Questions and Responses

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:02:57

So welcome to everybody here and welcome to the online folks. We're going to have about an hour or so worth of questions, maybe shy a little of that. Joseph has not seen these questions—we've had careful conspiracy among the staff and teachers to conceal this from him. Obviously we got lots and lots of questions and it's not possible to have all of them answered, but there have been certain repetitive themes, so we've drawn some from both the online submissions and from the submissions of you folks here.

So are you ready, Joseph?

It feels like a quiz show.

It is a quiz show.

*First Question:** As you know, someone once asked Dipa Ma, "What is it like in your mind?" And she said something like, "Mindfulness and compassion." After fifty years of practice, what is it like in your mind? What do we have to, quote unquote, look forward to? Do you feel you've experienced something to make you confident that there is such a thing as enlightenment? Sometimes I have doubts about plunging all the way in, the fear that this idea of enlightenment is not real. From your experience or that of your teachers, can you share what would make us confident that there is such a thing as enlightenment, or even stages of enlightenment?

One of the problems with multiple part questions is the third part pushes out the first. So what my mind is... Describe what your mind is like compared to Dipa Ma. Hard to tell the difference.

There are a couple of things that come to mind just in the moment. When I look back both to the early times of my practice and also over all the years of teaching, the way I most like to characterize the path of enlightenment is as lightening up—that we just lighten up. We don't take ourselves quite so seriously.

I've really experienced that over these many years, both in how I approach my practice, having been through so many ups and downs, even up until now. It's not like a unidirectional path upwards—it's up and down and up and down. Sometimes the mind is more concentrated and sometimes less. But whereas that used to be upsetting, or I would be concerned, now it's just held very lightly.

Also in the teaching—I don't know whether you experience it or not, especially those of you who have been here in the early years—but I used to be more serious in the teaching. Maybe it's age and maybe it's actually some progress along the path, but there's a lot more space now. Space to play and space to be

relaxed and space to connect. So that's a major shift that I've seen, and I think it's probably true of everybody as they walk along the path. We just become less self-obsessed.

The correlation of not being so self-obsessed is taking interest in what's going on in our minds and bodies. Instead of having it all revolve around an "I" or a "me" and "how am I doing," it's just an interest in what's going on in my mind. One of the things that has helped me so much over all these years is when my mind is in some kind of disturbance or suffering about one thing or another, the suffering, the experience of dukkha, really peaks my interest. It's like, if my mind is suffering, I'm really interested to understand why.

This is an expression of a teaching that, for some people, is hard to hear. For me, it's powerful. I was sitting with Sayadaw U Pandita on retreat—he's a very demanding teacher—and in one of the Dharma talks, he said something which just made me sit up straight. He said, "We are one hundred percent responsible for our suffering. One hundred percent."

That's not to say that we're responsible for everything that happens to us, and lots of terrible things can happen. So it's not about that. But how our mind relates to what's happening—that's completely up to us. We can either drown in it, we can be putting the blame on other people.

We can do all kinds of things in relationship to the suffering that's in our minds. But that understanding—that we are 100% responsible for how our minds are holding whatever the circumstances of our lives are—is also to acknowledge that sometimes the circumstances are really difficult and challenging, and sometimes the circumstances need addressing. So it's not about any of that. It's about how we are holding it in ourselves. And we can either hold it in a place of freedom, of understanding, of interest, of wanting to understand what our minds are doing—or not.

For me, that teaching is so powerful because it gives us agency. If we think that someone else is responsible for our suffering, we've turned over all the power. Then it's just up to them whether we continue suffering or not. But when we take responsibility for that, it is empowering to understand. Because we can do something about it.

This is all part of how my mind tries to relate to things.

Is there another part? Yes.

This is related: What was the most beneficial correction a teacher ever gave you about your practice or your understanding?

There have been so many. But as I'm thinking back, two come to mind.

The first one, on the surface, is not going to seem so profound, but it actually was really profound. I was practicing with Sayadaw U Pandita in Nepal, and the conditions were terrible. Everything. The food wasn't good, there were five of us kind of on a cement floor—each with our little pads—and it was noisy, and our room was right next to the latrine. So it was just all the conditions. Talk about having the thought, *What*

am I doing here?

My mind was just complaining a lot to myself. So I go into Sayadaw and I tell him what's going on, and he said, "Be more mindful."

And I thought, *Thanks a lot.* Here I'm listing this whole litany of things that are wrong with this place, and all he's telling me is to be more mindful.

