Understanding Doubt and Aversion

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 59:48

In one description of the Buddha's enlightenment, he is sitting under the Bodhi tree with the firm resolve not to get up from his seat until he has attained full realization, full awakening. Just imagine coming into the hall, sitting on your seat, with the determination not to get up until you've achieved complete awakening. You can appreciate the strength and the power of his resolve.

As the night progressed, it is said that different forces of Mara—the embodiment of ignorance and delusion—appeared before him, appeared in his mind. There were terrifying visions of violence and very seductive visions of heavenly pleasures. And then one sentence describes the tremendous power, the transformative power of this path. It's one sentence which described the quality of the Buddha's mind as he faced these forces of Mara: "And the mind of the great being was not moved."

I just love that. All of this is arising in the mind—the terrifying visions and the seductive visions—and the mind of the great being was not moved.

This line can be the reference point for our own practice. In whatever posture we are, in whatever activity—sitting, walking, doing our yogi job, moving from place to place—we can look at what has the power to agitate our minds. How are our own minds seduced or moved by what is arising?

When we look, we see that this agitation, this seduction, happens on many levels. It happens on very obvious levels and it can happen on very subtle levels. We can get overwhelmed by strong emotions. We all know what that experience is like—an emotional storm takes us over and we're carried away by it. We can get lost in background moods. Maybe it's not a big storm; maybe it's just some mood arising in the heart, in the mind and body, and we're not aware of it. That becomes the filter on our experience. We can get lost in, get moved by, get identified with the various thoughts going through the mind—sometimes long trains of thought, sometimes very fleeting thoughts. But if we're not mindful of them as they arise, we get caught up, agitated by them. We can also get caught up by identification with consciousness itself. This is the most subtle form, and we'll be talking more about this in the coming weeks—how we identify with consciousness, creating the self in the knower.

The Buddha highlighted a number of these particularly seductive states, and it's essential in our practice that we learn to recognize them. Because they're very deeply ingrained habits of mind, habitual patterns in all of our minds. The Buddha recognized them and named them 2600 years ago, and we're still experiencing these very same states in our own lives.

We want to explore not only their nature—what is the particular nature of each of these states—but also,

and what's of great interest, is to explore what makes them so alluring. Why is it that we get caught up in them again and again?

When we explore these patterns with mindfulness and with interest, we begin to see that it's not simply a question of our own personal difficulty or our own individual problem. We see that these qualities are first of all universal; they arise in all of us. And these difficult states are precisely the place where we can explore the possibility of freedom. We really can see, in both our becoming lost in them and becoming mindful of them, so directly the nature of ignorance and the nature of awareness, the nature of suffering and the nature of freedom.

This is not a question of Buddhist philosophy or theory. We're actually experiencing this in our own practice, in our own lives, and that is the beauty of being on retreat. Our experience is so direct and so immediate. If we have this attitude of interest and investigation, it's actually possible to become happy when these difficulties arise, because we're in that space of preferring to see them than not see them. Whenever the difficulties arise: "Oh, I'm glad I have a chance to see you, to explore you"—rather than simply getting lost in our habitual pattern.

This is a big shift in our practice, because we tend to be very self-judgmental when difficult mind states or afflictive emotions arise. But we can turn that to interest, to delight. "Oh, this is a chance to learn something."

The more we practice being mindful of these seductive, difficult mind states, the stronger and more stable our awareness becomes. If we know how to work with them, it's actually strengthening our practice, because we're developing that strength of mind that even in the face of storms—whatever they may be—or in the face of passing thoughts or different moods, the mind of the great being was not moved. We're actually practicing that for ourselves, so it can be tremendously inspiring.

Tonight I'd like to speak about two particular strong habit patterns of mind, and they're two of what the Buddha called—and you're very familiar with—the five hindrances.

I'd like to speak about doubt and aversion.

There are a couple of steps in working with each of the hindrances, with any of them. The first step is clear recognition. We really need to be able to see very clearly and to recognize the telltale signs of doubt and aversion—and the other hindrances as well—because they often come masquerading as something skillful. Mara is so tricky. Mara is the embodiment of delusion. One of these hindrances will arise and it will be masquerading as something wholesome. Unless we learn how to really see clearly, to see through the disguise, we get caught up more easily. So a big part of our practice is familiarizing ourselves with the signs of each of these hindrances, how they show themselves to us.

