# The End of Dukkha

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 1:01:30

Over these past weeks we've been discussing different aspects of the most fundamental core of the Buddhist teachings, namely the Four Noble Truths. The first of them being the Truth of Dukkha, which is often translated as suffering, but really in a more comprehensive way means the understanding of the inherently unsatisfying nature of impermanent conditioned phenomena. The second noble truth is the cause of suffering—different kinds of craving. Tonight I'd like to speak about the third noble truth, which is the cessation or the end of dukkha.

The Buddha speaks to this very directly, in the very first discourse he gave after his enlightenment. He said, "And this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: that is the remainderless fading away, cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, and letting go of craving." Fading away, cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, letting go of craving. The message is clear—a very clear and unambiguous statement about what frees the mind.

But can we even imagine a mind that is free of craving? Can we even imagine that possibility? We might resonate more easily with that famous prayer of St. Augustine where he said, "Dear Lord, make me chaste, but not yet." I think that's probably more the realm in which we operate.

A few years ago I was doing a self-retreat, and in one sitting, a few lines from the enlightenment verse of the Buddha—what he is said to have declared right after his awakening under the Bodhi tree—came to my mind. He said, "Realized is the unconditioned. Achieved is the end of craving." Again, it's a very clear statement of what constitutes freedom for us.

But in sitting on retreat and reflecting on these words, I started to understand them in a new and somewhat different way. Rather than understanding the end of craving as some far-off distant goal in practice—something that was even a little hard to imagine, someday maybe we'll be at the end of craving—or even as some special meditative state, I began to understand the possibility of practicing the end of craving in each moment. This is actually our practice now, in each moment. We can be practicing the third noble truth.

When we explore this for ourselves in our own experience, we can see how craving, when it is present in the mind, obscures the natural ease, the natural openness of mind. And how in moments when the mind is free of wanting, free of desire, free of craving, we really get a taste of happiness and peace.

As a simple experiment, the next time the mind is filled with some kind of wanting, some kind of craving, some kind of desire, pay attention to what that feels like. And then—and this is the beauty and the gift of a

retreat, where we have the opportunity and the invitation to see these desires arise in the mind and not act on them, simply to be aware of them—we're able to explore in a very direct way the feeling of the mind filled with desire. And then we're aware, we're mindful, and at a certain point the desire goes away. What does that feel like? We can see for ourselves, even if it's just for a few moments, the freedom that comes from the end of craving.

For myself, every time I can not act on a desire that's in the mind and be mindful of the process, it always feels to me like I've been let out of the grip of something when the desire goes away. Even if there was some pleasure associated with the desire, there's still a much greater taste of freedom in the mind free of craving, free of wanting.

But this is not something that we should just accept as a blind belief or as some Buddhist dogma. The Buddha is always suggesting that we look for ourselves, see for ourselves. These Four Noble Truths—we have to make them our own, because it's in that that they have transformative value.

Tulku Urgyen, who was one of the great Dzogchen masters of the last century, spoke frequently about practicing the recognition of the nature of mind. This again is using Dzogchen language. Nature of mind means that empty aware nature, the empty knowing nature free of any clinging. His instruction was: practice the recognition of this nature of mind for short moments, many times.

That's a very useful instruction, because very often we may hear of the possibility of freedom or the end of craving, and somehow we internalize that as thinking it will be some state we'll get and hold onto and have. But for most of us, the practice is really for short moments, many times. This is something we can do. And so this can become the framework for understanding our own practice of the end of craving. We can practice that for short moments, many times, throughout the day.

As you know, there are many different descriptions and methods and vocabularies and even metaphysical descriptions among the various Buddhist traditions regarding the nature of freedom. At times, if one is reading or becoming familiar with or studying in different traditions, it can be a little confusing because the methods and vocabularies are often dissimilar. But underneath all the differences, there is one understanding among all the Buddhist traditions of what it is that frees the mind. In the Pali texts, the phrase that is used very often is liberation through non-clinging.

That's a very direct statement: liberation through non-clinging.

