Morning Instructions Joseph Goldstein #2

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 1:02:22

Sit and know you're sitting.

Relax into that space of openness, receptivity. Let the eyes relax, the jaw. Let the shoulders relax. Relax the heart, the belly, the legs, the feet. Just sitting and knowing you're sitting.

Be aware of whatever presents itself in this space of openness. Maybe different sensations in the body become predominant. Maybe the feeling of the breath as it enters and leaves the body. Maybe different sounds that appear. Moment after moment, some new experience is presenting itself. Simply be aware of whatever arises, not pushing it away, not holding on.

If thoughts or images should arise, simply be aware that thinking is happening, or an internal seeing. Notice whether there's a wanting or an expectation in the mind for something in particular to happen, or whether the mind is simply present for whatever it is that actually is happening.

At times we practice a very open choiceless awareness—moment after moment being mindful of what presents itself: sensation, sound, a thought. At other times it may be helpful to let the mind rest on a particular object of experience. It might be the breath, it might be sounds, it might be the sitting posture. There can be a very natural rhythm, an intuitive rhythm, between an open choiceless awareness and times when we're stabilizing the awareness on a particular object.

With whatever is arising in each moment, pay attention to the attitude in the mind about that experience. You can check the attitude. Is there liking or disliking? Is there wanting or resistance? Periodically in the sitting, ask yourself the question: what's the attitude in the mind right now about what's presently arising? You can ask the question with respect to sensations, to sounds, to thoughts, to the breath. Even with something as simple as breathing in and breathing out, there are often unnoticed attitudes. We might want something. We might be resisting something.

Keep the practice very simple. It's being aware of what the mind knows. The knowing happens quite spontaneously. Mind is drawn to the breath, to a sensation, to a sound. That's quite a spontaneous process. The practice is to simply be aware of what the mind knows and to check the attitude in the mind about it.

It's very instructive to check the attitude, particularly with strong sensations in the body. Is the attitude one of openness, receptivity, equanimity? Or do pleasant and unpleasant feelings condition liking, wanting, aversion, resistance? Just notice. This is the process of investigation. What are you aware of in this moment? What is the attitude in the mind? Is it open? Is it wanting? Is there resistance?

Where is the mind right now?

When you hear the bell, notice how effortlessly the sound is known. Sound appears and is known. Simply be aware of the experience of hearing. The vibration of the sound appears and then fades, appears and fades.

I love that moment of hearing the bell—not just because it ends the sitting, but because actually the whole Dharma is right there in the sound of the bell. The ease with which we can be aware of the vibration of sound, where it's just that settling back, not doing anything, the sound just appears, and we can, in the most easeful and effortless way, be aware of the changing nature of the vibrations, how it appears and how it disappears.

The whole practice is nothing more than that. That same attitude that you have in the hearing of the bell—can you practice bringing that attitude to every other experience? There's nothing more that need be done.

The gathering of the troops.

Before people introduce themselves, I just wanted to say something. You know, people come here to practice and everything seems like it just goes so smoothly. The meals are out, you have your rooms, the building is taken care of, the grounds look beautiful, the toilets work—there's a lot of effort and energy that goes into this very smooth operation. These are the people responsible for it.

So maybe we could start at one end, and if you introduce yourself and say what department you work in, you'll get some sense of the energy it takes and the tremendous sense of service that everybody brings to the center.

Thank you. Thank you all.

So as you can see, you have quite a support team.

Do you have any questions about your practice or about the instructions?

Someone asks about the threefold bliss.

I'm not totally sure either. There are different interpretations of it. One is the bliss of non-remorse, of sīla—the bliss of virtue, the bliss of concentration, and the bliss of wisdom or freedom. So that's one threefold interpretation. The other interpretation is that it refers to different levels of concentration absorption—the realms of form, the formless realms, and then liberation. So maybe we'll make it the sixfold bliss.

A practitioner describes struggling with torpor during their sitting.

Could you hear the question in the back? First, in the investigation of the torpor, was it more than "here

we are again"? Because one aspect is the recognition—oh yes, torpor is here. That's the "here we are again." And right in there would be an interesting time to ask the question: what's the attitude in my mind about it? Because even in that way of expressing it, it sounds like there was a little aversion to it. Maybe not, but you would want to investigate that. How are you holding it? What's the relationship to the torpor?

