

## Summary notes: Class #8 - The Concentrations on Emptiness, Signlessness and Aimlessness Help Us to Touch Nirvana

# <https://www.youtube.com/watch/4oBdWS7etvg>

**00:01:27 – The class opens** with a welcome at Deer Park Monastery during the 2021 Spring Retreat. Brother Phap Luu affirms the value of trust in the Dharma, not based on blind faith but on direct experience, such as mindful breathing.

**00:03:07 – Awareness of breath** is used to touch the reality of impermanence. The in-breath and out-breath cannot be held onto, illustrating the fleeting nature of all things. Relaxation, body awareness, and mindfulness bring a natural calm.

**00:05:01 – Everyday experiences** like breathing, walking, and eating become meditative gateways into understanding interbeing. Everything is made up of non-self elements, and nothing can manifest without the right conditions.

**00:06:14 – Meditation frees us** from habitual grasping at appearances. The teacher describes the joy and confidence that arise when we experience this directly, reinforcing belief in the path.

**00:07:01 – The Dharma provides practical tools** to work with suffering. Emotions such as despair and anger are impermanent. Meditating on them helps us care for and release these blocks rather than fear or avoid them.

**00:09:33 – People often feel tired on retreat** because habitual suffering begins to thaw and release. This natural exhaustion signals a letting go of blockages, compared to an iceberg beginning to melt.

**00:12:24 – Social and familial conditioning** feed restlessness and inadequacy. Recognising this helps us stop running. Restlessness is one of the last energies to be transformed before awakening.

**00:13:20 – Thay used the metaphor of "froglessness":** a frog that always jumps off the plate symbolises the mind's tendency to escape. True freedom is found in staying present.

**00:15:01 – Spiritual practice involves discovering** and releasing inner blockages, including attachment to identity and ideas. Letting go of rigid views softens suffering in ourselves and in those around us.

**00:18:53 – Personal suffering** often holds ancestral and collective dimensions. By staying with our suffering, we begin to transform it not just for ourselves, but also for our ancestors and future generations.

**00:21:00 – Brother Phap Luu explores** how historical trauma, especially that inherited from European colonisation and slavery, still manifests today. This insight urges us to engage with humility and understanding, not domination.

**00:24:02 – Zen teachings** about the roles of guest and host offer lessons in humility. Practising the Dharma is not about being right, but about freeing oneself and others.

**00:26:00 – Nagarjuna's eight negations** are introduced: no arising; no ceasing; no annihilation; no permanence; not one, not many; no coming, no going. These are designed to free us from attachment to conceptual thinking.

**00:31:58 – The illusion of a permanent self** is examined. Change is constant, and through practice we can let go of fixed ideas about ourselves and others.

**00:34:55 – Thay's match and flame example** demonstrates "no coming, no going": a flame manifests when conditions are sufficient, and ceases when they are not. This is not destruction, but transformation.

**00:43:03 – In a wedding-style retreat ceremony,** a couple expresses that each is neither the same nor entirely different from the day before. This affirms the teaching that identities are not fixed.

**00:45:01 – Life is not a linear journey** from non-being to being and back. We arise from conditions and continue as transformations of matter, feelings, and consciousness. Nothing truly comes from nothing.

**00:49:03 – The cycle of a cloud** becoming rain, river, and ocean is used to illustrate that things do not die, they simply transform. This challenges our fear of death and loss.

**00:53:02 – The Dharma is seen** not as invented by the Buddha, but revealed and made accessible. The wheel of the Dharma is always turning. By practising, we become part of its continuation.

**00:59:01 – The eighth tenet is presented:** "The concentration on emptiness, signlessness and aimlessness help us to touch Nirvana and the unconditioned." These are known as the three doors of liberation.

**01:01:23 – Emptiness means the absence** of a separate self. Everything arises from conditions and is made of non-self elements. This is not abstract theory, but a meditation for freedom.

**01:05:34 – Signlessness involves letting go** of labels and concepts. Signs are useful but limited. When we let go of them, we see more clearly and touch a deeper reality.

**01:07:17 – Our brain simplifies** information to survive, but this limits perception. The practice opens our bandwidth and allows more spacious, accurate awareness of reality.

**01:07:23 – We often fail to recognise** our present happiness because of attachment to ideas and concepts. The human brain is wired for efficiency, filling in gaps and making rough estimates to avoid danger and support survival, but this creates distorted perceptions.

**01:08:44 – An example from vision** illustrates this: the brain fills in our blind spots. In daily life, our brain similarly approximates reality, often leading to wrong perceptions and suffering. Signlessness helps us free ourselves from these mental models.

**01:10:06 – Through the concentration on signlessness,** we drop our external performance-driven tendencies. We realise we already have the conditions for happiness, and do not need to grasp for more validation, status, or control.

**01:11:34 – Signlessness (animitta)** is the second door of liberation. Letting go of appearances and performance, we discover deeper freedom.

**01:11:47 – Aimlessness (apraṇihita)** is the third door of liberation. There is nothing to attain, nowhere to go, and no need to hurry. Happiness is available here and now.

**01:12:42 – Many waste their lives** chasing goals and status. Even when these are achieved, happiness remains elusive. The cycle of striving is endless.

**01:13:36 – A personal story** illustrates this: a consultant in Dubai kept discovering ever more exclusive VIP spaces, each promising fulfilment. But he eventually saw this chase was hollow, quit his job, and joined the Wake Up movement.

**01:15:20 – The concentration on aimlessness** can lead to concrete liberation. We see our pursuits have not made us happy. They once asked World Bank staff: "Do you want to be number one or do you want to be happy?"

**01:16:13 – Craving admiration** leads to deep dissatisfaction. Even the most admired suffer because the need for validation is never-ending.

**01:17:02 – Aimlessness arises naturally** when we have touched emptiness and signlessness. There is no need to attain even nirvana—They taught that we have been "nirvanised" since beginningless time.

**01:18:01 – Nirvana is not somewhere else. It is already here.** Even in a prison cell, with just a few square metres, we can practise and realise freedom.

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