

Monday Dharma talk

Gil Fronsdal

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People have been listening to the rain for as long as there have been people. And now is our turn to hear the pitter-patter of the rain, and a reminder that all things change. The weather changes. The rain itself is a pitter-patter of change. Those of us sitting here, inside, dry, warm, maybe brings us kind of closer to our own organic life, natural, the naturalness of our body and mind, as natural as the rain. And to have this shift from seeing ourselves with the eyes of a civilization, a culture, a religion, a town, family, with all the constructs and ideas and expectations, for that to shift and recognize that, to a big degree, we are nature, and we are closer to it if we don't think so much about it.

But feel it, hear it directly, see it, see the rain, see the moisture in our mouth, feel it. At the beginning of the retreat I talked about being simple in the process of simplification. And over these days, perhaps in some ways you become simpler. Great gracing yourself with seeing yourself in a simpler way. It's even possible to see oneself as having, for these few moments here, listening to the rain, feeling the body warm, dry, to see ourselves without a past and a future. Just the tingling and the flowing and the warmth and the breathing and feelings and emotions and attitudes and thoughts.

Nothing more than nature passing through, arising and passing. And so we come now to the seventh step of the *Upanisā Sutta*. And this, remember, builds on all the other earlier ones. And the immediate preceding one that it builds on, that it comes out of, is some degree of *samādhi*. And the simplest way of understanding that is some degree of calm, to see with calm eyes, to feel with a calm presence, and to begin having some stronger and stronger sense of what was talked about with suffering, the first step, to know suffering with what isn't suffering. And to some degree as we go along, we're always in touch with suffering.

To know suffering with faith, the faith that doesn't suffer. To know suffering with appreciation or gladness. To know suffering with joy, believe it or not. To know suffering tranquilly,

calmly. A calmness that doesn't suffer but is there to hold the suffering. To know suffering with happiness.

Imagine, and to know suffering with a sense of unification or wholeness, steadiness, stillness. So then we come into this next step. Kind of with all that, we have now some capacity to see clearly, to know immediately the immediacy of knowing what's happening here, the immediacy of seeing what's here, because we're here. The mind maybe has become quieter, stiller, enough so that it's enough just to listen to the rain. It's enough just to be in this body, breathing. The past and the future are kind of in the distance.

And a lot of the ways in which we project on top of our experience, to judge it, interpret it, make up stories about it, is quieted down to some degree. And so we see maybe even in a cozy way, we hear the rain, and that's enough. It's nice. We don't get, hopefully don't get, excited to start designing the perfect umbrella, then spend the next two hours having a business plan for your umbrella business. And now you're back in the old mind that plans and builds and creates and thinks about what you're going to do when you become famous and wealthy with your umbrella company. It'll be great.

People will praise you and admire you, and it'll be fantastic. And you'll be so wealthy and happy and contented. You'll just be able to sit quietly and enjoy breathing and listen to the rain. Or you can just do it now. Why go off into this abstract world of umbrellas and umbrella factories and fame and glory? Just now, it could feel so much better to be cozy here now, just to be with us in the simplicity of it.

So the whole beginning of this whole process is partly to support us, to have a willingness, a contentment, a subtleness, a calmness, to abide in our direct experience. And to see it with a kind of directness that is unfiltered by our projections, by our stories, by the meaning-making, what it's going to do for us, what it says about me. After all, you know, I might have been, probably am, one of the really, really, really good retreat center builders because I chose to build a place where they have this wonderful April rain. I mean, Gail, how could you have had that kind of foresight? You know, to have known that, boy, am I a hot retreat center builder.

I hope they appreciate how much care went into it, looking at the weather forecasts and the weather patterns. And why bother with all that? That whole movement of selfing is abated and quieted, and it's not needed now. The willingness just to be, things get simpler and simpler. And so the ability to see becomes more direct. The ability to know what's happening also is much more simple and direct. It's just rain.

It's a pitter-patter of rain. It's cozy. It's quiet and dry in here. So many ideas fall away. Ideas

which operate as filters, like wearing glasses, colored glasses that you see through them. But the glasses come off, the filters come off, and things are seen more clearly and simply for what they are in and of themselves.

