

## Dharmette: Insight (12) Change Highlights Clinging

**Gil Fronsdal**

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Hello and welcome to this continuing series on the insights of Insight Meditation. The topic currently is the first insight, insight into *anicca*. *Anicca* is the Pāli word often translated as impermanence. But in fact, what it means is not constant. So, inconstancy, and the difference between those two English words is that impermanence is often interpreted that things will end, that things are not permanent because at some point they'll stop being there. Inconstancy, in contrast, means that things are constantly changing.

They come and they go. Days are not going to stop, but individual days stop, and then the day comes back. Daytime comes and goes. Meals come and go. Breathing comes and goes. Sleep comes and goes.

All kinds of things in our life come and go and come and go. Breathing comes and goes, comes and goes, comes and goes. The heart beats ongoingly, but each beat is an in-constant sensation, an in-constant event. A beat and it stops. A beat and it stops. So it turns out that if we don't impute permanence, if we don't get caught up in our thoughts and ideas, and have ideas, this is how it's always going to be, this is how it is, if we don't live in that world of concepts and ideas, it's much easier to experience how the present moment is always changing, always inconstant.

This fascinating difference between the world of conception, the world of ideas, the world of plans, the world of stories, versus the world of direct experience, is the difference between flowing down a river on a canoe, on a kayak, versus sitting on the side of the shore and fantasizing about what a good kayaker I am. I'm the best kayaker. I'm a great kayaker. I'll always be a good kayaker, or I'm a terrible kayaker. We lock in to an idea: this is how things are. And someone who's a good kayaker will have a day they're not. Someone who's a terrible kayaker can learn skill and become better.

We don't have to have a fixed idea of how things are. I've had fixed ideas of a friend. Maybe I felt hurt by someone who was angry, and I was holding on to that anger, seeing them through

the lens of what happened a week ago, not realizing that they had changed. Something dramatic, maybe very difficult, had happened in their life in the intervening days. I was still carrying my anger at this is how this person is. Then I found out that they had a terrible loss. As soon as I hear that, the view I had before falls away and I'm ready to see them now as they actually are.

I've seen people through the lens of my desires, where that desire was holding a fixed idea of who that person was. Then have those desires kind of soften, relax, or disappear as the lens of perception. I discovered that people are very different than the thought I had of how I, the kind of desires or wishes I had for them. Over and over and over again, we can lock in to this is how things are, this is our interpretation, that gives a kind of permanence, a kind of constancy, a kind of solidity to something that's inherently not solid. It's always shifting and changing. Our friends are always different from moment to moment, minute to minute, day to day.

Our strangers are often different than how we project ideas onto them. Bias, prejudice, all kinds of things that we do are ways in which we solidify around ideas. People spend a lot of time ruminating, thinking about themselves over and over again constantly, tend to build up and create fixed ideas of themselves, often that are debilitating, that can cause depression or anxiety or shame or all kinds of things. This idea of fixating on ideas of self causes a lot of suffering. What we're learning to do in mindfulness practice is to recognize the difference between being locked in to ideas that give a sense of constancy, even permanence, the idea that I'll always be this way, versus how things are in a direct experience at a level that's deeper or more immediate than the ideas, the attachments we have. Generally, attachments, clinging we have when we grasp onto something, lends a sense of permanence at least to the idea that we're grasping onto.

This is what I need. This is how it is. This is what's going on. In doing that, we're stepping out of the direct flowing experience in the present moment of things always changing, always changing. So as we sit in mindfulness meditation and settle in—especially, you know, these talks are following the long series on *samādhi*—as we develop *samādhi* and stability and centeredness and really find ourselves to be able to rest here in the present moment in the direct experience, not an easy thing to do. That's why *samādhi* is really helpful to develop that capacity to be really right here.

Part of the value of that is then to be able to rest in the changing river of sensations, experience, thoughts, feelings, how it's all shifting and changing much faster than our interpretations, our ideas of things allow or admit or see. This is a very important insight because what

it allows is it begins to show us the cost of attachment. It begins to show us how some of our suffering is born from some kind of attitude, some kind of orientation towards permanence. This is how things are. This is how things need to be. Some kind of permanence around holding on to an idea.

Holding onto a memory, holding onto a plan or dream about the future, that we're locked into something. Even if it's a fantasy we're locked into, and that fantasy is, you know, that we're a fantasy of we're kayaking or doing something wonderful, there's something about being locked in that begins to create a kind of sense of permanence in the knowing, in the knower, in the one who is engaged. Any kind of clinging, any kind of attachment is a form of stress that gives us the wrong impression about what this world and life is about. It gives us a semblance of a fixed sense of self, a fixed idea of desires, a fixed idea of the tension or pressure, that stress is kind of something that's always built into reality, into society that we have to just go along with. Many people don't see how attached they are, how much they're clinging, how much they've tightened up around ideas, beliefs, stories about themselves, interpretations, judgments. The vantage point that seeing impermanence, seeing the changing nature, the constant nature of direct experience, is it highlights how we get caught.

It highlights how we're attached. It almost doesn't matter what we're attached to. We start seeing the cost. We see the tension. We see the stress of holding on. That's a consequence of having, of no longer being in the flow, no longer being in that river of change, that things are always flowing and moving.

So that part of the insight, of insight meditation, is the insight into how we suffer, how we cling, how we've lost touch of something very immediate and nice here, which we don't necessarily think of as nice, because the allure of thoughts, the allure of promise of doing things, getting through our to-do list, fantasizing, planning, being caught up in the world of activity can seem more promising, more valuable than the simple simplicity of being, the simplicity of joy, of happiness, contentment, of just being here. As we start settling into the inconstant nature of breathing, the flow of experience, we start to see how we leave that for solidity, we leave that for attachment. That is invaluable to see. This is the beginning of a real wisdom in Buddhism, a real ability to be your own teacher, to see what you're doing, to see what is healthy for you to do, and what is unhealthy. The opportunity is to be able to drop into this world of direct experience so that, in a deep way, our understanding, our understandings, our insight, our attitudes, our motivations, our way of living in the world arises from someplace deep inside that is quite capable of living in a rich, even sophisticated way in this world without any attachments at all.

We can take care of ourselves, we can be creative, we can be living with the conditions of the world, responding from a deep place inside that's part and parcel of this river of change that we are. Just like a skilled kayaker, he's completely wisely, knowledgeably aware of the river, the rapids, the currents, all the ways in which to paddle and to shift the weight. There's a tremendous amount that goes into being a kayaker, but it all exists and flows from this deeper place of constant change and being part of that change in a sophisticated way. As soon as the person gets locked in through these ideas, they lose touch with the kayaking. They might even lose touch with the shifting nature of the river, and they can, you know, end up in trouble. We stay safe, safer in the river of life if we don't get attached.

Part of the function of this deep insight into inconstancy is to see how we get caught. So as you go through your day-to-day, start noticing how you get caught. Notice the cost of being caught. Notice what you lose touch with. Notice how often it happens. Then maybe at the end of the day, or some point in the day, if there's a friend that you can talk about such things, maybe a Dharma friend you can call, maybe talk about what you're learning about the difference between being in the present moment in a full way and losing that in some way through being caught in ideas, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, bias.

Become wise. How about attachment? And you'll become a much better kayaker in this world that we live in. Thank you.