Faith and Awareness

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 50:31

Last night James talked on the topic of faith and touched on many different aspects of faith. Tonight I want to take up one of the aspects that he touched on and go into it in more detail: the aspect of faith found by taking refuge in our deepest nature, our truest nature.

The Buddha encouraged us over and over again to find the true security in life in the state that he called nibbana, that dimension of our being. Even the far-reaching doctrines that he taught, like the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, were only useful tools or skillful means—pointers to coming upon this dimension of nibbana, which he really saw as the ultimate truth.

These are some of the synonyms that he used for this state: the unconditioned, the truth, the other shore, the everlasting, peace, the deathless, safety, freedom, the shelter, the refuge. So I want to talk about where in our practice we can look for this kind of refuge that's beyond change, this kind of peace that is everlasting and deathless.

I have one warning about this talk. Before the Buddha began his teaching after his enlightenment, he almost didn't teach. He thought about what he'd discovered and thought, "I'm going to teach this and nobody's going to get it. I don't think I'll teach." In fact, what he said was, "This Dhamma that I have discovered, this truth that I've discovered is profound, subtle, and hard to understand." He decided he wouldn't teach because nobody would get it and that would be a bother to him. Actually, the word that's translated in the suttas is "vexation"—this would be vexatious for him.

So he wasn't going to teach, and then this heavenly being came down, a god, and said, "Oh, but there are some people in the world with very little dust in their eyes. Please teach for their benefit." And so he said, "Okay, okay." But he believed that it was profound, subtle, and hard to understand.

I can't claim that this talk is going to be either profound or subtle, but it may be hard to understand. I just want to set your expectations accordingly, so you won't worry about that. Really, the way to listen to this talk is just take it in, and don't try to figure it out as we go—and you don't have to try to figure it out later either. I'm being quite honest here: just kind of open your ears and open your mind and see what resonates, and if it doesn't resonate, let it go.

The other thing I want to say is, because I'll be talking about a view or an understanding of the unconditioned, don't take it as the gospel truth. There are many different views of the unconditioned. As the discussion this morning about God pointed to, there's one truth but there are many descriptions. The version that I'll be presenting tonight comes from the Thai forest tradition and is pretty uniformly

embraced by that tradition, but not by other Buddhist traditions necessarily. So there are a lot of opinions on this topic and this is one view—if it helps you, use it as a skillful means and no need to cling to it.

A couple of years ago, Sally and I were up in Yosemite. We were hanging out in the valley, and it's always interesting to be in Yosemite Valley. There's a lot of wildlife. We saw coyotes and deer. We'd get up in the morning, and there would be bear prints on our car where they'd gone through the parking lot looking for food. The cars next to us had had their windows ripped out because they'd probably left a candy wrapper or some peanuts on the seat.

But almost as interesting as the wildlife is the human life in the valley. Everybody comes to the valley. The tour buses come through and all the tourists pile off with their shorts and their video cameras. Then at the other end of the spectrum you've got the backpackers who are coming in from a week in the high country and they haven't shaved or washed the whole time they've been out there. And then you have the climbers who are setting up their base camp because they're about to go up El Capitan, three thousand feet straight up. You tune into their culture and it's kind of like the U.S. Marines meets the Grateful Dead. It's really a fascinating culture.

So we'd seen a lot of different characters in Yosemite, but I hadn't seen this one before. There was a circle of people who stood in the parking lot. One person from the group of about ten would get in the middle of the circle, and then someone else would stand behind them. The person who was standing in the middle of the circle would just throw their arms up and fall back, trusting that the person who was standing behind them would catch them—which they did, as we saw. It'd be kind of a dirty trick if they didn't. Then it might be a deep teaching on impermanence.

This is one of those trust exercises, a team-building exercise, so you know that your team is really there for you. But it kind of reminded me of our meditation practice. I kind of feel like in our meditation practice we're always doing this—we're kind of throwing our arms up and falling down. But the curious thing is that something is always there to catch us. Something's always there to hold us.