And I think that it's phenomenally respectful to reality, to allow reality to be its pristine self, just allow it to be itself in its utter simplicity without appropriating it or making it or fixing it or doing something. Just like maybe for you, you would appreciate someone who came and just allowed you to be yourself fully, completely. The pristine nature of yourself. Someone who saw you so fully as yourself that they're not seeing you through the lens of right and wrong, good and bad. It was so important for me that when I was in Thailand, my very first *vipassanā* retreat, I was practicing alone on the edges of the monastery in a little hut.

It was a little bit of an anarchistical place, poor monastery. And I was told it was going to be a schedule of just sitting and walking all day. And I mostly did it, and one day for some reason I was walking around the monastery, taking a little break, which I didn't think you were allowed to do, because I was to just sit and walk all day. And so I was walking around the monastery, and of all people who could show up, it was the abbot, you know, like I was busted, right? I was not doing what I was supposed to do. And we were walking kind of perpendicular to each other, and so he looked to his left to see me there.

And I thought, you know, he would tell me, well, you just blew it. You're not serious. You're not following the rules here. You have to leave, or something. That's the way I thought about it. I always thought I was wrong, whatever I was doing.

And he looked at me, and it was clear that he saw me, and he saw right through me. Like, I was just part of nature, I was part of the trees there, like you'd look at a tree or something. There was no valence. Eyebrows didn't go up. He didn't scowl, he didn't question. There was just a person walking, he saw me, and just... I wasn't even accepted.

It was more powerful than being accepted for who I was. I was just allowed to be in the eye-sight of someone without anything extra. I could just be. And it was kind of eye-opening to me that that was possible. Maybe I could do that for myself, that I could just be this simple way.

So slowly we're settling, quieting the mind that makes things up, the mind that spins stories, the mind that is judging and wanting it to be different or wanting it to be the same. And so what it does is frees up our inner eyes, and our external eyes too, inner eyes to see with tremendous simplicity what's right here, with our capacity to know what's happening. It becomes simpler and simpler. And so this seventh step of *Upanisā* is a long kind of com-

pound word to describe it. The first half of it is knowledge and vision, or knowing and seeing, knowledge and vision, a certain way of knowing, a certain way of seeing, not a certain way of figuring things out, not a certain way of understanding quantum physics, or the spiritual equivalent of that. Very simple.

And what is this knowledge and vision of? It says knowledge and vision in regard to becoming. Becoming is a special word in Buddhism. In this context, it's kind of like things, not things, but the process of what appears, what arises, what becomes. In a strict sense in Buddhism, there are no things. Nothing is. Nothing exists statically, unchanging.

Everything is in the process of change. Everything is coming into a new existence moment by moment. So that's why it's called becoming. Everything is in the process of becoming, becoming, becoming. Like the rain, the rain is appearing, coming with every drop. Without the next drop, we wouldn't call it rain. But there's a lot of next comings and comings and comings. So rain is becoming, becoming, becoming.

And so at some point, the seeing, the knowing, is to start seeing the process nature, the unfolding nature of everything. And this is where the river analogy works really well, like everything is flowing, everything is moving. The present moment is a little snapshot, a little window into the river of time, the river of change, the river of coming and going. We don't see in our direct immediate now the past and the future, but what we see is the moving through, the appearing, the disappearing, the river of change. In one way or the other, we're always abiding in this river of change.

It's fascinating to watch how the process of knowing, sensing the world, knowing the world, knowing what's going on, how it moves around. You might know a sound through your ears. Next thing you know, you have a tactile sensation of your belly somehow. And then you might smell. And then you might realize you're making a story of all those things. You know the mind's thinking.

And then you might have a taste. And then you might have, you know, it goes, you know, all these different things, and your mind, their knowing, is shifting and changing all the time. And a healthy way of knowing and sensing is to kind of be fluid and relaxed. And the metaphor, the analogy I like for this a lot is eyesight. It's stressful to hold your eyes, to stare at something, to hold your eyes at a dot on the floor in front of you and not waver one bit, just hold it fixed. It's tiring. It's stressful.

The easeful way of seeing is to let your eyes float in the eye sockets and roam, flow, and go up and down. I don't know if you've ever seen these, I guess they have these things that

measure or record how people's eyes move in central focus. And then they have a piece of paper that the pen, I guess, is tracking. And it's just big arcs and flows and figure eights and ups and downs and waves. And to let the eyes naturally float and see and do is very, can be very relaxing.

It's one of the reasons why I think watching a river flow by, or watching waves on the ocean come and go, or watching a fire. Something about the movement there kind of supports the kind of gentle, relaxed movement of seeing. And then it's possible to feel that when you tense up, then you start staring at something. Staring is kind of a tension. Sometimes it's necessary and sometimes it's fine. But to live tense, people who are chronically afraid, their eyes are always scanning.

