Instructions On Intentions and Q&A

Pascal Auclair · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2012) · 1:03:20

First thing I will say is how exciting it is to actually be talking to people who are devoting so much time—I use the same phrasing these days—to discover the human nature, and nature in the larger sense. Some of you for weeks now, and all of us for many weeks, taking really the time to stop and reduce the amount of stimulation, calm the mind, pacify and unify the mind enough to be able to discover what this experience is made of. It's really a privilege to be able to bring some thoughts here tonight in this context.

So last week, if you remember well, there was Rohitassa, this beautiful, candid trans person it was at that point, I think. Neither male nor female. I like that. So that's for my own little feeling tone, personal tone, to bring in a trans person. Rock the boat maybe a bit or not. And so this beautiful being with a lot of energy for practice, describing their search to reach the end of the world to the Buddha. If you remember well, they were asking, is it possible by traveling to reach the end of the world? And the Buddha said, no. By traveling, it's not possible to reach the end of the world. But I'll tell you one thing: without reaching the end of the world, there will not be a stopping of ill or suffering.

This nuance, the play with the two words *world*—the world as the outside world and the traveling in the world to reach the end of it, and the other meaning of world: "Oh, I'd like to be in your world," the world of experience. So when we left Rohitassa last week, they were about to switch practice, turn from the world to the inner world, the world of experience.

Tonight I would like to continue speaking about this investigation that we're on: How does this world that I find myself in get created? How does the suffering get created? Again, the mechanism of suffering and stress and the mechanism of disentangling and liberation. Tonight I'd like to take a very special teaching and explore this with you—the teaching of the five aggregates. Because to me, it's been very central in my practice, so I'm kind of passionate about this system for practice. And you might also be at the end, and you might also not be at all, which is fine because that's just one other tool. There's many tools to investigate the world, many ways to do that. This is one of them.

Now my little selling pitch to start with, to get you interested. If you didn't know, when the Buddha gave his first teaching to five of his old yogi friends, we could say, he mentioned the five aggregates, but only in passing. The teaching was powerful, but the second teaching of the Buddha was the one where these five practitioners got freed in the discourse, in hearing it. Their mind was cleared from any confusion. That discourse was about—what could it have been about? It was about the five aggregates. There's hundreds of discourses where the aggregates are mentioned.

So what they are is a description or tool, rather—a way, a reference. It's almost as if I go around the world

living my life with the glasses of me and what I want and how it should be for me and what I should do and how they should treat me. And when we come to the Dharma, we remove these glasses and we put other glasses. That's one way I see it. The five aggregates is one pair of glasses that can be used as a reference to understand experience, understand what's happening now. So it's one of the glasses. I'll try to have them fit on you tonight a bit so that you can use these glasses if you see fit and practice with them.

The aggregates are a way to divide our experience. Any experience that we have while we're here, for example, could be seen through the aggregates, understood through them. So I'll name them quickly and then I'll go over them again during the talk. The five aggregates that constitute the fullness of our experience: the first one is form, the physicality. The second one is *vedanā* or feeling tone that we talked about yesterday. The third one is perception, and I'll talk about this later. The fourth one is—quickly I'll just say it's intention that we spoke about this morning. And then the last one is consciousness.

This would be a way that we would divide our experience, divide our reality from the point of view of experience, from the point of view of the one being in there experiencing life. We could have decided to divide reality in two. Let's say we decide, let's observe the world, feel the world, experience the world through mentality and physicality.

We could have decided to divide reality in this way. There are many ways one could decide to divide experience. This is just one way, but apparently it was particularly potent in terms of freedom, in terms of bringing forward freedom, release from suffering. I think that's why the Buddha devised this way of dividing experience into five.

One of the main things that it does is that it helps break the idea of *moi*, me, self—that we go around being moved by, fascinated by, obsessed with, needing to defend and promote. To break that perception some, this is the model that is used: the five aggregates.

My understanding—and this is perhaps a wider parenthesis—my understanding of what we're doing here, certainly partly and in large part, is that we're moving from seeing the world only in a conventional way toward going more towards ultimate reality, or at least balancing out these two levels of reality: the conventional, the way we usually understand the world and go about it, and bringing an understanding that is more ultimate and liberating. Using the five aggregates is moving a little bit toward the ultimate.

