Q&A

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 56:23

There were a lot of questions submitted, and I probably won't have time to get to all of them tonight. What's interesting about doing these question and answer sessions is that there's a really nice range of questions and interesting topics, so I'll cover many different things.

The first question was: Is there anything similar to Buddha nature in Theravada Buddhism? The term "Buddha nature" appears quite commonly in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. The questioner writes, "I find the idea a helpful antidote to striving. That is, Buddha nature is already here. It's not something we have to get, but rather recognize and come back to." So what is there in the Theravada teachings that might have some similarity to this?

The Buddha talked about the nature of mind in a particular way in the Pali texts, and while it may not be identical to what's meant in the Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings, it points to a quality of the mind that has the same effect when we realize it in terms of helping us let go of striving.

This is from one of the suttas where the Buddha says, "Luminous is this mind, or shining is this mind, but it is obscured by visiting defilements. An uninstructed ordinary person does not understand this as it really is, so for them there is no development of mind. Luminous is this mind, and it is freed from visiting defilements. An instructed noble disciple understands this as it really is, so for them there is development of mind."

What does this suggest? The Buddha is saying quite clearly that the mind is inherently luminous or radiant, which does not refer so much to the quality of light—what we might normally think of as luminosity—but rather refers to its knowing capacity. The mind is luminous; it inherently knows. It's defiled by visiting defilements. The Buddha is saying that the defilements in the mind are not inherent in the mind; they are visitors.

This is helpful to know as we come face to face with different defilements or unskillful states. To know that they are visitors means they don't belong to us in any way. They come just as visitors when the conditions are there, and they pass away. They're not inherent. So we can recognize and come back to this—we could call it the bare quality of knowing, the bare quality of that luminosity.

I had an interesting experience of this which really helped me understand a way of being with things in a non-reactive fashion. This happened some years ago in January when I took a week's vacation down in the Caribbean. Beautiful. Almost all day long I was going around saying "pleasant, pleasant, pleasant." The sights were pleasant, the scents were pleasant, the warm breeze on the skin was pleasant. A week of

pleasant.

Then I came back to Barre in the middle of January. It was freezing cold, a particularly cold, freezing, icy wind. Walking outside, the wind would just be burning the skin. It was so cold. Unpleasant, unpleasant, unpleasant.

The contrast was so strong that something became very apparent: the knowing mind was the same. The knowing mind was not affected by the pleasant or unpleasant. The mind simply had the nature to know. That was the function of the mind—to know. Sometimes it knows what's pleasant, sometimes it knows what's unpleasant, but the knowing quality was exactly the same, whether it was down in the Caribbean or here in the freezing cold. It was just so striking to realize this again.

Whether we call that Buddha nature or not—and in the other traditions it may have other specific meanings—right within the Theravada tradition we can understand this fundamental nature of mind, the fundamental nature of consciousness, of awareness, which simply knows. We can always come back to that, remembering that the defilements which may come are visitors. They come and may cloud the knowing from time to time, but they are not inherent to it. They are not intrinsic to it. They are not a part of it.

This can be a very helpful place to come back to again and again—to rest simply in the knowing of what's arising, realizing that at times it will be pleasant, at times it will be unpleasant, but the knowing function is not affected by that. The knowing function is exactly the same.

Also, I heard that Sayadaw U Pandita taught samatha to people after they already had some insight. Why was this? And Dipa Ma asked you to sit for two days in meditation. I tell this story sometimes. She looked at me and said, "Sit for two days." And she didn't mean a weekend retreat. She meant sit down and get up two days later. Did you do it? Please tell something about that. If someone wants to practice like that, what should they do? Can you talk a little about the relationship of mindfulness and concentration?

So this is a question about these two different kinds of practice. The first thing to keep in mind is that concentration—often a translation of the Pali word samadhi—takes different forms. Basically, samadhi means undistractedness or steadiness. The example they use in the texts is of a candle burning in a place without any wind: the flame stays very steady, not flickering. That's what concentration means—steadiness of mind. The mind is not wavering, not flickering.

This can take different forms. In vipassana practice, the kind of samadhi that's developed is called momentary concentration, because we're developing a mind that's steady on changing objects. It could be on the breath, then sensation, then sound, then thought. Moment after moment the object may be changing, but the samadhi can develop if it's steady moment to moment, if it's not getting distracted or lost in thought. The noting here is a good check of whether our mind is steady moment to moment. If we can acknowledge: in, out, hearing, seeing, pressure, pressure—the objects are changing, but the mind is steady

on each object in the moment. This is called momentary concentration.