They're always staring, like, where's the danger? Where's the danger? Where's the safety? And there's a kind of fixation. Same thing with greed. When I was young, I used to go, I had no money, but I'd go into bookstores. I'd leave exhausted because I wanted so many books.

And I was staring, staring at, do I want that one? Yes, yes, yes. Anyways, my eyes would get tired and I would get tired. I'd leave bookstores more tired than I came in. The accumulated mass of desire. So there's an analogy of the eyes. It's the same thing with our inner, all the different ways we pay attention.

Even if you're kind of absorbed and there is just the breathing, even there, you want to be careful you're not fixating. What can happen, because breathing itself is a cyclic changing phenomenon, like waves coming and going, or rivers flowing, it's possible to kind of tune in very intimately with the breathing, without any stress in the inner eye or the inner feeling, inner attention. More like you're flowing along with it, coming and going with it. And that can be kind of a very, part of the *samādhi*, part of the attraction, just be there with the experience very intimately. And what happens is the constructing mind begins to quiet more and more, the mind that interprets, the mind that makes things into things, rather than just processes, rather than just knowing, flowing, flowing, knowing.

And so with this knowledge and vision in regard to becoming, we start seeing the fluid nature of our experience. One way or the other, we're there to see the changing nature. So it begins, this knowledge and vision is to recognize things in this new way, recognize with what doesn't suffer. And then to start having discernment, the second level, to discern clearly the difference between interpreting, projecting, ideas, bias, interpretations, meaning, on top of the direct experience we're having. Some of the interpretations and projections and all that are kind of appropriate enough in certain contexts. But in the middle of a retreat like this, so much of it is not needed.

And so just to have that become quiet and to notice a difference between getting involved in the ideas, the thoughts, the overlays, and not being tied to putting it on. To start seeing where there's a direct experience and what we add on, what we contribute to our suffering, the second arrows. But even less than the second, even more basic than the second arrows, to see that we're not leaving things alone. We're building on it, we're adding on it, creating things on top of it. And so there's a very clear beginning of seeing that there's the experience and what we add to it. And this is a great insight.

And so then there's a clearer discernment that sees the simplicity and the complexity. Oh, look at that, what the mind is doing, clearly seeing that process. And that's such an important part of *vipassanā* because if we don't see the overlay of ideas, concepts, stories, interpretations that we put on top of things, then we're seeing things through the lens of the idea, the concept. And concepts suggest permanence. Concepts suggest that they're real. This is what reality is. And so we have a delusion of permanence that we often live with.

And one of the paradoxes is the busier the mind is, the more the mind is spinning with ideas and stories, the more it imputes permanence into things. This is how it's always going to be. The less the mind is moving and changing and spinning, the more we're able to see that everything else is what's changing. Everything is a process of becoming, arising and passing. So we begin discerning this more and more clearly. So at first there's seeing without suffering, seeing suffering with what doesn't suffer.

And then it's being able to see that the suffering itself is not what we thought it was. It's not these complicated ideas. It's not the resistance, it's not the bracing ourselves, it's not the projections of what this means. It's not how we define ourselves by it. It's just tension, heat, fear, grief. Very simple.

And I think, again, it's phenomenally respectful, especially with our emotions, to leave them radically alone, not to add anything on top of them, not make them into anything, not recruit them for something or resist them, just grief, just happy, just sad, just allow them to be. To know the suffering with what doesn't suffer. So as this goes along, now the third level of this knowledge and vision is *anicca*. *Anicca* is a Pāli word that's usually translated as impermanence, which is probably fine, especially since that's what most people say.

If you imagine that you're finally in the flow of the practice, it's kind of like the river. The *samādhi* factor is kind of like now the water or the drop that was up on the top of the Himalayas. It's now traveled down the rivers and the lakes and come down to the plains of India and become the Ganges River. And it's just this tremendous flow where everything that's in it flows with the current. Everything is in harmony with the current. Everything's

going a certain direction. It's just flowing and flowing, and it's amazingly quiet.

This powerful current going. *Samādhi* is kind of powerful at times and very quiet. Everything's in harmony. Everything is kind of together. And so say you're on a, you know, you're kayaking down the Ganges River, same river the Buddha sat next to. Been there for thousands, hundreds, tens of thousands of years. I don't know how long it's been there, a long time.

