Q&A

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:00:50

In case you're wondering who this strange guy is, I'm Joseph and I'm subbing tonight. It's great to join with you. I thought we'd just have an open question period, so if any of you have questions about your practice or the teachings—easy ones.

Last night, Anushka came to talk and brought up a question today. She said I could probably elucidate further. She got to the area of consciousness, form, no form, changing form. What's the point? We're all part of the universe. What's the point?

Is that supposed to be an easy question? I'll try my best.

So just to talk about the underlying question of what's the point, which I think is a really important question. You're putting in all of this effort. This is not exactly a vacation. And so what is the point of it?

There are two different broad ways of understanding the point. One is in the realization and the experience—and this is a lot of what the meditation practice is about, contrary to how we often practice, so I think there's something quite essential here—that the point of the practice is not to be getting something. It's not to be getting a particular mind state, even though there's value, of course, in the cultivation of what's wholesome and the letting go of what's unwholesome. But the key element of our practice is through mindfulness to be seeing the impermanent, momentary nature of things. And so the awareness and the experience of impermanence goes from being an abstraction to being a lived experience.

Now you might say, why is this important? To realize on that level of depth the impermanence of things. It's really very simple: because if we're attached, if we cling to that which changes, we suffer. If we're holding on to something which in its nature is going to change, that's a cause of suffering in our lives—whether it's attachment to the body being a certain way, whether it's attachment to the mind being a certain way.

In one of the groups I was doing yesterday, I offered one frame for understanding how we get caught in difficulties in our practice. You may have had the experience sometimes of just going along, whether it's sitting or walking, just being around, and there's some sense of struggle. Things don't seem to be flowing along easily. We're in some kind of struggle.

So what does struggle mean? Struggle means that something is going on that we're not accepting. Because if we were accepting it, we wouldn't be struggling. And what is it generally that we don't accept? Things that are unpleasant. And this is pretty hardwired in us. We want what's pleasant, we don't want what's

unpleasant. And so as long as we're held by that conditioning, we're continually trying to hold on to things or push things away, and that creates the sense of struggle in our lives.

For those of you who are attached to summer, today was probably a hard day. We can take any example. If you're attached to the body feeling a certain way, then when you're feeling discomfort, there's a sense of struggle. If you're attached to the mind being concentrated or calm, then when the mind is thinking a lot or restless, you're in a sense of struggle.

And the Buddha talked about this in such straightforward language in terms of the practice. Most of you are probably familiar with the Satipatthana Sutta, the discourse on mindfulness. In that third foundation, the instruction is very simple. It says: be mindful when the mind is concentrated, when it's not concentrated. When the mind is restless, when it's not restless. When it's this or it's that. It's not saying hold on to anything. It's just saying be mindful of whatever's there, because in that mindfulness we see the impermanence.

So here's a little meditation instruction. The next time you feel like you're in the flow of the awareness of things changing—sometimes we just get into that flow, whether it's in walking or sitting or moving about.

Whenever you feel like you're in the flow of impermanence, really experiencing that, if you can remember, take a look at the quality of the mind when it is experiencing the impermanence of things. The Buddha said—and it's certainly borne out in my experience as well—when the mind is seeing impermanence, it's not clinging. Because if it were clinging, we would be outside of the flow of change. And so we can get a very immediate taste of what that mind is like, the mind of not clinging.

That is the essence of the practice. It's not about having some special experience. It's about not clinging. Often in the texts, one of the phrases the Buddha repeated very frequently is "liberation through non-clinging."

So that's one arena of "what's the point." The point is: through mindfulness we see the changing nature of things. When we see the changing nature of things, we don't cling. When we don't cling, we don't suffer. There's a pretty direct unfolding there.

From another angle—not from the impermanent side, but from the selfless side—whenever we're identified with any part of our experience, whether with the body, with thoughts, with emotions, or with consciousness, with knowing, that identification is already a contraction. We're confining ourselves through the creation of a sense of self in that very narrow slice of experience. My body, my thoughts, my feelings. We've narrowed our experience of the world. And as soon as there's a sense of self, there's a sense of other, with all that that entails.

I'll share with you an example which I've been talking about for the last fifty years. Many of you have probably heard it fifty million times. It's one of my favorite examples: the Big Dipper.

Are you familiar with the constellation, the Big Dipper? You go outside at night, and it's a pretty obvious constellation. Okay, you've been practicing now for five days. So this is your midterm exam: Is there really a Big Dipper up in the sky?

