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(Class #6) Nirvana Is Not a Phenomenon, but the True Nature of All Phenomena

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00:00:03.381 (Bell)

00:00:37.743 Dear respected Thay, dear sisters, dear brothers,

00:00:45.897 dear friends online,

00:00:50.498 here in Deer Park this evening we have mist.

00:00:56.038 Looking up at the mountain as I came down I saw the cloud sitting on the mountain.

00:01:07.701 I am working on a new path to the waterfall,

00:01:12.287 so I was walking up it and clearing some of the sticks away.

00:01:17.221 And the mist was penetrating my clothes.

00:01:22.086 So they became damp.

00:01:25.584 And I used what we've been learning in the 40 tenets class.

00:01:33.448 This is our sixth class on the 40 tenets.

00:01:40.712 To look deeply into the mist

00:01:49.470 and try to understand where does the mist come from.

00:02:11.598 We learn, of course, that -

00:02:16.386 (inaudible)

00:02:26.870 (inaudible)

00:02:56.737 Am I speaking too softly?

00:03:00.223 No? Okay.

00:03:02.043 I mean, I can use the microphone, but we thought,

00:03:04.896 because it's so small, I will just speak -

00:03:07.863 I will try to speak loudly.

00:03:16.039 So walking up the trail and having all these particles of water in the air

00:03:21.474 is like being in a cloud, it's actually kind of fog.

00:03:27.249 But lightly the water particles were falling and penetrating my clothing.

00:03:37.060 We look with the eyes of interbeing at the rain and we know

00:03:43.836 that the rain is just a cloud in a new form.

00:03:48.177 It's only changed its outer appearance.

00:03:51.305 And the cloud itself is manifested due to the sun shining on,

00:04:03.579 the water of the ocean.

00:04:06.384 This is what we all learn in grade school hopefully, the water cycle.

00:04:14.767 It's not just something for our information to learn that,

00:04:18.124 but it's actually a kind of tool we can use,

00:04:21.812 We call it concentration.

00:04:25.707 The concentration on emptiness, for example.

00:04:32.936 Most simply it's where we look into things

00:04:36.092 and we see that they are not by themselves alone.

00:04:39.545 When we talk about emptiness,

00:04:44.115 it doesn't mean that something is not there,

00:04:47.380 or that something doesn't exist.

00:04:52.077 But it means that

00:04:54.260 that thing is only made of non-it elements.

00:05:00.737 For example, a balloon is empty.

00:05:03.333 We can talk about it being empty. Or a bubble.

00:05:07.041 But we know that, actually, it's not truly empty, it's full of air.

00:05:11.746 There is something in there.

00:05:14.129 And the same thing is true of a flower.

00:05:17.149 When we look into the flower we see

00:05:19.519 that it's made of the sun and the rain and so forth.

00:05:22.521 That's a concentration on emptiness or interbeing.

00:05:28.062 When we do that with, for example, with the cloud and the rain when I was walking,

00:05:35.312 then rather than seeing

00:05:41.745 the rain is just something that is -

00:05:52.690 that makes me wet, makes me cold,

00:05:56.679 that has a certain experience of it from my point of view,

00:06:02.050 that it's actually something that is already -

00:06:20.212 It's really already there.

00:06:22.307 The conditions are already there for the mist to manifest.

00:06:26.586 And this just last condition of there being enough humidity in the air

00:06:32.641 allows it to manifest, and then I feel it on my skin

00:06:37.621 and I have the experience of rain.

00:06:44.615 But when I look up at the cloud, I see, on a sunny day, I feel, wow!

00:06:49.083 It's sunny, it's warm, I don't feel wet.

00:06:51.925 But I look at the cloud and I see that

00:06:54.367 when conditions are sufficient, that cloud can become the rain.

00:06:58.133 It can touch my skin, it can touch my clothing.

00:07:03.290 And through all of this,

00:07:05.832 I'm using the practice of deep looking to try to understand the nature of the mist,

00:07:11.485 the nature of the cloud, the nature of the ocean.

00:07:15.461 So that nature is water.

00:07:21.450 And this relationship between the manifestation of the water

00:07:29.040 as mist, or as cloud, or as ocean,

00:07:38.061 we can talk about it in a -

00:07:45.448 It's a way of understanding, it's a kind of skillful means -

00:07:51.973 on a horizontal plane or on a vertical plane.

00:07:56.701 Horizontal means that

00:08:00.197 on this level, there is the world of phenomena.

00:08:09.791 The water in the ocean becomes another phenomenon,

00:08:14.899 which is the cloud. And then,

00:08:19.685 the cloud, when conditions are sufficient becomes the mist.

00:08:24.127 This is because that is and this is because that is.

00:08:30.691 They have what they called the horizontal relationship.

00:08:40.883 [this is because that is]

00:08:56.191 The Buddha often said that his awakening came about dependent on this realization.

00:09:06.459 Realizing that things are interconnected.

00:09:10.959 Not only the rain, but also our emotions, our happiness, our suffering are connected.

00:09:17.504 When there are sufficient conditions for our happiness to manifest,

00:09:22.858 then we have happiness. But when there are not sufficient conditions,

00:09:27.842 like when there's a lot of anger, a lot of judgment, a lot of thinking,

00:09:33.584 oftentimes we can't truly be happy because our thinking

00:09:40.855 is perfuming our experience.

00:09:46.076 Last week we learned about *vāsanā*, the perfume.

00:09:52.399 [*vāsanā*]

00:09:55.822 And how our thoughts are always perfuming our experience.