It can get very strong. It can develop so that there is a very strong momentum of this concentration along with the mindfulness which is observing the object. Mindfulness is the observing power; concentration is the steadiness power. When they're working together, it can get very strong, until there's a very continuous momentum. Some of you may have experienced this in your vipassana practice. There are times when this momentary samadhi has a strong momentum, and one can sit for hours. The mind is noting and noticing and observing moment after moment, with very few distractions. We have built up this momentary samadhi in that case.

The other kind of samadhi—the practice usually referred to as samatha practice—is where we take a single object. The mind is not on changing objects; it takes just a single object. It could be the breath. It could be a visual image. In the tradition they talk of using kasinas, colored discs. It could be the brahmaviharas. This is a samatha practice where we focus just on a single object or theme. Here the goal is not so much seeing the momentariness of phenomena; here the goal is staying steady on a single object, the end result being absorption in that experience, where one is not aware of anything else, one is totally absorbed.

It's this kind of concentration, this one-pointed concentration through samatha, which is the basis for all the different psychic powers that you read about—the powers that the great yogis have mastered. One of the questions referred to Dipa Ma, one of our teachers in India, who had extraordinary attainment and realization, both in vipassana and the stages of awakening, and also in samatha and absorption. She could sit for days. She once sat for three days in an absorbed state, where the mind was not wavering at all, was completely absorbed in the object.

When she asked me to sit for two days—not asked me, she told me to sit for two days—I think she was thinking about herself and not me. Because my response was to laugh, as you just did. And all she said to that was, "Don't be lazy." I think there's a little more than laziness involved, although that might have been part of it. It takes a very strong development of that particular function of the mind.

And it can be practiced. Over my many years of practice, I've taken periods of time when I would do just a samatha practice. When I first went to India, I got interested in Buddhism when I was in the Peace Corps in Thailand and was just introduced to a very simple practice, but I was very new to it. When I finished my time in the Peace Corps, I realized I wanted to continue and needed a teacher, so I went back to India after coming home for a couple of months.

And after traveling around, I met Munindraji, my first Dharma teacher. A couple of things happened which are of interest perhaps to this question of Vipassana and Samatha.

When I first sat down—and again, I was very new to the practice, I didn't really know much about the practice or the teachings—I just had a little bit of light appear in my mind. Munindraji, having just trained

Dipa Ma in Burma, thought, "Oh, here's another yogi. We'll have him do Samatha practice." So he said, "Okay, concentrate on the light."

I started practicing on just seeing the light—light, light, light. I drove myself crazy. I was very new to the practice, really had no idea about how to work with anything, didn't know about the hindrances. All I knew was that there was this little bit of light and I was supposed to focus on it. There was so much striving, so much struggle, so much distress—unlike Dipa Ma.

After not a long time, Munindraji realized this was not the right practice for me to be doing at this time. So he said, "Okay, let's just go back to the Vipassana," you know, the rising, falling, and the instructions that you're all familiar with. It was very helpful, because then instead of struggling to be with just this one object and not knowing what to do about everything else that arose, I settled back and relaxed. I was just with the breath and different sensations and thoughts—but still it was very difficult.

There may be some of you who have a very natural ability for samādhi. There are some people like that who kind of sit down and their minds are naturally concentrated. The practice is easier when people have already developed this. For me, I had zero concentration. I had studied philosophy in college. My mind loved to think, and so when I first began meditation, I would just sit and think for an hour—and enjoyed it. This is a very nice way to spend an hour.

It took a lot of perseverance just to keep going, because it was difficult. When the mind is not concentrated, the body can get uncomfortable and the mind can get restless—all the hindrances. But I was very committed. I just kept doing it and kept doing it.

At some point I realized that the concentration factor was pretty weak. So I asked Munindraji to teach me mettā, because mettā and the brahmavihāras are a Samatha practice, a concentration practice, as well as developing those beautiful qualities. I felt that I could use both—that it would be good to develop the concentration as well as strengthen the mettā.

So I did. That was the first time I did a concentration practice. I did it for about six weeks in Bodh Gaya. Conditions were not great there—it was quite noisy, not ideal conditions for concentration practice—but I did it anyway. And it turned out to be very, very helpful.

