

The Naturalistic Teachings of the Buddha: Study, practice, and discussion of the Discourse on the Simile of the Cloth

Gil Fronsdal

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Gil Fronsdal [00:05 - 02:41]

So I'm delighted to be able to share this sutta with you. It's one of my favorites in the *Majjhima*. And the reason it's my favorite—I think, one of my favorites—is because what I interpret to be a very naturalistic teaching.

It's a, it's a very—it's, even though it might seem kind of grand, and the goal, what's being described, it's all being described in terms that are fairly simple and fairly humanistic things that we can kind of relate to. And it puts together in such a beautiful way.

And so there's something about the structure of the Buddha's teachings here, is that the first half of the text somehow relates to the second half, which has to do with a conversation the Buddha has with a Brahmin who uses sacred rivers as a way of purifying himself from his bad karma.

And so the purification comes from an external source. And the Buddha wants to—he doesn't necessarily deny this straight out. He just redirects it to a different river, the river that flows within us. And it's the inner river that can purify us.

In the first half—and this is not explicit in the first half—the first half is written, or composed, in a way that it flows. It moves in a kind of natural way from becoming familiar with the 16 stains, abandoning them, and then moving into developing confidence—verified confidence, experiential confidence—in the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha.

That flows into being inspired, inspired by the goal, inspired by the Dhamma. An inspiration or gladness or joy that leads to gladness, that flows in this—some Ajahn Nisabho describes as the—what is it called? He calls it the—what's it called? It has the word cascade in it. Cascading pentad? Is that what he says? Some of you might know. The wellbeing cascade. The wellbeing—I haven't ever heard that, but the wellbeing cascade?

Gil Fronsdal [02:42 - 06:51]

Great. So the wellbeing cascade. So again, this flow that, for Nisabho, seems like it's pretty, you know, a cascade rather than a gentle flow. Or maybe Kovilo came up with it. Yes.

And so this flow is related to the idea of stream entry. And as I say in my article, this famous term “stream entry” is an English translation term. The word *sotā* can mean stream or river, but it can also refer to the current of a river.

And that makes it come alive in a different way. Because in the many years when I saw this thing about stream entry, I thought it was associated with a different metaphor, which is someone who crosses the floods, crosses the river to the other side. This shore and that shore, and then you have to step into the river in order to reach the other shore.

So I thought it was like getting your toe in the water or something. And, you know, just, you know, you're putting one foot in the water, and you still have to make your way across. But I think that it's not necessary to connect those two metaphors. They have two different purposes.

And rather, it's the metaphor that's built on the idea of a current. And that at some point in practice, we're not so much the agent anymore of our practice. We're the recipients of our practice. We're being practiced rather than doing the practice.

At some point, something shifts inside. There's a momentum that carries us along. And we can feel sometimes that onward-moving movement of this being carried by something profound that perhaps is within, called the Dhamma.

So we have this sutta where the Brahmin is talking about an external river. And in my reading of it, the Buddha is talking about an internal river.

And so one of the tasks for the next few minutes is to try to make this whole journey that the Buddha describes come alive for you, so you can understand the value of it a little bit, or the power of it.

So the first thing I would like to—I want to ask you a series of questions. And maybe for each question we can have maybe three or so answers from people, unless I feel like we need more.

So it begins by—it begins with the metaphor of the cloth, the stained cloth. And we'll get back to that later. But for now, I want to say the actual teachings of the Buddha begin with the idea that there are these 16 stains.

And I prefer to translate it as “stains.” It could be imperfections of the mind, defilements of the mind, that some people might want to use, but stains of the mind. And that works well with the metaphor. So that's one reason why to stick—keep to that.

Now, why is it important that we know that we have stains in the mind? Or if you don't even like the word stains, why is it important to know that you have these attitudes, emotions, motivations, states of mind that are involved with social harm, that harm others? And why is this important?

Because, you know, you could just not care about people, and it doesn't matter if you hurt them. So why is this important? Yes, April.

Questioner [06:55 - 07:16]

So if you don't recognize through mindfulness the blocks in yourself that get in the way of liberation, then your struggle to try to do good is going to be continually frustrated because you're not seeing insightfully about your own dynamics.

Gil Fronsdal [07:17 - 07:23]

Very nice. Emily?

Questioner [07:23 - 07:45]

I think it can, if we don't recognize it and therefore can't change it or address it or let it become changed, then I think we have a sense of unhappiness that we can't even identify, because in some sense these stains do go against our fundamental nature. So I think we suffer.

Gil Fronsdal [07:45 - 07:54]

So would it be fair to restate what you say is that if we don't see the source of our suffering, how can we address it?

Gil Fronsdal [07:56 - 07:59]

Great. Thank you. And Luke?

Questioner [07:59 - 08:23]

Yeah, also the duties associated, or the corresponding duties, of the Four Noble Truths. So there's a simple logic to it, to this recognition as a prerequisite for abandoning.

Gil Fronsdal [08:23 - 08:24]

Uh-huh.

Questioner [08:24 - 08:42]

The recognition of the *kilesa*, or this certain stain, as an unwholesome property and as a form of *dukkha* in and of itself.

Questioner [08:43 - 08:57]

And then the duty of the Second Noble Truth to abandon that cause. That's what occurred to me, the first fully comprehending.

