

The Dharma is Like a Raft

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So good morning, everyone. So sweet to see everybody and familiar faces and new faces. And a special welcome to people who are at IMC for the first time, or possibly participating in a Sati Center program for the first time. This is a Sati Center program offered at IMC. And some of you may have come to this by way of the Sati Center page or some connection with the Sati Center and others through IMC. So just to say if you're familiar with the Sati Center but not IMC, well, welcome and familiarize yourself with the things that you can find out about IMC offerings here.

If it's news to you that a Sati Center exists, well, you can check out the Sati Center website, sati.org, S-A-T-I, thank you, dot ORG, and see the offerings there. The Sati Center tends to offer things that are more related to study and IMC, without, you know, over-generalizing, more practice-oriented programs. In our work together, the four of us like to bring study and practice together, and that's what we'll be doing today. We've chosen to look at water similes in the Pāli Canon and selected suttas. Selected similes in selected suttas or discourses. And there are a wealth of water similes in the suttas, and we are just going to focus on four because there's four of us, but also just because four is probably enough for one day's exploration.

We say in the description that we want to look to these similes and to generally the landscape of water as a powerful support for meditation and daily practice. Maybe that's sort of a way to, I like that. We say landscape, maybe I should say waterscape, but a way of thinking about these similes as they appear and as we kind of move through them as a way to enrich our practice, deepen our practice. These are four similes that kind of spoke to the four of us individually and as a team. We realized, I don't know if it was before the fact or after the fact, that we've sort of arranged them. I think it wasn't really purposeful, but it just happened this way, that we've arranged them in something like an arc or a progression.

We begin with a couple explorations of similes in which water, maybe not so much water as a physical thing, but the way water works in the world, to put it that way, can be seen as a reference to sort of water as a flood, as a movement of unwholesome mind states that we seek to cross over or somehow work within, live within, practice within. By the time we get to the afternoon, we start to move into similes that look to water as a way to help us understand how practice works, how when we cultivate wholesome mind states, we can see that our practice develops in the way that other characteristics of water work. So that's about all I say before I'm going to pass it on to Diana. A couple words about logistics. First of all, just the kind of setup for the day. We have schedules posted around, but to put it in this form, we sort of think of, we're kind of going to have four distinct sections broken by lunch in between the first two and the second two.

And in each of those, we'll have some words, we'll have some talk about similes, we'll have some sitting and or walking meditation, we'll have some Q&A toward the end of lunch or before lunch and then toward the end of the day so that we can bring your voices into the room and sort of broaden the conversation. You may have noticed that one of the bathrooms is not in working order, so there are two additional ones. We promised to have cooling ice water available all day. We tried, Jung and I, to make the ice maker run overnight, and we will have cooling ice water as long as the ice is still there in the water, and it'll be cool all day. At any rate, there will be water. Anything else, friends, to... I was thinking that maybe we could say hi, like Ying and Kim to say good morning.

Yeah, welcome. Good morning, everyone, and just delighted to be able to do this with you all today. Yeah. And welcome from me also. Is this on? Yes. My name's Kim Allen and I'm so delighted to be teaching with my three friends. We've done a lot of Sati Center classes together and each one has a way of flowing nicely. So I think that's the water connection. And I'm Diana Clark.

And the memory I have of how we chose these water similes was that each one of us said, oh yeah, and then there's this one about that. Oh, and then there's this other one about that. And so we all kind of said, oh, I want to do this one. What do you think we do that one? So there's something that when the four of us get together and we're talking about study and practice, I feel like we kind of come together. We each bring something and yet we land on something that works together. And it turns out to be really fun. And it's enriching. And so we're hoping to share that with you today, kind of the fun that and maybe some of the poignancy or depth as well as the playfulness. I don't know, this whole wide range of water and the similes.

So I'm going to start just maybe with this question. If you're a meditator, chances are you have an answer to this question. Have you ever noticed how, even with the best intentions to stay present and to stay with what's actually happening, when you sit down to meditate, you can be completely swept away with something that's a train of thoughts? Maybe there's a mood that you kind of get lost in, or maybe there's this judgment about somebody else, about you, about an institution that's kind of going around and around in the mind. Or maybe there's this wish, like, oh, as soon as I get finished with this meditation, then I'm going to go to Starbucks down the street or whatever it might be, whatever it might be. There's this way in which even though we might intend to be present, we can feel swept away.

We can feel like there's this momentum of movement that doesn't support being present. And the Buddha talked about this. For me, I feel very encouraged about this. That thousands of years ago, they were talking about the same thing that we're experiencing today, very often. And he used this word in Pāli, *ogha*, flood. These floods. Flood. Just the way that the water just comes and kind of just, doesn't matter what's in front of it, it's going to cover it up. I mean, we see this in America today. And then certainly in the time of the Buddha, he was living in the Gangetic Plain where it was the natural rhythm of the seasons. There would be floods. And of course, you couldn't get necessarily from one side to the other at that time, easily when there was floods. Yes.

