

Understanding Mind | Part Two

Still, Flowing Water

- Ajahn Chah

When sense impressions arise, know them. Why run after them? Impressions aren't for sure. One minute they're one way, the next minute another. Sometimes they stay as they were before. They exist through change. And all of us here exist through change. The breath goes out, then it comes back in. It changes like this. Try only breathing in: Can you do that? How many minutes would you last? Or try just breathing out without breathing in. If there were no change, could you survive? You wouldn't survive at all. You need to have both the in-breath and the out-breath. Only then can you walk to the monastery. If you just held your breath all the way coming here, you'd be dead by now. You wouldn't have made it. So understand this.

Sense impressions are the same. They have to be there. If they weren't there, you couldn't develop any discernment. If there were no wrong, there could be no right. You have to be right first before you can see what's wrong. Or you have to be wrong first before you can recognize what's right. That's the way things normally are.

If you're studying the mind, the more sense impressions the better. But if you don't like sense impressions, if you don't want to deal with them, you're like the student who skips class, who doesn't want to learn or to listen to his teacher. These sense impressions are teaching us. When we know sense impressions in this way, we're practicing Dhamma. We know what they're like when they calm down, we know what their issues are — just like understanding monkeys. The monkey in your home doesn't irritate you. When you see the monkey here it doesn't irritate you — because you understand monkeys, right? You can be at ease.

The practice of Dhamma is like this. It's not very far away. It's right with us. The Dhamma isn't about divine beings or anything like that. It's simply about us, about what we're doing right now. Contemplate yourself. Sometimes there's happiness, sometimes suffering, sometimes comfort, sometimes irritation; sometimes you love that person, sometimes you hate this person. Observing and understanding this is the Dhamma.

To know this Dhamma, you have to read your sense impressions. Only when you're acquainted with them can

you recognize the source and let them go of them. That way you can be at ease. The realization may come flashing up: "**Oh...This isn't for sure!**" When your impression changes: "**This isn't for sure!**" If you're acquainted with sense impressions, you're acquainted with the Dhamma. You can observe and let go of sense impressions. You see that there's nothing for sure about sensations in any way at all.

The Dhamma can be seen as what's not for sure. Whoever sees that things aren't-for-sure, sees for sure that that's the way they are. The way they are doesn't change into anything else. That's the way things are. That is understanding the Dhamma. If you know inconstancy, not-for-sure-ness, you'll let things go naturally. You see the futility of grasping onto them.

You may say, "Don't break my beautiful glass!" We want to control the process of change—glass breaking. But can you prevent something breakable from breaking? It is in the nature of glass to break. If it doesn't break now, it'll break later on. If you don't break it, someone else will. If someone else doesn't break it, one of the chickens will! The Buddha says to accept this. He penetrated all the way to seeing that this glass is inconstant and will break at some point. This glass that isn't broken, he saw will be broken. Whenever you pick up the glass, put water in it, drink from it, and put it down, he tells you to see that it is an inconstant object. The Buddha's understanding was like this. At some point, it will be broken. Develop this attitude. Use the glass; look after it. Then one day it slips out of your hand: "Smash!" No surprise, anger, blaming, vengeance, unrelenting sorrow. Why? Because you understand its impermanent nature and not-for-sureness.

But usually people say, "I've taken such good care of this glass. Don't ever let it break." Later on the dog breaks it: "I'll kill that damn dog!" You hate the dog for breaking your glass. If your child breaks it, you hate him, too. You hate whoever breaks it. Why? Because you've created a false sense of control, dammed yourself up, built a wall against the natural flow of inconstancy. You've made a dam without a spillway. The only thing the dam can do then is to burst.

So learn to hold the impermanent nature of things, whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, keep on practicing, using mindfulness to watch over and protect the mind. That's concentration. That's discernment. They're both the same thing. They differ only in their characteristics.

If you can practice just this much, it's enough. Suffering won't arise, or if it does arise you can recognize and address it easily. And that will be a cause for suffering not to arise in the future. That's where things finish, at the point where suffering doesn't arise. And why doesn't suffering arise? Because we observe and understand fully the cause of suffering. When there's no longer any suffering, that means it ceases. That's nirodha.

That's all there is. Don't stray away from this point. Just keep working away right here. Contemplate right here. Start out by contemplating your own mind. To put it in really basic terms, you should all have the five precepts as your foundation. (non-harming, not stealing, no sexual misconduct, no false speech, ingest no substances that cause heedlessness) You'll make mistakes. When you realize it, stop, come back, and start over again. Maybe you'll go astray and make another mistake. When you realize it, start over again, each and every time.

Your mindfulness will gain a higher frequency, like water poured from a kettle. If we tilt the kettle just a little, the water comes out in drops: glug ... glug ... glug. There are breaks in the flow. If we tilt the kettle a little bit more, the drops become more frequent: glug-glug-glug. If we tilt the kettle even further the glugs disappear and the water turns into a steady stream. There are no more drops. Where did they go? They didn't go anywhere. They've changed into a steady stream of water. They've become so frequent that they're beyond frequency. They meld into one another in a stream of water.

Don't think that the Dhamma lies far away from you. It lies right with you; it's about you. Take a look. One minute happy, the next minute sad, satisfied, then angry at this person, hating that person: It's all Dhamma.

Look yourself. What's trying to give rise to suffering? When you've done something that causes suffering, turn around and undo it. Turn around and undo it. You haven't seen it clearly. When you see it clearly, there's no more suffering. The cause has been put out. Once you shine the light on the cause of suffering, there are no more dark corners-conditions for it to arise.

Study concentration like this. When it's time to sit in meditation, then sit. But concentration isn't just sitting. You have to let the mind encounter different things, then register them and bring them up to contemplate. Contemplate to know what? Contemplate to see, "Oh. That's inconstant. Stressful. Not-self.

Have you ever seen flowing water?

Have you ever seen still water?

If your mind is peaceful, it's like still, flowing water.

Have you ever seen still, flowing water?

There!

You've only seen flowing water and still water.

You've never seen still, flowing water.

Right there!

Right where your thinking can't take you.

Where the mind is still... but can develop discernment.

When you look at your mind, it'll be like flowing water, and yet still.

It looks like it's still, it looks like it's flowing.

So it's called still, flowing water.

That's what it's like.

That's where discernment can arise.