Guided Meditation: Riding the Currents

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Hello and welcome, and welcome to this morning meditation. That's a continuation of this last week's focus on the five *khandhas*: aggregates, bundles, bundles of clinging. It's kind of the half of a two-part series, where the bundles are the challenge we want to overcome. Next week, the seven factors of awakening are the corollary of what we want to develop: the beautiful qualities, beautiful capacities we have, what we want to grow. So, welcome.

Today, the topic is the fifth of the five bundles. That's usually called consciousness. Many people might know what it is, but there are a lot of different definitions of consciousness. It's probably more humble to say that we don't really know what it is, or even if the word consciousness is a word that's useful to have.

Though for many people, it's self-evident that we have consciousness, this word that's the fifth bundle is *viññāṇa*, often called consciousness. It's probably more appropriate to call it cognition, because the verb that goes together with that noun is cognizing. The Buddha emphasizes that cognizing is momentary. There are momentary moments of cognition, not some enduring, unified field, a thing which is a thing called consciousness.

Regardless of what consciousness is, the Buddha called—I'm pretty sure—for the Buddha, it was more like moments of cognition that sometimes get strung together or seen somehow as being continuous. So, for example, today, here locally, we call this day Friday. But where's the cognition of Friday? Where's the perception of Friday? Where's the "I"? Where does that exist?

The idea of Friday, to say that it's Friday for twenty-four hours, is, you know, continuous—continuously Friday. But Friday doesn't exist except as a concept of the mind. And so, to cognize Friday is just a momentary cognition. That momentary cognition comes with the idea that it covers many hours of time, and so the idea is that it's continuous.

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But we don't have anything more than the idea that many people share. The actual cognition of Friday is all a mental event that happens momentarily. It's just, “Oh, it's Friday,” and then we live with the idea. We project the idea that this is twenty-four hours.

And so, if we start kind of recognizing that a lot of our cognitions, a lot of the momentary ideas and perceptions of what's happening, happen only in a momentary way, there's an idea, then it's renewed, and it's renewed. But many of them have built into them the idea that this is a continuous thing. And because we can renew that cognition over and over again, it lends itself to continuing continuity.

And in *vipassanā* practice, the idea is to settle into this place where we're not projecting continuity. We're not living in the mind's construction of continuity, assumption of continuity. We're recognizing we're creating, we're forming the idea of it, and dropping down to the building blocks for these more abstract ideas of, you know, continuity. And the building blocks are momentary cognitions that come and go.

It's a kind of an illusion to place continuity in moments of cognition that are just momentary. So, I know this is abstract and complicated for a short meditation, but that's a little bit behind what's today. And the central premise of *vipassanā* practice is to begin cutting through the mind's construction of continuity.

So, to meditate quietly, I want to offer you the idea that it's possible to not assert any ideas onto our experience. No assertion, no contention. But just settle back to be receptive and open, like a good listener. Settle back to live in the perceptions of the simplicity of the moment, as if life, experience of life, is a river of change.

Gently closing the eyes, and feeling your body. Not any idea or even feeling that the body is solid and continuous, but rather the sensations in the body—those that are shifting and changing, and pulsing and vibrating—and the awareness which flows between them. Now this, now that, now back to the one, and then that, this, and that.

You might be mostly focusing on some discomfort in your body. But momentarily, you're also listening to my voice. And if the instructions are to feel the sensations in your right hand, for maybe at least a moment, you feel the right hand and not the discomfort somewhere else. Unless it's in your right hand.

So, these two streams or rivers come together when we meditate quietly, receptively, openly. Not asserting anything, not asserting ideas and concepts. Concepts of continuity. There's the stream of our sensations. Some of them might seem to be enduring, but there's also the stream of awareness.

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The different things that come into awareness. The different ways that awareness flows and floats between things. Maybe think of them as two currents in a river that you move back and forth peacefully, gently between—these two currents. Sitting here, and the meeting place of these two currents maybe is the breathing.

The sensations of breathing are a river of changing sensations, in the river of changing moments of cognition, moments of recognition, moments of sensing. Here, relaxing into the broad river of change. Relaxing to find the two rivers of change: the changing sensations, perceptions of your ears, your body, sensations; and the river of awareness, the changing, shifting little moments of cognition, of knowing, being present.

As if you're resting on your back, gently, contentedly, floating on everything, not fixating on anything, allowing everything to be as it is. And you, floating back and forth, these two currents of sensations and cognition, sensations and awareness. And awareness is not continuous. It's made up of little movements, little moments of experiences being registered in a deep, unselfconscious movement of cognition.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, to appreciate water. Water is so central for being alive. And to recognize how the Buddha emphasizes a liberated life as one that flows like a river. Bringing the water of life that doesn't support life, human life, if it's frozen or evaporated.

A liberated life that flows, moves around, and neither resists nor asserts, but brings life, brings essential ingredient. And so, to be like water. That brings kindness. That brings respect and love. That flows, flows around, flows through.

Where everything that we touch, we don't resist, but we meet with kindness, with love. Water is one of the most powerful forces in the world. That works slowly, changing and shifting whole landscapes. So may our kindness, our love, our goodwill be carried by our flowing in the river of change, where everything we touch, everything we encounter, may we offer, may we meet it with love, with kindness, with goodwill.

Knowing, believing that kindness is one of the most powerful forces in human life, and that over time it changes the human landscape dramatically. May we meet this world in kindness and love, respecting all beings. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. Thank you.

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