Questions and Responses

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Joseph Goldstein · 1:08:14

We are a month into the three-month course, and Joseph has agreed to come for an evening of questions which the participants have submitted over the last 24 hours. There were way more questions than we could ask in the space of an hour, so a couple of the teachers went through them and pulled out about twelve or so.

*Joseph Goldstein:** I taught the three-month course for so many years—about forty of them. Since I stopped teaching the three-month course, it's always a delight to come back and at least drop into it for these sessions. So it's really a pleasure to be here. And I hope you ask the easy questions.

What do you like about walking meditation?

This could be the whole hour. First, just to say that very often yogis have a sometimes unacknowledged hierarchy in practice. The sitting is the real deal. Walking—yeah, it helps. And then mindfulness of everything else is a distant third. Sometimes I think it's helpful to just reverse the order in your mind. Make everything else the primary importance, then the walking, then the sitting—just to torch things up a little bit.

The walking, for me, in some way has been the most insightful part of my practice, with the most ramifications and implications for bringing practice into the world. So I'll just highlight a few points so we have a chance to get to some other questions, but the walking is a great practice.

From having done hundreds, thousands of hours of walking meditation over my meditative career, what happens at a certain point is that awareness of the body moving simply becomes the default for moving around. Having done it so often in the more formal way of walking meditation, now and for many years, I've just noticed every time I take a step—no matter whether in my house or going for a walk or even in the middle of a busy city—I take a step, and the mind is just there feeling the step, out of habit, out of the habit of having paid attention to movement and walking for so many years.

I find it's such a powerful way of integrating the practice into our daily lives, which of course is a big challenge for people. On retreat, there are many ups and downs, but there's a lot of support for your practice. We go back into the busyness of our lives, and for most people there's not that same level of support. But there can be this inner support, just from having done something as simple as the walking meditation. It really carries over a lot. That's just one tremendous benefit.

Second, I've discovered—and this happened over years, not just in one moment—each time I'm on retreat, it's "Oh, I just learned something else about the walking." This is a whole dharma talk.

One of the big level shifts in practice, in the course of meditation, is when we go from the conceptual level of experience to the direct experience of what's happening. For example, in walking, even when we're paying attention to the feeling of the movement and the touch, one of the things I've noticed is that very often there can be a very subtle overlay of the concept "foot" and "leg" as I'm taking the step. It's not that the concept is predominant—the predominant thing is the sensations of the movement.

But when I'm really quiet, I can feel that somewhere in the background, that conceptual overlay is there.

So one way I've found of cutting through that subtle level of conceptualization—because we don't actually feel our foot. We don't feel our legs. There's no sensation called "foot," no sensation called "leg." That's an idea, that's an image, which is the overlay on top of the actual sensations we're feeling.

So I had to cut through that conceptual overlay, and this is where it got really interesting to me—and probably will key into some questions that are coming—because it's a way of really getting an experiential taste of non-self, which is one of the more difficult realizations. You know, impermanence is pretty clear to understand. Suffering is certainly easy to understand. But non-self is almost counterintuitive because we all have this strong felt sense of a self.

So, walking. At one point, as I was walking, I started reframing the mental note. Whether or not you are using notes regularly or intermittently or not at all, what I found was this: instead of the more usual note of "lifting" and "moving" and "placing," I started noting the elements. In the walking, the movement became air element. When I touched the ground, it was earth element. So that just became the note: air, earth, air, earth.

Now, what happened prior to that? As long as there was that conceptual overlay of foot or leg, it's an almost inevitable step towards "my foot" and "my leg." Just from that level of concept, we've already bought into the notion of self. When I started doing the elements—air, earth, air, earth—and then I added a little tagline, "just this, just this," I noticed there was no inclination of the mind to say "my air" or "my earth." It really helped the mind drop into that selfless experience of the sensations of the movement. And it was a very vivid experience of selflessness. Oh, just this, just this, just this. It's just air, earth, air element, earth element.

So in the walking, it's actually possible to touch into a very deep aspect of the practice. It's not just some mechanical exercise. And it's more than just developing steadiness and concentration, which of course is important and helpful, but it's possible to go to the real depth of understanding in it.

One last thing, and then we'll get to maybe two questions. I hope I don't get into trouble with the teachers here, but I found that after one is established in the really classical slow form of lifting and moving and really training the mind to be there with it, it's really interesting to experiment and play and explore with

different speeds. Sometimes walking really slowly, sometimes faster. Are you aware of the whole body moving? Are you aware just of the sensations in the feet or leg? The encouragement is not to be afraid to just explore. I see it as kind of a laboratory. You make experiments and see what happens.

