

Emily's notes: Pema 1.1 notes (from Making Friends with Yourself: Self, Selflessness and the Roots of Attachment, Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia Jan. 2015 taught by **Pema Chodron**)

Talk one: Permanent, Solid, and Separate: An overview of the "Self"

Total audio time 44 minutes

Introduction to the six-week course taught during Yarne (49 day traditional monastic retreat)

Topic: Exploring Selflessness. Overview of the whole thing.

Three traditional subjects: numbered lists of 5, 8, and 12.

Classes 1 & 2	Five skandhas
Class 3	Eight consciousnesses
Classes 4 & 5	Twelve nidanas
Class 6	Topic not known (becomes "Nowness gives rise to Bodhichitta: connecting to sacred world")
Talk 7	Tying it all up

What do we mean by Self?

Traditionally said you can never find the Self. But it is always with us as experience. As an ally.

Ask "what do we mean by Self?"

We don't mean sense of continuous presence of self that follows us. No problem with that. The problem is how we resist experience.

Self—that which resists what is occurring.

When we look for a Self which is permanent, singular, separate (this is separate from that) we can't find it.

Permanent

"I feel like the same me that came over here from the cabin." We make an assumption that we are the same from day to day, moment to moment. If you look, there is nothing fixed. You can't see the hair grow. Things are moving and changing but we don't perceive it. We can know that it is changing but we behave emotionally as if we have the sense that we are a continuous permanent self. We question our mind and sense of "me". We have attachments and aversion like animals do. All based on a continual sense of permanent self.

Can you feel uncertainty? Not fixed but alive and growing and in process. No identity of "me."

"Continual sense of being." Everyone has this even enlightened people. But what we are referring to is an **emotional reactivity** coming from a fixed identity.

***Look for your fixed identity. What is it? "not smart enough; not nice enough; too this or too that" Look for your fixed identity. Selflessness is without fixed identity.

Self is "frozen". We are a work in process instead of being a fixed identity, such as "victim" or "fixer." Permanence: you can never find it.

Singular (*Pema also calls this **Solid***)

Sense of being singular, “all one thing” “one big thing” Look at the body, look at feelings. Hand has fingers, nails, knuckles. It isn’t really a “hand” but a composite. “**Lumping**” Fixed ideas of all kinds. Islamaphobia, demonization. See everyone who is a Muslim as enemy. Other categories are gay, women, men, buddhists, Catholics, vegetarians, smokers, etc. The biggest “lumping” we do is self. You don’t see the preciousness of things. I see forest as “the woods”. When we do that we don’t see it as an individual tree. Even individual tree has individuality. Carload of monks or nuns. They are all individuals. Cape Breton Island is not one thing. We don’t see variety of things—we lump. Our minds do it. There is the way things are and the way our minds work.

There is a fluid, open, dynamic nature of things. Not so easy for our nervous systems to tolerate.

Separate (also called **Independent** by other teachers)

The final one is most difficult to grasp. You can never find a **separate** self. [*Pema uses the word separate instead of independent or autonomous.*] “I’m here and you’re there. We need to have a kinship with others on the planet. My aspiration for kinship and fellowship. End of “us” and “them”. It all starts with this illusion of separateness.

Can you find anything that you touch that is separate?
Is there any separation?

We misperceive things all the time. If we look into this we find it isn’t true. Look in the mirror. Is that image in the mirror the same as me or is it different from me? Not the same and not different. We begin to get into the helpful area where we can’t really pin it down. Self and selflessness—you can’t pin it down. It can shake up your assumptions.

How can one explore selflessness? By exploring self.

“To study the self, is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things” Dogen

By coming to know the self, you forget the self. Then you don’t have anything to protect.

Know the self more=accepting the self.

Kindhearted, openhearted exploration, curiosity and acceptance about yourself.

Ken McLeod (paraphrased) “With attention, we leave behind a life of emotional reactivity and habituation, and enter a life of presence.”