Questions and Answers

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:07:53

Good evening.

Some of my colleagues were supposed to be here passing around the mic, but maybe they're out having pizza or something. So Roberta very graciously offered to pass the mic around. If you have any questions—not too difficult ones.

How has the aging of your body affected your meditation practice?

It's been a gradual process, as you probably are aware of as well. Mostly it's affected in terms of how I sit. It's been quite a few years now since I can sit cross-legged. That was a bit of a transition, having just sat cross-legged all the time and then going to a chair. But in terms of the mind, I would say it's just gotten better.

I'm going to paraphrase something. I was just recently teaching in France, and afterwards some friends and I went to Barcelona. In Barcelona there's the famous church by Gaudí—it's quite remarkable. There was a saying on one of the walls. This is just going to be a paraphrase; I wish I could remember it exactly. I guess he was relating it to architecture, perhaps art, but it really resonated with me in terms of meditation practice. It was something like: art or architecture or the practice, if it's done without love, is just a technique.

That just resonated with me, really in relationship to what you asked, because in looking back at how I practiced earlier on, it was much more about learning a technique and trying to understand it and maybe master the technique to whatever extent possible. But over all these years of practice, the quality has changed. It's not so much about technique and it's not so much about getting anything. You could almost say it's more about love of the Dharma and just interest in understanding. That quality really infuses the practice now, and it's been a relief because there's much less of a gaining idea with it and more the idea of understanding.

So whatever's going on in my mind—the ups and downs, times of difficulty, times of ease, whatever it is—instead of going through those experiences with an underlying self-assessment of "How am I doing? Am I doing it right?"—it's more just, "Well, what is going on now?" If there's some kind of suffering, what's happening in my mind that's creating it?

This has been, I think, a progression as I've gotten older, and it feels much more holistic, much more complete, much more enjoyable. The body will do its thing and it imposes its own limitations, but the mind can really be on a trajectory of greater understanding.

Could you speak about practicing with anxiety and fear, especially in connection to trauma?

Well, there is a whole spectrum there. I worked a lot with fear earlier on in my practice—that was, I would say, the primary afflictive emotion for me, in terms of the different ones that come up for different people. That was the strongest for me, but it wasn't so much related to trauma, which is its own category of experience. So I'll just talk a little bit about working with fear—non-traumatic fear—and then make a few comments about how one can work with it when it's really rooted in some trauma in one's life.

I've given whole talks on this, so I'm going to distill the main point in just a few minutes. The key turning point in my working with fear—and this can be applied to really anything that's arising in our practice—is that after years of working with it (this was not a quick process, but it could be quicker; you could do it quicker than I did, so that's why I'll tell you): what I finally learned is understanding the difference between recognition and mindfulness. For a long time I did not see that distinction. I thought if I recognized what was there and could name it and label it, I was being mindful.

So when this fear would come up—and it was not fear about anything in particular, it was really irrational fear; I have no idea where it came from, but there were times when that energy was so strong that I'd be afraid to go from sitting to standing—completely irrational, but there it was, a powerful energy arising. And I'd be noting "fear, fear, fear, fear," and it didn't dislodge it in any way.

Finally, at one point—I was just doing walking meditation actually, right outside here—something shifted. This is after years, intermittently, of working with it. Something shifted, and the shift was expressed in the thought in my mind: "If this fear is here for the rest of my life, it's okay."

And I realized that was the first moment in all that time that I actually accepted it. In all the previous time, I recognized it, but I wanted it to go away.

It's unpleasant. So there was aversion in the mind, even as I was noting fear, fear, fear.

Recognition is not mindfulness. Because recognition—we can be recognizing things through different filters in the mind, whether it's the filter of aversion or the filter of desire or grasping. So seeing that distinction between recognition and mindfulness, which implies an acceptance of what it is that's arising—it's okay. It's okay to feel this. It's unpleasant. It doesn't make it pleasant, but it's okay to feel the unpleasantness.