Gil Fronsdal [08:57 - 09:26]

And so then, good, thank you. So these are all great answers. And here, as Luke prepares us for the next question, you kind of suggested an answer.

Now, why in the world is it valuable to abandon these things? Aren't we just abandoning ourselves then? And isn't this kind of inhuman? Why should we—why in the world should we be interested in abandoning these things?

Questioner [09:27 - 09:43]

It's for our own happiness. You said, why do we have to care about other human beings?

Gil Fronsdal [09:43 - 09:44]

Yeah.

Questioner [09:44 - 09:45]

We're miserable. That's why.

Gil Fronsdal [09:46 - 09:55]

I'll say, so how is this going to make you happy, not to have these important common human motivations which people are driven by?

Questioner [09:55 - 10:03]

You become happier the more generous and loving you're able to be. I don't know how. I just know it's true.

Gil Fronsdal [10:03 - 10:10]

Wow. Imagine that. Okay, well, let's see what else people have to say. Dana?

Questioner [10:21 - 11:06]

I, um, I was wondering actually why this—we've evolved as a species to have a sense of well-being when we do good. And why that would have been selected for, you know, through natural selection, that a sense of altruism, I guess, helped pass on the genes.

So it's just part of our brain, the way it evolved and was selected for, that being kind, a sense of altruism—and because they found that when we're kind, especially to people who have genetic similarities to us—

Questioner [11:06 - 11:06]

Yeah.

Questioner [11:07 - 11:10]

Yeah. You know, it helps preserve the genes. So it's just—and now we're just hacking into this system to feel a sense of safety so that the brain doesn't go out into craving or into defilement.

So we're kind of hacking into this genetically innate way that allows us to feel more at peace and more—

Gil Fronsdal [11:36 - 11:52]

So abandoning these brings us into a more socially positive way of being, which we're kind of evolutionarily programmed to be able to do.

Questioner [11:52 - 12:18]

Yeah. And why? It's just because that's the way human beings are. I mean, if we would compare us to, let's say, other animals that aren't social creatures, that are just alone, you know, and then maybe at some parts of the year they would go off and mate, then maybe we wouldn't have a sense of well-being when we help others because there's no survival advantage.

Gil Fronsdal [12:18 - 13:49]

Yeah, this is very nice, what you're saying. And it occurs to me that many people can abandon some of these antisocial, non-social kind of emotional states when we're being connected to our closest friends and family.

And some people can't even with their family let go of them. And there's tremendous violence in some families. And then once people get further and further away from the people we feel close to, there's maybe less and less instinct to have these positive social emotions, and the negative ones can predominate.

Meg?

Questioner

and justified sometimes.

Gil Fronsdal

Yeah, I think we want to abandon these stains because it takes us away from our true nature and thereby increases our feeling of alienation and unhappiness.

Fantastic. So we're going to move on. I see a lot of hands, but keep your hands up. Maybe you have answers for the next question.

So what is it like then to have abandoned, let's say thoroughly abandoned, not just let go temporarily, but really feel like you've left behind even just one of these 16? What is that experience like? Is that a good thing or confusing, or what do you think it's like? Or maybe some of you had this experience. What's it like?

Dave?

Questioner [13:50 - 14:09]

A lightness of being. Well, there may be two Daves, I'm not sure, but a lightness, a lightness. There's less to carry around, lack of the artifice I need to be pompous. It comes naturally, but I find that it's a lighter lifestyle when I let go of it.

Gil Fronsdal [14:09 - 14:12]

Great, very nice. Beverly?

Questioner [14:12 - 14:14]

Uh, you're less distracted.

Gil Fronsdal [14:15 - 14:33]

There's kind of more space in there for positive emotions. Nice. Very good. Wallace? You're muted. Are you still there, Wallace?

Questioner [14:33 - 14:38]

I'm sorry. It's very freeing.

Gil Fronsdal [14:38 - 14:41]

Freeing. That's a good Buddhist word. Thank you.

Questioner [14:45 - 14:46]

Yeah, it's really letting go of the self. It's like releasing any sense of contraction towards me, mine, and freeing as well.

Gil Fronsdal [14:58 - 15:05]

Very nice. Because the contracted self is often the source of some of these negative mind states.

Questioner [15:05 - 15:06]

Yes.

Gil Fronsdal [15:09 - 15:12]

Marion? Let's see, you're muted still.

Questioner [15:12 - 15:30]

When you're loving and like that, you get back all the loving from other people. So you get a lot back.

Gil Fronsdal [15:30 - 15:38]

Nice. Okay. And Luke? Nope, that's the wrong thing.

Questioner [15:38 - 15:40]

Okay, I think I'm—

Gil Fronsdal [15:40 - 15:42]

Yeah, there, there.

Questioner [15:43 - 16:20]

Okay, uh, I remember hearing, well, two old talks that I've heard you speak of, one—or in which I've heard you speak of—some immediate fruits of letting go.

But you also, I once remember, gave a kind of test, and maybe it's not the same test you would use now, but if in the event that cognitively you think you've let go, but there's not some joy that accompanies that— —then that cognitive belief is suspect.

