



Kittisaro: Welcome back to our third week of this online retreat. I hope you’ve been practicing this very important principle of cultivating *nippapanca*, nonproliferation, practicing learning in the seen. Let there just be the seen, as Thanissara was sharing with us last week from that very pithy teaching of the Buddha to Bahiya, seeing and just noticing if there’s a resting with the silence, seeing, hearing, feeling and noticing when there’s that discomfort, wanting to elaborate, comment, complicate; and not judging that but just noticing that, and also really noticing if there’s thinking—just thinking—rather than thinking and always adding to thinking. Can thinking just be thinking? Especially noticing this ephemeral nature, even now, the ephemeral nature of words, thoughts, a talk, which might sound so solid—a dharma talk. But in the reflective gaze of contemplation, we can notice dharma talk, as its concept, like those lightning flashes appears and dissolves into that depth of listening.

The refuge of Buddha is not coming, not going, what the Buddha sometimes called the original brightness. In the Buddha’s first sermon, when he opened up the teaching of the four ennobling truths, by the end of the sermon or through the course of the sermon, one of his disciples had a breakthrough. At the end, the Buddha said, “Kaundinya knows. Kaundinya knows.” What did he know? He knew that what arises, ceases. He had this profound insight, which we might dismiss. So, what? Everybody knows impermanence—maybe conceptually—but have we really taken in the implications of really here, now, in the moment recognizing what comes shifts, ceases, dissolves, vanishes. The Buddha said Kaundinya’s dharma eye opened. He entered the stream. He tasted nibbana.

In the *Surangama Sutra*, Kaundinya talks about what analogies helped him have this breakthrough. He gave the analogy of dust-guest. He said if you’re in a room and you see the light shining through a window or a crack in the wall, you notice the dust dancing. The dust dances. It moves, but the space is undisturbed. The nature of dust is to dance,



shift, shimmer. The space is undisturbed. There's no contention there. Similarly, the guest, Kaundinya talked about an inn or a hotel, where a guest comes, maybe has a meal, stays a night or two and then leaves. The guest comes and goes, but the host remains. The nature of dust is to move and shift. The space remains undisturbed. The guest comes, lingers, and goes—host remains.

As we deepen our practice of radical reflection, returning to the root, radical is—etymology of the word is connected to root, returning to the root, that reflection that recognizes, remembers, as opposed to dismember, disconnect but remembers, doesn't lose touch with the root. These sounds right now, these sounds, perceptions, sensations that we're experiencing are like that dust, dancing, the spacious heart, the knowing. Can we get a sense for surrendering to, honoring the ephemeral nature of sounds, sensations, thoughts? Can our awareness also remember, stay in touch with the stillness, the spacious stillness of the listening?

The guests come and go. The sounds are coming and going. The thoughts, the actuality, this dharma talk are coming and going. What remains? As we practice letting each sound return to silence, not hating the sound, judging the sound but letting it be just what it is without grabbing or rejecting, as we practice letting each thought melt, subside, savoring that gap, that space, where there's just being with, the seeing, the hearing, the feeling, the sitting or whatever posture, language makes those seem different. Seeing, hearing, feeling, sitting all seems different, but when we also gather language into our contemplation, then we notice that language itself vibrates. These things are all different, and that thought dissolves.

The Buddha says this undying, unshakable, peaceful heart is always here and now. *Sabbe dhamma* means every circumstance we looked at has as its core, its essence, unbounded freedom. Feeling good, feeling bad, being confident, being, “I had it yesterday,”



confident, worried, happy, frightened. Every circumstance has as its essence. What leads to that? *Punya*, wise reflection. Wisdom overcomes every circumstance, recognizes this inherent freedom in every moment, and this teaching in the *Anguttara Nikaya* called the *Mula Sutta*, the discourse on the root, this is radical reflection, a discourse on origin, root. The next line is "All things merge in the deathless." When we haven't touched the proliferating nature of our relationship to thought, when we reify, make real, concretize, objectify, through assuming that our concepts are real expressions of the reality, me, you, here, there, then even as we noticed the smallest thought, "I" gives rise to the 10,000 things, because there's the you and the here and the there and the yesterday and tomorrow.

"All things merge in the deathless." When we only see life through the lens of attaching to our concepts, there's just separation, discrimination, complexity. An analogy like looking at the trees, the lovely, powerful oak trees, the magnificent eucalyptus trees, but we think, "Are they invasive?" and the fire risk, and we can start proliferating about them. There's an indigenous tree, the evergreen, the beautiful ones, the not-so-beautiful ones. We give all these discriminations, but where do all things merge? If we look with more of a spacious, all-encompassing reflection, we realize all these trees are rooted in the ground. The tree is not rooted in the ground, in Mother Earth. It's not a tree. It's dead. It's a piece of wood, which dissolves back into the ground. Every leaf, twig, branch falls into the ground. As we take these magnificent oaks and eucalyptus and evergreen and indigenous and beech and birch and we follow down to the ground, we'll see the place, get down into the roots, where they merge.