Now in English, the word "doubt" can refer to two very different mind states, so it can be a little confusing. There is a skillful kind of doubt—the doubt that is the opposite of dogmatic belief. It's the quality of

questioning, of investigating, of seeing for ourselves, not believing blindly. We might call this investigative doubt, just so we know this is wholesome, this is a skillful state to arouse.

The unskillful aspect, in terms of terminology, we should perhaps call skeptical doubt. This is the quality of indecision or perplexity. It's like being at a crossroads and not knowing which way to go. The mind just goes back and forth: Should I do this? Should I do that? Should I go here? Should I go there? As long as this kind of skeptical doubt is strong, we don't go any place. That's why this particular hindrance, of all of them, is the most dangerous, the most harmful. It can bring our practice—and also our lives, because it plays out in our lives as well—to a standstill. We don't do anything. We're not even willing to act and make a mistake and learn from the mistake. The doubt is a plague.

It's interesting that in English there's the phrase "plagued by doubt," because it truly is a plague. With all the other hindrances—even with desire or aversion or sleepiness—we're still in the game. We may be going through a storm and it's unsettling or agitating, but we're kind of still in some way present for what's going on. In doubt, we've stepped out of the whole game because we're caught up in this perplexity, this indecision.

There's a wonderful line in the book *The Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. It came out quite a few years ago, but perhaps you've read it. He wrote: "To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is like choosing immobility as a means of transportation." Not a very skillful choice. Immobility doesn't get us any place.

Although most of us here—probably everybody here—have quite a strong confidence in the Buddha's teachings (it's why we're here and why you're so committed to practice), doubt can still take some very particular forms in our meditation practice even when we have a lot of faith in the teachings. As we pay attention, we can learn to recognize more quickly the particular kinds of doubt that can arise for each one of us.

For all of us, for everyone who practices, it's inevitable that at certain times difficulties will arise. Maybe there's a yogi somewhere in the world who just sits down and ten minutes later is fully enlightened, but that's not really how it happens. There are lots of ups and downs, difficulties and challenges, and this is part of our practice. This is what the practice is. This is why it's called practice—we need to practice with these changes.

But if these challenges, these difficulties, are not understood correctly, if we're not seeing them correctly, then it can lead to a lot of doubting thoughts about what method we're using. We really question: What am I doing here? I'm sure in the course of your time here, at least once you will have the thought, "What am I doing here? What does sitting, watching my breath..."

or feeling a step have anything to do with all the suffering that's going on in the world? These doubts are going to come.

Or we might start comparing practices. Many of you have probably done different kinds of practices. And

so you're sitting here and maybe some challenges come. "Oh, Sufi dancing is much more fun." Or "Maybe Tibetan mantras would have me in a state of bliss." So we start comparing practices.

Or even within this tradition. I've been teaching retreats where yogis really have driven themselves crazy with the doubt: should I do metta, should I do vipassana? There was one yogi on a three-month retreat—for the entire retreat, whenever he was doing vipassana, he thought, "Oh, maybe I should do metta." So I said, "Fine, do metta." And whenever he was doing metta, "Oh no, maybe I should do vipassana." It was classic. I have to thank him for being able to tell this story, because it is such a classic example of doubt. Should I do this? Should I do that? And we don't do anything. That's the difficulty of it.

Or maybe you're doing vipassana, quite settled in that. "Oh, should I do directed awareness? Should I do choiceless awareness?" So you're just feeling the breath and working with that, and then, "Oh no, maybe I should open my mind." And your mind's open. "No, no, maybe I should..." It's not that one is right and one is wrong, and there are actually ways of interweaving the two skillfully, but we really have to pay attention to whether we are understanding it skillfully or whether the mind is simply caught up in doubt.

This relates to what I was talking about this morning. Should I make a determined, heroic effort—really the warrior mode? Or should I be more relaxed in my practice, settle back, ease into things? At different times, different approaches will be helpful. The thing to watch for is if doubt is taking over when you're doing any one of them, and you just get confused. So perplexity or confusion is a sign—that's one of the signs that doubt is present.

Even more deeply ingrained than doubt about our practice is the very strong habit pattern of self-doubt. This is doubting our very ability to practice. We may have clear faith in the teachings and know what practice we're doing, but then as we're facing difficulties or challenges, we start to doubt ourselves. This is very common. "Am I doing it right? Am I doing this right? Maybe this isn't the right time. I have so much going on in my life. Maybe I'll come back next year."