Questioner [16:26 - 17:56]

So just that joy, that's just an initial kind of positive reinforcement. And next, you've mentioned sometimes—and I myself, until very recently, because I'm so just science-minded, hardcore empiricist type, I've been hesitant to be open to the possibility of some such—but you've before talked of a notion of the body having a natural intelligence.

And as recently in my own practice, letting go of these unwholesome qualities is better allowing the just will of my being, or the intelligence of my being and tendencies of it, to match up with an environment such that there's a kind of wholesome confluence? A kind of harmony, even if it's an argument, but there's still maybe some harmony in the dissonance.

Gil Fronsdal [17:56 - 19:13]

So very nice. Very nice. And yes, I think these, at least 15 of these 16 stains, are not just raw instincts. They usually come with some constructs of the mind, some stories that we're making up, some building some sense of self or ideas.

It's a more complicated world we live in when we have them. So to have that settle down and disappear can be a great relief.

So I'm going to move on. Keep your hand up in case maybe you'll be the first one to answer the next question. Maybe what you're going to say is relevant for it.

So to abandon these stains, let's say we can abandon a few of them and really abandon them, really kind of have them disappear for maybe a considerable time, maybe they even disappear forever. What is it about this abandoning that gives you a hint, a glimpse? And what would that glimpse be?

Do you want to try, Sharon—Carol, since you're the first one?

Questioner [19:13 - 19:15]

I would say it's the bliss of blamelessness.

Gil Fronsdal [19:20 - 19:24]

Great. And I actually have experienced that.

Questioner [19:24 - 19:25]

You have?

Gil Fronsdal [19:25 - 19:26]

You have?

Questioner [19:26 - 19:26]

Yes.

Gil Fronsdal [19:27 - 19:42]

Yes. Fantastic. Okay. And also, I would say, living in a community, all of those 16 aspects are not good—not good—you’re motivated.

Questioner [19:42 - 19:43]

Yes.

Gil Fronsdal [19:43 - 19:46]

Great, thank you. Julie?

Questioner [19:46 - 20:25]

Well, it’s hard for me to put this into words, but when I read in your study guide, “The *brahmavihāras* are not the goal, but function as the purified cloth on which liberating insight can see the tiniest remaining stain and its disappearance,” I just had this, like—it’s hard to describe—this kind of bursting open, like this—the only word I can use is this unconditional heart. I don’t know how to describe it.

Questioner [20:25 - 20:26]

Hmm.

Questioner [20:27 - 20:33]

You know, that understanding just kind of shattered me open.

But it’s kind of like into an unconditioned, less conditional space. Like my mind isn’t as conditioned and reactive to conditions.

Gil Fronsdal [20:50 - 21:05]

I love hearing this. So we’re trying to get a flavor of the Buddha’s mind, how this might point to something. And so this points definitely to something.

And Winnie?

Questioner [21:05 - 21:46]

Oh, I think for me is that as you increase your awareness of these 16 stains, it obviously generates more compassion and caring for the rest of the world.

I think that the glimpse I have about Buddha when he was teaching this was that it wasn’t really for himself. It was really for the betterment of everyone around him. And that the reason for learning these things was that we would eventually have a more caring world than what we have now.

Gil Fronsdal [21:46 - 21:59]

What a great—I love that. What a great glimpse into the Buddha, that somehow abandoning these things would give us a sense that the Buddha is compassionate, and maybe we can be. So, Beth.

Questioner [21:59 - 22:30]

Equanimity, the feeling of being joyful to be with myself, which was absolutely stunning to me. Wow. And then therefore, to be with others that I might not even like, just suddenly seeing them as a person that I had to be kind to.

Gil Fronsdal [22:30 - 25:53]

Wow. What a combination. What a rich combination of things. Stunning joy. Good.

So it gives you some sense. So these things are pretty wonderful, what you're describing, and giving you a hint, maybe a small taste, of what it'd be like to be the Buddha.

So the way this text goes on, it is one that now has not just faith in the Buddha or confidence in the Buddha, but now there's *aveccappasāda*. *Avecca* means based on knowing, based on experience for oneself. So some people, as I said, say verified, or based on knowledge. And so now you know for yourself something.

And you have confidence in the Buddha. And this word *pasāda* that's here as confidence can also mean bright. It can also mean kind of peaceful. It's a kind of tranquil, kind of inspired faith. It's not zealot faith or confidence.

And because it's connected to the path itself, it's connected to the freedom that this practice can give from these kinds of intense, difficult states. So there can come an inspiration in the Buddha. There can come inspiration in the Dhamma.

And here in the text, it describes the characteristics of the Dhamma. As some of you maybe have been listening this week to 7:00 a.m., the five qualities of Dhamma are described right here.

And there are a few places in the suttas where the Buddha defines or describes how you experience the Dhamma in these five ways. And when he does, it's always with something you can see directly for yourself, that you can know for yourself.

This doesn't require—it doesn't tell you to go sign up for a PhD in Buddhist studies so you can know. He tells you to look inside and see it for yourself.

And so here in this text, what you can see for yourself is the stains and the abandoning of it. This is how you see the Dhamma. And then you have confidence.

Now there are other people who've done this as well, and they know this, and they know this possibility for themselves. And that makes a world of difference, to know people like that.

So this confidence, verified confidence—you know something in yourself, you feel it, you sense it here—brings inspiration, brings a certain kind of joy.