00:10:01.260 [perfuming]

00:10:03.725 Specifically they perfume,

00:10:06.650 they affect the seeds in our store
consciousness,

00:10:09.770 so that they become stronger, they
become weaker.

00:10:15.540 And all of our life experiences are
coming together

00:10:20.831 and touching those -

00:10:24.980 They're there latent in us. We talk
about seeds.

00:10:29.041 It's to describe these latent tendencies
that are there,

00:10:32.424 that are the accumulation of our
lifetime of experiences until the present moment.

00:10:37.715 And based on those experiences, a
word, a smile,

00:10:42.152 or a frown, one action can be the last
condition

00:10:48.836 which then triggers the manifestation
of anger,

00:10:53.297 or a smile that triggers the
manifestation of happiness.

00:10:58.015 Actually,

00:11:01.119 trigger is not quite an adequate word,

00:11:04.241 it's very often used nowadays in
psychology.

00:11:08.430 'She triggers me!' Triggers me. But it's
very simplistic.

00:11:14.882 I feel it tends to reduce our experience
to one cause.

00:11:26.351 You think, 'That one thing, that
suddenly triggered it in me.'

00:11:32.479 But actually there are many
conditions that are coming together,

00:11:35.881 our experience...

00:11:38.331 and that is the product of this
perfuming.

00:11:42.547 That comes from our experiences.

00:11:46.050 So our anger,

00:11:48.589 has all kinds of beautiful forms.

00:11:51.643 That's why we human beings

00:11:55.148 we produce incredible works of art.

00:12:00.619 Because our life experiences somehow
are channeled through,

00:12:06.671 whether we're painting, whether
we're making music, whether we write a poem,

00:12:13.062 it's coming through the lens of our
experience,

00:12:18.218 and then manifesting as a song, or a
poem.

00:12:23.837 And that poem is unique.

00:12:27.829 It has qualities that relate to other
poems,

00:12:31.599 but somehow, as a work of art it has its
own special quality.

00:12:36.531 And the same is now, we're realizing it
is true of our emotions.

00:12:41.419 Anger, fear.

00:12:46.889 For a long time,

00:12:49.758 when we studied these emotions in
evolutionary biology

00:12:53.866 we thought they were just hardwired
into the human body and mind.

00:12:59.938 Fear is fear and all we need to do is
just find the right way to measure it

00:13:04.158 and we can know, that is fear, that is
anger.

00:13:07.726 But it turns out it's a bit more
complicated than that,

00:13:11.999 that our emotions can take on quite
different forms based on our experiences.

00:13:17.253 So what we call anger might be a little
bit different for you

00:13:22.891 if you grow up in a household where
there's a lot of abuse,

00:13:26.962 where there's a lot of arguments.

00:13:30.249 It might be quite a different
manifestation in your body

00:13:34.100 than in someone else who grew up in a
warm caring environment

00:13:38.239 where nobody raises their voice ever

00:13:40.728 and we practice deep listening and beginning anew.

00:13:44.082 So my manifested anger might look very different, to use an extreme example.

00:13:48.580 But for all of us, our experiences

00:13:53.061 are affecting this kind of beautiful pattern of manifestation

00:13:57.845 of a mental formation within our body and mind.

00:14:02.850 Seeing it like that,

00:14:07.544 I really look at my mind as a kind of canvas,

00:14:13.768 or Thay said it's like a cinematographer

00:14:16.696 who's making a movie and it's painting all kinds of things.

00:14:23.115 With mindfulness we can look and just experience that emotion

00:14:28.093 in all its raw beauty,

00:14:31.041 before we make a judgment and say, 'That's a bad emotion, that's a good emotion',

00:14:35.877 and try to push it away,

00:14:38.284 but rather just to see like this beautiful canvas,

00:14:41.221 this cinematographic experience that's going on inside of us of an emotion,

00:14:47.212 and just looking at it with wonder.

00:14:51.423 Recognizing if there's pain, pleasure,

00:14:56.009 that is manifesting associated with that emotion.

00:15:00.102 So that is already therein the Buddhist teaching,

00:15:04.176 Looking at things as formations.

00:15:09.532 We use the experience of looking at things outside

00:15:14.438 as a metaphor for understanding what's going on in our minds.

00:15:20.023 When we look at the cloud,

00:15:23.712 and we see it transforming into rain,

00:15:29.700 we think that from one thing,

00:15:34.967 the cloud has become another.

00:15:37.661 That is a kind of horizontal relationship.

00:15:42.896 Thay proposes that we can also go more deeply

00:15:47.992 into this nature of this becoming that,

00:15:52.389 and look at things from a vertical perspective.

00:16:02.288 What that means is that

00:16:05.785 we understand the nature between the sign,

00:16:10.011 we say we understand the relationship between the sign and its nature.

00:16:33.881 [sign]

00:16:44.059 We're having fun in this class and learning some of the Sanskrit words.

00:16:48.548 Sign in Sanskrit is 'laksana'.

00:16:52.233 [laksana]

00:16:56.191 This is actually the same root of the English word to 'look'.

00:17:01.841 Look, laksana

00:17:03.941 Laksana means a quality, a characteristic, anything.

00:17:08.621 'Cloud' has a quality of whiteness,

00:17:13.507 it can be dark, grayish,

00:17:18.233 we recognize it as something that's floating in the sky.

00:17:21.994 All of these are qualities, signs of a cloud.

00:17:25.402 The word 'cloud' is another sign that's used

00:17:28.807 as a part of the collective community.

00:17:31.867 We agree on 'cloud' as a term for this thing.

00:17:38.260 When I say it, then it evokes

00:17:41.785 all the different kinds of other signs that you associate with cloud,

00:17:48.601 concepts, experiences of seeing clouds and mountains.

