Questions and Answers

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 1:01:38

Is there anybody who hasn't asked questions that would like to?

Is there a beneficial way to work with the sound of silence?

I need to back up and tell another little story first. This is Joseph's miracle story. I've performed one miracle in my life, and it happened in 1975. I was teaching with Sharon Salzberg in Mendocino, California, up in the Redwoods. Just before the 8:30 sitting in the morning, we were sitting together, talking a bit, and suddenly and spontaneously out of my mouth came this big cloud of smoke and ash. It was completely unusual. It was very sweet-smelling, and the ash was tangible. I was just like, "Whoa, what was that?"

But what to do? I had no explanation at all, so I went into the 8:30 sitting. Then it kind of receded into the background a bit, although it had struck me as very odd.

A few weeks later, we were teaching our first three-month retreat. This was before we had IMS, up in Bucksport, Maine. Before the retreat started, I was in the local bank in Bucksport, standing in front of the teller, and again, out came this cloud of smoke and ash. The bank teller looked at me. So this time it really piqued my interest—what is going on?

At that time, Ram Dass was still living in New York, and he was studying with and teaching with this Brooklyn-born mystic. Maybe some of you remember those days; her name was Joya. She had a lot of psychic abilities. I had friends who were down in New York studying with them, and I asked them to ask Joya what this was.

There's this famous saint in India, Sai Baba, and people would go to Sai Baba, and one of the things he did regularly was produce spontaneously this ash, which is called vibhuti—holy ash. When I asked Joya about my experience, she said, "Oh, this is the vibhuti of Sai Baba." I felt pretty good about that.

This story is related to your question in a rather roundabout way.

A few months later, I met with Munindraji, my first Dharma teacher. He was in the States, and I told him about this phenomenon. He just said, "Oh, it is the fire element. It's just some element in the body manifesting."

Months later, I asked Dipa Ma. I think I was in India at the time. I asked her about what this was, and she said, "Oh, you must have some disease."

So from the vibhuti, the holy ash of Sai Baba, to the fire element, to some disease. Which was a very good

lesson in how the mind can interpret experience in a lot of different ways. The experience didn't change. The experience was whatever it was. And yet there were all these different interpretations with different feelings about it. So that was a very powerful lesson in the power of interpretation and how that can really be a filter on how we're with experience.

So this all goes back to the sound of silence. There is an experience that people have, kind of an inner sound, and it's usually or often a very high-pitched sound. Some teachers give it the name "sound of silence." Some people think of it as the sound of the unconditioned. When I asked Sayadaw U Pandita about it, he said, "It's the friction of the earth element in the bones in the ear."

This reminded me of the miracle story. There's this phenomenon, a lot of different names given to it, and we might perhaps relate to it differently depending on how we think about it. From the point of view of vipassana practice, whatever has the nature to arise has the nature to pass. So it's another phenomenon which can be experienced, and many people do. When it's a predominant object, it could be fine just to pay attention to it for a while. It could be a good object of concentration where the mind could get really one-pointed on it. I would just be careful about overlaying it with any particular interpretation. Let it be just what it is.

Thanks for the opportunity. I have two questions, and they're not really clearly related to the Dhamma. I asked this because I had dinner with friends and the issues came up, so I'm curious how you would answer. The first is, I wonder how you would reply to the claim that there are drugs you can use in order to have a shortcut to the realization of emptiness and then get freed from illusion.

Let's do one at a time.

The second question would probably push the first one out, so let's begin there.

The question was about conversations with friends where some people claim or think that certain drugs could be a shortcut to the experience of emptiness. Having spent my younger years in the sixties, I certainly experimented a lot with different kinds of drugs and had powerful experiences on them. I think for different people there can certainly be mind-opening, heart-opening experiences. That's clear—it can happen. Though it's not for everyone, and for certain people it could be harmful.

But for me, the big difference is and was the realization that profound transformation requires a path of practice. It is possible that certain drug experiences could open us to possibilities, but they're not really a path. If people try using them as a path, I think that's when it gets quite problematic and dangerous. I see the possibility of a real opening to different and even profound experiences, but in the end we really need to cultivate those understandings and the qualities of mind which make them possible through our own practice and development. Because then it's all integrated. Otherwise it's a moment's experience, sometimes with understanding coming from it. But as I said, it doesn't seem to me a path of practice.

