

Notes for November 19
Module 10, Talk 5
Intellect (Formation or Concept)

You don't have to believe everything you think. Complete slogan

So – we are all confused here, and it doesn't seem to help to repeat the story of how there is basic ground or space, sparks of energy appear, there is panic and something freezes. So we will not go there, at least today! It does not help because we are all straining to find something that happened in the past, something that might happen in the future, or some sort of extraordinary experience. But in fact, we are pointing to is something so close at hand and so ever present and ordinary that we miss it. So let's relax and drop this for now.

Instead, I would like to tell the story about a hijacking. You could call it a derailing, whatever, but I like this image. The hijacker is really quite deluded and thinks that he owns this plane. He has some feeling about the plane, some confused idea of what it is, he believes that he has built it, put fuel in it, is able to pilot in, and getting even more drunk and deluded, he starts to invent crazy ideas of where he is taking it to and why he is justified in doing this. Finally, he thinks that he has arrived somewhere which may be wonderful or terrible or boring, and believing this, he needs a new story because another hijacking needs to happen to continue the delusion. Or perhaps we wake up!

When we seem not to be able to realize our own basic nature, many great teachers have suggested that we relax, and instead of banging our heads against a wall that we start to work with what we are experiencing right now. Sitting meditation is an excellent place to do this because when we are sitting, we constantly experience the arising of thoughts, and if one of the thoughts carries us away (This is the hijacking!), we will presently come back to our mind (This is our awareness or Buddha nature!) thanks to our good posture and our aspiration to follow the practice instruction. So what we learn, what we cannot avoid learning from meditation, is that thoughts occur, and we are not in control of what thought arises and when. Obviously, we carry our own individual suitcase of anxieties, fears, anticipated pleasures and pains, unresolved conflicts, regrets and fantasies, some very familiar and repetitive and some that may really surprise us. But what is it that triggers them?

Unless we are really psychotic and believe that some alien being is injecting voices into our mind, we can acknowledge that something must be happening in the mind before it hits the surface where we either believe it or recognize that it as a thought. So this process of some mental events before the level of awareness is what we are describing as skanda. The text says that this happens very quickly, it only takes a moment. That does not mean that it takes no time. A moment is a time period that is too short for us to separate into smaller parts. So very rapidly, an assembly of components is being marshalled in order to have a thought. And this is what we are now discussing.

It is important to understand that when we say that a thought is *dualistic*, we mean that that thought is about a relation between me and something that is not me. In terms of content, we

have been given a list called the eight worldly concerns. They are dualistic because they both reside within mind. In a dream, the “me” and something chasing me must reside within mind. So the question is how, starting with the tiniest blip of something, does it quickly become a full blown thought?

Skanda is translated as “heap” and the skandas are heaped on top of each other, that is, as a sequential of dressing up a delusion with all the outfits and props necessary to survive. There is no particular guarantee that meditation is going to enable us to slow down the mind and get to inspect the skanda process. But right now we can ask ourselves whether this story (about five skandas is consistent with a vast array of prejudiced and ignore behavior, questionable justifications, and massive amounts of self-deception, poor judgement, attempts to deceive and manipulate others that we see in ourselves, our relationships, our workplaces and in public politics.¹

Here goes:

1. The first step in this dressing up process is form or duality. This is the most primitive sense of self as subject and something else as other. (Find good examples!)
2. Attitude: This will develop into a desirable, hateful or indifferent other. (Example of a lover.)
3. Prejudice/Reaction: Now we need to pull in all sorts of materials from our suitcase of examples and unfinished business. (Familiar patterns from the past color our developing perception.) (Example of lover again!)
4. Formation: (Intellect, Concept) (*Mental* Formation). This is called samskara in Sanskrit. Gathering materials, preparing a case. Creating a story and justifications, excuses of all kinds.

