Awareness and Mindfulness (Practice)

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 1:06:48

This morning we're going to go back over what we were talking about yesterday, essentially to get the basics down. And when we talk about what constitutes the basics in meditation practice, it comes down to awareness or consciousness.

If we want to know what awareness is, or what we mean by it, we'll start with awareness in its elemental simplicity. Awareness is the presence of whatever is present.

So as we played around with yesterday, if we ask the question, "Right now, are you seeing?" Well, if you've got your eyes open, my guess is the answer will be yes. Only the most recalcitrant and philosophically educated yogi would try to argue otherwise.

So what does it mean to see? Doesn't it mean that this hall and these people are present to you? Present in the visual field.

Now, one thing we could do—and this is a highly advanced meditation technique, but I invite you to experiment with it—you can make everybody in this hall and the hall itself vanish. Like that. I'll show you how. Just close your eyes. Try it. Gone. Open up your eyes. Back again. Present. Absent. Present.

So when we're talking about awareness, we're talking about the quality of presence. Something is present to me; I am aware of that something. Something is absent; I'm not aware of it. Awareness is the quality of presence.

We can compare awareness to light. In English, we have the expression, "He saw the light." But actually, if you look around, we don't see light. What we see is the room. We see parts of the room that are particularly bright. I look out that side; there are sections of the outside view that are particularly bright. So there appears to be more light there than there is in that corner over there. But we don't see the light. We see the world. Yet we see the world because there is light. Without light, we couldn't see the world.

So how do we know that right now there is light? Because we can see. Therefore, there must be light. We step into a dark room at night—what is present to us? Just darkness. We switch on the light and the room and everything in the room is now present. How do we know there is light? Because the room and the contents of the room are present to us.

So awareness is not the contents of the room. Awareness is the appearance from darkness of the contents of the room. Awareness is not something; it's the presence of something.

But of course, where there is presence, there is something which is present. And we call this something the object of awareness. This is what makes awareness so slippery. On the one hand, it's the most obvious thing in the world. If we experience, we have awareness.

But on the other hand, it's incredibly slippery and mysterious because we never actually experience presence itself. It's the fact that something is present. So it can be both obvious but very difficult to get a hold of.

"Could it be both? Like you said, it's not... The thing itself is the presence of something. But what if it's both the presence of something and something in itself?"

Could be, yes. Because what we're doing is trying to put into some kind of coherent word system awareness and its object, since this is important for meditators. But no verbal formula is actually going to capture it. You could use other formulas.

I remember once doing a meditation experience exploring what is the experience of awareness. So look for awareness. And the teacher, who happened to be Emma, asked the question, "What's your experience of awareness?" And my answer was, "There isn't any." Because in terms of the visual field, well, I'm experiencing you. That's what I'm actually experiencing. So to say that there's awareness as well is kind of adding something extra on top, which strictly speaking just seems a bit clumsy.

So I could run with the theory that there is no awareness—there's just the world. Or I could run with the theory that, no, there is awareness, but awareness is the quality of transparency, which is the way the Buddha talks about it. He gives the example of a mountain pool, a pool of water, and the water is completely clear. You look into the pool and you can see down to the bottom. You see the rocks and the soil at the bottom. You see the water plants. You see the fish swimming around. He says the whole pool itself is the citta, the mind, the heart. The rocks, the plants, the fish—this is what's happening inside the mind, the heart. And the water is awareness. When the water is clear, is pure, it's transparent. It disappears. But when it's agitated or cloudy or murky, that's when you see it. Normally we don't notice it because it's completely transparent. That's another way of looking at it.

"It seems to me if you can be aware that you're aware, there's an awareness of awareness. Then it's more something than nothing."

So you're saying you can be aware of awareness, we can aware awareness itself, and that's more than nothing. There's something there.

"Yeah, and it's like that clear water, like it's... How can you... It's hard to quantify, isn't it? But it's something."

Yes, it seems to be. What we're interested in as meditators is not to come up with a philosophy that captures this, but rather to get a sense of what is the experience I'm heading towards. Sometimes we do

have a clear experience of, "Oh, this is what they're talking about." And sometimes we have no idea what they're talking about. It sounds like a nice theory, but I don't experience it. As meditators, what we're interested in is what we're experiencing and being curious about that.