Not only is this phrase found very often in the Pali texts, it's found very often in Zen teachings and in Tibetan teachings as well. There was a very famous Tibetan Rinpoche named Patrul Rinpoche who lived in the 19th century as a very poor wandering monk in eastern Tibet. He was called the enlightened vagabond, but he was renowned for the depth of his realization, of his awakening, and he was very much loved by the ordinary people in Tibet. He had some useful words about this teaching of non-clinging. In this teaching, he called it "Advice from Me to Myself":

*Listen up, old bad karma patrol, you dweller in distraction. For ages now, you've been beguiled, entranced, and fooled by appearances. Are you aware of that? Are you? Right this very instant when you're under the spell of mistaken perception, you've got to watch out. Don't let yourself get carried away by this fake and empty life. Your mind is spinning around about carrying a lot of useless projects. It's a waste. Give it up. Thinking about the hundred plans you want to accomplish with never enough time to finish them just weighs down your mind. You're completely distracted by all these projects which never come to an end, but keep spreading out more like ripples in water. Don't be a fool. For once, just sit tight. Even though you don't know how to practice, just let go of everything. That's what I really want to say. If you let go of everything, everything, everything, that's the real point.*

It's the same teaching. Liberation through non-clinging. Let go of everything.

What does "let go of everything" mean? It doesn't mean that everything stops happening. It means we're not holding on. We're not grasping. The world goes on. We don't disappear. But our relationship to the world can be completely transformed.

So the question for us then is how we can actually experience in practice and in our lives this non-craving, non-clinging—at first on a momentary level, then for short moments, and then in the end, really as the unshakeable freedom of mind.

We can practice non-craving and non-clinging in a variety of ways, and different Buddhist traditions highlight one way or another through different methods. We can decondition, relinquish, and abandon craving through an increasingly refined awareness of the three characteristics, which is a lot of vipassana practice. We're being mindful, coming face to face with what's arising in the moment, and through that coming face to face, the wisdom arises which sees that whatever is appearing is also disappearing. We see the impermanent, changing, unsatisfying, selfless nature. This becomes clearer and clearer as we pay attention. We begin to see the impersonal, selfless nature of this whole unfolding process. We see so clearly, and with increasing clarity, that nothing lasts long enough to be called self, that whatever is arising is also passing away. And it's all happening very quickly.

These three characteristics, which describe or characterize every experience we have—it's not that they're about some experiences and not about others—everything that arises will pass away, is unsatisfying, is selfless. The Buddha called these three characteristics the drawbacks or the downside of conditioned experience. This is really the understanding of dukkha. This is the downside: that things don't last and therefore are not satisfying and they're not in our control.

But happily for us, there is an upside to the downside. It's precisely because phenomena are impermanent and unsatisfying that we are motivated to awaken to a greater peace, a greater happiness. The Buddha pointed to this very directly. He said, "If there were no drawbacks or dangers in the world, beings would not become disenchanted with the world. But because there are these drawbacks in the world, beings become disenchanted by it."

So it's precisely because we all have both intuited and, to some extent, deeply experienced these drawbacks that we have become somewhat disenchanted with the world.

But it's also interesting to watch our reactions to this teaching and understanding. How do we relate when we hear words like danger, drawbacks, downside? Do these words sound gloomy? Do they evoke fear? Or in seeing things more completely, in understanding this aspect of how things are, do they bring a sense of greater openness and greater relief?

It's very helpful to understand the word disenchantment, because the Buddha often speaks of this quality of mind as the precursor, the forerunner to awakening. When he goes through the list of things leading to awakening, disenchantment often arises just before a final opening. So what does disenchantment mean? It really means waking up from the spell of enchantment. This is the story in so many fairy tales—the wicked witch puts somebody under a spell, and then the beautiful prince or princess comes and gives the frog a kiss, and they wake up from the spell of enchantment. That's what disenchantment means. It's waking up from the dreamlike spell of our ignorance.

I had an interesting experience of this on a retreat several years ago. Are you familiar with the experience you might have when you wake up in the morning, when you first wake up? There's that moment of awakening, and then sometimes maybe there's a fragment of a thought which captures our attention, and we just fall back into the dream state for a few minutes. And maybe again we wake up—this could happen once or twice until we're fully awake. We awaken, then fall back into the dream, then awaken again.

I was noticing this happening. Then, as I was doing walking meditation, I began to notice that thin layer of background thoughts that are often in the mind, even as we're being mindful. Feeling the sensation of the movement, feeling the step, but it's as if there's this ticker tape, very light, almost like whispers in the mind—just these very light background thoughts going through, hardly noticed. Perhaps thoughts, images, fragments of stories passing through the mind. Although they are hardly noticed, and although they may be very light, they really are the ongoing creation of the world we inhabit.

