Doubt and Aversion

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 59:42

In one description of the Buddha's enlightenment, he's sitting under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, India, and it's said that when he sat down, he sat with the resolve that he was not going to get up from his seat until he had achieved full realization. So imagine coming into the hall with that resolution—some indication of the strength of his mind and, I guess, his good karma. Fortunately, that very evening he did achieve it.

As the legend has it—or the reality of it—as he sat under the tree and the night progressed, it's said that different forms of Mara appeared in his mind. Mara is the embodiment of illusion, delusion, or ignorance. During the course of the night there were terrifying visions of violence and aggression, and there were very seductive visions of heavenly and celestial pleasures.

In one particular description there's a line which for me captures the essence of the whole path of practice. It's a beautiful description of the bodhisattva's mind in this situation. With all these forces of Mara coming to confront him, it said, "And the mind of the great being was not moved." Just the image of that—like a mountain sitting. The mind of the great being was not moved.

"Not moved" here is in the sense that Gina spoke so clearly about last evening: being non-reactive. The horrible things were arising, the beautiful things were arising, and his mind remained non-reactive, unmoving. This line can really be the reference point for all of our practice, because as we go through the day, watching and being with our various experiences—in whatever posture we're in, in whatever activity we're engaged with—we can look and investigate: What does have the power to move our minds? What does have the power to agitate our hearts? How does our mind get seduced by various experiences?

This is what we can learn on retreat, in the beauty of the silence and the non-distracted awareness. We really learn about ourselves.

We experience agitation and seduction on both very obvious levels that we may be familiar with, but also on very subtle levels. We're all familiar with being overwhelmed by different emotions at times—that's a familiar experience for all of us at one time or another. We can get lost in, seduced by, various moods that we're in, becoming completely caught up in the mood, or lost in and identified with the different thoughts running through our minds.

On the most subtle level—and this takes quite a bit of training and awareness to begin to see—we become identified with consciousness itself. We create a sense of self, a sense of ego self, in our very identification with knowing. There are all these levels to our practice, and as we deepen, we begin to explore them.

In the teachings, the Buddha highlighted a number of these particularly seductive mind states. In a way, he made it easy for us because he pointed out very specifically and very clearly: these mind states have the power to seduce us, to trap us again and again. He called them the five hindrances. Many of you are probably familiar with them: desire, aversion, sleepiness, restlessness, and doubt.

It's essential in our practice that we learn how to recognize these particular states because they are deeply ingrained habits of mind. For me, it's both encouraging and discouraging at the same time that these very states we all experience right here—wanting and restlessness and sleepiness and doubt—are the very same ones the Buddha was talking about 2,600 years ago. These are universal patterns, deep neural pathways in our brains. We need to explore them, to really learn about them, because otherwise they dominate our lives.

We want to explore the nature of these hindrances. What is each one like? How does each one manifest for ourselves in our own experience? And we also want to investigate what makes them so alluring. Why is it that we get caught again and again?

A very helpful perspective as we explore these patterns is to see that even though they may feel very personal to us, they are not personal—they're impersonal. These are universal habit patterns of everyone's mind. If we take it out of the personal, first it helps us disentangle a bit. Secondly, it provides us with the understanding that right in the time of experiencing one of these hindrances, that is exactly the place where we can see for ourselves, explore for ourselves: What is ignorance? What is awareness? What is delusion? What is wakefulness?

Right in the time of their arising, if we bring mindfulness to them, we're at the heart of what it means to awaken, to wake up. If we have this attitude, then in a very surprising way—and I've experienced this many times—we actually become happy to see the hindrances, because we'd rather see them and understand them than not see them and act them out. Instead of being self-judgmental or thinking our practice is no good, every time we're actually aware of one of the hindrances, we can think, "Oh good, this is a chance to understand something."

This changes our relationship to these patterns. The more we practice being with them and staying mindful of them—these strong, seductive emotions—the more stable our awareness becomes. It's as if we're actually in the stream of that line about the bodhisattva: the mind of the great being was not moved. Perhaps for us, even if it's for just a few moments at a time as we experience different difficulties, we too can touch that unmoved awareness.

and our minds of somewhat less than great beings are not moved. But we can taste it. We can get a sense of the potential.

So tonight I'd like to speak about just two of the hindrances, because a lot can be said about each one of them, and I wanted to go into a little more depth about two in particular: the hindrances of doubt and

aversion.

