# Deepening Insight into Impermanence

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:02:39

The Buddha opens the Satipatthana discourse, which as I mentioned is the discourse he gave on the four foundations of mindfulness. It's the root teaching for Vipassana practice. He opens the discourse with an amazingly bold and unambiguous statement. I'd just like to read the opening lines of it. He says, "This—this practice—is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of nibbana"—the Pali word for the highest peace or awakening—"namely, the four foundations of mindfulness." That's pretty direct. This is the direct path to liberation.

The obvious question then for all of us as we engage in the practice is: how in fact does the practice of mindfulness—that is, feeling the body, feeling the breath, observing thoughts—how does being mindful of all this actually lead to liberation? How does it work?

I think this question has particular relevance now, these days, given the widespread teachings of mindfulness where liberation or awakening is not the stated goal. As mindfulness has spread and become so popular, it's generally not taught in the context of awakening. So for us on retreat, we really want to understand how it leads to the highest goal, the highest potential. We really want to understand how mindfulness leads to the uprooting of the very deeply conditioned tendencies in the mind—habitual patterns of greed and craving and hatred and fear and ignorance. This is the essence of the awakened mind: the mind that's free of what are called these afflictive emotions, free from the sleep of delusion and ignorance.

We need to understand how mindfulness is not an end in itself. It's a methodology. And the real question is: what do we learn from being mindful? We're practicing the tools, we're practicing the method, and then what is it that we're learning from doing this?

There's a Burmese teacher named Sayadaw U Tejaniya with very helpful teachings. He's teaching in the West more and more now. The title of one of his little booklets is *Awareness Is Not Enough*. That's kind of a shocking statement, where all of the emphasis is on being aware, being mindful—and then he's saying awareness is not enough. We need to use the great power of mindfulness, which means being aware without grasping, being aware of what's arising without pushing things away, in order to investigate what is true. The awareness is in the service of wisdom. That's why we're cultivating it.

One of the simplest, most accessible, and profoundly transformative avenues of investigation—a path into the deepest kind of wisdom—is a growing and increasingly refined awareness of impermanence.

Many of you are probably familiar with the Zen master Suzuki Roshi. He founded the San Francisco Zen Center back in the late fifties or sixties and wrote a collection of his teachings, the classic book from those years, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. A student once said to him, "I've been listening to your lectures for years, but I still don't understand. Could you please put it in a nutshell? Can you reduce Buddhism to one phrase?" Suzuki Roshi replied, "Everything changes."

The implications of this statement are enormous. Although we all know that everything changes—this is not a big surprise, not a hidden or esoteric teaching—we need to go from an intellectual understanding of this, which I think we all have, to an ongoing, direct, immediate, intimate perception and awareness of change as it's happening. We could probably go up to anybody on the streets of Woodacre, if we find anybody there, and say, "Do things change?" Everybody would say, "Of course things change." We all know it on an intellectual level, but we need to go from that level of understanding to seeing it very closely, very directly, very carefully. That's where the transformation happens. It's not simply in knowing that everything changes.

When we can do this—and this is what our practice is about—we practice being mindful of what's arising in order to see this truth. Everything is changing all the time, so it's not something we need to create. We simply need to be present enough to see it and to see it clearly. As we refine our awareness of the experience of things changing moment to moment, over time our hearts and our minds relax. We let go of struggle. We let go of so many different kinds of suffering.

We can see this clearly in our experience of our aging bodies. For some of us this is more clear than for others, depending on where you are in the spectrum of life. But it's equally true for everyone. If we are attached to our bodies staying a certain way, when they change—as they always and will inevitably do for everyone—whether through accidents, whether through illness, whether through the simple process of aging, we suffer. It's so obvious.

If we're holding on to that which in its nature changes, we're going to suffer. It's like someone pulling a rope through your hand—the more you try to hold on, what happens? Rope burn. So do we go through life with rope burn, or are we in harmony, as Anushka was saying last night, with this truth of change?

It's very different and difficult for us, surprisingly difficult, to see that the changes that happen—for example in our bodies but in different circumstances as well—are not a mistake. Very often we're feeling well and things are going along smoothly and then something changes, and a very common response is, "Why me? What did I do wrong that my life, which had been going on so well, all of a sudden has taken a different turn? If only I were a little more on top of things, this wouldn't have happened." But it's not that we've necessarily done anything wrong. It is simply the very nature, the Dharma of things. The Dharma of everything is change. And it's what happens to everyone. It happens to everything.