And it was amazing that just in that moment when I finally dropped into a place of genuinely accepting—because we can't fool the mind. We could tell ourselves we're accepting it, but if we're not, it's not going to work. So there has to be a coming to that genuine place. It's okay. It's really okay to feel this. If it's here for the rest of my life, it's okay. In that moment of genuine acceptance, I could feel that whole ball of fear wash through in a way that it never had before.

And it's not to say that fear never comes up again, but the relationship to it now is completely different.

It's okay. It's just another passing feeling. So that's the general framework with which to work, whether it's anxiety or fear or anything else.

When it's rooted in trauma, I think first it's really good to work with somebody who is familiar with that in terms of giving guidance in how to work with it. But we need somewhat more care, because when things are trauma-based, sometimes it's not appropriate to dive right into the middle of it—it can trigger a very strong traumatic response. And so there's a much more balanced dance we have to do of kind of opening to it a little bit, seeing how the mind is doing. If it feels like it's getting overwhelming or out of balance, we need to back up, maybe bring the mind to a more neutral place or even a pleasant experience to give the mind a little rest and balance. Then maybe touch it again briefly, come back to a place of greater ease. And so there's a back and forth involved in that.

This is just a general guideline. But as I say, working with somebody, if the trauma is very strong and conditioning powerful experiences—it's definitely workable, but it needs care.

It's very interesting, and I'm sure after sitting for six weeks or three months, I'm just curious whether your mind ever does what I'm about to say. And my guess is that it does. Generally—and this is just so common—we assess our sittings based on whether they're pleasant or unpleasant. Maybe you come in and have a really difficult sitting with a lot of pain in the body, maybe restlessness and boredom. And you get up and somebody asks you, "How was your sitting?" "Oh, it was a terrible sitting today." Or maybe you sit and it's light and concentrated and blissful. "Oh, great sitting!"

We tend to assess sitting based on whether it's pleasant or unpleasant. But that is completely beside the point. The wise assessment of the sitting is really how mindful we were of whatever is arising. And so when there's unpleasantness, can we be with that with the same equanimity as we are with what's pleasant? That's really what we want to be paying attention to.

But it takes a lot of remembering, because the tendency is—and in a way it's normal—I think all of us on the path are a bit abnormal, because the normal way people live is they want what's pleasant and they don't want what's unpleasant. Go up to anybody in the street, and of course that's just what makes sense. But that's not the path of practice.

The Buddha gave one very striking teaching which always makes me sit up straight. He said, "As long as there's attachment to the pleasant and aversion to the unpleasant, liberation is impossible." That's quite a statement, and it shows the work we need to do, because that conditioning is so powerful. We like what's pleasant, we don't like what's unpleasant.

But you've probably had at least times in your practice here where the mind really was in an equanimous place, even for short periods of time. Pleasant. Fine. We're just aware of it. Oh, pleasant. Or it's unpleasant.

It's okay. It's fine. There's no aversion to it, no reactivity to it. That's what we're developing in the practice. And so with the unpleasant emotions—and again, where trauma is involved that takes a certain kind of

care—but the general principle is that we learn to open to the pleasant and the unpleasant equally. And that's challenging.

Question: Now that I'm in my 70s, close friends are starting to get sick with things like cancer, and a dear friend of mine just lost his lifelong partner, who was also a dear friend of mine. I also have an adult son who has a debilitating autistic condition. How do I do upekkha practice when these people I love and I are suffering from things that are not of their own actions?

I would really consider what you would most wish for them. With the metta phrases or the compassion phrases, we have to be careful, along with the vipassana practice, not to get too fixated on the technique of them, but really try to connect with their essence.

Let me give you an example of how we can mold the phrases to the situation. I was teaching a retreat just after 9/11, and it was in upstate New York, so there were a lot of New Yorkers there. We were doing the metta practice and the question came up: how in the world could I ever wish these people, who caused so much destruction and death, to be happy? There was just no way they could find that space in themselves.