00:17:53.493 Every experience you've had with the cloud is coming together, all these signs,

00:18:01.414 so that you can try to understand the nature of a cloud.

00:18:08.874 [nature]

00:18:16.494 But a problem rises If we also take that nature to be a phenomenon.

00:18:25.384 Because as soon as we see the nature and we think we've got a concept,

00:18:31.709 we've mastered what is a cloud,

00:18:35.435 then it immediately is no longer its nature, it is only a sign.

00:18:41.027 So to describe this conundrum,

00:18:47.492 that anything that has a sign is not nature,

00:18:55.855 in the tradition we are proposed to practice to investigate separately

00:19:02.914 sign and its nature.

00:19:05.682 The separate investigation of sign and nature.

00:19:14.313 I think I'm going to have to move the cloud.

00:19:38.957 [separate investigation of sign and nature]

00:20:11.658 We can also translate it as separate investigation of

00:20:22.001 phenomena and noumena.

00:20:26.418 [phenomena and noumena]

00:20:41.743 So we do not apply

00:20:45.148 our way of deep looking that we use to understand the phenomenon of a cloud

00:20:52.383 as we do to understand the nature of the cloud.

00:20:57.651 'Noumenon' is a word that means

00:21:03.848 something that is a -

00:21:07.284 that cannot be described by qualities. It's a Latin word.

00:21:11.637 A phenomenon is something that has qualities that can be measured,

00:21:15.897 that can manifest in the historical dimension.

00:21:18.629 But the noumenon cannot be,

00:21:21.355 no quality can be ascribed to it, it is altogether,

00:21:25.070 it is not a phenomenon.

00:21:33.380 So the tenet for this week is nirvana is not a phenomenon,

00:22:07.586 [6. Nirvāṇa is not a phenomenon]

00:22:23.895 but it is the true nature of all phenomena.

00:22:38.600 [but it is the true nature of all phenomena.]

00:23:06.433 In our everyday way of doing things - I think of myself as a kid.

00:23:13.523 At that time, it was in the 80s,

00:23:17.873 you had these little battery operated cars.

00:23:24.005 You could turn them on and they would just drive around,

00:23:27.926 just drive straight, you couldn't control them or anything.

00:23:31.578 And usually I would get bored after about a day or so playing with it.

00:23:35.514 So I'd want to take it apart and look at the engine and understand.

00:23:39.342 I would see the coils that had these little engines,

00:23:43.055 with the gear on the end,

00:23:45.949 and with two electric -

00:23:51.225 What do you call them, electrodes or something,

00:23:55.018 where you attach the positive and the negative from the battery.

00:23:58.904 Then, I would take apart that little metal canister,

00:24:02.361 and inside you had a coil of wire

00:24:05.583 that would send the positive and negative charge through

00:24:10.083 and then it created a magnetic field,

00:24:12.679 which then caused the magnet in the center on the axle

00:24:15.897 to spin around with the energy of the electromagnetic field,

00:24:20.102 and then that caused the gear outside to turn, which caused the car to run.

00:24:25.321 I felt like, when I took that apart as a kid

00:24:28.847 I discovered the true nature

00:24:31.398 of that little car, electronic car.

00:24:42.270 That is using the investigation of phenomena,

00:24:47.645 of signs, of qualities, of things, to try to understand nature.

00:24:52.642 But what I learned from Thay

00:24:56.016 is that our way of looking at the true nature of things

00:25:00.860 is separate, it is not using

00:25:05.696 the same way of investigating, the same method.

00:25:12.643 The difficulty is that it can only be experienced.

00:25:21.458 It's not something that can be described.

00:25:24.792 That's what the Buddha was always faced with,

00:25:27.538 it's why he despaired about teaching the Dharma.

00:25:30.644 When he first got awakening, he thought, 'It's too difficult.'

00:25:34.400 He can explain about phenomena.

00:25:40.008 We can investigate a tree, we can investigate these things,

00:25:44.625 we can now understand the DNA, the genome of different plants and animals

00:25:53.327 and go deeper into understanding the nature,

00:25:57.175 how phenomena function.

00:25:59.968 But to understand the true nature beyond words, is beyond description.

00:26:06.122 Because it brings us back directly to the lived experience in the present moment,

00:26:12.837 which is one of wonder

00:26:18.114 of indescribable beauty,

00:26:24.974 of suchness, right?

00:26:27.067 The Buddha (said), 'How can I describe suchness?'

00:26:31.689 He proposes this word.

00:26:35.804 [suchness]

00:26:38.116 [tathātā]

00:26:43.245 Tathātā.

00:26:44.931 It's just like that.

00:26:49.465 And the students, they want to -

00:26:52.386 'But tell me how it works? I want to understand!'

00:26:57.065 Then he gives some skillful means.

00:27:00.362 You can use mindful breathing, calm your body, calm your mind,

00:27:05.404 and then embrace your emotions,

00:27:08.354 be able to understand that those emotions are fed by your thinking,

00:27:13.695 and this body.

00:27:16.101 I give you some exercises, this body is not me,

00:27:19.038 I'm not this body, these feelings are not me.

00:27:21.730 It's not for the sake of ontological proof that the Buddha is saying

00:27:26.535 'This body is not me, these feelings are not me'.

00:27:29.411 That's a training. He's just training us how to take care of our mind.

00:27:33.314 Because he sees that we suffer so much,

00:27:36.268 because we have such difficulty to touch our true nature.

00:27:40.568 Whereas a tree doesn't have much difficulty at all.

00:27:44.647 You go out and see a tree, and it is a tree.