And this is really, I think, one of the lessons we learn about trust and faith in the Dharma: if we're willing to let go and take that step, we get held by something.

So I want to talk a little bit about what it is that holds us. And what does it really mean to let go?

Somebody said in an interview, "I really want to be with the breath, but thoughts are so seductive." And they really are, aren't they? We have the greatest intention to be with the breath in a sitting, but the thoughts come along and they just invite us away. They invite us to be somewhere else.

When we start to look at what's so fascinating about our thoughts, we find that they express a lot of our hopes and fears. They express a lot of our desires and likes and dislikes in terms of the world. And in a way you could say what we discover through our thoughts is that we have a tendency through our thoughts and those intentions born of thought to want to control our experience or control the world.

We want to set things up so that the pleasant things come our way and stay as long as possible and the unpleasant things are kept at bay and don't come anywhere near us. That's basically what our thoughts are expressing. It's these twin strategies of desire, of pulling to us the pleasant, and aversion, pushing away the unpleasant. And they're means of control. These are the basic strategies with which we try to control our experience and the world.

What we're invited to do in our meditation practice is to stop trying to control, to open ourselves up to the moment in whatever form it's presenting itself and just let that experience be felt in the body, in the emotions, in the thoughts, in the sounds. And basically we're being asked moment after moment to give up control, to surrender.

Ajahn Chah put it this way: if you let go a little, there's a little bit of peace. If you let go a lot, there's a lot of peace. And if you let go completely, there's complete peace. So this is the opportunity to touch that really deep peace, but it's also kind of threatening to let go of the sense of control. Not that the control has ever worked particularly well. That doesn't seem to be the point. But it's a very deeply conditioned strategy.

And the Buddha's shorthand for it was: it is the strategy of greed, aversion, and delusion. Letting go of this strategy leads to peace. This is really the challenge, the peace that the Buddha called the stilling of all formations, the relinquishment of all attachments. That is nibbana. So he more or less uses this word nibbana as synonymous with this deep peace that comes from letting go completely.

Ajahn Buddhadasa, one of the great masters of the Thai forest tradition this last fifty years, said that this peace really comes from letting go of I and mine. Anytime you see the activity of I and mine in your thoughts, you're blocking the peace, if there's a clinging to it. But when you're willing to let that go, your mind is empty of I and mine. And he called that a state of voidness of I and mine. And he said, you touch that peace.

And he said, "If there is some voidness of I and mine, and I merely use the word some, it doesn't have to be completely or unchangeably void, then you are dwelling within the sphere of nibbana. Even though it is not absolute or perfect nibbana, it is nibbana just the same."

So he's talking about degrees of peacefulness and equating that peacefulness with nibbana. As we let go of these strategies of control, we are actually performing a real act of trust and faith. We're surrendering to the universe and we're trusting that we're going to be okay. We're actually very vulnerable at that point. We're very exposed. We're very open. We've dropped our defenses. But something in us is encouraged to try it. And then we find more and more that it's trustworthy, that space.

So how does it feel when you let go in that way? How does it feel when you're not clinging? And you can try it in this moment. You're not clinging to the body. You're not clinging to any particular thoughts. You're not clinging to any particular mood. You're not even clinging to the words that you're hearing. There's just a state of presence and openness.

Sometimes when you let go in that way, if you really let go completely, there's kind of a rush of energy. The energy is as though released from being held. Some people have said that at times it feels like they're floating or flying. As we practice it, it can feel quite calm, quite ordinary. Nonetheless, there's a sense of release, as though our center of gravity has shifted a little, away from the objects that have been clung to, into a sense of spaciousness.

But there's still an awareness at work. And this awareness kind of reveals our basic situation.

Our basic situation is one of vast openness.

When we're not holding on, we see that there's this awareness and there are all the appearances of the world, inner and outer, that are just coming and going. It's a little bit like we're sitting in a movie theater and there's a bright screen up front and all the objects of the world are kind of being tossed up in front of the screen. You know, mother, body, death, fear, joy, school, career, income tax, Britney Spears, in-breath, sounds.