As Emma was saying yesterday, it's the curiosity that drives this. This is interesting: Is there awareness? What is it exactly? How do I know there's awareness? When we ask these kinds of questions, it really doesn't matter what the answer is. What matters is that the question itself sharpens the investigation. And you come up, and there's something, as you say—there's something there.

There's something happening. And clarifying that something—that's the job. So although there's a lot of theoretical discussion, it's not about the theory. The concepts will hopefully point us towards something useful. What I'm trying to do with that example is to separate awareness from the subject, which for meditation purposes has practical application. To be able to distinguish between "that's the object of awareness" and "this is the awareing of it." In the tradition, this is considered quite useful—to be able to make that distinction, to be able to move between one and the other. That's why I give that analogy. But again, I don't claim that it's correct.

Someone asked: could you say that awareness is an experience rather than an object? Awareness itself, yes. You experience it, but do you experience it as an object? It's not an object. A lot of people would say that is absolutely correct—it's not an object. When we talk about an object, we're implying a subject-object dichotomy, and awareness doesn't quite fit into that dichotomy. So again, language fails. That's the reason why in the yoga traditions you get so many different philosophies, so many different ways of talking about what everybody experiences—because none of the conceptual frameworks actually precisely, one hundred percent, fit. It's just a question of whether there's a framework which is useful, and then we use it.

One person said they thought they were okay with it until they heard all this theory. Now they were completely bewildered. They wondered if I could give them one example to hold onto and throw the theory out.

An example of what? Well, the awareness and the seeing. I thought Emma's question yesterday was very good, when she asked: is anybody here seeing? Before I asked, did you know you were seeing? Or was there a qualitative difference in the experience? You were seeing, and then she says, "Are you seeing?" What changed? Something changed. And that's where you would find this business of awareness itself. That's the area where you would look for the experience.

The example that I like to give, which you'll be hearing more of: when you've been meditating, have you ever been distracted? Have you ever slid off into thinking? When you slid off into thinking, did you know you were thinking? Or do you sometimes wake up with, "Oh, I've been thinking for the past five minutes. Whoops." Yes? So you look back, and you can remember—yes, I was thinking about this or that. So you must have been aware. But you didn't know you were aware. You weren't aware that you were aware.

And suddenly, you're aware of your awareness.

Same thing with driving a car. You're driving along, and you suddenly realize: where am I? I was off in a dream. So you were driving the car and aware—it's a reasonable hypothesis because you're still alive. But you didn't know you were aware. You weren't aware of the awareness. Something has changed. It's in that something that this is what we're interested in. What is that something, that mysterious something, that shift? As meditators, we start to get interested in that.

There are different ways you can talk about it, but that's what we're interested in. So for me, when I teach meditation, I emphasize being genuinely interested in distraction. It's a really interesting experience, so start to pay attention to it.

That's what changes. We're seeing, and then the light is on the subject. There's a subject and an object, and now the subject is becoming an object. The light is being shone on the subject, which was hidden.

It's quite interesting the way you put it: "Oh, I'm thinking." You could have the emphasis on the thinking, or the emphasis could be on the "I'm thinking." And if it's "I'm thinking," then you've suddenly got this subject-object duality, and you're aware of the subject. So who's aware of the subject? And so on. It gets incredibly complicated.

It's quite interesting territory, but you can see how we can go around and around in academic circles. None of it is particularly useful. What matters is being interested in the fact that these are the shifts and changes within awareness itself. As meditators, that's what we're interested in.

As has come out in our discussion, when we are aware, we are aware of something. If I'm seeing, I'm seeing something. If I'm thinking, I'm thinking something. There is the object of awareness. In meditation practice, we often talk about the meditation object, and what we mean by that is what we are aware of when we're meditating.

Another way to look at this is to see awareness working as a dyad. I'm carefully using the word "dyad," not "duality," because duality has all sorts of connotations that I want to sidestep. I think there are philosophically sophisticated people in this room who are not going to let me get away with any sidestepping, but I'm going to try.

So, a dyad. Where if you have one, you have the other. If there's awareness, there's an object of awareness. If there's an object of awareness, there's awareness. If I'm seeing, there's an object. If I'm seeing, there's awareness of seeing. But they come about always as a package. Awareness and its object arise together and operate as a partnership.

