

Living as a River

Finding Fearlessness in the Face of Change

By Bodhipaksa

Synopsis: A captivating and substantive look at the source of human suffering—our identification with a solid sense of self—and how to deconstruct it using illustrations from science to highlight what the Buddha was trying to get us to recognize.

What happens when we embrace the flow of life? We stop suffering. In *Living as a River*, Bodhipaksa conducts a masterful investigation of the nature of self, with an eloquent blend of current science and time-honored spiritual insight meant to free us from the fear of impermanence in a world defined by change.

The primary vehicle for this journey is Buddhism's traditional Six Element Practice, a deconstructive process of deep reflection that helps us let go of the belief in a separate, static self—the root of unhappiness. Bodhipaksa takes readers through a systematic analysis of the self that supports the realization of:

- A sense of spaciousness and expansiveness that transcends the limitations of the physical body
- Profound gratitude, awe, and a feeling of belonging as we witness the extent of our connectedness with the universe
- Freedom from the psychological burden caused by clinging to a limited identity
- The relaxed experience of “consciousness, pure and bright”

Engrossing and incisive, *Living as a River* is at once an empowering guide and a meditative practice to overcome the fear of change and align with the natural unfolding of creation.

The Six Element Practice

In this practice we reflect on what constitutes the body and the mind. We call to mind the solid matter (Earth), liquid (Water), energy (Fire), and gases (Air) that make up the body—as well as the form they comprise (Space), and notice how none of these is a static thing that we can hold onto, but instead is a process. We also notice that each of these elements is “borrowed” from the outside world.

With the sixth element, Consciousness, we note how our experiences—our sensations, feelings, emotions, and thoughts—continually arise and pass away, once again leaving us nothing that we can identify as the basis of a permanent and separate self.

The Six Element Practice is a reflection specifically designed to undermine our delusions of separateness and of having an unchanging self. It's a practice of letting go.

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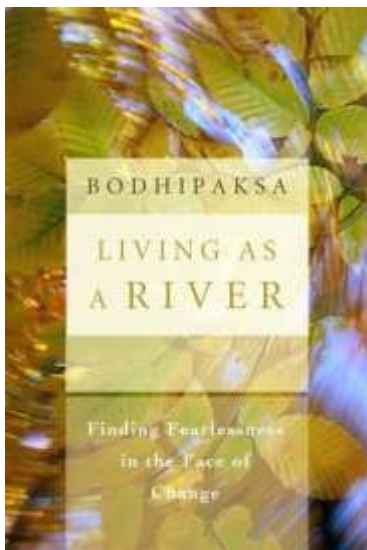
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About the Author, Bodhipaksa

Bodhipaksa was born Graeme Stephen in Scotland and currently lives and teaches in New Hampshire.

He is a Buddhist teacher and author who has been practicing within the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order since 1982 and has been a member of the Western Buddhist Order since 1993.

Bodhipaksa runs the online meditation center [Wildmind](#) to increase awareness of the positive effects of meditation. He teaches at [Aryaloka Buddhist Center](#) in New Hampshire, and also at the State Prison for Men. He blogs at [Bodhi Tree Swaying](#).

His published works include the audios *The Wisdom of the Breath* (Sounds True, 2009) and *Still the Mind* (Sounds True, 2009), and the books *Wildmind: A Step-by-Step Guide to Meditation* (Windhorse, 2010), and *Vegetarianism: A Buddhist View* (Windhorse, 2009).

What People Are Saying

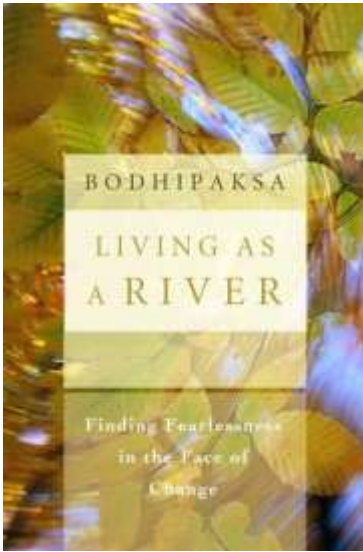
“An interesting, lively, and genuinely illuminating teaching of dharma.”