So seeing this repeatedly, seeing the changing nature—which is what we're doing in our practice, whether we're sitting, whether we're walking, whether we're paying attention to the activities during the day—if

we're paying attention to the flow of changes and seeing it more deeply and more clearly and more precisely, it begins to decondition the tendency in the mind to grasp, to hold on, because we see that holding on to that which changes doesn't make sense. It's just the creation of suffering.

What's particularly noteworthy in our lives is that for some reason we are in the habit of holding on even to states of suffering. Why the mind does this is a great mystery. But how often do we justify to ourselves feelings of anger or self-righteousness? "I should be angry. Somebody did this or that." Or we justify to ourselves feelings of jealousy or hatred or envy or pride, as if there's some reason why we should hold on to these states. We're forgetting, or not seeing, that we're the ones who are suffering. Independent of what the external conditions are, if our minds are filled with these emotions, we're the ones who suffer.

On one retreat, many years ago, before I started the retreat I was in a somewhat difficult situation with someone. And so on the retreat, of course, it was coming up a lot—the situation and the person. I would see my mind getting caught in different unpleasant and unskillful emotions. And then I would see it, and my mind would become calm and peaceful. And then the thought would come again, and I'd get lost in whatever the story was. And then I'd get calm and peaceful again. After a while, I just had to start smiling at myself. Peace. Suffering. Oh, let's suffer for a bit. That's what the mind was doing.

The habit is strong, and our practice is to decondition that habit so that we're not caught up in it again and again. Mindfulness and investigation show us that we have a choice. We don't simply have to be carried on the wave of our past conditioning. If we're mindful and we see what's happening, then we have a choice. Do I feed this? Do I simply go on in this pattern? Or can I let it go?

Understanding that we have a choice is a tremendously powerful, transformative insight, because most people don't realize this. Most people are basically slaves to their minds and to whatever patterns of conditioning are there. Mindfulness—exactly that which you're practicing throughout the day—shows us what is arising in the mind, and with a certain wisdom we see: this is wholesome, this leads to more peace or happiness; this is not, this is creating suffering. The seeing of that enables us to cultivate this and let go of that.

Again, from Suzuki Roshi: "Leave your front and back door open. Allow your thoughts to come and go. Just don't serve them tea."

It's not the idea—in fact, if you really let what I'm about to say in, you will save yourself an immense amount of suffering.

The idea in practice is not to stop the thoughts. The idea is not to serve them tea. The thoughts are going to come, but how we're relating to them is up to us.

What's so amazing about the seductive power of the world—and it is very seductive—is that when we look back on our experience, it's so easy to see the impermanent, ephemeral nature of everything that's happened. The experiences we've had a year ago, or a month ago, or a day ago, an hour ago—where are

they now? When we look back, this is very clear. We all know this.

But what's so amazing is that when we look ahead in our lives, we often get entranced by all the possibilities, both the pleasant and unpleasant ones. For most of us, this is our lives. This is how we live—leaning forward, looking forward, anticipating, thinking about the next hit of experience. The next event in our lives, the next project, the next day of work, the next relationship, the next problem or difficulty confronting us. How much of our time is spent leaning into some imagined future?

On retreat, we do the same thing. It's on perhaps a smaller scale, but we're practicing often waiting for the next sitting. "Okay, I didn't quite get it this sitting, but I'll wait till the next one, or the next walking." And on an even more refined level—and it would be really interesting for you to observe this—even in sitting we are often leaning into the next breath. We're with this breath, breathing in in order to breathe out, or breathing out in order to breathe in. Of course it's a good idea to keep breathing in and out. But what is the relationship of our mind as we're feeling this, as we're observing it? Are we just with what's happening, or is there that forward lean, that forward tilt? Thinking that somehow the next moment, whatever it may be, is going to resolve everything—even though when we look back, we see that it's all just a passing show. Just as everything that's arisen in the past has come and gone and is gone, everything that we're leaning into will be doing exactly the same thing. So what are we hoping to get?

The paradox of the spiritual life—and this is kind of an interesting thing to observe for ourselves—is that as objects of wanting or desire, whether it's wanting or desiring sense pleasures or meditative pleasures, wanting some meditative experience, we see that all of these things ultimately leave us unfulfilled. Why? Because they're changing. Precisely because they don't last. But the very same experiences that can be objects of desire or wanting can also be objects of mindfulness, whatever they are. It could be sense pleasures. It could be meditative states. If what's arising is an object of mindfulness rather than an object of desire, that very same experience becomes a vehicle for our awakening.