There's no Big Dipper. What's there are points of light, which we know to be stars, in a certain pattern. But the pattern is so seductive that when we look up, immediately the mind goes to seeing "Big Dipper." And there's a certain use to it. As I'm told, the handle of the Big Dipper points to the North Star, and if you're navigating in the middle of the ocean, you can find north and get where you're going. So the concept has a use, but it is a concept. There's no Big Dipper up there.

One of the very interesting things to notice—and you might make this experiment some night on a clear night—is to go outside and see if it's possible not to see the Big Dipper. Very hard. We've been so conditioned to see in a certain way. But attachment to that way of seeing, whether conscious or unconscious, attachment to that concept of Big Dipper, separates those stars from all the other stars in the sky. So there's the Big Dipper and then there's everything else.

The notion of self is just like Big Dipper. It's a concept. It's a useful concept. We use it to navigate and negotiate the world. But it is just a concept. And as long as we're attached to that concept and that way of perceiving, we have separated ourselves out from the totality.

There's a teaching by Kalu Rinpoche, who was a great Tibetan master. He said, "We live in illusion and the appearance of things. There is a reality; we are that reality. When we understand this, we see that we are nothing. And being nothing, we are everything. That is all."

That really points to a very different way of experiencing our lives. And again, I want to reiterate: it's not that we give up the notion of self in terms of a relative reality that we rely on in many ways. But it's not the ultimate reality of what's going on.

And if we're attached to the concept, then it's a limitation.

This is a long answer, but I'll just finish this. You know, for many years, the teaching on the aggregates—the five aggregates—appeared on almost every page of the Buddhist teachings. It's such a common part of the teaching and way of understanding what is really there, the nature of our experience on the fundamental level. I had been reading it, and my teachers would talk about it, and I just found it the most boring thing in the world. Because it just sounded like Buddhist philosophy to me. The five aggregates, perception, formations—what are they talking about?

It took a long time in my practice. And this particular insight I'd like to share with you, because as you leave here and go back into the world, perhaps staying connected through reading or studying the teachings—the big change for me happened when I realized that these teachings on the aggregates are not about Buddhist philosophy. They're not even particularly a description, although they are in part. They're an instruction. With so many of the teachings, we read them and think, "Oh yes, we understand the

Buddha taught this," but we don't necessarily take that teaching—and sometimes it can be a single line—and actually apply it, really investigate it in our experience.

When I started doing that with the aggregates, it became an incredibly rich exploration, because it is a direct way into the understanding of selflessness. The notion of self is a concept, and a useful one, but if we look underneath the concept, what's actually there? It's just the dance of the aggregates. This is quite revolutionary. Everything we took ourselves to be, we're not. That's kind of exciting.

So, how is the metta practice connected to all this? The metta practice works on the relative level of concepts. In that respect, it has a different aim and a different form than the vipassana, because in metta we are relating to the concept of beings. May I be happy, may you be happy, may all beings be happy. It's important to understand that this is the relative level which, as I said, we engage in. We're not throwing out the concept of self. We use it, but understanding that it refers to a concept. In the metta practice, we're using those concepts of self and other and well-wishing for ourselves and others in the service of cultivating and strengthening a wholesome mind state.

I'll tell you a little story, which hopefully is little. I mentioned this, I think, in one of the groups. Some years ago, I was involved in a very conflicted situation, and I was right in the middle of it. There was a lot of tension and stress in the relationships. It was going on for quite a while, and it was very hard to see how we were going to resolve it. At times it got pretty heated.

So I went on retreat, and this was of course coming up in my mind a lot. It was very present, a lot of thinking about it. And most of the thoughts were just justifying my point of view, which was the correct one, of course. I became the lawyer for my own case. Over and over again: this, this, this, this. Don't they see that? But it was obsessive. I couldn't let go of it because the situation was so intense.

At the same time, I happened to be reading a wonderful book called *Tattoos on the Heart* by Father Gregory Boyle. He's a Jesuit priest in Los Angeles whose mission and work is with the gang kids there, who are living in a horrendous situation. Some of these kids are killing each other, and their backgrounds are horrendous. You see why they've come to that. It's just a lot of dukkha. And Father Boyle is right in the middle of it, working with these kids who are involved in all of this violence.

