

Tuesday Dharma talk

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April 21, 2026

Keywords: *Vipassanā, samādhi, Dhamma, Upanisa Sutta, Dhammapada*, non-clinging, disenchantment, suffering, seven factors of awakening, Joseph Goldstein

I still remember when I was eight. There was a toy that I saw that I wanted to have. I really wanted it. It was a little bit unusual, maybe, and my parents weren't particularly keen on getting me this toy, but I really wanted it. I really wanted it. I really wanted it. So they got it for me for Christmas.

I opened the package, and I was so happy to get it. And that's the last I had anything to do with it. I never played with it, never was interested in it again. Somehow the illusion, the fantasies, the allure, advertisements, whatever for it, had kind of gotten my imagination, and I wondered what it was going to be, how great it was going to be. But then the actual reality of it just didn't do anything for me.

And you might be happy to know what it was that didn't do anything for me. It was a toy machine gun. Somehow that got into my head, that this would be the thing to have. But then having it, the interest in it, the illusions, the enchantment in it, whatever it would do, I don't know what it was, but it was gone. Maybe you've had something like that.

Or you had something, put great value in something. You had imagined it was going to be fantastic. It would be really wonderful. And then you did it, and it wasn't so wonderful. It just didn't live up to the hype.

Sometimes people plant illusions, delusions in our mind, politicians. And sometimes we, or some people, believe them. They're just constructs, ideas, but sometimes we invest a lot of authority in some people, like they know, or a lot of power or status compared to us. And then something happens, and it goes away. Sometimes we see their human side perhaps, or we see that we had projected it onto them, and then we were living in some kind of illusion, idea.

And sometimes it takes years for some of these bubbles, these ideas, to pop, and we no longer see through a thought lens. But what we realize is how much we've been seeing through a lens that we constructed, maybe with the help of society. And we can be living in illusions, living in delusions, living in an enchantment.

It's still meaningful for me, the experience I had many years ago when I was at the meditation hall at Green Gulch Zen Center. And the rule back then was very strict. The way the altar was situated, did I tell you? Let me tell you this. The way it was situated there was like this one here, except there was space behind it. You could walk.

And we were never, ever supposed to walk across the midline right in front of the Buddha. You had to go always behind to get to the other side. And I was a new student, and I took this seriously. And there were times where, for some reason, I had really got close to that line. And it was like a force field. I could feel the force. I couldn't cross that.

I don't know, something would happen, but it was a force field that repelled me. And I lived with that. It was very matter-of-fact to live with that. No thoughts about it. I just thought, yeah, it's just...

And then one day I was in that meditation hall, kind of off to the corner in the back corner. And there were Buddhist tourists who came in, tourists who just came to see Green Gulch, walking around, and they didn't know anything about a line down the middle. And they were talking in the meditation hall and just crossed that line as if it was not there. As if it was not there. And nothing happened to them. Nothing. It was just like there was nothing.

And something in my mind was just like, wow, it doesn't exist. The force field was a projection of my own mind. I said, wow, my mind is powerful, to imagine so strongly that I actually could feel like I'm getting close and, like, better step back. And then it's even stranger since then. I've gone back to give a Dharma talk, and now they've changed things around.

And I couldn't believe it. They put the seat for the Dharma talk teacher smack on that line. You're directly in front of the Buddha, right, looking at the Buddha. Like, what am I doing sitting on this? This is crazy. This is not right.

So I was living in a kind of illusion. It was socially created, an idea, but I took it on myself and built it up in my mind and created this whole world that seemed so real. And just some people walking across the floor was enough to just pop the bubble. And then, wow, I saw it pop. That was quite fun.

And I've done that to people. I've projected onto people all kinds of things. Probably, you name it, I've done it. So I don't have to give you examples. And then I've gotten to know

them. Sometimes they're so much more wonderful than I thought. Sometimes they're so much more ordinary than I thought. Sometimes something else. But I could see I had a whole fantasy idea that I built up.

There is something called, probably we all know this, but there's something called *Vipassanā* romances. That's when we fall in love with someone on a retreat without even talking to them. So I was at the three-month retreat at IMS. It's a long time. And I had a *Vipassanā* romance for a woman there.

But the romance was very successful, because I had three months for it. And in the course of that time, we met, we spent time together, did wonderful things together, we got married, we had children. It was quite a wonderful romance. And it kind of wasn't like I was doing it all the time, but it was kind of like a little thread that was running through here and there, and I guess it was building, and it was quite lovely.