However, I left the interview. I went out and did some walking. And I thought, *Well, this is a great teacher. He said be more mindful. Why don't I try it?* And so in the walking, I actually began to feel the movement and the touch much more closely.

This ties into a frame for practice that I think is useful for people to hold: that we want to practice in a relaxed way, but not a casual way. And very often—very often—we're practicing casually. It's a mind state that I call *more or less mindful.* We're kind of there. We're not totally lost. We're there, kind of. But not closely there, not really feeling whatever's going on closely and intimately, fully.

It was amazing. Within a few steps of dropping into that level of attention, all of that mental proliferation completely fell away. And it was such an interesting, simple reminder both of the power of mindfulness—a real deep connection to what's happening in the moment—and how it can take us out of all of the mental restlessness and proliferation. And it's not hard to do. It's hard to remember to do.

So that really was very useful. And to this day, when I feel my mind getting a little caught up, I come back to that instruction.

This corrective would be particularly valuable now. I don't know—did you notice? I'm sure you did notice the energy in the room. Understandably. And it just felt collectively we were getting disembodied, you know? We can practice with that.

This is the correct approach. We can actually be more mindful and deal with whatever we have to deal with. But are we in our bodies, connected? Or is the energy carrying us up and out? So it's a very powerful teaching, even though it's incredibly simple—just to be more mindful, but closely, and not with force. It's like practicing with a feeling of intimacy with what's going on.

Everything can become an hour-long dharma talk, so let me just share this briefly. One time I was walking with my teacher, Munindraji, in Bodh Gaya, where I had been practicing in India. We were walking around the village, and he said something which at the time I felt was really hokey. I didn't have any appreciation for it at all. He said, "Joseph, you know, I'm never lonely. I'm friends with the clouds. I'm friends with the grass. I'm friends with the trees." And I was young, in my early twenties. It didn't really resonate.

However, as I've practiced over all these years, I've found it is exactly true. When we're mindful in the way I was just describing, there is that intimacy of connection with the breath, with the step, with the

sound, with the feeling of the air on the skin. In that sense, loneliness doesn't make sense because there's always some intimate experience happening. And it really is fulfilling. It brings a sense of completion. I've truly felt that.

The other corrective came when I had been in Burma for quite a while. My practice really felt like it was going to deeper and deeper places. I was seeing things in such minute detail—it was amazing to me how I was seeing things. I went in to see Sayadaw and described my experience, thinking he was going to pat me on the back. All he said was, "You're too attached to subtlety."

It was really powerful because I hadn't even realized there was an attachment. I was thinking, "Oh, this is great. I'm seeing so much." But the practice of liberation is about not clinging to anything. We can get so caught up in an idea of what the practice is, or what we want to be happening, and then when it does happen, we get really enthusiastic. We forget that it's about not holding on to anything—letting all that happen as it does, but without getting attached to even these very deep meditative states or blissful states, because it's all just part of the passing show.

That was a good reminder for me at that time. It was really helpful. I could just settle back and not be so caught up. And then the practice continues to unfold. So those are the two correctives that come to mind.

I want to go back to that enlightenment question. It's definitely possible—at least the different stages of awakening, and particularly the first stage or the second stage. Many people have experienced that. Many lay people who come to practice, just like we have. It takes a steadiness of practice and a commitment, and often it takes a period of lengthy practice, but it's definitely possible. It's not impossible. It's not some myth, and it's not out of the range of possibility for any of us.

The higher stages of awakening really require very particular strengths of mind. The concentration has to be very strong, along with the other factors of enlightenment. But the first couple of stages don't have that level of requirement to experience. I would really encourage you to hold that as a possibility.

The Buddha said that from that first stage of awakening—in this tradition it's called stream entry, like we're entering the stream of enlightenment—from that point on, one is destined. There's no going back from that place.

So it's a powerful turning point in one's path. And I think it's beautiful to have that aspiration and then let things unfold as they do. It may take a short time. It may take a long time. As one of my teachers said, in the spiritual path, time is not a factor. So we can just let go of that, but really have the pole star of awakening setting our direction and inspiring us. This is really possible.

Question: This is related to practice and your interactions with your teachers. What was the most supportive or useful question you ever asked one of your teachers?

You know, I can't remember yesterday. I'll let that settle, but nothing is particularly coming to mind.

Question: What's your best advice for staying interested when you're concentrated? I often get concentrated and don't know what to do with myself.