This really made me reflect. If metta is truly a universal quality, a boundless quality, what would that look like—sending metta to people who have created so much destruction and harm? It took a little reflection on my part, but I was genuinely interested in that question. At a certain point I realized there was definitely a way to do metta practice in that situation, but it required reframing it.

For me, the phrases became, in thinking of those people who caused so much harm and devastation: May you be free of hatred. May you be free of delusion. May you be free of fear. Is there anybody that we would exclude from the wish, "May you be free of hatred"? No. And so it becomes a way of embracing everybody with that basic feeling of connectedness as a fellow human being. But we have to find the right expression for it.

With people close to you who are going through either a dying process or other difficulties, I would look in your heart and see: given this situation they're in, what is your deepest heartfelt wish for them? It might be something as simple as, "May your heart be at ease." But you have to find your own words for your own feeling and intention. I think that's the way to do it, and it's definitely possible in any circumstance. It's just finding the right language.

Question: How did you start such a beautiful sangha? What is needed for a sangha like this to happen or flourish? This comes because where I live there is no sangha or community.

When I think back to the beginning years, even before IMS, when I was still living in India—I think the process starts with coming to some place in our own practice where we feel there's enough understanding that it would be valuable to share. It's probably not a good idea to do a meditation weekend and then go out and set up oneself as a teacher, which sometimes happens. But also it doesn't mean one waits for fifty years.

When there's a real devotion to the practice and you've done enough to feel confident in your understanding, then you can begin. I'll just reflect about when I was in India. There were other Westerners there practicing, and we would go up to the mountains during the summer months because it was so hot on the plains. Many of us were living in Dalhousie, one of what they call the hill stations—beautiful, seven thousand feet, overlooking the Himalayas. People would rent different cottages and spend the hot season up there.

I just started offering to lead a meditation and give a mini dharma talk once a week. Anybody who was interested would just come. But week after week, it kind of built a sangha. We'd have a discussion afterwards. Sometimes it's just as simple as becoming a focal point for people who are interested and then sharing what you're able to share. That's really how it happened. Then more people heard and more people came.

And then at a certain point, one of my teachers asked if I would teach a short retreat. So it's a very organic process. But it just started with my own practice. I began feeling at a certain point, "Oh, there are some things I understand that I can share." It's not really complicated or mystical.

And also, depending on one's personality type, sometimes people overestimate themselves, but sometimes people underestimate themselves—a kind of holding back even when it really would be a good thing to share what they know. But for most people, at least in the beginning and even more than the beginning, motivations will be mixed. So if we're waiting for ourselves to be totally saintly before we share the Dharma, it'll probably be a reasonably long wait.

For me, what's most important as people get into some kind of sharing role is just to stay very attuned to the different motivations that are arising in the mind—not to expect that they're going to all be totally pure.

Just as an example of that: when people would come for those weekly talks, and I was just beginning—it was the first sharing I had really done—every week before I gave the talk, I would count how many people came. "Oh, this week eight people came. Oh, only five people came this week. Maybe the last week wasn't so good." My mind just did that. Not the most wholesome motivation. But I would just see that arise in my mind. It would come and it would be there, and I would see it go. And then I would get into it and the sharing felt very pure. As I was actually speaking the Dharma, it's like the Dharma energy took over.

But if I had seen that part of my mind which was not so pure and said, "Oh, I shouldn't be doing this," I think that would have been a mistake, because we do have mixed motives about a lot of different things.

One more story about motivation, which I'm sure you've heard a lot about over these weeks. Attuning to one's motivations—about anything, about the practice, about our speech, about how we act in the world. The motivation behind the action, as you know, that's really the determining factor for the karmic potential of that act. It's the motivation behind it that determines whether it's skillful or unskillful.

But how often do we actually, for example in speech—it's not very common, I think, for people to take that moment to reflect: "Okay, why am I saying this? What's the motive behind it?" Usually the words just come spilling out, which you've had a break from now for six weeks or three months. But starting tomorrow and being out in the world, you'll be back in that realm of a lot of talking. Right speech is a huge arena for our practice. It's been so valuable for me because we talk a lot. But as I said, mostly we're not paying attention to the motive.