The book is really a transmission of this principle: love no matter what. Love no matter what. Whatever the kids were doing—it's not that he was condoning their behavior by any means—but he loved them. In Jesuit language, which is not necessarily Buddhist language, love them as God would love them, or as God did love them.

So that phrase went in as I was sitting and going through all my mental obsession: love no matter what. I started applying it to my situation. All of the different people who were doing all these things that I felt were creating so much trouble—love no matter what. No backdoor, no matter what, it doesn't matter.

Something quite extraordinary happened, and unexpected. As that settled, as I could really feel that drop

into that space... I would be doing walking meditation. Okay, love no matter what. And then, but— No matter what. No matter what. It didn't take too long until the "no matter what" took hold.

What was so remarkable was contrasting the felt experience of love no matter what as compared to righteousness. The "I'm right" felt like a prison of self and other. As soon as I dropped into a metta space, that particular quality of mind freed me. Even though we're using the concept of self to generate it, it actually brings us into a selfless space of love. So that's how they work together—understanding that we are using concepts, but we're cultivating wholesome states of mind which go beyond them.

Question from a student: I've been playing with the idea of expectations and dropping all expectations. On some level, it seems to make really little sense. But I keep getting stuck on the slippery slope—I think it's also problematic because don't you need to have some expectations of yourself and other people?

Yes. What's so interesting to me is that on a fundamental level, our minds are all the same. The stories are different. We have different backgrounds and conditioning. But how they're working, the basic working of the mind, is the same in all of us. So I can totally relate to that question, because expectation creeps into our practice and is the cause of a lot of suffering.

It took me a while to discern the difference between aspiration and expectation. Aspiration is totally valuable. You have a certain aspiration in coming here, a certain aspiration in what you want to develop in your life or become in your life. That aspiration sets a direction. And even—this is a word I'm not afraid to use, although some teachers don't like to use it—it's fine to have a goal. The Buddha talked about a goal. There's a path and the path leads someplace. That's not at all a problem. That's the quality of aspiration. We see a possibility, and we aspire to experience it. That sets a direction for us.

Expectation, in the way that I experienced it and am using it now, is when we have an attachment for our experience to be a particular way *now*. That is always going to get us in trouble. Because things arise in every moment when the causes and conditions necessary for their arising are present. And if they're not present yet, they're not going to arise. So if we have expectation, that wanting or grasping at a result, it's going to cause a lot of frustration in the practice. Because as you've probably experienced by now, the practice does not unfold according to our desires. There are a lot of conditions at play. If we have the aspiration and we understand the principles, then we cultivate them and we're going in that direction, but there are lots of ups and downs—difficulty and challenges, then it's easeful, then periods of suffering.

All of that is part of it. The ups and downs, the challenges and ease, the periods of suffering—none of that has to impact our aspiration at all. In fact, we begin to understand that this is all part of the path.

But it does help if we distinguish aspiration from the grasping of expectation, from wanting things to be a certain way right now. I would say just try to see the difference in yourself. You can hear these words, but you really have to investigate for yourself whether you can parse out the difference between those two in

how you experience them. I think you would find that it does resolve the question. We can let go of expectation in the unfolding practice and simply be there for whatever arises. The mindfulness itself in each moment is both fulfilling and the path to our aspirations. So the aspirations are being fulfilled even though it may not be according to our moment-to-moment expectations.

Question: I have a question about concentration practice in relationship to insight practice. My understanding is that somewhere in the Satipatthana it says "mindfulness of the breath to the extent necessary for continuous mindfulness." I feel like I went way too hard with concentration and that brought misery. Now as I'm starting to go the other way, "to the extent necessary" just isn't an answer.

I'm going to give you a two-word mantra that maybe will be the answer: focused relaxation.

Very often, even the word "concentration" in English carries the connotation of tightening up and scrunching down, concentrating on the object while completely forgetting about the relaxation part. Relaxation means settling back, being at ease. In doing that, the tendency might be to relax to the extent of spacing out. That's why you need to combine the two and really experiment. When you feel like you're getting too tight, see if you can remember: just relax. The body's breathing anyway. We don't have to make any effort to breathe—breathing is a natural function of the body. Is it possible to settle into the awareness of the body?

Perhaps instead of narrowing the attention on the breath, use the frame of the whole body. Just: there's a body. That becomes our reference point, our primary frame of reference. Within that, we become aware of the body breathing, but it's not necessary to narrow the attention. We can keep the broader perspective and still stay focused on the body breathing. So it's really just playing with those two aspects.

