

## Filling the Water Jug

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Okay, so this morning, Diana started out by framing our journey as crossing a flood using a raft. And in this image, the floods were the... the floods of the mind, the way it gets overwhelmed. We talked about the specific floods of sensuality and becoming and views and ignorance. But in kind of immediate terms, what we often get overwhelmed or flooded by are emotions or thought trains or body sensations that are surprising or strong. And just in general, we get overwhelmed by things that the mind grasps onto that tend to come from greed, hatred, and delusion in the mind. And then Yang offered some teachings about how we actually go about crossing this flood, because how we do it matters.

Actually, it's not so effective to just... throw ourselves into the water with this goal-oriented, you know, I'm going to get across and beat this thing down. You know, that would be the kind of hurrying and pushing forward that leads to agitation or other ways of, you know, bumping up against these issues in the mind. But we also don't want to be standing still or tarrying, as we said, the mind can cause a way of sinking or not engaging, and we can't get across if we don't engage with what's happening in our experience. So there's somehow a balance involved in how we do our practice. And we already see between just these first two images kind of a shift in how the water is being portrayed.

You know, at first it was this overwhelm. And that's a very real thing, right? And as Diana mentioned, the Gangesitic plane has these cycles that just involve flooding. That's what happens. And there are other images of floods, sometimes dramatic ones, of beings who are not paying attention will get overwhelmed in the mind. And like the way a sleeping village would get overwhelmed by a flood.

And we'll acknowledge that here, right here in the US, right, we have issues with flooding. So this is a real phenomenon and it's to be reckoned with. You know, it's not just an image

can be a real thing. But then if the flood is approached in the way that... Ying mentioned, an inward focus with a certain amount of balance to it, a kind of a trust of our moment-to-moment meeting of the flood, quote-unquote, the water, then it becomes something that's workable, something that's manageable, something where our practice is providing us with the tools to be in the water in a way that is actually feels okay. Like, all right, yeah, we're working with this. We're in it. We're in it. And that's what the process is.

So there's a little bit of a shift there, right, in how we see the water. So I want to continue that notion that there are different relationships to this water image. And that it continues to be rich as we practice. So once we're underway, once we're in the water, not hurrying and not tarrying as best we are able, we may need some encouragement to keep going, let's say, because we get in and then we say, where is the far shore? It looks pretty far. Or, you know, is this it? We just keep swimming as best we can.

So I'm here to give you the boring truth, remind us of the boring truth that this is a gradual process. And it's not really that we have a big bang moment of enlightenment after a short period of practice. Even if we put in a lot of effort, we're probably not going to have that big bang moment. I go, you know, I've got time this summer. You know, before I have to start things in the fall, I wonder if I could get enlightened before then. You know, that's kind of attitude. It tends to unfold more slowly.

So this is a quote from the *Majjhima Nikāya*. The Buddha said, Monks or practitioners, I do not say that final knowledge is achieved all at once. On the contrary, final knowledge is achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress. So it's kind of a long swim, not really a sprint. This is not the 50-meter fly.

So the Buddha then goes on in this particular text about the gradual process to say that the foundation for making this gradual progress is a quality called *saddhā*, which is often translated as faith, but not everybody likes that term. And it's not a literal, you know, that's not the best English word for it. It's more multifaceted. So we could say trust or confidence, something like that. There's some acknowledgement in this quality of *saddhā* that we don't actually know how long the path is or what we'll encounter along it necessarily. But in this quality, we are willing to keep swimming. Like, okay, based on the confidence in what little we do know, if you'd like. And what do we know? What do we know about practice as we go along?

So there's a foundation, the Buddha pointed toward a foundation, on teachings on ethics perhaps, or, you know, the wholesomeness of the mind in some way. So understanding that there's results of our actions, and generally speaking, we can say that wholesome or benefi-

cial actions bring about greater ease and peace and even happiness in the mind in general. Whereas unwholesome or unhelpful unskillful actions tend to bring about difficulties in some way or even pain or suffering, again in general I don't know if it's a hundred percent true or if it's possible to see that a hundred percent of the time. But I think that's probably less important than giving credence to it in a general way and deciding that if we were to live by the principle of trying to act in skillful ways, that would be a good way to live. That would be a satisfying way to structure our life. That I can go with.

You know, if I try my best to get from this moment to the next in a wholesome way, I actually don't have to know that much about the whole terrain of the path. I just know getting from this moment to the next in a wholesome way, that's better than not doing that. And piece by piece, step by step, that will unfold the path without my having to know the whole structure of it. So once we have that as a foundation, this orientation of the mind toward wholesomeness, helpfulness, skillfulness, we're in a good position to just keep moving across this flood. It'll add up. It'll add up to a path that goes in the right direction.

So I want to read now a verse from the *Dhammapada* that talks about this, gives a nice water image. It says, Think not lightly of goodness, saying it will not come back to me. The jug is filled with water falling drop by drop. The attentive one is filled with goodness, piled up bit by bit. So I find this image rather comforting.

Now notice that the water image has shifted rather than the water being something that's going to overwhelm our mind. It's something that we have to get across, that we have to deal with in some way, all these floods that we have. Now the water is a positive image of something that we're piling up, drop by drop, in a helpful way. Because the water image doesn't have to only be various unskillful tendencies of the mind. Water works just as well as an image of the flowing, helpful nature of what's going on in the mind. In that way, we have this idea or this image that each moment is a raft.

And Ying alluded to this in what she said, I want to now extend it and deepen it a bit, that each moment of mindfulness, each moment of patience, each moment of kindness or love, that is our raft from this moment to the next moment. And it is one drop in our jug that is building up bit by bit. So this way, in this image of water, we start to see that the wholesome mind is our ally in the journey. So yeah, I get that the mind still has its unwholesome tendencies. My mind still grasps onto things. It still gets irritated with things. Sometimes it's in a snarky mood.

