

## Dharmette: No Weight, No Substance

**Gil Fronsdal**

**January 22, 2020**

**Keywords:** Ajahn Chah, alms round, boulder metaphor, burden, desire, selfing, monastic rules, letting go, mental formations, weightlessness

---

So I want to follow up a little bit on the theme that I mentioned earlier today for a little practice note section of the morning, and that is that I am using a different story. This comes from the Tibetan tradition, from a teacher named Ajahn Shaw. I recently heard the story from a person who had been a monk from Ajahn Chah, who apparently was there when this happened. So it's kind of, you know, now it's only two generations away, or two, the story. And that is that Ajahn Chah went out with his other monastics on alms rounds. They were going with their bowls and probably walking single file through the countryside of Talan to receive alms food for the day, and at some point he stopped, and up ahead of them on the trail was a very large boulder.

So he turned to his monks and he said, Is that boulder heavy? One of them said, Oh, yes, it's really heavy. Apparently Ajahn Chah had a way of kind of being a little bit stern, or to grunt, or his disapproval, or something. He was not happy with the answer, and kind of a little bit barked back and said, It's only heavy if you try to lift it. That's a wonderful little story, because you know it's only heavy for you if you try to lift it. If you don't try to lift it, it's not heavy for you.

You don't experience the heaviness. You don't touch it. You don't strain against it. It's just in your mind. There's no weight, just a boulder. The idea of the boulder, and it has no weight just from a distance, looking at it in terms of you having to do anything about it, and how many things have no weight in your life until you pick them up.

There's certainly all kinds of issues and problems in the world, and difficulties in the world, and all kinds of issues that we have. But do they, in and of themselves, have any weight? If you leave here today, if you drove here in a car, and you leave here today, and the car has two flat tires, one flat tire is bad enough, right? But you have a spare, but two flat tires, it's more than the spare can handle. That's a problem if you pick it up.

So what does that mean? To pick it up. It doesn't mean just walking away from, you know, go to the car dealer and buy another car. It's to look at that and think, But what do I need to do? I guess I should try to call someone who can come and get it. Or, if you know, how close is the closest station, gas station that has tires? Or, What do I do here and now? I can figure it out.

But to make it heavy, what does it mean to make it heavy? So you pick it up, and so it's a heavy burden on the mind. What's the difference between just taking care of it and the extra stuff of being burdened by it? It's all kinds of things involved in that. One is to have very strong desires that things be different. I have an important appointment to go, and this is, and to the desire for the appointment, all the associations with the appointment, all the expectations when we live under the weight of, I'll fail at whatever.

People won't like me if I don't come on time, or I'm in a hurry, or I had this wonderful thing I'm going to do, and now I can't do the wonderful thing. Or we pick up the weight of, I'm incompetent. I don't know what to deal with this problem. And what am I supposed to do? And who knows? Maybe the person who comes with the tow truck will take financial advantage of me, and, you know, I can't find navigate the difficulty of it all. And it's true they might. Who knows? But there's a way of picking that up as a heavy thing with weight.

What is it to see these issues, even see the thoughts that we have, and see them as if they have no weight, that they have no substance? They are information that we use. Look at that, two flat tires. I need to figure out what to do, that's just thoughts having information. But, Oh my lord, not again. This is not fair. Life is not fair to me. Someone needs to be blamed. I just had it at the mechanics yesterday. They must have done something to give me a flat tire, those people.

Now the mind has gotten heavy, lots and lots of weight that you're carrying around. So to have the thoughts work as formation, as simple problem solving, that has no weight. It's a boulder that's just there. But if you pick it up, it has weight. So you pick up the information. You'll think, It's a flat tire. I have to figure out what to do. You don't have to pick it up. You don't have to be under its weight. You don't have to add the frustration, the anger, the impatience, the fear, the drive, the addiction, to wanting and being, and add the selfing.

Or this means that I'm a bad tire owner. I probably didn't service the tires well enough. And I'm sure that I, you know, all these things are ways of adding weight to the boulder that you see. So then back to the story for this morning. Two monks come to the river, a woman is in distress, needs to get across. She can't. One of the monks picks the woman up, carries her across, immediately puts her down. Six hours later, the other monk bursts out, blurts out,

You're a monk. You're not allowed to touch women. How could you have picked her up?

And the first monk says, then says to this complaining monk, I put down the woman at the river. You are still carrying her. Did you just notice all the silence? I didn't speak for a while. What happened to the words that I spoke? Where do those words go? Do these words have any weight? What happens to the words that I speak if you don't pick them up? If they're just words that are spoken and long after they're spoken, seconds after they're spoken? Are they living in you? Have you picked them up? Are you carrying them along?

What happens if, after each sentence, you put it down, or you think, What Gil is doing is ridiculous, or Who? This is a different approach to words and thoughts. Who? Or I don't understand. I don't understand what Gil is doing. Those are three examples of picking it up and carrying it along. What happens? And then if some of you are really troubled by what I say, like Gil needs to take lessons in public speaking at Toastmasters, they would never let him get away with saying two words, letting it hang, to make a point that words just can disappear. They have no weight, they have no substance, they arise, they pass.

You can snake po nose, or do for me confesto meda va hana. I shall pass nak and speak confesto. What do you do with those words? How do you pick those words up? Very different and is probably speaking if I speak in English. What are you doing in your mind? All this, who is responsible for your mind. As I speak, words come, they go every moment we cross the river, and you can put them down. Words have no weight unless you pick them up.

And what is it? What is what way do you pick up words, ideas, stories, events in your mind? So it becomes a burden, a weight. Carry the weight of the world on your shoulders, they say. Does the world have weight only if you pick it up? Turns out we don't have to pick up so much. So I hope this was evocative to kind of turn your mind to look at yourself in a different way and what goes on in there. And I hope it helps you to be more peaceful, more settled and more at ease as you go through. And we have wonderful minds, and to have them operate out of that ease so that it's weightless. The activities of the mind is one of the great delights that come from this practice. May your mental life, inner life, be weightless. Thank you.