The implication here is that it's not a question of pulling away from experience. That's not what this is about. It's about not holding on to experience. We can be completely engaged in whatever's arising, and our practice is in learning to not hold on.

Liberating insight into the truth of impermanence comes on many levels and in many different ways. We see it in science—the birth and death of stars and of galaxies. They come into being, they have their span of existence, and then they disappear. On the smallest scale, we see or can understand the rapidity of change on the level of subatomic particles.

I want to read you something, just in case you're under the illusion that things are stable and fixed: "Capturing the motion of an electron within an atom sounds like an impossible task. Not least because the shuffling of the electron between orbits, or one that's escaping the nucleus, takes just attoseconds—a billionth of a billionth of a second." That's how fast that change happens. To put this in perspective, an attosecond is to a second what the blink of an eye is to ten billion years. It's unimaginable. That's how fast

things are changing. If we think that things are changing in the blink of an eye, that's ten billion years too slow. This is on the most fundamental level of our physical world. This is the speed at which things are changing.

Now it's true that for most of us, in our ordinary perception, we are not going to be picking up change on this level—billionths of a billionth of a second. But still, as mindfulness and concentration and awareness and investigation get stronger, as we look more and more closely at our experience, we begin to see for ourselves, not theoretically and not from some science text, but in our own direct experience, that things are not solid and not fixed, and they're changing much more quickly than we previously noticed.

Even in the ordinary experiences of our lives—taking a breath, or a step, or hearing a sound—it's not just one thing. A breath is not a single event. A step is not a single event. When you hear the bell, how many changes, vibrations, nuances are happening within what we call a single sound? "Oh, I heard the bell." If we're really paying attention, "bell" disappears. Bell is just a concept, and we're simply with that experience, moment to moment to moment.

It's what I call NPMs—Noticings Per Minute. In the beginning, our NPMs are not so high. But as you practice, and you'll see this even in the course of a retreat, our NPMs go way up. Within hearing the sound of a bell, or a step, a single movement, if we're paying attention—it's the only way to perceive it, not to know it intellectually but to actually perceive it—so many different experiences are happening, so many different sensations. Our life is a flow of this.

Here's another way of understanding that things are not always what they appear to be. If we took any ordinary object and looked at it under a high-power microscope, a whole different reality would appear. The conventional notion of what it is disappears, and we see another whole level of what's going on. That's what we're doing in our practice. We're refining the tools of mind so that we're able to see this for ourselves—strengthening the continuity of mindfulness, strengthening the concentration, strengthening the interest in investigation. And so these whole other worlds of how things actually are begin to reveal themselves.

Think of another example. Think of the last time you went to a movie, and you were caught up in the story and the action. If it's a good movie, it probably induced a whole range of emotions and feelings. But when we look more carefully, is there really anyone getting chased, or falling in love, or dying? No. All that's really happening is changing pixels of light on the screen. But it's happening so rapidly that in our perception it forms a picture, and we get so seduced by the picture that we think it's real and we're totally caught up in it. Everything we thought was happening is not really happening at all. It's kind of interesting that we can be so in the delusion of things—and actually pay for it. "Oh, let's go see a good movie tonight."

Now, this is not to suggest that we don't experience or engage with the movies and stories of our lives. That's not what I'm suggesting. It's not that we don't engage with ordinary perception, conventional perception of what's going on. Because we do, and we have to, in order to live in the world. But if at the

same time we can also understand the deeper level of what's happening, understanding that there's a more fundamental changing nature, then we don't fall so easily into reactivity and suffering. We're still engaged. We're relating to people and our lives and things that are happening. But when we have this larger perspective, we're able to be with it all with much greater equanimity and ease.

Here's just a little teaching about how to understand these different levels—the movie-story level of our lives and the more underlying reality. This is from a Tibetan master. He said, "It's not that you're not real." We all think we're real, and that's not wrong. You are real—but you think you're *really* real. You exaggerated. So that's the dance. Obviously in our lives we go through everything, we are real, and all the things we're involved with and engaged in. But even as we're fully engaged, can there be that understanding: yes, we're real, but not really real.

And it's that deeper understanding which allows for the possibility of freedom, even as we're engaging with our lives and the world.

Wisdom also arises from a careful attention to impermanence in ways that we already know, that we don't have to particularly look for, but which we often overlook. If we can learn to pay attention in these arenas, just in our ordinary everyday life, that helps refine and stabilize our insight into the truth of change.