I think this points to something that is often overlooked—not overlooked completely, but not emphasized as much. We're very good at highlighting the hindrances and the negative mind states, but being mindful of the wholesome mind states, being mindful of the factors of enlightenment—this deserves equal attention. In the same way we are mindful, hopefully, of aversion or greed or sleepiness, we can have that same quality of interested mindfulness when the mind is very still, when it's calm, when there's equanimity.

These states should be recognized and really experienced mindfully so we know, "Oh, this is what calm is like. Concentration is like this. Equanimity is like this." Occasionally, even though from the perspective of non-distractedness it may not be necessary, when the mind is concentrated, periodically just dropping in a note—"concentration," "stillness," whatever word best describes your experience—can be a support for staying interested in the state.

Now, I'm describing this in terms of the concentration that comes in the course of Vipassana practice. In terms of samadhi practices, concentration practices that we may be doing regularly leading to jhana and absorption in very deep states—reflection is not helpful for that. But in Vipassana, keeping that interest and the non-identification with it, that's another aspect or benefit of the noting at that time. Because it could be easy to become identified and attached to the concentration. Just by dropping in a note, we're acknowledging the state while being mindful of it. I think that's a really helpful thing to do.

Question: If there is no self, and this no-self has no direct control over the elements of reality, what then is liberated and how? What are those countless beings we want to liberate, including ourselves, if we are just a clockwork succession of interactions between elements over which we have no direct control?

A couple of things here. The Buddha expressed so simply what the path is about and what's really the underpinning of our whole practice. He said that he teaches just one thing: he teaches suffering and the end of suffering. That's what all of this is about. In the context of the Buddha's teachings, it's to see the suffering that arises in the mind, to understand its causes, and to see that we can do something about those causes if we understand them.

To say that we don't have control over the elements, or as I described anatta, one meaning of it is being ungovernable—it's ungovernable in the sense that situations are not completely subject to our will. It's not that because we want something to happen it happens necessarily. Things happen when we are in harmony with and understand the causes and conditions necessary for something to occur.

This is the beauty of the Buddhist teachings. I would like to ask the Buddha, "Well, what's your mind like?" Because from the teachings, it's just amazing how he was able to see so precisely and so clearly what factors—what impersonal factors of mind that don't belong to anybody—are causes of suffering.

He could see what factors of mind just lead to more suffering—like greed, like anger, like delusion. And he could see what factors, what impersonal factors of mind, lead to awakening.

One of the factors of mind is wisdom. It's also an impersonal factor in the mind. Wisdom has two sides to it: one is the investigative side, and one is realizing the truth of what we're investigating. But that wisdom factor is also impersonal. We don't have to claim it as "I"—we just have to understand, "Oh yes, this factor, when it's developed, will lead to certain things. This factor, if it's strong, will lead to other things." So it's all working, and we can not control, but perhaps a good word is *guide*. We can guide the unfolding. But again, it's not because we're willing it to be that way. The guidance can come from our understanding the conditions necessary for the outcome that we desire.

I'm thinking of an example. I don't know if it's apt for this question, but I'll put it out since I've been using it for the last fifty years.

You go outside at night. You look up at the sky—clear sky. You know the constellation, the Big Dipper? Easy to see. Okay, this is kind of a final exam for the retreat now: Is there really a Big Dipper up in the sky?

No. The Big Dipper is totally a concept. We see a certain pattern and we give a name to the pattern. The name is "the Big Dipper." But it's just a pattern of stars. And the pattern is useful because, as I learned, you can use the Big Dipper to find the North Star. So if you're in the middle of the ocean and you need to navigate, look for the Big Dipper. However, there's no Big Dipper.

But try going out at night and looking up and *not* seeing the Big Dipper. It's really hard, because we are so conditioned to see in a certain way, to see the pattern.

Now here's the punchline: When we realize that there's really no Big Dipper, that it's just a concept, does anything at all change in the sky? No. The sky is just as it always was. It's just we're seeing it in a different way. We're no longer compartmentalizing or separating out this group of stars from all the others based on a concept. We're seeing in a much more complete and total way what's there. And what's there can be understood in terms of the laws of physics and astronomy—things are not happening randomly, things are happening lawfully. We don't need the Big Dipper for us to understand that.

Self is just like the Big Dipper. It's not there in the first place. However, we create the concept because there is a pattern of mind-body elements, just like the pattern of stars. There is a pattern. So when we look in the mirror, there's Joseph. But not really. It's really just seeing.