First, the word aggregate, *khandha*—I don't know if it means something to you in English, aggregate. It's not something that is often used, or maybe it's very technical. Some of the other more usual words that are used are "heap" or "grouping." The way I like to think about this is *river*, as if there were constantly five rivers running through that make what we call being me hearing the wind. There are always these five rivers. They're very dynamic. So they're not things, but kind of activities that make being me. And they influence each other and co-arise together.

As we're sitting here having this experience of the talk being given, these five rivers would be running

through. There is the river of physicality. As you're sitting here, on your eardrum there's the vibration of sound. This is the physical world. There are waves that hit you. This is happening right now. This is the physicality. It's always there. Either you're hearing me, and if you're not hearing me, you're feeling your seat. There's something happening. There's some physicality that is present. So that's the first river.

The image that the Buddha used to talk about this river or heap or grouping of experience is a lump of foam in the ocean. For me, and probably for you also, the image of foam points to the ephemeral nature of the physical experience. The experience of this body sitting here now is like this. When the body was doing walking or drinking tea or lying down in the bed earlier, the foam was different. It had a different shape. It was a different experience of body.

When we think of the body as something very solid—"it's me, it was me, I came here last week or seven weeks ago, I'm here at the end of the retreat, I'll go home, that's me"—this starts to break that down and says, let's bring attention to this. And we discover that all of what we call this form, me, the body, is actually changing all the time. So that's why it's a river—because it's changing all the time. If you stand up now, it's going to be a different experience.

If you think of your hands or feel them—because it's very predominant for me in my experience right now—there is a river of sensation. It's a river of tingling. It's a river of heat radiating, or experiences of coldness perhaps, or pulsation. This is one of the rivers that makes the being we are: the river of form. And there can be attachment to this, identification with this. *This is me.*

And so not on a conventional level. On a conventional level, we can use that languaging: "Oh, I will meet you there at that time." That's very useful. But actually, like many of us—most of us, us being the wide world now in my mind—most of us have left the conventional reality of "this is me." It's not conventional for us anymore. It's become a complete explanation of reality: this is me. So there's a complete identification with this physical form, which can change. And so by being attentive to body and form, we can discover that it's changing, it's impermanent. And that can help release the notion of "I, this is me."

Actually, the Buddha said there were four kinds of basic views that one could have in identifying with any of these aggregates. And let's take form now, since I'm talking about that aspect of reality. He said you either think that this is you, or you think that this is yours—no, it's not me, but it's mine. Or you think that you're in it—no, it's not me, it's not mine, but I'm inside the body. Or it's inside of you—I'm the universe, and this body is inside of it. So it's either one of these. You might not be conscious of it. And this will apply to any of the other aggregates we'll look at. It's either me, mine, I'm in it, or it's inside of me.

Okay, let's try maybe a second river that is there. So the second river is the river of feeling tone that we talked about yesterday. With any experience—and we said this yesterday—with any experience, being heard, smelled, thought, sensed, naming the six senses there, with any experience, there's always this quality of pleasantness or unpleasantness or neutrality. We could say, "Well, there's neutrality, so it's not there." Well, actually, it's there because it's very important—it's going to provoke a bunch of things if it's

neutral. So it's very important.

And so this feeling tone is, we could say, a little bit of a... I read this in a very old book. It's almost like the contact between, let's say, the eye and the sight. There's a contact. There's a kind of pressing against each other—a sound in the ear, there's a pressing. Out of this pressing comes a juice. You could say it's the juice of feeling tone. It's the juice of life for many of us. It's pleasant, I like, it's good.

The image that the Buddha used for that aspect of our experience, or that river flowing through of feeling tone—pleasantness, unpleasantness, or absence of either pleasant or unpleasant—the image he uses is the bubble. The way it's described in the text is when it rains, at the surface of the little puddle, there are these little bubbles when the rain drops in. I, being of a French culture, like to think of champagne personally. As good as they are, they're impermanent, the bubbles. And so the image used is bubbles.

