunately the Indian Mahayana philosophers started developing them centuries later, as if this understanding was completely unknown beforehand and as if nobody else has access to it. It's quite peculiar, really.

But in fact, I think this awareness runs through everything, because it's in a sense bleeding obvious—an underlying, essential truth that's not even particularly esoteric.

Shall we do one more exercise? We'll take this exploration one step further.

In this practice, you'll notice we're engaging in something two-fold: having a meditation object and noting something, while simultaneously cultivating sensitivity to the arena within which this takes place—and this arena is the mind that's doing the meditation. So we're going to take another step into that territory.

Construct your posture, then settle awareness in the body. Begin to focus on the movements within the body that indicate breathing. Track the movements of your breathing. Follow your breathing. Be interested in what is happening to your breathing. It is as if you are holding the movements of your breathing with your hand—holding it there so you can follow it.

Now relax your hold on your breathing so your hold is more gentle, less intense. Allow yourself to become sensitive to the broader field of awareness around your breathing. Become interested in the whole field of experience of being aware of breathing.

Don't do anything with the breathing, but just hold the mind steady. The breathing comes and goes. Be interested in this without clinging to it. The mind changes all the time—be interested in this without clinging to it. Awareness moves from one object to another. Be interested in these movements without trying to stop them.

Don't force anything. If the breathing slips out of view, let it go. Just notice that it slipped away and what replaced it. Things come and go. Let them. Just stay aware that things are coming and going.

If you get lost in thought, come back to breathing. When you feel settled and stabilized, relax your hold on your breathing and open up to the mind itself, letting the objects of awareness come and go.

How was that? What happened?

"Pleasant later."

"Just let the thoughts come and go and don't note them. Is that another type of meditation?"

That's the noticing—that's open awareness, that's the straight noticing.

For me, it's like setting up a posture. When I meditate, I set up a posture of the body, and then within that posture, I meditate.

With the mind, it's like setting up a posture of attention, and then if I simply hold that posture, I can let go of the specific object. Things are moving, but that posture of attention remains. It's like everything is just moving in and out of awareness and I'm simply with it. It's rather like establishing a posture of the mind.

"Would I get in trouble with a Mahasi teacher if I did that?"

"You'd definitely get into trouble. Well, not necessarily."

I stumbled into this at the Mahasi Centre with two different teachers. One time with Sayadaw Lakhna, I

was doing the practice, noting the primary object. I remember coming into an interview and saying, "My primary object has changed. It's now the entire universe. Is this okay?"

"Yes, it's okay."

The same thing happened, but it arose spontaneously. Later it shifted back to something more normal. The same thing occurred once when I was working with Upandita. I asked him the same question, because I knew he's fanatical about rising and falling. I said, "Well actually, the mind doesn't want to note rising and falling. It just wants to note the whole universe. Is that all right?"

He laughed and said, "If you're noting the whole elephant, why should you be worried about the details?" You know the image of the elephant.

My experience with all those teachers is that if it happens spontaneously, they don't care. If you direct it, if you change it intentionally, they don't like that, because they've got a certain agenda.

I think one of the strengths and weaknesses of the Mahasi method is that it has a very specific agenda and wants you to jump through very specific hoops for a very specific result. That gives it tremendous power that I think a lot of other approaches just don't have. But equally, that's its shadow, its weakness—that it only does that. There comes a time when that becomes too narrow a box and it's time to move out of the box. But to go through that kind of training is immensely valuable.

"My feeling is that this follows my experience. I started very much with noting, and it was a big struggle. It became a lot easier when the noticing came in, when I let the noticing arise."

Yes, that's on the open awareness end of the spectrum. There have been times when that sort of thing has arisen spontaneously. But today, doing it as a direct practice—sitting down with the intention to work with open awareness—I've never really practiced in that way. A couple of times when I found myself with teachers like that, I felt like I didn't know what to do. The biggest experience was incompetence—the lack of skillfulness was really obvious to me. It was very much a feeling of "okay, well, back to kindergarten."

"What about this morning? Were you incompetent during that last exercise?"

"I was feeling that last night. Yesterday kind of sent me off in this general direction, and I feel like I'm wallowing around in a big swamp with no clue what I'm doing or where I'm going. Back to kindergarten—A is for apple, B is for bat, C is for cat."