The second question was whether there's a certain downside both to insight practice and jhāna

practice—whether you can use it as a kind of avoidance, and whether one can become addicted to the pleasant states of certain meditative experiences.

I think both those possibilities exist, and they manifest in several ways. First, people can misunderstand both the meaning and the practice of mindfulness, particularly with respect to emotions. Some people—and here's where guidance can be really helpful—could be using, for example, the technique of noting not as a frame for then going into the feeling of it, but as a way of pushing it away. They avoid feeling what's coming up. Sometimes people even get dissociated from their feelings. That's not a helpful avoidance at all, and it's not really the practice. But without guidance at certain times, we might not see this. Somebody on the outside can reflect back, "Oh, that's what's happening." So that's one danger.

Another danger, which is not uncommon in spiritual scenes—and I saw it to some extent in myself in my earlier years, not a serious case but a mild case of it, though I've seen it a lot—is that we may have a genuine experience of the emptiness of phenomena, just seeing the selfless, insubstantial nature, and we get attached to that level of understanding without integrating into it the level of interaction that happens on the relative plane. By relative or conventional, I mean self and other and personality and relationship.

There's a very famous teaching by Nāgārjuna, one of the very great Buddhist masters of ancient India, considered by many to be the second Buddha—a very renowned master. He says that being attached to the solidity of things, to taking things to be real and solid, is a big problem. However, being attached to emptiness? It's hopeless. He was really highlighting the danger.

At different times I've seen this—people who may have had a genuine or deep realization of emptiness but in some way are getting attached to it. Then it can manifest in terms of relationships in the world: "Oh, it's all empty, nothing matters." They're not first understanding that the law of karma—how to say this—that empty phenomena are following or manifesting as the law of karma. To see that things are empty doesn't negate how the unfolding process happens. But very often people think, "It's all empty, things don't matter," and so they don't take responsibility for their actions. I've really seen this in different spiritual scenes. People can get into a lot of trouble with that. That's another danger.

The third is the one you mentioned. There's a potential danger, which I've also seen happen, but it's workable. When people do experience highly concentrated states, jhāna states, it is very pleasant, and it is possible to get attached to them and to be practicing just for that. Even though the Buddha spoke often of these states of concentration as a vehicle for liberation, for using them in the service of insight, if one just gets attached to them and practices only for them, it's a stumbling block. People get stuck in that place.

One of the few times that the Buddha is said to have reprimanded Sāriputta, the chief disciple second only to the Buddha in his wisdom, involved an Indian Brahmin who was dying or close to death. I can't remember the story exactly—whether he wanted to do the brahmavihāra meditations in order to have union with Brahmā in the Hindu fashion. But anyway, Sāriputta taught him the brahmavihāras. He attained jhāna. He was reborn in the Brahmā worlds. When the Buddha came to find out, he said to

Sāriputta, "That was not correct. This person had the potential to become enlightened, to become liberated, and you taught him a path to just another conditioned existence." So Sāriputta quickly exercised his psychic powers, went up to the Brahmā worlds, and straightened this fellow out.

So there is that caution.

The question was about free will and if everything is conditioned, where does free will come in. This is really a discussion that I started having as a freshman in philosophy in college and have had for the last forty years, and it hasn't really gone anyplace.

The only thing I will really say about it—and I'll put this out not as a conclusion to the question, but as something you might want to think about in your spare time off of retreat—is understanding the difference between conditioned and determined. Because things can be conditioned, meaning they have causes behind them, without the outcome being determined. So that's just one little piece to consider.

The other piece, which I've always been a little hesitant to say, but when I really look at the term "free will" and what those two words mean, I can't come to any understanding of what the term means. We put them together and we assume we know what it means. But as I understand it, the term free will implies someone who has it. And if there's no someone in the first place, then what does the term mean? So I'd like to leave it at that.

What has been suggested, as this topic comes up—which it does, because in a way it's a question that makes sense for it to arise—whatever the philosophic conclusions are, act as if you have a choice and choose the skillful. Whether you're choosing the skillful is predetermined or it's arising in the moment or however it comes about, choose the skillful. Abandon the unskillful, cultivate the mind. That's the best I can do.

Someone asked about existential fear, and whether this would be a time to say something about it. The only thing that comes to mind in terms of that phrase—and I'm not sure this experience actually is that, but perhaps it is—for quite a long period in my practice, fear was a very strong part of my practice. That was the major, big defilement that I was working with, struggling with.