One way to explore awareness is to examine its object. This is what Mahasi Sayadaw himself talks about—the stern-looking fellow whose picture sits beneath the Buddha. He's regarded as the founder of the lineage, and he lived from 1904 to 1982. He was one of the great Burmese reformers, part of a broader

movement to make serious insight meditation available for lay people as well as monks and nuns.

Before this movement began in the mid-nineteenth century in Burma, meditation in the Buddhist world was for a tiny, tiny elite, mostly ordained people. But the Burmese started a movement to open it up to the whole population, and Mahasi Sayadaw was part of that movement. Hence, we have meditation here in Australia.

He talks about how one way to get a sense of awareness is to start with the object. If the object is clear, the awareness will be clear. That approach has never one hundred percent worked for me, but this is what he says. So let's play around with it, shall we? Let's do a little meditation exercise in which the meditation object, the object of awareness, is the touch of our hands.

So just sit holding your hands together. This is a very advanced meditation, but let's see if we can do it.

Sit comfortably and settle your posture. Hold your hands together. Close your eyes and ask yourself: can I feel my hands? If the answer is yes, then ask yourself another question: am I making any particular effort to feel my hands? Is this hard work? Take your time. Relax. Just feel your hands and check how hard you have to work to feel them.

Any luck? Did anybody succeed in feeling their hands? Well done. Anyone else succeed? Universal consent. Did anybody have to work particularly hard to feel their hands? Was it hard work? Was it difficult? Did you have to really sweat and strain? Was sweat pouring from your armpits? Maybe not.

So this is getting back to right effort, or wise effort, that Emma was talking about yesterday—the quality of effort involved. We are already aware. Awareness simply happens. As the tradition says, it is the mind's nature to aware an object. That's what it does, and it does it all of the time, regardless of what we feel about it. Sometimes we'd rather wish it wasn't, but it continues to do so.

This is where I like to give the example of a cult, very popular in Australia, that is devoted in the higher stages of practice to the complete abolition of awareness, and therefore the complete abolition of suffering. There are practice centres scattered throughout the country devoted to this. Often you see them on street corners where a lot of people pass by, particularly after work at night. Devotees pour into these practice centres and engage diligently in the practice, which consists of reaching out with one hand, grasping a glass full of magic liquid, and pouring it down their throats. What they find is that the more liquid they consume, the more the grip on awareness starts to loosen. And for those who have really advanced in the practice, they will wake up the next afternoon thinking, "That was a good night. I've got no idea what happened."

You can see the popularity of this—that awareness can be painful, and people try to escape from it. But it's very, very difficult. You could try that practice yourself, but I do not recommend it. For starters, it's very expensive if you really devote yourself to it. And secondly, it's very bad for the health. But it's an illustration of how determined the mind is to aware.

So awareness is already happening. The first time I did that little exercise with the hands was during Sayadaw U Tejaniya's first visit to Australia. When he opened up the retreat, he was talking about how he teaches meditation. He did that exercise and asked the question: how much effort are you making? The answer being, bugger all. And then he added—which quite shocked me—he said, "That is all the effort you ever have to make in a meditation practice. You never have to make any more effort than that."

I found that a very interesting statement, and I put it to you to be interested in, because we tend to make a big deal out of the effort involved. And so that's why we talk about effort, this quality of effort.

Question from participant: You said Mahasi Sayadaw said "clear object, clear awareness," but that hasn't worked for you so much. I'm just trying to understand where you went from there. Is that because that's a very "holding on a single point" approach? You're saying for you it worked more as a choiceless awareness?

Yes, that's in terms of approach to practice. You get approaches which are very object-oriented. So you'll be told, "What I want you to do is sit down and track your breathing without a break from now until we ring the bell." Now, simply by phrasing it like that, you've taken the object of awareness—in this case the breathing—and you've assigned it immense importance. This is really, really important. As if you stuff up this breathing over the next thirty minutes, you are stuffing up your meditation, and your chances of enlightenment are just plummeting. So it's really, really, really important.

Now, our habit is to always project importance into the object of awareness. The classic thing is when I'm thinking, what I assume is important is what I'm thinking about. But in meditation practice, if you start to examine the process of thinking, what you discover is that what we are thinking about is probably the least important aspect of the whole process. It's the thinking itself. It's the awareing itself which is actually much more significant.