Now if we leave our mind in its natural state, we sit in the movie theater, all those things that go up also go down and just pass away. But if we get preoccupied, we'll tend to reach out. It's like a hand comes out from a seat in the front row and grabs mom, body, career. And then there's grasping.

Once we've grasped, things get solid. We lose that vast openness that's really our natural state. And the focus starts to shrink down because we formed an "I" through the holding. Something has become of tremendous concern to us, and in that latching on, we shrink our experience from this vast oceanic mind state to a narrow, confined sense of self.

So the natural state of mind is just to allow the appearances to come and go and not be moved by them. Then the mind stays balanced and centered. But when an appearance comes along that has a certain charge on it, the mind inclines toward it, either out of desire or aversion, fixes on it, and solidifies a sense of "I" around it. This distorts the mind's natural peace and freedom. And it's only through the action of reaching out and grasping.

So in our practice we have this choice, moment after moment. We can rest in that natural freedom in which everything is coming and going, or we can give in to the self-centeredness and try to hold on and grab a hold of something.

This kind of natural state of freedom takes some recognition. It's not obvious to us from our upbringing. It takes some familiarity in getting pointed out. But I think when you look at really great spiritual beings, you can see they've kind of released into this. They've really come to trust this state and they've really let go into it. And out of that then there's a real spontaneity in their being.

There was a fantastic photo in the newspaper a couple of years ago. There was a gathering in a university in West Virginia of Nobel Peace Prize laureates. They got together to discuss the world situation and how

to contribute to more peace in the world. So it was people like the Dalai Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu and Rigoberta Menchú from Central America. All these really well-respected peace workers were gathered in one place and at the end of their conference there was a photo opportunity.

They were all lined up on a couple of platforms, and the photographer was there to snap the photo to be released to all the national media. The Dalai Lama happened to be standing right behind Bishop Desmond Tutu, who I think of as a fairly august personage. And just as the photo was about to be snapped, the Dalai Lama leaned down and pulled Desmond Tutu's cap off his head.

The photographer caught the moment. The cap was being lifted up, and the Dalai Lama was just laughing this huge belly laugh. And Desmond Tutu was in the spirit too. He sort of saw his hat going, and he started cracking up.

That's trust. That's trust. Just to kind of let it rip, and at an assembly of Nobel Peace laureates.

So in our practice too, we start to feel this kind of effortless quality that awareness has, that we don't have to do anything special in it. We can relax into it. And if we just rest and we're not really pulled away with grasping, the awareness happens all by itself.

We try to point to this in the instructions on sounds—that just have the sense of resting in your sitting, opening to sounds. The sounds just come and go quite easily. And when we're not distracted, we can relax into that without a lot of effort. And the awareness happens spontaneously.

Now I'm using the word awareness, and I said a couple of nights ago that I wanted to talk about these three words—awareness, consciousness, and mindfulness—and what the differences are between them. So I want to go into that a little bit right now.

First thing to say is that there's no word in Pali, in the Buddhist language, that we need to translate by awareness. There's no word from the Buddha that we have to use the word awareness for. He basically used the words mindfulness and consciousness, sati and vijñāna.

So let's start with consciousness. Consciousness or vijñāna just means the bare knowing of experience. And it's a very ordinary use of the term in a way. Because we're sentient beings or we're conscious beings, we have an experience of phenomena.

And just that simplest receiving of the impressions of the world, inner and outer, is done by consciousness. When the sound of the bell arises in your mind and you just hear the sound, there's consciousness knowing it. If you were a trunk of a tree, presumably you wouldn't know that sound. Well, let's not get into that debate. If you're the back wall, you probably don't know that sound. But because you're a conscious being, that sound registers.