And for me, these images of the foam in the river or the ocean, the bubbles and the other images coming, are extremely important. To me, they point really well to the experience of feeling tone, how changing it is. As you're sitting here, even you might be experiencing it. Experience it, yeah? So something is said that's pleasant to you, and then something is said that's unpleasant to you, or a feeling in your lower back, and suddenly—boom—it switched to unpleasant. It's very changing, very rapidly. Somebody was even mentioning this yesterday morning at the Q&A, saying it goes pretty fast. So we're invited to put attention on this and see how little control we have over it. The pleasantness, unpleasantness, is hardly controllable.

And so we might ask: Are feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness yours? Are they you? Are they inside of you? Or are you inside of them? "My pleasure. You destroyed my pleasure. I was having a good night until you started breathing in the hall." We can get really attached to the pleasantness.

Yesterday, Annie talked about the tendencies that can come out of the feeling tone. This is a very central point to get interested in if we are interested in freedom, because that's where grasping and clinging can happen. The tendency Annie described was that when there is pleasant—it doesn't happen all the time, but it's good to actually see it happen—there's this: "Good. Want more. Want to keep." And she mentioned the tendency being activated with unpleasant: rejecting, fearing, wanting to destroy, wanting to avoid.

There's actually a second tendency that I find interesting. In one text, it says the untrained mind, when meeting a difficult or unpleasant feeling tone, not knowing what else to do, tries to avoid it, resents it, tries to run away from it. That's the first tendency. But having no other way to deal and cope with it, the untrained mind—if there was one here tonight—activates a second tendency: because of no other idea how to cope with unpleasantness, they turn to look for something pleasant. Have you noticed this in your life?

So you sit here. It's getting a little boring. The neutrality is not so well met, so it's becoming unpleasant. And then, well, let's check out into the world of fantasy and create something. The tendency when meeting the unpleasant is to actually turn toward something pleasant. We see this in life. You read an email that is

unpleasant, and you just reach for the fridge door to cope. Because unpleasant, you don't know what else to do with unpleasantness—pile pleasantness on top of it.

I'm saying this because that can be interesting to watch: the tendency that gets activated while we're here. For me, there's a special kind of joy. We talked sometime about the vipassanā joy, and it's a very twisted kind of joy, I want to say. It's when we actually see the teaching in action. So if I am actually there—there's unpleasantness, it's unnoticed, but it leads to looking for pleasantness—I'm walking, it's getting a little hard on the legs or something, there's unpleasantness, "but just go rest a little bit in my room." And suddenly I'm resting in my room, and I'm like, "Oh." It was unnoticed, but what happened is there was this turning toward pleasantness, because there was the incapacity to recognize unpleasantness.

In the same text it says, on the other hand, the well-trained mind will know that unpleasantness comes to pass. They will be able to be with it, knowing that it will pass. Just this recognition of the impermanence of it. One of the great teachings around the feeling tone that I've heard is that when pleasant passes, it's unpleasant; when unpleasant passes, it's pleasant. So they contain both, each of them.

And the tendency with neutral is to not talk about it in Dharma talks, because it goes unnoticed. The tendency is to check out, to miss this. So there's the clinging that can happen with this feeling tone, but also the owning of it, the identifying with it. Sometimes we can even get stuck.

The image of the bubble becomes vivid here—like a huge bubble from that night in 1982 when someone said something so unpleasant. We get stuck, clinging to a feeling tone that is long gone, that lasted only a moment, but the mind became fixed on it. There's rehashing: "This is what you said, and this is what I said, and if I had said this instead..." This trying to resolve a past unpleasantness. Or past pleasantness—back in the days when the feeling tone was a beautiful, pleasant bubble, and now it's gone.

I'm laughing because I'm caricaturizing a little bit. But still, it's good for us to notice this—how pleasantness and unpleasantness can rule our world.

Let me go one step back to form, because there's something in the text that I find interesting. There's a similar kind of wording where it says the untrained mind with form will feel the earth element—the hardness, softness, harshness, or smoothness. The untrained mind will recognize it as the earth element, like sitting now, perhaps there's hardness. So the untrained mind will recognize it as the earth element, but will make this small little mistake out of which suffering will come. They will think, "This is earth element, and this is mine. This is my earth element."

