

Flowing in the Dharma by Seeing in a New Way

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September 26, 2021

Keywords: vipassanā, samādhi, dependent arising, liberation, mindfulness, suffering, pain, Dharma stream, faith, disenchantment

Before in our furthest talk today, it's possible it could be as soon as in a couple of weeks. It depends whether we can put together the protocol that we would like to have to feel safe coming here, and we'll have more kind of care given to it than we were planning to during the summer. So on the next Sunday after this ten o'clock Dharma talk, the plan is to have a Community meeting for the MC community. One of the things we'll do is talk about that a little bit and describe the protocol. We'll start by some opening small. I'll probably open on Sunday, and maybe with twenty-five people coming, and now people who register ahead of time.

Then we'll see how that feels and how that goes. Maybe we'll slowly start to increase, and maybe have more programs. So that's for next week, a Community meeting. The Zoom link will be up, and I'll post it in What's New some days before. Also, I'll post it in the calendar for this event, for that event in the C calendar. Those are the two places you can get it in.

I'll probably post it also here on the chat, so that's a new tool. So if you're on YouTube, you can just maybe just jump over. When we open on Sundays, we'll still do the Sunday morning on YouTube. We were doing that before the pandemic, and will continue after. So to do *vipassanā*, the practice of clear seeing, is to see in a new way, and in a new way. That begins opening up all other possibilities for how we can grow and develop and unfold.

Our life can unfold. It's a marvellous thing to learn a new way, and then to give ourselves to that new way, and let that new way really develop and grow and change us from the inside out in a useful way. That's the way you know what the Buddhist path involves. Initially, the new way of seeing is learned. Initially, it may be even provisionally that we hear something, and then we try it out. Like, I've heard that there's a new way of seeing. I guess I kind of get a sense of it. I'll do my best and see how it is.

Over time, maybe we'll have evidence that this actually works really well. It's actually a very useful framework for living our lives, and so that it grows and grows. This growing of the momentum around a new way of seeing, new way of living, is a lot of analogies the Buddha gives that have analogies of movement. So a movement of a stream entering a stream and being carried by the stream, or water, rainwater falling on a hillside, on the mountainside, and then the drops roll down and become bigger drops. They flow into little creeklets, and those little creeklets flood into little pools, and the pools overflow with enough water, and they flow into little streams, and the streams keep flowing to larger ponds.

When they overflow, that flows further down into rivers, and the rivers flow into bigger lakes, and when they overflow, the water just keeps getting bigger and bigger and stronger and stronger, and keeps going downhill until eventually it makes its way all the way to the ocean. So they say of movement that we are entering into this movement of growth and development and flow. The rainwater analogy is fascinating because it has two different meanings. It points both to something growing in strength and capacity. It's also flowing down waters, following gravity rather than resisting gravity, following gravity in a natural way all the way to the ocean, where it doesn't have to flow anymore. It can come to a rest of sorts.

This new way of seeing that is encouraged is, one way of describing it is, a very simple mindfulness. It's very simple, ordinary seeing things in their own, in how they are, as they appear, as they exist in the moment, without, you know, as we do mindfulness practice, without reference to the past, to the future, and without reference to—and this is what's more difficult—without reference to the egoistic self. Not without reference to the ideas we build up around who we are and what we need and who we aren't, and the judgments we have about ourselves, the ways we undermine ourselves with negative self-talk, the way that we have delusions of grandeur about how wonderful we are, and we disallow experience just to be itself without any reference to itself. But we see it clearly. Now, this isn't necessarily how we're supposed to live our life the whole time. Past and future are valuable and enrich life as well.

But in meditation, that's not what we're trying to do. Meditation is trying to really discover something very radically new, and allow this stream inside of us to get bigger and flow, and to be carried along by it, the Dharma stream. So it does involve seeing in a new way. A fascinating way of presenting this is that it involves seeing our suffering in a new way. Some of you probably are tired of Buddhists always talking about suffering, this suffering, that, and maybe you even kind of tune out a little. As soon as you hear the word suffering, it's repeated so much.

What's fascinating is that the Pāli word for suffering, the literal meaning of it is not suffering. The literal meaning of it is pain. We often—and it's by kind of by interpretation or by application—it involves psychological pain and emotional pain that we would like to call suffering. But it's useful to think of it as pain. What happens if we see so-called suffering or the big sufferings of our life as pain rather than suffering? It begins to maybe take a little bit of mystery of self, of the ways in which self will invest in the self.

We get invested in the pain. We get interested in pain. We get infatuated with pain. We get all these ways we get involved with the pain. One of the ways we get involved in it is we overlay attachments and reactivity on top of whatever pain we're looking at, so that there might be emotional pain, there might be psychological pain, there might be physical pain, existential pain. All kinds of pains come along with being alive, and then we overlay our ideas on top of it.

It shouldn't be there. This means that I'm living life the wrong way, I'm doing something wrong, that I feel pain. I need to be the one who now gets rid of it, who this is happening to me. I'm the victim of it. There is the pain of loss, and then we refer that loss to all the ways in which I thought I was going to live my life and build up my wonderful life. It's not possible now. It's sad. It's you now that this happens.