But if we have an approach to meditation in which so much importance is attached to an object, that for me reinforced the habit of ignoring the awareness and focusing on the object. So I didn't see it. I could read Mahasi Sayadaw—yes, yes, you see the awareness—and I thought, "I don't see the awareness. I either see the object or I miss the object." So I had to really step back and loosen my hold on the object, and then I could begin to notice the awareness.

So it was a clash between what Mahasi was saying and taking for granted that people would notice, and what I'd experienced when following instructions. My main teacher was Sayadaw U Pandita, and he was very object-oriented in his approach. So it took a while to figure it out.

It's very tricky figuring out what I'm supposed to do when I'm meditating because, for a start, it's incredibly difficult. So I like to say that it is impossible to teach meditation practice. It is possible to learn it, but it's not possible to teach it. Because as a meditation teacher, if I give a particular piece of advice to a room full of meditators, the odds are there will be at least one person in this room for whom that is the worst thing I could have said, and it'll completely screw them up. But there's no getting away from it.

And especially when we're talking about these modern meditation techniques—they are designed for mass production. So if you have twenty people in a room and you're teaching meditation, and these people are working people who've taken a week off from work, time is precious. You can't muck about. You can't do the traditional thing of "join the community and in five or ten years you'll gradually figure it out." That's not good enough. You've got to get them into it soon, so you need a technique. But because you say "do this" to everybody, you're presenting a technique. And then the technique gets placed on the altar and everybody's worshipping it, including those people for whom that technique simply doesn't work. And they're vigorously worshipping it as well.

So this is why it's really important that as meditators, you take responsibility. It's up to you to figure it out. If I say something and you think, "Nah, that's wrong"—great. Fine. I won't necessarily change what I'm saying. This is the way that I see it, the way that I express it. But that's just the way that I express it. If it doesn't work for you, just drop it.

Question from participant: When you say if you have a meditation object and it's breathing and you're told to track your breathing—isn't the purpose of that, when you wander away, that you strengthen your awareness when you remember that you've wandered away and come back to the breathing?

Yes, what you do is you strengthen, in particular, samadhi—classically translated as concentration, though I don't think it's a very good translation. I notice Ajahn Sujato now translates it as immersion, which quite works for me. I quite like it.

Imagine jumping into a swimming pool. You're immersed in the water. You're jumping into your experience, immersed in the experience. So the heart and the mind are unified. All of me is just breathing—not part of me thinking about lunch and part of me feeling restless and part of me checking out the breathing, but all of me. This is samadhi.

So the basic boot camp training for that is: you send your awareness to the breathing, you realize it's wandered off, you bring it back. It wanders off, you bring it back. It wanders off, you bring it back. Again, again, again, again, again. And you try to immerse yourself in it. So that's a samadhi-oriented approach, and that's one of the standard ways in which people undertake a meditation practice.

And you notice that in what we're teaching, the natural awareness approach, we actually don't do that. We've got another approach.

"The only thing I find with natural awareness—I think I have a bit of an idea about it—but what I find is when you become aware of one thing, then you become aware of another thing, then you become aware of another thing. And then when you say have curiosity and focus on one thing, it's kind of like I don't know what to focus on, because there's so much happening."

And this is exactly the question we're going to address tonight, where we bring Mahasi Sayadaw in from the cold and talk about his concept of the grounding object.

Basically, we need a central reference point. Most people need a central reference point. Otherwise, as you say, it just gets completely scattered. And usually the central reference point is some aspect of body—why that is, we'll talk about.

But even if you've got a central reference point, you notice the awareness moves, goes somewhere else. So it's the difference between: my awareness has gone walkabout—oh, it's gone walkabout—drop it immediately, get back to the grounding object. Versus: my awareness goes walkabout—oh, it's going walkabout, that's interesting, what does that feel like?—then come back to the grounding object. And that's a big difference. This is what Mahasi in particular is very strong on, but we'll talk more about it as we go through.

You're right though—you've picked out a problem that people have if you just begin by opening up. Some people just get lost; there's so much going on. Other people find themselves at home, like they're just swimming around in it. But some people get hopelessly lost. So again, you modify the method according to your own circumstances.