And then when the retreat came to an end, I think we had a big kind of closing circle of some kind, and everyone was going to speak. And so she spoke. And she had a really thick French accent. And my whole fantasy was based on her being an American. And in that moment, I saw it. The fantasy just crumbled. It's like, wow, Gil, what were you doing? What were you up to? Wow.

And one more story. This was kind of very humbling in many ways. I spent three years living at the Zen monastery in Tassajara. And I spent a year working in the kitchen. I didn't want to be in the kitchen, but I got into it and loved it. And I was kind of a kitchen manager type person, running the kitchen for quite a while that year.

And in the summer months they used to have a guest season. People would come and be guests there, and they would cook these elaborate meals for the guests. So there was a whole set of cooks that just cooked for the guests, and a set of cooks for leftovers and things for the students. And I kind of looked around and saw, well, I'm really now the most qualified person to be the guest cook for the next summer. And then, you know, of course they'll choose me.

So during the winter, for six months, we ate most of the meals in this posture in the meditation hall, kind of meditating if you're not eating and waiting for the food to come. And you're kind of eating mindfully. It's quite something to do. But I spent most of the time thinking about menus for the next summer and what I'd do as the lunch, you know, the special guests, evaluating the food that we got. We were thinking about how it could be better. I was just thinking because I was certainly going to be.

So then at the beginning of that summer, when they were going to announce the job, they

were going to do it in the meditation hall. Everyone is standing in a circle, so it's kind of a ritual. And they read out a name and the job you'll have. Some people don't know what they're going to do until they have that announcement. So I didn't know what was going to happen.

They did not announce me to be the guest cook. And I said, Gil, what were you doing all those months? Like, you wasted your youth. I could have been meditating. That's what I mean. I could have been just sitting there and practicing instead of these fantasies and ideas and how wonderful it would be. Food thoughts.

I said, wow, that's a long time to be enchanted by something, and then to have the rug pulled out from under it. I wasn't exactly disappointed. It wasn't like I was crushed or disappointed exactly. It was more like, what have I been doing? Am I capable of that?

So the big lesson, these are all stories of becoming disillusioned in a wonderful way. I think the English word disillusionment has a really heavy, negative feeling, like a big disappointment in something. But if you're living in illusion, disillusionment should be considered, should be celebrated. And sometimes we use in Buddhism the word disenchantment. And I like that word better than disillusionment.

But disenchantment implies that you've been enchanted, that you've been under the spell of something, and the spell has been broken. So that's one of the things that this practice of the Dharma sooner or later brings us up against, these places where we see our illusions, we see our delusions, we see how we're in the spell of something, and the spell is broken. We are disenchanted. And it's considered to be a very important and mature step in the practice for this to happen. And it can happen in many different ways. Tourists walking across the floor. It didn't take a lot of meditation to see that, but it made a big difference for me.

It can also happen in deep meditation, from deep meditation. And that's kind of what the *Upanisa Sutta* is pointing towards, that it's laying down a series of conditions, starting with suffering, that are the proximate condition, the proximate supporting context, for something else to have a chance to happen. So from suffering, it's a healthy, important, direct way of seeing suffering that can give rise to faith. The faith that it is possible to end suffering. Without suffering, why would you want to end it? So you have to have it for that faith.

And then there's gladness, appreciation for having a practice, having knowledge that this is possible. And there's the joy of doing the practice, the joy and engagement, having the good fortune to practice. A lot of people don't have that fortune. There's tranquility, learning how to relax and become calm and settled, that's built on this foundation of gladness and joy and

faith. So it's qualitatively a particular quality of tranquility with those others as a foundation. And from that foundation there's happiness. From that there is a particular quality of *samādhi*, a particular way in which the mind gets gathered and united.

You can get really concentrated and united doing even unwholesome things. But this is coming out of this very wonderful, important foundation of this goodness, this warmth, this happiness. And so this gathering, settling, there is a lot of goodness here, a lot of well-being, a lot of peace. And then from there we're able to see more clearly. It's kind of like the lenses over our eyes get taken off. All the confusion, all the agitation, all the spinning of the mind, all the projections, quiet enough that we start seeing more clearly.

And we have the seeing of becoming, seeing how things come to be, that they arise. And some of that we see, they arise out of conditions. And we see, for example, we look back over this process of *Upanisa* and we see, oh yeah, all these things have come into being from conditions before. The particular way they're there, they're not just there. I didn't just sit down in a meditation hall one day and snap my fingers and *samādhi*, boom. No, there were all these conditions in place that really allowed this to happen.