When we pay attention, just throughout the day, throughout our lives, we see the changes happening all the time, all around us. Changes in nature—sometimes big changes, and we see the climate change, things that affect the whole planet, or even just the daily changes of weather patterns. On the social level, we can see change in the rise and fall of whole civilizations. It's amazing to think that at one point the Roman Empire was the center of a good part of the world. Where is all that now? And we can look at any culture, any civilization. It's the same because of the truth of change.

You see it in a very beautiful and poignant way in New England. IMS is in central Massachusetts, lots of forests. And IMS is surrounded by a lot of woods. Throughout the woods of New England there are miles and miles, right in the woods, of stone walls and old stone foundations. It's so easy to imagine the life stories of people who built those walls. There are miles and miles of them extending through the woods that have grown up. Or people living in those houses, people living lives as vivid and as compelling as our own. But as you walk through those woods, where are they now? What's left is a stone wall in the forest.

We could look even closer to the changes that are happening in the experience of our relationships. You may fall in love and enter relationship with the expectation that this person is going to stay exactly the way they are when we fell in love with them. Unlikely. We look at the changes in our work, in our bodies and minds. We see that everything is disappearing and new things are arising, not only every year or every month or every day or every hour, but actually in every moment. That's the nature of experience.

So just as an experiment—and this will be a little memory test to see if you can remember between now

and the end of the talk—when you leave the hall after the talk, just pay attention to the flow of changing experience that happens. As you go from sitting to standing, how many different sensations are involved in that rather complex maneuver of changing posture? We do it unmindfully, without thinking about it at all, but when you really are paying attention, there are a lot of movements required. And each of those movements is made up of so many different sensations. Then as you walk and leave the hall, just be aware of the changing visual field and all the different sounds that come and go, and be aware of maybe the different thoughts that are passing through. Just in this simple process of getting up and leaving the hall, you can hone in on the truth of change, the truth of impermanence in a very profound way.

So it's not something that we have to wait and practice twenty years for. It's simply a matter of paying careful attention. And really that's what we're practicing, because we haven't been taught that for the most part. Mostly we're just kind of coasting along on the surface of things. But the truth of change is so ordinary. It's so much the fabric of everything—our lives, our minds, our bodies, the world. Everything is changing. Because it's so ordinary, for the most part we've stopped paying attention to it. And so we're missing the opportunity to actually understand deeply the truth of this.

Being on retreat is just a fantastic gift that you've given yourselves, because you only have one job. You have no responsibilities other than to pay attention and just be mindful of what's arising and notice the truth of change. Is anybody still confused about this? It's very simple, but as my first teacher, Munindraji, would say very often, it's simple but not easy. It's not complicated, but it's not easy because our minds have not been trained to pay attention in this careful way.

The clearer we perceive impermanence and the more we practice seeing it on all levels as it's happening, the less we cling. The less we cling, the less we suffer.

So here is the Buddhist description of the enlightened mind. It's a very simple description. The Buddha said, "In seeing impermanence, the mind doesn't cling. When it doesn't cling, it's not agitated. When it's not agitated, it personally attains nibbana—freedom, peace."

It's helpful to understand this not simply as a description, but also as an instruction. "In seeing impermanence, the mind doesn't cling." So what's the instruction here? The instruction is to really notice those times when you are in the awareness of the flow of phenomena. It could be in taking a step, and the mind is just there easily, experiencing the flow of changing sensations. Or in a breath. Or in a more choiceless, open awareness where we see things coming and going.

See if you can remember, the next time you're in this kind of easeful flow of change, to look back at the mind and notice whether in those times of seeing impermanence, the mind is clinging or not. You're checking this out. You're not just believing what the Buddha says—you're really checking your own mind. Is the mind clinging as I'm seeing impermanence, or not?

Probably I shouldn't tell you this, but most likely you'll see that it's not clinging. Because if you were

clinging, you would be outside the flow of change again. It's like you would be damming it up. But really see for yourself, because it will give you a taste and direct experience of what the non-clinging mind is. You'll actually be feeling it and experiencing it.

So that's the first part of the instruction: just really look to see how the mind is when it's seeing impermanence. "Oh, not clinging." Then do the second step, the second instruction. When you experience that the mind is not clinging, see for yourself—at that time, is the mind agitated or not agitated? Hint: not agitated. But again, don't believe it. Check it out. It's very illuminating to experience this for ourselves.