00:27:47.810 It puts out leaves in the springtime, and it puts down its roots down.

00:27:52.537 They interact with the fungi in the soil and they receive nutrients.

00:27:59.116 The tree doesn't ask itself, 'Why does this all happen?'

00:28:03.894 But human beings we ask ourselves that question.

00:28:07.989 We want to know.

00:28:10.021 But why do we want to know? And the Buddha said,

00:28:12.959 'We want to know

00:28:15.576 because we like power, we like fame,

00:28:21.251 we like wealth, we like sex, we like food, we like all these things,

00:28:27.566 and because we like them we want to have more.

00:28:30.794 Then we learn that by investigating the things that we like more deeply,

00:28:35.907 we can understand how we can get more of them.

00:28:39.153 So behind it, he noticed that there was this craving,

00:28:42.419 there was this feeling of,

00:28:45.101 the feeling of lacking inside of us as human beings.

00:28:52.053 So we try to mechanistically understand the nature of things

00:28:57.792 not for the purpose of understanding that we are already free,

00:29:02.161 that we already have the nature of nirvana right here and right now,

00:29:06.259 but for the purpose of obtaining things, of getting something.

00:29:11.619 That is why we have to be careful

00:29:15.734 and not get caught in this conundrum of

00:29:21.260 putting nature in a box,

00:29:24.024 putting a word, or a sign, or quality, or characteristic on the nature of things.

00:29:29.331 Because the word 'nature' is only a word to describe what is indescribable.

00:29:34.896 But it just is like that. Tathātā.

00:29:51.143 So Thay brought this teaching out from deep within the tradition

00:29:57.287 to help us to resolve our struggling,

00:30:04.802 our struggling to understand the true nature of things.

00:30:08.262 We struggle to touch nirvana.

00:30:13.206 What Thay proposes is that,

00:30:15.801 why do we need to struggle? Does the wave need to struggle

00:30:19.772 to touch its water nature?

00:30:22.494 In the cloud, does the mist have to struggle

00:30:25.551 to understand that it is already of the nature of water?

00:30:30.868 It doesn't think, 'Oh! Why am I not a cloud anymore?

00:30:34.318 Why am I falling to the earth like this?

00:30:37.504 Or the ocean asking itself, 'Why?

00:30:40.942 On the surface I'm losing so much of my body to the air to become a cloud!

00:30:48.066 Give me back that water!'

00:30:51.328 But that's the way we act as human beings. It sounds silly, right?

00:30:55.109 The ocean doesn't think that, but as human beings that's the way we behave.

00:30:59.801 Because we believe that this body is me, these feelings are me,

00:31:03.379 and so we're grasping.

00:31:05.442 So we come back to the teaching on grasping at the five skandhas.

00:31:11.182 All of this is just it's a lovely play

00:31:14.556 to help us to see how our mind functions

00:31:19.947 in ways that bring about suffering.

00:31:25.432 This teaching of the sixth tenet is an invitation for us to continue to

00:31:40.046 make good use of the teaching, the teaching on this is because that is,

00:31:45.778 but not get caught in the teaching,

00:31:48.949 not get carried away by it and think, it's all just -

00:32:00.219 Like, for example, even in the time of the Buddha, there were teachers

00:32:04.331 who got caught in a nihilist understanding thinking,

00:32:07.566 'The body when it decays there's nothing,

00:32:11.276 there's nothing left. It is the end of everything.'

00:32:16.045 The Buddha was very clear that this is a wrong understanding.

00:32:22.600 And we see that very clearly.

00:32:24.948 So the teaching of the cloud becoming the mist is an everyday example.

00:32:30.387 You could say, 'Well, the cloud died. There's nothing left.'

00:32:34.872 But then we need to say as well that the rain has not come from nothing.

00:32:41.748 How can something come from nothing?

00:32:46.792 So that is a wrong view, to just say, when the body dies there is nothing.

00:32:53.579 This is the end.

00:32:57.058 If we get too caught in just looking at only phenomena

00:33:01.423 and we don't touch the ultimate, touch the noumena, touch the nature,

00:33:09.632 then we can easily get caught in that materialistic view.

00:33:15.458 Then we miss the chance to actually free our mind and miss the chance

00:33:22.852 to actually become free from a dogmatic understanding of the world.

00:33:29.456 Jorge Luis Borges wrote many funny little fiction stories.

00:33:34.411 He's an Argentinian writer.

00:33:37.163 One of them is where a group of adventurers decide on a project,

00:33:44.097 they're going to map the world at a one-to-one ratio.

00:33:50.746 It means, basically, rolling out a map that is exactly

00:33:55.258 the size of the land that they're mapping,

00:33:59.778 in order to mark all of the mountains, and the trees and so forth.

00:34:03.890 That is a little bit poking fun

00:34:06.850 at this kind of scientific materialistic way of looking at things.

00:34:10.224 We forget entirely that all of our words are metaphors,

00:34:13.822 and we start to think that the language itself is conveying some kind of truth.

00:34:18.670 The Buddha said, 'No, that is a misunderstanding

00:34:21.617 that is when we get caught

00:34:24.386 trying to understand noumena

00:34:27.139 through the same kind of investigation we use towards understanding phenomena.

00:34:32.121 It's a beautiful image of the mistake we can make,

00:34:35.402 and why we need to understand, separately investigate these two things.

00:34:41.338 It's ridiculous.

00:34:43.330 Imagine making a map that is the size of the actual planet.

00:34:49.179 What is the use of that map?

00:34:51.719 But that is what we do.