So the Buddha, he pointed to four major floods. So in this way I'm using water as something that just carries us away. And he talked about sensuality. I'm going to simplify this. There's ways that we could really flesh this out. But to all simplify this, one of the floods is sensuality, this craving for more comfort. Why isn't the temperature just right? Right. Why didn't this start a little bit later so I could have sleep longer or something like this, right? This craving for more comfort, for example.

This flood of what we call becoming... So that is maybe this chasing an identity. I want to make sure everybody sees me a particular way as a nice person, as a good meditator, as whatever it might be. Or becoming could also be where we're projecting into the future. That's how we want to be perceived or what we want about ourselves in the future. Third flood is views. And this is like grasping onto opinions. I'm right, you're wrong. This is how things are. Us versus them, we have the right views. Those people over there have the wrong views. And the fourth one is ignorance, which we could just say is not seeing clearly. It's not seeing the full picture, but instead what we're seeing being filtered through our own experience or our own views or So that's kind of a really high level, these four floods, sensuality, becoming, views, and ignorance.

You don't need to remember this list. These are just natural human responses or experiences, maybe I should say, that the mind gets caught and there's this momentum and we kind of gets pushed, pushed around. So there's this way in which... We can work with this. Of course we can. We can work with these floods that visit us. And we could say that the Buddha, he gives a simile specifically about how to do this. He says it's the *dhamma* is a raft to cross the floods. So we could unpack this. What does *dhamma* mean? What is a raft? I talked a little bit about what the floods are. But I'd like to read a little bit of this sutta quote, and later there'll be a handout with this sutta quote if you're interested. You don't need to be interested. You don't have to memorize this or anything like this.

So the Buddha is speaking to his monastics, and he says, I shall show you how the *dhamma* is similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping. Listen and attend closely to what I say. And they say, yes, venerable sir. And then he says, suppose a person in the course of a journey saw a great expanse of water. We could understand this as flood. This something that this water that's moving that is in between or that's in front of you. It's in between where you want to go. Suppose a person in the course of a journey saw a great expanse of water whose near shore was dangerous and fearful. So where you're standing is dangerous and fearful, dubious and perilous are some other translations. So where you're standing, it's not a problem that there's a flood if where you're standing is fantastic. You just keep on standing there. But it's recognizing like, oh yeah, even this isn't so... There's suffering here. There's difficulties here. And what's this flood that I want to get across is a barrier to where I want to go.

Suppose a person in the course of a journey saw a great expanse of water whose near shore was dangerous and fearful and whose further shore was safe and free from fear. But there was no ferry boat or bridge or going to the far shore. So there's no easy way to get to the other side. It'd be great, you know, like you just call Uber or something like this or if there's like a water taxi equivalent of that. And then they thought this person who finds themselves on the shore, suppose I collect grass, twigs, branches and leaves and bind them together into a raft. And supported by the raft and making an effort with my hands and feet, I got safely across to the far shore. So there isn't an easy way, some prefabricated made way to get across, but, oh, why don't I just work with what I can find here on the shore? Twigs, grass, leaves, branches, bind them together and make a raft. So to work with what's here right now on this shore is as a way to find a way across the floods, the difficulties, to the far shore where there's peace, ease, and freedom.

And then the person collected grass twigs, branches, and leaves, and bound them together

into a raft. And supported by the raft, and making an effort with their hands and feet, they got safely across to the far shore. First, they make a raft, and they're And then they still have to do some effort to get across. I appreciate this, you know, with the hands and feet. This is what we have in our life to, you know, make effort or to go a particular direction. So it's not like you get on this raft and then just allow yourself to be swept away. To make the raft. And then there's some sense of directionality, intentionality, and some effort. How do I use what I created to help get across to the other side?

Then, when they had got across and had arrived at the far shore, they might think thus, this raft has been very helpful to me. Since supported by it and making an effort, I got across to the far shore. Suppose I were to hoist it on my head or load it on my shoulder and then go wherever I want. This idea of like, oh, the raft was helpful. Now I'm going to carry it everywhere I go. Even if I'm going to be on land or in a desert or whatever, still carrying this raft. Okay, of course we don't do that. It doesn't make sense. And then the Buddha, he asks his monastics, so what do you think? By doing so, would that person be doing what should be done with that raft? No, venerable sir. And then the Buddha continues, when that person got across and arrived at the far shore, they might think it's been very helpful for me. Suppose I were to haul it onto dry land or set it adrift in the water and then go wherever I want, letting go, even of something that's been useful and helpful, even something that you took a lot of time to build and create, even something that you thought for sure was going to be the answer to everything and was tremendously supportive.