So this is just one other little motivation story. I was on retreat once, and I was reading some of the suttas. I came across a passage, a story in one of the discourses, that I thought my colleague Sharon Salzberg, who was writing a book at the time—this would be a good story for her book. So that was my first thought. I read this and thought, "Oh yeah, Sharon would really like this. I'll tell her about it."

And then my very next thought was—knowing that as a teacher, a good story is gold—"No, no, I'm going to keep this story for myself. This is too good to just give away."

So I saw that thought. And then I said, "Well, that's just being selfish. No, I'll give her the story. But I'll tell her what I went through so she'll feel a little indebted."

I was just watching my mind go through this whole train of different motivations. And at a certain point, I was basically amused by it. I was just watching my mind do this. And then I asked myself, "Well, where in the midst of all this is there any purity of motivation?" And I realized there was—in that very first moment. That was just that spontaneous motivation of being generous.

I realize that even though we may have a whole train of other kinds of motivations that follow, if we're mindful and we see it and we don't act from them, we can always come back to that very first generous impulse. This is why it's important to be aware of our motives but without the expectation that they all have to be perfectly pure before we can act. Because maybe until we are arahants, the mind is a mix of different qualities and different motivations.

And it's mindfulness which lets us see all of that and then choose: which one am I going to feed? Which one am I going to try to act on? And which can I just let go of?

Question from participant about struggling with subtle expectations during retreat

You know, having been practicing for so many years now, I feel like I've fallen into every possible hole that one can fall in. So it all sounds familiar to me.

A big problem arises when we have some idea in our mind of enlightenment or the deathless, but it's an abstraction. We just have some notion of what it might be, and then we can drive ourselves a little crazy—either in striving mode and over-efforting, or just in confusion about where the practice is going and what it's really about.

What I'm about to suggest is a practice which, for me, takes it out of the realm of abstraction and gives even a mini taste of what the practice is really about at its deepest level.

The preface to this little teaching is a line found commonly in the suttas. Sometimes when people hear it, they actually get enlightened just hearing it. At other times, this very same line is the expression of somebody's moment of realization. And it's so simple—I mean, totally simple—that for years I read it and thought, "Oh yes, that's obvious."

The line is: *Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away.*

A basic statement of impermanence. I'd read it a million times and never gave it more thought because it seemed so obvious.

But a couple of years ago, I was on a self-retreat, just sitting, somewhat deep in my practice, and this line arose in my mind: *Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away.* Because I was sitting, and because—as I was saying before—instead of the practice being merely a technique, I was asking what does that technique actually mean in terms of this experience right now? That sentence dropped right into the midst of the momentary unfolding—the breath and sensations and thoughts, just the usual meditative flow of experience.

And in that moment I realized: if whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away, therefore there's nothing to want. Because whatever it is I might be wanting on a meditative level will also pass away.

Two things happened. One is I could feel my mind drop back from a wanting that I hadn't even known was there. Are you familiar with the experience—and I think this is quite common, perhaps the predominant aspect of meditative experience—where just on a very subtle energetic level, we're leaning into the next moment? We're with the in-breath in order for the out-breath, or we're with a certain sensation in order for it to open. There's some kind of leaning into the next moment, as if the next moment will resolve everything.

But of course, it never does, because whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away. And so we're continually in this leaning into the process.

When this thought came, and I realized therefore there's nothing to want—

Right in that moment, just with that phrase—there's nothing to want—I could feel the mind drop back from any wanting for a moment. Any leaning into the next moment. And it was so striking, the difference between not wanting and leaning into.

I realized in that moment that really what we're practicing, or what we should be practicing, is not wanting. That's what the practice is about. It's not about gaining experience. But we don't practice that way. Generally, and I see it in myself, a good part of the time I'm with this in order for something to happen. Instead of not wanting—that's where the freedom is.

