Crossing the Flood

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 58:25

Most of you have probably seen the scheduled change for the part one yogis posted on the board. We'll talk about that tomorrow, but let me just notice how even something that simple can impact your minds.

When the Buddha taught, he used a variety of teaching styles. One of the ways he communicated and expressed the Dharma was through the use of analogy. I think he was actually quite a master at analogy. For me, when I read the analogies the Buddha offered, I find that they seem so appropriate and apt—it's like the teaching comes in from a different angle. The image created in my mind around the analogy often goes in a different way than simple words do. Analogies provide an intuitive way that we can connect with the teachings.

Tonight I'd like to explore two analogies that the Buddha offered. They're both quite familiar—you're probably acquainted with one or the other or both of them. They're both water analogies. The Buddha used water a lot in his analogies, and both of these have to do with crossing a vast expanse of water or a flood.

Before I actually get into these analogies, I want to explore a little bit about what this flood means. The Buddha explicitly said in one teaching that the floods he's referring to in these analogies are the four floods: the flood of sensuality, the flood of existence, the flood of views, and the flood of ignorance. It's said that they're called floods because these aspects of our mind keep us submerged in the round of existence, in samsara, not able to find our way to freedom from suffering.

This particular list, the four floods, is not talked about that much in the suttas. But all of these unwholesome states referred to in the floods are grounded in what we could call the three unwholesome roots of greed, aversion, and delusion. That's how I relate to this notion of flood and of crossing the flood—that we're crossing over this flood of greed, aversion, and delusion. We get swept away by greed, aversion, and delusion. We get drowned in these states of mind.

We try to arrange things to suit us. We try to arrange our lives, even for small moments, so that we can have things be the way we like them to be. You might think of this as coming up for a breath of air. But it doesn't last long. Things fall apart, and so then we have to work again, struggle again to find a way to come up for another breath of air, arrange things again. And again it doesn't last very long. We're submerged again.

I think you all know this sense of being submerged by these qualities of mind, and the struggle of using our habitual, familiar ways of getting that breath of air, seeing that it's just an endless struggle. I'm

reminded of the saying of the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland: "You see here, it takes all the running you can do to stay in one place." Being flooded by greed, aversion, and delusion, we're not able to navigate our lives very skillfully.

Tonight I'd like to explore two of these analogies about crossing the flood. I think we actually have a lot to learn about practice and what the Buddha had to say by looking at the various parts of the analogy, by unpacking it a little bit. So I'd like to explore these two analogies in some detail.

The first one is the simile of the raft. I'll read this to you and then go over parts of it—read a little bit, do a little commentary, then read a little more and do a little commentary.

"Suppose a man in the course of a journey saw a great expanse of water whose near shore was dangerous and fearful and whose further shore was safe and free from fear, but there was no ferry boat or bridge going to the far shore."

So a couple of the parts of the analogy so far. First is this near shore that's dangerous. The Buddha equates this near shore with identity. Why is identity dangerous? He says that the near shore is dangerous. Some identities are obviously dangerous just in their very being, in their way of feeling. I have had various identities that have felt dangerous—the identity of self-hatred, of being miserable. "I'm the miserable person. Well, I'm happy now, but I know that really what I am is miserable." Those identities, those very identities can feel, at the very least, unpleasant and uncomfortable. That's one way that identities are dangerous.

And then there are those other identities that we feel somehow are the way things are supposed to be. When I feel like I know how to do things, when I feel like I'm right, when I feel like I'm a good person—whatever it might be, fill in the blank. These identities are a kind of way of feeling stable, secure. It's like, "Yes, this is me. This is when it feels right. This is when it feels good. This is the way it's supposed to be." There's this solid feeling, and with it comes a sense of what feels like safety or security.

But it's an illusory kind of safety. In the analogy, the near shore is solid—it's at least not in the expanse of water—but the Buddha says it's a dangerous place. In clinging to an identity, we have to make this effort to protect it, to defend it, to make sure that other people agree with this identity, that they see who we really are. There's an endless need to prop up this identity, and we suffer when some experience or circumstance undercuts that sense of solidity, of security.

On one retreat, I got very familiar with two patterns that I saw playing off of each other. One was "I'm a good yogi." The other was "I'm a failure." When I was in that place of feeling like I was a good yogi, it felt like that's what it's supposed to be like, that's what I'm supposed to be and do. I was trying to find a way to have that identity and get rid of the other one. What I discovered, kind of to my surprise, was that these two identities were intimately interconnected. There wasn't a way to have one without the other. The very having of that identity of "I'm a good yogi" was the setup. Because we can't always have things the way we

think they should be. So when for a few moments or hours I couldn't be very mindful, or the mind was wandering a lot, the other identity arose: "I'm a failure. I'm not that good yogi." These identities are a dangerous place. They create suffering.