So the Buddha says, so I have shown you how the *dhamma* is similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping. When you know the *dhamma* to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even the teachings or the *dhamma*, how much more so things contrary to the *dhamma*. It's pointing away from dogmatism, fundamentalism, pointing away from this flood. So I talked about like some of the views, we're right, you are wrong. This is a way in which we're grasping like, okay, we know the truth and nobody else does. Or holding on to this idea, okay, as long as I keep on doing, making rafts, then finally I will be a person who has peace and ease and freedom. Or maybe we'll, maybe I'm stretching this analogy a little bit too far. Maybe we feel like the rafts can only be made a certain way. You have to do the left-handed, goes around the post, the rabbit goes down the hole, these types of knots, you know, something. There's this way in which we can get stuck in some of the particulars of holding on to what this raft is made out of or what it looks like and So the water, the water can be a flood which has this momentum, which feels like it's going to sweep us away, which are perfectly natural human responses. I don't want to say that we're bad people or

anything like this when we are having these experiences. And then the Buddha taught that the *dhmma* is a raft that can help us cross over to where there's more peace, ease, freedom. Yeah.

And you might say, well, what is this *dhmma* you're talking about? In the moment here, I'm going to do a guided meditation. And there's a number of ways we can understand this idea of *dhmma*. There's a lot of ways we can. But for the purpose of this meditation this morning, I'm going to say that *dhmma* is about practice, about our meeting, our life, meeting our experiences, gathering the branches, the leaves, the twigs, things that are happening right here, right now, and just being present for them as best we can, without the resistance or the shoving away or avoidance or these types of things that we so often like to do. So the *dhmma* is mindfulness as best we can. But this open-heartedness with some warmth, some care, with some respect for our experience. So I'll talk about this a little bit in the guided meditation.

So we're going to do a guided meditation that'll be, I think it's 40, about, yeah, 40 minutes. So you guys have already been sitting for about 20 minutes. If you'd like, we can stand up a little bit. Otherwise, that might be an hour, might be uncomfortable for some of you. And some of you that are sitting up there, if you want to come in closer, you're welcome to do so. Or if you're sitting on the floor and want to come and sit up here, so you don't behind all the chairs, you're welcome to do that. Just moving the body a little bit just so that it'll be a little more comfortable to sit.

So taking a meditation posture, a posture that expresses your intention to meditate. It has some uprightness, but also some ease. In some way it's a dignified posture, but not stiff. Feeling the contact of the sitting surface against the body. This might be the back against the back of the chair. The backside, the seat. Feeling the pressure against the body. The back of the legs. and the feet, feeling the feet connected to the ground. Can you feel grounded, connected, supported by the sitting surface?

We'll do a light body scan, allowing any areas of tension to soften. Noticing if there is tightness around the eyes or jaw. Common places we hold tension. The neck. Sometimes it can be helpful to push the chin straight back so that the ears are over the shoulders. This is a very small movement. It might not even be noticed by other people if they were to be watching you. Having the shoulders away from the ears. Can there be some softness or opening in the chest? So often we are guarding or armoring ourselves. Can we let that soften? And the belly, letting that relax and be soft also. And then resting attention on the sensations of breathing, tuning into the bodily experience as the body breathes, the sensations. We're not changing

the breath, we're just allowing it to be known. And when the mind wanders, as it's apt to do, Just very simply, gently begin again with the sensations of breathing.

Right now, there's nothing in particular that needs to be happening. Just be mindful of the sensations of breathing with an attitude of care and respect for our experience. And then... for the purpose of exploring this notion of floods. Can there be a gentle query? Is there a pull towards more comfort? This pull towards some pleasant experience? Maybe there is, maybe there isn't. There's nothing bad about this. It's very, very human, of course. Yes. Can you notice this pull might be very subtle? And just return to the breath, return to the sensations of breathing. This pull for what I'm calling more comfort, this pull for pleasant experiences, sometimes in our life is like a flood. Can we feel this pull without needing to act it out? Yeah. and just return to the sensations of breathing, which can be like the raft, helps take us over the flood of the pull of comfort, comfort-seeking, in a way that feels distracting. There's nothing wrong with seeking comfort, but there is a way in which you can have this momentum that can sweep us away, seeking this next pleasant experience.

And then, for the purpose of exploring this notion of floods, turn your attention to noticing if there are any patterns of thinking about the past or the future. Memories, plans, regrets. Just notice the pattern, not the content. We'll let the content take care of itself. Perhaps the mind is imagining who you'll become. It'll be the one who is prepared. Or who you were. I was the one who did that thing. And can you notice that that is just only a collection of thoughts? It's just a collection of thoughts. Becoming. A collection of thoughts related to becoming. A flood. And then... rest the attention on the sensations of breathing. We can use this being present with our experience as a raft to carry us over the flood. Again, these floods are natural human experiences. We don't have to make them wrong. They don't have to mean anything about us as meditators. We can just begin again with mindfulness of breathing.

And if it's already part of your practice... could expand to mindfulness of bodily sensations or mindfulness of sounds, whatever is compelling. But an encouragement to keep it simple. We build this raft one moment at a time, being present for each moment. So now we have time for some walking meditation.