And how would some of you characterize a joy that comes from this kind of experiential confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha? Some of you like to give one or two words for that?

Yeah, onward leading. Perfect. Onward leading. This works perfect because of the way this is a flow that we're describing. We're on a journey here.

Yeah, and I noticed that the attributes described are what I've seen in other texts described as the spiral texts. And I didn't know that this sutta had that structure. So it's really beautiful to see it.

Questioner [25:53 - 25:54]

In there.

Gil Fronsdal [25:54 - 25:56]

It's a beautiful thing. Thank you.

Luke?

Questioner [25:57 - 26:03]

Cool and yet brilliant.

Gil Fronsdal [26:03 - 26:07]

Cool and brilliant. That was very nice.

Questioner [26:07 - 26:11]

Cool, like temperature, and brilliant, like shining light.

Gil Fronsdal [26:11 - 26:18]

Very nice. Very nice combination. Thank you. Barbara? Muted.

Questioner [26:29 - 26:31]

Quiet smile.

Gil Fronsdal [26:31 - 34:27]

Quiet smile. Very nice. And your own?

It brings up other moments of joy. Brings up other moments of joy. Perfect.

So then the text describes that based on this inspiration, this joy around the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, that's based on the experience we've had ourselves, now, now as the practice continues, there's a momentum that starts up.

And remember that this description of confirmed confidence, confidence based on understanding, and that kind of confidence in the tradition, is the same as stream entry, or entering the current.

So a person who has it strong enough, has this abandoning of these defilements strong enough to really make an impression, so that it's kind of like, wow, this is possible. Wow, this is fantastic. Boy, is this good. This is inspiring. This is good.

And there's other people who do this. The Buddha has done this. He's done it all the way. And there's the Dhamma that he teaches. And wow, this is a fantastic kind of event here I'm part of.

And so the inspiration is there. And if the inspiration somehow feeds into the quiet, deep sensitivity of practice, then we start flowing along. The flow, the momentum catches us or lifts us.

And the way it's described is first there's a gladness. And the gladness, as I understand—how I interpret it—is that it's evaluative. It does involve the conceptual, cognitive mind understanding, wow, this has a lot of implications. This is great. This is a really good thing. This is profound. It understands something.

But as we give ourselves over to it and allow this momentum to carry us, it starts to quiet something inside, and the gladness becomes less evaluative and more embodied. And we have joy.

The joy in this tradition is born. This is a biological reference point. From gladness, joy is born. And it doesn't say from gladness we then get out our hammers and screwdriver and construct joy and, you know, put it together like joy by numbers.

It's more like we're getting out of the way and allowing a natural process to go through us. And something is born, something is growing and gestating inside of us until some point where it surfaces and is born as joy.

And then from there, something begins to relax. So some kind of confidence, some new kind of steadiness occurs, and the body becomes tranquil. As the body becomes tranquil, there arises happiness. As we become happy, then *samādhi* arises.

Samādhi. *Samādhi* here I like to translate as unification, a gathering together. *Samādhi*, again—and I suspect, like me, some of you are like me—there's been a time and place where you try to develop concentration with a lot of huffing and puffing and trying and kind of, like, bringing out the sledgehammer or the, you know, the jackhammer to really—you're going to bore down.

And this is not the way for *samādhi*. It's part of this natural process. We have to—that the conditions are there and the momentum of practice is there—something begins to—*samādhi* begins to appear.

I like to think of *samādhi* as a gift whenever I have it.

And then with *samādhi*, now the cloth is clean. Now the cloth is ready for a stain. A stained cloth won't take any more dye, or you put a little bit of dye and it's lost in all the stains. But a clean cloth can take a stain, a dye.

And now the dye is something, a singular dye of loving-kindness or of compassion or of sympathetic, appreciative joy or of equanimity.

Now the mind is clear and clean and maybe empty in a certain way so that it can be filled without any blemish. It's phenomenal to sit with a radiance of joy, of joyful happiness, joyful love, *mettā*, that just feels so clean and so healthy and so healing, just kind of flowing through us.

I've had it in such a way that it felt like *mettā* was flowing in my blood, healing my whole body, kind of like a nourishment for my body.

And so again, it's not being described as something you have to do. And in fact, in the suttas, I don't really know of any place in the suttas where the Buddha gives—he doesn't give that kind of clear technical instructions in the *brahmavihāras* as you get in the *Visuddhimagga*, as you get 1,000 years after the Buddha with Buddhaghosa, the way it's sometimes taught as a technique.

If anything, in the suttas, it's kind of understood to be a natural byproduct of this momentum of practice that happens if you can clean your mind well enough, make it clear and clean and ready to take this in.

And then from this, then I kind of imagine that this is a stain—or a dye—which is beautiful but only settles into the cloth very lightly. It's dissolvable. It's a dissolvable stain or dye, so that it doesn't take much for it to dissolve.

Maybe even it evaporates. You put it out in the sun, and the dye just kind of lifts off the cloth until there's no cloth even. You thought there was cloth, but when the dye goes, even the cloth has disappeared. What is that?

So then we have this idea that the person moves now into the liberating insights. And the way it's presented here is there is this. There is—which is often presented in the Four Noble Truths—here is that there is this suffering. There is this. There is what's inferior. There is what's superior. And there's that which is beyond this realm of conceiving, of conception that we have.