Kindergarten is very useful. She just wanted to move quickly through the alphabet.

"Is there a shadow side to too much noticing?"

Yes, both approaches have their shadows. Every technique has its disadvantages. Every technique has its strengths and its weaknesses. There's no such thing—as I said at the beginning of the retreat—as the one true technique.

What you find is that some people do better with noting than with noticing. Some people do better with noticing than with noting. It just suits their minds. At certain times it's better to notice rather than note. At certain other times it's better to note rather than notice.

This depends on circumstances. Again, this comes back to the skill of the meditator. You've got to work it out for yourself. What we've been doing this morning—is this relevant to you or not? If it's not, forget it. Don't bother with it. But if it's relevant, if it's interesting, if there's something there, then play with it. Explore it. See what's going on. What does it have to offer? What is the dark side?

The dark side of open awareness is exactly as you've been talking about—floundering. Don't know what to do. Sliding. Space-outs.

One student shared: "When you said take a posture of the mind, I had huge washes of indigo and green with visual hallucinations. Thoughts were just gliding over the top like on a sheet of ice, but they couldn't come into this incredible space. It was total bliss."

The variety of responses is always amazing. But you can't generalize from one guided meditation experience—it may never happen again. Minds are incredibly different.

Some minds cannot take the noting. They cannot do it. They can try for years and it just never works. They get tied up in knots. Nothing settles. But give them the universe as an object—completely present, right there—and they flourish. Other minds are the exact opposite.

Part of the whole process is getting to know how this mind works and adapting to it.

A student asked: "Do you think you could delude yourself into thinking you are practicing correctly with open awareness?"

Absolutely. I think that's definitely the shadow—that you can basically not be meditating and persuade yourself that you are.

Another student reflected: "My practice is basically that kind of open practice, but I doubt myself. I think I should be doing something else—this is just too busy. One teacher told me I was just craving non-existence and dismissed it."

One of the challenges of open awareness practice is that the experience can be so subtle that it's actually difficult to tell whether you're meditating. The experience is subtle and natural. When I'm really focusing on something and developing samadhi, there's a kind of artificiality to it—this is not normal. There's an obviousness to it. I know this is a meditation state. But with open awareness, the result is so natural that it can be hard to tell. There's so little doing in it that it can be difficult to discern.

What you want to do is check the state of mind. Is the mind clear and at ease? This is the sensitivity aspect. You learn, particularly with open awareness, to read the mind—to read the state of mind as it's

meditating.

Is the mind clear and at ease? If you're not really meditating, the mind will not be clear. The attention might be moving from one thing to another, but is there a continuity of awareness? Can you actually see the movements? Not that you wake up here, then wake up there, then wake up somewhere else.

Can you actually be aware of the movements? Is the mind clear as you do this, and is the heart at ease, peaceful, not disturbed, not caught up with longing and grief for the world?

So longing and grief for the world, longing and sorrow for the world. Is it falling into emotional entanglement, or is there a sense of stability, ease within the heart? And the window we're talking about—is that completely clear? And is there a continuity of awareness?

Then you tick those boxes and you realize, no, this is not normal deluded consciousness at all. This is quite different. It's subtle, subtly different, but it's definitely different.

What comes up for me is: And what next? And then what? It's like, here I am, and it seems like I've ticked all those boxes. And then what? Yeah, interesting question. And that's what I think is one of the interesting things about this style of practice—the "and then what."

Part of that is actually the perception of impermanence, the felt sense of no future. If I'm not meditating, if I'm in a normal, agitated, deluded state of mind, I know what's going to happen next. I've been here before. I know that soon I'm going to end this talk and head upstairs. I'm quite confident in that. But when I'm really clear about this right now, I really don't know it. I can imagine it, but I don't know it. I don't know what's coming next. And that's one of the flavors of the perception of impermanence.

When the Bodhisattva came to a dead end in his ascetic practices and realized this was a dead end and he had to change track, the question that he asked himself was: Why am I afraid of pleasure? And he resolved, "I will not be afraid of pleasure." An ascetic would ask that. I find that very interesting. I missed it for forty years or something.

The relationship to pleasure is really important. It gets you back to this visual bliss out, which happens to me when I'm doing open awareness.

"What, visual bliss out?"