And we see that becoming. One thing leads to the other, supports the other. And we see a lot of this becoming. We see how much there is. We see that maybe there's constant becoming, constant change, constant inconstancy. The only thing that's constant is inconstancy. Things are changing all the time.

And that's the condition for a particular Dharmic disenchantment. So that's the next step in the *Upanisa* path, to become disenchanted. And there are some verses in the *Dhammapada* that make some very fascinating statements about this disenchantment.

All mental constructs, impermanent, changing, inconstant. Knowing this, one becomes disenchanted with suffering. This is the path to purity.

All mental constructs are suffering. Seeing this clearly, one becomes disillusioned with suffering.

All states are not self. Seeing this clearly, one is disillusioned or disenchanted with suffering.

And what's strange about this is, disenchanted with suffering? What is that? It implies that there are people in this world, probably nobody here, just to make sure that you're not being judged, there are people in the world who are enchanted with suffering, or in the illusion, or deluded about suffering, and they're caught in that delusion, caught in that enchantment.

And my interpretation of why it goes from mental constructs to all states is that mental constructs are the stories. What do we make up in the mind? And usually when we make things up in the mind, there's usually clinging, delusion, illusions, grasping involved in those made-up worlds we make. So to really see that the mind is doing these things, to really see the mind making things up, is quite powerful. And to feel that making things up, making ideas up, stories up, there's suffering there, kind of a strange suffering, suffering based on illusion.

Seeing this clearly, what is this illusion without suffering? So I've certainly done that in meditation, lived in certain making-up worlds of fantasies. And sometimes in longer retreats, it's really obvious that it's exhausting. I've had fantasies that just wouldn't stop for days on long retreats, and I was just begging for it to stop. It was just so tiring. It was so crazy, so much of a fantasy.

But to see the mind making these fantasies and living in them, reacting to them, I saw this is suffering. This is not real. And so most of us live so much in the world of make-believe, made-up worlds of thoughts. It's phenomenal how much we live in the world of making it up, called mental constructs. To see it as inconstant means to see it as something that comes and goes, to see that there is no inherent existence, there is no substantial truth to it. They're just phenomena that come and go.

And if you see them as coming and going and see them as being stressful to have, then we don't put a lot of value in them. We don't invest a lot into them. We don't have a lot of attachment to them. We don't have a lot of resistance or antipathy towards them.

But then it goes to all states are not self. It doesn't say all states are suffering. And I take it there are a lot of wonderful states, wonderful *dhammā*, the seven factors of awakening are *dhammā*, are states that are wonderful. Think mindfulness and deep clear discernment, vitality and joy and tranquility, *samādhi*, equanimity. These aren't made up by the mind. They're not illusions. These are states that are born from within, things that arise from within that are not delusions, but natural states.

There's even forms of thinking that are not delusive. They don't involve making things up, but involve deep recognition, deep questioning, deep exploration. What is this life we're living? That's a natural way of being present and living in this world. And it's coming from a different source than the mind that makes things up.

But even those wonderful states are not self. To see that clearly is to become disillusioned or disenchanted with our suffering. Because it's possible to be attached to these wonderful states. It's possible to define oneself by them. And it's possible to get into a wonderful med-

itative state on Tuesday, but the practice discussion with the teacher is on Wednesday. And then Wednesday, you're not in that wonderful state. But that was so wonderful to report.

Joseph Goldstein tells a story of going to Paṇḍita with the report, and U Paṇḍita looked at him and said something like, that's not right. Something's wrong here. So Joseph had to admit, well, this was yesterday's report. You're supposed to report about today, but he wanted to get credit for what he did yesterday. So he was attached to his good state of yesterday and wanted to get credit for it. Or it was kind of frightening, kind of scary, to go talk to Paṇḍita. So you want to somehow manage those conversations so this fierce metal-general kind of teacher would mostly leave you alone.

And so as we get quieter and stiller and learn the practice, we start seeing the birth of thoughts, the birth of ideas. It's possible to see what wasn't there and then see an idea, the becoming of an idea, the coming of a thought. And this is a powerful position from which to see our life, rather than the thoughts arising kind of out of sight, and they're just there, and we're in the thoughts, and thoughts provide us with the interpretation of our world, the projections of what's there, and we believe it. Our interpretations, our opinions, and that clearly must be true since I'm thinking it.

But to watch a thought arise makes us so much more responsible in this world, because you can put a question mark after it. Is this true? Let's check it out. If you see someone sitting giving a Dharma talk in a blue shirt and a thought arises, that's the wrong color for a Dharma talk. This is really a lousy shirt to be sitting in. How could Gil not have known and made such a terrible mistake?

