

Where are we in Module XVII? “Looking at Self and Selflessness”

Looking at what makes up the Self. Primarily the false belief that we are Permanent, Singular and Independent (and Andy Karr adds Important).

In class 2 we listened to a talk by Pema Chodron from a program called “Making Friends with Yourself: Self, Selflessness and the Roots of Attachment.” She presented 5-8-12.

5 skandhas, 8 consciousnesses, 12 nidanas. Thought we would cover only the 5 skandhas. Need to also cover the 8 consciousnesses and the 12 nidanas to have a complete view. Last week J. Crane talked about the 5 skandhas: heaps. Tonight I will talk about the 8 consciousnesses and next week Michael Fagan will talk about the 12 nidanas.

Process of deconstructing the edifice of ego that we have built. Going to the very root. Five skandhas (aggregates) are very primitive almost pre-thought.

Taken from *The Indestructible Truth* by Reggie Ray (pages 372-376)

1. **Form:** physical elements (earth, water, fire, air) as well as the five sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) and their corresponding sense objects (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile). “Form” refers to those momentary events that we experience as “physical.”

2. **Feeling:** Primitive sensations of positivity (pleasure), negativity (pain) or neutrality (indifference) that attends any experience that we have, however momentary and fleeting.

3. **Perception:** Experience of rudimentary perception in which we recognize and type what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think. (Example: roaring sound outside—later label as motorcycle, tree, smell burning)

4. **Karmic formations** (samskara): All of the habitual concepts, identifications, labels, and judgments—all of the extra mental baggage—that we attach to the experiences of the first three skandhas. They cause us to react to things as we do and lead us to act in particular ways.

5. **Consciousness:** is the circumscribed, self-referential field of awareness within which we become conscious of the first four skandhas. Consciousness is like a field surrounded by an electric fence. Within the field is our consciousness governed by motives of self-protection and territoriality. When anything potentially helpful or harmful comes in contact with our consciousness, it mobilizes the other four skandhas to pull in the incoming object if it promises pleasure, to push it away if it appears threatening, or to ignore it if it does neither.

## The Eight Consciousnesses (in the Yogachara school of Tibetan Buddhism)

The fifth skandha of consciousness is composed of eight aspects, differentiable according to function. These are the “eight consciousnesses.” They include the five sense consciousnesses: the eye consciousness (the aspect of consciousness that registers the visual impressions of the eye organ) and, likewise, the ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousness.

The five sense consciousnesses are *concept free*—they merely register the sense experience.

6<sup>th</sup> consciousness: that aspect of the consciousness that registers the “mind organ’s” perception of mental objects. The 6<sup>th</sup> consciousness is also *concept free*, insofar as it only registers the direct and unmediated experience of its object, without adding onto it.

7<sup>th</sup> consciousness: the creator of duality. Here the bare experience given by the six senses is separated into “I” and “other.” The seventh consciousness adds the idea of “I,” “me,” and “mine” onto our experience of the six consciousnesses. It taints every experience with the idea of a self and imposes the false idea of a self on everything that happens.

8<sup>th</sup> consciousness: the *alaya*, the “storehouse consciousness” where karmic seeds that have been created are “stored.” Every experience that we have ever had has left an impression on our consciousness. This impression remains from one moment to the next, from one year to the next, from one lifetime to the next, until it is resolved through the natural occurrence of one’s suffering or through deliberate spiritual practice. This is what **karma** is, namely the collection of impressions that we have received since beginningless time. The sum total of these impressions exists at the most subtle level of our consciousness. Even when, at death, all of the more superficial levels of consciousness disappear, this most subtle alaya consciousness remains. It exits the body at the moment of death and passes on to a new birth, carrying all of our karma.

It is important not to think of the alaya as a “thing,” and here is where the analogy of the storehouse breaks down. All of the five skandhas are momentary, including the eight consciousnesses. One moment of consciousness, with the alaya as its most subtle level, carrying our particular karma, dies. As it does so, it transmits this karmic “load” to the next moment of consciousness. Thus what we call the alaya is really the succession of moments of the most subtle dimension of our consciousness.