There are a couple of steps in working with all five of the hindrances. The first step is learning how to recognize them when they arise. Because often these mind states will slip in and we don't even know they're there. They're so seductive that we get lost in them, just living in them and acting them out, not aware that they're present. So the first step is really learning to recognize them when they arise, to recognize the telltale signs of doubt and aversion and the rest as well.

The reason this recognition is so important is that very often these hindrances come disguised. They come masquerading as something helpful, as something good, as something skillful. And if we are not on the ball, we believe that—we fall for their disguise. So this recognition is a very key point. We have to see them for what they are and not be deceived, because Mara is exceedingly ingenious. The mind can fool us in so many ways.

So, doubt. To begin with, it's helpful to understand that in English, the word doubt can actually refer to several different mindsets, one of which is skillful and another is not skillful, not helpful.

What's the skillful kind of doubt? That is the mind that inquires, that investigates, that doesn't just fall into dogmatic belief. The doubting mind in that sense is really helpful. It's like, "What is this? What is this experience? What is it about?" Not just assuming that we know or believing something without examination. That kind of doubt is good. Actually, the Buddha encouraged that kind of inquiry. He said, find out for yourselves what is helpful, what is skillful, what is useful. Don't just believe—don't believe what I say, don't believe what's in the books—really test it and see. So this is a good kind of doubt.

The unskillful doubt, the one which really is a hindrance, we might call skeptical doubt. This is the mind state of endless uncertainty or indecision. It's the opposite of being confident. It's like being at a crossroads and not knowing which way to go. The mind simply goes back and forth: Is it this way? Is it that way? Should I go this way? Should I go that way? And we don't go any place. In that way, doubt really stops us in our tracks.

Of all the five hindrances, skeptical doubt, when it's unnoticed, is the most harmful. It's the most dangerous because it has the power to bring our practice—and very often different aspects of our lives—to a standstill, unable to move forward. With all the other hindrances of desire and aversion and sleepiness and restlessness, we're still in the ballpark. We're kind of in the game. We're going through storms, but we're in there. When skeptical doubt is strong, we're not even in the game anymore. That's the power of it. This kind of doubt doesn't even give us the chance to take a wrong turn and then learn from our mistakes. We're just frozen through indecision, through uncertainty.

Some of you may have read the book or seen the movie *Life of Pi*. The book was by Yann Martel. There's a wonderful line in it which describes perfectly the debilitating power of doubt. He wrote, "To choose doubt as a philosophy of life

is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation." That's what doubt does.

Although all of us have some degree of confidence in the Buddha's teachings—or we wouldn't be here—doubt can still operate. Even when we have a fair confidence in the teachings, doubt can show itself in so many different ways.

It can take the form of doubt about the meditation practice itself. For all of us, at different times, difficulties are going to arise in our meditation. You've been here now, what, a full day, day and a half? Has anybody been here without any difficulty at all? Something or other—disturbances in the mind, or the body hurts, or something. Difficulties are part of the path. They're an inevitable part of the path. This is normal.

But when these difficulties arise, if they're not correctly understood, they can lead to doubting thoughts about what method of practice we're using. Different kinds of questions arise. Gina referred to a few of them this morning. "What am I doing here?" That's not an uncommon thought. "What does sitting here, watching my breath, or feeling the movement in a step, have anything to do with all the suffering that's in the world? What is the connection?" That kind of thought can easily arise.

Or we might start comparing practices. Many of you have probably done different practices of different kinds. "Maybe I should be doing Tibetan chanting. Or maybe Zen—Zen really has it. No sloppiness there. They get right to it. Or maybe Sufi dancing would definitely be more fun." As we're sitting, struggling with the different difficulties that come up in the practice, these doubting thoughts are not uncommon, where we start comparing and wondering.

Even within one tradition, even just within this tradition, doubting thoughts can arise. On one three-month retreat there was one yogi—this was the most extreme case in over forty years of teaching I've ever come across. For three months, this yogi could not make up his mind whether to do metta practice or vipassana practice. We tried everything. We said, "Well, just do vipassana." Okay, he would do it. But the next interview: "Oh, maybe I should do metta." "Okay, that would be great. Metta is a wonderful practice. Do metta." "No, maybe I should do vipassana." This went on for three months. It was an amazing manifestation of the doubting mind—just unable to unhook from that indecision.