And even if it's just for short moments, this does not have to be some big state that you're entering into for the rest of the retreat. It can be a few minutes seeing impermanence and seeing that the mind is not clinging. In experiencing the mind of not clinging, really notice, "Oh, the mind's not agitated now." And when you're experiencing that non-agitation, right then you are in the field, the arena of nibbana. Non-agitation is kind of the foretaste of nibbana.

It's only by applying the teachings in this way, where we take these descriptions and then take them as instructions and check them out—that's when we make the teachings our own. It's not just a question of reading something and believing it or not believing it. We're really testing it and saying, "Okay, is this true? And is this true in my own experience?"

There's another aspect to check out. In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, that discourse on the foundations of mindfulness, the Buddha suggests regarding the hindrances—which are mind states we've referred to, states of desire or aversion or sleepiness or restlessness or doubt, those things which obstruct clear awareness—the Buddha says to be aware when they're arising and present, so we actually make them the object of meditation. But also be aware when they're not present, when our mind is not filled with desire or aversion, not sleepy or restless or doubting.

This is important because we often overlook those times. It's like our mind is always looking for trouble. But those times when we're actually in quite a peaceful state and we're just there in a very simple way—notice that. Notice that quality of ease, of calm.

Buddhadasa, who was a great Thai monk of the last century, called these moments of peace, when we really are noticing that the hindrances are absent, "temporary nibbana." He talked of the use of this word nibbana—in ancient India, that word was used in a colloquial fashion to mean "cooled down." People would refer, if they were cooking rice and the hot rice cooled down, they would say the rice is nibbana'd. It's really beautiful just to see: yes, sometimes our minds are heated up, and sometimes our minds are cooled down. Don't overlook that. You can appreciate this temporary coolness, this temporary nibbana.

Don't underestimate the importance of seeing, and practicing seeing, and refining our seeing of the truth of change on all of these different levels—whether it's externally in nature, whether it's the circumstances of our lives, whether it's the flow of our own mind-body experience. Don't underestimate the importance

of noticing that everything is arising and passing away. Through seeing impermanence, the mind doesn't cling. When it doesn't cling, it is not agitated.

When it is not agitated, it personally experiences nibbāna, the coolness.

There was a very famous monk in Burma who lived at the end of the 1800s and beginning of the 1900s. His name was Ledi Sayadaw—that's L-E-D-I. Very famous. He was reputed to be a great enlightened master as well as a great scholar. You could search for his writings online and find a massive amount of his teachings. If you wanted to really explore in great depth the Buddhist teachings, his work is fantastic.

He said, "Not seeing arising and passing away—not seeing that things are just coming and going—is ignorance. While seeing all phenomena as impermanent is the doorway to all the stages of insight and awakening."

This is really important to let in, because we can hear all this talk about impermanence and it's so easy for the mind to think, "Oh yeah, I know that. I know things are changing." But that's missing the profound nature of seeing it and perceiving it moment to moment, directly for ourselves. Not seeing that is ignorance, while seeing all phenomena as impermanent is the doorway to all the stages of insight and awakening. It's a doorway for us.

And this is from the Dhammapada, which is a collection of verses of the Buddha. He said, "Fully knowing the arising and passing of all experience, fully knowing that, one attains joy and delight. For those who know, this is the deathless."

So this is not an insignificant thing. Again, even though the notion of impermanence is not foreign to us—we know that things change—all of these teachings point to how profoundly transformative it is to really be seeing it deeply and clearly, moment to moment. And that's the opportunity you have here on retreat. As I said, there's nothing else to do except be paying careful attention to what's already happening. You don't have to create it. This is what's happening. Can we just settle into the awareness of it?

There is some careful observation of other obvious truths of change, of impermanence—some reflections which can jolt us out of complacency, because we are in the habit of living our lives complacently with regard to these truths. We get so busy and caught up and engaged in our lives, and so all of this goes on the back burner. There are a few reflections which can help jolt us into a state of greater attentiveness.

Probably the most obvious and ignored reflection on impermanence is that the end of birth is death. Who didn't know that? We all know that. How often do we reflect on it? That our lives are only getting shorter and shorter every day.

You know the great Indian classic, the Mahabharata? It's an epic work. In that work, one of the great Indian sages makes the comment that one of the most remarkable things in the world is that we see people all around us dying, but we don't think it's going to happen to us. We know intellectually it will, but

we're not living that understanding.