Over years—this was not a quick thing—sometimes I could see the fear arise in relationship to particular situations. There would be some situation, I could feel the fear, and then try to work with it. But at certain times in my practice, especially on long intensive retreat, there were times when the fear was so strong I was actually afraid to go from sitting to standing. So maybe that's what existential fear is about. It was completely irrational. There was no obvious cause for it to be there. But for whatever reason, that was the energy. It was like the primal emotion of fear arising. Very unpleasant. It's not a pleasant emotion.

So I was working with it a lot. Fear, fear, fear, fear. The phrase Guy used the other day, I think, in reference to his coming to understand what real acceptance means—I had exactly the same experience. I was actually doing walking meditation outside here, again having been through this for a long time, and I

was creating a whole self story which was just feeding the fear. I was building up this fearful persona. "I'm such a fearful person. This goes back so long. This is going to take thirty years of therapy to unwind." I was really identifying with this. This is who I am.

There were two turning points—big turning points, not little ones. One of the turning points was at a time I was teaching with Sharon Salzberg. We were teaching in Texas sometime, going for a walk after lunch, and I was going on and on about my fear. She just turned to me and she said, "Joseph, it's only a mind state." And of course, that's something I had told different people countless times.

But when you hear something at just the right time, it lands differently. That was one of those right times. Yes, it's just a mind state. I don't have to build a whole self-story around it.

But the fear was still coming a lot. I wasn't so much building the self-story anymore, but it was still powerful. Then later, during a long retreat, I was doing walking meditation out here, feeling the fear, noting it. And in just the way Guy described, at a certain moment my mind simply settled back and I said the same words: "If this fear is here for the rest of my life, it's okay."

That was the first moment I had genuinely accepted it.

Before that, I'd been noting it. I'd been thinking I was being mindful and accepting, but I wasn't. Behind the note was really "fear, go away." Something I'm sure you've realized by now—you absolutely cannot fool your mind. We can pretend to be mindful, but the mind knows. Is there acceptance or not? And if it's not, it doesn't work. But often we don't see it. We actually think we're being mindful.

So that moment—"here for the rest of my life, it's okay"—"it's okay" actually became a powerful mantra for me. Almost like if a young child were afraid, if we were that young child who was afraid, it's interesting that we would really know the right attitude to have. It's okay. It's okay. We wouldn't try to convince them that they weren't feeling the fear, or judge them for having it. We would have a very intuitive, loving, caring response: "It's okay."

It's so interesting that we have such a hard time having that same relationship to our own emotions. But it's the same thing we need.

This points to another important distinction, which maybe at some point could be a whole dharma talk: understanding the difference between recognition and mindfulness. Because often we confuse the two. All that time until that moment, I had been recognizing the fear. I knew what it was. I could recognize it. I could name it. But I was taking the recognition—which is really the factor of perception—I was taking that recognition to be mindfulness. And it's not. They're two different functions.

So when you're with some deep feeling, whether it's existential fear or existential anything else, and there's that feeling of being caught in it somehow, stuck in some way—if it's a quickly passing emotion, or even not so quickly, but we're with it and we feel it come and we can be with it and it goes away, it's not a

problem. But with these things that are deeply conditioned, where we feel caught, then I would really look to see: Are we simply recognizing it? Or are we being mindful in the sense of being totally accepting? It's okay. If it's here for the rest of my life, it's okay.

A retreatant asked about whether the big mind meditation was derived from the Dzogchen tradition, and wanted to hear more about the differences and similarities between Dzogchen and Vipassana regarding mindfulness.

That's a huge question. When I first started doing a little bit of Dzogchen practice, I found that the metaphysics, the philosophical description of reality that the Tibetan tradition used and that, for example, the Burmese tradition used were really different. Sometimes they would be saying opposite things about the nature of freedom.

So the first long Dzogchen retreat I did, I was driving myself crazy—talk about the manifestation of doubt being perplexity! The question that was tormenting me was: "Who's right?" If they're right, then these others can't be right—and back and forth. It was a very difficult month.

But by the second month of the retreat, I really had a shift of understanding, and this became the basis for my writing *One Dharma*—because it was really that dilemma which was behind that book. How can we hold different traditions that may be saying different things, but hold them in a place of unity rather than conflict?