There's one line in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the foundations of mindfulness, that says: be mindful—and then the equivalent of quotation marks in Pali—be mindful, quote, "there is a body," just to the extent for clear knowing and continuous mindfulness. Bhikkhu Anālayo, in his book on Satipaṭṭhāna, highlighted that phrase, which was very interesting to me. He said "there is a body," and because it was in quotes, it's almost like a mental note—to use it in that way.

So I started using it in walking. As I was doing walking meditation, I would frame it: "Oh, there is a body." And again, something really interesting happened. I was walking, not super slowly, not speeding, but kind of a slow, gentle walk. "There is a body." This led the mind to be aware of the sensations of the whole body moving. It wasn't a narrow focus; it was quite a wide frame. "Oh, there is a body." And what was interesting in doing that, in that experience, was that body disappeared.

"Oh, there is a body," and then walking. And all that was left were sensations in space. That was the actual experience, because "body" itself is a concept. So that phrase—"there is a body"—was just to set the big frame. And then, to be walking with that framework, we have the experience of there *not* being a body. There are only changing sensations in space. So again, it's a way of touching into the impersonal, selfless nature of the whole process.

Do you get a sense that walking can be valuable? There is so much here. This is just touching the surface. But explore, play with it. I think that's where the interest lies, rather than just doing it as some formal exercise.

Question: When the body dissolves into vibration and space, there still seems to be an observer present. Can you talk about that subtle sense of self that remains, and how to work with it?

One technique I found really helpful—and this relates to something I haven't mentioned yet. So much of how we experience things is conditioned by language. How we language things very much conditions how we experience them.

Here's one example, one that transformed my practice. Usually we speak in the active voice: subject, verb, object. "I'm knowing the sound." "I'm knowing the movement." There's a subject, a verb, and an object. At one point in my practice—I don't even remember how it arose—I started languaging experience to myself in the passive voice. So instead of "I'm knowing sensations," it became "sensations being known."

What happens to the subject in the passive voice? Self as subject disappears. "Sensations being known"—there's no "I" involved in that languaging of experience. It's just things being known.

This is a bit of a confession: I asked ChatGPT what the subject is in a passive voice construction, because

the "I" isn't there. It said the object becomes the subject. "Sounds being known"—the sounds become the subject. That's interesting, almost like a collapse of subject-object separation. It's just things being known.

I use this in walking a lot: "sensations being known." And that frame immediately became completely effortless, because you take the "I"—the someone making an effort—out of the picture. It's just an experiment. If you move your arm with this frame, just be with "sensations being known." Do you have to do anything? They're just being known—spontaneously, effortlessly, precisely, exactly. Not a moment before, not a moment after. They're just being known.

If you carry that frame throughout the day—things just being known—the practice becomes very easeful. That whole struggle-striving mode we often fall into dissolves. "Oh, it's just sensations being known." In that way of experiencing, there is no subject separate, no "I" separate from what's happening. And it becomes very obvious.

If you're at all interested in this, I'd really suggest you play with it a little. Experiment. See if you can settle into that way of experiencing things. There's nothing you have to do except language it that way.

Things being known, sensations being known, sounds being known. Just see how effortlessly it's all happening. If you do this and settle into an easeful rhythm of it, where it becomes obvious—oh yes, this is simple. And it is simple, it's not complicated at all. You don't need to develop samādhi to do it. It's just right there.

If you settle into the flow of it, the rhythm of it, you could then ask a really probing question: Okay, sensations being known—known by what?

This is a way of turning the attention, or highlighting the very nature of awareness, of consciousness. Instead of the sensations being the predominant aspect and the knowing remaining background, it's like reversing it. Known by what? So the knowing becomes foreground, and the sensations are still there but become background. It's a very interesting exploration to really be looking at the very nature of awareness, of knowing.

I don't know if I should tell you what I found or not. I'll leave you to find it out for yourselves. Well, I can't resist.

So I'm doing this—known by what? And then I realized: there's nothing to find. I can't find the knowing. And as one Tibetan teacher said, the not finding is the finding. That's what's to be found—that it can't be found. And yet the knowing is happening.

