Q&A

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:05:45

It's a pleasure to be with you all.

The question was about jhana practice—any observations or comments? Basically, the development or strengthening of concentration is always a good idea. There are very few people—maybe there are some, but very few—who have too much concentration. So I think for most of us, especially living as lay people in the world where there's so much distraction in our normal lives, to develop through periods of intensive practice a baseline of samadhi, and to strengthen that and keep it strong, carries over to some extent into our life outside of retreat.

For myself, over all these years, I've done periods where I felt this would be a good time to just emphasize the concentration aspect. And so I would take periods of time to do that. Sometimes there was a particular retreat, and a couple of times over all these years I would decide, okay, for the next year I'm going to just devote myself—not all on retreat, but really emphasizing that aspect. It's always been useful, and it also feeds and supports the Vipassana practice.

In terms of jhana explicitly, as you may know, different teachers have some different interpretations of what jhana is. Rather than get into that, just understand that there are various interpretations of what that term refers to. But in all of them, it is the deepening of samadhi, of concentration.

Often people will come and ask, "Should I practice this way? Should I practice that way?" And it's interesting because it's all good. It's not that there's a right answer and a wrong answer. Over the course of our lifetime of practice, we need to do it all. We need to develop the insight and the samadhi and the metta and the compassion. All of it, over time, needs to be brought along. We each do that in different ways, and so I would suggest when there's an interest, when you really feel inspired—"I'm feeling the urge, the interest to strengthen the samadhi now"—let me do perhaps some form of jhana practice. At other times you might have the interest to really just practice more open awareness. It depends on where each of you is in your practice, knowing that it's all good, that it's worth doing.

Just one little addendum. When I first went to India, when I first started practicing, I had zero concentration. I would just sit and think for an hour and enjoy it. The hour went quickly and I was entertaining myself, but it was not really very helpful in terms of the meditation. When I went back the second time, I realized that I really needed to emphasize the concentration more. The way I did it was through intensive metta practice. We can develop concentration in a lot of different ways, whether it's on the breath or metta—there are forty traditional objects of concentration. But for me, the metta practice... I think I did at that time six weeks or two months of intensive metta, and it really made all the difference. It

was the first time my mind had actually gotten a bit concentrated. I remember thinking to myself, "Oh, this is why people like to meditate." Because before that it had just been an ongoing struggle. But once the mind settled a bit, it gets a lot more easeful and a lot more is available to us. So I think at different times it's worth doing and finding the practice that really inspires you.

On the question of interdependence, different teachers may explain it differently. I have a very simple way of understanding it for myself—there may be much more elaborate descriptions than what I'm about to say. But for me, interdependence is simply the expression of the fact that all things are conditioned, that things don't exist independently. They arise because certain conditions are there which give rise to them appearing. So just by virtue of that, there is interdependence, because nothing exists in and of itself independent of conditions. For me it's that simple—to see that whatever is arising, whether it's thoughts or sensations or the body or things in the world, everything is arising because of particular conditions which give rise to that.

One time the Buddha was having a conversation—I forget exactly what it was about, one of you probably will remember. Maybe it was about dependent origination, and Ananda was saying something like, "Oh, I understand this and this is so important, and I think I get it." And basically the Buddha said, "I don't think so."

This is very deep and very profound. So you can take my explanation in that context. But it seems to me a very straightforward way of understanding interdependence, rather than something outside the range of what we can really understand.

Just as a footnote to this, and here's where I think it gets quite interesting: not only can we understand interdependence—meaning that everything is dependent upon conditions—but it's really a doorway into understanding selflessness. There is no self which is independent of the arising of changing conditions.

The understanding of this would be very interesting to explore in your practice. Just keep an eye out for when, whether sitting or walking through the day, you have the strongest sense of "I am." Where are those moments of selfing that come up? Very often it's an identification with a thought. We're lost in a train of thought and there's really a sense of "I'm the one thinking, I'm the one in the story of it." Or the selfing could arise when we're having reactions to what's happening, and we become identified with the aversion or the grasping.

Just watch for those moments when that I-sense feels very strong or apparent to you, and then see that whatever is arising in that moment is also a conditioned phenomenon arising because of causes. It's not I, it's not self, it's impersonal. Given these causes, this arises. The conditions change, the experience changes. So we can learn from the times that we are caught in the sense of I. If we're paying attention, right in that moment we can practice freeing ourselves from that identification through understanding the conditioned nature of whatever is arising.