Sometimes external situations can trigger self-doubt, feelings of not being good enough. "I'm not a good enough yogi." This comes when we begin to see really what's going on in our minds. I remember when I first began practice in Bodh Gaya with Munindraji. This was my first experience—most of you are much more experienced now than I was then. But when I first started practicing and I saw all the defilements in my mind, I would just go running to Munindraji. I didn't say this exactly, but it's what I felt: "I'm such a terrible person. Look at all of these unwholesome parts of the mind that are arising."

And in working with Sayadaw U Pandita, which was many years later, he had the very great skill—the expression—to push your buttons. He would just say things to push my button, to cause a reaction in my mind. One way or another, some comment about my practice or what was arising, and it would just trigger all this self-judgment, all this self-doubt. I remember going in for one interview. I had been there some time at that point.

I gave my report, and he just proceeded to list all of the defilements that were present in my mind based on what I had reported. By that time, fortunately, when he did that, I just started to laugh because it seemed so funny to me at that point. It took me quite a while to get there. But as soon as I was able to start laughing at it, he stopped doing it. It was amazing. The whole relationship changed. The interviews from that time on were never about pushing buttons, because by then I could take it more lightly. I could see it. Each one was a chance just to see, to learn.

So we really want to be very watchful of this kind of self-doubt. Very often self-doubt arises because we're personalizing what's impersonal. I'll give you an example. At the retreat center—we don't do it here—but during the long course, the three-month course, we post the interview sheets and they're in four-day cycles, with each day marked by another letter. The first day has the letter A before each yogi's name, the second day the letter B, and so on. Well, the yogis don't know what the letters stand for. And the D-day yogis, some of them would think, "Oh my God, I'm a D-yogi. I'm not an A-yogi." And all of this self-doubt would come up. Of course, it had nothing to do with their practice—all it indicated was the day on which they were scheduled for interviews. But our mind will just jump to these kinds of self-doubting conclusions.

When self-doubt is strong—and it is strong in a lot of people in different situations—this is not an uncommon pattern. It's not only a hindrance in meditation; self-doubt is a huge hindrance in one's life. It really becomes a debilitating force, always undermining us, keeping us from going forward. If we don't learn to recognize all of these kinds of doubt when they arise, they become self-fulfilling. Because doubt itself is a state of perplexity, of indecision, of immobility. So if we're not seeing it, not recognizing it, the doubt becomes self-fulfilling, and in fact our meditation and our lives do come to a standstill.

This is really a very important aspect of practice and of one's own mind and experience to investigate. The doubting mind, and self-doubt in particular, has an interesting description of its effect. It's likened to a thorny mind—a thorn that keeps jabbing. If you jab the skin with a thorn, it gets very irritated. Well, doubt is like a thorn jabbing the mind. And when it's strong, the mind gets irritated, gets discouraged. We really do start to give up.

Sometimes self-doubt can come from an underlying feeling which, in some people—not everyone, but not uncommonly either—manifests as a deep pattern of feeling unworthy. For whatever reason of our conditioning, that can become a deep pattern within us.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said something very powerful about this when someone asked him a question on the subject. The question was, "I do not feel worthwhile as a person. How can I work on this as a beginning meditation student?" Well, this feeling arises not only for beginning meditation students. Sometimes that pattern is deeply ingrained. And this was one of the few times when I saw His Holiness respond to a question with such directness. He said, "You should not be discouraged. Your feeling of 'I am of no value' is wrong. Absolutely wrong. You are deceiving yourself."

This is a very interesting response. And Tsoknyi Rinpoche, who is a contemporary Tibetan Dzogchen teacher, offered a very interesting teaching about this. He tells a story of flying on a small plane somewhere in Nepal. It was very bumpy—the plane was going up and down, up and down—and a lot of fear arose, he said.

You probably have been in that situation sometimes—it can get a little intense, especially in a small plane. So he was telling that story, and then he said that at a later date, he was on another flight and it was perfectly smooth, but the same fear arose, conditioned by the first flight.

He became interested. Why is this fear arising? It's not bumpy now. He elaborates on this story, but basically he came to see and express his insight about this feeling of fear—which we can apply to unworthiness and many other emotions. He said it's real, but not true.

The fear was real. Unworthiness is real in the sense that this is the feeling that's arising. So it's not denying anything. When the Dalai Lama says you're wrong, you're absolutely wrong, you're deceiving yourself, he's not saying the feeling isn't there. It is there. The feeling is real in the sense that it's present, but it's not true. That's what the Dalai Lama was pointing to.