This is a great mystery. This is the mystery of consciousness. There's nothing there tangible to find, no color, no form. It can't be found, and yet the knowing is happening. It's this union of, we could say, emptiness and knowing. This becomes very apparent in this very simple exercise. That's why when I said this passive voice construction really changed my practice, it really was a major shift to greater ease and

even greater interest, because it was touching into some profound questions. What is awareness? What is consciousness?

In practice, it's easy to hear "let go," but it's often not clear how to actually do that. Could you talk about what letting go really means in practice?

Yes. This is going to be a really short answer. If you just change one word, it becomes super simple. Letting go—just change it to letting be. Just let it be.

And the letting go will happen by itself, because everything in its nature is arising and passing away. If you're just there with experience, letting it be with awareness, with mindfulness, you don't have to do anything to make things go away. In their very nature they're going to arise and pass away. If we can just settle back and let it be—you could even sing a little verse of that song perhaps.

It's so simple. And I think that's a helpful reframe, because letting go implies that you need to do something, and letting be implies there's nothing you need to do. Just let it be. And then in the letting be, you will be in the flow of changing experience. You're not interfering with it. You're not holding on. And if you're not holding on, there's nothing you have to let go of. Things are arising and passing by themselves.

There's a haiku poem—I forget who wrote it, maybe Bashō or one of the great Japanese haiku poets:

Simply trust.
Don't the leaves fall down just like that?
Simply trust.

Don't the leaves fall down just like that.

I love that poem because it points to how everything is part of nature—just a natural happening. Our own inner process, moment after moment, is just like a leaf falling down. Each moment's experience arises and passes away, arises and passes away, all by itself. We don't have to do anything except let it be and pay attention to how everything is unfolding.

It's pretty simple, actually. But we're very conditioned—that's the problem. A big part of meditation, though it's sometimes talked about and sometimes not, is about relaxation. Particularly in our Western culture, we're so hyped up. The whole culture is like that—all this doing and striving. So we find it hard just to relax and let things be.

But in meditation, if you can remember this, it's really helpful, and the whole system relaxes. This doesn't imply a loss of connection with each moment's experience. We're right there. But there's nothing to do except be mindful, except be aware, seeing the arising and passing of everything.

So it may be simpler than you think. I'm going to get into trouble with this—it's simpler than you think if you let go of letting go. Maybe just let be. Something like that. It's simple. It's really simple. But it's our

minds that complicate things, thinking we have to do something, when it's really a question of relaxing. Just relaxing. Let things be.

And in the letting be, all three characteristics become more and more obvious. The impermanence, the unreliability, and the selflessness all present themselves with greater clarity the less we're in there trying to manipulate things.

Someone asked: Could you talk about the nature of viriya energy and how to recognize when it's wholesome—how to see when it's mixed with striving?

This is an interesting question. First, let me say I am not by any means a Pali scholar, so keep that in mind. But when I was giving talks on viriya, I did a little study and research, and it turns out there are many different English words that can serve as translations. Usually we translate it as either effort or energy, but it can also mean perseverance. And this is the one I really like: it can also imply courage.

When I read that, something resonated deeply. If we think of the root of that English word, it comes from heart, from *cor*. So we could think of courage as strength of heart, particularly in the face of obstacles.

When we try to understand viriya and how it's applied, it might be helpful to consider this range of meanings and see which one is really appropriate to the moment. Let me give you a few examples of different ways I've experienced it, and also what to do when we lose the balance.

I first started sitting with Sayadaw U Pandita when he came here in 1984. Perhaps some of you have sat with him or heard of him. He was a very demanding teacher—a real effort warrior. Until I met him, I had been practicing with different teachers, none with his kind of warrior-like energy.

For many years before that—I'd been practicing a long time already—my mind had really settled into a very easeful flow. I would just sit and there would be this nice flow of energy that didn't really require much effort. Then U Pandita came along, and in a variety of ways, it was like a kick in the pants. "Okay, you've been enjoying this long enough. Get to work."

And it took many forms—not sleeping very much, using the noting technique, and really making the effort to stay more with the rising and falling.

One of the things I learned from that application of effort or energy was that effort creates energy. Usually, I think, we have the sense that we need energy to make effort. But just think of times when you're tired, you don't have much energy, but you make the effort to go out for a brisk walk or something like that. The effort creates energy, and we feel more energetic, we feel more alive from having made the effort.

When I started practicing with Sayadaw U Pandita, by making the effort—I'm not quite sure how to express this—the energy level in the body, in that flow that we can get into in our meditation, just the flow of sensations, it had been at a certain level, easeful. But having made the effort, all of a sudden that same

flow was happening on a completely different level. I came to appreciate how effort creates energy and how it can really impact the practice.