We don't need the sense of self to experience how things have always been. When we realize selflessness, it's not getting rid of anything. It's not like we're getting rid of a self that was there—it's not there in the first place. We're just using the word "self" as a designation for the pattern. That's how the word is used when it's used with wisdom. And we can use that language—I and you and me and other. In certain situations, that's the level we're operating on, and that's totally fine. It would be very awkward to start saying, "Can these five aggregates call your five aggregates for a date?" Very awkward. So we can use

conventional language. That's not the issue.

But how do we understand the fundamental reality of what this is? And that's what this whole practice is about. It's dropping out of our confusion or delusion of thinking that the concept is the reality.

Is this clear? The self is a useful concept, and it is just a designation for the pattern of mind-body elements that are unfolding lawfully. It's not chaotic and it's not arbitrary. It's following certain laws, which is why there is a pattern. We can see that. But we don't want to confuse that then with the belief, "Well, there's some unchanging me who's understanding it all."

I talked about this in some of the groups just as a visual to express this. Generally in our lives, we're going through life with all experience coming like this—all coming back to the "me." I'm the one knowing, I'm the one feeling, I'm the one seeing. So it's all right back to me.

With practice and with a gradually growing understanding and experience of selflessness, we go from this to this. Everything is still there. All the experiences of our lives are still just as they always were. But instead of our minds doing that with everything—basically identifying in one way or another with something, even if it's just the knowing of everything—instead of that, we simply are with things as they are. Without that additional self-referential tendency.

And that's what we learn. That's what we're learning in the practice: to be letting go of that self-referential quality. And it's not easy because it's so deeply conditioned, which is why we're doing what we do. It really takes practice to begin to shift the way we're seeing things.

And again, it doesn't mean that we don't also at times operate on the conventional level, because we do, and even most of the time. But do we do it understanding that, yes, this is just conventional reality, but it does not reflect the truth of things?

The value of beginning to see things in alignment with how things actually are is expressed by one Sri Lankan monk: "No self, no problem." The self—this concept of self and I—we have loaded so much on it, and so much of our suffering comes from this deep belief that there's a "me" engaged in all kinds of things that cause problems. So it's really freeing. It's very liberating.

A question: "Practicing in this manner is a profound privilege and seems fundamentally incompatible with modern life. Where am I wrong? In what ways is deep mindfulness practice compatible with modernity as experienced by many, particularly in the Western world?"

This is a very simple question. The Buddha gave one discourse which he called the All. And in this discourse, he described the totality of our experience in six phrases. That's pretty good.

So what is the all of our experience? The eye and visible objects, the ear and sound, the nose and smell, the tongue and taste, the body and physical sensations, the mind and mind objects—thoughts, images, emotions. Is there anybody who experiences something other than one of those six things? The Buddha

challenged us, saying if you experience something other than that, please tell me.

Nothing. It's amazing. We think our lives are so complicated and so confused in the modern world, in the ancient world. At any point in time, there are only these six things happening. It's a sight, it's a sound, it's a smell, it's a taste, it's a sensation, it's something going on in our minds.

I like to think of our lives and the unfolding of our lives as a six-piece chamber orchestra. It's just playing the music—the music of sights and sounds and smells and sensations and thoughts. So can we appreciate the music? It's the same. It doesn't matter what the culture is. It's universal. Universal across cultures, across time. These are the elements, the basic elements of our experience.

And practice is paying attention to that. It's just what you've been doing.

It's being mindful of seeing, mindful of hearing, mindful of sensation, mindfulness of a thought or an emotion. So the practice is really simple. And much of the time we're not experiencing taste, and maybe not even so many smells. So it's really only four things that are going on.

So what's the problem? It's just that we get caught up in the concepts, which is a mental phenomenon. We get caught up in the concepts about what's going on, and we create these huge life stories and dramas, and we lose touch with just these basic elements.

Now again, I'm not suggesting that the stories of our lives are not important. This is the conventional level of reality. Our relationships and our work and the world and the state of the world—all of that is really important. And we have to respond. But what's the place we're responding from? Are we responding from a place of deeper wisdom, or are we just totally caught up in the story?

It's understanding the simplicity of this which is why I was really encouraging right from the beginning, and with that handout for daily activities—we can have really deep practice in the midst of our daily lives, doing whatever we're doing, if we drop into the level of those six things. And then when we need to engage the mind in concepts, we do. Using the conceptual level when it's appropriate is appropriate.

As I was saying in one of the groups, if you try to read a book mindfully—mindfully in the sense that we're doing here—you can just start seeing black on white. The words are not going to have any meaning. So there are many times in our lives where we need to engage on the conceptual level, and that's totally fine.