But you have this thought arise, and to see that thought arise, oh, look at that. Is that really true, that Gil is a terrible teacher because he has a blue shirt? Let's question this. And this is a silly example, but it's not silly what we do in the world to each other. The amount of bias, prejudice, stereotype, quick decisions we make about people. And we believe them. Of course we do things like this.

To be quiet enough to see the thought arise and not believe it, to question it, to see it, know it as an arising thought that wasn't there before, gives you this ability to question it, to say, wait a minute, what is this? And then take a second look. Is this really true? I do this frequently, and then very occasionally it's true, whatever I'm thinking, but often it's not. Often it's different than what I was assuming. It's very valuable to question it and take a second look and to really see what's going on.

So we see ourselves too. We can make up stories about ourselves. We interpret ourselves.

And you can watch the thought arise about ourselves. And we can put a question mark after it. What is this? Is this true?

So when you come to this stage of disenchantment, there are kind of five levels of that too that I've made up. But not just as a fantasy, but kind of for some purpose of exploration, for the purpose of deeper inquiry into understanding ourselves. And the first level is just simply noticing we're doing it. This is like the fundamental aspect of mindfulness. Just be mindful of it. Oh, look, there's a thought, there's an idea, there's an interpretation.

And then to question it. What is this? Why am I so invested in it? Why am I leaning into it? Why am I holding on to it? Why am I insisting that I have to tell everyone else this thing? Why is it so important? Why am I so captured by it? Why am I pushed around by it? Why do I have so much anger with this thought? Why do I have so much desire with it? What is this thought?

So I question it. And the ability to both see these things is so much stronger, see and question, after we have a lot of steadiness, peacefulness, joy, well-being, and we're beginning to see things clearly as they come into being. We see the comings and goings of things. And we see, for example, that in the comings and goings of the ever-changing, these illusions, these enchantments we have, these ideas we have, are a kind of stepping out of the stream of change. It's a kind of taking things as having some constancy, some solidity. And we've kind of made this part of the fantasy, to remove it from the world of change into the world of this is how things really are.

And so to be able to see the movements of becoming, the constant stream of change, we can feel that we have wind drag. We can feel that we put our hand out the window and now we feel the air pushing against us, we're creating wind drag for the car. Maybe. We can feel that sometimes, that we're now pulling an anchor behind us walking on dry land because it's heavy, it's hard. Now there's work going on to have this illusion and to live in it and to reinforce it and to believe it and to be contracted around it and caught in it.

So to start seeing and feeling what's going on here and be able to question it and have a contrast, this is the third level, to do something that's very unpopular in *Vipassanā*, I think. I think you're not supposed to do this. So you can just say I'm a heretic. You compare. You do an act of comparing.

When you were peaceful and calm, and now you decided that the right thing to do is really to make sure that the next time you come on retreat, everyone's wearing a blue shirt. That's really the right way to be when Gil's doing it, so it must be it. And so this is going to make IRC really good. Blue shirts for everybody, little uniforms, kind of like monks. It'd be great. And

we'll all get more easily into *samādhi* because we're all having this commonality, and we're all part of the same tribe. It'll be great. Blue.

But you've watched how your peace started to vanish. You were at ease, you were peaceful, you were settled. And then as the mind picks up this fantasy and how important it is, you see the contraction, you see the agitation. And you can compare. Wait a minute, it was like this, and now it's like this. It was good, and now it's worse.

If there's any one saying coming out of Dharma practice, it's, don't make it worse. Just don't make it worse. So you can see that I'm making it worse. I was peaceful, I was calm, I was settled. And now I've lost it. I've been involved in something.

And more important in terms of comparison is, it's actually better if I don't do this. So you might be able to choose not to do it, not to get involved. Or if you do get involved, you can choose to not be involved. And this is making a choice, choosing. Or choosing may be too strong a word, but it might be that it's a choice to no longer invest yourself in the illusion that you have. To say, I don't believe this.

Yes, it's powerful. There's a lot of forces in my mind and heart that are keeping these going. I don't understand all the forces of delusion and fantasies, but I don't stand by it. I'm not going to live in it. I'm not committed to it. Just that can make a huge difference. I'm going to step away from it.

Or maybe you can let go of it. Or maybe you can return to just mindfulness practice that just knows it carefully and mindfully. And just the mindfulness practice helps elucidate it.

One of the enchantments that I had in practice was that if I just practiced really well, I could make things go away, make things better, get myself into good wonderful states. I used to have the bazooka approach to mindfulness. If I just blasted it with mindfulness, I would just blast it out of existence, whatever. It doesn't really work. But I thought it worked. I had this illusion that I could do that.