Some people wonder, "Should I be feeling the breath at the abdomen or the nose? Well, no, the abdomen's better. Oh no, maybe it's better up here." That's the doubting mind. "Should I practice a narrow, focused awareness on the breath? Or should I practice an open, choiceless awareness? Should I be making a heroic effort? This is a rare opportunity—enlightenment or bust! Or should I relax? Should I really just take it easy? I've been working hard in my life."

Let me just chill out.

All of these questions, actually, in themselves are fine—each one of them. There's nothing wrong with any of those questions. It's when we get caught in the cycle of endless questioning, of endless doubt, never

coming to a resolution, never resolving it for ourselves—that's when it becomes a problem. Because then we're not doing anything. We're not doing either one or the other.

So when we see this happening in the mind, it's important to recognize it, to label it, to note: "Oh, this is doubt"—so that we're not fooled by it. This is the doubting mind. And in that moment, we're becoming mindful of it rather than lost in it. And right there, the mind has become free.

Perhaps even more ingrained as a pattern than doubt about practices or doubt about particular techniques—even more deeply ingrained for many people—is the habit of self-doubt. We may have faith in the practice, in the technique, in the method, but we doubt ourselves. This could take the form of thoughts like, "Am I doing it right?" Or "I'm not doing it right." Or "I can't do it. It's too hard. It's not the right time. There are so many other things going on in my life." All of these thoughts arise, undermining us. We're doubting our capacity to do the practice.

Sometimes external situations can trigger self-doubt or even feelings of unworthiness, and these can be so easily triggered. It's amazing how sensitive the mind can be and how easily it can fall into that form of self-doubt.

During the three-month retreat, we put up the interview groups in four-day cycles, so people are seeing two different teachers every other day. There's a whole chart, and after each person's name—where there's the time and the day—there's a letter. After some people's names there was an A, some people B, some people C, some people D. I'm sure you can imagine: "Oh, there's a D after my name. That person has an A after their name." It can drive people into a tailspin. All that the letters represented were which day of the cycle people were being seen. A and C were Monday and Wednesday, B and D were Tuesday and Thursday. That's all the letter meant. But the mind has such a tendency to interpret without information.

This is just another extreme form of self-doubt, where we might feel unworthy. We personalize what's impersonal.

It's really important to pay attention to all these forms of doubt, but I think particularly to the different forms of self-doubt, because this can become a tremendous obstacle not only in our meditation practice but in our lives. If self-doubt is strong and unnoticed, it really becomes a debilitating force. It undermines us, continually holds us back. But it's just a thought pattern in the mind. We can actually see it and understand it and be free of it.

There's a very interesting phrase in English where we say someone is "plagued by doubt." That's an interesting phrase—plagued by doubt—because doubt is like a plague. That's the effect it has. Instead of allowing us to make the experiment, whatever it may be, whether in meditation or anything else in our lives, instead of allowing us just to dive in and make the experiment and see for ourselves whether the particular activity has value or doesn't—when self-doubt is there, or different kinds of doubt, we just get caught in endless speculation. We're caught in a standstill. We don't do anything.

These doubts then have a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because staying lost in self-doubt really is useless, and so it just keeps reaffirming itself: "Yeah, this is useless." And it is useless—because self-doubt doesn't allow us to move forward. It's likened to a thorn that keeps jabbing. And if there's a thorn that keeps jabbing, what happens? The mind gets irritable.

It gets discouraged. It gets dissatisfied. That's the effect doubt has in the mind.

Sometimes doubt comes from deeper feelings of unworthiness. This can be a deeply conditioned pattern for a whole variety of reasons in our lives where we don't feel worthy. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had some strikingly direct words about this. He was visiting IMS back in the 1970s, and somebody asked him a question about unworthiness and self-hatred. There wasn't even a word in Tibetan for that—it was so foreign to that culture. So he had to have it explained to him.

The question was: "I do not feel worthwhile as a person. How can I work on this as a beginning meditation student?" His answer was strikingly direct: "You should not be discouraged. Your feeling of 'I am of no value' is wrong, absolutely wrong. You are deceiving yourself." It was very striking because usually in his talks there's something very soft and gentle. But here it's just: that thought is a wrong thought—"I'm of no value."