It became very interesting to notice that I'm walking and tuning in more carefully to these background thoughts, and most of them were self-referential in one way or another. A wanting, or a memory, or a planning—there was some sense of self in most of them. Likes, dislikes. What was striking to me as I was doing the walking meditation, just noticing all this, was how similar this experience of getting pulled into these background thoughts was to the experience of falling back into the dream in the morning. It was really the same thing happening. I realized that through the course of the day, we are simply dreaming ourselves into existence in our getting lost unknowingly in the background thoughts of our minds.

This became a very useful mantra for me. Throughout the day, I would remind myself: dreaming myself into existence. It was really powerful because I could see so clearly how the sense of self was being created when I wasn't aware of these thoughts arising. And it inspired much greater energy to stay awake, not to fall into the dream.

Awareness of the impermanent, selfless nature of thought is such a powerful part of our practice, and I know you're aware of this—you've been practicing this now for many weeks. When we're unaware of thoughts as they arise in the mind, or we are identified with them, they have tremendous power. They are just like little dictators in the mind. Thoughts arise: go here, go there, do this, do that, say this, get married, get divorced. Yet when we're aware of a thought as being just a thought, that's all it is—a thought arising and passing away in the open sky of the mind. There's hardly anything there. When we can see this, we're no longer enslaved by the thoughts that are arising. We begin to see that the only power thoughts have is the power we give them. And we give them power when we're not aware that they're there, when we've fallen back into the dream.

Something I've recommended over these weeks, and this is just a reminder: occasionally, it's very interesting and helpful just to sit, and it's almost as if we're sitting waiting for thoughts to happen. That becomes the object of our mindfulness, our attention. But it's not so much trying to recognize the content of the thought—it's settling back, being aware as the thought arises, holding the question: what is a thought? We're really looking at the nature of thought itself, not at the content. And we begin to see very directly how empty and insubstantial it is. This is tremendously freeing, and it helps us to stay awake.

In one discourse, Ananda, who was the Buddha's cousin and his attendant for many years, and a great devotional type, was recounting all the marvelous qualities of the Buddha. You can just imagine the many, many marvelous qualities, and Ananda was recounting them with great devotion. Then the Buddha added one to the list. He said to Ananda, "This too should be remembered as one of the marvelous qualities: that the Tathagata"—which is how he referred to himself—"is aware of thoughts as they arise, abide, and pass away."

That's something. The Buddha was seeing this as one of the marvelous qualities of the Tathagata. And we can share in that marvelous quality. That's pretty good—simply by being aware of thoughts as they arise, abide, and pass away.

This is so much more profound than we realize, because in our lives, as I've mentioned, we are really living in a dream. It's only when we awaken to thoughts arising, abiding, and passing away that we begin to live in wakefulness. This is a practice you have all been doing, and we can all continue to do. It might be good to give it a little more emphasis, because it is a powerful deconditioning of craving. A deep investigation and mindfulness of the truth of the experience of change—really reflecting on that and seeing it in the moment—is a powerful deconditioning of craving. It's one of the ways we come to the end of craving, even for short moments. But short moments many times.

I think I mentioned this perhaps in part one: the recollection of impermanence can help us unhook from where we're caught in the mind. I was just remembering the very early days of my practice in India. I hadn't done much meditation at all, and I faced a lot of the very common problems—couldn't concentrate, the body hurt, all of the hindrances. I remember in those days being caught up in some mind drama or

other and thinking to myself, "Joseph, in six months from now, you are not going to even remember what's going on now." I just extrapolated over time: not only six months, but five months, four months, three weeks, two weeks. Of course, these days it's about ten minutes. But that's not a meditative attainment.

If we can remember that whatever is arising—we may be going through what feels like the most intense drama, and we get so caught up in it, and it feels so real—but if we can remember and recollect in one way or another that it's just part of the passing show, that in a day or a week or two weeks or six months this condition will have changed countless times, when we can remember that, it's amazing how it allows the mind to let go of that identification, that grasping. We come back to a place of peace.

As we see more clearly the changing nature of phenomena—in one way, this is the major thrust of Vipassana practice—we're really refining our perception of change. We've talked about it in so many ways. We can be aware of an in-breath becoming an out-breath, but we can also be aware of the microscopic sensations within an in-breath or within a step. As we drop into the moment, our perception of change becomes more subtle, more refined.

As this happens and we really drop into seeing the rapid rise and passing away of phenomena, at times it can be exhilarating. It's as if we break through the sense of solidity and drop into the realm of energetic phenomena that's constantly changing, quickly changing, arising and passing away. It can get so dramatic, with everything seen on this momentary, microscopic level, that it often feels to yogis that no one else has ever experienced it quite like we have, because it's just so dramatic.