I hope you're having fun meditating, at least some of the time, because it's so interesting just to watch the mind and see everything it's doing—the skillful parts and the crazy parts. One of the things that amuses me about my mind, and I've just found it very interesting, is to see the conditioned interrelationship between thought and emotion. So often we get caught up in being identified with one or the other, with the thought or with the emotion or both.

At one point I was just sitting and watching my mind, and a certain thought came—I can't even remember exactly what it was, but I think it was about some difficult situation that had arisen. The thought came, and immediately following the thought, it conditioned the arising of an emotion. I don't remember exactly what the emotion was—maybe annoyance or irritation—whatever it was about the situation. I thought, "That's interesting. This is just a thought." A thought is so insubstantial, so empty, so nothing. And yet the thought comes and immediately it triggers the emotion. "What just happened?" It was such a striking experience to watch the conditioned nature of what arises, particularly with strong feelings.

So then I just started playing. I started intentionally calling up these thoughts to trigger an emotion, because I just wanted to see it happen again and again. And of course the opposite is true—sometimes emotions are there for whatever reason, and they trigger our whole train of thought. But when we see their conditioned nature, it helps us depersonalize them. It takes out the I. "Because of this, this arose. Because of this, this arose." It was interesting and fun to watch the mind with that level of specificity.

The grasping, I think, comes first. Grasping can take many forms. It can be the clinging at something, but it also can be the process of identification with something. That's a slightly different mental quality than grasping—it's basically wrong view, where we take something to be self. The thing is, even after the view of self has been uprooted, which happens at the first stage of awakening of stream entry, there are still lots of other defilements in which grasping is involved. So the craving or the grasping is really the key, or the identification with.

Just to clarify the way you framed the question—"which comes first, the grasping or the self?"—it's helpful to always keep the understanding that the self is not there in the first place. It's not something that exists. Rather, there is a felt sense of self in those moments when we're identifying with something. So I think it's helpful to come back to the process by which we feel there's a self, but not to be misled into thinking that there actually is such a thing, because then we really get mired in wrong view.

In the course of practice we just go through a lot of different perspectives. We'll have a lot of different experiences and perceptions of this mind and body as it moves through the process.

And in one way it could be an indication or an expression, to some degree, of the understanding of selflessness—some sense of the impersonality of it all. There's just this mind-body doing its thing, and so it can feel like that.

But I would be careful not to create the idea that this is how it should be, because sometimes we get a

particular perspective and it may feel insightful in a certain way, and then we make that the goal of practice—to have our experience be like that. So I would be very careful of that and really trust the whole unfolding process. Sometimes you see it like this, sometimes it's like that. There will be a lot of different ways.

Just to mention—you're all experienced yogis, so I don't think you're falling into this trap so much—but I just want to reiterate something I do in most retreats. It's particularly for people learning the practice, but perhaps a reminder for you as well. In meditation jargon, we use a lot of watching language: watch, notice, observe. This can give rise to the sense of someone looking at whatever's happening, creating a kind of separation or duality.

What I've found helpful, just to counter that tendency, is to sometimes change the language from watching language to feeling language. This is particularly apparent in walking practice or just walking around. There's a big difference between the sense of observing the movement and feeling the movement. Observing it, it's as if we're from the outside, tracking it. Feeling it is from the inside, and it's much more effortless. You take a step and you're just feeling it, rather than taking a step and trying to hold onto it in the observation.

When I say observe, for me that feeling is more like—even if I'm not looking at it with my eyes—the sense of being up here watching, rather than being in the body feeling. You're probably doing this already, but I just wanted to highlight it. Particularly in the walking, that's a very good place to see if you notice the difference. Are you just feeling the movement, or is there a sense of observing it?

Question: What's your opinion on meditation in the supine position? I understand it enhances relaxation, which enhances the ability to focus and concentrate, but it also can enhance the possibility of nodding off.

Are you asking about occasional times of lying down, or because of some medical situation needing to do it most of the time?

Response: No, to select a time when I feel very awake, maybe agitated. I feel there's no danger of getting dull or falling asleep, but it would enhance my ability to settle.

And what's your experience? Does it do that?

Response: Yes. It takes all the agitation, or if there's pain somewhere, it eliminates that and leaves me free.

That sounds fine to me. Really, it's not about the position—it's about the mindfulness. That should be the measure. If you can be meditating in a lying position and staying wakeful and mindful, that seems fine to do. And you might try—maybe you already have—different lying positions, whether on your side or on your back, to see what works best to keep you most clear and wakeful. But sometimes giving the body that kind of rest and relaxation can really be helpful.