Quite often. I remember being very confused and asking—I wasn't just doubting him, and I didn't really like his answer, but it kind of makes sense. His answer makes sense. His definition of meditating is really... it makes sense now. His explanation makes sense, because he says meditating is rather than really meditating. It's a bit circular.

For me, a touch too circular. So I thought, well, I'll just daydream. And if it's this easy, far out. Then I was driving home the very first time I did it, thinking, did I meditate? Like, what the hell? I was very confused,

but also very blissed out.

As I was driving home, anyone who needed to be let in ahead of me, I let them in. I was just acting like such a nice driver. I'm not a horrible driver, but I don't notice all the other vehicles. So I was thinking maybe I was meditating, and the only way to know is that the fruit of it is some kind of driving compassion—unless that's just the fruit of samadhi, because I do get that sort of "well, so what" feeling, you know?

It is very subtle.

And this is true of any meditation approach. The deeper you go, the more refined and subtle it becomes. And your appreciation of what's going on has to adjust accordingly. With open awareness, this can be trickiest to work out, but I do think the shadow of open awareness is the wallowing—people who just persuade themselves that they're meditating when they're actually quietly spacing out. It's the middle way—it's always the middle way.

But there's nothing wrong with pleasure. In fact, developing concentration, samadhi, is one of the factors, and the Buddha says the immediate cause for the arising of samadhi is pleasure.

Of course, the predominant lay meditation tradition in our culture comes out of the Burmese insight tradition. If you're doing a traditional insight meditation practice, then what will tend to become most apparent to the meditator is dukkha rather than sukha. As one teacher at Mahasi Centre explained to me very cheerfully, he said, "Samatha meditation is close to sukha. Vipassana meditation is close to dukkha." And I thought, "Damn it! I'm in the wrong place."

So there is an emphasis on the relationship to dukkha in insight meditation with a capital I, capital M. And sometimes that has resulted in a culture which is actually fearful of pleasure. "So don't go there. Or it's dangerous, don't cling, don't cling." Okay, fine, don't cling to pleasure. But equally, people can cling to their pain. People do cling to their pain, ferociously. It's not that there's any particular danger in clinging to pleasure. There's an equal danger in clinging to pain. So don't worry about the pleasure. Enjoy it. Use it.

"Can I make a comment? In 1982 I was meditating for Joseph Goldstein, who was very much coming from the Mahasi approach then. And I was incredibly restless. Just so restless I couldn't even sit still. And he said to me, 'Just let your mind do what it wants to do. Just let it be like that.' And he described open awareness. He said, 'Practice that.' And it was the best antidote to restlessness. So, you know, I think it's around... That was after he had written Insight Meditation, that classic book. I think he wrote it in 1979 or something. But that's coming from the Mahasi approach, and it's a strategy for..."

"You know what you said about the right effort? It just came to mind when you spoke about the right effort, in relation to this very disciplined approach with concentrating on the object and then also letting go. It's when you put the right effort—what is appropriate at the moment."

Yes. Absolutely. It's something to do with that. It's that sort of being aware and knowing what is right. And what's appropriate to the circumstances. And it's a constantly moving feast. It doesn't stay still. So it's a question of adapting. But it's also a question of meditating according to your particular kind of mind and finding a way that suits this mind.

"Back to the pleasure thing, you know, you were talking about vedanā the other night. But when you get to the second categorization of vedanā—so there's pleasant, unpleasant and neither—but then there's that ethical division of wholesome and unwholesome. So what we tend to forget is the wholesome pleasant feelings that are beneficial, useful and leading on. So it's all very well to remember the wholesome, unpleasant feeling, but we tend to imagine that somehow there's unwholesome, pleasant feeling and wholesome, unpleasant feeling. Well, that's not the way it is. There's any of the three—pleasant, unpleasant or neither—that can be wholesome or unwholesome, depending on the context and what the ethical result is."

So if you're having a pleasant feeling in your meditation, it's just as likely to be wholesome, especially if it encourages you to do more meditation and stay on the path and keep moving onwards. This is definitely a crystalline form of pleasure—bliss, happiness, and the like.

So play around with these teachings. If what we've explored this morning doesn't suit you, simply forget about it. Chalk it up as the morning's entertainment and move on. But if there's something useful here, then play with it, experiment, and make it your own.

Thank you for listening, and may your practice continue to unfold with wisdom and joy.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.