But this has a good name in the texts. It's called pseudo-nirvana, because we think, "Oh, this is it." And it is a powerful insight. But at this place, we need to proceed to the next step on the path, which again has a very apt name: discerning what is the path and what isn't the path. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement, even in the very wholesome states of mind that are arising at that time, because the mindfulness is strong, the concentration is strong, the rapture is strong. But at that particular place, until we discern what is the path and what is not the path, all those wholesome factors are actually called corruptions of insight, because we mistake them for being the ultimate peace instead of seeing them as just steps along the way.

With dedication to the practice, and sometimes with appropriate guidance at this point, we do discern what is the path and not the path. We just keep being mindful. And at a certain time, we begin to see everything dissolving and decaying and disappearing. This gets to be a difficult time in practice. It's very hard to land on an object because it's all disappearing. We get very uneasy. There's often a lot of despair here, or fear. We think that our practice is totally shot.

It's actually a deepening of the whole process, but we're not seeing it that way, not feeling it that way. But again, if we're just continuous in our practice, sincere in our practice, we just stay mindful of this state. Oh, there's fear, there's dismay, there's discouragement, whatever it is. We're not finding any stability in

anything. It's not a happy time, but we can be mindful of that too.

And in time, with perseverance in the practice, we go through various other aspects of the path until the mind comes to a place of genuine and deep equanimity. At this place, the practice is just going on very smoothly. It's going on all by itself. It really doesn't require any effort at all. And in this place of equanimity, craving is greatly weakened because the mind is just not reaching out for anything. Equanimity means impartiality. Equanimity is likened to space because space can hold anything. Space doesn't care what arises within it. Space is impartial. The mind of equanimity is impartial. Things are pleasant, things are unpleasant, things are neutral—it's all equal.

One of the interesting things that happens at this time in practice, because of this profound equanimity, is that pleasant feelings begin to turn, become less predominant, and what becomes more predominant is neutral feeling. We're just feeling this great neutrality about what's arising. But what's interesting about this is we begin to feel neutral as more pleasing than pleasant. Before that, and mostly in our ordinary lives, we go for the pleasant because it's a strong hit of what we like. But as the mind gets more refined and less reactive, we begin to experience neutral feeling as a more refined pleasure. Still, this is not the goal, but it's an interesting shift of perspective that takes place.

It's said that this experience of equanimity, when it's well developed, when it's really mature in our practice, is a foretaste of the fully enlightened mind. It's said that this is the kind of mind state that arahants, fully enlightened beings, abide in.

This is from Ajahn Jamnian, one of the great Thai meditation masters. He's visited mostly on the West Coast, taught at Spirit Rock a lot. Quite an amazing being. He said, "At some point the mind becomes so clear and balanced that whatever arises is seen and left untouched with no interference. One ceases to focus on any particular content and all is seen as simply mind and matter, an empty process arising and passing away of its own, a perfect balance of mind with no reactions. There is no longer any doing."

So we've really come to a place of rest. Perhaps, I don't know how you related to the guided meditation this morning, but it was pointing to that place of equanimity of mind in which everything is arising and passing and there's no movement toward or away from anything.

Sometimes in our practice, especially at this stage of equanimity, all objects may disappear and all that's left is knowing. All that's left is awareness. But a lot of care is needed here because there can be a subtle attachment to this state itself, an identification with awareness. It becomes very easy to make a home of awareness and then to have a sense of self settle right into it. We realize all these other objects are just coming and going, they're not self, but I'm the one who's aware of it all. So this is a very subtle place of practice.

Andrew Olendzki, the senior scholar at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, has an amazingly creative mind and is a really great teacher. He had a wonderful line about awareness consciousness. He said,

"Consciousness is not a thing that exists, but an event that occurs." I'm not exactly sure what he meant, but in reading it, something just opened up. It's not a thing that exists. It's an event that occurs. And so it helps to free the mind from identification with it.

The question for all of us as our practice goes on and deepens is: how do we cut the identification with knowing, with consciousness? Even as we begin to see the selfless nature, the changing nature of all other phenomena, how do we cut through this identification with knowing? Free ourselves from the idea of a knower, an observer?