In this text they say the trained mind doesn't go that far. It simply stops at: "Oh, this is earth element. This is hardness. It can be known." Much of the work we do here is to release that false view. I've heard it said many times: "Earth element, pressure—it's public property." How can you actually claim hardness? Hardness is there, available. Many people will feel it at some point. Plus, it's passing as soon as the body leaves the cushion—the hardness is no longer there. How can it be yours? How can it be mine? It's gone.

It's interesting to see what the untrained mind does and what the trained mind or freed mind does—the level of understanding.

So the third river: there's a river of sensations through the five senses, the river of form running through all the time, and it's changing constantly. Sometimes we feel joyful and light, so the experience of the body is light. Sometimes we feel oppressed by something, and the experience of form changes. The river of form really is a dynamic river, and we're invited here to learn to see this—how it's changing all the time, cannot be owned, is not solid or permanent.

Same with the river of feeling tone—constantly changing. A moment of thinking an unpleasant idea, followed by a pleasant sound, followed by something else. How it changes all the time, how it's conditional.

I remember one time sitting in the hall and there was this sound. It was a yogi making this sound—really annoying, and it kept repeating itself. So unpleasant. I couldn't believe this yogi was making this sound. Suddenly, there was a perception change. It got more refined and accurate, and it became clear that it was actually a frog outside making that sound.

It was interesting to see how suddenly it was pleasant. Same sound. But the relationship to it had changed. Some conditions had changed—it was not made by a human being but by an animal. And suddenly, the feeling tone was pleasant.

I mention this so that we don't go thinking that the feeling tone is inside the object.

The feeling tone is one of the aggregates on this side of reality. The feeling tone is conditioned here—it's happening in this mind. It's not that person who is unpleasant. The experience is here. It's here. We can do something about it. A lot, at least.

So we have form, feeling tone, and the third river running through is the river of perception. It's been happening the whole time—the whole time since many years ago, and the whole time since we've been sitting here tonight.

Perception, in this very precise understanding of the five aggregates, is the organizing of the world, the recognition of what is what. The sensations you have in your body—you don't have to work really hard. This river suffers freely, organizing the world. You know that these sensations are hand-tingling, that these sensations are butt resting, or feet feeling heat or cold. As you're hearing me talk right now, there are these vibrations at the ear door, and perception makes it make sense. You recognize the words. You don't have to work really hard. There's a recognition of what's happening. As you look around right now, as I look around right now, I can see that my mind—I don't have to—it's not just colors and shapes. It's a cushion, person, yogi sitting, blanket. It recognizes. This river flows all the time, organizing the world.

Do you recognize this in your experience right now?

This is offered freely. You don't have to do much. It just does that. Often we take this to be reality—whatever I perceive, for me, equals reality. And so in this practice, we start to bring really close attention to how perception works, like in the example of the yogi making the sound becoming a frog making the sound.

What we're doing here on this retreat is actually refining perception. In the same way that you might see a branch in the path in the summer—you see a branch, you walk closer, and you see actually a group of ants walking. It was not a little branch. It was a group of ants. You break down reality. You correct reality. Then when you come closer still, you see one ant walking in the paw, or whatever it's called, of this little ant.

In the same way, I sit here with my breath. The breath—it's always been the same. Why would I watch the breath? It's in, out. I know. Suddenly, something appears. It's like, "Oh, this breath, maybe..." Even what I call "this breath" becomes cut into the beginning of the breath. And so at some point, this thing that I call the breath—I notice that this is not actually a solid thing. When there's the beginning of the in-breath, the end of the in-breath actually doesn't exist at all. And when there is the end of the in-breath, the beginning doesn't exist. But I make them together. I put them together. So there's the refining of perception that happens.

Is this perception, this river of perception, always happening? Is it you or yours, your perceiving? Is it happening in you, or are you inside perceptions? That's how the mind will own it, cling to it.

There are so many things around perception. There's the owning of it, like with the other aggregates, but there's also the functioning of it, how it's conditioned. Some of the distortions of perception that we clarify here: "This will be satisfying. This will bring me complete happiness." This next meal, or this next sit—I feel it's going to be it. Or this talk. And in the end, you say, "Oh no, it didn't quite do it."