And it's expressed by the Buddha; it's built into the Four Noble Truths. There's dukkha and the cause, which is craving, and the end of dukkha, which is the end of craving. And in the Buddha's enlightenment song after his great awakening—you know, the famous "house builder" quote: "House builder, you have now been seen, you will build no house again," this house of self. And then he ends that with: "Realized is the unconditioned, achieved is the end of craving." It's as explicit a statement of freedom as you can get. Achieved is the end of craving.

My problem had been that I had always seen that as a far-off goal. Okay, I'll practice for the next five lifetimes and maybe I'll get to the end of craving. And it was revelatory to realize that yes, the final end of craving may be sometime in the future, but we can actually touch that and experience that in any moment. Maybe just for a moment, but we get a real taste of the peace and freedom of not wanting.

So just as a meditative experiment, if you're interested: as you're practicing, when you get into the flow, whatever's happening, maybe just start dropping in the whole phrase—"Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away, therefore there's nothing to want." Or just shorten it to "not wanting," or "there's nothing to want." And see if bringing that to mind affects a shift in your experience and in your practice. I think it might well. Again, just for the moment: there's nothing to want.

These days, I actually use that quite a lot, reminding myself that this is the practice. It's not about wanting, and it's not about getting, which can tie one up in knots. But the not wanting is always accessible, again, even if it's just for a moment.

One last piece to this. The reason I'm going on and on about it is because it really had quite a profound impact on my practice, so I think it's significant. If you experiment with this and explore this, and you're just going along with "nothing to want," and then if you recognize that moment of dropping back from the leaning into the next moment—just become aware as best you can of the experience or the quality of the mind that doesn't want. In that moment, what's that like? What does that moment feel like?

I think you'll experience that in the moment of not wanting—I'm talking now primarily on the meditative level; there's another whole discussion about what that might mean in the world—but specifically about the meditative process: there's nothing to want. There is a momentary experience of peace, of stillness, of completion. It's all there in that moment. The end of craving for the moment, or for two moments. But it gives you a real taste rather than it being some abstraction that you're thinking about.

So I don't know whether that addressed your question, but it would definitely bring your mind to a place of ease, greater ease. There's so much to say about right effort and too much effort.

"You were speaking about motivation earlier, intention. The last couple of days I was noticing—I kind of called it a 'not true' practice—I was noticing whenever there wasn't mindfulness and the mind was just doing its stories, it was always not true. I was kind of floored. Just 'not true,' that's not true. It was like whenever there was just a bare mindful moment. And then Jaya suggested, you know, 'okay, a couple of

days of telling yourself everything is not true'..."

Maybe look at the intention before the thought. What's the intention behind the thought? And the intention is always—well, nothing's always—but becoming, just I-making.

So there are two levels of working with thoughts. One level, we could say this is kind of the relative level of discerning which thoughts are wholesome, which are unwholesome, which are beneficial, which are not beneficial. On that level, you were discerning. This is a whole category of thoughts that are unwholesome or not beneficial, not true. So in a way you're fulfilling already that level of mindfulness in just that discernment.

On a deeper level, it's really exploring the nature of thought as opposed to the content of the thought. A question that I often suggest people ask themselves, especially when there's a lot of thinking, when you're on a thinking jag, is to ask: what is a thought? Not what is the thought saying, but what is it as a phenomenon?

This gets very interesting, really interesting. And it's something I think very few people ever do. Mostly we are just caught up—either lost in or reactive to—the content, the story of what's being said. Very rarely do people really stop and ask: what is thought as a phenomenon?

When you look in that way, it's so interesting. What is a thought? We have endless times to practice this. We see that a thought is little more than nothing. It's so ephemeral and so insubstantial. And what is so remarkable is that when we're not mindful of the thinking, thought has huge power in our lives. We're the slaves of our thoughts. Go here, go there, do this, do that. We're just running after whatever the thoughts are telling us to do. They have all this power when we're unaware, not mindful.