Shall we carry on? Awareness. But next we come to mindfulness, and this question arose yesterday: what's the difference?

Sayadaw U Tejaniya is a bit loose in his language. U Tejaniya was not a scholar—or is not a scholar, he's still around. He's not a career monk. In Burma, the career monks, the big Sayadaws, are women and men who ordain when they're children—ten, twelve years old. They go into the monastery as novices and undergo a monastic education. They get highly educated, then they become meditators, then they become meditation teachers, and they're kind of walking encyclopedias of Theravada Buddhism.

And so they tend to be very careful and precise in their doctrinal formulations.

Utajaniya was a layman. His family lived in Rangoon, a business family. His parish church, as it were, was Shwe U Min's monastery, and he used to play with the children there. He made a connection with Shwe U Min's abbot, who happened to be a great meditation master, and learnt meditation. As a young man, he would go into the monastery, do a retreat, ordain temporarily—because this is the custom—and then leave the retreat and go back to lay life. Come in, go out, come in, go out. It was a typically lay approach. Eventually he just got fed up and went in and didn't come out.

So he hasn't got the classical education that most of the Burmese meditation teachers have, which some people would argue is a great advantage. For starters, he really understands lay life.

I remember one time—I forget which retreat it was; I've done two retreats with him, both in Western Australia. At one point he was talking about mindfulness in everyday activities, and he described how when he would go to work, he would walk from his home and his route would take him down a street where there must have been various pubs or nightclubs. When he was a wild young man, there were places on that street where he would go and get stonked and be outrageous. As he would walk down this

street later in life, remorse would arise at what he did in his youth. And he would take the opportunity to meditate on the nature of remorse as he walked. It's just typical of his approach—you work with whatever is there.

I went to the interpreter afterwards and said, "I get the impression that before the Sayadaw ordained permanently, he was a bit of a lad." And the interpreter said, "The Sayadaw says there is no drug I have not tried." This is pretty unusual for Burmese monks. So he's really got this very clear sense of lay life. Whereas the great masters—my main teacher was Sayadaw U Pandita—I mean, he entered the monastery probably by the time he was ten. He had no idea about lay life. Absolutely no idea about it. Different approaches.

Anyway, I digress. Mindfulness—that's what we're talking about.

Awareness is the presence of that which is present. It's part of nature. Are we experiencing something now? If the answer is yes, we are aware. But are we mindful?

The practice that we're doing in Pali is called satipatthana, which could be translated as the applications of mindfulness or the domains of mindfulness. Mindfulness in Pali is sati. This is a style of meditation practice that puts mindfulness at the very centre of the project.

To get a sense of what is meant by that, let's do another little meditation experiment. We'll have the same meditation object: holding your hands.

So sit comfortably, settle your posture, hold your hands together, and close your eyes. Ask yourself: can I feel my hands? This is not some special meditation exercise that you might fail if you don't work hard enough. Just feel your hands. This experience of feeling my hands is awareness—the awareness of feeling my hands.

Keep feeling your hands. Is your awareness of your hands continuous? Or do you notice any breaks in your awareness of your hands? Is your awareness of your hands discontinuous?

You may notice thinking in the background of your mind and then suddenly realise thinking has taken over. Did you lose the touch of your hands? You may be listening to my voice and suddenly realise you have lost the touch of your hands.

Just feel your hands. Check to see if there are any gaps in your awareness of your hands. Are there any gaps? Or is your awareness of the touch of your hands continuous?

Okay. So could anybody say their awareness was continuous without any gaps? One nodding, one shaking. How many people would say yes, continuous, no breaks? How many people would say otherwise?

Very interesting.

Many years ago there was Susan Blackmore, an English researcher in consciousness and a Zen

practitioner. She wrote a book years ago called *Ten Zen Questions*. Since then there's another edition with a different title, I think, but I read the original one. What she would do as a Zen practitioner was create her own koans, her own questions, and work on those. There were ten of them, and the experience of working with them made up the book.

What interested me were the first two questions. The first question she worked with was: Am I aware? It could have been: Am I aware now? She worked on that seriously—did retreats, really working on this. And what she came up with was 100% yes. That was the answer to that question.