Different traditions use different methods to cut through this identification. In this Burmese Vipassana tradition, the great teacher Mahasi Sayadaw spoke very directly to this. He said, "At times the number of different objects may shrink to one or two, or all may even disappear. However, at this time, the knowing consciousness is still present in this very clear, open space of the sky. There remains only one very clear blissful consciousness, which is very clear beyond comparison and very blissful. Yogis tend to delight in this clear blissful consciousness."

This is known as lust for the Dhamma. At this time, it simply has to be noticed: knowing, knowing, knowing. We actually become mindful of the knowing itself, noting it as a way of cutting through identification with it. This is one very powerful and traditional method of breaking that sense of self in the awareness.

In some Tibetan and Zen traditions, they cut through the identification with knowing using a different technique—one we've mentioned at different times during this retreat. In this approach, it's suggested that we look for the mind itself. Can we see it? Can we taste it? Can we touch it?

As a little experiment in this moment: can you find what's knowing the sound? We're all hearing it, but can we find what's knowing it? When we look—and sound is a particularly easy way to make this experiment—there's nothing to find, and yet the knowing is happening. During the day, especially when there might be many sounds and you're simply aware of them, you can explore this: Can you find what's knowing the sound?

Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche used to say that the not finding is what is to be found—the recognition that it can't be found, that there is nothing to find. When we play with looking at the nature of mind itself, the nature of awareness itself, and recognize its unfindability, that becomes another way of cutting through identification with it.

There's a very famous Zen dialogue that illustrates this point. As most of you know, Bodhidharma is credited with bringing Buddhism from India to China. He was quite a fierce old Zen master. It's said he lived in a cave for seven or nine years, facing a wall. At some point during that time, a very ardent, sincere seeker named Huike came to him for teachings. Huike was suffering greatly, but Bodhidharma simply ignored him. It was winter, there was a blizzard, three feet of snow outside, and Huike just sat waiting for

Bodhidharma to come out. In the dramatic telling of many Zen stories, it's said that Huike finally cut off his arm to demonstrate his sincerity, and then Bodhidharma emerged. Whether that's actually what happened, who knows.

But imagine the scene: here's this man in tremendous suffering, wanting desperately to understand, wanting to be free. Huike says, "My mind is distressed. Please pacify it with your teaching." Bodhidharma responds, "Present me your mind and I will pacify it." Huike says, "I've searched for my mind, but I can't find it"—which is exactly what we can do in our own practice: search for the mind and not find it. And then Bodhidharma declares, "There, I've pacified it."

This is a remarkable moment—to see that in the not finding, in the unfindability of the mind, it's already pacified. We can apply this many times a day. I've done this in my own practice, not only in formal retreat but in my life in the world. At those times when I feel the mind caught up in some kind of suffering or distress—it doesn't have to be anything dramatic, just caught up in one way or another, perhaps a little anxiety or worry—when this dialogue comes to mind, all I need to say to myself is "already pacified." It's shorthand for the whole exchange: look for the mind, can't find it, and in the recognition of its unfindability, the mind is already pacified. There's nothing more to do.

This is simply another method, another way. In any of these approaches, as equanimity matures, we reach a place where all the factors of awakening come into balance. At this time there's no craving, no yearning—not even for the next breath or the next moment of experience. The mind is genuinely already pacified.

So at a certain point in this place of equanimity, the flow of consciousness conditioned by changing objects—that consciousness which is arising dependent on changing objects—suddenly stops. And the mind opens to what the Buddha called nibbana, or the unconditioned, the unborn. In Pali, these moments are referred to as magapala, or path moments, fruition moments. These are called supermundane consciousness because they take nibbana as their object.

The path moment happens just once for each of the stages of enlightenment. This path moment, a single moment, has the power to uproot certain defilements from the mind, to permanently uproot them, and to weaken the remaining defilements. These are powerful moments. It's because of this function of these path moments that the Buddha described nibbana in this way: "And what, bhikkhus, is the unconditioned? The destruction of lust, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of delusion. This is what is called the unconditioned."

I like this because it is such a pragmatic expression of awakening. There could be all kinds of descriptions of different experiences, but this gets to the heart of it—the uprooting of greed, of hatred, and delusion. This becomes a very pragmatic assessment, not only of different meditative experiences, but of our entire path.

Many of you are seduced by arising thoughts of practice assessment. I call them the practice assessment tapes. If you can manifest the wonderful quality of the Buddha and simply see them arise, abide, and pass away, there's no problem. But if by chance you happen to get caught by these practice assessment tapes, the best assessment is really to look in one's practice, in one's life. Are the defilements getting weaker? Are they getting stronger? Not whether we're more aware of them, because hopefully we are, but really as we watch—and this will be very interesting as you go back into your life in a week or so—to truly see: has the mind weakened these elements, these defilements that cause suffering, or not? That's the measure of our practice.