Now, before any words come into play, before you interpret it, before you think "bell" or even you think "sound," there's just that hearing. It's consciousness that knows that, that receives that sound. It's just a

very bare and simple sense experience. It's quite automatic. Bell rings, we hear. Can't do anything about it. It's almost mechanical. Doesn't have any particular intelligence in it. It's just that receiving.

Then the other term the Buddha talked about was mindfulness. Mindfulness is the knowing of our experience but in a more conceptual and intelligent way. In other words, when the bell rings, if you're mindful, you'll know "hearing." So you'll recognize that your experience in this moment is one of hearing a sound. At least that.

So there's an intelligence at work that is kind of commenting on your experience. "Oh, now I'm hearing a sound. Now I'm feeling an in-breath. Now a thought is arising. Now I feel a mood of peace." This is the function of mindfulness, this knowing in a more intelligent way. This is why the noting practice is powerful. It really draws out this knowing quality.

And one other thing I'll mention is that the Buddha always used the term mindfulness in reference to a particular object. Mindfulness of body, mindfulness of mind, mindfulness of feeling, and so on.

So awareness is a word that we kind of use in a slippery way. It kind of glides between consciousness and mindfulness. In other words, we can make it mean whatever we want it to mean. Sometimes we use it to mean mindfulness, sometimes consciousness, sometimes a blend of both.

Because awareness, when you think about it, when you're aware of your experience, it has the kind of spontaneous quality like consciousness does. Just easily aware. But it also has this intelligent aspect that mindfulness does. I know what I'm experiencing. So it's kind of a nice word to use when you want to look at that combination. There's a spontaneity and there's also an intelligence together. This is more or less the connotation in the word awareness.

Sometimes this quality of spontaneity and intelligence is what's called our Buddha nature. This is from Ajahn Mahaboowa, also a Thai forest master: "Although all phenomena without exception fall under the laws of the three characteristics—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self—the true nature of the mind doesn't fall under these laws. The natural power of the mind itself is that it knows and doesn't die. This deathlessness is something that lies beyond disintegration."

"The natural power of the mind is that it knows and doesn't die."

Maybe this is what we can trust in. Maybe this is what holds us. Can we look a little closer into it through our practice?

So when I get to really profound topics, I like to consult one of my masters, and that is Calvin and Hobbes. This is a strip from Calvin and Hobbes. It's around Christmas time. And Calvin is saying to Hobbes, "This whole Santa Claus thing just doesn't make sense. Why all the secrecy? Why all the mystery? If the guy exists, why doesn't he ever show himself and prove it? And if he doesn't exist, what's the meaning of all this?"

Hobbes responds, "I don't know. Isn't this a religious holiday?" And Calvin replies, "Yeah, but actually I've got the same questions about God. Why doesn't he ever show himself?"

This exchange touches something profound. We all, I think, can resonate with that trust on some deep level—that the universe is safe, or we can put ourselves in the hands of God or the Dharma. But what do we mean by that? What do we mean by God or the Dharma? Have we touched them? Do we know that clearly for ourselves?

I think it's really the point of practice to discover this for ourselves in our own experience—that it is possible to know this firsthand. And I think that's what our practice leads us toward.

Calvin asks why God doesn't show himself. Well, actually, when you think about it, it has to be that way. If God or the Dharma was something that could be touched or seen with our eyes or heard with our ears, it would be of the nature to arise and pass away. All phenomena that have the nature of arising at the sense door also have the nature to pass away. So the unconditioned can't be one of those things, or it wouldn't be deathless. It would have the properties of being born and dying.

Therefore, the unconditioned has to be invisible. It has to be intangible, and it has to be silent.

This is from Angelus Silesius, a Christian contemplative mystic: "God is a pure no-thing, concealed in now and here. The less you reach for it, the more it will appear."

Let me read that again: "God is a pure no-thing, concealed in now and here. The less you reach for it, the more it will appear."

I like this because in a very pithy statement, in four lines he's pointed to two fundamental things. One is that trust is connected with relaxation. "The less you reach for it, the more it will appear." It's about non-doing, non-grasping. The second is that the ultimate isn't separate from the present moment. It's concealed in now and here. It's not apart from this.