00:34:54.454 So in the Buddhist teaching we always remember

00:34:56.688 that the teaching is not there for the purpose of description,

00:35:00.145 or to try to create some kind of philosophy, which then can just describe life,

00:35:06.401 but it is there for our liberation,

00:35:10.514 it's there to free ourselves from concepts.

00:35:14.919 That can only be tasted through lived experience.

00:35:21.637 Just like the wave.

00:35:24.393 No matter how much you describe it,

00:35:27.447 you cannot get at the experience of being a wave,

00:35:34.735 which nature is water.

00:35:38.169 It is always there in the wave, it is its true nature.

00:35:43.878 That is also a metaphor.

00:35:46.037 It's not to get caught as well and think,

00:35:49.097 'But water is H₂O, and it's made of composite thing!'

00:35:52.164 That's not the purpose of that metaphor.

00:35:54.805 Thay uses that metaphor a lot, a wave in the water.

00:35:57.858 The point is to see that we already are our true nature,

00:36:02.270 we've already realized, that since beginningless time.

00:36:06.397 It's just this clouding of our mind through concepts, through ideas

00:36:10.759 because of our desiring mind, because of our grasping,

00:36:14.740 that we just lose it.

00:36:17.327 Then we feel stressed all the time.

00:36:20.900 For me personally when I encountered the Dharma and I started practicing

00:36:24.910 I was just so relieved, because I thought, 'Oh! this is something I don't -

00:36:29.174 growing up and I think I have to learn this and that and this fact and...

00:36:33.686 When I need to write a paper about this.'

00:36:36.531 Everything is mediated through signs,

00:36:40.493 through the manipulation of signs, of words,

00:36:44.401 in order to prove that I'm intelligent, to get a good job,

00:36:51.733 to impress people with my ability to solve problems, to manipulate words.

00:37:03.872 But then, finding the Dharma, this is all just there, all these words,

00:37:08.693 everything that has been transmitted by the ancestral teachers whether in a book,

00:37:13.808 which is really just a crutch

00:37:17.169 but even more importantly, through a realized teacher,

00:37:20.861 somebody who is living every day the Dharma, breathing like Thay.

00:37:25.364 Just seeing how Thay walks, seeing how Thay talks,

00:37:30.427 and being around, just soaking that up,

00:37:33.718 allowing Thay's actions of body, speech and mind

00:37:37.119 to perfume the seeds in my store consciousness.

00:37:41.460 That is the living Dharma.

00:37:45.357 There are many ways in which we receive the Dharma from the ancestral teachers,

00:37:50.024 but all of them are there not for the purpose of us to just learn new concepts,

00:37:54.733 but they're there as a kind of brainwashing,

00:37:59.885 not in a negative sense, but literally to help us to purify our mind.

00:38:09.529 That is the teaching of all buddhas.

00:38:12.767 Do good, refrain from harming others, purify your mind.

00:38:19.274 Right now the novices are studying to become bhikkhus,

00:38:27.251 because we'll have a greater ordination ceremony in September.

00:38:31.628 So we're studying the very early years,

00:38:36.358 when the Buddha had ordained many monks, but only the Buddha was teaching.

00:38:40.720 The monks didn't dare to teach yet.

00:38:43.984 So king Bimbisara, in Rajgir, Rājagaha,
00:38:57.174 he saw many other Brahmins and
asceticson certain days of the month
00:39:03.462 coming into the market and
teachingtheir philosophy, their way of living
00:39:08.531 to the people. And he said,
00:39:10.774 'Why do the monks not come inand
teach the Dharma?'
00:39:15.570 So the Buddha said, 'Okay,I allow
them to go in.'
00:39:18.619 But then the monks went in, but they
said,'But we don't know what to say!'
00:39:22.633 Nobody dared to say anything.
00:39:24.909 All they did was just listen to the
Buddha teaching.
00:39:27.960 It was a bit like when Thay used to
take us.
00:39:31.058 I remember, in Thay's hut,
00:39:34.332 in 2000... I think it was 2011 or
something like that.
00:39:39.707 It was a year we had the US tour.
00:39:43.028 There was a director
00:39:46.224 who wanted to make a film
aboutmindfulness with Thay as the center of it.
00:39:51.652 He really wanted to get this interview
with Thay.
00:39:57.635 So Thay invited a few of usto come
there with him
00:40:00.219 and then every question that he asked
Thay,
00:40:03.002 Thay pointed to one of us and said,
'You answer.'
00:40:06.116 So we had to answer the question.
00:40:09.262 Thay just sat thereand Thay didn't say
anything.
00:40:12.446 So it's a bit like that, like the
Buddhasaid, 'I've been teaching you!'
00:40:16.688 I mean, he didn't say that,but I can
imagine,

00:40:19.535 'What do you thinkI've been teaching
you all this time?
00:40:22.855 Go out and teach it to them!'
00:40:25.077 -'No, no, no, no!'
00:40:26.977 So finally he said, 'If you don't
knowwhat to teach, you can teach:
00:40:30.843 Do good, refrain from harm,and purify
your mind.'
00:40:34.130 That is it. That's a Dharma talk.
00:40:37.376 That was the first instruction apparently
of the Buddha
00:40:40.163 in terms of how to teach the Dharma to
people.
00:40:44.183 Maybe we can listen to a sound of the
bell.
00:40:53.283 (Bell)
00:40:57.221 (Bell)
00:41:36.914 There's a book written by a
mathematiciancalled, I think it's called 'Flatland',
00:41:45.448 or 'Flatlanders' something like that.
00:41:50.481 All the beings in that world, thatflat
land live in only two dimensions.
00:41:57.756 Then one day, one of them
00:42:00.967 comes off of the two dimension into
three dimensions.
00:42:05.374 And it looks down, but then when he
comes back,
00:42:09.137 he finds he doesn't have any words
todescribe his experience.
00:42:14.080 He's had this incredible experience
00:42:16.794 of looking at things at this two-
dimensional space,
00:42:20.158 where everybody lives their life,from a
third dimension.
00:42:24.634 And yet, as hard as he tries to go
around
00:42:27.834 and explain to everyone this incredible
experience he's had,
00:42:31.328 he just finds that every reference, every
word

00:42:34.889 that he can use to try to describe it to them

00:42:38.340 only is valid in two dimensions.