Later, another Tibetan teacher, Tsoknyi Rinpoche—a contemporary teacher, younger, and very skilled with Westerners—was talking about this feeling of unworthiness that so many people feel. He made an interesting distinction, building on what the Dalai Lama said. He said the feeling is real because we actually feel it. It's real but not true. I thought that was a very good way of understanding it. We're not denying that the feeling is there, because we all do have it at different times. It may be part of our experience, this feeling of being unworthy or not good enough or self-doubt. So it's real, but it is not true, because we all have the potential for awakening, for liberation.

The Buddha highlighted the importance of working with these hindrances. I've been talking a lot about doubt, but this is true of all the hindrances. The Buddha spoke very directly about how important it is to bring mindfulness to them. He said that when we attend to the hindrances carelessly, they cause lack of vision, lack of knowledge, are detrimental to wisdom, tend to vexation, and lead away from Nibbāna, from enlightenment. He's saying if we don't attend to these mind states carefully, if we're careless about them in our meditation and in our lives, that has consequences—causing lack of vision, lack of knowledge, being detrimental to wisdom, tending to vexation and upset, leading away from awakening.

Given all that, we may wonder: why is it that we get so caught up in them? If they have such a negative impact on our lives and our understanding, what is their seductive power?

If we take the first step of recognizing them when they arise—and this is essential—I would really suggest and encourage you in your practice throughout the whole day to keep an eye out for the arising of doubt, and the other hindrances as well. Really keep an eye out for their arising so you recognize them. "Oh,

that's doubt. That's doubt." That's the first step.

The second step is then understanding why doubt is so seductive. Why do we believe it? We begin to see that the great allure of doubt is that it comes masquerading as wisdom. We hear this very wise-sounding voice in our minds. It sounds so reasonable and so valid and so true that we believe what it's saying. "What's the point of doing this? Maybe some other time. Aren't we already enlightened?" Or, "I'm so hopeless. I'm really hopeless. I can't do this. I'm the world's worst meditator." It's amazing how wise-sounding these voices can be, as if they're telling us the truth. So we have to be on the alert, not to be taken in by the masquerade of doubt as wisdom. We have to see it for what it is.

If we can learn to truly recognize doubt and not be fooled by it, right in that moment of seeing doubt as doubt—"Oh, this is a doubting thought"—right in that moment we're awake. Right in that moment we're aware. We see, at least for that moment, the empty, insubstantial nature of doubt. And that's tremendously liberating.

Perhaps at first we just see it for a few moments, and then we're caught again. But if we keep practicing seeing doubt as doubt, we can really free our minds from this particular pattern. And it's tremendously enlivening—not only of our meditation, but of our entire lives.

Another state that is very powerfully conditioned in our lives is aversion. We experience aversion in a wide variety of ways; it has many flavors: anger, hatred, annoyance, irritation, fear, ill will, the judging mind. All of these are just different manifestations of aversion, and they're all conditioned reactions to what we find unpleasant. Something unpleasant comes, and our conditioned reaction, in one way or another, is to feel aversion to it. This is the habit pattern.

But as with doubt, we can learn to recognize this response. We can investigate the nature of each of these mind states—anger, hatred, fear, ill will, annoyance—and see why they have such a hold on our minds.

Aversion arises in some pretty predictable ways. One of the most obvious is that it arises very easily with regard to physical pain. We're sitting or moving about or just going through our lives, and there's pain in the body. It's a rare individual who will say, "Oh good!" Maybe now, after a few days of practice, you can do that, but mostly the conditioned reaction is, "I don't like this." We feel the contraction, the pushing away, the aversion, the dislike—sometimes even hatred.

We can notice the aversion even if we don't catch it immediately as a mind state. The signal that it's there is when you feel that contraction of the body in response to pain. Don't you feel that? There's some kind of pain, and whether on an obvious or subtle level, it's like we tense against it. We don't want to let it in. We don't want to experience it, to feel it. That's an indication of the aversion in the mind—not liking it.

Here's one little meditative hint. What I'm about to say can save you lifetimes of suffering: When you're struggling—whether it's in meditation or in anything else—struggle means one thing. Struggle means that something is going on that, in that moment, you're not accepting. Because if you were accepting it, you

wouldn't be struggling.

Now, you don't want to misinterpret this. Acceptance does not mean not doing anything about it. Acceptance means we're there and we are connecting with what's happening in an open way. We're actually feeling it, experiencing it, and then seeing what should be done about it.