And when we are mindful of the nature of thought, when we ask, "What is a thought?"—it has no power at all. On that level, the content doesn't matter. You don't even have to bother figuring anything out because you're seeing the very empty nature of thought itself.

I find this incredibly interesting. Something which can have so much power when we're not mindful and have no power when we are—well, that's worth paying attention to. And there's a lot of freedom that comes. It's more than just seeing it once. We need to practice seeing the empty nature of thought over and over again until it's so deep within us that, at least for a good part of the time, we don't take our thoughts so seriously. It's just this empty phenomenon. The content is irrelevant on that level. When we're about to act, that's when we want to tune in to the content level, to that discernment: is this helpful or not helpful? But in the meditation practice itself, we can go to the more fundamental level. It's very freeing.

Just as an exercise, you might also pay attention—and this I found extremely interesting. In the course of the day when we're moving about, whether on retreat or off retreat, we have an endless number of quickly passing thoughts that go through the mind. For the most part, they're not problematic. They may not even be troublesome. They're just like that. Because they're not dramatic or problematic, what I

noticed is that I hardly paid attention to them. They didn't seem to be a problem.

But then at a certain point, I did start paying attention. And I realized that even though they may last for a short time, maybe five seconds or ten seconds, and maybe not be particularly problematic, for that five or ten seconds, I was back in a dream state—not aware that the thought was there. And I saw that a lot of these very light thoughts, in one way or another, were self-referential. Maybe it's a plan, maybe it's a memory, but something to do with the sense of I.

A phrase that I started using when I noticed this was: I'm just dreaming myself into existence. Every time I'm lost in a thought, it's like a dream, even if it's short and not problematic. It's very interesting. When you go home, just as an experiment, see what it's like to set the intention—even maybe take ten minutes—with a strong resolve: I'm going to really be aware of these quickly passing thoughts. It's very interesting to see.

how much of the time that we think we're awake, we're actually asleep. Because these lapses are just for short periods—it's like mini-naps, where we just drop off, we're lost, and then five or ten seconds later we're aware again. But this happens very often. And so to bring attention to that really opens something up.

A practitioner raised a question about sexual pleasure and awakening, noting that in two years of practice, they had encountered very little teaching on this topic. They wondered why, given how important sexuality is in human life, there seemed to be so few dharma talks addressing it directly. The follow-up was whether I could recommend teachers or books on the subject.

As you say, it's a huge topic because sexual energy is so primal and so powerful. There's a whole spectrum of ways of relating to that energy.

On retreat, where we take the precept to refrain from sexual activity—which doesn't mean that sexual energy doesn't arise within us, because it's easy to spend a long time lost in sexual fantasies; at different times they arise and can be really powerful—being in this kind of environment gives us the chance to really become intimate with the energy itself within us and to examine how we're relating to it.

One of the great lessons on this level is the understanding or realization that emerges through direct experience. We're just sitting, we're with the breath and bodily sensations, and maybe strong sexual energy starts to arise—perhaps triggered by some fantasy, or maybe the energy itself starts to create fantasies. We can feel it in the body, sometimes very strongly, and it can get very pleasurable.

I remember, going back years, the first time when the mind got a little concentrated and I was having these kinds of experiences—oh, this is fun! In some way the meditation was just opening to a fuller experience of that energy within myself. And so for quite a while it was, "Let me go sit."

Then after some time, and it took quite a long time, the next phase was, "Okay, enough already." I was

getting annoyed at it because after indulging it for quite a while, I recognized that this was not what I was seeking in this context. And so when it came, I would get a little impatient.

Then finally, it came to a place of real equanimity. I just settled back, and when it was there, I could simply be with it—with a lot less attachment to it or feeding it, and without any pushing it away. It was just another experience.