I had the illusion that if I just huffed and puffed, if I just brought really good mindfulness, really good concentration, that'll do it. And occasionally it does do it. And then you just believe it even more. It could have just been coincidence. But I gave myself credit.

But I think one of the really powerful things in this practice for me was to see that there is a level, a time and place, where I have to create the conditions for change. I have to be mindful in an open, relaxed way, and really be honest and see what's here, not be for and against anything. And then if I'm really there in this quiet, clear, open way, something changes that

I don't make happen. I didn't make the change. I didn't let go. But something let go of it. Something shifted, something opened, some kind of *samādhi* arose.

And so one of the things I then became, in a healthy way, disenchanted with was me as the controller, me as the doer, me as the maker, me as the one who was going to fix things or make things better. And there were a lot of illusions about me as the actor, me as the practitioner, illusions about me as the victim, me as the experiencer, just do the whole list of me's that were appropriating. And because I saw so often how, if I got that out of the way, things worked so much better, the Dharma unfolded. And slowly I got disillusioned with this whole mental construct of me and my responsibility, my doing, my capacities to make change this way.

The deepest change in the Dharma is not something you can do. And so even before that, it's so wonderful to see that you can just have a very important role, to be really present, really be there, really be there, seeing one thing through to the end, but not be the one who's going to do the change. The Dharma knows what needs to happen better than you. And so to trust the Dharma knows, but you have to be present.

So this disenchantment, we do have a role there. We have a role to notice how we live in illusions. We have a role to question the mental constructs we have and ideas, attitudes. We have a role in comparing the healthy states that we've experienced versus the state we have. Which one do we want to invest in? Which one is the fork in the road we want to follow?

And maybe you can relax, maybe you can let go sometimes. If you can, wonderful. But maybe just step back, make a bigger picture, and just see very clearly. The choice is to see very clearly, this is an illusion. Boy, am I enchanted.

And one of the things that's amazing is to realize that we're enchanted with suffering, that we can invest a lot of value, importance, in suffering. There can be a lot of conceit that happens around suffering that we construct. This suffering says something about me. This suffering is about me. This suffering means that I'll be a better me if I could just not have it. I'll have a wonderful life. I'll win the lottery. It's all kinds of things.

But we can live and have a lot of delusions about suffering itself, what it means, who we are in relationship to it, how wonderful our life will be without it, the cause of it, the solution for it. There can be a lot of suffering, a lot of illusions. And so this idea of becoming disenchanted with suffering, to no longer have illusions, no longer have made-up ideas, and let suffering become ordinary, to let suffering become simple, to become disenchanted with suffering, is not to make suffering worse, not to build suffering upon suffering.

And then there might be the time and place where some of our suffering fades away, some of

our illusions disappear, so clearly that we kind of go, wow. Kind of like those tourists stepping across that middle line in this meditation hall. And I was just blown away at what vanished from my mind. It was this construct that lived in my mind that suddenly just was gone. That's possible? Wow.

Or after seven months of thinking that I was going to be the lunch cook, then in one moment, not only was I humbled, not only had I wasted my youth, but I also was, wow, that just vanished from my mind. Where did it go? Never had those thoughts again. It's kind of a sacred absence.

So as we practice, there are all these different ways that we will sooner or later become disenchanted. And rather than being discouraged by that, there's wisdom in knowing that this is what happens. And the core area that it circles around is to have wisdom about non-clinging, to be disenchanted with all clinging. Every possible clinging, become completely disenchanted. See that it's all based on illusions when we cling.

And that's one of the core wisdoms in Buddhism. You don't have to have a lot of knowledge wisdom. You don't have to study a lot of books to develop wisdom in Buddhism. The real wisdom is the wisdom of clinging and the end of clinging. Clinging and how unsatisfactory it is to cling, how unsatisfying it is to cling, and to become disenchanted with clinging. And sometimes it's to become sick and tired of it. Enough already. That can be a healthy move.

And so there are other forms of disenchantment that happen in practice as well. Generally, all disenchantments point to something wonderful if they involve two things, either letting go or being inspired or determined, inspired or determined to become free, free of clinging, free of the suffering. So the disenchantment, the absence of enchantment, leads us to really saying, yes, let's take this through all the way to the end. Yes, let's become free, free of clinging.

And to end this talk with two words, what this whole talk was pointing to, the two words are the two-word sentence. Trust peace. Trust peace. Thank you.