And so some people see, whenever they see inferior and superior, get irritated by Buddhism. Because it's, you know, judgmental, it's hierarchical, and we shouldn't have this kind of idea.

But we can maybe come up with more polite words that inspire people in the modern American world, maybe. But, you know, one sees this, one sees the ouch, and one sees the ah. This is good.

And so we see the downside of something. We see something which is painful, that is suffering. And we see this is not the way forward. And then we see something which is better than that, that feels really good.

And we're allowed in the Dhamma to feel good. I'm going to—I'm going to—we're allowed in the Dhamma to feel good.

And not only that—and this was a surprise to me because I never got this message in the first couple of decades of practicing Buddhism—in the suttas, over and over again, there’s an emphasis on becoming filled, abundant, complete, fulfilled in the Dhamma, fulfilled with joy, fulfilled with freedom.

There’s a feeling of real—an arahant is someone who’s completely fulfilled, is saturated, is permeated with certain qualities. And we’re allowed to do this.

But here, to be saturated with these *brahmavihāras*, they’re pretty good, but they still involve part of the conceptual mind operating, very subtle, maybe seemingly invisible. Sometimes we don’t even see what we’re doing in the mind to have these conceptions of goodwill, conceptions of caring for people’s suffering, conceptions of being concerned with people’s well-being and their joy, sharing their joy.

And even equanimity. There is a field of conception there that goes on. Conceiving. And it’s pretty wonderful.

But imagine that you went on with it nonstop. You know, what if it went on for 20 years? Like, if you just had compassion for 20 years nonstop, nothing else was really going on for you, you’d probably be begging for it to stop. You know, enough already.

There is a limitation to these things. And so it’s to see the downside of it. So not to dismiss it, not to be against it, but so we’re willing to let go of that too. Let it evaporate.

And in the evaporating of these wonderful qualities, these deep states, everything else evaporates too. And we go beyond this realm of conceiving.

And this is considered to be, in this text, full liberation, becoming an arahant.

So there is this flow that goes on in the text. And the Buddha brings the flow to a completion. And then there happens to be a Brahmin sitting nearby, the Brahmin who likes to go into the river, and he hears all this.

And I guess he’s made—who knows, he’s concerned or he wonders if he found a brother in the Buddha, since the brother Buddha also goes and flows in these streams. So he certainly, he must know about going into physical rivers also to get purified.

So he says, “Do you also go into the rivers?” And the Buddha says, “Well, what should I do that for?”

And then the Buddha offers this verse to—you know, as a kind of—it’s a brilliant verse. Rhetorically, I think that’s what he’s trying to do there.

But before I go into that, I think it might be a good time to take some questions, concerns, protests. What would you like to—what would you like to have some discussion about? Make some room for you now. Mary.

Questioner [38:14 - 38:54]

I'm just curious if the *brahmavihāras* can be used as an antidote to these 16 unwholesome qualities. I was just trying in my mind, as I was looking them over, to see if I could almost map them out.

I don't think there's a linear mapping. Like, I don't think you can put, like, *upekkhā* is the opposite of arrogance. But I just wondered if there was a connection in using them as an antidote to purification or to getting a cleaner cloth?

Gil Fronsdal [38:54 - 40:59]

Yes, there is this idea that they are antidotes and that these two things can coexist. Cruelty can coexist with compassion. Ill will can't exist with goodwill.

So people use it as antidotes. And probably we should just consider that's a very individual situation. Different people can use it for different purposes, different antidotes for different of these negative mind states. And so we experiment and try to do them.

But as an antidote, I think for the most part what it does is it settles them, relaxes them, pushes them away, creates an alternative mind state that is healthier and good. But it doesn't do the same thing as abandoning them. It might temporarily still them.

But what the Buddha is looking for is much more than just stilling something as an antidote, but really getting rid of it. Really being done with it once and for all.

And so there's only maybe one or two of you who have some issue around conceit, some mild issue around conceit. But wouldn't it be nice if, you know, if you were just done with it once and for all?

You know, not just to give you an antidote for conceit and say, you know, just go around and use equanimity and that's all you do all day long, equanimity to keep your conceit at bay. That's not really so great.

So we want to be a little bit careful about the antidotes. We want to be able to also really turn towards these difficult mind states and really understand them deeply, see them deeply.

And that's what, when it's the beginning of the text, where it begins with one knows the stains are there. I mean, this is a powerful thing to do, to really turn towards it, to know it.

So then we have R.K. And so you have to unmute.

Questioner [41:12 - 41:12]

Yes.

Gil Fronsdal [41:12 - 41:48]

Yeah, you are unmuted, but we still don't hear you. Yeah, so there must be something else going on with your computer. I wonder if you look under the settings for the mic, the microphone setting, that maybe you're not on the computer mic or a different mic. Maybe you have AirPods on in your ears.

So I think, okay. Okay. So then Michelle.

Questioner [41:48 - 42:00]

Yeah, I think to pick up on what you were just saying a few minutes ago about turning towards that which is difficult or turning towards the suffering.

Gil Fronsda [42:00 - 42:01]

Uh-huh.