This is peripherally related, just a little something I noticed. I don't know how many of you are in the habit

of taking a nap after lunch. So I was a big after-lunch napper on retreat. But I found something interesting that had to do with this relaxation. At a certain point, I would lie down after lunch, and you know that moment when you're resting and you can feel the body let go just before falling asleep? There's that moment where everything relaxes.

So what I noticed, even at that time when I felt I needed to sleep, actually I didn't—I needed the relaxation. And so I got into a habit at that time of as soon as I felt that moment of release, I would get up rather than take the nap.

And it was so interesting because it wasn't out of any guilt. It was just interesting to me to see, okay, what's actually needed here? And if sleep were needed, that would have been fine. But I found that it wasn't, at least for me then.

So these are the kinds of experiments we can make—just pushing at the edges a little bit and really seeing, as we get into different meditative habits, which ones serve us, which don't, and the ways of playing with them.

I think this is really important because it's very easy to get into the habit of a routine. We get really comfortable in that habit. And it can serve us because we establish a lot of good habits, but there are some which may not serve us. So sometimes we need to be poking at the habits of our practice. It might be sitting a little longer or walking a little longer or not having the eighth cup of tea or whatever it is. It's just to see what we do habitually and to play with that rather than simply be carried along by the habit.

With regard to that, different teachers will have different methods and systems. For me, I don't have a particular sequence—I'm just sitting and being with whatever is arising, and different experiences just fall into one or another of the four foundations. But other teachers really have a systematic way of going through them. And it's all good. It really is about what works best for you at a particular time.

Just on the body, there are lots of ways. Do you let it arise? Which one might you focus on? Do you start with the breath?

Many of you have probably heard me speak about this. In these last quite few years, I've introduced the beginning practice in a somewhat different way than I had been before, which had been really going to the breath and using that as the anchor and the primary, and then opening to other things. But in recent years, I've been using this phrase, which is a line from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: "There is a body."

Bhikkhu Anālayo had highlighted that phrase, and then I started experimenting with it. I found it very useful. So beginning with just that, and even using that phrase as a kind of mental note, where I would repeat the phrase not every moment, but intermittently: "There is a body."

This is just the sense or the awareness of the whole body. It's like the framework. And having that be the grounding element, staying open then to whatever arises within that frame. So there is a body, and then

within that one might feel the breath in different places or feel different sensations or hear sounds. But instead of narrowing the mind onto those objects, in this particular way of practice, it's keeping the broader frame—there is a body—and simply letting these objects come and go within the frame.

I've personally found that very helpful, and I got a lot of feedback from yogis that it helped. Sometimes people can get a little too tight narrowing the focus on the breath. Not everybody, but it's not uncommon. And this is just a way of making a wider frame that allows the breath just to be however it is because one is not zeroing in on it.

So that could be one way. So much is experimentation. It's just playing and seeing what helps, what doesn't help.

*Yogi:** You gave the wonderful talk on Friday, and I wasn't aware of the designation of unworldly and worldly pleasures. In illustrating that distinction, you told the story of the Buddha. It wasn't some profound, transcendent state that the middle way was. So I was wondering if you could just elaborate on that.

*Joseph:** Well, I'm not really an expert in the historical development, but my impression is that in the India of his time, there was a lot of emphasis among the sadhus and yogis on the renunciation side and the self-mortification side. That was a very predominant part of the Indian spiritual culture at that time.

And so his big insight at that moment was, "Oh, there are certain pleasures that are not unskillful—the unworldly pleasant feelings that are actually skillful and onward-leading on the path."

And there are many examples of this that we have in our own lives. Certainly, at those times when the mind has settled into some level of concentration, there's an ease to that. It's a good experience where the practice can be very pleasant, but there's not a grasping there. It's a function of the concentration. Of course, one does want to watch to see if we get attached to that or not, but that's another whole issue. The pleasant feeling in concentration itself is a skillful, wholesome state.

But we can feel that same unworldly pleasant feeling in many of our worldly interactions. In those moments when you're being generous, how do you feel? There's a good feeling. Being generous, being kind, following the precepts, restraining from something that we see as unskillful—there's a good feeling that comes from that. And that pleasant feeling, we could say, is an unworldly pleasant feeling. So we have both mundane experiences of it and meditative experiences of it.

