Q&A

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:04:55

Good to be with all of you this evening. I'd be glad to try to respond to any easy questions.

*Question:** I believe you told a story that in his last lifetime the Buddha had headaches because he had rejoiced at the flopping of a fish in a previous lifetime—a fish that was going to be his lunch. What that suggests is that for each transgression there's a specific penance we have to pay. But it seems hardly possible that we'd ever get out of karmic debt if that's true. What's your understanding of how we resolve our burden of past karma?

There's actually an important point in this question which I think is really worth addressing. Although I don't particularly remember telling that specific story, it does illustrate the point. There's often a misunderstanding that in order to realize enlightenment or awakening, we have to burn through all our past karma in some way. But as you suggested in the question, that would be impossible, because if one believes in the Buddhist cosmology of many lives and past lives, we're all trailing an infinite amount of past karma. There would be no way to have all of those past actions bear fruit before awakening.

So I think that's just a mistaken view. It really has to do with developing the mind—the balance of mind and the factors of awakening, which I'm sure you've heard about during the retreat—to a place of maturity and balance where the mind opens. It's said that some specific actions will prevent that awakening in this lifetime. They're called the five heinous deeds, and I don't think any of you have hopefully committed them: killing one's mother or father, wounding the Buddha, killing an Arahant, causing a schism in the Sangha. Short of that, even though all of us have a mix of wholesome and unwholesome karma from the past, none of it will be a barrier to awakening. So I would just say that's good news.

I've heard this misunderstanding from many people over the years, and it doesn't really make sense.

*Question:** Everything that arises is not-self. This includes the body and the brain and its qualities and characteristics—memory, emotions, motives, intentions, and so on. If everything that arises is not-self, there can neither be a situation in which there's choice or no choice, a situation in which there's responsibility or no responsibility. And also in such a situation there can't possibly be any karma, because it's a situation of not-self, and not-self can't have karma. So in that kind of situation, where there's not-self to be reborn and there's not karma to be reborn, what can possibly be reborn? And if it is reborn, it's not-self anyway.

There was a lot in that question. I'll try to address at least some of it.

First is the understanding that in the teachings of not-self, it's not that we start with a self and then somehow through our practice we get rid of it. It's really to realize that it was never there in the first place.

The law of cause and effect—of actions bringing about results—does not depend on the concept of self. It simply is saying that certain actions are going to bring about certain results depending on the motivation of that action. I'm sure you've heard this over these weeks: actions motivated by greed, hatred, and delusion will bring about unwholesome results. Likewise, wholesome motivation will bring about wholesome results. There's no self involved in any of that. It's simply action and result, action and result. It's this process of each moment's experience conditioning the next, conditioning the next, conditioning the next.

The way it's described in the Buddhist teachings, death consciousness—the quality of the mind at death—depending on the particular qualities present in the mind at the moment of death consciousness, that will condition the rebirth consciousness, the quality of the ongoing process.

To talk about selflessness does not mean that the process is unlawful or chaotic or that somehow everything just falls apart. The unfolding of our lives and the unfolding of the world are following certain laws of nature, whether they're the scientific laws of chemistry or physics, or the psychological laws—the laws of the mind—which the Buddha so brilliantly illuminated for us to see for ourselves. So it's not a question of belief. The Buddha gave teachings and pointed a way for us to understand this process of cause and effect, moment to moment, and to verify that in our own experience.

Just to underscore this: in all of these teachings there's never a requirement for belief.

It's not what this is about. It's all about suggestions for your own investigation, your own understanding.

Very often, conventionally, and for most of our lives until we've really examined this process very deeply, there is the felt sense that the process is happening to someone. This is where I think the illusion arises—the critical importance of the notion of self. Even when we see the impermanence of all the things mentioned—the bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, and emotions—even when we have some sense of their impermanence, of their arising and passing due to different causes and conditions, even when we recognize it as an impersonal process and perhaps get a glimpse of that in our practice, even more than a glimpse... it's all just a passing show. Still, for the most part and for quite a while, there's a tendency to be identified with the one who's knowing it all.