After a few weeks of doing the intensive mettā—which most of you are familiar with, the repetition of the phrases and directing it towards an image and arousing the feeling, almost like a mantra of loving-kindness repeated again and again—my mind became somewhat concentrated. I remember thinking first that I was just filled with a lot of happiness. I had been struggling for so long, and finally the mind settled and became concentrated and easeful. I remember thinking at that time, "Oh, this is why people like to meditate." Because before that I was very committed to it, I knew it was important, but it wasn't fun. There was a lot of struggle.

Once the mind developed some degree of concentration—and again, this is not like the concentration of

Dipa Ma, but it was enough to stabilize the mind, to make the mind and the concentration of mindfulness more effortless—I understood how Samatha and Vipassana can work together. At different times, one or another may be helpful. In the very beginning, I really needed to do the Vipassana, just to learn about what was going on. After some time, it became possible to actually do the Samatha in a way that was useful. And then that really helped the Vipassana when I went back to it.

So they're not at all, in any way whatsoever, opposing practices. They're different practices, but they support each other.

And so it's helpful, either in your own experience or working with a teacher, just to see at a particular time what might be helpful.

In the end, this is a long path we're on to full awakening—even though from the perspective of Buddha nature, we're already here. As one Tibetan teacher said, it's something like this: "You're already perfect, but there's much to improve." It's kind of like that. We can recognize the essential nature of the knowing mind, the essential nature of awareness, and still these qualities have to be cultivated so we actually are living them and realizing them and actualizing them.

So one practice is metta, and we'll get benefits from it. But how does it benefit others who are receiving the metta? That's a question. We may be here radiating loving thought and feeling, and we know that it can benefit us. Does it really benefit anybody else?

Of course, the power of the benefit will be proportional to the strength of the metta, which is informed by the strength of the concentration. As you may know from the very classic story of the Buddha, his evil cousin Devadatta sent a mad elephant charging down a narrow lane, thinking that the Buddha would either be killed or run away and so be discredited, because Devadatta wanted to take over the Sangha. And as the story goes, this charging mad elephant—and they're big—charging at him. The Buddha was just radiating metta towards the elephant, and the elephant slowed down. Just before the Buddha, it's said the elephant bowed down in front of him, pacified by the power of the Buddha's loving-kindness.

So that's metta at its peak. It's probably best not to test our own metta in that kind of situation right away. We should test it slowly. But the benefit on others we can see in a much more ordinary way.

I'll illustrate it by talking of its opposite first. If you walk into a room, or maybe you're just with somebody who's very angry, do you feel that? Can't you feel the anger? The energy is tense, and maybe we get tense in response to it. And then what happens when you walk into a room or you're with somebody who is just very loving and very friendly and warm? Don't you feel that? This is not magical and it's not mystical. When we're with somebody like that, we feel warm and loving and friendly. So it has a very immediate effect on the people around us—the more loving we are, the kinder we are, the friendlier we are. It affects the people we meet in a very immediate way.

It was very interesting when we would visit Dipa Ma in Calcutta. She lived in very, very poor

surroundings, just in two rooms with her daughter and grandson—certainly by Western standards, very, very poor. But we would go up into her room, and this room was just filled with light. In Indian fashion, we'd come in and kind of bow, and she'd do that Indian blessing of running her hands over our heads and shoulders. We would walk out totally blissed out. What was that from? It was from the power of her metta. There was just so much love coming that it was tangible. We could feel it. It was so heart-opening and uplifting. So it definitely has an impact, whether on the more ordinary level or on a special level when people have it very well developed.

Now, here's a question: "In sitting meditation, when aware of some or many mind states appearing and disappearing, sometimes quickly, it was noted that the mind was indifferent to these mind states. But upon investigation, by asking the question 'What are these mind states?' it seemed that the mind did not understand or recognize them, and thus was unable to react. In actuality, the mind was in confusion about the mind states. The mind seems unclear most of the time these days. Any suggestions?"

I think there's an interesting distinction here between being confused or deluded and not necessarily being able to name precisely what a mind state or emotion is. Especially when we're sitting and different moods or mind states are appearing and disappearing, and especially if they're coming somewhat quickly and we're not particularly caught in them, we're not identified with them, we know something's there—it's like a cloud passing through—we may not know exactly: Is it sadness? Is it unhappiness? Is it sorrow? Or on the other side: Is it happiness? Is it excitement?