Munindra, my first teacher, said that in those situations, which is a lot of our lives, the kind of mindfulness we need is not this really pinpoint moment-to-moment attention. It's more what he called a kind of general mindfulness, a background of mindfulness. We're doing what we're doing, we're engaged, fully engaged, but there's enough awareness that it will pick up if the mind becomes unwholesome as we're in the midst of whatever the engagement is.

So that's enough, and that's the way to practice in the world. When we don't need the conceptual mind, we should be really watchful for all the stories that are going on, really see them as thoughts. When we're

engaged in a situation that does need the conceptual mind, then we enter into it and use that faculty of mind, which is a lot—this is a big part of our lives. But can we keep that general mindfulness so we're not just totally subsumed by whatever the concepts are?

So I think it doesn't have to do with this modern time or ancient time. It's the same practice, the same understanding. And we can do it.

When noting, my labeling is too slow for how quickly my experience and awareness changes. How should I approach this?

That's actually a good sign in practice. As I've said a few times, one of the developments of practice is an increasing refinement of the perception of change. We're seeing change at first maybe in big blocks, and then the blocks get a little smaller. At times when the concentration is steady and the mindfulness is strong, we're seeing impermanence just very rapidly—arising and passing, arising and passing very, very quickly.

So obviously at that time the noting is going to be much too slow. You can do one of two things. Either drop the noting, because in that situation it is a sign that the mindfulness is already pretty strong and you might not need the noting at that time. Or you could just drop in notes periodically—maybe every tenth thing or every twentieth thing. You're going along, just with the flow, and then drop in a note. Then a little later, drop in a note. Either way would be fine. But it's actually a good sign when we're really seeing things change with that rapidity.

In practicing, or in any intimate relationship, we attune to others' emotional states as part of caring for and communicating with them. How do we attune without getting too entangled with their emotions, mindfully and with mettā?

This actually came up—I think it was today's group we were speaking about it. One of the most overlooked parts of our practice, and it's really the fault of the teachers because we generally don't emphasize it, although whenever I do speak about it, I wonder why we don't, because it's really important.

And that is being mindful of seeing.

You know, for people with eyes that are in good working order, seeing is probably the predominant sense experience. We're basically walking through a world of what is being seen, and then all the reactions to it and responses to it. Seeing is a tremendously important part of our lived experience, and yet it's very rare that we actually become mindful that we're seeing. When seeing is arising, we're most likely lost in what is being seen. We're not mindful that we're seeing.

So this is one of the things I would recommend, both for those staying for a couple more days and those leaving. It's always with us, all around, and it doesn't take any effort at all. We don't have to look for an object to see—it's just always there. Just practice, even for short periods of time, stopping and noting:

seeing, seeing, seeing. Because just that changes the relationship to what is being seen.

This relates to a particular story. Years ago, in the very early years of teaching, there was one meditator who came often, who for whatever reason had the most abrasive personality—aggressive and abrasive, difficult. And I was a new teacher. They'd come in for an interview, and I would try to make some space. It was challenging because the energy was coming at me. So this went on for quite a while.

And then in one interview, something shifted in my mind. I just really looked at them. I really looked. I was seeing. And when I looked at their face, the suffering was so obvious. Because what causes that kind of difficult behavior or personality? There's some kind of suffering going on, and that's being expressed in that way. But normally we're so reactive to the behavior and to the personality—as I had been. I would just be reactive and try to protect myself and all that. But when I could just see and see the suffering, instantaneously feelings of compassion arose, and a whole wonderful relationship ensued. I really enjoyed the meetings. We talked. And it all came from seeing.

When I was so caught up in my own reactivity, I was not seeing. I was just reacting. That's with a particular kind of visual expression, but the visual cues for how people are feeling—they're pretty obvious if we look. We can see when people are happy or joyful or angry or afraid or whatever it is. We just have to see. This has been a powerful thing for me, so I would recommend practicing that. I think it is a way to connect deeply with what another person is feeling without being subsumed by it, because the mindfulness of seeing gives us that place of balance within ourselves. We're seeing and open to it, but not lost in it.

Is this clear? That was really a powerful moment for me, to see what a rich possibility exists for compassion to arise, or love to arise, or whatever our emotional response might be.

Another question: How does open awareness help concentration? It seems like jumping from one thing to the next would dilute it.

So when I was a kid, I lived up in the country, a really small town. But I had relatives who lived in Jersey, you know, the suburbs. They lived a few blocks away from a busy highway, and I don't know why that should be fascinating, but coming from a small town, I just used to like to go and watch all the traffic. This was before iPhones—in those days, that's what we did for entertainment. But I learned a really big lesson in doing that.