So I'm the one who's seeing the impermanence of all this. I'm even seeing the selfless nature of all those phenomena—but not yet seeing the selfless nature of the knowing itself. I find that this identification with consciousness, identification with knowing, is the last holdout of self. It's where that final vestige of a sense of self resides: in the identification with the knowing, which creates the felt sense of a knower, an observer, a witness.

None of the processes of our unfolding life, and none of the processes involved in the continuity from life to life, are in any way dependent on the notion of some unchanging, abiding something-or-other that is carried through all the changes. It's not that the changes are happening to someone. Rather, if you want to use the word *self*—which we do conventionally, and it's totally fine to use it in a conventional way, there's no problem—the key is to really see what you're referring to when you use that term.

If you're referring to some sense of an unchanging, abiding, soul-like entity, this is what the Buddha said is not seen clearly. But if you're using the term *self* to describe the unfolding, changing process of life and the continuity of it, the lawfulness of that unfolding, then it's fine to use the word that way.

I can't resist—I'm sure many of you know what's coming. An example I've been using for the last fifty years: the Big Dipper. You're familiar with the constellation in the sky? You go out at night, it's clear, you can see the stars. It's a pretty easy constellation to recognize.

So you're coming close to the end of the first six weeks. Consider this your final exam. Everything depends on your answer to this question: Is there really a Big Dipper up in the sky?

There's no Big Dipper. Big Dipper is a concept, obviously, which we've created. There's a certain perception of stars in a certain pattern. We perceive the pattern, we put a name on the pattern, we call it Big Dipper.

Self is like Big Dipper.

All of the phenomena—just like those stars creating a pattern as we look at the sky—all the phenomena of our life create a pattern. When I get up in the morning and look in the mirror, yeah, that's me. The pattern is there. But what happens in this situation, and in many others, is that we reify patterns. We make a pattern into a thing. And that's what we do; that's how the notion of self is created.

There is a pattern, a recognizable one, and this pattern is different from that pattern—each one is different. But it's a pattern of changing elements. It's not a pattern with any unchanging thing at the heart of it. We reify the pattern into a thing and then we live in that world. And that's the source of a lot of our problems.

If you think it's an easy thing to let go of, to see through patterns, try this as an experiment: on a clear night, if you're familiar with the constellation, go out and see if it's possible not to see the Big Dipper. It's really hard to just see stars in the sky without collapsing them into separate patterns, because that's our own overlay. The pattern as a thing is not in the sky—we're perceiving it that way.

So if it's that difficult not to see the Big Dipper, it's no wonder you have to spend three months here in order to not see self. Or maybe many three months. But this is where it's going: seeing through our attachment to the pattern of self.

I hope this covers at least some of what you were asking about.

Any women who would like to ask some questions?

"In the beginning of our retreat, the teachers emphasized that this is a marathon, not a sprint. I am here for three months, as many of us are, and I was curious about any suggestions you have about refining our practice for the rest of our time here—not coming from a place of striving or panicking that we're halfway done, but just out of honoring."

I have suggestions for almost everything. Whether they're valuable or not is another question. But in this regard, I do have a very specific one, something I've been working on myself in recent years that has really changed my practice and my understanding of the practice in a pretty significant way. It was interesting to me that it unfolded after all these years—I've been practicing for fifty years. But this is the beauty of the Dharma: it's endlessly rich. It's so vast. So it's definitely not a question of a three-month retreat. It's a lifetime, perhaps many lifetimes of practice, a continual exploration and investigation of the nature of this body-mind and how it all works.

This has been born out of my own practice over all these years, just sitting, sitting, and every once in a while in a retreat, you see something in a slightly different way. That's a long preface to this.

There is a line in the suttas which recurs quite frequently, and it's often the line which either prompts a person's awakening or is spoken as an expression of somebody's awakening. So I'm going to give you the line. This is a big chance. Just before I do—don't be beguiled by its simplicity, because, as I said, people get enlightened listening to this.

Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away.

Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away. It's not saying some things that arise will pass away. *Whatever* has the nature to arise will also pass away. So what has the nature to arise? Absolutely everything in our experience.

I was doing a self-retreat, sitting and just watching the unfolding process. For some reason this line came to my mind. But because it came to mind right in the midst of intensive practice, it wasn't so much an intellectual remembering. It's as if that teaching—*whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away*—be came part of the process. It took on much more meaning than just reading it as a philosophic statement of impermanence.

So I'm sitting, just in this unfolding process: whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away. And I saw in that moment, with regard to Dharma practice on the most fundamental level, there's nothing to want. Because whatever it is that we're wanting will also pass away. That became a little mantra for me: *t here's nothing to want.* And in that moment, I could feel the mind drop back from a subtle level of wanting or leaning into the process that I didn't even know was there.

I thought I was just in the unfolding of the breath, the sensations, sounds, whatever was occurring. But I'm

sure you've had the experience of meditating where we're in this moment *in order for* the next moment. We're with the breath in order to get a little more concentrated. We're with the sensation in order for it to dissolve. There's very often an "in order to" mind, in a very subtle way, just in the moment. It's as if there's a slight leaning into the process.

So this line—whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away, there's nothing to want—meditatively, I could feel the mind dropping back. And that not wanting is exactly a glimpse of the Third Noble Truth.

In the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha talked about suffering, about what is the cause of suffering on the most fundamental level. Of course, there are lots of causes for suffering in society and in our lives. But on the most fundamental level of this mind-body process, what keeps us locked in, even imprisoned by it, is craving.

We're wanting something, and that's what keeps us locked into this cycle of becoming—wanting to become this, wanting to become that. Even dharmically, meditatively, this craving creeps in.

So that realization, even if it's just for a few moments... it's not that we may realize something in paying attention to this and it's necessarily going to be full enlightenment. It may just be a moment's enlightenment, where we say, "Here, there's nothing to want." Nothing to want is the end of craving, which is precisely the Third Noble Truth.

And in that moment—and I'd suggest you play with it, without going crazy, just having fun playing with it out of interest and investigation and inquiry—maybe you will have that experience, even for a moment or two: nothing to want. And to be sitting or walking at any time, if you actually feel that moment of dropping back from that leaning into, just pay attention or take an interest in the quality of the mind that doesn't want. You will have an experience—again, it may be momentary, but genuine—of a genuine peace.

The Buddha, in his enlightenment song after his awakening, in that famous quote: "Oh house builder, you have now been seen. You will build no house again, house of self." The end of that whole verse is: "Realized is the unconditioned. Achieved is the end of craving." The Buddha couldn't point more directly to the nature of the free mind.

But for years, I had put the end of craving far away. I had seen that and understood the Third Noble Truth as something I might reach in thirty years, in fifty lifetimes—maybe then I'll come to the end of craving. I saw it as a far-off goal. It was in this situation that I realized: yes, it's that also, but actually we can touch it and taste it right now. So that's what I would suggest. I think that would reframe your practice.

This is not to say that particular practices we do to develop concentration and to develop metta, where there is an aspiration for some kind of completion—those practices are absolutely essential. They're essential in developing wholesome states of mind, but also essential in creating the foundation or the momentum of practice where things are just rolling on by themselves, which actually allows the mind to

realize, to taste that there's nothing to want.

If our mind is still struggling with being scattered and lost in thought, it may be harder to actually have the taste of that. So even if we're holding this as the foundation of our practice, we can still be doing—and need to do—all the other practices. But it's very different if we have that in mind. Then we even do those practices without that agitation.

Just as an example of what not to do: one time in Burma, I was doing intensive metta practice. I'm going to share with you two completely nutty things I was doing. I bet none of you have done anything quite as nutty.

Somehow I got it into my head that the faster I said the phrases, the deeper my practice would go. Pretty crazy. I spent—it wasn't too long, but long enough—doing just that. Obviously it was the wrong way to be practicing metta.