Because all of us—the very nature of our minds—have the potential even for Buddhahood, for awakening. So to feel that one is unworthy or not worthwhile as a person, we are deceiving ourselves. We're not seeing the real nature of our hearts and minds. Do you understand this distinction—real, but not true? We acknowledge, yes, this is the feeling, this is what's present. But we remind ourselves: yes, this is here now, but it's not true. This helps us extricate ourselves, step out from being lost in it.

The Buddha highlighted the importance of working with these different hindrances and difficult emotions, whether it's doubt or any of the others. And the Buddha is very straightforward here, as the teachings usually are. He said that when we attend to the hindrances, these difficult states, carelessly, they cause lack of vision, lack of knowledge, are detrimental to wisdom, tend to vexation, and lead away from Nibbāna.

When these states arise, if we attend to them carelessly, it has all these consequences: lack of vision, lack of knowledge, detrimental to wisdom, tending to vexation, leading away from Nibbāna. Given all that, it can make us wonder—why would we ever be caught up in them? They only have unskillful consequences if we get lost. So what is their power? Why do we keep getting lost or caught up in them? What is their allure?

We begin to see, once we recognize the hindrance that's there—that's the first step, clear recognition. Okay, this is doubt. So what is the allure of it? Why do we get fooled by it?

Doubt will come masquerading as wisdom. We hear this very wise-sounding voice in our minds, or experience some very compelling feeling in the body, and it all seems so reasonable and so true. It's very helpful to recognize—each one of us—the particular ways doubt arises for us, because it will be different

for different people. We can learn to recognize its disguise.

Maybe it will come as a particular pattern of thought. Maybe certain thoughts will just keep arising: What's the point of doing this? This is useless. I'm not getting anyplace. Some other practice would be so much quicker. Aren't we already enlightened?

If it's through doubting thoughts, if a thought pattern is predominant for you, really pay attention. Every time you see that thought—that's doubt. That's doubt. But we need to recognize what the thought pattern is. As I say, it will be different for each one of us. Pay attention. If we can see through the disguise and recognize doubt—oh, this is just another thought, just another passing thought—then "Why am I doing this?" loses its power.

We see it as a thought. It comes and goes. There's no problem. It's only when it seduces us, when we believe it, that we get caught up.

Sometimes doubt will manifest not as a particular thought but as a mood—a kind of background mood. And moods are tricky because they're not strongly defined objects of experience. A mood is very amorphous, like fog or a cloud. There's no specific outline to a mood where you can say, "Oh, there it is."

So very often, moods are arising—there are pleasant ones and unpleasant ones, but those associated with doubt might be discouragement, or just feeling down, low energy. To be aware of a mood takes a little refinement in our skill, because we can't just point and say, "There it is." With moods, it's much more that we have to back up and become receptive.

When we are aware that a mood is present, I find it tremendously interesting because it is more subtle. Can I back up and just let the mood and the awareness of the mood emerge? It arises in awareness. So we're not trying to pinpoint it. And as soon as we become mindful of the mood, it no longer is the unconscious filter through which we're viewing experience. I'm sure you're familiar with that—when you're in a mood, everything is colored by it, because we're not seeing it as another arising experience.

Sometimes we become aware of doubt through certain feelings in the body. Some people are very body-oriented, and so maybe there's some feeling in the body that's telling us doubt is present. Just check out whether that's how it is for you. Maybe it's some tightness or contraction or stuckness—something. It may be a thought, it may be a mood, it may be a body sensation, but really investigate for yourselves how doubt manifests. Because it's only if you recognize the sign of it that you then have the opportunity to be mindful of it and to not be caught up in it.

Another mind state that powerfully conditions our lives, not only doubt, is the mind state, the emotion of aversion. We experience aversion in a lot of different ways. It takes many forms: anger, hatred, annoyance, irritation, fear, ill will, grief, the judging mind. All of these are forms of aversion. They're mind states conditioned by our reactions to what we find unpleasant.

This is the pattern of conditioning: something is unpleasant in our experience, and the conditioned reaction, the habitual reaction to what's unpleasant, unless we're really being mindful, will be one of these forms of aversion. We don't like it.

So as with doubt, we can learn to become mindful of all of these different expressions of aversion when they arise, and we have to learn to recognize them. Otherwise we just get caught up and are reconditioning that pattern.