The second part of this analogy is the vast expanse of water—this is the flood. I've already spoken about this a little bit. The other part we've talked about is the far shore. The Buddha equates the far shore with Nibbāna: freedom from suffering, freedom from needing to do, needing to protect, needing to defend, freedom from clinging, freedom from greed, aversion, and delusion.

To continue with the analogy, we have this man who is on a journey and has come to this place. He thinks, "There is this great expanse of water whose near shore is dangerous and fearful and whose further shore is safe and free from fear. But there is no ferry boat or bridge going to that far shore. Suppose I collect grass, twigs, branches, and leaves and bind them together into a raft. Supported by that raft and making an effort with my hands and feet, I could get safely across to the far shore." And then the man collected grass, twigs, branches, and leaves and bound them together into a raft. Supported by the raft and making an effort with his hands and feet, he got safely across to the far shore.

There are a few parts to this aspect of the analogy that I'd like to unpack. The first is the raft itself—this raft by which we cross over the flood of greed, aversion, and delusion. In exploring this analogy, Ajahn Sumedho wrote something that really spurred my thinking and prompted me to look closely at the various parts. He wrote: "The Buddha referred to his teaching as a raft, which you can make out of the things around you. You don't have to have a special motorboat or submarine or luxury liner. A raft is something you make from the things around just to get across to the other shore. We're not trying to make a super-duper vehicle. We're just able to use what's around us for enlightenment."

This is quite inspiring to me—this notion of the raft being created from just what's at hand. And what's at hand is our present-moment experience. Wherever we are, whatever's happening, we have our sense experience: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and things happening in the mind. So the raft is built in part out of our moment-to-moment sense experience.

The other part of the raft—in fact, what I think of as the binding for the raft—is the Dhamma. The Buddha equates the raft with the Eightfold Path: wise view, wise intention, wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, wise effort, wise mindfulness, and wise concentration. We can look at the path as a way to meet our moment-to-moment experience. It's the binding that holds the raft together.

Our moment-to-moment experience, our sense experience—we meet it with wise understanding, with the intention to engage. We meet it with wise effort and mindfulness, and it cultivates concentration.

On one retreat I was sitting with Sayadaw U Tejaniya, he went over how this Eightfold Path is really a moment-to-moment unfolding. It's not necessarily something that unfolds only over a long course of time. In each moment we're cultivating the entire Eightfold Path. And for the three aspects of ethical

conduct—wise speech, wise action, and wise livelihood—he pointed out that these are fulfilled by abstaining. Here on retreat, those aspects are fulfilled by the abandoning of killing, taking what's not given, all of the precepts we're working with. Wise livelihood is fulfilled by engaging in the practice of meditation. Wise speech is primarily fulfilled by silence. So moment to moment we are cultivating the Eightfold Path by meeting our experience.

Using this combination of our moment-to-moment experience and the Eightfold Path, we cross over this flood of greed, aversion, and delusion. This is the raft built out of our present moment experience and bound together with the Dharma.

Another aspect of this analogy of crossing the flood that I resonate with is this notion of being on a raft. A raft is pretty creaky. You're not going to stay dry, right? You're on the raft; you're going to be in contact with that stream while you cross over it. You're going to be in contact with the flood of greed, aversion, and delusion as you cross over it. The raft helps keep you afloat so you're not drowning in it, but you're in contact with it. We don't cross over the flood of greed, aversion, and delusion by somehow magically floating up in the air and flying across. We have to meet the difficulties. We have to meet the flood in order to cross over it.

It's not a mistake when we turn with mindfulness to our experience and see anger, aversion, longing, pride, arrogance, frustration, ignorance. It's not a mistake. The practice brings these into our awareness. The practice doesn't create these states—it uncovers them. It allows us to see them in the space of mindfulness where we have an opportunity to work with them. Rather than having them run us, rather than having them make our choices for us—because if they're not seen, if these states motivated by greed, aversion, and delusion are not seen with mindfulness, they're going to be running the show. They're going to be making our choices for us.

Being on the raft with mindfulness, with effort, with concentration, with understanding and intention, we meet those states of greed, aversion, and delusion, and we aren't swept away by them. We can cross; we can navigate them.