Another thing I did, which took a while to see and let go of, was that I kept checking. So I'm doing the phrases, and I got past the speed phrases. I'm a little more relaxed, just saying them and trying to feel. But then I got into the habit of asking, "How am I doing? Is the metta developing? Oh, the metta is stronger. The metta is weaker." It became all about me, not about the metta I was trying to extend. When we're checking our practice instead of just doing it, that can become a big hindrance.

So there's nothing to want. Realizing that, we can do all of the various practices in skillful ways. One last little mantra that has helped me a lot in my practice when I felt like the striving was too strong, where I could feel the pushing—it was just a really simple reminder: "Already aware." Already aware. Or "already here." That awareness is not something I had to get. I just had to come back to being present. Each time I felt myself struggling, I would remind myself, "Oh, already aware," and I could settle back into that ease. Some combination of all this might be helpful.

ability to function, to walk and all of that. But it's my perception around it, and it comes with a lot of aversion and delusions. So how do you change? Because it's nothing but just changing your perception around it—the condition begins to change and fade or become non-existent, because it doesn't exist anyway. But how do I do that without aversion and delusion?"

That's a striking example of something that is happening, perhaps in less intense ways, all the time with different kinds of conditions. But it's a good example because it points to something striking and impactful.

It really has to do—and again, I'm sure you've heard quite a lot about this—with our relationship to the feeling tone of experience. The reactivity of either attachment or aversion lies in our habituated response to pleasant and unpleasant. This goes very deep. It's not by accident that the Buddha gave so much emphasis to becoming mindful of these feeling tones, because it just seems the most normal thing in the world to want what's pleasant and to avoid what's unpleasant. If we went up to anybody on the street and

asked, "Do you want what's pleasant?" they'd say, "Yeah." "Do you want to avoid what's unpleasant?" "Yeah." It just seems like total common sense.

But this is where the Buddha's awakening to how the process unfolds, and what entangles us in the process, was so brilliant and liberating. He saw that it's precisely this habituated conditioning to pleasant and unpleasant that keeps us in reactivity to experience. It keeps us living very defensively against any unpleasantness, and aggressively in terms of trying to get more pleasant things in our lives.

Being here on retreat, in the whole of this practice—and it is a practice over a lifetime—when you're experiencing physical sensations that are unpleasant, there can well be a tendency to feel the sensation and feel the pain or the unpleasantness of it, and then, unless the mindfulness is right there, there may be reactivity to the unpleasant. "I don't like this." We're trying to push it away or get rid of it in some way, or we contract, and sometimes fear arises. All of that is habituated response to unpleasantness. And then the mind very easily starts creating all kinds of stories about the unpleasantness, about the reactivity, about the disease, about somebody having a disease. We create a big story of our lives, which at this point is quite distant from the momentary experience of sensation and unpleasantness. The mind has moved far from that bare experience, that bare attention.

So our practice is coming back to that moment, freeing ourselves from the reactivity and from the story. It takes a lot of practice, and it also takes a lot of interest in watching the particular process of your own mind.

I'll give you an example. This goes back quite a few years now, maybe fifteen or twenty years. I was on a self-retreat, a long one, for a few months. And something happened—I did something that really damaged my body in a significant way. It was quite bad. And it was something I had done voluntarily, just trying to make myself feel better. I did something that actually made it incredibly worse.

For almost a month, my mind was lost in anguish because the physical situation was really bad. It was very painful, and I didn't see any way out. So my mind went through that whole sequence I just mentioned—just lost in the story. The words that kept coming up were so seductive: "How could I have been so stupid?" There was that self-judgment. Here I was going along fine, and then I thought, "Oh, how can I make things better?"—the old greedy mind—and it made things infinitely worse.

"How could I have been so stupid?" If I didn't catch that thought, it was so seductive, so believable, that I would spend the next half hour or hour in anguish, with all the thoughts associated with what I had done and my judgment about it. It took a couple of weeks of being carried away again and again in that cycle.

But at a certain point I said, "Joseph, what is going on here? How am I getting so caught?" And then I saw: I was getting caught because I wasn't picking up that first thought—"How could I have been so stupid?" Because that thought was so believable, so seductive, if I was not mindful of it as a thought, I was on that train.