Suzuki Roshi put it this way: "It is necessary to trust in something that has no form or color, but is always ready to take on form and color." Something that has no form and color, but is ready to take on form and color.

Just as a side note, in Buddhist terminology, "form and color" is shorthand for the visual world. Every object of sight has form or shape and color. That's really all it is. So this is shorthand for all created phenomena.

This is interesting. It's not of form and color, but it takes on form and color. So it's not in the world, but it's not apart from the world either, this unconditioned thing.

I used to think—this puzzled me for a long time—I used to think it meant something like raw matter, atoms or nuclei or quarks or something like that. They didn't have form, but they could take on any form.

But you realize, no, even atoms and quarks have form. They're somewhat locatable. They're somewhere there in space.

So I started to realize that what Suzuki Roshi was pointing to was not something from that side, but something from this side—something from the side that's seeing, something from the side of consciousness. Because consciousness doesn't have form or color, but it's always ready to take on form and color. It can take on any form and color.

So we're back to this term consciousness, or vijñāna. In the Buddha's teachings this has a very specific meaning. As I mentioned, it's what holds a sense experience. But it's considered to arise with the sense experience and pass away with it. And that means that consciousness, as the Buddha talks about it, is arising and passing. It's one of the five aggregates. And like the other aggregates, it arises and passes. It arises with the object.

It passes as the object passes.

So what could be unchanging? Because our refuge needs to be unchanging.

Well, in our practice, we change the instructions every day. We talk about sounds, body, breath, thoughts, emotions, intentions, and so forth. But there's one aspect that doesn't change. Have you noticed that? What's the common thread that's linking all these different pieces of the instructions?

Mindfulness. Yes.

This quality of paying attention, or we could say in a way awareness, is the common thread, or you could say the constant thread in all of it. It's a string that connects all these moments of beads together.

So could the deathless somehow be connected with awareness? I don't want to say right now that it is awareness, but maybe it's closely related.

Someone came to the Buddha and asked him, "Venerable sir, I know there are these five physical senses. Where do they come together? What is their resort?"

The Buddha said, "The resort of the five senses is the mind. Chitta."

The questioner said, "Okay. What's the resort or the abode of the mind?"

And the Buddha said, "Awareness."

"Okay. What's the resort of awareness?"

He said, "Liberation."

"And what's the resort of liberation?"

The Buddha said, "Nibbana."

"Okay. What's the resort of nibbana?"

And the Buddha said, "That's going too far. You can't answer that question."

So awareness is kind of the link between the physical senses and nibbana, the unconditioned.

This is from an Indian teacher named Nisargadatta Maharaj: "I met my guru when I was thirty-four and realized by thirty-seven." That's kind of nice, isn't it? Good path. "Pleasure and pain lost their sway over me. I was free from desire and fear. I found myself full, needing nothing. I saw that in the ocean of pure awareness, the numberless waves of the phenomenal worlds arise and subside beginninglessly and endlessly. There's a mysterious power that looks after them. That power is awareness, life, God, whatever name you give it. It's the foundation and ultimate support of all that is, as gold is the basis for all jewelry."

Awareness is the ultimate support of all that is. It's not just human beings that have this nature. All sentient beings share in this.

This is the Zen master Huang Po whom James quoted last night: "Buddhas and bodhisattvas, together with all wriggling things possessed of life, share in this great nirvanic nature."

We share that nature with all wriggling things possessed of life. So nothing to be proud about. We all have this.

So this basic nature of awareness holds all the arisings and passings. This is from Ajahn Mahabua again: "There's no escaping this truth. Whatever arises has to vanish. Whatever is true, whatever is a natural principle in and of itself, won't vanish. In other words, the pure mind won't vanish. This vanishes, that vanishes, but that which knows they're vanishing doesn't vanish. This is what's called the pure mind. All that remains is simple awareness, utterly pure."