In terms of courage—okay, another basic confession—I'm basically lazy. My tendency is just to go for the easy. Why not? But once I started exploring all this energy and effort, I had a little mantra in my mind, a little instruction to myself: *Choose the difficult*. This went so against my nature. But when there was a choice between an easy way and a challenging way, during that period in my practice, I'd just choose the difficult. Go for it. See what happens.

It even extended beyond meditation. In those years—this has passed now—I was doing some mountain biking with friends who were much better than I was. They'd be going up these hills and I'd have to walk my bike up. They'd be waiting for me at the top reading War and Peace or something. But when I started getting into it, choosing the difficult, I was looking for hard hills to go up. It was difficult and it was challenging, but because I kept doing it, obviously I got stronger and I could do it. That's another sense of an application of right effort or right energy—where we really see how we can strengthen ourselves and maybe come out of our habituated patterns, whatever they may be, at whatever level.

From the other side, there was a time—this relates to the question—when I was doing another retreat with Sayadaw at the Forest Refuge. Because of the way he teaches, very much within the frame of different stages of insight and progressing from this stage to this stage, and unfortunately I knew too much, I knew what all these stages were, and because that was the unspoken message of the retreat, I felt myself striving in an unhealthy, unskillful way. I could feel that.

Then I drew on something I had learned from Tibetan practice. I had done a little Dzogchen practice with some teachers, not a lot, but enough to get the gist of it. In that framework, the message is more "already aware"—just settle back. And just that phrase, "oh, already aware," cut through the striving or wanting something else. Very quickly, it was a very effective way when I saw striving come up—just reminding myself, *already aware*. There's nothing to do except be present. It brought it back into balance, and then I could continue in that retreat, in that style of practice, but without the unhealthy striving.

I think it is important to be watchful of that. The Buddha talked about this—the famous example of tuning the lute in terms of finding the balance of effort. If the strings are too tight, it's not right; too loose, it's not right. There's an exploration, and it really takes paying attention to the quality of your practice. If you're feeling that it's a bit of a struggle, you might look at the quality of the effort you're making—maybe it's too much.

This is not exactly related to the question, but it's coming to mind. Usually when we're struggling, we think it's a problem. We don't like that feeling. What I've found is that the feeling of struggle is a tremendously helpful feedback tool. When we really look to see what struggle means, it means there's something happening that we're not accepting. Because if we were accepting it, we wouldn't be struggling. So when we're struggling, instead of getting upset about it, we can just take it as feedback. A little investigation:

Okay, what's happening here that I'm not accepting? What am I resisting or pushing away or not wanting? Maybe it's some discomfort in the body.

Maybe it's an emotional state. Maybe it's sleepiness. If there's struggle, it means we're not accepting something. So then if we look and discover, *oh, it's this*—oh, it's okay. Let me just be with it. Let it be. And we come out of the struggle and into a place of greater ease.

So again, this is tied into the balance of skillful and unskillful effort or energy. But this is an important dynamic to watch in the mind.

I've heard you say that a thought is little more than nothing. Often that really resonates. Many thoughts do feel just like noise, but sometimes thoughts seem to point to things that genuinely matter. When you say they're little more than nothing, how can we understand that without dismissing what feels meaningful or important?

This is a really important question because it points to what we could call different levels of understanding or different levels of experience.

To say a thought is little more than nothing is referring to its impermanent, impersonal nature. One way of seeing this clearly—and I think it's really important to do—is when we're having a lot of thoughts, that would be a good time to ask the question: *What is a thought?* Not what is the thought saying, but if there are a lot of thoughts going through the mind and we just turn the attention back and ask, well, what is thought as a phenomenon? We're looking at it because the thoughts are there. What is a thought?

That's when we see it's little more than nothing. We're looking at this thought and it's like a little energy blip. It's there and then it's not there. There's really not much there when we look at it on that level.

But then there's the whole level of the content of thoughts, which is the world we mostly live in. We are almost completely immersed in just the stories and the movies of our minds. We're lost in our stories about ourselves, about other people, about the world. We're lost in the content of the thoughts.

A couple of things about this. First, because we're so immersed in that level of reality, it's really important to see or to discern the content. Is this skillful or unskillful? Wholesome or unwholesome? Does it lead to suffering? Does it lead to happiness? That discernment is really important.