The other piece—he says, "making an effort with hands and feet, he got safely to the far shore." So we build the raft, and we can't just go out into the water and sit there. We've got to make some effort. We've got to head in a direction. If we just go out and drift, it's pretty unlikely, even floating on this raft, that we'll actually get to the far shore. We need to make the effort. Engage with the practices of the Eightfold Path. Make the effort to stay present.

This effort is the resonant piece of the second analogy that I want to bring in, so I'll shift to that one for a few moments.

This analogy comes from a time when the Buddha was sitting in meditation and was visited by a deva. The deva came to ask him a question: "How, dear sir, did you cross the flood?"

"By not halting, friend, and by not straining, I crossed the flood."

"But how is it, dear sir, that by not halting and by not straining you crossed the flood?"

"When I came to a standstill, friend, then I sank. But when I struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not halting and by not straining I crossed the flood."

One of the notes about this sutta observed that there's meant to be a little bit of a paradox in this analogy of not halting and not straining while crossing a flood. The comment says that typically how you would cross a raging stream would be to find a foothold, stop there, look, find the next place where you could step, and then rush quickly through the raging water to get to that next foothold. Rest for a minute.

That's not what the Buddha describes for crossing the flood of greed, aversion, and delusion.

There's another translation of this that is my resonant translation. In reading the suttas, I actually recommend—if you get interested in reading the suttas—finding multiple versions. When you discover a particular sutta you're drawn to, seek out different translations, because we're reading translation. Different uses of words can highlight things or resonate with us somewhat differently.

And so there's another version of this sutta that translates these words: "By neither tarrying nor hurrying, I crossed the flood. When I tarried, I sank. When I hurried, I was swept away." For me, this has been the image and the words that have resonated most deeply. Neither tarrying nor hurrying.

The first thing I want to point out about this—something I personally take great inspiration from—is that the Buddha says, "When I tarried, I sank. When I hurried, I was swept away." He didn't do it perfectly. He had to experiment. He had to find what worked, what allowed him to cross the stream. We also need to do this. We need to experiment and observe what happens, observe what supports us in our practice, what helps us to cross the flood, what sweeps us away, what makes us sink. Again, it's not a mistake when we find ourselves tarrying and hurrying, sinking and being swept away. We learn from that. The Buddha learned from it, and we can follow his example.

I want to explore this notion of tarrying and hurrying. The commentaries describe many different ways that tarrying and hurrying can be understood. I'm not going to follow the commentaries so much, but rather explore some of the ways I've found in my own experience—this image of tarrying and sinking, hurrying and being swept away—how I've felt it in my own practice.

The first and most obvious form of tarrying is sleepiness, the dullness of that hindrance of sloth and torpor, where we're just sunk into oblivion. There's a feeling of sinking there. This is tarrying in our practice—we are not engaging. The counterpoint to this, restlessness, is a form of hurrying. When the mind is restless and unable to really meet and connect with experience, it's like we get swept away. We land on something for a moment and then our minds get swept away.

Related to these two of dullness and restlessness, for tarrying there's also a kind of laziness or

indulgence—we find ourselves indulging a pattern of thought. It's almost like we're in a whirlpool, using another water analogy. We get caught in a whirlpool of thinking. We don't go very far. We're sinking into the water in that whirlpool of thought. On the other side of laziness is over-efforting, being anxious for results. For me, this has had a feeling not so much of sinking, but of not really connecting. It's like being swept away on the current, not meeting experience moment by moment.

Another way to explore tarrying and hurrying is through greed and aversion. We can think of greed as a kind of tarrying. We get stuck on something. "Oh, this is pleasant. I think I'll just hang out with this for a while." It could be anything—a very blissful state of meditation that we get stuck in, or a pleasant fantasy whose pleasantness catches us, and we just remain there. With aversion, we have a sense of not liking an experience, and rather than meeting it, we want to rush past it, on to something else. That would be hurrying past our experience from aversion.

Then there's another aspect of aversion which can be a form of tarrying. I'm very familiar with this one, actually. This is a way my mind tends to work with aversion: I get stuck to things I don't like, trying to get rid of them. That's a kind of tarrying. "How can I fix this? How can I change this? How can I control this? How can I get rid of this?" Or with greed, we can have the sense of being swept away—just the anxiousness of wanting the next pleasant experience. "Where's the next pleasant experience? How can I get the next good thing?"