Our vision is incomplete. We just notice the difference without noticing where they merge. In our contemplation, yes, we notice the uniqueness of every sound, thought, impression just like those lightning flashes as the differentiation, but when we're open-hearted, we'll see them dissolving into that background of the sky. Every thought and



sound dissolves back into that ground of listening, where all things merge—no more separation.

So, it's important to practice. Remember in this teaching that I started off with the Buddha speaking to Saka, king of the gods, about the pathway to *nippapanca* through nonproliferation, encouraging Saka and all of us, because that question has profound implications, because not understanding *papanca* is the root cause that leads to conflict, to living in conflict and hate, even though our wish is peace and harmony, because it's grounded in this separative consciousness right from the beginning, that very first thought, in that ground of ignorance it gives rise to a creation. That thought “I” when there's really attachment to that mark creates the you, yesterday, tomorrow, here, there.

So this path to the ending of *papanca*, the Buddha encourages us to train ourselves. Yes, reflect what's skillful or not, but learn to allow that mood, that happiness, that activity to also be quiet, without the commentary. And rather than just thinking, “That's impossible. I mean, who can do that?” we don't have to jump to the top of the tree. Even in an activity that's normally associated with unconscious reflection, thinking, planning, even that directed thought, that thought like just walking, that one thought's telling us what's happening, gives us some orientation. We hear that thought dissolve, walking, in practice just being in the inner silence with the actuality. Notice the flow, the cascade, sensations, sights, sounds, which have all different labels, but in silence the walls of the mind, where did they go? We might have on our land—we live in a beautiful mountain in South Africa, and when it really rains, there's an amazing waterfall up the sacred mountain. The waterfall is on our land, waterfall, my waterfall. Go up to a waterfall. The noun, the thing, can we grab it? The word is a pointer. It's a pointer. The actuality is ungraspable, awesome, hints, the Buddha says in the *Lotus Sutra*: “This dharma cannot be described. This reality cannot be described. Words fall silent before it.”



We're not hating words but learning to get a feeling for the limitation by allowing ourselves to practice, turning the mind to the deathless, turning the mind to that place where all the sounds, all the perceptions merge. So, this week, in a moment when it seems so real, "Gosh, it's just so difficult," repeat that slowly, "It's real difficult." Hear that thought that seems so real, hear it vibrate, the sound, inner sound, difficult. Let that thought dissolve. "It's going great. I've got it. I understand, really happy," not to deny anything, but the, "I'm really happy. I'm unhappy." This dharma cannot be described.

We can be so mesmerized, enchanted by these labels that we can take our own life, take someone else's life. But when we practice, noticing a thought come and go, getting the feeling for the guests coming and going and allowing our heart to be turned to that host, that which remains, so continuing that practice and using a question, which is a thought like what remains. So we're using the cognitive faculty, still having thought. The Buddha didn't just stop talking. He talked, but it didn't lead to proliferation, because he recognized the limitation of language. It was a tool. In using a question like, "What remains? What remains?" we're in touch with the changing nature of the thought. Hear it vibrate, but remember, stay connected to that ground that is untroubled, that ground of listening that remains. What remains? And notice the question, "What?" For a moment, the mind goes silent. "What?" That helps us widen the gap that we can savor when the mind is not conceptualizing.

When we're already feeling or experiencing something that seems quite real, I'm walking, I'm getting somewhere, a question: Who? Who's walking? Notice what happens. Who? The attention returns to this ground. It returns and looks. Your heart might give an answer, "Me, Dumbo. Me, Dumbo," very important to hear that "me." That inner voice seems so familiar, "Me, Dumbo. Don't ask me stupid questions." Hear that, "Don't ask me stupid questions," and dissolve back into the sky, the markless spaciousness of listening. Who is suffering? Don't be afraid of that down. Listen. If the

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feeling taunts a little too strong, we can also mind the gap, savor that space by letting go.
Takes us to the same place.

“Let go” means holding more lightly. And hear the space after the let go. Takes us to that ground of listening, where all things merge, so really encouraging us in our radical reflection to remember the ground, to keep practicing ordinary moments, waiting, just waiting and stretching, training ourselves to get the feeling for just being with the shimmering flow of sensations, thoughts, sounds as they return to that silent brightness of awareness and to use this question like, “What remains?” which is not getting rid of—not pretending that the dust doesn’t dance, not trying to push anything away. “What remains?” Even while we ask the question, we notice the changing nature of sound and thought, but the heart is pondering the stillness in the midst of movement, the movement in the midst of stillness. “This dharma cannot be described,” as the Buddha says, “Words fall silent before it.”