You're by the side of a road and all this traffic is going by. There are two ways you might approach that if you want to really see every vehicle that's passing. One way is to track each car as it comes—following it with your eyes as it moves past. The other way is to keep the eyes totally steady and let everything pass through your field of vision, letting the vehicles cross your gaze. I kept my eyes completely still, and everything was just passing by, and I saw every single one.

So, I think there's an analogy here. The continuity of mindfulness of changing objects means that in each

moment the mind is steady. The objects are changing, but the steadiness can be there. It's not that we have to be jumping from one to the other. It's not a jumping thing. It's steady, just being aware of whatever's presenting itself moment after moment.

And this develops what is called momentary concentration, because it's not concentration on a fixed object—it's concentration on a changing object. But concentration means steadiness. It means the mind is not flickering, not looking here, looking there. It's steady. So it's simply a question of whether it's steady on one object or steady on a flow of objects.

When you're practicing in that open awareness, we can rest in the steadiness of just being there mindfully in a receptive mode. We're not going out to the object. We're just receptive and let all the objects pass by. So it can be very steady and very relaxing.

Question from audience member: Being of the same generation as you, death is an ever-present reality, and not in a bad way. Do you personally believe in karma and reincarnation?

I do, but I would like to distinguish the belief in it, or the tendency to believe in it, from claiming "I know." Some people, through meditative attainment, can see—there are techniques for how to review past lives and other realms of existence. Dipa Ma was extraordinary in this way; she had all kinds of spiritual attainments. But even people with lesser attainment than that can develop this ability. I do not have them myself.

I did not start with this belief. I grew up, like most of you, in this culture. I studied Western philosophy at college. I had no idea about karma and rebirth or anything like that. But over the years, there were a few significant points that made me become more open and inclined to believe it, which I do.

One was simply that it is very much part of the Buddhist teachings. When you read the discourses, it's on almost every page. So at a certain point, when I could confirm so much of what the Buddha said in my own experience, it made me think, well, if he was right about all this, maybe he's right about this too. That was the beginning of an opening.

Then I met Dipa Ma, who had the ability to really see for herself all of this. Again, that's not proof, but I had no reason—there was not even any feeling in myself—to doubt what she was saying, because she said she experienced this. So I believed her. And it is right out of the texts, the formula for how to accomplish this, if people really want to commit to that. So that was another piece.

And so many, almost all of the great teachers in the Buddhist tradition—this is just an integral part of their understanding. With many of them, it does come from their personal experience. So that was another piece.

The third piece was that in the course of my practice, I really, at a certain point, began to experience in a certain way the immaterial nature of awareness, of consciousness. It's not a material phenomenon, and so

it's not really located anyplace, because location has to do with physical phenomena, material phenomena. When I got a much more expansive understanding of the nature of awareness, the nature of consciousness, and saw that it's not necessarily tied to physical phenomena—that it's a distinct phenomenon—that again opened my mind. Well, yes, lots of things can be possible here.

So it was all these things, just little pieces that led me, as I say, to this inclination to believe. And if it's not true, so what? That's how I hold it.

Can I ask a question? So if this does not seem likely or possible to an individual who's a practitioner, is the removal of provisional confidence in this a deal-breaker in terms of their practice and its development?

Good question, and not at all.

Munindraji, my first teacher, used to love talking about the deva worlds, the heavenly realms. In the Buddhist cosmology, there are all these realms of existence, and lots of things are going on in this mysterious universe that we are simply not attuned to. Perhaps you could think of it as wavelength frequencies—where we can see or experience certain wavelengths while remaining completely oblivious to others. So it's not hard for me to imagine that there are things going on at different frequencies that are just outside of our usual sensory capability. That's not hard for me to picture.

Munindraji used to love speaking about these things. He trained Dipa Ma in how to do all this—seeing all these realms. So he would talk about it a lot, talk about the deva world, and I loved it. For whatever reason, I just really loved hearing about it.

But he would always say, "You don't have to believe this in order to practice, in order to become awakened. This is not a necessary component of enlightenment at all." So he would say, "You don't have to believe it. It's true, but you don't have to believe it." That was always how he ended.

Great. Well, thank you, Joseph. That brings us to the end of our time.

So can we just sit for a minute and let that settle?

May offering and hearing the Dharma in this way be a cause and condition for our own awakening and that of all beings everywhere.

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