And likewise with the unworldly unpleasant, because we go through meditative stages where things are unpleasant—whether it's unpleasant physical sensations, or sometimes certain stages in practice where we're seeing the difficult side of impermanence. Everything is just falling away, there's no security, and it's not a pleasant experience. But it's actually deepening meditation. It's a deepening part of the practice. And at that time it's unpleasantness without aversion. And so it's an unpleasant, unworldly feeling.

It's just interesting to know that. This teaching came about because somebody once asked—I think they asked the Buddha directly, or it might have been one of the great nuns, I can't remember who the dialogue was with—whether pleasant always conditions greed, or unpleasant always conditions aversion. And so this was the point made: no, not always. There are pleasant and unpleasant experiences that don't condition unskillful things. It's helpful to know that and then to recognize it in one's own practice.

Speaking of whether feelings always condition certain responses, someone asked about the statement that wherever there is impermanence, there is suffering. That seems like a pretty absolutist proclamation. At the root level of experiencing, one might see that connection, but otherwise, it just seems puzzling.

I think the problem there is that the Buddha wasn't speaking English. Suffering as the translation for dukkha is limited. Sometimes it means suffering, but that word does not cover the full range. For example, when things change from being unpleasant to pleasant, we don't experience that as suffering—we experience that as relief. So we need to enlarge our understanding of what dukkha means.

If you understand dukkha as meaning unreliable, then we can see clearly its connection to impermanence. Whatever is impermanent is going to be unreliable. I think that's a more inclusive way of understanding that teaching.

This issue of translation comes up a lot in studying the dharma. I think it's a problem generally with translation. Just as another example, which is a common source of confusion: the English word "desire." In English, that word can mean many different things and reflect many different mind states. But because desire is the usual translation of tanhā, or craving, then people wonder, "Well, what about the desire for enlightenment, or the desire to be more compassionate?" But that's a different mind state, even though we're using the same word.

That's why, when there's some confusion, when things don't quite make sense in one translation, it's a good opportunity to do a little exploration of the Pali. What's the Pali word? Speaking to someone who really is an expert in the language about the Pali word and the meaning, and what are the connotations of it—that can often help illuminate the meaning.

Someone mentioned they weren't quite getting the point about striving. That's a good thing to explore. It's an interesting question for me as well, because on the surface of things, I'm not particularly a devotional type. Some people have a very strong feeling for devotion within them. It comes easily, that expression of devotion. My mind tends much more to the investigative side of things than the devotional side.

But that's just devotion on a certain level, because I am completely devoted to the Dharma. There's no question in my being about that.

So when I sit now, where I sit, I have this big, really big book that somebody gave me with a beautiful picture of the Buddha on the cover. It's just propped up against a bookcase. Before I start sitting, I do the refuges. And what I'm doing when I take refuge in the Buddha—I'll just back up a little bit. I adjusted the

formula for the refuges slightly, but I think in a way that would meet his approval. I just add a few things, and it helps me with the very question you're asking.

So the way I take refuge is: I take refuge in the Buddha and the awakened mind. I take refuge in the Dharma and the noble path. I take refuge in the Sangha, in the community of enlightened beings. And may my practice be for the welfare and benefit of all.

What that does for me is give a little more specificity to what I'm actually taking refuge in. I'm highlighting a particular aspect in each one. So when I say I take refuge in the Buddha and the awakened mind, and I'm looking at this picture, it's almost like—of course this is a projection—but I'm imagining the Buddha's awakened mind. I get whatever it is, an intuition or a glimpse or an idea of the Buddha's mind that's completely free of any identification with self. Completely open and fearless.

So then it's easy. That feeling of devotion to the Buddha comes not only or limited to the idea of him as a historical being, but to the nature of his mind that's so inspiring. That's how I cultivate that sense of devotion, even though it's not my strongest temperamental quality. You feel me?

I would just find your own way. For me, that really works—when I look at the Buddha and think of the expansiveness of that mind, especially relative to my own, I can feel a lot of devotion. That would be a good place to be.

In some way, we all have our own projections about the Buddha. But one way I like to think of it and relate it to my own practice is this: I think for all of us, we have a comfort zone in terms of experience that we're okay with. We can be with this much, and it's okay. We feel accepting of this. But then we get to the edge of our comfort zone, and it may have to do with physical discomfort, or it may have to do with certain difficult emotions, or some expectations about our practice. We get to the edge of our comfort zone, and often people get a little agitated there, or kind of struggle, or pull back—because we want to be more comfortable.