And then the investigation could bring you right into the middle of it to see: well, what is it like? What does it feel like in the body? What does it feel like in the mind? There's really an active unpacking of the experience that we're calling torpor, or tiredness.

Within that, it can also be very interesting—often within that experience of sleepiness, there's a thread of something quite wholesome, surprisingly enough. Generally there's a feeling of calm. In the feeling of sleepiness, we're not restless. There's not agitation. So sometimes I've found it helpful, if we can disidentify with any aversion we're having to the state and wanting to get rid of it, to actually look in closely and see what it is. Sometimes we can pull that thread of calm from the middle of it, become aware of the calm, and see what happens with that.

So there's a lot to do in the investigation. If you do all that—you check your attitude, see whether there's resistance or wanting it to go away, go right into the middle of it, see what it's about, see if there's calm—if you do all that and you're still drowning in it, then it might be helpful to either go to mettā or to come back to the breath or something to energize the mind a bit. But I wouldn't jump to the alternative too quickly.

Another practitioner asks about investigating without creating more thinking.

Good question. How does one investigate without just creating a lot more thought and then staying in the realm of thinking?

The investigation has to do with a direct... and here language gives us difficulty. We have to use a lot of different words to get at the actual experience. I was going to say a direct looking, a direct seeing, but even those words add to that mix. A direct feeling of what's happening. Because sometimes if we use too much watching language or seeing language, it creates a sense of someone here looking at something. It's more from the inside. That's why I like feeling language to describe the practice.

You can use a thought as a leading question—for example, "What's the attitude?" or "What does this feel like?" But those questions are not for the purpose of getting a conceptual answer. The thought process could end right there in terms of the investigation.

You use the thought simply to prime that looking, feeling, seeing. It becomes a way of heightening the awareness of the actual experience. So it's not really a thought process at all, except perhaps for that initial priming.

This is what I've found very helpful—this question: *What's the attitude in the mind?* Just periodically through the sitting, with whatever is happening. Sometimes I do it quite randomly. I'll be sitting and then

ask: *What's the attitude with whatever it is that's happening?* It could be a sensation, could be the breath. Just that question enlivens things. We see things that we might not have noticed.

So that's what investigation means. It doesn't mean conceptual analysis.

Often the insight we have—and this would be interesting for you to check out, just to see if this is true in your experience—in the moment of the insight, it's actually a very intuitive understanding. We're just going along, going along, and suddenly we see something or understand something that we didn't see before. That insight is then expressed in words. But the words are not the insight itself. The words are the expression of the insight. See if that makes sense in your own experience.

One word of caution: those moments of insight and then the expression of them can be so interesting, so juicy, so entertaining, that we chew on them a lot. Chew once or twice, and then swallow. You don't want the mind just going around in circles, even if it's around what we understand to be a dharma insight. Have it, recognize it, even as it's expressed in words, and then just keep the practice going along.

This understanding means that everything we possess in the world will eventually be lost. All our possessions and relationships and even this mind and body—it comes and it goes. But what's sustained throughout our long evolution over lifetimes is our actions and the fruit of those actions. That karmic unfolding is why it's called our true property.

This is just a little aside, but I really like this. In the Buddhist understanding, there's a lot of emphasis on the whole concept of merit, of skillful actions. One of the definitions of merit is "provisions for the journey." When I read that, it just landed—*oh, yes*. If we're on a journey, we always benefit from being well-provisioned. That's what merit means.

One thing as you go through the day: the place where mindfulness is most easily lost—I want to highlight it as a particular area to remember—is in transitions, as you're going from one activity to another. It's so easy. We're mindful in whatever activity we're doing, and then there's something else to do. In that transition time, our mind just jumps ahead. We get caught up and our mind is ahead of ourselves.

So the transition periods between activities are as important as everything else in the day. Watch, and again ask the question: *What's the attitude in the mind right now as I'm going from this to that?* Then the day becomes very alive. The day really becomes seamless in the practice of awareness. As Myoshin said in the instructions yesterday, it can all be very easeful. It doesn't mean a hard focus. It means that easeful presence of mind.

That's what we're practicing.

It's not that somebody forgot to ring the bell. Just to remind you of that.

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