Questioner [42:01 - 42:38]

That really sort of makes me go back to the parallel simile of gold being refined in a furnace. It's not just the cloth, which is like, oh, it's being rinsed in the water. And it's so like, isn't that refreshing?

It's like, this is a parallel simile. The two are side by side. And, you know, I guess for storytelling purposes, the water theme is maybe more useful. But in my experience, whatever experience I might have of this, it's very much like being burned in a furnace.

Gil Fronsda [42:38 - 42:40]

Very nice.

Questioner [42:40 - 42:44]

Anyway, I just wanted to sort of bring that up.

Gil Fronsda [42:44 - 42:47]

That, then, this explains something about you.

Gil Fronsda [42:48 - 42:51]

What it explains is why you're so golden.

Questioner [42:54 - 42:54]

Thank you.

Gil Fronsda [42:54 - 42:57]

Yes, very nice. Very nice.

Questioner [42:57 - 43:21]

Yeah, it's not easy, you know, to turn towards that which is difficult. And so I think, you know, for me anyway, only really focusing on the piece that has to do with the water and the cleansing and that piece kind of, it doesn't really, you know, evoke maybe some of these other themes that are maybe suggested. So.

Gil Fronsda [43:21 - 44:04]

This is fantastic. I appreciate you saying this because this is something I knew about that simile there, but I never really paid much attention to it. And this makes it much more realistic, what you're saying.

It's true that to provide this kind of romantic idea, just flow in the river and everything's going to be good, is, you know, it can happen that way at some point. But to get to the point you're in the river, it might be that you're in the furnace for a while, you know, in the fire.

And so that's the way definitely it is for some people. And for people to get support through that fire or find a healthy way to go through it is part of the art. Thank you.

Questioner [44:04 - 44:23]

I want to continue that talk from my own experience. I'm 79 years old. And it took—I'm working with a trauma therapist on my complex PTSD from childhood.

Questioner [44:23 - 44:46]

And it's never-ending. And it keeps coming. And it's very difficult. And it's wonderful. And it seems like it will be never-ending. And I wish I could live many more years and keep going through it.

Gil Fronsdal [44:46 - 45:10]

Fantastic. Okay. This has been—yes, it's—I love this. And it makes sense that it's maybe never-ending. There's always more work to be done.

At some point, Marianne, when you feel you're ready for this, I don't know when it might be, but at some point before you finish going through all your PTSD, all your difficulties, you might want to do a ritual.

Gil Fronsdal [45:12 - 45:59]

And then in the ritual, put it down, put it behind you symbolically, and take it and step into a fuller, more embodied presence where you now see yourself, be yourself, without any of this. Like you're now ready for a new way.

This is not magic. This is not going to make it all go away. But it might begin shifting your perception and shifting your identity around it.

So at some point, you won't be so identified with it. It might still be there, but you'll have a whole different way of holding yourself in relationship to it that might be able to kind of help you move on in this practice.

Questioner [45:59 - 46:12]

I think I should tell you that I have a very serious illness, very painful for me, and I won't be around very much.

Gil Fronsdal [46:12 - 46:15]

Oh, so you should do the ritual sooner rather than later then.

Questioner [46:15 - 46:16]

Right. Thank you.

Gil Fronsdal [46:19 - 46:21]

Thank you. Wallace.

Questioner [46:21 - 46:47]

Yes, I have a question about the rapture, joy, and bliss that's mentioned in this sutta. Is that directly related to the—and I'm using Bhikkhu Anālayo's translation—of joy, happiness, and gladdening that we find in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*?

Gil Fronsdal [46:47 - 47:50]

I think you used the word directly. Is it directly connected? You know, the ways that we experience things like joy and happiness, bliss, rapture, can be at so many different levels that to put it neatly into one particular level, one particular place—and we experience so many different ways, so many different conditions come together—that I think the answer is very personal.

So if you're doing *Ānāpānasati* and you feel the joy and the happiness there, then can you identify that your way of experiencing it there fits how you might experience it in this simile of the cloth sutta, what's being described there?

There's no authority that's going to answer this question of yours for you.

Questioner [47:50 - 47:51]

Right.

Gil Fronsdal [47:51 - 48:21]

In a clear, definitive way. I think that understanding the pattern of these teachings, the conditionality of these teachings, and then seeing how to understand it for yourself so it supports your practice, guides your practice, that's what's interesting.

To make a one-to-one correspondence in an intellectual way, that's not so interesting. Does this make sense? Yeah, you're still muted.

Questioner [48:21 - 48:42]

Yeah, I was just noting how in the sutta the joy and the happiness in a similar way leads to tranquility, and then which leads to further sort of happiness, which leads to concentration.

Gil Fronsdal [48:43 - 49:41]

So it—yeah, you can map these together. What I really like as a teacher, especially as a teacher, is that I'm less interested in the nouns, less interested in the particular states that people can experience, but rather I'm interested in the pattern of the unfolding, to have a sense of how these things go from one to the other.

And these patterns can unfold at many different levels of concentration. And so I'm not so interested in saying this is the right way of doing it.

What I'm interested in is how, in the state that you're in, how does the practice allow you to move on to the next step in the pattern? And then sometimes it might be a spiral where you go deeper and deeper or fuller and fuller over time.

But I think knowing the pattern can help guide the practice. Okay, thank you. And Luke?