But being at the edge of the comfort zone is exactly where we want to be. That is the edge of our practice. And so if we can recognize that, then we can ask: can I relax a little bit into whatever that experience is? If it's physical pain, okay, can I just be with it? Or a difficult emotion—can I just be with it? And through our practice, our comfort zone gets a little bigger. Then we reach that edge, and it gets a little bigger and bigger.

And so my imagination of the Buddha's mind is that there are no edges. There's no edges. And if there are no edges, there's no fear. My imagination of his mind is just that mind of complete openness without any boundary of what's okay and what's not okay. This is just another way we explore our own relationship to the Buddha, and what our idea of the Buddha is, and what that means to us.

Question from the audience about working with delusion, which can be more opaque than greed or aversion.

Yes, I can speak to that, but I'm curious to know what your experience of the delusion is.

The questioner describes their experience.

Okay. There's one very simple, and for me tremendously illuminating, way of understanding delusion. There are many, many moments when you can experience this, and that is really watching—

that process of sitting with the breath or the body, whatever you're aware of, and then the mind gets carried away in a thought. At a certain moment, you wake up from being lost in the thought. Right in that moment, generally what people will do is either jump back to the object of meditation—the breath or the body—or they may precede that with a little judgment about having been lost.

Instead of either of those, I find it extremely interesting to highlight that moment of transition from having been lost to being awake. We're lost in the thought, lost, lost, lost, and then—always thinking—what just happened? Right in that moment. Being lost is delusion. We're not aware of what was going on. In the moment of waking up to the fact that we're thinking, we're already back in awareness. And if you highlight that moment, the contrast between delusion and wakefulness will be so vivid.

The next step then, really, and this could change your whole practice: instead of getting down on ourselves for all the times that we're lost, why not take delight in all those moments of waking up? In every moment that you come out of a thought—oh, the mind is awake again. Delight in that awareness of awareness. Because as many times as you get lost, that many times do you wake up. It's an equal number of times. So why not highlight the delight of waking rather than judge oneself for having been lost?

This brings a lot of delight and interest to the practice because first we're seeing that transition from one to the other, and we get a very clear view of what each is.

Another practice which I've done recently I found super helpful. I first did this in walking—not even in the slow walking meditation, but when I would be walking at a more normal speed, trying to be mindful. I started noticing the very quickly passing thoughts that come through the mind, thoughts that are not problematic, just light little thoughts that pass through—maybe it's a plan or a comment or a memory. I realized that because these thoughts are not particularly problematic, I was really not paying attention to them. They would just come and go.

Now I want to back up from that for a moment. Do you know the experience of when you wake up in the morning after a night's sleep, and you wake up and then maybe sometimes you drop back into sleep and perhaps a dream for a minute or two, and then maybe wake up again and then you're really awake? I had been noticing that, and then when I started watching these quickly passing thoughts, I saw it was exactly the same experience of falling back into the dream. Just a quick thought, but for the duration of that thought—until I started doing this exercise—I was not aware. I was back in the dream of the thought. It might have been ten seconds or twenty seconds. Again, not dramatic, not problematic, but still asleep.

Then I noticed that a lot of these thoughts, even though they were very light, in one way or another were self-referential. Oh, I want to go here, I want to go there, or that would be a nice vacation, or a memory that I had. One way or another. So the phrase came to mind: I'm just dreaming myself into existence with all these quickly passing thoughts. I was unknowingly reinforcing some sense of self.

It became a very interesting practice for me and very illuminating because this is a practice we can carry throughout the day and throughout our lives outside of retreat if we get into the habit of just watching for these light, quick thoughts, seeing if we can maintain awareness in them and of them, and seeing how often we don't.

It's also very humbling, because we may think, "I'm pretty mindful. I've been practicing all these years. Not that I never get lost, but I'm pretty mindful." But when we're watching for these quick thoughts passing, we see how many times in a day we drop into that delusion. It can be quick, which is why we haven't particularly paid attention to it.

So that could be another way to explore this. But for me, the difference between being lost in a thought, however long or short, and being aware of the thinking is just the clearest view of delusion and wakefulness. It's so apparent.

It's a little sobering to realize that most of the world is in delusion most of the time. Which is why we're in the state that we're in. Here we are, devoted to mindfulness and wakefulness and awareness, and we see how often the mind slips into delusion. People without any intention or practice to be awake or aware are just living in that. That's the norm.

For me, understanding this really inspired a lot of energy to practice and be that attentive. And also, it's fun. It really is—just to be seeing our minds and everything they're doing.