The texts have a large catalogue of samskaras, 51 of them. The chapter in the book mentions some of them, but basically they are all things we can do with mind, good, bad and neutral, and then some more categories as well. The main point is how they are used.

Eleven virtuous thoughts: Faith, awareness, discipline, equanimity, absence of passion, absence of anger, absence of ignorance, humbleness, tendency of nonviolence, tendency of energy or effort or bravery.

Six egocentric thoughts: ignorance, passion, anger, pride, doubt, dogmatism.

Four neutral thoughts: sleep or slothfulness, intellectual speculation, remorse, knowing.

Here is one list of 51 samskaras: <http://viewonbuddhism.org/mind.html>. There are others.

¹ Buddhism also has a theory of valid perception that arose historically much later than the Abhidharma, the source of the teachings on the skandas. This theory is called pramana in Sanskrit. Pramana is taught in all the Tibetan schools in various ways. One of its principal uses is as ground rules for debate, which is taught as a non-egocentric practice to sharpen intellect or understanding as wisdom.

Interestingly, experimental psychology has also been investigating both valid perception and confused perception on its own terms using fast video and EEG as its instruments of investigation. If my understanding of these investigations is correct, direct (sensory) valid perception happens very quickly, and the confused skanda-like ego activity comes in *after the fact* with its biased memories and invented justifications.

However, even virtuous thoughts can be used for egotistical purposes, which of course perpetuates samsara. We have often discussed these under the topic of psychological and spiritual materialism that is, using conventionally good thought and behavior for in self-enhancing ways which can change very quickly when we do not get what we want.

It is important to understand that samskara is the skanda which wastes the most amount of unnecessary energy. It is reaching into the murky clouded mind to concoct whatever story and justification is necessary in order to dress the self up in whatever way is needed. There is a lot of furniture to be moved around by the need to reinvent ourselves every moment. If we can see through the fourth skanda, formation or samskara, and do less of it, a lot of useless energy is saved.

Before opening up to discussion, I want to leave you with:

You don't have to believe everything that you think.

This suggests that we can start to see through our skanda process. It does not mean that we can or should try to make the skandas disappear. However, if we practice with energy, discipline and curiosity, and with the aspiration to know our mind without grasping, we can start to lighten up and liberate ourselves from the grip of egocentric thought.

Two weeks from today, Emily will be teaching the class on Meditation which will go further in bringing us down to earth.

Discussion:

Supplement:

It may help to point out some passages in *Glimpses of Abhidharma* which are strung together like pearls. The passages selected here form a thread of Mahamudra view throughout the book, so they are worth pointing out. They also go along with my use of the image of a hijacking

Page 10: The important point here is that because we take the mahamudra view, ignorance is not seen as just ignorance, but as holding the potential of wisdom.

Page 28: Going beyond hope and fear, there is always the possibility of having enough bravery or daring to touch on our basic intelligence or Buddha Nature.

Page 36: A student asks if awakened mind is actually doing all the work. Trungpa Rinpoche replies, "Exactly!" This inspires the image of a hijacker who has no ownership of the energy of the skandas.

Page 50: Trungpa Rinpoche is asked to define "ego's game." The answer is very straightforward – it is to maintain the survival of the sense of "I am."

It might be useful to recall some of the words of the Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Knowledge (Prajnaparamita), which is our chant book (on line).

“O Shariputra, a son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the profound prajnaparamita should see in this way: seeing the five skandhas to be empty of nature. Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness are emptiness ... Therefore, Shariputra, since the bodhisattvas have no attainment, they abide by means of prajnaparamita, since there is no obscuration of mind, there is no fear. They transcend falsity and attain complete nirvana.”