But... I have a lot of confidence in seeing that clearly, in just being patient with it, in smilingly saying to it, wow, you're struggling right now, aren't you? And I know that each of those

offerings to my challenged mind is a drop of wholesome water in this bucket and that it's piling up bit by bit. So... We have this jug. Can we now imagine maybe our body and our mind as a vessel into which we can evoke various wholesome qualities? And mindfulness itself counts.

So even if we're just being aware of whatever is going on in this moment, that counts. Or better yet, if we have love, compassion, tranquility, ease, wow, great. Great. Each of those is a refreshing, nourishing drop of water, adding moisture to the dry, challenged heart. You see the shift, you feel the shift. It's beautiful.

And it might be that when the mind fills up its jug, which we can do in any given sit, any given day, we can feel the fullness of that jug at times, maybe it even begins to spill over. And at that point, the mind, that spilling over from the jug can become the headwaters of a stream. The headwaters of a stream that will flow all the way down to the ocean. And that's what David will talk about a little bit later. But for now, let's picture that jug slowly filling. Maybe we start out just with faith that this is happening. Kim said, there's a jug. I guess I'll try to believe that. Kim said that just being mindful of this anger and fear is good enough. I guess I'll try to believe that. Believe it.

But it can ripen into confidence, into patience, into a gentle effort, into a caring presence that's very much visceral in the body, like Ng pointed to. Can we feel a certain tenderness? In the body, mind, that is onward leading, that feels like drops or feels like the beginning of a flow of something helpful. So this can lead us to be content with the process rather than looking for a particular result. Who cares where the far shore is if we can be content to get from this moment to the next? So with that let's sit together.

Settling in, finding a posture for meditation, perhaps feeling again the echo of that movement we did just before. The flow through the center of the body. The shoulders are flowing, the hips are flowing, all connected in through the belly area. I feel like some balance, even though we're still now, can we carry a sense of balance? Connection throughout the body, softening. I'll invite a brief connection into different aspects of the body.

So seeing if we can awaken a connection in our head area, can you feel the eyes resting in the eye sockets, softening the jaw, gently loosening the thinking muscle in the head? The trick with the sit after lunch is not to allow too much, too much softening such that we fall asleep, but more of an enlivening as we feel into each aspect of the body. So maybe a brightening in the head down into the shoulder areas, a sense of filling the energy in to the shoulders, in the chest area, feeling the expansion of the chest on the in-breath and the way the body straightens as we breathe in, some energy comes into the spine on the in-breath. Very natural

that we feel an uplift down into the belly. We may sense some heaviness there, roundness, and just taking care with that. I'm letting the arms and the legs... sensing all the way down to the hands, all the way down to the feet, the fullness of the shape of the body.

And now tuning the attention into the sensations of breathing, the freshness of the air coming in, the softness of the air flowing out. We may sense the breath as a whole body process. It's not only the biological process, breath of the lungs, but an energetic flow and exchange inside and outside, an enlivening of the body and also the mind. In this simple natural flow of the breath in and out, we may begin to notice that each breath is unique. We can be alert to the uniqueness of each breath. There are little nuances of difference in how the air touches the nostrils, flows in through the nasal passages.

Some breaths extend into just the upper chest, some you can feel all the way to the belly, seeing if you can notice something different about the sensations of breath that you hadn't seen before. Yeah. Think not lightly of goodness, saying, it will not come back to me. The jug is filled with water, falling drop by drop. The attentive one is filled with goodness, piled up bit by bit. So content just to be with this breath and this breath, knowing that we are filling the jug, knowing that goodness is flowing.

As we continue to allow the breath energy to flow throughout the body, we may come to sense a certain richness of sensation. The mind can sense more nuance, subtlety. Sometimes we feel some lightness, of energy, a sense of fullness perhaps, the fullness and richness of the Dharma being shown through the breath and the energetic sensations in the body. So content just to be with the richness of experience, the fullness of this moment. So most moments on the path are not big bang moments. Most of them are just being with this experience as it is, as well as we can.

But one of the great discoveries on this path is that just doing that again and again, even sitting in with being with the breath, for example, there's a way that that opens up experience more and more. So that we see the freshness, the difference from moment to moment, much more than when we were trying to get somewhere, get past this moment. That's when the moments all seem like they're the same, they seem boring, they seem like I've done this same thing again and again. If you actually do it again and again and pay attention, it's amazingly varied and interesting, can be. I remember there was a time in my life when I was just at home for a while and was kind of on the same pattern of what I was doing much of the day. And so I had a walk that I did around the neighborhood five or six times a week and the same kind of route.

I don't know. I was just on that pattern. And I wasn't trying to do this, but one day, while tak-

ing that same walk and seeing the same fence and street and trees, I suddenly became alive and awake to all the microclimates along that route, which are little variations in pressure and temperature over distances of temperature. A few feet up to hundreds of feet, say. But I suddenly realized, oh, this section always gets a breeze, and so it's just a little cooler when I come around this corner. This section is protected from the prevailing winds based on the shape of the buildings, and it's always a little warmer, something like that.

I'm sure all of that was registering on my system all that time. But it never made it into awareness, really. And once I saw that, I couldn't unsee it. It was sweet. There's nothing very liberating about microclimates, but it was a beautiful discovery. And in the same way, this breath, this breath, this moment, can start to flower into more subtlety.

This is one of the enrichments of the path that we discover. We discover how beautiful and varied and sometimes surprising a human life can be. It's not always pleasant, I didn't say that, but it is varied. One of Gil's teachers said, just to be alive is enough. So moment by moment, we are the raft if we see it that way. So now we have a period of walking for 30 minutes and we'll see you here at 2.30.