The great blessing of our connection to the Dharma—and this is why in the refuge we say, "I take refuge in the Dharma, the Noble Path"—is that in the midst of all this delusion in the world and in the mind, there actually is a path. And through some incredibly good karma, blessings, and whatever mysterious causes, we are all on that path. We understand that path to some extent. This is a fantastic thing.

A question was asked about how, as laypeople who come on retreat only occasionally, we might find optimism or hope regarding practice.

This will be a good conclusion to the evening, because it involves another practice I've just started doing over these last few years, and it's really had a tremendous impact.

A couple of years ago, I was on a self-retreat. There's a line in the suttas that appears frequently, and I'm sure you're all familiar with it: "Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away." Sometimes in the suttas, just hearing this, people get enlightened. Sometimes this line is the expression of somebody's enlightenment experience. It has profound meaning.

But I had read that statement for forty-five years of my practice, and it just seemed like an obvious statement of impermanence. I never really gave it any more thought. Yes, whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away. Everything changes.

Then on this self-retreat, I was just sitting, and for whatever reason, right in the midst of a sitting, this line came to mind. Because my mind was fairly still, it's as if that phrase—"whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away"—instead of being up here somewhere conceptual, the meaning of it dropped into the very process that was unfolding. Have you ever sensed this? The meaning just became very vivid experientially in that moment, because I was sitting in that process of watching things come and go, just the flow of impermanence. On this moment-to-moment level, "whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away" became so vividly clear.

Then my mind went to the conclusion of that. This was all within a minute or so. It came intuitively—it wasn't like I was particularly proliferating or thinking it through. So I was in that process, things just flowing along. Whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away. Therefore, there's nothing to want.

Particularly on this meditative level, this moment-to-moment level—because whatever I want in the practice will also pass away. Understanding that, there's nothing to want. And in that moment, when that thought came, I could feel my mind drop back from the very common tendency we have of leaning into the next moment. We're with this in order for that. We're with the breath in order to deepen our concentration. We're with the pain in order for it to morph into something else. There's always that—not always, but often—this leaning. It's almost energetic. Do you ever sense what I mean? Just leaning into the next moment as if somehow the next moment will resolve everything this moment hasn't.

But then with this understanding—whatever has the nature to arise will also pass away—I realized there's nothing to want, because whatever I'm leaning into will also just pass away. In that moment of nothing to want, I could feel the mind drop back from the leaning. It really dropped back into, just for a few moments, a deep not wanting.

This was both very simple and quite profound for me, because it highlighted what our practice is actually about. Really what we're doing is practicing not wanting. The practice is not, at its essence, about gaining experience. There's nothing to want because what we're practicing is not wanting.

And in that moment, I could really feel: this is a taste of the Third Noble Truth. There's dukkha, the cause of dukkha which is craving, and the end of dukkha which is the end of craving—the end of wanting. Even if it's just for a few moments, I could taste the peace, the profound peace of the mind not wanting. It has a very unique flavor, unlike anything in the process that's arising and passing away.

I'm not suggesting these moments constitute great enlightenment experiences, but they offer a taste—a genuine taste of what's possible.

The Buddha's great enlightenment song, that famous verse supposedly arising in his mind at the moment

of awakening, addresses the house builder: "House builder, you have now been seen. You will build no house again"—the house of self. And the conclusion of that verse declares: "Realized is the unconditioned, achieved is the end of craving."

He states so explicitly that this is what we're practicing: the end of craving, the end of that wanting or leaning into experience.

Previously, I had always placed the Third Noble Truth and the end of craving as some far-off goal—perhaps in some lifetime I'll arrive there. But through this experience, I realized that this is something we can practice now, in this very moment. Even if it's only for a moment.

I've been using this little phrase frequently in my practice now: "There's nothing to want," or simply "not wanting"—something that reminds me what the practice actually is. It's not about getting something.

There is a way to practice this in a very meaningful and profound way because it genuinely gives us a taste of liberation. And the more we cultivate that taste in formal practice, the more we may remember it in worldly situations where desires are running amok. If we can remind ourselves, at least at times, "There's nothing to want."

If you're interested, you might play with this, because I found it extremely helpful given our tendency to lean into the next moment—which is itself a kind of wanting, a kind of craving. It's craving for becoming: become this, become this, become this.

Nothing to want.

It's amazingly simple, and as I've said, for me it felt as though there's something genuinely profound in that recognition, because it reorients how we're practicing entirely.

You can play with it.

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