I want to read something—a story about Henry David Thoreau. Many of you may know that he died at forty-four from tuberculosis, quite young and very ill. This is from a book about his life and his death:

"Henry was never affected or reached by his illness. Very often I have heard him tell his visitors that he enjoyed existence as well as ever. He remarked to me that there was as much comfort in perfect disease as in perfect health."

Just that. That's a remarkable understanding—that the awareness could hold perfect health and perfect disease, and the awareness was not affected. That's quite remarkable.

"The thought of death, he said, could not begin to trouble him. One friend, as if by way of consolation, said to him, 'Well, Mr. Thoreau, we must all go.'"

And Henry replied, "When I was a very little boy, I learned that I must die. So, of course, I am not disappointed now. Death is as near to you as it is to me."

Some of his more orthodox friends and relatives tried to prepare him for death, but with little satisfaction to themselves. When his aunt Louisa asked him if he had made his peace with God, he answered, "I did not know we had ever quarreled, aunt."

So really what we're doing here is learning that we have no quarrel. We don't need to quarrel. You could call it God, you could call it the Dharma, you could call it the truth. Yes, birth and death—the end of birth is death. This is not a tragedy. It's just the Dharma. It's the way things are. Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away. "I did not know that we had ever quarreled." Can we come to an understanding like that?

The Buddha offered some powerful reflections to help us open to that space, to that understanding. I found these reflections so effective, and they're very simple. The Buddha suggested reflecting: What is subject to old age will grow old, and I am not exempt. What is subject to illness will become ill, and I am not exempt. What is subject to death will die, and I am not exempt.

We're all familiar with the first part of those phrases. It's not a problem for us. Whatever has the nature to grow old or ill or die, those things will happen. It's the second part that's the hook. Because in some deep way, we think we are exempt, or at least should be.

I've seen this so often in life and in meditation. I can be doing walking meditation, and all of a sudden my hip will hurt or my knee will hurt. Why did that happen? And then I'll just call to mind the phrase: and I am not exempt. This is the nature of things.

So I suggest, if you like, you can just practice with that phrase. And I'm not exempt. I'm not exempt from the truth. I'm not exempt from the way things are.

What's so surprising is that given how obvious the truth of change is, we are still surprised by change—that somehow we count on things staying a certain way, or if they're going to change, they're going to change according to our liking. Sometimes they do, but often they don't. And I am not exempt.

Given this great truth of change, what does it really say about how we're living our lives? About what we rely on, about the choices we make?

Just as a little experiment sometime, you might imagine yourselves on your deathbed. And for the sake of the experiment, let's all be comfortable. We're in bed, but we're dying. It's our last few breaths. Just imagine actually being on our deathbed and reflect: What would you have wanted to have done in your life? Looking back from that perspective, what is really important?

These are questions that each one of us has to ask for ourselves. There's no one right answer. But these are important questions, and it's important to ask them now—because if we wait until we're dying, it's too late. We can use these reflections to really help wake us up to our lives, to how we're living, the choices we make, and how we're relating to one another. How will I have wanted to have lived? This is a powerful question for us.

The liberating power of seeing impermanence was expressed in one very startling statement of the Buddha's. He said it's better to live a single day seeing the rapid arising and passing of phenomena than to live a hundred years without seeing it. Isn't that amazing?

I mean, with all the good things that we could do in a hundred years of life, the Buddha is saying it's better to live a single day seeing the truth of change on that momentary level than to live a hundred years without it. Why? Because it's precisely that seeing which is the doorway to liberation.

We begin to see that this truth of change is the nature of life itself. And seeing it clearly and repeatedly reorients our lives and our minds towards care and loving-kindness rather than attachment. It reorients our lives and our minds to letting go rather than clinging, rather than holding on. Seeing impermanence really reorients us towards freedom.

I'd like to close with this one teaching from a Tibetan master, Dzigar Kongtrül. He said, "The potential for realization is universal and present for all of us. True benefit will come from your own efforts and realization. For your efforts to bring benefit, you must take your life into your own hands and examine your mind and experience. From this point of view, nobody could be kinder to you than yourself. Nobody could have a greater effect on you or actually do more for you than yourself."

The Buddha said, "I have shown you the path of liberation. Now liberation depends on you."

This is really true. If you don't take your life into your own hands, not even the Buddhas can make a difference. It's up to you. That's what we're doing here—really practicing. Practicing seeing. Practicing awakening.

So let's just sit for a few moments and let the mind nibbāna out. Cooling. Relaxing into the flow of changing experience.

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