Then she moved on to the second question: Was I aware just then? Again, she worked on it seriously. The result was undoubted—nowhere near 100%.

So how could that be? How could the answer to "Am I aware now?" be 100% yes, but the answer to "Was I aware just then?" be nowhere near 100%?

I found that interesting because to me it showed the difference between awareness and mindfulness.

Mindfulness is *sati*. *Sati* is a word from memory, from the verb *sarati*, to remember. We'll talk more about it tonight, I think. But mindfulness is memory in terms of remembering the present, not the past.

If we came up here from Sydney on the train—and I find trains very dharmic because they have signs that say "Mind the gap"—you've seen those signs. What the signs are asking you to do is remember there's a gap between the train and the platform. But it's not asking you to remember that hours after you arrive at your destination. It wants you to remember that in the very act of stepping into or out of the train. That is mindfulness the way the Buddha talked about it—remembering the present rather than the past.

So, remembering awareness. One way of looking at distraction: How is it that I'm doing something really simple, really easy, like feeling the touch of my hands, and suddenly—thup—the mind goes away and I'm thinking about something? How did that happen?

I forgot. I forgot my hands, or I forgot that I was aware of my hands. In that forgetting, the mind slips into autopilot, into habit. My awareness will go where habit takes it. So if I'm in the habit of thinking blah, blah, blah, that's where it'll go. I'm thinking and I don't know that I'm thinking because I've forgotten.

Then suddenly I remember—oh, wait a minute, I'm supposed to be meditating. Ah, and I'm back again.

That action of remembering is mindfulness. When we train it—in a sense you could say meditation training is memory training—we get into the habit of remembering awareness so that the awareness is genuinely continuous.

If we ask the question, how do I know if I'm mindful? Mindfulness is the felt continuity of awareness—the felt continuity. We experience it. And when people hit it, they talk about it because it feels qualitatively different. I'm just maintaining the awareness over a period of time.

It feels very different. And you know it—you can see it.

So this is mindfulness. Mindfulness is awareness, but it's awareness over time. And therefore it becomes stronger.

One image that's used is this: imagine you're at a beach, close to the water's edge. You've got a stick, and you draw a line in the sand. The next wave comes in and erases the line. So you draw another line. The next wave comes in and erases that one too. You draw another line—gone. Draw another one—gone. Draw another one—gone. Gone. Gone. That's normal everyday awareness.

But when you draw a line and it stays there—that's mindfulness.

Let's do one more exercise. What would happen if, on the one hand, we remember our awareness, and on the other hand, we do not try to force it to stay on any one particular object, but allow it to move if it wants to? What would happen then? Shall we give it a go?

And again, the same meditation object.

Sit comfortably and settle your posture. Hold your hands together. Close your eyes.

Feel your hands. Be aware of the touch of your hands, the different sensations that are playing out there. Don't try to do this. Don't try to feel your hands—it's not a special project. You already know you are feeling your hands. Just feel them.

Does your awareness move to something else? For example, do you find yourself being aware of other sensations in your body? Or of the sounds around you? Or of your thoughts sliding here and there? Don't try to stop any of this happening—just watch and see what happens.

If something is happening, that's awareness.

Let your awareness move from one thing to another. In other words, let what you are aware of change. Just stay aware of these movements and changes.

Use the touch of your hands as a home base—somewhere you leave and return to. But do not try to cling exclusively to the touch of your hands. Let the touch of your hands come and go. Sometimes you are aware of it, sometimes not.

Just watch whatever is happening. Is something happening? That's awareness.

You are using the touch of your hands as your home base, but not holding tightly to it. Just hold your mind steady. Let things come and go. Just stay aware that things are coming and going.

So how did it go? To some extent? Was it more or less strain, just letting things roll? Or no difference?

"For me it was incredibly strange because normally I'm like... and then I was like, oh, sorry, I love to go

here gently. So I think there's an element of my meditation which is more disciplined, where I tell myself what to do. So that's quite odd, an unusual experience."

It sounds like less stressful.

"Yeah, way less. I'm like, oh, okay."

We'll be talking more about this particular approach. This is what in the Mahasi tradition is called *khanika samadhi*—immersion into momentary experience—where you allow the objects to change, but you maintain the awareness itself. It's a different approach to samadhi, as opposed to what's called absorption samadhi, where you have a single object and you absorb into it. So there are different ways of getting that immersion, that absorption. In this style of practice, we're training ourselves to open it up.