Aversion often arises in some very predictable ways. There are lots of opportunities to observe this, to be with it. It's very easy to see aversion in relationship to pain, to physical pain. There are probably very few of you who, when pain comes, say, "Oh good, this is just a chance for me to be with it." Maybe at a certain point in your practice it might be like that, but the habitual reaction to pain is aversion. We don't like it.

It's unpleasant. And so when these unpleasant sensations arise in the body, as they will for everybody, we often feel the contraction, where we're pulling back from it, or we feel impatience or a sense of struggle with it. We just don't like what's happening.

When you're feeling some contraction in your energy system or you're feeling some sense of struggle—whether you're sitting and it's just kind of, you're struggling to let things unfold, or in the walking or moving about—that sense of struggle or that contraction is almost always a signal that aversion is present in the mind. And so it becomes a very good feedback for us. It's a chance: okay, let me look at this.

Sayadaw U Tejaniya, this wonderful Burmese Sayadaw, has some very good advice. 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 Dhamma?

It's just the recognition that unpleasant experience is part of life. It's going to happen. Given the nature of the body, we all experience it. Pain is going to come at different times or different levels of unpleasantness. It is our practice. We need to practice settling back, opening to, relaxing into.

The ability to do that will be strengthened if we recognize when the aversion is there. Because probably the first reaction will be the aversion—dislike, fear, judgment, whatever form it takes. If we're not aware of that initial reaction, we can spend a long time in that reactive mode. So we need to see that, and then in the mindfulness of that, it's much easier to remind ourselves: oh, okay, not liking, not wanting. Take a deep breath. Okay, can I just feel the pain? Can I just be with it? And so we kind of coach ourselves back into a more mindful, relaxed relationship to it.

What's so interesting about aversion is that it's so deep. As many of you know, this is not uprooted until the third stage of enlightenment, until what's called non-return, anāgāmi. That's a pretty high level. It's said that Dipa Ma, our teacher in India, was at that level—a very high level of realization. It's only at that level that aversion is uprooted. So best to become familiar with it and to learn how to be with it skillfully,

because it is going to be there.

With pain it's fairly obvious; we can see it. But what's so interesting is how many other situations arise where aversion appears, which are really quite ridiculous.

For example, aversion can arise when we think about a painful or difficult situation in the past. How often does this happen? A lot. We're reliving old experiences, some of which were unpleasant or painful. We're having these thoughts and images in the mind and then getting angry or upset. This happens to all of us. But what's really happening there? We're getting angry at a thought. The situation is not happening now. All that's happening in the moment is that there's a thought in the mind or an image in the mind, maybe a feeling in the body.

Munindraji, one of his great teaching lines—he was my first teacher—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. But we often don't see that, and we just get caught up thinking that that's the reality in this moment, and then we're enmeshed in all of the reactivity. So we want to see this. This is common. This happens to all of us. But we can learn to be a little more attentive to it.

Even more ridiculous than that is getting angry or upset about an imagined, anticipated future event. It hasn't even happened, but we're sitting imagining something will happen and then we get afraid or angry. The mind is—from a certain perspective, and we're not always in this perspective—but from a certain perspective, we really have to be able to laugh. Because the mind does so many crazy things that cause suffering.

But the beauty of being on retreat, the beauty of being here—I've just come off retreat myself. I was doing a self-retreat for about five and a half weeks, so I'm very freshly imbued with the power of it. When people ask me, "How was your retreat?" I say a retreat is always everything. It's always everything. There was a lot of difficult, challenging stuff that came up, and then the mind would get really quiet and go to deeper places of understanding, and then...

But the beauty of the retreat is that you've given yourself this huge gift of this time of silence in this beautiful place. You have nothing else to do except to be aware. That's your job—just to be aware of whatever's arising. And by that, through that awareness, we learn how to be skillful with these difficult states. The aversion is going to come. Can we see it? Can we name it?

It is important to also realize that sometimes strong emotions, even anger, can be conveying important information. So it's not always that we just want to see it and dismiss it or let it go. Sometimes people get angry in the face of injustice. When boundaries—personal boundaries—are being violated in some unskillful way, sometimes the anger we're feeling is telling us that there's some action that's needed. The really important thing is, can we understand the message that's being conveyed about the situation on the retreat or in the world without being overwhelmed by the anger? We're taking the message but then

freeing ourselves from the angry response.