But the sense of struggle itself—and this comes up so frequently in meditation—when you're sitting or even walking and you feel like you're struggling in your practice, take a look. Just settle back and ask yourself the question: "Okay, what is it that I'm not open to?" It might be a physical pain. It might be a certain unpleasant emotion. It might be the fact that your mind is wandering a lot. The mind is struggling because it's not accepting.

There's a youngish Burmese teacher who's become quite popular in the West in these last years. His name is Sayadaw Tejaniya, and he has a very down-to-earth and common-sense approach to meditation.

He says, you have to accept and watch both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. You only want pleasant experiences. You don't want even the tiniest unpleasant experience. Is this fair? Is this the way of the Dharma?

He's simply pointing out that life consists of pleasant and unpleasant. And our practice—and it needs practice, we need to practice it—is being willing to open to both. Because otherwise we're in a place of struggle, otherwise we're reinforcing and strengthening the pattern of aversion, of anger, of hatred, of dislike, of irritation, of annoyance.

Working with physical pain in the body takes practice. When I first started sitting, when I first went on retreat—this was a million years ago—I couldn't sit for five minutes cross-legged. The pain was so intense, I didn't have any concentration, and I was struggling a lot. It took a long time to really settle in, and slowly the ability to be with unpleasantness grew over time. There's still a lot more to do as well. So you want to understand it as a practice, but as an essential practice. This is part of what we're doing here.

We can see aversion arise very clearly with respect to physical pain. We can also see different forms of aversion arise when we think about unpleasant situations or things that have happened in the past—some event. We think about it and then we get angry or annoyed or irritated. This is common. You're just sitting here minding your own business, feeling your breath, and then all of a sudden you remember something that was difficult. The aversion is there, the anger is there, the ill will is there.

What's really happening in that moment? We're getting angry at a thought. We're not in the situation. What's happening is a thought is arising, and we're getting angry at the thought.

My first teacher, Munindraji, had a wonderful line. He said, "The thought of your mother is not your mother. It's a thought." The thought of anything is not the thing—it's a thought. This is not to say that thoughts aren't useful. We use them, and we can use them skillfully, and we need to. But we want to

understand what they are.

We can also get angry at imagining things in the future that haven't happened. I had the most interesting example of this quite a few years ago. We were about to have a board of directors meeting, and there was some contentious issue. I was president of our board for a while. It was just one of those meetings where I knew there was going to be some disagreement.

I was walking the loop, just going for a walk, and I was anticipating this discussion. So I would have this thought in my mind, and it was so amazing—just the thought of the anticipated discussion, and in that moment, anger arose in my mind. It was so surprising to me. What's going on here? How did this happen? I kept purposely having the thought just to watch the anger arise, because it was fascinating—just this connection between thought and emotion. What's going on in our systems, that a thought can trigger a very strong emotion in the moment? It's really interesting to watch that and to see how in many cases we are getting angry or upset about things that have not even happened. We're just thinking they might happen.

In talking about all this, it's also extremely important—and I know you know this very well—to understand that powerful emotions can sometimes be conveying very important information for us. It's not to say that we shouldn't be having them. That's not what this is about.

Because sometimes there may be a strong feeling of anger or outrage at injustice or oppression, or about situations in our lives where boundaries need to be set in some way. Sometimes these strong emotions are actually conveying important information for us. We want to understand that, but can we be mindful enough of our experience, mindful enough of the emotion, so that we see it, we take the information, but are not overwhelmed—we don't drown in the emotion—so that we can actually act effectively, in a way that's not harmful to either ourselves or others?

There's a lot of subtlety in understanding this particular hindrance of aversion or anger, and in seeing those situations when there's something we need to pay attention to, but then using the energy of it skillfully, wisely, and compassionately.

So there's a lot here. You think you're just sitting here—in, out, in, out—but really sitting here, it's your whole life. Your whole life is manifesting. The life of your body, the life of your heart, the life of your mind. And the beauty of a retreat is you have nothing else to do except to observe it all. What a gift. It is a real privilege in this world to have the time to be doing just this, to be understanding these elements of ourselves and our lives in such a careful way.

We can get annoyed or irritated by the littlest things on retreat. If we're going through a difficult time and feeling grumpy or discouraged, the smallest thing that somebody else does can irritate us no end.