So the Buddha said that consciousness was impermanent, and Mahabua is saying that what knows the comings and goings is lasting. How do we reconcile those two?

If you'll humor me, I'd like to lead you into a little thought experiment. I studied physics in college and it was accepted as a valid principle that if you could describe an experiment through thought and prove something would result from it, that was as valid a form of proof as mathematical or experimental, physical experimental proof. The name given to this is a gedanken experiment, thought experiment. So I'd like to do a little gedanken experiment with this quality of awareness.

I want you to imagine that you're in outer space. You're somewhere out there in the solar system, and you're facing away from the sun. And let's just make it interesting—let's say you're looking into an area of the sky where there are no stars. What do you see? You're facing away from the sun. You're looking into outer space. There are no stars in front of you. What do you see? This is not a trick question.

Nothing. Right. You see nothing. There's just blackness, isn't there? Is that blackness completely empty or is it filled with light? The sun's behind you. There's sunlight streaming through the empty space. So is that blackness empty or is it full of light? It's full of light, isn't it? But you don't see it.

Now, suppose a meteor comes from below and whizzes across your field of vision. Will you see it? So you see it. And when you see the meteor, what are you actually seeing? You're seeing reflected sunlight, aren't you? The light hits the meteor, bounces off it, and comes into our eyes. So if you turned around at that point, you would see the radiance of the sun directly. But when you turn away from it, you don't know it's there until something comes in to reflect it.

What I'd like to suggest is that this sunlight pervading empty space is the unconditioned. This is what's ever present. This is the quality of pure awareness. But we don't see it. When something arises in the field of our experience, it's illuminated by this pure awareness and reflects into our eyes. That's consciousness.

So I want to suggest that the unconditioned forms the background of our experience. And it is what illuminates the arisings when they're there. When they're not there, it's simply dormant. It's latent. And we don't see it until some moment, perhaps, when the mind turns around back to the source and touches it directly, knows it directly.

This latent quality of the unconditioned was described by a Zen master called Bankei, who taught in the late 1600s in Japan. He described it as the unborn. And his primary meditation instruction, which he repeated over and over and over again, was "live in the unborn nature of things." In the unborn, all things are perfectly resolved. Live in the unborn. This is an interesting instruction. I find this a very provocative instruction.

What happens to me when I hear that instruction is that my attention naturally releases its grip on the limited and temporary, expanding outward to touch this vastness. Then if we slip back into striving or grasping, we contract again and leave that unborn state. As Banke says, "If you harbor the slightest inclination to seek something, you are turning your back on the unborn." This is like grabbing at the images appearing on the movie screen instead of recognizing the screen itself.

How can we touch this quality of the unborn in our practice? We begin to sense it in those moments when the demands of the "I" are weak. You can learn to notice when the ego is insistent—or as Sylvia mentioned in an earlier talk, when it's "aggrieved"—when it's strong and demanding or complaining. Correspondingly, you can develop sensitivity to when it's quiet, when it's not so demanding or agenda-driven. In those moments, there's a sense of clearer seeing. You can trust more deeply the seeing that emerges from that spacious awareness.

This awareness illuminates everything, yet itself is empty. Nothing is fixed about it because all temporary phenomena can arise and pass within it without obstruction. It's often compared to vast space—open, unlimited, boundless, empty in that same sense. But the crucial difference is that this vastness of

awareness possesses a knowing quality. Physical space doesn't have this intelligence; it simply holds physical objects. This vastness of mind, however, has intelligence inherent within it.

What we are most truly and deeply is this empty space that is unchanging, that knows all the temporary arisings and passings. We are not the temporary arisings and passings themselves, though we become confused and mistake ourselves for them. What we really are is this empty space that also has the capacity of knowing.

This is called in some traditions the nature of mind, or our Buddha nature. This nature has always been like this. It is now. It will always be like this. It exists beyond change, beyond coming and going.