What was instructive about that process was how it countered the notion that with sexual energy—and many other things as well—the choice is either we're expressing it or we're suppressing it. That was what had been in my mind. But the meditation showed that there is a middle way between those two, where we're not expressing it, especially in this context, but we're also not suppressing it. We can sit and really be open to feeling whatever those sensations and energies are—and they're usually very pleasant—but we can be with them, and they pass by themselves. Because everything that has the nature to arise will also pass away. So it's not suppressing it and it's not expressing it. It's just allowing that experience to arise, to do whatever it's going to do, and to pass away like everything else. There comes to be a real equanimity with respect to that powerful energy.

This is a really important understanding. One time, Sayadaw U Pandita was giving a talk about sense desire. He was speaking in Burmese, and he went on for maybe five or ten minutes. Then the translator rendered what he said into four words: "Lust cracks the brain."

Lust cracks the brain.

In my experience, this is completely true. When we're in a lustful state of mind, we can go crazy. You just have to read any newspaper.

There are so many unskillful actions that can happen when people are captured by strong lust. It really can cloud everything. So that's why what I've been saying previously about coming to an understanding of that energy where there's balance—where we're not suppressing it, we're not necessarily expressing it—means we're not so prone to getting totally identified with it when it arises and acting in ways that might not be helpful. So that's a meditative way of relating to strong sexual desire when it arises.

Then the question is, most of us are not leading the monastic life with its own set of guidelines. As lay people, for many of us, sexual activity is an important part of one's life. Leaving aside the use of that energy in some esoteric spiritual way—in some schools of Buddhism, in Tantra, there are practices that I'm not familiar with, so that's why I'm leaving them aside for now. There might be ways of actually channeling that specific energy in a particular meditative discipline. For that, you would have to speak with teachers who do those practices. I know that at least in some of the Tibetan traditions they talk about this, but I'm really not familiar.

So leaving that end of the spectrum aside, just as lay people in the world involved in relationships and sexual desire and intimacy, it's really the same practice of being mindful, being attentive, being aware,

being sensitive, not causing harm, seeing what the motive is. Is it really coming from a place of love? There are many aspects that mindfulness will illuminate. And because it is such a powerful energy, I think it is important that we really pay attention to how we engage with it.

So that was a long answer that really says: be mindful, even as we're engaged in all the activities of life. But this one is a particularly powerful energy for many people, and to really bring that sensitivity and mindfulness to it is a great and important practice.

The next question: What does letting go mean to you? And do you think that there will ever come a day when all minds have released illusion?

Two questions. The first one is answerable and the second one is not.

Perhaps a better expression than letting go is letting be. Because letting go in a way implies a doing. Letting be just implies allowing things to unfold. And because everything that has the nature to arise will also pass away, the letting go happens by itself if we're letting be—because then things are just arising and passing and we're not interfering with that process.

As you've all gotten deeply involved in the practice, I have a tremendous appreciation for how powerfully language conditions our experience. Sometimes when we get caught or we're in a struggle or confused, very often it's because of how we're languaging something. It's not actually the experience itself. This is an example. We could use the phrase "letting go" and that might call up all kinds of questions—well, what does that mean and how do I do it? The simple shift to "letting be" might be a much more accessible way of experiencing things. So it's interesting just to look at language and how it shapes our practice.

In terms of whether we're going in a direction of all beings getting enlightened—one of my favorite mantras is simply "who knows." And it's not the "who knows" of confusion. It's just the "who knows" of openness. Realizing what we don't know and resting in the not knowing.

I could go on forever, but my first teacher Munindraji really did go on forever. He once gave a three-hour talk on twenty-one kinds of silence. And ever since then I've been very conscious of how long these dharma talks go.

Thank you. It was wonderful just wandering in for lunch over these last three months and seeing all the yogis practicing. It's really inspiring. There's nothing better to do.

There really isn't, which you will discover in another day or two. It is truly fantastic. I have deep appreciation and respect for all your practice, because this is really what the world needs. To bring whatever understanding we develop, whatever peace we develop in ourselves, out into the world—this is the greatest gift.

So thank you.

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