But there can be a lot of extra investment of self—what it's in it for me, myself, and mine—which is separate from the pain of the loss. Now, it's the pain of losing a future, which is a little different that we imagined than just the particular loss we have. So grief sometimes gets quite complicated, what it involves. There can be an anguish over the pain because we add so much meaning to it and so much projections into the future. This is always going to be this way. It's always been this way. I'll never make it, never figure it out. This is too much for me, and no one's caring for me, no one's taking care of me. I feel so lonely in my dismay and my despair.

I don't want to belittle how difficult it is to human suffering. It's quite challenging. But I want to try to get across the idea that there are certain layers, an overlay, overlaying a certain degree of extra baggage on top of it. Our reactivity or commentary, and maybe that's just a veneer on top of it. Maybe it's not very much, but for some people it's actually not so, you know, that the overlay is actually the primary quality of what makes the pain suffering. So the suggestion is to see in a new way.

Maybe it's an outrageous suggestion—to see our suffering, whatever we have, whatever we call it, but you don't call it suffering, not call it grief, not call it anguish, not call it dismay or depression or anxiety and all these things that we now have got used to calling it. It's

valuable to see it that way. I'm not to continue. I don't want to diminish the importance of seeing clearly. But when we sit to meditate, it might be a time in our life when we can let it be very simple, and just see it as pain, and make it that simple. Seeing it just as pain might help us to begin relaxing the mental work activity of these overlays we put on top of it.

The way we build helps us build the story of me, myself, and mine, and we might start seeing that some of those layers lighten up. The pain is still there, but it's not as intense. It's not as debilitating. It has a whole different quality to it. So I'll give you a simple example. I don't want, again, I don't want to belittle how difficult life is, to give a simple example, which simply makes me be clear that what I learned was very powerful learning for me.

So that's why I like telling it. When I first started meditating, I was practicing Zen, where you weren't supposed to move during the forty minutes of meditation, but my body had not been conditioned to sit in this posture, and so my knees were on fire. They hurt a lot, but I wasn't supposed to move. So I had a lot of intense suffering around this. I felt self-pity. I felt fear. I felt upset. I was angry with myself. I was angry at others. I was feeling, "It's impossible, why me?" and, you know, very impatient, frustrated, all kinds of layers of things were happening.

Because I kept sitting this way, I slowly began to notice that there was a difference between experiencing the pain in and of itself and experiencing the pain with the self-pity and all the different aspects of it. If I had all this extra stuff—the self-pity, the impatience, the frustration—then it was, you know, intense psychological suffering, emotional suffering. But if I dropped the self-pity, the pain remained, but it didn't become as bad. If I had space, had breathing room, it eased up, and sometimes the pain would become quite manageable until I kind of forgot about putting aside the self-pity. It would come roaring back, and the new pain would get intense again. I saw over and over again how much overlay I put on it, and slowly began to kind of simplify and simplify, and not add all these layers on top.

That, to me, was incredibly inspiring. It gave birth to a kind of inspiration, a faith, a trust, a confidence that this was useful to shift how I saw the pain. So this radical idea from this talk today is, whenever you have suffering, and you're going to try to take a radical approach to it, like meditation, see what the shift is. If you stop calling it depression, anxiety, despair, grief, sadness—without any diminishing of it, without any disrespect for it, of what's happening for you—but simply shift the orientation to see it as a pain, and then breathe with that, and see if some of the layers that are extra and the baggage on it begins to settle. If you get inspired like I was by that, or have trust or confidence in it that gives birth, that's similar to what the Buddha said: that learning to see pain, suffering, in a new way through practice, through the eyes of *vipassanā*, clear seeing in this way, he said, that gives birth to faith, to confidence, a

kind of inspiration.

If then you don't just get inspired, but with that faith, that confidence, to—"Now I'm going to start practising this new way of seeing. I'm going to stabilize in it. I use it more, and really give myself to develop this new way of seeing." Then it's when the stream begins to flow. At first it might be just a trickling little stream up in the mountain. But if we want to get this stream to grow and develop, we have to practise it.

So then we start practising. We have this inspiration. If the inspiration can fuel the practice, confidence can fuel a practice, rather than continually falling back into the old patterns, that can give rise to gladness, to delight, that we have a practice. "Well, this is cool. I didn't know that I could live this new way. It's hard. It's challenging. I doubt it at times. But there are times when it's really great and I think I am on a path."

The Buddha said that once that faith is there and we continue to practice—without the practice, probably nothing will happen—then with the practice, then there comes a delight, a gladness, or a satisfaction, or a feeling: "This is right." As that practice continues, and you start getting more evidence that this works, as we get into the flow of the stream of practice, and it becomes, we are feeling the stream getting bigger, and the stream starts to have a little more momentum, and initially seems like we're doing the work. But with time, it just seems like, "Ah, now it's the practice is doing me, and kind of flowing along here," and that being involved and being really engaged, having been able to put aside a lot of the distracted mind, and the undistracted mind is really into doing this practice, seeing in a new way. There is a kind of physiological delight, joy that comes. The Buddha said that if we keep practising with delight, from the delight there grows a joy.