Questioner [49:41 - 50:51]

This is commenting on similes and symbols that was coming up a bit earlier about flame or stream.

And it occurred to me, or what was reminded in hearing Ajahn Jayasāro speaking on the topic of patient endurance, or *khanti*. And so of course we may like the cool, cool stream. That sounds pleasant, like you're at a water park and you got a little raft to float down on.

But apparently the supreme incinerator of the *kilesas*, the defilements, or in this case these 16 stains, what's described as the supreme incinerator is—

Questioner [50:51 - 50:51]

The fire.

Questioner [50:52 - 50:54]

—that patient endurance, or *khanti*. So.

Gil Fronsdal [50:55 - 50:57]

Very nice. Very nice.

Questioner [50:57 - 51:01]

Not so cool and pleasant, but still the way to go, perhaps.

Gil Fronsdal [51:01 - 51:04]

For some of us. We don't get to choose sometimes.

Questioner [51:04 - 51:07]

Yeah, right.

Gil Fronsdal [51:07 - 51:20]

Is it Kester? You're still muted.

Questioner [51:20 - 52:00]

My name is Karsten. I don't know why it comes out like that. Anyway, I've had some thoughts about something you said just a short time ago.

You said that the *brahmavihāras* wouldn't necessarily be a full antidote to the defilements, because while it creates another mind state, you wouldn't necessarily have the full abandonment. I mean, I'm assuming you meant by that that you could create the alternative mind state, but some of these things would still hold on.

Gil Fronsdal [52:00 - 52:03]

They might be. They might still be there in the recesses of the mind.

Questioner [52:03 - 52:05]

Yeah, so they'd be there in the—

Gil Fronsdal [52:05 - 52:08]

They're quieted for a while.

Questioner [52:08 - 52:36]

But then the question in my mind is, well, how do you go about abandoning them? I guess one way I could think of, without the *brahmavihāras*, is you just see the way that they cause suffering.

But at some point, if you just see the way they cause suffering, that's very self-interested. You need something more. And then I began to think, well, maybe you need a kind of synergy between the *brahmavihāras* and the abandonment.

Gil Fronsdal [52:36 - 52:37]

Nice.

Questioner [52:37 - 52:55]

Maybe in the same way, the *brahmavihāras* need the work on abandonment in order to get there. In other words, you develop sympathetic—you develop the joy and the appreciative joy and the compassion.

Questioner [52:55 - 53:16]

And partly abandoning these things. And maybe if you just work on the *brahmavihāras*, it doesn't fully work either, because these other things are in the recesses of the mind.

Well, what I'm really asking is, following your train of thought, it would seem that you both—you have to put these two together.

Gil Fronsdal [53:16 - 53:17]

Lovely.

Questioner [53:17 - 53:22]

Two streams that need to intersect. Am I on the right track here? What do you think?

Gil Fronsdal [53:22 - 54:18]

Oh, you're definitely on the right track. It might be the right track for you also. I'm a little bit reluctant to make any track the track.

There's so many varied ways in which individuals navigate this Dhamma path. And I think there are people who definitely find what you're saying true. And they may not only find it true, but maybe they need to work on the *brahmavihāras* before they have any hope of being able to really let go deeply.

But this path has so many different ways in which it works. And I've known people who could really only work with some of their deep attachments only when somehow accidentally something had happened in their life—they took a psychedelic or something—where they really let go deeply.

Only then did they have the mind state to be able to go and address some of these deep attachments.

Questioner [54:18 - 54:19]

Yeah.

Gil Fronsdal [54:19 - 54:24]

So there's so many different ways. But what you said was brilliant. So thank you.

Questioner [54:24 - 54:36]

Just one quick follow-up. Could you abandon these things without cultivating—

Gil Fronsdal [54:36 - 54:43]

Everything is possible. Don't limit the possibilities. Thank you. Thank you.

Questioner [54:46 - 55:12]

Gil, there's a sentence in your study guide that I've been puzzling over. I really love it, but I don't have any idea what it means, really.

Birth is destroyed. The holy life has been lived. What had to be done has been done. There is nothing beyond this here.

I just feel so satisfied to have everything done, you know, finished.

Questioner [55:12 - 55:26]

But then there's the parenthetical, i.e., nothing beyond this life. And it's taken from the—where does this sentence come from? And can you comment more?

Gil Fronsdal [55:26 - 57:56]

Yeah, this is a very common sentence in the suttas where someone describes their full awakening this way. It's kind of like their confirmation or their recognition. Now they're fully awakened.

So nothing more needs to be done means nothing more needs to be done in terms of becoming free of suffering. The Dhamma path has been fulfilled. And so nothing more needs to be done here.

And one of the meanings that there's no more birth, the traditional Theravāda way of understanding it, is you won't be reborn. Because there is this traditional idea that the whole point of practice is not to be reborn, because birth just means guaranteed suffering.

But the word birth is used in many ways in the suttas, including figuratively or metaphorically, as we see in this text where it talks about the birth of joy. It's the same word, *jāti*.

And so I, at least from my interpretation, the way I'd like to interpret this passage is this means the birth of becoming, birth of identification, birth of our attachments. These things, these things that keep us suffering in this lifetime, will no longer arise for us.

And we're confident in that. We see that. We know that. There's an amazing confidence, there's an amazing degree of self-understanding that comes with deep practice.