So what happened to me after that month of practice, struggling as I was—it was like the way Zen koans are sometimes described, how you should hold a koan: like having a hot burning something in your throat that you can't spit out and you can't swallow. That was the intensity of it. It felt like my whole spiritual life depended on resolving this question: Who's right?

This is the amazing thing. If we just go on sitting and walking and sitting and walking, somehow the Dharma unfolds in beautiful ways. I realized I was asking the wrong question. It wasn't about who's right. I began to understand that all the teachings—all the teachings—are skillful means for liberation. And so I had this phrase in my mind: metaphysics as skillful means.

Because if we take teachings as statements of truth, one school says this, another school says that, they may say opposite things, so there's conflict. But if we take all the statements of the teachings and understand them as skillful means rather than as statements of truth, then we can learn from any tradition, from any metaphysics, if it's truly skillful for us.

So then the question becomes: skillful means for what? That became very clear, because all of the Buddhist traditions—whether it's Dzogchen or Vipassana or Zen—it's always skillful means for not clinging. That is the bottom line. And when I realized that, all the dilemmas fell away. Is this helpful for

not clinging, or not? We can find this in all the traditions.

In the Pali Canon, very often, many times, the Buddha uses the phrase "liberation through non-clinging." So it's very clear that that's the essence of our practice. In the Dzogchen tradition, this appears in so many different places. Patrul Rinpoche, one of the great masters—I think he lived in the 1800s—a wandering vagabond, but one of the very great masters, has a teaching called *Advice from Me to Myself*. It's a wonderful piece, which maybe in the next six weeks I'll read. So if any of you want to stay.

He goes through this whole long teaching and then says, basically, the essence of it all is not clinging. That's what he comes down to. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, one of the great masters of the last century, said that the essence of awareness—so in Dzogchen there's a lot of emphasis on awareness, the nature of mind—he said the essence of awareness is not clinging. If there's clinging, it's not awareness.

So when I really saw what it all comes down to, what all these different metaphysical teachings are about, what all these different skillful means point toward, it seemed to me that this was just the core teaching. And this is what we're practicing. In that way, we can learn from different traditions without conflict, if we understand: Is this helping us to not cling, to let go of everything?

In one of the Pali suttas—one that I love a lot—the Buddha says, "Abandon, let go of that which doesn't belong to you. If you abandon that which doesn't belong to you, it will be for your welfare and happiness." What doesn't belong to us? Everything. So it's the same teaching.

As long as we're identified with any arising phenomena—because again, the Buddha was just so clear: whatever has the nature to arise will pass away. If it has the nature to arise, it means it's a conditioned phenomenon, arising out of conditions. Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away. And so if we're identified with anything that's arising—a thought, a feeling, the body, a sensation, an external situation—then we're caught. We're in Mara's snare, in Mara's trap. And as soon as we don't identify, as soon as we abandon or let go or let be, whichever phrases work for you, and simply let things arise and pass on their own, then we're in a place of freedom.

So in that way, even though the methods may be a little different and the metaphysics may be a little different, I see the essence as being the same.

Question: I was struck by something you said before. You talked about a similar question of moving between traditions, and you said, "Whatever one you choose, follow it to its end." I'm just wondering, in your own life and practice, how do you know?

Is the end nirvana, or is there a certain awakening that can happen? The question referred to something I had mentioned at the Forest Refuge—that one should practice in one tradition until its end before exploring other traditions. But I'm not sure I would have said "the end." That doesn't quite resonate exactly. What I meant is that I think we should come to some depth of practice, some depth of understanding in one tradition. The real end, the end end, is arahantship or full liberation. I don't think

we have to wait until then to necessarily explore some different ways of practice, but I do think it's helpful to come to where we feel—and this may be different for different people—a real depth of understanding the practice, where we have had deep and transforming insights, and we feel confident in it.

Because then it becomes possible to study and practice in other traditions and with other teachers without it causing confusion. If I hadn't felt so confident in my Vipassana practice, that experience I described when I started practicing Dzogchen, I don't think it would have resolved in the way it did. I think I would have been caught by a lot of doubt and then confusion.