The abhidharma does not talk very much about ignorance in the fundamental sense of ignoring oneself, but understanding this adds a further dimension to the teaching of the eight consciousnesses. Once there is bewilderment, then a sort of doubletake begins to happen of wanting to find out where you were, what you are, where you are at. But the nature of the bewilderment is that you do not want to go back and find out your original situation, you do not want to undo everything and go back. Since, with the bewilderment, you have created something to latch onto, you want to ignore the case history that led to that altogether. You want to make the best of the present moment and cling to it. That is the ignoring—refusing to go back because it is too painful, too frightening. As they say, “ignorance is bliss.” Ignoring of ignoring is bliss, at least from ego’s point of view.

This understanding of ignorance comes from the mahamudra teaching of the vajrayana tradition. The difference between the abhidharma and basic sutra teachings on ignorance and the more direct and daring mahamudra teaching is that the sutra and abhidharma teaching relates to ignorance as a one-way process—bewilderment and grasping and the six sense consciousnesses develop and ignorance takes over. But in the vajrayana teaching, ignorance is seen not only from the angle of the development of ego, but also as containing the potential for wisdom. This is not mentioned at all in the lower teachings. But within the eight consciousnesses, including the six sense consciousnesses, there actually is the possibility of ignorance turning into wisdom. This is a key point because wisdom cannot be born from theory, it must be born from your actual state of mind which is the working basis for all spiritual practice.

The wisdom of dealing with situations as they are, and that is what wisdom is, contains tremendous precision that could not come from anywhere else but the physical situations of sight, smell, feeling, touchable objects, and sounds. The earthy situation of actual things as they are is the source of wisdom. You can become completely one with smell, with sight, with sound, and your knowledge *about* them ceases to exist; your knowledge becomes wisdom. There is nothing to know about things as an external educational process. You become com-

and nothingness, emptiness and openness, the awake state, is automatically in itself regarded as a sleep state, as overcrowded space. That kind of freezing of the space starts at the level of form, continues with feeling and now manifests fully with perception.

Perception, in the sense of the third skandha, cannot exist without solidness, without solidifying. That is the manifestation aspect. The nonmanifestation aspect is the aspect of annihilation, giving up all hope of retaining any kind of ground, which is based on fear. The first is hope, the second fear. The manifestation, physical manifestation, the solidified content of perception, is based on hope. And the second aspect, nonmanifestation, is based on despair (disappear). That works by, when there is no hope of maintaining solid ground any more, making that position of despair into solid ground.

A third and fourth aspect of perception after manifestation and nonmanifestation are involved with criteria again. The criteria here concern how much area the grasping of perception can cover. Ego is extending its territory as far as it can, that is, trying to label and define as much as it can. Automatically the notions of big and small, greater and lesser, develop. Even the notion of smaller can help define more ground. So these polarities develop.

Then the fifth aspect of perception is absolute nothingness. Absolute nothingness in this case could be said to be a spark of intelligence coming through, connected with the primordial ground. There was a dispute on that subject between scholars of two schools of thought. One school said it was a spark of intelligence coming through. The other said that it was still confusion, that there could be no question of awakened intelligence in the skandhas; at this stage of perception there could be no hope of freeing oneself at all. But, in my view and as I have been taught, there is a possibility of a complete change in one's perspective in relation to perception. An experience of absolute nothingness means giving up even hope itself or fear itself, and no longer perceiving in terms of grasping or clinging onto something. In that experience you are just trying to be brave enough to let go of your grasping a little to just feel around openly a bit in local areas, float around a little bit. So that aspect of perception means beginning to be pretty brave. This sort of bravery

comes from *tathagatagarbha*, buddha nature, the basic intelligence. It is the basic intelligence which begins to show this bravery. On the whole, any notion of exploring or taking a chance in relating with one's ego and projections is regarded as inspired by the enlightened mind. That is because you are not trying to hold on, to continue something, to prove something, but you are looking at other possibilities. That in itself is a very brave attitude and a very spacious one, because your mind is completely charged with curiosity and interest and space and questions. It is a sort of wandering process and is very hopeful and very positive in this particular connection. This absolute nothingness is the last stage of development of perception.