And this kind of confidence, done what had to be done. The last line is my translation of this. Bhikkhu Bodhi, he translates it as—which is a little bit more the traditional Theravāda one—“There is no more coming into any state of being.”

So now we're back into this idea that you're not going to be reborn. There's no more rebirth anywhere. But the words in the text are very simple words, very simple things. And so it's a kind of a little bit of a leap, I believe, to read it the way that the tradition reads it.

And based on my own kind of experience in deep meditation, this idea, there's no—nothing more here. There's nothing more here to be done. Kind of. There's nothing more than this, this world that we're living in. Let's live in it well.

Questioner [57:56 - 58:08]

And does it point to a real feeling of deep satisfaction that you've come to some conclusion?

Gil Fronsdal [58:10 - 58:11]

Yes.

Questioner [58:12 - 58:17]

That everything's been consummated, so you don't need to strive anymore.

Gil Fronsdal [58:17 - 58:48]

Something like that. The real feeling that I think I've done what had to be done. Like, okay, I did it. You know, that it's complete. It feels complete.

And sometimes, you know, in practice, in deep practice, it's a lot of time and effort to practice, and to—ah, done what had to be done. It's like there can be a clarity about that that happens to you.

So maybe the last one, if R.K. now can unmute. Yes.

Questioner [58:51 - 59:07]

Okay. I have a question about abandoning things like lust, greed, anger. I see those thoughts arising, right? And I've been doing that for a long, long time.

Gil Fronsdal [59:07 - 59:07]

Yeah.

Questioner [59:07 - 59:24]

Not even in meditation, you know. I could be doing anything, and I see those thoughts arising. And other than following them, not following them, there doesn't seem to be anything I can do. And I've been stuck in that state for a long, long time.

Gil Fronsdal [59:24 - 59:25]

Right.

Questioner [59:25 - 59:26]

So, I don't know what—

Gil Fronsdal [59:26 - 01:00:15]

So, what you said, you have these thoughts arising. So the way that this *vipassanā* practice works is you want to be able to step away from the thought part of it.

The thoughts and the ideas are not so useful, but rather to drop down into the body and become familiar with the deeper sensations and the deeper emotions that are connected to these thoughts.

And dive in and really feel the suffering those thoughts bring on, the tension, the tightness, the fire. Really go down and really start feeling the ecology, the whole phenomenon for which the thought is just the tip of the iceberg.

Questioner [01:00:17 - 01:00:32]

If you don't mind, you know, I know we're out of time. So when this happens, I do look at my body and I see the tension it's creating in the body and everything.

But, you know, this is during normal activity. It is not during meditation.

Gil Fronsdal [01:00:32 - 01:00:35]

Yes.

Questioner [01:00:35 - 01:01:01]

And so I feel stuck there because at that point in time when I'm in an activity and I'm seeing something happening, let's say I'm at the gym and I have a lustful thought and I see how the body is reacting, you know, I can see that.

But other than not following the thought and ignoring it, and trying to switch to something else, I kind of just seem to be stuck in that state for a long, long time. Now, this has been a year, year and a half.

Gil Fronsdal [01:01:01 - 01:02:08]

So two things. And this—you're asking very important questions, and we are out of time.

So two thoughts for you. One is that to really work well and deeply with these kinds of deep, deep attachments, deep states, sometimes it's best to do that on retreat, where you really give yourself a lot of time to really feel and be with these things over an extended period of time.

And the second thing is, you might want to shift your orientation around these mind states or these things when they're happening for you.

Rather than thinking of them as something you have to deal with, something you have to fix and figure out, just recognize them as uncomfortable states.

And then expand your capacity to be quiet and still with discomfort. Like, make yourself big enough so that your discomfort around all this is held in by some kind of soft kindness.

And just allow yourself to be and feel the discomfort, allow it to be there, but don't do anything more than feel it in this kind way.

Questioner [01:02:08 - 01:02:10]

Okay, thank you.

Gil Fronsdal [01:02:12 - 01:02:47]

Thank you. So thank you. I enjoyed this with you all. I hope this was nice for you.

I do have another one of these classes that is not, not, not going to just prepare you for *vipassanā*. But I don't think we can make it as fun the next time because it's kind of a dry philosophical one.

But it's the very first discourse of the *Middle Length Discourses*. So in some ways, it's like the gate. Someone put it there first, whoever the editor was, so that it would be kind of the door into this text.

And it also is a kind of polemic—is that the right word?

Questioner [01:02:47 - 01:02:48]

Yeah.

Gil Fronsdal [01:02:48 - 01:03:38]

A critique of Brahmanical ideas, just like the one we did today. So we'll see a very different approach for this purpose.

And it has a lot of implications for how the Dhamma is understood in the modern world. Very common ideas that people want to say about the Dhamma that turn out to be very similar to the Brahmanical ideas that the Buddha is critiquing.

So I think that's the beginning of October. Same thing, with a study guide you'll get beforehand.

And I want to thank you all for being here and being part of this. And I am going to meet for a few minutes now with the people who are in the Sati Center certificate program.

So if you're here, if you could stay on—or maybe we'll start in about five minutes. We'll take a stretch break.

And for the rest of you, you know, thank you very much. And I look forward to more of this.