We may not have the exact word for it. That doesn't matter if we can simply sit and remain aware that, yes, there's this mind state present—we don't know exactly what it is, but we're observing it. It just comes and goes, and we're not getting caught in it. We're not becoming identified with it. In that case, precise recognition is not necessary, because the whole point of recognition and precision is to enable us to see so that we are not identifying, so that we're not caught.

Is this clear? Something's there. We don't quite know what it is, but it's just passing through. It's not a problem. We're just there.

It becomes more important to investigate precisely when it feels like we're caught in an emotion or caught in a mind state—where we may be lost in the story around it, or it feels like it's really stuck. We're in it. Then precision and investigation of what it is can be very helpful.

I'll give you an example from my experience. There are many different examples, and I'm sure you've had your own. This goes back many years, but at one time I was meditating and I was feeling waves and waves and waves of sadness. It was just this very strong feeling. I'm noting: sadness, sadness, sadness, sadness. But it felt locked in, and I felt locked into it. I felt really identified with it.

The fact that I was so stuck aroused my interest. What's going on here? Why am I so caught? So I just kept looking more carefully at the emotion itself. What is this? And I saw that it wasn't sadness. It was

unhappiness.

Now, these two emotions are close, but they're really different. They have very different flavors. As soon as I saw, "Oh yes, this is unhappiness," it was as if the mind could become aligned with what was actually there, instead of misperceiving and being slightly out of alignment. When I could see exactly—"Oh, this is unhappiness"—the alignment, the correct perception, allowed me to be accepting of it. That was the key. When I was misperceiving it, acceptance wasn't possible because I wasn't seeing clearly what it was.

Is this clear? It was quite remarkable, because it was just in that moment of getting in alignment—"Oh, unhappiness"—then I could just note: unhappy, unhappy, unhappy. And it washed through, as emotions will.

So in that kind of situation where we're caught or stuck, that's when precision can be really helpful.

I'll give you another example. This happened in Burma. I was sitting, and for those of you who have practiced in Asia, it's not uncommon for it to be incredibly noisy. This time in Burma, right outside my room, they were doing construction. They were straightening steel rebars, clanging metal on metal, all day long.

My mind went through all kinds of things. "Here I come to Burma to get enlightened and they're making all this noise." A lot of distress. But there was nothing to do about it. This was truly ungovernable, completely outside my control. So I was suffering a lot for quite a while.

But then, again, we can become interested in why the mind is suffering, what's going on that's causing the suffering. When I finally realized that it wasn't the sound—that's not what was making me suffer—I saw that my mind was complaining. It was just complaining mind, complaining a lot.

It's so interesting: as soon as I could recognize, "Oh, that's what's happening—complaining mind," the whole thing shifted. "Oh, complaining, complaining, complaining"—it just became another mind state. The sound was fine. The sound was just the sound.

So it's just another example of times when we're stuck—precision about what's happening can be helpful.

When we're not stuck, when it's all part of a flow, the precision is less important in terms of naming specifically what it is.

One day on this retreat, someone asked about an intriguing experience. They wrote, "I got up later than normal. When I was sleeping, someone called, 'Wake up, now nearly 4:30.' I opened my eyes, looked at the clock—4:20. The question is, who called me? My mind or a deva? If my mind called, how can the mind know the time so correctly? If a deva called me, it is extremely interesting because the deva here can speak Vietnamese."

I like that question, just because it might have been a deva—a Vietnamese-speaking deva.

There's a lot of mystery to the mind. The mind has unimaginable capacities. It's this huge, huge mystery—what the mind is, how it functions, and what it can do. And it's precisely this aspect that has kept me so interested for fifty years, because our practice just keeps going deeper, exploring the nature of this mind, of consciousness, of awareness. It can do so many things.

Of course, the stories of Dipa Ma are extraordinary examples of what the mind can do. But even in more ordinary ways, this is quite common. Very often people report that if they go to sleep with an intention to get up at a certain hour, the mind awakes at that time. Just the power of intention in the mind.

We can see this in samatha practice. When the mind has the ability to enter into certain concentrated states, we can make resolutions. "May this arise." And the mind just does it. "May I enter this state"—the mind does it. "May I come out of this state. May I be in it for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes." The mind is this amazingly responsive mystery.

Different teachers teach metta in different ways, so there are many styles of doing metta practice. When we studied with Sayadaw U Pandita, the way he teaches is to do the metta phrases with visualization and arouse the feeling. Then over time, to begin making resolutions first for the jhanic factors—the five factors of mind that comprise the first jhana. In Pali they're vitakka, vicara, piti, sukha, and ekaggata: initial application, sustained application, rapture, happiness, and one-pointedness.