We want to see that this pattern of thoughts—of greed or anger or fear or whatever it may be, jealousy, envy—the content of these thoughts really creates a lot of suffering for ourselves. And so we want to be very mindful when that content arises, and then drop into the understanding. This is a way of freeing ourselves: drop into the level where we see, *oh, well, the thought is basically empty.*

If we can see, for example, an envious thought—when we're caught in it we can feel the suffering of

it—and then we recognize, *oh, it's just a thought, it's just this little blip*—then we're not caught by the content. The thought just comes and goes in a really easy manner.

And likewise with wholesome thoughts: when we see them, these should be cultivated. They're the cause of happiness. Thoughts of generosity, of loving-kindness, of compassion. So on the level of content, that discernment is really important. But we also want, at the same time, to understand their empty nature.

This was expressed by different teachers in various traditions in different ways. The Korean Zen master Seung Sahn Sunim, who founded the Providence Zen Center, had this great little phrase: "There's no right and no wrong, but right is right and wrong is wrong."

There's no right and no wrong—that's pointing to the empty nature. They're just thoughts. They're just empty thoughts.

On that level, it doesn't make any difference. When a thought just comes, it goes. We're not involved. We're not identified. We're not acting on it. But "right is right and wrong is wrong" because on the content level, that difference is important—that's the level from which we act. So we have to combine both of these levels of understanding: to see their empty nature, their being little more than nothing, and at the same time pay attention to the skillfulness or unskillfulness of the content.

I think this understanding of bringing both levels together reflects a certain maturity in our Dharma practice, when we can really hold both levels simultaneously.

The next question asks: Is there any aspect of self or awareness that exists independently of the five aggregates? And if even awareness eventually falls away, how should we understand what remains, if anything, in experience at that point?

This is getting into a really profound question about the experience and the nature of Nibbāna. First I should say that different Buddhist traditions have very different takes on this question. The way Nibbāna is understood in early Buddhism and in Theravāda Buddhism is a very different understanding than Nirvāṇa—which is the Sanskrit term—in the later Buddhist traditions. Even though the same word is used, they mean different things by it. That's helpful to know.

In the West, because all of these teachings from these different traditions are available to us, and many of us have studied or practiced or become familiar with various traditions, it can get really confusing when they're using the same word to describe different things.

So I'll be speaking now from the early Buddhist perspective, which is that there is no awareness apart from the five aggregates. Consciousness is the fifth aggregate. And the experience of Nibbāna is the experience of the cessation of the aggregates.

Let me use a simile for this. I'm sure you've all had the experience at different times—maybe you're sitting in your kitchen just doing whatever you're doing, and then all of a sudden, the refrigerator hum goes off.

You're familiar with that? And you can feel a kind of sudden release from a dukkha you didn't even know was there. In the absence of it, there's this sense of relief and release.

So if you think of the five aggregates as the refrigerator hum, and then in the moment of its cessation, the release—okay, here's where it starts to get a little complicated.

While we're alive and practicing and we have that experience, there is a consciousness which takes Nibbāna as its object. It's a consciousness which knows the experience of cessation—knowing the experience of the refrigerator hum going off. This is why when people have that experience, besides the transformative effect it has, the experience can be described in some ways, although very difficult, because there was a knowing of it. But in the "it," there's no awareness itself. This is called supermundane consciousness because it's not usual sense consciousness. It's that special consciousness that is taking the unborn as its object.

It's like the experience of zero. There was a book I came across, and the title alone made me have to get it. The title was *The Nothing That Is: A History of the Number Zero*. Just "the nothing that is." Of course, after the first two paragraphs I couldn't understand anything it said. But I didn't have to, because the title was enough.

You could think of Nibbāna as the nothing that is. That nothing is its own reality. It's not a nothing-nothing. It's a nothing that is.

As you can tell, it's very hard to talk about this.

But while we're alive, we can have that experience. And so we know for ourselves exactly what all these words are referring to. At the death of an arahant—that's called Parinibbāna—there is no supramundane consciousness, because that consciousness is still conditioned, even though it's special in that it takes Nibbāna as its object. At the death of an arahant, a fully enlightened being, there is no awareness in that. What's left is that reality of peace, the nothing that is.

Now that I've totally confused you, I know you can at least begin to get some sense of the subtlety of this. But it's that first experience of the zero that uproots the belief in self. Because we've gone from having a self center at the heart of everything to the experience of the zero center. Once one has had that experience, it's clear that there's no self at the center of things, because we've experienced the zero center. That's why that first glimpse of Nibbāna is what uproots the view or belief in self.