As we keep practising, and settle into this, and really start feeling, begin the fruit of this is really works, this is good. The practice begins kind of growing. The stream gets a stream, and lands into a large lake that's calm and very tranquil, and tranquillity sets in, like a certain ease, certain like, "I have something here that really works." I'm not to be so agitated or so anxious anymore because I have this practice. The practice really helps me to see in a new way. I can't always do it, but just knowing I have the practice can make us less agitated as we keep practising, and that tranquillity fills up.

It goes over the banks and it creates a different river that's a smoother member of its big rivers get bigger and come down off the mountain into the rivers and the plains. The big rivers can be very quiet, whereas in the mountains it's quite noisy, rapids and boulders over. So it gets quiet and becomes something called a happiness and a pleasure, or deep, sublime feeling. It just feels so good to be in the flow. That, the Buddha said, gives birth to concentration, to

really be present, to really be here. That, the Buddha said, gives birth to seeing things as they are, which is now to get confirmation, a real kind, qualitative, a different kind of affirmation, confirmation of the value of seeing in this new way.

Now you see directly the evidence of this really is significant. To see things, because things are constantly flowing and changing, this natural world, to really see this flow moving along and seeing how nothing gets stuck, nothing gets frozen. Unless we bring the baggage and the self and the attachment to it, then things get solidified. But to see that without that baggage, without that overlay, that things just flow, natural flow, the natural inconstancy of movement. So not only do we feel like we're in the stream of practice, but now we see the stream, we see the flow. This feels so good, so right, so much clarity that there starts to be what the Buddha said gets born is now a disinterest or a disenchantment with the old way of seeing.

Now the old way of seeing through the ego—egoistically or self-centredly or with all the baggage and concerns, or even some of the old cultural ways, familiar ways we've learned to always see our life—are seen, you know, maybe that's not so accurate or not so useful to that lens. So we start becoming disinterested, disenchanted with it, and it begins to relax and fade away, and that gives birth to the further, this fading away. So seeing things as they are gives birth to a disinterested disenchantment, which gives birth to this movement of fading away of our attachments. When the attachments have faded away enough, and who knows when enough is enough, but when there's enough, something lets go and we have liberation. Liberation then flows further into a deep understanding of what this liberation is all about and on things. It's about is now not the confirmation of the seeing in a new way, but now inhabiting the new way of seeing in a whole different life becomes like who we are rather than something that we introduce into our life.

So remarkably, twenty-five hundred years ago, the Buddha and the people around him who were practising—really looking at their minds, understanding their minds, understanding how to practise with these minds and hearts we have—discovered these amazing tools and capacities of the mind that then they described in, I think, quite inspiring ways. The description I used today is something called liberative dependent arising, how liberation comes dependent on certain conditions being in place. There are twelve steps, and they are born on the basis of seeing suffering in a new way. That gives birth to faith, gives birth to delight, gives birth to joy, gives birth to tranquillity, gives birth to happiness, gives birth to concentration—*samādhi*. *Samādhi* gives birth to seeing things as they are, seeing things as they are gives birth to disinterest in attachments. Disinterest, disenchantment, gives birth to fading away of attachments. The fading away of attachments is the condition that leads to the ending of

attachments, which is called liberation. Once there's liberation, that's not the story. Doesn't end there. But then there's understanding what has happened, and really understanding. Now, living in the world with new eyes, seeing in a new way.

All this depends on itself. The whole list depends on practising. The practice we do is what? That's the rain. That's—I love the analogy of rain, because it's just drops, little drops, moment by moment, that we're adding. Those drops are not inconsequential moments of mindfulness, but the continuity of it more and more over and over again, so that it's, you know, not just occasional drop, but it becomes a kind of, you know, lots of rain falling on the parched ground, and then overflowing, and building up the volume that allows the river to get bigger and bigger and bigger.

So practice based on seeing in a new way. You might consider, is there a new way to see that you could try out? Is there a new way of seeing you'll do provisionally, meaning you don't have to accept that this is the absolute, true way of seeing things? But maybe it's just a different orientation, a different perspective, and to see without any reference to me, myself, and I, without reference in past and future. Just see pain, see suffering just as pain, very simply, and see if that begins to loosen up the crust, this solidification of all this extra baggage, extra layers we add on top of the difficulties of this human life.

If those difficulties don't have all these extra layers, maybe it's easier, and maybe we'll be inspired to practice, because it's really worthwhile. Once we get a glimpse of this new way of seeing, it's really worthwhile to do what it takes to let this glimpse become a bigger and more regular part of our life. So to see in a new way—*vipassanā*—may you see in a new way. Now, may we as a community, and I, share that with each other, and see each other in this new way. I think that will end up with tremendous delight, appreciation for each other. Thank you very much.