And you look over the side of the boat and you say, yep, there's the Ganges. It's impermanent. What does that mean? Well, it's not really impermanent exactly. It's been around, at least since the time of the Buddha. So what it means here is, and it isn't that like, yeah, it's impermanent, one day it'll be gone, that's for sure. But that's abstract ideas.

What *anicca* is here, the Ganges is changing all the time. Its very nature is a constant change, constant becoming, constant movement. So sometimes *anicca* is better understood not as impermanent, but change. Some people translate it as inconstant. Sometimes it has more of a feeling of inconstant, things come and go quickly. And sometimes it's more like the flow of a river. It's constantly changing with waves and currents and movement.

Sometimes it's more somewhere between the two, like the rain. The rain is a constant right now, I mostly hear it. And it's constant change of sound coming and going. It's kind of both change, but now it's getting quieter, then it gets stronger. But it's also inconstant. There are actually a lot of individual drops that make a little sound, and then the next one, coming and going, coming and going, coming and going.

So there are different ways. There's change, there's inconstancy, there's impermanence. Things disappear, things come, they become. And so here the insight into this knowledge and vision in regard to becoming is we start seeing the process nature, the changing nature, the flowing nature, the inconstant nature of direct experience. It's not something that anyone is supposed to convince you is true. This is not like something you have to believe. It doesn't belong to the world of belief exactly.

It's meant to be something that is revealed to you, that in your own insight, your own clear seeing with your mind's eye, your own direct experience, oh, well, look at this, it's changing all the time. You can see it in your breathing. There are changing sensations in breathing, flowing and moving and shifting and changing. Luckily, your breathing for the time being is not impermanent in the sense of disappearing because... So there's this deeper insight into change, and to ride the change, to get closer to it, to feel it, to sense it, to be intimate with it, to let the change be the mood music, in a sense, where you will just let it register, be closer

to it, sense it.

Just be there in that change as close as you can, or as intimate as you can. And then when things are changing all the time, the flow of everything, the present moment, it's an amazing thing to see that and see that ideas just don't have anywhere to land. Or the metaphor of that, or the analogy, is there you, you're doing it. It's wonderful. You're on this river. It's a beautiful river. The water is very clear. You see the bottom.

It's peaceful. And you're floating down on this little kayak, and it's so flat. And you have this great idea. Since you have watercolors with you, why don't you paint? You have this wonderful image you want to paint on top of the water. So you take out your brush, get a little bit of water, and mix up the watercolors, and then you're ready to paint this beautiful painting on top of the surface of the river.

And as soon as the paint goes on top of the surface, it just runs downriver and doesn't stay. Wait a minute, I have this important picture to paint. This is like really crucial. You know, I'll keep trying. I'll keep trying. So that's one of the wonderful things about really being settled and quiet and peaceful, and resting, in a sense, in the constant change, is that you have this insight, clear seeing, that so many of the things we're doing, it's like just putting watercolors on top of the flowing river.

It's not really there to receive anything. It can't take it in. There's a kind of delusion of permanence that comes with these ideas we have that we overlay, and then we live in the ideas. And then we live in our ideas, and then we tell our ideas to other people, and they live in our ideas, and then tell us their ideas. And more and more people are living in these constructed ideas, more and more abstract ideas that they think are real in a certain way. It's very different if you settle at this basic sensory level, you see how we're putting things on top.

And one of the fascinating things to see, it's kind of fascinating, troubling, infuriating, humbling. You see something that you want to have. And so you take your mind's fist, hand, to grab it. But have you ever tried to grab a hologram? You put your hand into a hologram, you know, they have them in the museums and science places, you know, in that box with a hologram and there's like a chess piece there. And so it looks like just so you want to take it home. You come up empty-handed.

There's nothing there. So at some point this amazing experience, you go to grab and it's not there, what you're grabbing. It's not there. By the time your hand gets to it, it's already gone. It's kind of fun. It's kind of frightening.

Wait a minute. My life depends on holding on to things. My life depends on grabbing on for

dear life. And now I can't grab. So some people, it takes a while to get reoriented to this new way. It can be kind of disorienting for a while. This world of change.

So there's recognition of suffering again. There's the kind of seeing it more direct and directly, being very discerning about what's here, and seeing the difference between ideas and direct experience. And then it's seeing change. That's the key insight in *vipassanā*. And then, because of seeing change, one of the things, one of the ways we use watercolors to try to paint something onto the surface has a lot to do with selfing. Some percentage of what you think you are is constructed by yourself.