There are two opposing patterns that often arise on retreat. On the one side, there's often the Vipassana romance, where people fall in love with somebody. They don't even know them. They haven't spoken to

them. But already in your mind, you're married. You have kids. The other side of that is the Vipassana vendetta, where there's one person or more on the retreat who just drives you crazy. You don't like the way they walk, you don't like anything. Whatever they do, you get irritated. Again, you don't know them, you haven't spoken a word to them. It's all a projection of one's own mind. But it happens. And this is a good example not to get caught by these patterns, but to say, "Oh, that's aversion, that's ill will." We begin to see and understand it so we're not identified with it. We see it as just a passing thought in the mind. We really can free ourselves.

I hadn't planned to talk about this, but here's one little exercise you could do that ties into working with this kind of aversion. When I was on retreat—I'd done many retreats here as a yogi—on one retreat I noticed that every time I walked into the dining room for a meal, my mind would have a comment about every single person. Mostly judgmental. Whatever. It was ridiculous. Totally ridiculous. But that's what the mind was doing.

Then I realized that all of those aversive-type thoughts were being triggered because I wasn't being mindful that I was seeing. All of those thoughts came from seeing different people. So what I decided to do was that every time I went into the dining room, all I would note was "seeing, seeing, seeing, seeing." I was just staying very mindful of the bare seeing. Those judgments all disappeared. It was amazing. Something that felt like such a strong habit pattern of mine—as soon as I saw what the cause was, what was feeding them, they vanished. This is what we can explore. We actually can free our minds from these patterns that cause so much suffering, either big or small, to ourselves and others.

So a question arises: after we learn to recognize the various forms aversion takes for us—and they're quite individualized, we have to see each one for ourselves—what form does our aversion take? But then it gets interesting to ask the same question as we did with doubt: Why is it so seductive? It doesn't feel good to be angry or to be filled with ill will or judgment. So why are we seduced by it again and again?

One of the great seductions of anger and ill will—not in every case, but this is one of the big ones—is the very sweet feeling of being right. We justify the anger to ourselves because we feel right. "Look at what that person is doing." And we're so caught up in our own sense of rightness.

The Buddha described it so beautifully. He said anger has its poisoned source and honeyed tip. It does have that honeyed tip. When we're feeling kind of self-righteous in our anger, we feel energized by that. But we're not seeing the suffering of the source. When we're filled with anger, even though we're justifying it to ourselves by that honeyed tip, by being or feeling right, we're missing the fact that we're the ones who are suffering. It's like holding on to a hot burning coal.

My first teacher, Munindraji, would often give three-hour dharma talks, and I hated them. So I am very conscious—there's definitely another hour here. So I'm going to wrap this up.

One of the things we need to be watchful of as we're working with aversion is first to see how we can feed

it by this feeling of being right, justifying it to ourselves and missing the suffering that's really there. Another way we feed the aversion in us is by having aversion to it. If we're judging the anger, judging the ill will, or having aversion towards the aversion, it's not a very effective strategy, because we're just feeding it, just strengthening it. We have to really become aware of our attitude about the aversion when it arises.

And remember, aversion can take many forms—anger, hatred, fear, irritation, annoyance. It's a whole range. What's our attitude towards these feelings? If you hate these feelings, if you have aversion to them, if you want to get rid of them, you are strengthening them. So you need to check the attitude as these feelings come up. "Oh, fear feels like this." You want to be investigating it. "Anger—oh, this feels like this. This is what it's like. Rage feels like this." We're not condemning it and we're not identifying with it. We're just exploring its nature. And in that, we begin to see its very impermanent nature. It's there out of certain conditions, and it passes away.

I want to read something from Thich Nhat Hanh. The Vietnamese Zen master and peace activist writes so beautifully. He says, "The Buddhist attitude is to take care of anger. We don't suppress it, we don't run away from it, we just breathe and hold our anger in our arms with utmost tenderness. The anger is no longer alone, it is with our mindfulness. If you keep breathing, mindfulness particles will infiltrate the anger. If you keep shining your compassion and understanding on it, your anger will soon crack and you will be able to look into its depths and see its roots."

That's how we have to hold it, and that's how we can come to understand it.

We'll be talking more about this in our meditation practice and exploring the other hindrances, but I hope you have some sense of how important it is to really be open to and understand and investigate these powerful tendencies of mind. Because if we don't, then we're just acting them out in our lives. And it causes a lot of trouble and suffering for ourselves and for others.

But when we can be mindful of them—they're going to come, these are universal forces in the mind—when we can be mindful of them, they actually become the path to our awakening. And that's really what our practice is about.

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