

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN/SHARON SALZBERG TALK

**Presented by L.A. Dharma
January 14, 2003**

Joseph Goldstein's talk centered around the theme of his new book: One Dharma

His foundation is Theravada Buddhism, but Joseph has spent the last twelve years studying Tibetan (Dzochen) and has struggled to reconcile certain contradictions between these two schools of thought. One day he had a deep insight: "I don't know." And this was a relief, and he proclaims that he is able to practice both techniques and philosophies simultaneously. Here is what he says:

The issue is really skillful means versus "this way is right and that way is wrong." By focusing on the skillful ways of living ones life, he contends that the different ideologies are not pitted against each other. This thinking leads away from BELIEF, which engenders dogma and inflexibility and towards FAITH, which leads us towards openness.

Belief yields conclusions that we cling to. Faith is a quality of openness to the things we don't know. It rests in NOT KNOWING. There is much wisdom beyond our knowing.

We can benefit from the vast array of methods, but there is one understanding that is the common core: **NOTHING IS TO BE CLUNG TO AS "I" OR "MINE."** These are the teachings.

So, he practices "not clinging." Buddhism is clothed in different robes, but it comes down to the ONE DHARMA OF NOT CLINGING.

So, he implores us to pay attention to where we cling:

1) We cling to sense pleasures. This goes very very deep and is very very strong and the driving force of Samsara--suffering. He asks, at the time of our death, how important are these sense pleasures, really? Our ability to NOT HOLD ON is what is of value—an open heart.

He recounts a story when he was deep in meditation, just seconds away from enlightenment (well that's how it felt), when the bell rang, and all he could think about was the banana he gets to suck down for dinner.

2) A big arena for clinging is our attachment to our views and opinions. But, who really knows? This is NOT bewilderment, nor confusion. Rather, it is openness and not clinging to views, like they are solid stuff. Openness means we are open to other viewpoints because we are not so entangled in our own opinions...which leads to the deepest clinging of all...

3) Clinging to the concept of self. He cites the Big Dipper as an illustration. We look

into the sky and see this beautiful constellation of stars forming a spoon in the sky. It is our viewpoint from earth. But there is no Big Dipper. We have placed a concept over the seeing. The same goes for self.

We practice not only for ourselves, but for the welfare of all beings. If we can begin to break-down the illusion of self, deconstruct the concepts, open our hearts to the rise and fall of phenomena, that affects all our relationships; it affects the world.

Sharon Salzberg's talk centered around the theme of her new book: Faith

Faith is opening up, moving on, resting in not knowing, and finding the threads of connections between us. It is aspiring to move from despair and confronting ones particular conditioning (for me, that means my psychology, my story).

If we really knew who we were, we'd discover a lack of a solid, isolated self, but we'd also discover certain qualities that are innate to our being. We would discover the capacity for awareness.

THE FORCES OF GREED AND FEAR ARE JUST VISITING. But I am pure awareness. Recognize this and let go of the clinging to self, then we can be free. The hindrances may come a lot and incessantly, but they are **visitors** only.

She asked a psychiatrist friend what he thought really helps clients and he replied "its the love in the room that heals." She adds on her own spin--it is also that *something* that gets us to the appointment in the first place. Change brings possibility, and that is faith.

Acting from faith, we surrender to nature and its need to take its own course. It is a letting go. Each moment is like another drop in our bucket. We have something to do of great value right now and right here. AND, DON'T LOOK AT ANYONE ELSE'S BUCKET.

We don't have to be defined by the circumstances of our life and with faith, there is always a sense of possibility. We can relax a little and be the kitten who lets her mama carry her around, instead of the baby monkey who clings to her mama. Faith carries. Belief clings.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Letting go versus setting boundaries?

Joseph Goldstein responded that everything rests on the tip of motivation. The challenge in different situations is to see our true motivation.

There is such a thing as 'wrathful compassion.' Sometimes our energy has to be strong when confronting a situation. But resting in awareness one can identify if she is coming from wrath or from compassion. There is a difference.

Elaboration on integrating different schools of Buddhism into ones practice?

Joseph responds simply "the way that works for you is the best."

Talk about the effects of 9/11 on you and our culture?

Sharon responds that we need to acknowledge our fear and not gloss over this. We live in very scary times. The specter of 9/11 can cast us into fear and despair or motivate us to live differently and relate differently in the world. To open ourselves to the suffering of others builds our compassion. The connection is such that what happens there, happens to me. She quotes poet Mary Oliver: "Until we have loved all, news comes as if from a distant land."

Taking actions, but staying out of the results?

Sharon responds that faith is resting in the unknown. We are planting seeds that might take a long, long time to come to flower. Trust.

-- notes taken by Cali Rose-who scribbles really fast --