The commentaries do mention that one of the ways of exploring this tarrying and hurrying is through looking at how we can be sunk into unwholesome states of mind and caught by, swept away from the true goal by wholesome states of mind. This is an interesting one, I think, to explore. Yes, the unwholesome states of mind catch us and drag us down. But we can get caught by wholesome states, feeling like, "Oh, this is what is most important—being with this state of bliss"—and missing out on the understanding, the wisdom that we can cultivate through combining concentration with mindfulness. So we can get swept away from the true goal, not able to actually land on the far shore, by being caught by these wholesome states.

Another sutta explores something that's not connected particularly in any of the commentaries with tarrying and hurrying, but I found it and it resonated for me again in my own experience—ways that I get stuck and swept away. This is a sutta about investigation. The Buddha said, "One should investigate so that consciousness is not distracted and diffused externally, and internally is not fixed."

What does that mean? For me, again, it's not explained anywhere that I've seen, but I have seen in my own experience at times that when I'm investigating something, if I'm looking at something, it's kind of like my mind goes, "Oh, look at that thing. Let me put that under the microscope and really look at it." And it's almost as if I hold onto it in order to look at it. I think that's what it means by being fixed internally—that we kind of get stuck in the pattern of investigation, holding onto something in order to look at it.

Distracted externally—my connection with that is that we can move into looking at the outer experience,

looking for explanations of why things are happening in our history, in our surroundings, essentially in our external environment. We look for the reasons why things are happening, as opposed to really seeing moment to moment that suffering and its causes are happening in the present moment. That's another way to look at this tarrying and hurrying.

For me, this image of neither tarrying nor hurrying has been a really supportive image, actually. Just almost envisioning the Buddha crossing this stream, like walking on water, with a very steady pace. Each time the foot meets the water, it comes up. But it meets the water. It meets it, and then it comes up. It meets it, and it comes up. Just that very steady meeting of experience, moment by moment.

On long retreat, this image has been so helpful to me. Just keep going. Just keep going. Moment by moment, just meet what's right in front of you. And whether we're on retreat or at home, whatever is happening, we can just meet with this very steady pace, moment by moment. Meeting things we like with balance of mind—not holding on to them, trying to keep them, not lost in thoughts about how to control it or get more of it. Meeting things we don't like with balance of mind—really meeting it without rushing over it, but also without getting stuck to it, trying to figure out how to change it or fix it or get rid of it. And meeting things that we usually ignore.

Actually, I think in the ignoring we can both get sunk and swept away. It's kind of like things that we're not really connecting with can grab us from behind and either pull us down or send us off. So meeting the things that we usually ignore, moment by moment—every experience.

Returning to the raft analogy, we left our protagonist at the far shore. He had made it across. And the sutta continues. The Buddha says:

"Then when he had got across and had arrived at the far shore, he might think thus: 'This raft has been very helpful to me. Since supported by it and making an effort with my hands and feet, I got safely across to the far shore. Suppose I were to hoist it on my head or load it on my shoulder and then go wherever I want.' Now, what do you think? By doing so, would that man be doing what should be done with the raft?"

"No, venerable sir."

"By doing what would the man be doing what should be done with the raft? When that man got across and had arrived at the far shore, he might think thus: 'This raft has been very helpful to me, since supported by it and making an effort with my hands and feet, I got safely across to the far shore. Suppose I were to haul it onto the dry land or set it adrift in the water and then go wherever I want.' Now, bhikkhus, it is by doing that that the man would be doing what should be done with the raft. So I have shown you how the Dhamma is similar to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping. When you know the Dhamma to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even good states, how much more so bad states."

There's a lot to explore in this—this letting go even of wholesome states. The image here is of having

crossed over, then setting the raft adrift.

The letting go is not so much a pushing away; it's a not clinging to. One of the key pieces here, I think, is that we can't let go of this raft too soon. We have to use the raft in order to navigate the flood. So the Buddha doesn't recommend letting go of the raft while we're in the middle of the stream.

I think that in hearing this teaching of letting go of everything, letting go of craving, letting go of wanting, we see how when we're engaged in the practice there is wanting—wanting to be mindful. And we've talked about this. We've talked about the notion of wholesome desire, the possibility for wholesome desire, of the *chanda* that can be associated with wholesome states, and the unwholesome desire. We let go of the unwholesome desire, the unwholesome craving, and try to connect with the wish that's associated with the wholesome.