But particularly in the beginning, it can be very useful to have a sense of a home base. And particularly if we're looking for a home base—again, especially in the body, especially in the early stages—body is really useful. Because body sensation is fairly clear, it's kind of pretty obvious. And body sensation is always now, always in the present. If I'm aware of body, to the extent I'm aware of body, to that extent I am in the present. Mind time travels, but body is always in the present.

So I'll just finish with a few basic tips that I like to give. Number one: do not be in a hurry as you move about your day. Nothing to hurry for. I mean, how can you be late for anything? Now notice when you find yourself hurrying, because you may find some tension underneath the hurrying. So feel the tension, relax, and check to see any difference in your body when you do that. So don't be in a hurry.

Be graceful—which in practice means be committed to noticing those moments when you realize you are clumsy. So when you unexpectedly drop something, or bump into something, or make a loud noise doing something, just be interested in those moments. And you may notice that a moment of clumsiness is conditioned by momentary loss of awareness, of mindfulness—when you lost awareness of your body and your awareness went off into habitual concepts. So again, stay grounded in the body.

Remember awareness. When you're practicing, do not try to be aware—just remember you are already aware. Using the image of just switching on that light: click, up, aware. And ask yourself every now and again: What is clear now? What is obvious now?

Okay, we've run over time. Any final questions? Questions or comments?

"Actually, may I ask, what is the ultimate goal of meditation?"

Liberation. Freedom. Liberation from suffering. The cessation of *dukkha*. So we practice strengthening mindfulness eventually just to end suffering. And the wisdom—the wisdom is important.

Any kind of mindfulness practice is oriented towards wisdom. Why that is, we'll talk about more as we go through. But the Buddha in the Satipatthana Sutta, which is the root discourse, makes it quite clear this is

the direct path to enlightenment.

So enlightenment is when you can actually end something. You can come and then... then you're not quite fully enlightened. But enlightenment is a process like anything else. You can have a glimpse of it. You can have a little bit of it. You can gradually deepen it and go more and more into it. Usually in the tradition, when they talk about enlightenment, they mean full, one hundred percent enlightenment. In the Theravada tradition, this would be someone who is an Arahant. These are rare. Mahasi's teacher was supposed to be an arahant. But there are stages of enlightenment which are not as deep, but they're much more accessible.

According to the tradition, the Buddha takes for granted life after life. And once you've entered upon that path, once you've had the first glimpse of the Dharma—what he calls the Dhammacakru, the vision of Dharma—that's it, you're on the way. It may take a number of lifetimes, but you're on the way.

How do we know that we are doing it?

You'll find out when you are. It's an experience. It becomes clear. No doubt.

The practice for the rest of the day is to have a touch and to watch it?

Well, what would be your meditation object normally?

A mantra.

Do you prefer mantra over breathing?

Yeah, I do.

Okay, stick with the mantra. But again, notice when the awareness goes and where it goes to. In other words, don't grip it. It's like you're holding it, gripping it. Loosen your grip and let it go. Let it go, come back. Let it go, come back. This relationship—this is what you're setting up. So you don't have to change your meditation object. It's the way that you relate to it that you're starting to play around with.

And of course, become sensitive to posture. What is the body doing right now? If you're using mantra, you may not pay a huge amount of attention to the body when you're sitting because you're absorbing into the mantra. But when you're going about your daily activity, be really aware of what the body is doing, particularly touch. For example, in everyday activity, feel when the feet hit the ground and feel anything the hands touch. Be particularly sensitive to those two areas.

Do you do walking meditation?

Yeah.

So walking meditation. Do you do mantra in the walking?

I've only started to, literally, in the last couple of days.

Some people find it very useful.

Completely new.

Yeah, play around. Check it out. In the walking, the mantra would be the way you develop samadhi.

Whereas the body would be more mindfulness. So you're getting a balance. You're changing your relationship to your meditation object. You don't have to pick your meditation object, throw it out the window, and get another one. That's not necessary.

Good. Anyone else? Anybody puzzled about what they're supposed to be doing here?

Always.

Okay, I'll give you the standard answer: Be aware.

Thank you very much.

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