So I just got really good at it. I set out the radar. I could not give that thought any airtime, because if I did, I was gone. But it was amazing—once I figured out what I needed to do to not hop on the train, the whole thing turned around. The physical consequences stayed for quite a while, but my mind became so much more at ease because I could bring it right back to the momentary sensation, catching the thought, noticing the unpleasantness, catching that first thought and not getting lost in it.

So I think that's part of the discovery process, rooted in developing and deepening the capacity of equanimity. This is really what equanimity means: where pleasant and unpleasant become equal, where the mind is just not reactive. Pleasant—we experience it as pleasant and see that, yes, this is pleasant, and it's changing.

When painful things come, we experience them as unpleasant without reactivity. "Oh, this is unpleasant." That's the equanimous mind. Equanimity is like space—it just holds everything. Space is impartial. So equanimity really means impartiality.

We can develop that, and with certain things it's challenging. Like in the example I gave, it took me quite a while to come to that place of equanimity where I wasn't caught up. But it's definitely workable to come to a place of freedom.

So just one last little mantra: if freedom is dependent on conditions, it's not freedom. If you have the idea that your experience has to be a certain way to be free, you're missing the boat. Because then it's not freedom. Freedom is in the mind that's not wanting, that's not craving, that's non-reactive to the changing flow of phenomena.

This is really the last little mantra, and it's one of my favorites. The Buddha talked about liberation through non-clinging. That's the essence of the practice. That's what you're practicing. It's not practicing *fo r* something—it's practicing the mind that doesn't cling, that doesn't crave. So the mantra is: it doesn't matter to what you don't cling. Which means you don't have to wait for something not to cling to. Why not not cling now? To whatever it is that's arising.

But as we all know, we come to the edges of our comfort zone and we're okay with this, and we can not cling to this much, but then we reach a certain edge and we get all reactive in one way or another. So that's the course of practice. We're at an edge. Okay, can I not cling here? We each reach our edges of the comfort zone and then relax, and so our capacity gets a little bigger. We reach other edges, we relax, capacity gets bigger.

My imagination of the Buddha's mind—and it clearly is my imagination of it—but it's a mind without edges. And a mind without edges is a mind without fear. It's just openness. Whatever's arising and passing, pleasant or unpleasant, the mind is residing in that spaciousness.

Could you provide some tips and techniques for working with the mind state of fear?

Oh, plenty, because I worked with that a lot. Of the various afflictive emotions, my big alternation was between desire and fear, so I worked a lot with it. It's very related to the last question because the great difficulty with being with fear is that it's very unpleasant. And so it triggers the same conditioned response as all other unpleasant things. It's the emotional analog. Fear is analogous to a pain in the knee, which is physical pain—fear is emotional pain.

I was working with this a lot, and there was a point in my practice where the fear was just so strong. It was primal. It was completely irrational. I was afraid to go from sitting to standing. It didn't make any sense. It was just the primal energy. For whatever reason, in my particular conditioning, that's what was coming up.

And I was noting it and noting it and noting it for years. This was a deeply, deeply rooted pattern.

There were a few key moments in the process of working with it. One was when I was teaching with my colleague Sharon Salzberg. We were teaching in Texas, and it was at a time when I was in the midst of all this. We were taking a walk after lunch, and I was going on and on about my fear—there's so much fear, and I'm such a fearful person, and it's going to take thirty years of therapy to unwind it all. And she turned to me, looked at me, and said, "Joseph, it's only a mind state."

It's something I must have said to other people a million times. It's just a mind state. But I was making this whole big story. I was building the superstructure of self on top of a passing emotion. The fear was not always there—it was there sometimes—but because I was so reactive to it, so didn't like it, so didn't want it to be there, I built up this whole story, which of course just solidified it. So that's one thing to pay attention to when fear comes up: to try to really see it. Yes, this is a passing mind state, and whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away.