00:42:43.176 This is something similar to the separate investigation of noumena and phenomena.

00:42:51.118 This idea of the vertical relationship.

00:42:56.080 Things happen because of many - Actually, it's not just one,

00:43:01.341 but many causes and conditions in the historical dimension,

00:43:06.248 in the everyday life.

00:43:08.279 Anything that we can have any perception about at all,

00:43:15.170 anything that can be described in terms of a sign.

00:43:19.633 But the nature of things is signless.

00:43:25.760 It is something that is indescribable,

00:43:29.359 it's something that we don't even need to struggle to try to touch,

00:43:33.202 because it's already there.

00:43:35.351 Just like the wave in the water.

00:43:37.579 The water is already there.

00:43:40.795 Really it comes from stopping the struggling,

00:43:45.288 stopping, continuing to see -

00:43:55.525 In this investigation of phenomena, we map out things, we measure them,

00:44:00.946 we see this becomes that, which becomes this and so forth.

00:44:07.384 But in the investigation of noumena,

00:44:10.562 we get rid of all of that.

00:44:13.346 We let go of all of that, completely,

00:44:17.125 all of our concepts.

00:44:19.454 We can say, nirvana is this: extinction of all concepts and notions.

00:44:26.438 it can only be touched through the direct lived experience in the present moment.

00:44:34.117 That is what we learn in the fifth tenet,

00:44:39.700 that nirvana can be touched in the present moment.

00:44:42.761 This follows after that.

00:44:46.139 We just need to notice the tendency of our mind to continue to operate

00:44:50.672 in this horizontal level.

00:44:54.734 We're just

00:44:57.156 going away over and over and over again in the historical dimension.

00:45:03.371 Of course, it's natural because we want to understand the world.

00:45:07.055 So it's not that we abandon.

00:45:10.101 You might say, 'Well, okay

00:45:13.035 then I want to get rid of investigating phenomena,

00:45:16.907 and I just want to go straight to the noumena.

00:45:20.008 Nonstop nirvana, ultimate dimension all the time.'

00:45:24.336 And we definitely have had many people come to our practice centers like that,

00:45:28.681 with that wrong idea as well.

00:45:32.095 And when they come out of the meditation hall,

00:45:34.875 they just see some shoes there and they put the shoes on and they just walk away.

00:45:39.454 And when you come and you say, 'I think you're in my shoes',

00:45:43.805 they say, 'These shoes are not yours, they are not mine.'

00:45:50.922 Why do you worry about your shoes?'

00:45:55.214 As monks and nuns we get many interesting people who come to the monastery

00:46:01.629 and they are like full-time ultimate dimension.

00:46:05.942 Actually, it's a bit joking, but sometimes

00:46:11.306 it's a kind of psychosis in a way,

00:46:14.094 but what you've done is just fixated on the sign and the words.

00:46:20.465 You're not actually touching the nature.

00:46:24.863 Thay proposes this metaphor we talked about last time,

00:46:32.218 which is the sugar cane.

00:46:34.950 You chew on the sugar cane and you get the sweetness,

00:46:38.147 but the fibers, you don't swallow them, you spit them out.

00:46:41.892 So all the teaching of the Dharma should be like that,

00:46:45.185 we don't need to swallow the fibers.

00:46:48.052 When you have the experience of the sweetness,

00:46:50.669 when you touch nirvana, that is it.

00:46:54.331 So you say, how do I keep that?

00:46:58.280 Rather than just grasping onto the words, grasping onto the signs of things.

00:47:03.987 Because that can be -

00:47:06.899 For example,

00:47:09.881 I'm in the ultimate dimension all the time,

00:47:12.461 you people, you are still in the historical dimension.

00:47:16.668 You get that kind of attitude.

00:47:19.735 And it's kind of natural.

00:47:22.479 In Zen circles they call it 'the stink of Zen',

00:47:26.652 because it smells.

00:47:29.276 You see when somebody is caught in that thinking,

00:47:33.022 and through their thinking, they have convinced themselves

00:47:37.325 that they have this great enlightenment.

00:47:40.205 It's kind of stinky,

00:47:42.492 because you can't really talk to them as a normal person,

00:47:47.429 because they're grasping onto this idea of awakening.

00:47:55.113 That is when you are investigating using the -

00:48:01.147 For example,

00:48:03.078 the means of investigating the noumena, you apply it to the phenomena.

00:48:08.492 So you expect things in the historical dimension to be

00:48:17.557 completely -

00:48:24.920 You're not able to even just use the common way of relating to one another anymore,

00:48:34.813 just saying, brother (), and sister () sister ().

00:48:38.969 There's a story in Zen of a monk who says,

00:48:47.799 he sees another monk and he says, 'Did you see the abbot walk by?'

00:48:55.640 And then the monk says, 'No, I didn't see the abbot walk by,

00:48:59.143 I only saw the skandha of a body, feelings, perceptions,

00:49:03.164 and mental formation and consciousness walked by.'

00:49:06.380 And he felt quite proud of himself.