Even in the Buddha's time, there was the famous example of someone who was trying too hard, and the Buddha used the example of tuning a lute. This is not a new problem. To tune it correctly, the strings can't be too tight and they can't be too loose. If it's too tight, we loosen them a bit. If it's too loose, we tighten them a bit. I wouldn't be discouraged by the fact that you're in the process of finding the right balance. As you described it, you're doing exactly what you need to do. You're paying attention. You notice when it's a little too tight, then you relax, make the frame a little bigger, see if that finds the right balance. If it goes too much toward relaxation, bring a little more focus in. I really don't see it as a problem. This is the practice, and that's why it's called practice.

Question: You once said to me that once you glimpse Nibbana, you're in the fold of the divine. Could you elucidate that?

I'm always a little... cautious when people refer back to things I've said. Of course I don't remember, but also it would have been unusual because "divine" is not a word I typically use, so it may have been a special moment. However, there's something there, whether I used that particular word or not.

In one way it's very simple. In one description of Nibbana, the Buddha talked about the highest happiness

being peace. When we get even a glimpse of that possibility—even before the actual immersion—

in a nibbanic experience, you've probably had moments all along the way of times of greater peace. When the mind has been very agitated and then all of a sudden settles—so just extrapolate that all the way to the highest peace. When we have that taste, it's unforgettable. Not that we're staying in it. That could be just a glimpse, and then we're caught up again in all the patterns of our conditioning. But once we've seen something, we cannot un-see it. That experience is like a gravitational pull. Even as we're caught up in all the stuff of our life, that understanding is in there and it keeps pulling us. So whether you call it divine or peace or the highest happiness—whatever.

How do you stop resisting the unpleasant?

That's an important question, because we all do. And this is a deeply conditioned pattern. So I have another little mantra for that. I have mantras for everything. And it came after years of working with the very unpleasant emotion of fear. That was my main afflictive emotion, and sometimes in intensive practice it was just experienced in completely irrational ways. There was nothing fearful happening, but that's just the energy that was coming up in my mind. Very intense. And I'd been working with it for a long time.

There's a very important distinction which is necessary in understanding how not to resist the unpleasant. And that distinction is to see and understand the difference between recognition and mindfulness. Because we can be recognizing something and think we're being mindful, but we're not. We can recognize something through the filter of aversion. That's what I was doing with the fear for years. I recognized it, I was noting it, I was thinking I was being mindful of it, but I wasn't—because I was always wanting it to go away. *I'll note it so you'll go away.* It took me a long time to realize that I was just feeding it.

So at one point, I was doing walking meditation outside in beautiful weather, and something shifted in my mind. That shift was expressed in the thought: *If this fear is here for the rest of my life, it's okay.* And that was the first moment I had really accepted it. All the time before that it was, *I want to get rid of it.*

So "it's okay" became a mantra. Whenever unpleasant things come up, or things I was resisting—*it's okay, it's okay.* It's like how you might be with a child who's going through a difficult time. You don't beat the kid. You don't say, "Oh, you're so stupid for feeling that." No—it's okay. It's okay to feel it, whatever it is, even if it's unpleasant. Sometimes we need to coach ourselves. And as we do, the ability to be okay with the unpleasant gets stronger.

But it's a practice, because the tendency, of course, is we grab onto what's pleasant and we don't like what's unpleasant. That's a pretty deep pattern. So I would just suggest—and again, all of this only has meaning if you experiment to see for yourself whether there's anything valuable in it—but you might try, the next time you're feeling discomfort in the body and you're kind of being mindful but it also feels like you're in a struggle, see what happens if you can remember: *Oh, it's okay. It's okay. Just let me feel it.* You

might imagine you're being with a child who is hurting. And that's how we recondition—or decondition—the resistance.

There are different ways in different traditions to talk about consciousness and how we can actually experience the nature of consciousness, not just as an abstraction, but...

to really investigate what it is and how we're relating to it and understand it.

Different traditions talk about that in different ways. All of them agree on the importance of not identifying with it. But still, the first step is getting some experience of it, some really clear experience. "Oh, this is what consciousness is. This is what the knowing faculty is."

There are different ways of doing this. One way—and this is very classical, a classical insight in the Vipassana trajectory, one of the first stages of insight in the Unfolding Path—is called purification of view. What this means is that just by being mindful of the breathing, sensations, thoughts, whatever it is, we begin to see that in every moment two things are going on simultaneously. The flow of experience is a pairwise progression of knowing an object. There's the breath and the knowing of it, a sound and the knowing of it, a thought and the knowing of it. All the aspects of our experience—it's always this pair of knowing and object. You want to explore that and see: is that true in your experience?