The second major turning point with the fear came when I was on retreat, doing walking meditation right outside. I was walking and walking and noting. And then something shifted. This was after years of the fear coming up at different times, sometimes very strongly. Something shifted in my mind, and the shift was expressed in the thought: if this fear is here for the rest of my life, it's okay.

In all those years, that was the first moment I really accepted it. All that time when I thought I was being mindful, I was noticing it, I knew it was there—but it was not true mindfulness because I was noting it so it would go away. I didn't realize this because there's a very common mistaken conflation of two different mind states: the mind quality of recognition and mindfulness.

We very often think that if we recognize something, it means we're being mindful of it. So I recognized the fear. I knew what it was. And because I recognized it and was noting it, I thought I was being mindful. But recognition and mindfulness are two very different things. We can be recognizing things through the filter of wanting, through the filter of aversion, through the filter of delusion, where experience is just not being seen clearly. That moment outside was the first moment I was really mindful, which included that aspect

of acceptance. It's okay. If it's here for the rest of my life, it's okay.

"It's okay" became a little mantra that I use a lot in practice, whenever I'm struggling.

This is another principle worth remembering. Whenever you're struggling—let's say in your practice for now, but it could also apply in life, and does—struggle means just one thing: something is happening that you're not accepting. Because if you were accepting it, you wouldn't be struggling.

So struggle goes from being a problem to becoming feedback. It's almost like a mindfulness bell. If you're struggling in your practice and you realize, "Oh, this means something is happening that I'm not accepting," then that can trigger a real inquiry. Look: okay, well, what is it? Maybe it's some pain in the body. Maybe it's low-level discomfort that the mind is reacting to with "I don't really like this." You're trying to be with the breath, but you're struggling with it. Or it could be restlessness—you're feeling very restless. The restlessness is one thing.

The struggling with restlessness is another matter entirely. So the question becomes: can I just open to feeling restless? That's what's arising. Or maybe there's a lot of thoughts going through the mind. Here you're trying to be with the breath or be with sensations in the body, but thoughts keep carrying you away, and then you get into this sense of struggle. Struggle is simply saying something is going on that you're not accepting—in this case, a lot of thoughts. How about just sitting back and noting, "Lots of thinking"? That becomes your note. And you're just allowing for that to happen instead of struggling with it.

So that goes back to the fear we discussed. Can we just be with it as an unpleasant emotion, which involves bodily sensations and thoughts and feeling tone in the mind? It's okay. It's okay. Here for the rest of my life, it's okay. And you know what happens when you have that attitude of "it's okay"? It becomes okay. Even if it's just for a few moments.

It's through this exploration—that's why I say this whole practice is about your own investigation of how the mind creates suffering, how our minds work. We all have our own patterns for it. But that's what's so endlessly interesting about all this. You're getting in there, and you're developing the tools that allow you to get in there. There's enough stability, enough mindfulness and stillness and acceptance. Oh yes, it's this intricate web—each one of us with our own personal conditioning. It's pretty interesting. And it's all going to a place of greater ease.

*Question:** I have a tendency to have very seductive daydreams that I love to just live in. And I know that I should be mindful, but I don't want to.

*Joseph:** I have the perfect remedy. This is something I never really practiced myself, because that wasn't so much the hindrance that my mind went to. But I read about it in the teachings of Mahasi Sayadaw, who's kind of the grandfather of a lot of our teachers. He once described, as part of the practice—and it really surprised me when I read this because it felt a little out of the box in terms of meditation—but he

said you can use the noting to note what's happening in the fantasy. So you're not trying to give up the fantasy. You're having the fantasy, but you're noting: "imagining," "meeting," "talking." I'll leave it there.

But it would be really interesting for you to watch carefully the difference in your experience between those moments when you're really lost in it—just in it and carried away by it—and those moments when you're still aware of the fantasy as it's playing out, but the mind is actually noting. Because then you are being mindful of that experience. I think you would see the huge difference, even within the fantasy, of whether you're lost in it or mindful of it. So that way you don't have to get into a conflict of thinking, "It shouldn't be here" or "How can I get rid of it?" You're actually using that as the vehicle for mindfulness. Good luck.

