

Dharmette: Insight (17) The Emptiness in Impermanence

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So hello and welcome. And welcome to this continued series on Insight for Insight Meditation. I think now we're on the 17th talk on this topic. Okay. Continuing with the sub-theme of insight into impermanence, inconstancy, change, as this is one of the most important insights that this tradition offers. The other three important insights that are really the transformational insights come out of insight into change.

So the insight into inconstancy, insight into stress and suffering, and the third one, the insight into what's called not-self. We'll go through these three as I teach these 7 a.m. through the summer, through next while. Right now I just want to keep focusing on this impermanence because it's so foundational. In this Theravādan tradition, there are teachings on emptiness. The primary way of understanding emptiness is that it's synonymous with the concept of *anicca*, impermanence, change, inconstancy.

Anything that's constantly shifting and changing has no inherent solidity, no inherent thing, thingness there that lasts over time. As I keep liking to refer to, it's like a river that's flowing that you can't find a solid place in the water that's unshifting, unchanging. It's always dynamic. It's always in flow, moving. Unless it becomes ice. But the river is not, you know, ice. The river is the flow and the flow.

So we would say in Theravādan Buddhism that the river is emptiness of any inherent solid place that makes the river what it is. What makes up the river is the flowing, changing molecules of water. As we settle into meditation and below the level where we're going to argue or have concepts or have ideas of how things should be or how things are, but we are settling the thinking mind, the analytical mind, the constructing mind gets quieter and quieter. So we're now living with awareness in meditation, in the direct experience, the experience of the moment. This is why *samādhi* is so important for insight practice, because

samādhī is what allows us to be centered in the direct moment-to-moment experience, as opposed to being away from it because of these concepts, thoughts, ideas we have.

Some way of thinking can give the idea that something is permanent. There are two reasons for that. One is that ideas are unchanging, you know, like the idea of a door. The door that's there, the door doesn't change. So the door is unchanging. But the experience of the door is changing all the time. I'm looking at it, I'm not looking at it, I close my eyes, I don't see the door.

The idea that it's still there, that's just an idea. In direct experience, if I'm looking at the door, the awareness of it is shifting and changing. So in the direct experience, the door doesn't change, but the way I'm constantly being perceived, the perception is shifting and changing and moving all the time. If we now turn that kind of attention not to a door, but to anything that we feel inside is essence of who we are, this is my M-ness. This is I am this. I am whatever you fill in the blank.

If that is something that feels permanent, feels unchanging, like we have in it, you know, then if we really turn that movement of direct experience, experiencing directly what's actually there, apart from the thoughts and ideas, we see that there's nothing there but these thoughts and ideas. Any sense of solidity that's there or permanence that's there begins to dissolve. It's like pieces of ice in the river that then melt and fall away and become part of the flow and changing nature of the river. It's profoundly satisfying to be able to sit in meditation, get quiet enough to perceive that everything is, nothing is solid. Everything now has become spacious, open. Everything has become easeful, still, quiet.

In that spacious, quiet, there's experiences for sure. There's perceptions for sure. But those are constantly kind of flowing and moving. Sometimes they can be experiences happening quickly. Sometimes in a very quiet, peaceful manner, things are just coming into awareness and receding and arising and passing, appearing and disappearing. Because the mind is gathered in the moment, it's not distracted and not spinning out, it's not pulling back and judging and reacting and having preferences. It's just right there in it.

There's something that gets very peaceful and very happy to just be there in that flow and that, and that, and that the changing nature of phenomena, as I said yesterday, it becomes kind of the organizing center for this gathering of the mind into harmonious, centered kind of attention. It's an attention where now we see in the direct experience, everything is empty. Everything, nothing has any inherent self, inherent essence that's just unchanging, unmoving. The reason why this is so powerful is that the movement of clinging to something only gives the, only seems to work if it's there long enough to hold on to. So if I have a striker, I

can grab it because it's there long enough to grab. But if the striker is just constantly disappearing, then as I grab it, there's nothing to hold on to.

There's something in very deep meditation where we see that what the mind wants to cling to is only concepts and ideas, wishes, projections, and that in the deep sense of everything is empty, everything is changing. By the time the mind goes to grab onto something, it's no longer there. Before that, it's the very sense of grabbing, where we think we're grabbing something, but it's that grabbing gives a sense of solidity, because it gets tight, it gets like a fist or a knot or something. Then it seems like, yes, something is solid there. But if we open the fist like this, what happens to the fist? The fist is not there. It's just now there's just openness.

So the opportunity for deeper meditation, just like in deeper *jhāna* practice and deep *samādhi*, and we talked about earlier this year, we enter into kind of a, we enter into and abide in a very different kind of world than the world we ordinarily live in, going around, taking care of things. Right. So there needs to be a willingness to drop the ordinary perceptions, the ordinary way of thinking, in order to really become quiet and still enough to be able to sense, feel into the empty nature of direct experience and find the freedom in there, find the delight in there, find the deep sense of being at home that can't be there if we're holding on to something like this. Like this is how we want to be. Open-handed, open, relaxed, at peace.

The important point I'm trying to make here is that as insight meditation develops, what we're entering into and abiding in is direct experience, direct perception of experience, where the experience and the perception itself is seen as a flowing river, the river of now that every experience is shifting and changing. If we look deeply at that and find any place that's not flowing, any place that's gotten solid and holding on, gotten frozen, if we look at that kindly and gently, it too will dissolve into that flow of change. Everything becomes change. Everything is shifting and changing. There we find change. The fist of attachment, the holding on that we have begins to loosen up, begins to relax.

The function of this deep experience of inconstancy as an insight, the deep revelation of seeing things constantly change is not to live with this kind of insight all the time. The purpose of it is how it helps to melt the attachments we have, how it helps us to soften and let go. So we get a very deep personal experience of what it's like to not be attached. In this insight tradition that I'm teaching from here, they say that in settling into, opening into this deep experience of constant change in meditation and feeling the freedom of it, this gives a person a pre-taste of what liberation will be like, the ultimate liberation. It's a kind of getting a kind

of a sense or a smell of what's possible in terms of a dramatic shift of letting go. That is the purpose of this insight practice.

So I hope that this makes sense for you. Probably tomorrow we'll do one more day on this impermanence insight and then start moving into the, maybe the little more challenging ones that are very important also for this insight tradition. So thank you very much and look forward to tomorrow.