00:49:08.974 'I'm a Zen master, because I didn't see a person, there is no person,

00:49:13.145 there's only form, feelings, perceptions, mental formation and consciousness.'

00:49:17.730 It's a bit ridiculous.

00:49:20.050 That is brother (), sister ()...

00:49:25.660 In the historical dimension, we can refer to things and people.

00:49:30.138 Buddha called Ananda by his name, he didn't just sit there and say,

00:49:34.018 'I've touched nirvana. Nobody has name and form anymore.

00:49:37.425 I'm just going to be in endless bliss

00:49:41.959 and not acknowledge anything that is going on around me.'

00:49:45.405 That's not nirvana at all, it's a really wrong understanding.

00:49:49.755 Learning how to look at phenomena with intelligence,

00:49:56.710 this is really what it means.

00:49:59.121 Using our intelligence.

00:50:01.090 As human beings, we have intelligence, that's part of our makeup.

00:50:04.969 We can look at phenomena, but we don't get caught in phenomena

00:50:09.420 and try to touch the ultimate,

00:50:15.116 or try to grasp at the ultimate, through the historical,

00:50:20.147 but rather see, when we look deeply into the historical,

00:50:23.447 the ultimate is already there.

00:50:25.961 Just like the water and the wave.

00:50:36.900 Svabhāva.

00:50:40.495 [svabhāva]

00:50:46.951 Own nature, or own being.

00:50:52.629 In Sanskrit.

00:50:56.221 [own-being]

00:51:00.882 'Sva' is self-referential, whatever it is in front of.

00:51:05.177 And 'bhāva' means being or becoming.

00:51:40.156 So with this separate investigation of sign and nature,

00:51:49.493 then we no longer get confused between the horizontal relationship,

00:51:53.536 between phenomena,

00:51:56.459 and the vertical relationship between phenomena and the nature.

00:52:02.786 There's a relationship between one phenomenon and another phenomenon,

00:52:08.846 and there is a relationship between a phenomenon and its nature.

00:52:14.947 Or the sign and its nature.

00:52:17.568 And that is a vertical relationship.

00:52:23.844 I hope that's clear.

00:52:26.810 It takes a little bit of

00:52:29.309 I noticed with this teaching when I first heard Thay teach it

00:52:32.737 I wasn't quite sure.

00:52:34.733 I just perceived it as Dharma rain.

00:52:37.798 But over the years it's become more clear

00:52:40.608 observing it in my mind, in what ways I'm grasping at -

00:52:49.466 For example, you think you get a lot of happiness, you get a lot of bliss,

00:52:54.280 from your practice, letting go of thinking.

00:52:58.107 Then, you look for people in the world to recognize.

00:53:03.353 Don't they recognize what I've realized?

00:53:07.180 They don't recognize my great happiness.

00:53:09.907 I should get -

00:53:12.602 We had one man, I remember, he came into Upper Hamlet meditation hall

00:53:19.284 totally naked one morning. We were sitting in meditation,

00:53:22.971 and he came in without any clothes on.

00:53:25.723 He was convinced himself that he had become a buddha.

00:53:30.561 So the brothers had to get up and we take him out the door.

00:53:35.085 Later on, he jumped into the pond.

00:53:40.895 Anyway, he actually had a psychotic episode.

00:53:45.786 But somehow he also,

00:53:49.272 that mental imbalance also grasped onto the sign of nirvana.

00:53:56.166 He was convinced that

00:53:58.921 he had become free from, I guess, the phenomenal world

00:54:05.251 and was suddenly completely enlightened, in the ultimate dimension full time.

00:54:13.298 Actually, because of that situation of grasping deeply onto that belief,
00:54:24.120 he actually became quite violent.
00:54:27.152 And one of our brothers had to really try to break through
00:54:30.904 his delusional thinking just by -
00:54:36.147 I remember at one point, that actually
00:54:38.811 he had one of our other brothers up against the wall.
00:54:42.286 And he was like a big guy, really strong.
00:54:46.524 And that brother just practiced lovingkindness and sending positive energy,
00:54:52.131 and he didn't punch him.
00:54:55.171 I was not there, I heard about it afterwards.
00:55:00.117 That's a psychotic episode.
00:55:02.529 There's also mental imbalance there,
00:55:05.228 but the words of the Dharma had somehow contributed to that.
00:55:09.390 He had become () for his psychosis.
00:55:13.370 And he ended up later on feeling quite ashamed about the experience.
00:55:21.078 But in that moment it was for him totally real.
00:55:24.085 So that is swallowing the fibers of the sugar cane.
00:55:31.241 For most of us it would never manifest in such an extreme way,
00:55:36.374 but it's something where, for example,
00:55:40.157 our blissful positive experiences from the practice,
00:55:43.924 and get tied up with an idea about ourselves and who we are.
00:55:49.774 Then we start to think, 'People should treat me like this or like that.'
00:55:54.265 Don't you know who I am?'
00:55:57.748 And that is where the noumena and the phenomena get mixed up.
00:56:04.347 A true practitioner is very humble.