*Question:** Could you talk a little bit about doubt? Because I feel I have a lot of it, but in some senses it has served me. I think it makes me not buy so much into rituals and big ideas, and test everything for myself, which I find is wholesome and beneficial. But in other senses, I feel it kind of separates me, and maybe I don't test my boundaries or get out of my comfort zone sometimes—not trying things that feel wrong.

*Joseph:** First, you know, one of the interesting problems in the transmission of the Dharma in the West is that the teachings were preserved in the Pali language from early Buddhism. As it's translated into many languages—but now into English—one of the problems is that English words we use for certain Pali terms can have a variety of meanings.

Doubt is one example. Desire is another. Desire can mean greed or clinging—that aspect of the mind. It can also mean aspiration. So there can be a really wholesome aspiration for awakening, for compassion, for love, and we could use the same word "desire." Doubt is the same way.

So one kind of doubt which you described is really the doubt of—you could say it's the opposite of dogmatic belief. You don't just believe anything. You're really checking it out and inquiring for yourself and seeing for yourself whether something is true or not. And the Buddha suggested that. That's actually a very skillful mind state. So that aspect of doubt, I think, is worth cultivating.

The doubt that's a hindrance is the doubt of bewilderment. It's not the doubt of discernment. The example given is you're at a crossroads and you just don't know which way to go—should I go this way, should I go that way—and the mind just goes back and forth and back and forth and doesn't go anyplace. The doubt has stopped all forward movement. So that's the doubt that has to be seen through and seen as a hindrance and not identified with.

Years ago, there was a yogi on a three-month retreat who spent the whole three months going back and forth between whether he should be doing metta or vipassana. Every single interview. He'd come in and say, if he were doing vipassana, "Oh, I really want to do metta." I said, "Great, do it." Next interview, "Oh, I think I should be doing vipassana." It was a classic example of doubt—that quality where the mind just doesn't land and is caught up in bewilderment.

The problem is the great seduction of doubt. The Buddha talked about this as being, of all the hindrances, the most dangerous, and for an interesting reason. With all the other hindrances—desire or aversion or restlessness or sleepiness—the mind can still be in the vicinity of the object. It may be looking through different filters and may not be clearly focused, but at least it's in the ballpark. With doubt, we're not even in the ballpark. The mind has completely removed itself from what's actually happening in the moment and is just caught in this seesaw of bewilderment. That's why it's really worth learning about doubt so we can recognize it when it comes.

The seduction of doubt is that it comes masquerading as wisdom. It's very tricky because there's this wise-sounding voice in the mind: "Oh yeah, maybe I should really open my heart. Metta would be good. No, but this doesn't really lead to deepening insight. Maybe I should do vipassana." And each one sounds reasonable. It's this wise-sounding voice that seduces us. So you have to catch on to the trick of doubt and see how it comes disguised as wisdom.

When you can see through that, see through its disguise and recognize doubt, you see it's just a thought. That's all it is. And if you see it as an empty passing thought in the mind, it's not a problem. The fact that it arises is not a problem. It's getting seduced and caught up in it that's the problem.

Just like in the example I used with the anguish and catching that first seductive thought in its first few words, I would pay attention very carefully and specifically to the particular form that doubt takes in your mind. See it clearly enough so you could write down the sentence, whatever it is. Because once you see clearly, most likely there will not be too many varieties. There'll be maybe a few seductive sentences. But once you see what they are, you just keep the radar out. And as soon as it comes—oh, that's doubt. So it's very workable. And it's important to work with it, because that hindrance can really take one out of the practice.

Okay, gang. I could go on for a long time. One time with my first teacher Munindraji, he was visiting the States and we were out in California in someone's home and people had come to hear his teachings. He started at two in the afternoon and people were asking questions.

He went until 10 at night. I was there thinking, come on, let's just go. As long as people were left, he would continue—people were just fading out until the last person had left, and he was still there.

So I vowed never to do that.

Let's sit for just a couple of minutes and let everything dissolve.

Thank you.

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