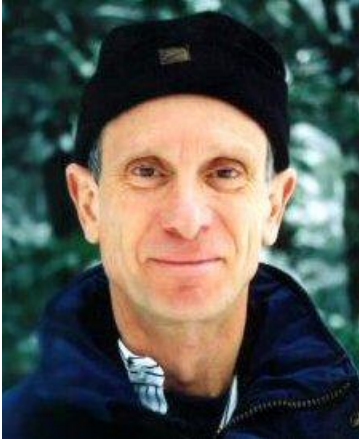


THE NATURE OF INSIGHT



The insights of insight meditation are intuitive, not conceptual. Intuitive in this sense does not mean some kind of vague feeling about something; rather, it means clearly, directly seeing and experiencing how things really are.

For example, you are sitting in meditation, watching the breath. All of a sudden your mind settles into a different space. Even if it is just for a couple of moments, you feel a deeper kind of calm and peace. Instead of struggling to be with the breath, you begin just to rest with the breath in a very calm, effortless, way.

That is an insight through direct experience into the nature of calm and tranquility. You do not think about them or reflect on them. You know that daffodils are yellow because you have seen them. You know the nature of calm and tranquility because you have felt them in your heart.

There are many such experiences and many levels of each one; and each time we know them directly, it is as if we open to a new way of seeing, of being. This is insight.

But often our mind becomes so excited by each new experience that we start thinking. "Look at that. I'm so calm. This is great." Or we start reflecting discursively on impermanence or suffering or whatever the particular insight-experience has been.

We need to take a lot of care. If we fail to note such reflections and become caught up in them instead - and Dharma reflections can become extremely compelling and interesting - they themselves become a hindrance to deepening insight. Sometimes people become obsessed with Dharma thoughts, with reflections about genuine insights they have had.

So try to differentiate clearly between true intuitive insight and thinking about it. Knowing the difference can save you trouble and delay. You do not have to worry about later finding words to communicate your insights. Our mind very rarely has a problem coming up with the words. Simply staying present with each new arising appearance allows the whole Dharma journey to unfold.

Joseph Goldstein