Doubt, as you probably know from times it has arisen, is the most dangerous of all the hindrances. With the other hindrances—as strong as they can be—desire or lust or aversion or restlessness or sleepiness, we're still practicing. It's difficult, we're struggling with those mind states, but we're still on the path. When doubt is there and it's strong and we're buying into it and not seeing it, that just stops us. That's why it's considered so important to understand that particular factor of mind and to work with it.

So that's by way of saying: practice until we really don't have much doubt about our practice. Then opening up to other ways and other teachers can be enriching.

I'll give you one example that was particularly enriching for me, which we've brought into these teachings. Even though this is found in the Pali canon, this aspect was not given as much emphasis as in some of the later traditions—and that's the aspect of bodhichitta, that aspiration that our practice be for the awakening of all.

It's there in the texts. When you read the Pali canon, the Buddha, after the first sixty arahants became enlightened, sent them out: "Work for the welfare and the benefit of all, you who have done your duty." It's there, but as a specific teaching, it's not emphasized that much. Whereas in the Tibetan tradition, it's emphasized a great deal. I found it really inspiring to bring that aspect front and center.

I had always realized that the practice will inevitably help others, because if our minds become more peaceful and more loving and more patient, of course it's going to benefit everybody we meet and everybody we're close to. But the teaching of bodhichitta brings that motivation up front rather than being seen as a consequence of our practice. It can become the motivation for our practice: may my practice be for the welfare and the awakening of all. I found that it just expanded the whole view of practice and was very energizing.

That's an example of how, once we're confident in our practice and then explore other traditions, it can be very enriching. But if we do it too soon, before we're really stable in our understanding, it can get confusing because some of the teachings apparently say different things.

The next question was about other pieces I've brought in from other traditions, and also what other teachers' responses have been—not just to big mind meditation, but to anything brought into the conversation from elsewhere.

I'll answer the second one first. As with every endeavor, there is a liberal-conservative spectrum. This is not to put any hierarchy on it, because I see value in the whole spectrum. Among teachers, some are very conservative, conserving a particular tradition. Each tradition has its own integrity, so they are worth preserving. Other teachers—you might say the more liberal wing—have a different mission, a different interest, bringing in other things and synthesizing.

So it very much depends. Some of my teachers would look upon big mind meditation probably with horror, whereas Munindraji was an example of someone who was very open. I want to emphasize that I really think the whole spectrum is needed. We want to conserve the integrity of particular traditions, and also for some to be exploring synthesis.

Most of what we have brought in has been from the Tibetan tradition, because we've practiced mostly with that. But there's been some Zen influence, particularly from readings. Some of the Zen masters and texts are just so wonderful, such direct pointings. There's one book I mentioned in an interview which had quite a strong influence on me—by the Korean Zen master Chinul. He was, I think, twelfth century or perhaps eleventh, one of the founders of Korean Zen. There's a book of his teachings called *Tracing Back the Radiance*.

What I liked about his teaching was how he framed it all. He had this wonderful phrase—he framed all of his teachings in terms of "sudden awakening, gradual cultivation." The teachings were always pointing to that moment of sudden awakening in terms of understanding the nature of the mind, the empty, aware nature of mind, free of any clinging. It was always pointing to the realization of that, but also acknowledging that one moment's realization, as important as it is for reorienting, is just the beginning. Then it needs gradual cultivation over a long time to integrate that understanding.

That just feels so true to my own experience and to the experience of so many yogis over these weeks. In one way or another, I'm sure you've had moments—aha moments—where you simply understood something, at whatever level it may be, something you didn't understand before about your mind. We could call that a moment of sudden awakening to something. It needs the gradual cultivation so it grows, it deepens, it matures. This is the path aspect. In a way, that goes back to the very first question. A psychedelic experience might give us a moment of sudden awakening, but it doesn't give us the gradual cultivation. It really can't give us that, and so it's not really a path.

Someone read a definition of insight or vipassana, a kind of working definition, which says it comes from investigating fabrications in an appropriate way. The question was about the balance of understanding the practice being described both as bare awareness, which has this passive, receptive quality, and also described as an investigation into the nature of reality.

What you're really asking about in a fundamental way is a description of the first two factors of enlightenment, the first two factors of awakening. The nature of mindfulness is that quality of just bare attention—it's aware of what's arising without clinging, without condemning, without identifying. So

that's very much the first aspect of what you described.