One way to investigate this—and this is a bit of an odd example—but if you had a corpse in your living room and you pumped the diaphragm with air, there would be a movement, the rising-falling movement. As far as we can tell, there's no knowing there in the corpse. The movement is the same, but it's just the physical. When we're feeling the breath, the rising-falling, we might just remember or investigate: "Oh yes, there's the physical movement and there's something else as well—there's a knowing of it." This highlights the fact that there would be no awareness of anything if consciousness were not there.

We begin to see that consciousness and object are arising and passing together as a pair—arising and passing, knowing an object, knowing an object, knowing an object. You might direct some of your attention to investigating the process of your experience in this way, because it can give you a very vivid experience of the nature of knowing and the fact that it is also arising and passing in each moment with the object. So that's one avenue of investigation.

There are times in Vipassana practice, especially in the later stages, where the awareness of the body really disappears, and our experience is that of just knowing. Even all objects can disappear, and it's just knowing. So that again gives you a very vivid experience of the nature of knowing.

There's another method which is called the Goldstein method. This has no authoritative reference in the texts, but it's something I found very helpful. It involves reframing experience in the passive voice.

Usually we're always languaging experience, even if it's not on a conscious level. And usually we're languaging things in the active voice: I'm hearing, I'm thinking, I'm walking, I'm doing this. There's a

subject, a verb, and an object. At some point—I'm not even quite sure how it came about—I started framing experience in the passive voice. I was doing walking meditation and it became "movement" or "the sensations of movement being known," rather than "I'm knowing," which creates the sense of self as the knower. In the passive voice, there's no subject. Sensations being known. A sound being known. A thought being known.

Practicing in that way had a remarkable consequence. Going back to the question of expectation, it completely let go of all expectations because I was just there in that process of experiencing things being known. And they were being known without effort, being known spontaneously.

Just now, we'll do a little example. If you move your arm, see if you can get into the frame of the sensations or the movement being known. Do you have to do anything special for them to be known? It's quite miraculous. This is the miracle of consciousness. We're not doing anything. But if we're there, it's just being known, and it's being known spontaneously, and it's being known perfectly and selflessly.

The philosopher Wittgenstein—this is a paraphrase—said something like, "The sense of self is a fluke of grammar."

Because our grammar in language is so powerful, it conditions the way we experience things. Change the grammar a bit and we get a whole different take on what's happening. So I found this passive voice mode very liberating.

The first step is just settling into the ease of it. You walk in again, it takes no effort. You're walking and the sensations are just being known all by themselves. Once you get easeful with the ease of it, then you could ask a very interesting question: Okay, these sensations, this movement is being known—known by what?

That's a really interesting question. It's clear that they're being known. We have no doubt about that. But known by what? This is a way of turning the attention right back to the knowing. And there is something very mysterious about it, because when you look for it, there's nothing to find. And yet the knowing is happening. So you're really getting right into the depth of understanding the nature of consciousness and the experience of consciousness. One teacher called it "the cognizing power of emptiness." It's a nice phrase. So those are a couple of ways of really honing in on that aspect of our experience, and it's an important one.

Question: I have a very practical question. When I go home, one of the things I'm nervous about is how am I going to practice without all of these people supporting me? I've been to a retreat before and I told myself, "Oh yeah, I can sit for forty-five minutes, that's easy now. In fact, I'll be nice to myself and just sit for thirty minutes a day." It didn't happen. So how does a person practice every day, or at least almost every day, especially in an area where there isn't really a sangha or something like that? And with all the instructions we've been given, sometimes when I sit I'm like, "Should I practice mindfulness of just the breath, or should I practice mindfulness of all these other things?" And then I just get a little frustrated.

This is not an unusual question, and it's one of the great challenges. Here, conditions are very supportive for practice—it's what the environment is designed for. And it is really challenging when you go home and there's not this support.

Just a few suggestions. First, note that this is not just your problem. So you don't need to add self-judgment on top of the difficulty, because it's a common problem.