When the Buddha speaks of the end of dukkha, he's not simply talking about being in a good mood. The freedom of nibbana, the weakening and destruction of the defilements, is not dependent on conditions being a certain way. If we can be at peace only when conditions are appealing to us, that's not freedom. Freedom means being able to be at peace with whatever the arising conditions are. And of course, this is what you've been practicing all of these weeks. Whatever is arising—it's pleasant, it's unpleasant, it's neutral—can the mind be at peace?

This comes through a gradual shift of understanding, this end of craving. For some very few people, it may come in just a moment's great enlightenment. For most of us, it's a gradual weakening of the defilements culminating in the uprooting of craving.

It's not surprising that different Buddhist traditions describe the unconditioned, describe nibbana, in different ways. In some traditions it's described as the cessation of consciousness, going beyond even awareness. The Thai forest tradition describes it differently. Ajahn Maha Boowa, one of the great Thai forest masters, speaks of it as the mind released. In this teaching, when the kilesas disappear through mindfulness and wisdom, then what remains, as he describes it, is simple awareness, utterly pure awareness. This awareness has no reference point, no center, it can't be located, it's unsupported, unconditioned, unconstructed—what he calls the ultimate ease.

But in both of these descriptions of nibbana—the cessation of consciousness, the ultimate ease—a lot of care is needed. Because when we're talking about the most subtle aspect of the Buddha's teachings, it's very easy to mistake certain states for others. We can mistake certain gaps of consciousness for being nibbana, for being magapala. But in the teachings, there are five different causes for gaps in consciousness. We can be sitting and going along and all of a sudden there's just this gap. "Oh, enlightened!" Well, maybe. But it can also come, as it's taught, that this gap in consciousness has come from an excess of calm, an excess of rapture, an excess of sloth, an excess of concentration. When the mind is out of balance, we can experience a gap, or it can be a genuine moment of realization, of magapala, of opening to the unconditioned. But a lot of discernment is needed here. We really need to take care.

Likewise, in the other description of nibbana—the ultimate ease, the unconditioned awareness—it's very

easy to mistake refined states of meditation for genuine freedom. One of the greatest descriptions of this is from Ajahn Maha Boowa describing his own enlightenment experience. It's very powerful because very few of these Asian monks

will speak so specifically about their own experience. So this is quite rare.

He said: "Once when I went to practice, the problem of unawareness or ignorance had me bewildered for quite some time. At that stage, the mind was so radiant that I came to marvel at its radiance. Everything of every sort which could make me marvel seemed to have gathered there in the mind, to the point where I began to marvel at myself. Why is it that my mind is so marvelous? Looking at the body, I couldn't see it at all. It was all space, empty. The mind was radiant in full force."

Just imagine. This radiance is the ultimate counterfeit, and at that moment it's the most conspicuous point. You hardly want to touch it at all because you love it and cherish it more than anything else. In the entire body, there is nothing more outstanding than this radiance, which is why you are amazed at it, love it, cherish it, dawdle over it, want nothing to touch it. But it's the enemy king—unawareness.

But luckily, as soon as he began to marvel at himself, to the point of exclaiming deludedly in the heart without being conscious of it, "Why has my mind come so far?"—at that moment, a statement of Dhamma spontaneously arose. This he hadn't anticipated. It suddenly appeared as if someone were speaking in the heart, although there was no one there speaking. It simply appeared as a statement: "If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is an agent of rebirth."

This is powerful—where he had reached this amazing place of radiance and openness, and then realized it was the ultimate counterfeit, the ultimate ignorance. The real freedom wasn't even there; it required cutting through any identification at all, even with that exquisite radiance. "If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is an agent of rebirth."

So in our practice, there is this whole vast path of understanding. As our practice of mindfulness and wisdom continues, we gradually weaken the defilements, weaken the power of craving, deconstruct the sense of self, until we can say in the end, as the Buddha did: "Realized is the unconditioned. Achieved is the end of craving."

However each of our practices unfolds—and it unfolds differently for each one of us—as we develop all the factors of awakening and deepen our understanding of the Four Noble Truths, our minds increasingly incline to the highest peace. Our minds incline to the end of craving.

I'd like to close with a few lines from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which sum up beautifully this third noble truth of the Buddha's teaching:

"A condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything. And all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

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