00:56:08.980 Like Thay.
00:56:11.037 Whenever we see a monk or nun who really deeply practices,
00:56:15.981 there's so much gratitude for their freedom from their afflictions,
00:56:22.979 freedom from their delusions, that they only want to help others
00:56:28.119 they don't want to impose their ego or try to get power or dominance
00:56:33.023 out of their experience.
00:56:35.723 That is how we know there's something not quite transformed yet.
00:56:41.770 We can have compassion for that person too,
00:56:44.520 it's not that we judge. We are also compassionate,
00:56:47.686 because we know that that stink can happen to any of us.
00:56:51.916 In our need for love, for appreciation, for being understood,
00:56:57.660 we grasp on to the teachings and the practices
00:57:00.786 as a way of bolstering up our ego.
00:57:04.466 It means that there's something so lacking there, there's nothing horrible.
00:57:09.831 It just means there's something missing, there's some love, some appreciation
00:57:14.330 that I'm not able to generate for myself.
00:57:17.495 So I need to somehow get it from other people.
00:57:21.275 We just try to be careful,
00:57:25.005 and when we are praised,
00:57:28.901 or when people say good things about us, we don't reject it, but we practice
00:57:35.881 to notice if there's some attachment that goes on there.
00:57:40.207 What's going on in my mind.
00:57:42.559 It's very pleasant when people say nice things. We don't need to reject that.
00:57:46.578 We should recognize it,

00:57:48.722 because sometimes when you reject it, you secretly,

00:57:51.839 'She said that.'

00:57:54.333 So when people say not nice things about you,

00:57:57.509 then you want to bring out your arsenal of all the good things people say about you

00:58:02.222 in order to counter what they're saying,

00:58:05.206 when the reality is mixed.

00:58:07.597 We all do things that harm others and we all do things that are very wonderful too.

00:58:14.390 But the reality is sometimes harder to look at that complex being of

00:58:23.154 doing kind things sometimes, sometimes being really jealous,

00:58:29.198 sometimes saying harmful words,

00:58:34.745 when that is the reality of all of us.

00:58:39.372 But somehow in our mind we get this dualism,

00:58:43.283 and that dualism is a product of mixing up noumena and phenomena.

00:58:50.866 So that is a proposal of the teaching

00:58:53.486 on the separate investigation of sign and nature.

00:58:56.652 That is actually from a misunderstanding

00:59:00.761 of god, of nirvana, of whatever you want to call it.

00:59:05.240 You can put whatever word you want on it.

00:59:08.633 Something that cannot be described by any quality, the unconditioned.

00:59:13.913 Something that words can only approximate,

00:59:16.890 which can only be touched by lived experience in the present moment.

00:59:23.165 And then trying to make something of it, anything.

00:59:31.236 A sign, word, phrase, a statue.

00:59:35.491 In Christianity, in Islam, in Judaism as well

00:59:40.630 that's the understanding behind not putting some kind of representation,

00:59:47.446 or worshiping an idol.

00:59:50.571 In there is this teaching of the separate investigation

00:59:54.506 of phenomena and noumena.

00:59:58.137 It's all there. It's manifest in different forms in different spiritual traditions.

01:00:04.114 But somehow, it always comes back,

01:00:07.840 that need to have the sacred and the profane.

01:00:12.677 The thing that is holy, the Holy of Holies,

01:00:16.204 and the rest of things, which are polluted.

01:00:20.489 And that may help us on a day-to-day basis,

01:00:24.216 but if we see that as absolute,

01:00:27.249 if we see it as the noumena,

01:00:29.741 that is where all the hatred between religions,

01:00:33.455 between peoples, racism, all of that arises.

01:00:37.048 Because we hold some phenomena to be noumena.

01:00:46.303 The word God, or Allah or whatever, you say, 'That is holy.'

01:00:58.615 And we suffer and we make others suffer because of that.

01:01:02.509 So this is very important actually, this teaching.

01:01:05.790 So all of the Buddhist teaching is built into it.

01:01:09.768 'Batteries included.'

01:01:12.370 It's the way out of all the teachings.

01:01:15.646 But if you don't investigate, if you don't learn the Dharma,

01:01:20.456 then I don't experience that

01:01:26.867 it's very easy to become free,because
it's very subtle this teaching.

01:01:36.427 All of us are encouraged to study with
ateacher, to live in community in sangha,

01:01:42.144 like we do here,

01:01:44.014 so that as we grow on our spiritual
path,we can have a mentor,

01:01:47.568 good spiritual friends around who can
help us when we get stuck.

01:01:51.617 If you just sit at home with a book,it's a
good start.

01:01:56.762 But in my experience,before I became
a monk,

01:02:01.204 living and practicing as a lay person for
some time on my own

01:02:04.965 I saw that I would get stuck very often
in certain ideas.

01:02:10.123 I would try to raise the
phenomena unto the level of the noumena.

01:02:16.858 And I was probably pretty obnoxious
as a young Buddhist

01:02:21.514 going around like as a kind of Buddhist
evangelist,

01:02:24.807 telling people about the four
noble truths and the eightfold path,

01:02:28.529 until my family got sick of it.

01:02:31.142 It's not helpful at all.

01:02:33.248 I said, 'This is the teaching of
liberation!'

01:02:36.386 Because I was treating the sign of the
Dharma,

01:02:41.490 something that in its true nature has no
quality,

01:02:49.751 form, or any word or sign that can be
ascribed to it.

01:02:59.582 I think

01:03:07.147 that covers most of the topic

01:03:11.056 of the separate investigation of sign
and nature.

01:03:23.799 Thank you so much.

01:03:43.731 (Bell)

01:03:49.115 (Bell)

01:04:19.615 (Bell)

01:04:47.535 (Bell)

01:05:21.278 (Bell)

01:05:44.178 Please, if there's any question about
anything,

01:05:48.622 please feel free to come up and ask me
about it during the week.

01:05:52.377 For those watching online,you can put
it in the comments

01:05:55.834 or write to the office
atdeerparkmonastery.org

01:05:59.992 and then I'll try to incorporate the
answer into the next class.

01:06:09.277 (Bell)

01:06:16.751 (Bell)

01:06:22.043 (Bell)