Neither the meal, because it's gone, nor the talk, because this is samsara. The phenomena cannot bring complete satisfaction. It's not in their nature. They simply can't.

So there's a refinement of perception that we do on this retreat. We refine perception. And one of the perceptions is the perception of self, of "me," that we're going to break down into many moments of many different things—many different sensations, many different mind states. And suddenly the idea of "me" is not so clear and solid. It's like, wow, this is very conditional. There are things appearing, disappearing, things that can be controlled, others that can't.

The image for perception, and this is very important—the image is a mirage. You see how this image speaks to how we can see in a certain way and how the seeing can get clarified or refined.

So the next river that I named at the beginning of the talk is this river of intention. There's always intention. Actually, it's a much wider river or heap or grouping, this aggregate. It includes everything else that is mental, that is happening—emotion, everything else. We could say that feeling tone is affective—how we're touched by the contact with the world. It's pleasant, it's unpleasant, it's neither one

nor the other. Perception is cognitive—this is a tree, this is male, female if we think in these terms, this is food. It names. This is cognitive.

So this "all other" heap or river is the river of, we could say, the reactive or responsive—or I read somewhere "purposive," if that means something to you. It's how the mind engages with what is born out of contact with reality. So "I want," or "it hurts, I want to move my leg"—the intention to move would arise out of that. The conditionings of, you know, "when somebody says that, it always makes me laugh," or "when somebody does that..." There's a conditioning to respond. "When I hear that, I always get scared. This is how I am." You see?

So that's another area where identification can come. I don't know if you studied intention today in your day of practice, if you were aware of this. This is one of the places where, at some point in our practice, we can say, "I'm not the body." Clearly, there is a body—I agree with Joseph. There is a body. It's not mine. It's not me. It's there. It doesn't disappear, but it's not me. It's known. Okay, I agree with that. I agree with the fact that I'm not the feeling tone. They do happen and they change quickly and I don't have control over them.

But the one who really goes to do the walking—this is me. The intention to stand up and go—this is me. I agree with everything else you say, that's fine. But intention, that's me.

In Buddhism, it goes so far that it questions every aspect of reality: Is it really you?

Can this really be owned? Do you have mastery over this, or is this conditional? I talked about this this morning—how intentions are conditional. And so that's one of the, what is the expression, hideouts of selfing. "This one I'm going to keep identifying with." That takes really refined attention to be able to notice. It needs a mind that is really able to be concurrent with the unfolding of events, an attention that is sustained over time, to be able to catch how decisions are made because of circumstances.

I've been playing with this a lot in the last few days, knowing that I would be talking about it. It's still so fascinating to me how suddenly at seven-something, I'm in the office up there, and I have the idea that I could go down. I'm giving a talk at seven-thirty. So of course at seven-something, if things are right, the idea to go down will come. It's conditional in this way. But I can really be misled thinking that I'm deciding to go. On a conventional level, totally. But when we yogis really slow down and take a good, sustained—I want to say profound—look at reality, we notice how we're conditioned to.

If you're interested right now, or if you're disinterested, it's not so much a you that decides this. It's the temperament. It's what you're used to. It's what you've trained yourself to be interested by. It's the biological level of energy available. It's many things that will make you want to listen or want this to end. It's not so personal.

This—do not believe me—this practice is an invitation to actually slow down enough, gain enough attention to maybe see this or see something else.

Perhaps one important thing to say about intention, to revisit what I said this morning: all these little chapters, rivers of experience—I think the Buddha divided them like this because they have so much meaning in terms of freedom and suffering. This intention, for example, is what's going to condition the experience of further aggregates, further rivers, all the rivers. If I train worry, resentment, my experience later reflects that. And neurology agrees—there are these neural pathways that even become physical in the brain. And so the way I use this mind, these intentions, will have an impact on how I experience life later.

I was just about to say "the Buddha," but what I meant was Joseph. I had a moment of delusion—or clarity. A number of nights ago, you will remember, he was talking about renunciation. And I think, if I remember well, that's when you talked about this, Joseph—about these two ways that the Buddha divided his experience.

