

## **Dharmette: Insight (11) Introduction to Change and Impermanence**

**Gil Fronsdal**

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Hello everyone and welcome back to this series on Insight that is following the longer series on *samādhi*.

And so after a break for this last week, I want to pick up again and now do a series of talks on the first primary insight of insight meditation, which is insight into the experience of change, of inconstancy, of impermanence, and that things are constantly shifting and changing and arising and passing, appearing and dissolving and disappearing. That this is a really central aspect of human life. And becoming wise about the changing nature of life is something that a lot of wisdom traditions, maybe all wisdom traditions, emphasize. Heraclitus is the one who said, you can't step in the same river twice. But even more wisely, the rest of the quote goes, you cannot step in the same river twice because it's never the same river and never the same person stepping into it.

And so even you are changing, just as the river is constantly changing and shifting. We often have ideas about, that don't change with the changing nature of reality. We have ideas that things are going to be this way forever, and some things will never, they disappear, will never come back. But the art of, and the power of mindfulness practice is to appreciate that in our direct experience, what we're experiencing is constantly coming and going. Nothing stays the same in experience, in what we sense and feel, and the nature of all the different aspects of the human being that come together in the moment. We're always a change.

And to a great degree, the world is too. There's a Sufi story that I like, of a man who had a ring made, and he went to a Sufi master and said, can you inscribe something on this ring that whenever I look at it, I will be wise or will support me in my life. And so the master said, yes, please leave it here. And when the man returned in a week to pick up his inscribed ring, on it was written, this too will pass. This too will pass. And so Buddhism is not unique in emphasizing the changing nature of the world.

In fact, I've met people who I thought were more wise than many of the Buddhists I've known. People who have been in the middle of life's challenges, in the middle of all the changing nature of life and death, and change and war and peace and poverty and wealth, and just has been, people have been through it all. So much different things, that, and through it all, they haven't become bitter, they haven't become despondent, they haven't become afraid. Somehow or other, they've come to the point in their life where they understand in some deep way and wise way that everything is changing all the time and to expect change, not to be surprised by it. Certainly there can be sadness, certainly there can be grief, certainly there can be joy and celebration by what changes and comes along in our life. But to really appreciate so that there's a way maybe of stepping into the change, stepping with it, being with it, flowing with it, being in harmony with it, not fighting it unnecessarily.

Not pushing for change faster or not holding on to things so they don't change. These are not universal ways of being, but given how much things are always changing, there's a way of being wise about that and not foolish. There's a way of being in harmony with that rather than out of harmony with how things are always changing. In Zen Buddhism, a person who's a novice monk, a monk in training, is referred to in Japanese as an unsui. And the word unsui is made up of two characters, two words, cloud and water. It's pointing to the idea that someone in training in Zen should go through the monastic life like clouds and waters, fluid and flowing and moving around, not resisting anything, but somehow adjusting and reforming.

The cloud is constantly reshaping itself with what's there. And a water is constantly kind of going to the lowest point, always flowing around things and with things, and the lowest point being the point maybe of peace or freedom. That something inside of us is in the flow towards freedom from holding tight, freedom from being contracted, freedom from resisting tight, because those things are a lot of work. Those things involve a resistance. We don't have to accept things as they are. We don't have to necessarily accept everything that's changing.

Part of Buddhism is to appreciate how deeply things are changing, but they're not chaotic. And especially in our own direct experience for ourselves, what's moving and flowing and throwing us and what's growing in us. We're not internally chaotic. Right? Through Dharma practice, we slowly learn to come into a kind of inner harmony and to shape and develop so that the river that's flowing through us is a harmonious river. Or what's growing within us becomes beautiful and supportive and healthy.

There's a metaphor in Buddhism, of the river is often used by the Buddha. But one metaphor is the analogy is that high up in the mountains, when the river is still small and a creek or a

stream, and it's going over rapids and going over boulders, the river can be quite noisy. And when it's a waterfall, it's a big roar. But when the river finally gets big enough and comes down into the plains and is wide and big, the river becomes silent and it flows harmonious. So in our own life, as we begin Dharma practice, the Dharma is flowing through us kind more like a high in the mountains. And it's having to deal with boulders and rapids and waterfalls and blockages and things. Sometimes it's chaotic and sometimes it's, you know, waterfalls and rapids. Sometimes it's noisy and challenging. But we stay in the river. We stay in the practice.

And as we bring our kindness, we bring our clear attention, as we bring our *samādhi*, as we bring our goodwill, as we bring our non-attachment, all these things grow. As joy grows, as seeing things more clearly grows, as a sense of tranquility grows, equanimity grows. The sense of the Dharma River we are becomes stronger, bigger, and it begins flowing silently. It still flows, but it's a silent flow. And so we can go through this world as a powerful, peaceful, peaceful, flowing river that can meet anything that comes, anything that comes our ways, with wisdom, with compassion, with clarity, maybe with the skill and the ability to welcoming it into that peaceful river, welcoming it into the flow of love and care, friendship, that we change the world through the flow of love, the flow of peace, the flow of the river of caring for each other in this world. We're not a boulder. We're not the rocks that are tumbling in the river, banging against each other. We become the river. We welcome everything into the river. Maybe we're helping the ice boulders to dissolve. Yes.

So, this introduction then to the theme of impermanence, I wanted to emphasize that it's not a unique wisdom that Buddhism has. I think I'd like to propose that all wisdom traditions have contended with the same experience that we live in the world of change. Things are changing all the time. And that there's an ordinary, even everyday way that we can become wise about how things change, that doesn't require deep meditation, doesn't require deep insight. It just requires ordinary sight, that we see clearly, and we stop and reflect and contemplate all the change that we see here so that we can be in this world in a wise way. May it be that our exploration of impermanence, *anicca*, the Pāli word, may it be that it's a way of supporting this world to become more peaceful and caring. May we care for all beings without exception. Thank you.