But there can be a kind of confusion that happens when people hear this teaching about letting go and they see that they want to be mindful, they want to cultivate these qualities of concentration, of effort, and then they realize, "Oh, but I'm not supposed to want anything." We have to build the raft. We have to use mindfulness, effort, concentration in order to cross this flood. If we let go of the raft too soon, or if we think, "I'm not supposed to want mindfulness, so I'm not going to do anything to be mindful. If I find myself wanting mindfulness, I won't engage in that mindfulness"—the instruction there is to notice the wanting. It's not to let go of the mindfulness. It's to notice the wanting.

So we use the teachings, which help us to let go of suffering. And there's likely to be some clinging in this process. The path can unfold as a staged letting go. We start our practice, and a lot of what we see initially, and for a long time in our cycles of practice, is real challenges. *Dukkha dukkha*. We see the pain of afflictive emotions, the pain of holding on to wanting things to be the way we want them to be. We really experience that suffering. And we use wholesome states of mind to begin to let go of those unwholesome states of mind. This is using the raft to cross over the flood, using these wholesome states to let go of the unwholesome. And then we start to see as we practice that we're holding on to those wholesome states. We begin to see that there's suffering, there's clinging in those wholesome states as well. And then we need to start looking at that. So practice can unfold by stages.

The Buddha actually pointed to this. He said, "Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened bodhisattva, I too clearly saw as it actually is with proper wisdom how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them. But as long as I did not attain to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, I recognized that I could still be attracted to sensual pleasures. But when I clearly saw, as it actually is with proper wisdom, how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, much despair, and how great is the danger in them, and I had attained to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, I recognized that I was no longer attracted to sensual

pleasures."

So here the Buddha is pointing to the wholesome pleasure of meditation, the wholesome pleasure of concentration in meditation, as being a way to surmount or let go of the dependence that we have on happiness coming from sense pleasure. This is the only way we think that happiness can come until we actually meet another way. And so by depending on the wholesome states of concentration, of insight, we let go of the unwholesome.

And then in another place he said, similarly but pointing to a little more realization, "I see other beings who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures, being devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, burning with fever for sensual pleasures, indulging in sensual pleasures, and I do not envy them. Why is that? Because there is a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, which surpasses even divine bliss."

Here he's pointing beyond the happiness of wholesome states themselves to a state that surpasses divine bliss. And the commentaries point this to freedom, to the freedom of complete liberation. This is, I think, what he's pointing to when he says letting go of the raft once we've crossed over—letting go even of the wholesome.

Now in my own experience exploring this navigation of when to let go of the wholesome, my own guideline, my rule of thumb, is to use suffering as a guide. As we explore our experience—I'll go through some various ways I've used this suffering as a guide, and I think you've probably seen some of this as well. As we practice, as I said, there are a lot of unwholesome states that we meet. And as we bring mindfulness to that, we start to see that the unwholesome states begin to fall away. Sometimes we bring clear mindfulness right to a difficulty and it just falls apart.

And so we start to want that falling apart. An unwholesome state comes up and we bring mindfulness to it in order that the thing will go away. "Oh, here's a painful experience. Let me be mindful of it, then it'll go away." This is a clinging around mindfulness. It's an attitude in the mind, an agenda. Essentially, it's an agenda around why we're being mindful—so that these difficulties will go away.

We start to see, actually, and I know you've all seen this, how this agenda just gets in the way. When we have that agenda—"I want to be mindful in order that this will go away"—we often find that it just locks things in place. So we have to start seeing that agenda itself.

Now, it doesn't mean that we stop being mindful. It doesn't mean that we let go of mindfulness just because there's an agenda there. It means we turn that mindfulness to include the agenda. The agenda and the mindfulness begin to get decoupled so that we can bring mindfulness without that agenda. Initially, it seems hard to do. How do we decouple them? We decouple by turning and noticing the agenda itself, noticing the suffering of the agenda, using suffering as our guide. This is where we need to turn our attention, to bring our mindfulness.

As we continue in our practice, maybe some of these more obvious agendas begin to fall away, but we get really interested in our experience. We really want to understand what's happening. This can be a very helpful agenda at times. If we're in the midst of an aversion attack, wanting to understand it is very useful. And yet this wanting to understand, I've seen in my own practice, becomes a kind of habit and pattern in itself. The wanting to know becomes the important piece. It's like, "I'm not okay unless I understand this, unless I know this." So this wanting to know is a subtler form of wanting—a wanting to understand.