It's a project called selfing. Of course, we're not denying self, but a percentage of what you're doing is defining yourself certain ways, building up a sense of self, projecting a sense of self, defending ideas of self. And some of these are clearly constructed by yourself. It's ideas, belongs to this world of ideas and concepts and stories. And what becomes clear, again, you don't have to believe this. You're not supposed to believe this, because this is the point, is you see clearly it doesn't work.

There's no point. It's just a construct, it's just an invention, it's just kind of a hologram that you've made, that you've overlaid, that is not needed in this quiet state. If you're finally on vacation and finally traveling down the San Lorenzo River in a nice kayak and having a nice time, and then you start thinking about, you know, you're really a good umbrella factory planner builder. You're probably the world's best umbrella designer. And this is like, you're just filled with the kind of clothes you're going to wear to show people that you are a good umbrella designer.

And the world of umbrella designers, like this is like the best thing to be, an umbrella designer. And that can be a lifetime of self that you create around an umbrella designer. It could be okay. I'm not saying it's the wrong thing to do. But maybe you have better things to do when you're sitting meditating. Or when you're in the center and there's a river just relaxing and taking time off, you kind of forget you're even in the river. You even forgot you're supposed to just relax and enjoy.

You're already calling up all your friends to recruit them to join your company and talking them into it. It's very stressful. But you start seeing how much this idea of self is not inherent in what we are, but is a construct. And that's called selfing. So seeing things as they are, seeing things as they become, seeing the becoming, helps us to see more clearly what we add that's not needed. And one of the things that is added, which is often very stressful, is this whole idea of self, self overlay on top.

And in this very deep place, to really see that gives us a lot of wisdom as to how to live with ideas of self when we come out of deep meditation. To see it as a construct doesn't mean that we deny it. It means that we become wise about how we live in those constructs that we have. Constructs are not wrong. They just get in the way if what we're doing is kind of entering deeply into the river of change. And part of the reason that this deep river of change is so valuable is that because it's hard to grasp, like water, if you try to get a fistful of water, you end up with just a few drops. It doesn't really work.

And because it's so nice to just be in the river floating down the current, the tendency to grasp begins to stop, to grab, to have a handful of water to show your friends stops. Grasping doesn't work. Grasping is not interesting. There's a better thing to do. There's more pleasure, joy, sense of deep satisfaction, just kind of riding along, being here, not reacting to anything. And so we learn something very profound about non-grasping, non-clinging.

And so knowledge and vision in regard to becoming, in regard to change, the final thing is it teaches us about freedom, freedom from clinging, freedom from grabbing onto the water. And we get a very clear lesson, very clear understanding of the nature of clinging, the advantages of not clinging. And so in the wake of *samādhi*, now being ready to really see in a fresh, clear way, one of the final things we see in these five levels is we see freedom, freedom from clinging. Seeing change, seeing selfing, seeing suffering in this kind of way allows us to now begin releasing the fist in the mind and heart, to soften, to let go. And we know we're so much better off, so much healthier for us, healthier for the world. Do not cling, do not grab.

So this flow of the *Upanisā Sutta* and this flow of five levels for knowledge and vision, this is discernible. We can see this process in very simple and ordinary ways. It doesn't require deep meditation. And we can see it in deep meditation. And it's wonderful any way we see it in our life, to see suffering, to see it calmly, to see how we complicate it more than it needs to be, the second arrows.

To see the underlying changing nature, things are changing. And to see the particular construct of self that we are suffering under, and that maybe it's not needed. And to see something as simple as standing in line for food, and the line's going kind of slow when you're impatient, because you're really in a hurry to go back to the meditation hall where you can just be in the present, and to see the impatience and like, oh, then to your surprise, you're there, you're just present. Oh, that's what I was going to do up in the meditation hall. So I'm trying to give you some examples.

It can be very easy and light, it doesn't have to be so deep, but any level at all, to start having these insights, these understandings, can be a great support for our life. And it's important

not to try too hard. A lot of this, when you get to this knowledge and vision stage of the... There's a lot of trusting the process, not straining, not trying hard, letting go, getting out of the way, simplifying so that knowledge and vision can be part of the becoming, part of what arises. It's not constructed, it's not made. Deep trust in the process of practice. Thank you.