The way he would teach is that after we had gotten into the momentum of the practice, he would say, "Make a resolution for these jhanic factors to arise." So: "May vitakka arise. May it become strong. May I experience it clearly." And then something would happen. Maybe not the first time—sometimes it took a while for these resolutions to start working—but at a certain point they do.

One of the most interesting things about the mind, and this goes back to the comment about the deva speaking Vietnamese: I was teaching metta to a Western student, an American. I gave her these instructions to make resolutions in Pali—"May vitakka arise, may vicara arise." She didn't speak Pali and she did not know the meaning of the words. And yet when she made the resolution, the same experiences happened as when anybody else made the resolution knowing the meaning of the words.

So what's that about? Maybe Pali is the inherent language of the nature of mind. It's just a mystery, and there are a lot of mysteries.

In some way, what we're all doing in the day-to-day practice—which at times can feel difficult or like struggling, with all the many ups and downs that everybody experiences—what we're really doing is developing the tools and the strengths to investigate this mind. To investigate it on deeper and deeper levels, with all of these mysterious things it can do. And to see more and more clearly, most fundamentally: What is the cause of suffering? And how can I come to the end of it?

This is something that we're actually doing through our observation. And we just need to develop the tools of mindfulness, of concentration, of wise effort—all the things you're familiar with.

What's the difference between observing lobha and dosa—greed and hatred—in cittānupassanā, that is mindfulness of the mind, which is the third foundation of mindfulness? In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta there's mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of the mind, and then mindfulness of dhammas, which include a whole range of things. So in mindfulness of the mind, the third foundation, the Buddha talks about being mindful of when greed is present and when it's not present, when anger or hatred is present and when it's not present. The question is, what's the difference between that and when the Buddha talks about being mindful of greed and hatred in the fourth foundation, dhammas, under hindrances? Because they're many of the same qualities. Why are they repeated? Or is there a difference in how we're practicing?

This may seem a little theoretical based on the sutta, but it does point to some interesting practice implications. In the third foundation of mindfulness, the instruction is very simple. It simply says: be mindful when greed is present, when it's not present. Be mindful when hatred or anger is present, when it's not present, when delusion is present or not present, and then a few other states. So it's very simple—just to be aware whether this is present in the mind or not present.

There are a couple of interesting points here. One is something that we often overlook and which would be very helpful to incorporate in our practice. Usually we give emphasis to when these states are present. We're mindful when there's greed or desire in the mind, mindful when there's anger or hatred in the mind. We pick it up and note it. But we don't often pay attention to those times when it's not present. We're not recognizing those moments: "Oh, at this time there is no desire in the mind. At this time there's no aversion in the mind." But the Buddha is saying, pay attention to both.

This would be interesting to remember to do from time to time, because it will build confidence. We're so used to seeing and being with the hindrances and the defilements that very often the mind can just get discouraged or fall into self-judgment—"My mind is so filled with these defilements." But it's not. Those defilements, those kilesas, are not there all the time. They're there at times, and then they're not there. When we pay attention and recognize, "Oh yes, now the mind is free of those defilements, there's no desire present, no anger present," we're actually getting a certain taste of freedom. We're experiencing the mind free of defilements at that time. We learn to recognize it, which is helpful because then we can come back to it more easily and it builds confidence in us. We see, "Oh yes, the mind's not so bad after all. It has a lot of times when it's wholesome, when it's free." So that's one aspect I feel is implied in this third foundation—knowing when these things are present and when they're not present.

It also highlights the importance of just discerning the difference between skillful and unskillful mind states. Normal people who do not come on retreat—just all those normal people out there—I think it's very rare for them to be watching their minds carefully enough to actually discern what are wholesome mind states, what are unwholesome mind states. This is not the usual way people live in the world. And in fact sometimes it's the opposite.

I'll give you one example. One year I was teaching at a Trappist monastery in Snowmass, Colorado. It was quite a liberal monastery. They invited different Buddhist teachers to come and teach, and they invited me to come and teach metta. Just before I came, there had been some kind of teaching that was more therapeutic-minded, more psychologically oriented rather than meditative. Basically the message was: honor your anger. From a therapeutic psychological point of view, one can understand what's meant by it. But it's very easy, with "honor your anger," to fall into the understanding that somehow anger is good because it's arising within us and we should honor it.