At least in my own experience, what I've seen is that at some point, that very wanting becomes clearly suffering. And that's when I need to turn and look at that habit. I don't necessarily worry about it too much if I see wanting to understand while I'm engaged in observing an aversion attack. But when the mind is more balanced, when there's a flow of experience, and the mind leaps in wanting to understand—again, it's like that tarrying. It steps into the experience, fixes on it, says, "What is this?" We sink into that experience. So again, beginning to notice this agenda. That's all that the practice asks of us: turn towards what is creating the suffering itself. That wanting to understand, at some point, is the suffering and needs to be seen. What is the clinging around that? What is the suffering there?

I've also seen in my practice a kind of holding on to mindfulness, doing the mindfulness, pushing the mindfulness. "I need to be mindful. I need to be mindful. I need to be mindful." In seeing that, I began to see there's an over-efforting, a pushing in to try to be mindful. That over-efforting can bring a kind of struggle to it. Again, when we notice the suffering of that, that's when to turn to explore it.

One of my favorite ways to explore this over-efforting is to ask myself a question. Noticing that over-efforting, turning to notice, "Okay, over-efforting is happening," and then asking myself: "How little effort do I need to make in order to be mindful here?" That one question has been hugely supportive for me. I actually find I can let go of quite a lot of the doing of mindfulness. To my surprise, I don't have to do the mindfulness in order to be mindful. Mindfulness gets its own momentum, and we're getting in its way, essentially, at some point, by that trying to be mindful. So again, this is an agenda behind the mindfulness that we can see.

And we can see the suffering of it when we begin to experience the suffering of it. That's when we look at it.

Sometimes we can be in a state of beautiful, expansive clarity—calm, quiet, no problem. It really seems like a very pure experience, and it doesn't seem like there's any suffering in there at all, no clinging at all. Those are times that are great to just check into and get familiar with that experience. It's also helpful at times like that to explicitly check your relationship with that experience. What is your relationship to this state of blissful peace, calm, quiet, purity?

On one retreat, I noticed just this kind of state, and it did not feel like there was any clinging in the state at all. It felt so pure. And then I checked: what's my attitude? There was a subtle, just a very subtle leaning in, trying to make it continue—a little doing to hold on to that state. When I noticed that, the mind was clear

enough that all I had to do was just notice that subtle clinging to the state, and it let go. The next thing that arose was clear suffering, wanting it to continue. And again, that was seen and that was let go. The next thing was fear that it wouldn't continue. And the next thing that arose was joy that the mind had uncovered all of this. I was blown away. I had no idea there was defilement in that state. I had no idea.

So this practice of checking the attitude, checking our relationship with experience, is a key practice. In fact, all of these examples that I'm giving are looking at essentially the clinging that is there in the relationship with the practice, in the relationship with the mindfulness. This checking into what is my relationship to the experience is very helpful for uncovering this kind of clinging even to wholesome states.

The last part of the analogy is the letting go altogether. I just want to say something about that, because the analogy has the raft set adrift, and the raft is the Eightfold Path. So I want to explore that and bring in some teachings from other places.

One piece here is that the letting go of the wholesome states once one has fully crossed over greed, aversion, and delusion—the understanding isn't that they have somehow transcended those wholesome states and that they don't apply. In one sutta, the Buddha says about the Eightfold Path that right view comes first. And how does right view come first? In one of right view, right intention comes into being. In one of right intention, right speech comes into being. In one of right speech, right action comes into being. In one of right action, right livelihood comes into being. In one of right livelihood, right effort. In one of right effort, right mindfulness. In one of right mindfulness, right concentration. In one of right concentration, right knowledge comes into being. In one of right knowledge, right deliverance comes into being. Thus, the path of the disciple in higher training possesses eight factors—the standard Eightfold Path. The arhat possesses ten factors: the Eightfold Path plus right knowledge and right deliverance.

So in this crossing over the flood, my understanding here is that someone who has fully transcended greed, aversion, and delusion is living the Eightfold Path. They don't have to try to do it. They don't have to hold on to it. It's just simply an expression of their being. The Buddha says the arhat, the fully awakened one, possesses the ten factors—the Eightfold Path plus right knowledge and right deliverance.

So in a way, we can think of our following the Eightfold Path, engaging in the Eightfold Path moment by moment, as a way of modeling what it's like to be liberated. The path and the goal, the freedom from suffering, the way one behaves in the world—my understanding of this is that the way one behaves in the world is through living the Eightfold Path. So by following this path, we too can live the Eightfold Path. Maybe not in that pure way where it doesn't take any effort. But I like this notion that what we're doing to engage in the practice is very much how our life will be with complete freedom.

So let's sit for a couple of minutes.

Thank you for your attention.

This talk was given by Gil Fronsdal at the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, California.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.