These are in my words this time. But I always found this very fascinating: that the Buddha at some point said, "I'm going to make a division between two kinds of thoughts or intentions"—that's this river that I'm talking about now. "I'm going to put in one category all the intentions of renunciation, generosity, kindness—all these wholesome intentions. These I'm going to cultivate. I'm going to appreciate. And every time there's an intention that is related to hatred, greed, aversion, delusion, or cruelty"—these are my words, not exactly his or theirs—he said, "I'm going to actually abandon this."

So he was basically looking at this aggregate and saying, "I'm going to act on a certain kind of qualities of mine, and I'm going to abandon certain other qualities of mine. And in this way, my life should gain in freedom and ease. I should go in the opposite direction from suffering."

And when I read this, I think, "Wow, this is so simple. I just have this to do." And then practicing—how complex it gets. Is that this intention or that? I'm not clear if I'm being generous right now or if I'm looking for vengeance as I'm generously giving this feedback to this person. What's happening here? What is the motive, the intention? So it's not easy to do.

But at the same time, I have to say that these days it's very much in my mind that it's actually pretty simple, if one can recognize and just joyfully abandon. Joyfully—because knowing this is going to lead to trouble. And if something of beauty, beautiful states of mind are there—I'm talking about the highest kind of aesthetic, related to beauty, at least in French it is—

So when I see beautiful states of mind, I rejoice, feel them, sense them, nurture them. Then there's something very simple about this—very, very beautiful and wholesome and truly liberating.

So maybe that's a few words on that river that is running through also. It's always there. As you have the intention right now, maybe to listen, or the intention to think about something else that is more pleasant—still it's somewhere effective, somewhere in there.

And the last river is this river of consciousness. This is the activity of knowing. It's something actually

extremely simple, maybe also mysterious, but it's this knowing that is happening with any of these other aggregates or in any experience that we have. There might be the recognition of what it is—that this is plaid and this is striped—but there's another kind of knowing that is extremely simple. It's the actual connecting, receiving the experience. So it's not the organizing of the world, but the being-there-ness, we could say. The awareness that it's happening.

Now, if you manage to clarify that all the others are not me, not mine, they're really happening out of conditions—but the observer is *moi*. Again, I don't want... Very important here not to think that I should not perceive reality like this. "Oh my God, I'm perceiving that I'm lifting the glass of milk. Wrong. Everything's wrong." It's not like this. In practice, I would just become aware of it, like, "Wow, it really appears like this." You know, it appears—it's really convincingly, three-dimensionally, totally appearing like I'm... it's felt like this. Being aware of it, being aware of the way it's perceived. Or, "What is he saying? I'm here listening to the..." There's nothing wrong with that. You can totally be aware of this. It feels like "I" is experiencing this, when actually we could say it's just a factor of mind. Generosity sometimes is a factor of the mind that is in there, and it wants to give, it wants to share—that's its function. And this consciousness, you could say, is also something, a function in the mind that is knowing experience. Nothing personal about it. But you see how sticky it can be. "But it's really me. It really appears like it's me."

One way to break it down maybe a little bit is to talk about the six kinds of consciousness. The consciousness of hearing at the ear door, the consciousness of sensations, the consciousness of all these senses—smelling consciousness or tasting consciousness. Try to hear the bell. That's the classic example here. Try to hear the bell, to have the hearing consciousness. Hear the bell before it actually rings and after it will have rung. Bell-hearing consciousness is concurrent with bell ringing. It cannot happen before or after. It doesn't last after. It arises with the experience and dies with it.

Consciousness of feet right now appeared conditionally to me suggesting it, and it didn't appear before the sensation or after—it's concurrent. It appears with it and dies with it when you bring your attention to your earlobes. If you do. So there's this consciousness we might perceive as something that has duration. It stays. It's me. But in this way of using the aggregates, I start to see how it arises with experience. Hearing consciousness arises with that. Consciousness of your father arises with that image in mind—the thinking consciousness. Arises with it and dies with it. It lasts only the moment that it's in contact with the experience and dies right there.