– Jack Kornfield, author of *A Path with Heart*

“At a time when it’s increasingly challenging to find clear and honest direction on the spiritual path, *Living as a River* offers contemporary insight into an ancient practice and wise counsel we can trust. This book is both beautifully written and useful to all serious seekers.”

—Mariana Caplan, PhD, author of *Eyes Wide Open: Cultivating Discernment on the Spiritual Path* and *Halfway Up the Mountain: The Error of Premature Claims to Enlightenment*

Reader's Guide – Practices



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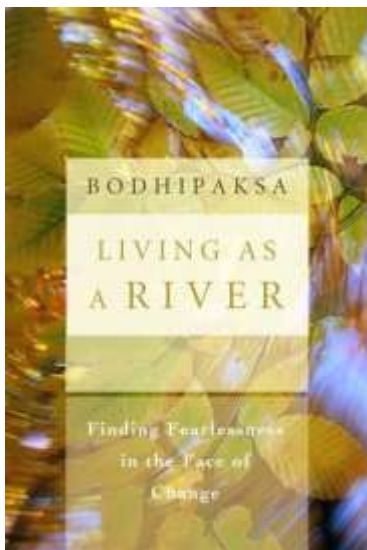
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1. Take one simple item of food you're about to eat—some fruit, or a piece of breakfast cereal, for example—and visualize where it came from, imagining the water, soil, and air that went to form it. Then visualize where, in turn, that water, soil, and air came from. Continue this reflection as you eat the food. What effect does this have on you? What do you feel as you imagine the food becoming part of your body?
2. Notice the breath flowing in and out of your body, and inwardly repeat the words “This is not me, this is not mine, I am not this.” What do you feel? What thoughts and images spontaneously come to mind?
3. Consider which aspects of yourself you regard as part of your core identity, and which as peripheral. How do you decide which are which? Is it possible to draw a clear distinction?
4. Imagine that through some error you'd been taken home as a newborn by a different family, who immediately moved to a different country, spoke a different language, and practiced a different religion from your own. Do you think of the “alternative you” as still being “you,” or would the “alternative you” be another person?
5. Think about your very earliest memories. As you consider them is there a point at which you find it difficult to identify with that early “you” as being you? Where is that point? What's different about the “you” before and the “you” after that point, if it exists? What about the “you” who predates those memories? Most people's first recollections are from around age four. To what extent do you find it is even possible to identify with an existence you can't remember?
6. Imagine that through advances in technology, all the parts of your body (heart, liver, lungs, limbs, etc) could be replaced one by one with tissues and organs grown in a lab. Would there be a point where you ceased to be you?
7. Now imagine that parts of your brain could be replaced with computer circuits with the same functionality as the original neurons. Would you cease to be you when just one part had been replaced, or all of them, or at some point in between? How would you know?
8. We rarely see our bodies and faces as they really are, and some research shows that we tend to hold an idealized image of our faces in mind. Try looking at your face in the mirror, and see if you can see what you truly look like. Do you have little tricks that “improve” how you look, such as only focusing on what you think are your best features, or putting on a certain expression? Do you find you're critical and unable to accept what you see? Are you able to move towards a greater acceptance of how you really are?
9. If you're sitting in a room, become aware of the space around you, using your senses of vision and hearing, and your spatial sense. In a sense your



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consciousness is filling the space around you. Consider that in some sense everything you are perceiving is part of you, and note how that changes your sense of the self/other split. How does this affect your sense of self?

10. Pay attention to any language you use that may define and limit you. This could include telling yourself or others that you “can’t” do certain things, or that you have a certain personality type. Can you notice a tendency to reinforce your sense of identity? What happens to your sense of self when you don’t do that?
11. For one week, try to consciously change some of your habits: your route to work, where and what you eat, where you sit, the people you talk to, your sources of news and entertainment. How does this change your sense of self?
12. Fear seems to underlie most, if not all, of our craving and clinging. For a full day, try to notice every mental, physical, and verbal act of craving, and clinging, and see if you can detect any underlying fear. What, from these observations, did you notice you are most afraid of? If it helps, when you notice, say, that you’re craving something (it could be anything from recognition to a pair of shoes), ask yourself, what do I fear will happen if I don’t get this thing I desire?