I think what's really meant—at least from a Buddhist perspective—is that we can honor the fact that anger has arisen. We can say, "Yes, it's here," without denying it or avoiding it or pushing it down. In that sense, we can honor the fact of it being there in the present moment.

But that's very different than honoring the anger as being some wholesome state. Do you see the difference?

The Buddha, in his teachings, places tremendous emphasis on this wise discernment of skillful and unskillful, of wholesome and unwholesome, in terms of the different mind states that arise. And this is the foundation really—this is the whole ethical foundation of our practice. Unskillful mind states lead to suffering for ourselves and others. Wholesome mind states lead to happiness for ourselves and others. So it's very pragmatic. It's not coming down from on high, telling us what's what. We should see for ourselves. We should make this discernment in our own minds. We should be careful enough in our observation as we go through these different states, honoring whatever it is that's arising and the fact that it has arisen, but then with discernment. Oh, is this wholesome? Is this unwholesome? And we can feel that. We can see that for ourselves.

So all of that is in this third foundation of mindfulness. In the fourth foundation, where the Buddha is talking about recognizing these states as hindrances—that's the category in the fourth foundation. Here the Buddha gives more specific instructions. I thought I would read the specific instruction, and I think you're very familiar with this.

The Buddha asks, "And how does one, in regard to dhammas, abide contemplating these dhammas in terms of the five hindrances?" There are three steps, and I've condensed them a bit. First, in dealing with them as a hindrance, know when a hindrance is present and when it's not present. So that's the same as before. But then, know the conditions that lead to the arising of the hindrance. That's something more than was said earlier. It's not just knowing whether it's present or not present, but investigating: what are the conditions that lead to the arising of it? And what are the conditions that lead to the removal of it?

You see, there's a little more investigation here, because in this foundation of mindfulness, the Buddha is not just naming these mind states—he's saying these mind states are hindrances; they hinder our practice. And so we need to investigate them a little further. Are they present or not? What are the conditions leading to them and removing them? And know the conditions that prevent a future arising.

This gets very interesting, and we have so many opportunities to practice this. Just as an exercise while you're here—and your time here is so precious because, as I've said many times, you're all in a laboratory of awareness. That's all you have to do. Your only job, besides pot washing—and even in pot washing—your only job is to be aware, to be watching. Okay, a desire arises, or aversion arises. What was the cause of that? Was that because I saw something and I wasn't mindful of seeing? So we investigate.

I had such a liberating example of this when I was on retreat years ago. Many of you probably have heard me tell this story—it was so powerful for me. I noticed, being on retreat, that every time I walked into the dining room for meals, my mind would have a comment about almost everybody. Some kind of judgment. I liked what they were wearing, I didn't like what they were wearing. They were moving too quickly, they were moving too slowly. They took too much food, they didn't take enough food. It didn't matter—it was ridiculous. But the mind just kept doing it, just commenting about everyone.

So at a certain point I thought, come on, mind, why do you keep doing this? Because it was clearly so ridiculous. And then I realized all of those thoughts, all of those mildly aversive thoughts, were all happening based on eye contact, visual. I was seeing someone and I was not being mindful that I was seeing. Seeing, perception of the person, leading to all kinds of proliferation of thought, all these judgments.

So what I started doing was this: I would walk into the dining room, and from the moment I walked in, all I would note was "seeing."

Just seeing, seeing, seeing—in line for food, seeing, taking the food, seeing, taking the food. It was amazing. In that simple note, being mindful of seeing, all of those judgments and comments disappeared.

This is the kind of investigation the Buddha is suggesting we do in this foundation of mindfulness. What's the cause of the hindrances arising? How can they be removed? And how can we avoid them arising in the future?

Of course, we can do this with all of the sense doors. Maybe you have a hindrance of aversion that comes, and you notice while watching it that every time it arises, it's because of a particular thought. One thought comes into the mind, and then there's a whole story which causes aversion to arise. Well, if you're investigating the cause of that aversion, then you see—oh, it's that thought. If I can be mindful of that thought arising—thinking, thinking, it's just a thought—the hindrance doesn't arise.

Do you see the power of this? This is what the Buddha is talking about in this fourth foundation of mindfulness. Not only knowing whether a hindrance is present or not present, but doing a further investigation. Can I see the cause? Can I see how to remove it? Can I see how to prevent it?

And in this way, we really develop a mind of much greater ease. We really find a place of greater happiness.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.