And so we can become aware of this in our practice, to see how consciousness of a certain kind arises with the experience. It's mixed and it's impossible to remove it, but it's the knowing aspect of the experience. It's not the bell ringing, it's the knowing of it.

So these are the five rivers constantly running through. If you want to play with this, what I like to do often is—and you'll adapt this as you want—but in the right weather conditions,

I'll take a walk around the loop at lunchtime, and I'll just spend a few minutes being aware of form, the river of form. As I walk, it's constantly changing—hardness, lightness, movement. There's hearing vibration, feeling the body, the form, the physicality of the material world. I can feel this.

Then I'll spend another thirty or forty seconds just being aware of feeling tone. I zone in and focus on pleasantness, unpleasantness, or neutrality. As I'm walking: oh, beautiful tree—pleasant. Car coming—unpleasant, fear arises, unpleasant sensation. Car passes by, release, feels pleasant. I can be aware of just the changing nature of pleasantness and unpleasantness.

Then I go to the next river. As I'm walking, I can totally experience that this mind organizes the world. It's trees, road, left side of road, car—it names things. What is happening? It knows. It organizes in a certain way. I can see this.

And then I spend another few seconds just noticing that there's an intention to walk, an intention to look in that direction perhaps. Or the production of thoughts—that's also part of this aggregate. I see something and think, "These walls, we don't have these walls. Is it only in Massachusetts they have these rock walls? There's so many of them. This farmer, who did that? Who was paid? Were they paid?" It's like, wow, it's producing a lot. There's visual contact, and it's producing stuff. This is that river running.

And then there'll be the last river: wow, there's consciousness. Through all of this, there's a knowing. There's an awareness of all these different things, and it's happening now. There's a knowing quality.

This slowly breaks the notion of "me walking." It's just these things working together. This is human experience.

So that's one way to work with it. The invitation, if you take this on, is to use these as glasses to look at the world as dharma, rather than as "what I want in life." You can take another pair of glasses. If you don't like the five aggregates, you can put on the four noble truths. Or you can put them down and take another pair—something else. I don't want to get you too confused, but there are many of them. The brahma viharas: Is there presence or absence of care in here? Or the hindrances: Is there presence or absence?

So if you take on the five aggregate glasses, then you would learn to recognize them in experience. That's already a skill to gain. And then you would see their impermanent nature, their unsatisfying nature—beings changing all the time. How many thoughts will it take, as I've heard Joseph say many years ago—which thought will be the satisfying one? Which feeling tone will be the one that will do it? None.

So we see the impermanence, the unsatisfactory nature of them, and the incapacity to own any of this. Because it runs by. Because it arrives uninvited, as I heard someone say here in the hall.

Thank you.

Ally, I love these images too.

For the mental formations and intentions, the image is a banana tree trunk, because we can see that there's no hardwood or heartwood in the banana tree. It bears its fruits, and then it falls flat on the ground.

You see this when you're sitting here and suddenly there's this mental formation of, "Oh, where I want to be is not here," because there's an experience of wanting to be in this place with these people or that person. There's this big production—the banana tree with its great fruits and beautiful leaves. It's a big production. And after it has borne its fruit, it falls flat on the ground. And I'm like, "Oh, there was a big production and it had no substance to it. It was an empty arising."

It felt like I am the one turning when I reach the end of my path, but if I look closer, there's no core, there's no essence—no Pascal that is turning. It's a bunch of conditions that make turning happen.

So, the plantain tree trunk.

And the last one, consciousness, is the magic show—or the magician, you can choose. It gathers all these sensations, feeling tones, and it knows all this, and it makes it feel like, "Wow, it's really happening to me!" It creates this illusion of continuity of *moi* that is very enticing.

These are the images: foam and bubble, mirage, plantain tree, and finally, magic show. Hopefully there was something in there for you.

Let's finish by just sitting a moment in these rivers, maybe. See if you can remember and recognize them in your experience right now, or some of them—the most apparent, perhaps.

May we all have a fluid sense of self that can come in when useful and be dropped right away, instead of a rigid sense of self. May we all know freedom within these five aggregates and use them to free the mind rather than to entangle it.

Thank you for listening.

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