And then, of course, there's still plenty to do, because lots of other defilements remain. There's still aversion, desire, and even conceit. This is kind of interesting also. One might think, well, if the view of self is uprooted, why does conceit remain? In Buddhism, the Pāli word is *māna*. It's any sense of "I am"—comparing oneself with others, or "I was," or "I will be this" over time. *Māna* remains until full enlightenment. It's the last of the defilements to go.

So one might think, if the view of self has been uprooted, why is conceit still there? This gets very interesting for the practice. That pattern of conceit, the "I am-ing" in one way or another, is just such a deeply conditioned pattern—more deeply conditioned than desire. It's deeply rooted, which is why the pattern remains. But after uprooting the view of self, even though conceit still arises, we understand that the conceit itself is selfless. It's just another selfless, impersonal pattern. And the pattern is deeply conditioned, which is why it still shows up.

For myself these days, I love it when I can see conceit arising in my mind, because I'd rather see it than not see it. Some kind of comparing going on—ah, *māna*, I see you! I feel like I'm working on arahantship, because it's one of the last defilements to go. And it's so freeing, because *māna*, when we're not mindful of it, is a real contraction.

I'll tell you a little *māna* story. This was a few years ago. Do you know who Bhikkhu Anālayo is? This really exceptional monk—he lives down at the Study Center. He was on retreat in his little cabin at the same time I was on a self-retreat in my house. So I'm sitting and walking, and then one afternoon I was just frittering away some time. I didn't know what I was doing. And then the thought came: "I bet Anālayo's not frittering away his time."

When I had that thought, I really started getting down on myself. What kind of yogi are you? But then pretty quickly—because I've done a lot of practice, so it didn't take that long, maybe ten minutes of being lost in the self-judgment—at a certain point: "Oh, that's just *māna*." That thought, that comparing mind. As soon as I recognized it as *māna*, and the selfless nature of *māna*, the whole thing just disappeared. All that self-judgment disappeared, because I could see the conceit for what it was instead of not seeing it and being caught in the pattern.

Because this is such a deeply rooted one, and the cause of so much

suffering of one kind or another. When we're in that comparing mode, I just find it really liberating and joyful to keep an eye out for māna, for that pattern of conceit—and not start judging oneself for having it, realizing yes, this is going to be here until full enlightenment. But we can see it. We can see its empty nature and its selfless nature. And so we're really free in it.

I'd recommend keeping an eye out for that. Whenever there's this feeling of "I am" in one way or another—and it takes many forms—it's a really intriguing place to practice and very liberating.

Question: After a lifetime of practice with impermanence, is there anything about aging and approaching death that you didn't expect?

In my mother's last years—she lived to about eighty-seven—maybe in the last five years or so of her life, she was in her eighties by then. All the stuff that happens when you're eighty. I'd visit her, and she would be telling me about this or that, and I would be listening, hopefully empathetically, saying, "Oh, I understand." And she looked at me and said, "You have no idea."

Now that I'm in my eighties, I had no idea. Even though I've been teaching this stuff for fifty years—about the body and everything it goes through, all the changes—it is just really interesting. I found it really interesting, the difference in how much more vivid the teachings become as I've aged. It's like, "Oh yes, this is more of what the Buddha's been talking about."

This is not to say that younger people, for various reasons, aren't going through really intense suffering. I'm talking more in a general way about the general aging process. It's just the depth—the depth of experience of the teachings with respect to the body and the nature of the body, and even the mind. Maybe it's losing some of its sharpness, or memory. Things happen. That understanding just becomes so immediate and so vivid.

In some way, the aging process for me has brought the Buddha's teachings even more to life, just experiencing it more viscerally. And that's a bit of a surprise. I didn't realize that's what the trajectory would be. I've had friends who were really great Dharma practitioners, older than myself, and there's this one woman in particular—she just kept saying how interesting it is, this whole process. And I'm finding that myself now. It's just interesting to see more clearly the real nature of what this mind-body is about.

Of course, I think our practice sets us up for having that level of interest rather than just drowning in the difficulties. I'm just so grateful for all the practice I've done, and I see it in other people. It just provides a profound foundation for really investigating and taking interest in this whole process of life and aging and illness and death.

So it's really profound, what you're all doing here. I know at times you probably forget that, with all the ups and downs and challenges, but there's nothing better we can do. And then, of course, we try to share it.

Thank you.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.