This awareness also possesses a perfectly reflective quality, like a mirror that reflects absolutely accurately anything arising before it. This awareness reflects the painful and the pleasant, the beautiful and the ugly, movement and stillness. It reflects impurities of heart like greed and aversion, as well as beautiful states like loving-kindness and compassion. It reflects all of them, yet notice—a mirror isn't changed by any of its reflections. The nature of the mirror remains constant regardless of what it reflects. This Buddha nature is the same.

It cannot be harmed by appearances. Its fundamental nature remains unchanged no matter what has happened to us or in us. This nature therefore has a quality of freedom, of remaining uncorrupted by any arisings. When we realize that this is who we are, we discover that fundamentally we are free. We have been free from the beginning. We have never actually been bound, but we haven't recognized this freedom, so we keep grasping. When we stop grasping, the freedom is immediately present again.

This is from Rumi: "Live in the nowhere that you came from"—notice the echo to the unborn—"even though you have an address here. That's why you see things in two ways. You have eyes that see from that nowhere, and you have eyes that judge distances, how high and how low. You own two shops, and you run back and forth."

Try to close the one that's a fearful trap, always getting smaller—checkmate this way, checkmate that way. Keep open the shop where you're not selling fish hooks anymore. You are the free swimming fish.

We are that free-swimming fish.

This emptiness, this empty knowing, is pregnant with wholesome qualities. As we develop the capacity to touch it again and again, the wholesome qualities just flower out of it spontaneously. It contains love and compassion and wisdom and patience and acceptance and faith and joy and peace. Different ones appear as the situation requires. When this empty, knowing heart is faced with suffering, compassion comes out. When it meets happiness in someone else, a resonant joy comes out.

So in our practice, can we start to tune to this kind of clarity? This kind of purity of knowing, starting by noticing when our mindfulness is clear, when it's strong, when the reactions of self are not so insistent.

Then if we have the capacity, we can just rest in this knowing, sometimes called resting in awareness.

But the awareness is not a separate place. It's not like another destination apart from appearances. It's actually right there with the appearances. So maybe a better way to say it is we're resting with awareness. If you have the feeling that you've touched an awareness that's not holding appearances, that's delusion. Awareness is always of the arisings. The arisings and the awareness always come together. So look again and see what is being known in resting with awareness.

So this awareness is there. We're clearly in touch with the arisings and the passings. The appearances keep being illuminated. They keep being known. But we also recognize that the mind is in its natural state. It's not clinging anywhere, so it's not being distorted out of self-interest. It's not trying to hold on to anything. And we are in this state of the unborn.

This is from Ajahn Buddhadasa again: "The voidness of I and mine is self-existent. Nothing can touch it, concoct it, or improve it. This voidness is the eternal state, for it knows neither birth nor death. This is the unborn, the Buddha nature, the Dhamma itself."

Ajahn Mun, also from the Thai forest tradition, put it this way: "The Dhamma stays as the Dhamma. The appearances stay as the appearances."

As we recognize the nature of the unborn, the fundamental state of mind, we're actually tuning our being to the unconditioned. We're tuning our being to nibbana, to the safety, to the peaceful, to the refuge. This can become its own path. And we can simply, at a certain point in practice, recognize if we're in that natural state, which is freedom, or if we have moved out of self-interest to try to take hold of something, out of desire or aversion. So we recognize when the mind is in the state of freedom, and we recognize the movements that constitute grasping. This can actually become our practice. And as we just trust more and more in that resting in freedom, it draws us down the path.

I'll just close with this quotation from the Sutta Nipata. The Buddha was talking to a bhikkhu whose name was Pingiya. He said, "Pingiya, other people have freed themselves by this power of trust. Vakali, Bhadravuda and Alavi have all done this. You too should let that strength release you. You too will go to the further shore, beyond the draw of death."

Let's just sit for a minute together, please.

Other people have freed themselves by the power of trust. You too should let that strength release you. You too will go to the furthest shore beyond the draw of death.

Thank you for your attention.

Thank you for listening.

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