The Buddha—again, all of his teachings are so direct. Even the things we've heard a million times, things we're so familiar with. One of the things I love about retreat is that we can hear the words that we may have read or heard many times, but when you're on retreat, sometimes they just go in in a new and transforming way. I'm sure you've had that experience at different times.

So when the Buddha said, "Hatred never ceases by hatred. It only ceases by love"—that's powerful. That's not how most of the world is operating. And so we have to see, even in the face of injustice or things that need addressing, can we understand it but free ourselves from the hatred, from the anger, and then act? Act out of love, act out of compassion.

With aversion, sometimes it's unnoticed. Sometimes there are other unnoticed emotions which are fueling the anger. If we're caught up in some kind of aversion, whether it's fear or anger, and we're looking at it, trying to be mindful of it, really investigating it, but somehow we just feel stuck in it—it might be helpful to look and ask, is there something else going on that I'm not seeing, that's fueling this like an underground spring feeding the anger?

I'll share with you one story. Years ago, I was teaching retreats for law students, lawyers, judges—the legal world. Very interesting. There was one third-year law student, and we were talking about anger and how to work with it. This one third-year law student said something really interesting to me. He said, "I need this anger and I need it so I don't have to feel the fear."

I thought, yes—using anger as a way of avoiding another feeling, because he had no idea how it was possible to be with fear in a skillful way. And to realize, to learn—and I've worked with this a lot—once we learn how to accept and be with fear, it's very possible to act right in the face of fear. It does not have to be debilitating at all once we accept it. But he didn't know that, and so his only response to fear was to get angry.

This is what I mean. Sometimes there's an underlying emotion, or very commonly under anger, maybe there's a feeling of hurt. We've been hurt in some way, hurt emotionally. If we don't open to that, if we're not aware of that, then it can be feeding the anger.

So what is the great seductive power of this? Why is it that part of us loves it? The anger makes us feel strong, energetic, powerful. Often the seduction of anger is the sweet feeling of being right—that kind of self-righteousness.

"Well, I should be angry because this person is doing this or that. Yes, I'm going to really be angry." Again, the Buddha's words: anger with its poisoned source and honeyed tip. It has a honeyed tip. Anger has that sweetness—the self-righteousness we feel, a kind of sweet sensation—but we're not seeing the poisoned source, the root of it: ill-will and hatred.

There are many ways of working with aversion and anger and ill-will, and I'm sure you're familiar with them. But mostly it's simply to be mindful when it's arising. We need to recognize it and not be seduced by that self-justification. "Oh well, I should be feeling angry." When we're lost in that kind of self-righteous anger—"I should be feeling this"—who's suffering? The other person's not suffering. We're the ones who are suffering. And yet we're holding on to it. It's like holding on to a hot burning coal. "I should be holding on to this." Meanwhile, it's burning us.

On retreat, we have a chance to see this. When anger arises, observe what your relationship to it is. Are you feeding it because of that tip of sweetness, not seeing what's really underneath?

Just one last subtlety with respect to anger and aversion—or fear or ill-will. One of the things that feeds and strengthens these states is our aversion to the aversion. If anger is there, or self-judgment, or fear, it's unpleasant, just as pain is unpleasant. And if we want to get rid of it, if we have aversion to it, pushing against it, that actually strengthens it. It's like two playing cards resting against one another—each one supports the other. So if there's ill-will or anger and then we have aversion to it, it just keeps both in place. It's like trying to get rid of aversion through aversion. Not very helpful.

We need to see if that's how we're relating. It's a common response. Pay attention, take a look, and say, "Okay, can I let go of that resistance to it and just experience? Oh, aversion feels like this. Anger feels like this. Fear feels like this." It's just another arising, passing mind state. And so we allow it to arise and flow through.

All of these hindrances are not intrinsic to the mind. They are visitors. They're all coming out of causes and conditions. They're not who we are. They don't belong to us. They don't define us. They're simply arising out of particular conditions. They will pass away. If we can learn to work with them skillfully, then these very hindrances become the vehicle for our awakening. If we don't deal with them skillfully, then as the Buddha said, they lead to vexation, away from wisdom.

I would like to close with just one line from the Persian poet Hafez. I love this: "Ever since happiness heard your name, it has been running through the streets trying to find you."

That's really our practice. The Dharma—it's like the Dharma has heard our name. You're all here, and it has been running through the streets trying to find us. The more we surrender and engage in this amazing practice, the more we taste the fruit of so many different kinds of happiness.

Let's sit for just a few moments.

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