You might try using some guided meditations at home. There are tons of them online and through apps—lots of ways to access them. That's a kind of sangha support that you're bringing into your home, and it's really helpful. You could then do the practice of whatever meditation is being guided, because they're all good. It's not that you'll be making a mistake. Whether you're doing just the breath or more open awareness or mettā, it's all good. Keying into that resource would be very helpful. You could do a fifteen or twenty minute or half-hour guided meditation, and that would also inspire you to keep going until the end of it.

The other suggestion—this was something a yogi from New York described. They had a very hectic, frantic lifestyle and faced the same problem: strong intention to sit every day, but it just got swept away. What they finally came up with was making the intention to simply get into the meditation posture. That's all. Not for any length of time at all. Just get into the posture. Is there anybody who doesn't have time to get into the meditation posture?

If you don't have time to do just that, see me afterwards. We all can do that.

What this person found, and I've seen it in myself, is that the problem is not finding the time. The problem is disengaging. We get so hooked into what we're doing—and we can see it when we're working on the computer or our communication device. It's so hard to disengage, just to let go of it. And that's true of the flow of our daily experiences in general.

What this person found is that once they got into the posture, then it was easier to sit for however long they sat. So sometimes it might have been for a minute or five minutes or ten minutes, and sometimes longer. But it was just the disengaging that was the key element. So you might try that. You make a commitment—but you really have to make the commitment. Not just, "Okay, every day I'm going to at least get into the posture and then see what happens." Between these two approaches—using guided meditations and this commitment to the posture—you might find it helpful.

A question came about the notion of not-self: rather than being the liberation from all suffering, it just seems extremely scary. There was a very gut aversion to it. And along with that, a comment that even though Buddhism is sometimes talked about as not being a religion, there seems to be a surprising amount of faith or trust involved.

So the first question had to do with hearing the teachings about selflessness and no-self and finding that it doesn't feel liberating—it feels scary. "I'm not sure I want to go there." This goes back a little bit to an

earlier question. Sometimes people hear "no-self" or "selflessness" and the mind conjures up *poof*—and then we disappear into a cloud of smoke or something. The mind has all kinds of imagination of what it means. And it doesn't mean any of that.

Because again, going back to the Big Dipper—are you familiar with that constellation? When you realize that Big Dipper is a concept, that there's really no Big Dipper there, does anything change in the sky? Nothing changes. It's as it always was, because Big Dipper wasn't there in the first place. It was an overlay, and as I said, it can be a useful overlay.

So when we touch into selflessness, it's not that we're getting rid of anything that's there. We're just seeing things as they are, and still able to use the notion of self. We're not giving up the usefulness of it. When you realize that nothing changes, your whole life continues to go on as it always was. People have the idea of no-self or selflessness as getting rid of something. It's not getting rid of anything, because it's just a concept in the first place.

So then there's another question which takes it a little deeper: if it's not there in the first place, why is the concept so prevalent? Why is it so deeply conditioned? Because there is a felt sense of self, and that's how most people are living their lives. But if we realize that it's just a concept, then we can begin to investigate—where does that felt sense of self come from? Because it's common and we all have it.

When you look carefully, you see that the felt sense of self happens in any moment when there's identification with some aspect of our experience. There's a thought, and if we're relating to it with identification—"my thought," or "I'm thinking"—right there, the felt sense of self has been created. But all it is, is the process of identification. All that's really there is a thought. And the thought comes and goes; the thought is selfless. You follow?

So there's a way of understanding that self is a concept, and therefore we're not getting rid of anything. In understanding it, you don't disappear. Everything is still there, just like the stars in the sky. Realize Big Dipper is a concept, nothing changes. We're just seeing it in a different way. And still able to use the concept.

So the second question was about this: even though Buddhism is sometimes talked about as not being a religion, there still seems to be a lot of faith and trust involved in undertaking the practice. Just as with expectation and aspiration, I think it's helpful to see the difference between trust and belief. Because in the teachings, you don't have to believe anything.

All the teachings are simply an invitation to explore for yourself your own experience—what causes suffering and how to come to the end of that.

The trust part, or what we might call faith, requires only a certain level of confidence. Even on just the intellectual level, some of these teachings seem to make some sense. That's all you need. It's not about belief, and no belief is required.

It's like hearing, "In seeing impermanence, the mind doesn't cling." Let me check it out. Or, "Metta is a happier state than greed or hatred." Let me check it out.

So there can be trust in the path without the requirement of dogmatic belief.

I think we need to stop. Why don't we just sit for a couple of minutes and let the words settle...

Thank you for stimulating my neural pathways.

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