The wisdom aspect of mind, which is the second factor of enlightenment, that investigation of dhammas—I think we talked about this a little bit the other morning. That's the investigation, the more active aspect, which begins to highlight and see the fact that whatever is arising is changing. So we're investigating the impermanent nature of things.

Just one way of doing this, which I think we've mentioned in the hall: when we would report to Sayadaw U Pandita, he had a very specific way of reporting, which was quite challenging. We would need to report what was arising in our sittings or walking and also describe what happened to the object as we observed it. So sitting, rising, falling—describe the different sensations—then felt pressure. As I observed the pressure, it got stronger, or it got weaker, or it disappeared, or something else arose. To be looking that carefully, to see what happens to the object—that's a more active investigation aspect. It's also the investigation of the unsatisfying, unreliable nature, the selfless nature. All of that is part of the investigating faculty.

Someone asked: at what point do we emphasize one versus the other? It seems like the investigating quality is really where the substance is supposed to be, where you build on bare awareness.

The question is, when do you do one or the other? They really work together, because if you're not mindful of what's arising, there's no foundation to investigate. You need the mindfulness and a certain stability of mindfulness in order to investigate. As you have undoubtedly noticed, in those sittings or walkings when the mindfulness is not particularly strong and we're kind of there but not really there, and the mind's just wandering a lot, there's no basis for investigation. The mindfulness is the foundation. When there is somewhat of a continuity of mindfulness and there's stability, then the investigation not only becomes possible, it almost happens by itself. So you certainly need that foundation of mindfulness in order to investigate. But you're all experienced yogis now, so just play. Really see. Explore.

Another question arose about holding these two truths about self—the absolute truth that we're coming to know through deepening understanding, seeing that clearly, and at the same time honoring the relative, the conventional level of self and other and relationship, alongside the more ultimate level of seeing the emptiness of it all.

It's a really important question—how do we integrate the relative and ultimate levels? I'm trying to think how to frame this. I don't know if you've noticed, but the older one gets, the synapses kind of work slower. Whatever jumps the synapses have a little less oomph.

In the context of retreat, obviously this is a very extraordinary time to be exploring the more ultimate level. There are very few distractions, no responsibilities other than doing this. This is an opportunity to really explore the impermanent, unsatisfying, selfless nature of these arisings.

Whatever wisdom is developed in this context can then be brought to our life in the world where, for the

most part, we're operating on the relative level—because we're in relationship to people, we have our responsibilities, and we're just operating in that conventional way.

One of the most powerful practices to bring to our relative world is understanding the importance and power of seeing our motivation behind our actions, because we're acting a lot in the world. We're acting in speech. Everything I said in the last two talks where the Buddha highlighted the ten unwholesome actions—he said these are going to cause suffering—but the only way we can actually avoid doing them is if we're aware in our life in the world of those motivations as they come up. Before we act, what are we doing? Are we aware? Are we mindful? Is this skillful? Is it unskillful? That's an important application. That's still on the relative level, but it's bringing our dharma understanding to that level.

The place where it becomes very useful to call up the wisdom of emptiness—the insights that we've developed on retreat—in our life in the world is in times of suffering. Suffering becomes a powerful signal to us: okay, something's going on here and I'm not understanding, I'm holding on in some way, I'm resisting in some way. Remember that powerful teaching where the Buddha said we are one hundred percent responsible for the suffering in the mind. Conditions may be painful—that's something different. But if our minds are suffering, it's because there are defilements of one kind or another.

When we're suffering, instead of drowning in it, it actually becomes a powerful call to investigate. That's really a time to investigate. What's happening here? What am I attached to? What am I clinging to? Is it a point of view? Is it a state? Is it a situation? What am I resisting? What am I not letting in? To the degree that we can bring the insight we've developed here on retreat to those moments of investigation, that really is the integration of the two levels.

Ajahn Chah had this wonderful line. He said there are two kinds of suffering. There's suffering that leads to more suffering—that is when we're just drowning in it and lost in it and don't understand it. And there's suffering which leads to the end of suffering—which is suffering in our lives, even not suffering but just difficulties, places where we feel stuck. If we bring investigation to it and ask, what's going on here? What can I learn? Where am I caught? How can I be free? That's suffering that leads to the end of suffering.

Our whole life is our practice. That's a good note to end on. Our life is our practice.

May the merit of all our practice together be dedicated to the welfare, the happiness, and the awakening of all beings everywhere.

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