On the whole, the relationship between perception and the previous skandhas is that form creates the ego and ignorance and basic things, and feeling brings the spiky quality or sharpness within that, of something trying to maintain itself. The perception comes as extending ego's territory and trying to define its position even much more. There is in perception a lot of referring back to the central headquarters of ego, and then extending and exploring further and further always in relation back to it. This establishment of territory in relation to a central reference point seems to be the general pattern of the development of ego.

QUESTION: I only got four developments in perception. Manifestation, nonmanifestation.

RINPOCHE: Big is the third one, and small is the fourth. The fifth is absolute nothingness.

Q: Could you go over nonmanifestation again?

R: It has to do with fear. It is based on the fear of not having a solid situation anymore. Solidified space is hope. It is hopeful in that you manage to solidify the space as something to hang onto. In non-manifestation, you have found nothing, and there is complete despair and giving up hope. But that is in itself a doublecross of ego, because giving up hope is in itself clinging to something.

to be a cloudy mind or a clinging mind?

R: I think there was tremendous distrust in the definition of the absolute, of absolute mind, buddha nature, and its intelligence. That connects with our previous discussion about viewing Buddha as a great scholar. From the point of view where being enlightened is being a great scholar, any kind of feeble intelligence or feeble inspiration is regarded as a manifestation of samsara. The people holding this view thought that in order to have a really good glimpse of the absolute you had to have fantastic dramatic flashes. They themselves had not had these experiences, but they imagined that should be the case. The other school, our school, says that awakened mind has to be something that is part of our everyday domestic experience of ego. The experience of awakened mind is extremely simple; it does not have to be dramatic. The faintest expression of intelligence is part of the awakened state of mind. So you do not have to build up a mythical notion of enlightened experience. It is something realistic and flashes of it happen constantly. That viewpoint also coincides with the tantric teachings.

Q: So all through these skandhas, the awakened state of mind is the thread that everything goes on, and somehow the complications built up by each skandha live on this thread which they obscure.

R: That's right, that happens all the way along.

Q: So that the awakened state of mind is actually doing all the work that everything else is living on?

R: Exactly, I mean even uprisings, agitation, aspects of living in the samsaric world like guerilla warfare and political intrigues and everything—all are based on a fundamental sense that something is not right, and seeing that something is not right is based on intelligence.

Q: So doubt is intelligence.

R: Doubt is intelligence, yes. That is really very powerful thinking actually. The chaos is intelligence and it is teaching. So you do not have to ward off anything at all.

Q: Could you say something about pure pleasure and pure pain isolated unto themselves? How could they exist outside the body or mind?

R: They cannot exist outside the actual body and the actual mind, but they can exist outside our version of the body and our version of the mind. That is the most difficult thing of all—we say “body” and we say “mind,” but we have our own interpretation of them, our own concept of them, which constantly separates us from the reality of the body and mind, the bodyness, mindness, the thingness of things as they are. This thingness of things as they are is what is called “emptiness,” *sunyata*, the actual isness quality of things. Things could be without us; they could remain pure and perfect as they are. But we put our own version over them, and we then amalgamate them all together. It is like dressing up dolls. We have the naked bodies and then we put on military costumes or monks robes or an ordinary tie and suit. We dress them up. Then suddenly we find that they are alive. And we try to run away from them because they begin to chase us. We end up being haunted by our own desires and perceptions, because we put so much onto them. Finally our own creation becomes destructive to us.

Q: I really didn't understand what you said about freezing space.

R: The basic ground is open ground, but you do not want to accept that. You want to solidify it to make it tangible, safe ground to walk on. So by freezing space, I mean solidifying that open space. There could be the experience of pain and pleasure as naked pain and naked pleasure without any problem of fixing them in relation to anything. We do not have to conquer our projections and our mind at all. We do not have to control anything. Things as they are can remain independent. Once situations are left open and fresh and naked, experience can become very flowing, real, living.