

## Dharmette: Insight (14) Flowing or Selfing

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So hello from Insight Meditation Center here in Redwood City. Happy to continue this series on the topic of insight, the insight of insight meditation. And currently the topic is the insight into inconstancy, the insight into change. And it's not a difficult insight. Maybe it's almost too obvious that things change and that things are not the same. But still, we get caught in permanence.

We get caught in that kind of believing this is the way it is. And to come to freedom in Buddhism, a kind of a deep inner freedom, we're supported by staying close to or recognizing in a deep way, or to say differently, not in a continuous way, how continuously things are changing. And it's almost as if, or it is like, that if we see change, we realize deeply we can't cling to anything. Because as soon as we cling, it's like clinging to the current of a river. You put your hand into that current. You're going to grab that current, grab that water, hold on tight, and you come up empty-handed.

It might be a few drops of water on your hand, but the current is not amenable to being grabbed, and the water just goes out your hands. But some people are constantly grabbing, grabbing, grabbing, or they're grabbing within the current, thinking they have it. And so to begin seeing and feeling the distinction between being in the flow of change and somehow being separated from it or trying to hold on to something. And one of those things, concepts, ideas, that takes us out, really far out of the flow of the river, of the present moment, is ideas, concepts, attachments to self. Independent of whether there is a self or not a self, in a practical way, we can get attached to self. We can hold on to the self.

And it becomes a trap that takes us out of staying in the changing flow of the present moment, in the fluidity of the present, staying fluid and moving with it. And knowing how to be safe, knowing how to find a peace in the current of the river. And so I've gone rafting, and one of

the ways to get trapped, to get caught a little bit, sometimes rafting, is to get pulled into the eddies, usually on the side of the river. And the eddy is a place where the current of water flowing somehow gets pushed off maybe the bottom or usually the sides of the river in such a way that part of the current flows backwards and upriver, to be then pushed down again, and it can go in a circle. A little bit like a whirlpool, but the water is not being pulled down. So it's just kind of moving around in a circle.

And the raft can get stuck there. Some eddies can be quite strong, and some are somewhat large. And you're kind of stuck in there. Every time you try to come out of the eddy, you come into where the current is most strongly going to push you down back into it, and around and around. And so the preoccupation with self is an eddy. It has a gravitational force that pulls us into it.

So if I have this idea that I'm a bad meditator or a good meditator, that's an abstract idea. But it's an abstract idea about me. I am something. And anything about me is interesting. Anything about me that's praise or blame is even more interesting. And so there's a pull into that world.

There's emotions and feelings that are produced by it. There's concerns and anxiety produced by those thoughts. There's ways, and they get pulled into that eddy. And even if we try to come out of it, the force pulls us back in and we circle and circle. And the river is just a few feet away. It keeps flowing. Constantly the water is flowing and flowing. But now we're stuck in this eddy going around and around. And when we try to get out of it, towards the edge of it, it can feel, it gets harder and harder to kind of pull up, because there the current, the force of the eddy is strongest. But if we can get free of the eddy, then there's the freedom, the delight of now being in the flow of the current of the river, being carried by it nicely.

And then not a lot of rowing is needed or paddling is needed because now we're kind of in the flow, we just have to stay in it. And we might, from the point of view of being in the current, come close to an eddy, but we can see it and we keep ourselves away from it. We know the danger there. So there's a lot of way that selfing is one of those concepts that we get caught in permanence, get caught in this is how things are. And when it really caught in it, then we've actually disconnected to the simplicity of life, the current kind of flow and unfolding of life. And it can be quite intense, the entities we go into, where the ideas of self, the self-concepts we caught in, are not just simple ideas like I'm a good meditator, I'm a bad meditator.

But it gets pulled into the world of fantasize, imagination, story making. Maybe I start imagining that I'm going to go off to some beautiful, natural place. That's what it's going to take for me to be a good meditator, where there's peace and serenity, and I imagine the bird singing,

and how there'll be people coming and delivering wonderful drinks to me, smoothies, and it'll just be kind of so comfortable, the temperature, and I'm lost in a fantasy. This fantasy that's centered on me, myself, and mine, that's more and more disconnected. What's sad is when those fantasies are negative in nature, I'm a bad meditator, and therefore everyone will hate me, and I can't go to meditation centers because I go to a meditation center and meditate on other people. They're going to see that I'm a bad meditator, and they'll want to reject me, or they'll laugh at me.

And we start imagining all these things actually happening. And the imagination affects our emotions almost as strongly as if it's really happening. And we're caught in that eddy, and it's hard to get out of it. But if we know, if we have some deep understanding, deep insight, deep ability to connect to the flow of the present moment, the changing nature, everything is inconstant, everything is changing, including our thoughts and emotions, so we don't get caught in it. So we're not in the eddy, but we're in the current that flows downriver. We just stay in there being carried along. Then we're less likely to be tricked, fooled by these concepts of self. We're able to better see that concept selves are a little bit like, or very much like, grabbing onto something and holding on. And sometimes it's not like an eddy, but you can't actually hang onto it, but you can get caught in this flow. Sometimes what keeps us caught is that we're still tied to the pier, or the anchor has been pulled up, and the self is that strong, that solid.

And it isn't that we have to deny that there is a self at this point in practice. There's never any denial. But we see that more and more how concepts, ideas of self are pulling us away from being fluid, being in the flow, being somehow adaptable or somehow kind of appreciating the lived life of the present moment as it unfolds and changes and shifts in the present moment. And at first, this present moment simplicity of being can seem boring, too simple. It's much less sophisticated than the elaborate thoughts, fantasies, ideas about self and what I'm doing for myself and what I'll accomplish and what I'll prove and how great I'll be. But over time, we began realizing that the eddy of self is kind of very, it's itself very impoverished, very limiting.

And that the three-dimensional, the multidimensional richness of human life has so much there in the simplicity of being. Because it's in the simplicity of being that we have, we can connect to the deep sensitivities of the deep sensitivities of the heart, of our inner life, to ourselves, to others, that that's where something comes alive that is freeing, that is satisfying, that's wise and caring. So part of the emphasis on the insight into inconstancy and change is to help us support us from being caught in the eddies of self. So as you go through your

day today, you might look at this, you might consider, you might try to notice when you get involved in the swirl of thoughts, ideas, stories that are centered on me, myself, and mine. Somehow you're the prime character in your thoughts and ideas or your emotions are the primary fuel for thinking about other people even. Right? And how it takes you out of something.

It disconnects you to something that if you were connected to, would actually give you a much better ability to be wise, to be present, and to be caring for the whole world.

So may your simplicity of being be a gift you give to this world. Thank you.