

2007-06-09 Settling of the Sankharas

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SPEAKERS

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Here at the IMC or perhaps some, you know, myself as a Buddhist teacher. There are very few Buddhist rituals and chants that we do. Some of you were here last Sunday we did Buddha's birthday celebration, it's one of the few kind of things we do. In terms of chance, there's very few chants there's homage to the Buddha, Namo tassa, bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. And then there's the refuges. Buddham saranam gacchami. Dhammam saranam gacchami. And then if you include chants, you might include the precepts the five precepts that we do sometimes. And that's pretty much it except for one more so and so we don't have a lot. So for this next one, it goes: anicca vata sankhara Upada vaya dhammino Upakituva nirujihanti Tesang vupasamo sukho. Different Buddhist countries, different Buddhist monastic traditions have different ways of chanting. So you might not recognize it exactly. But this is the basic chant.

And this one says, in turn to translate translated, all sankharas are impermanent. They have the nature of arising and passing away. The subsiding of these or the bring these things to peace. Settling these things of the Sankharas is the great happiness. And this chant is used in many different circumstances. When my son was first one was born, I chanted, first that when the first things he heard And it's also used commonly in funeral ceremonies. And right people are dying even sometimes in Theravada Buddhism. So it's the last thing people hear. Last thing people hear as well. So all Sankharas is the word and sometimes is translated as all things. But Sankharas is sometimes translated as conditioned things, or constructed things. And one possible etymology of the word is san means with, you know, icon. And khara means to make my karma seem to make make together so constructed, conditioned.

And there's two general things that are called sankharas. It's all constructed things, all conditioned things. So everything we see and experience and everything, you know, basically Everything. And so like this building and the author in the kitchen floor, they're all constructed things. They're all conditioned things, and they have the nature of the impermanence. The other meaning of Sankhara is a little more specific, and that it refers to all the volitional activities of the mind. So sankharas are the constructed, conditioned activities of the mind. volitional sometimes the things that you intend to happen in your mind. It's most thinking we have is intentional. You don't think you're intending what you think. But there's a motivation often behind what you think, what you feel, your beliefs, or your motivations that he wants to see happen. And so there's all this mental phenomenon going on some of the mental phenomena just inherent in the mind, just now. actual function of the mind and mind, in a sense, in the mind, perceives sight objects and constructs it into some kind of sight concept. Pretty straightforward, perhaps. But then there's these sankharas, the whole world volitional world, intentional world motivational world and for those mental activity, thoughts, feelings, emotions, desires wishes, memories are considered to be part of the world of some Karos fantasies, projections. So these things

also this inner mental activities mental world that we construct, also called Sankhara. And they're also it's also impermanent. It's impermanent has a nature of arising and passing away.

And then this last part of the chant

bring these to stillness are settling them subsiding of them. bringing them to peace. pacifying them is a great happiness. And, and so probably here, it doesn't talk about, you know, bringing tablecloth Zaku in the Florida peace, you know, they're both peaceful, they're about as peaceful as you're gonna get. And but I think it's here the chances prefers sankharas here as this inner mental activity. And what's very humbling and very, I think very profound is to realize how much of our life is mental activity, how much we understand ourselves, and building up sense of self, our relationship to the others and the world around us. how we see the world. You know, the world of, you know, just a great degree. The world we experience is not the real world out there, but rather it's partly through the filter of our constructs and ideas and different people will experience the world differently because of different way of constructing and different activity of the mind that gets activated. And partly, you know, we have a psychological term in the West have been conditioning, I was conditioned a certain way. And so we know, our conditioning for all kinds of life experiences, affects the kind of inner mental constructions, mental conditioning, mental formations, sometimes called mental formations. This inner sunkhara, samskara in sanskrit.

And so bring them to peace. Settling them is the great happiness and sometimes, so the idea of moving towards liberation of freedom has something to do with bringing the system to a peaceful place to settle place is easy, I think for many of us to, at times, to experience the inner mental world, constructions of activity as being in turmoil being on fire Being hot, or being rigid or frozen, you know, it's not been frozen and rigid ways not really peaceful, you know, looks peaceful, someone's really steppers it's really still. Yeah, but the person's bottled up, you know, it's refreshing, you know, that's, that's not really stillness. And so those activity of the mind can be can be settled, a bit calm. So one of the reasons but one of the reasons why some people like meditation is it helps to calm these things down the mental activities and, and experience some kind of relief from the inner life. The reason I want to talk about this morning is to understand the movement of practice to one from going from a act some way in which the mind is activated in an unnecessary way, or a painful way to cause suffering to a place where that kind of activation to suffer activation Because suffering is settled and brought to peace is a very important understanding of how practice works. And I think of it as kind of like water flows downhill. If something is active, if it's actively operating, it takes energy and effort to keep something active. And anything that's active will eventually, you know, there's far as I know, they haven't invented yet a perpetual motion machine. So, you know, if you don't, you don't continue to give fuel to something that's active and engaged. It eventually runs out of fuel stops, your car will stop, you know, progressing comes to peace, settles down, the engine gets cool after a while. And the same thing with activity of your mind. And so for example, some of the things we think about over and over and over again, be concerned about the reason we keep thinking about it is because we're continuing to fuel it. We're adding Energy attention, we can in some ways, or they're giving food to the thinking mind to think about this particular thing. And if the food is not there, that'll fall away and think about other things. Perhaps there's a refueling going on all the time. And that's why things often continue through time. All sankharas are impermanent, of the nature arising and passing, but it'll keep reappearing and continuing because of being fueled, in one way to fuel certain things is to is to grasp and hold tight so that you know, when we hold on tight to or certain kinds of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, and so that holding on to it, it's the fuel that keeps it going. And, and so if you haven't been in the teachings of the Buddha, this wonderful wordplay where the word for clinging and the word for fuel is the same thing. So they do

daily to fuel they are cleaning off often convenient to fuel things. But if something is active, it's natural tendency, if fuel is not there is a natural tendency is to subside, to settle down is to come to quiet, something like that. And so, you know, certain kinds of hyper active mental activity is not sustainable. And so you know, if you go for a walk, sometimes if things settle down after a while, or you'd have various ways in which you helped me kind of a hyperactive concern activity emotions kind of settle down. And so this idea that things things can move from an active state to a quieter state is a natural move like water going downhill, the force of gravity, or you take a spring, that's all warmed up tight. If you release the spring, it you know, the energy that gets is called kinetic energy is built up in the spring will unravel, dissipate. Or if you take you can fill up a bathtub if you pull the plug The natural thing you know is good water to drain out. So the same thing with our mind that given the right conditions, the unhealthy activities of our mind will, you know your activities of mind will dissipate and come in or settle out and go to peace. Or the reason that was so one of the reasons I wanted to mention this is that that understand kind of understanding can lend itself to a very generous approach to doing practice. Where anything that goes on anything or suffering or any strong emotions or any painful activity going on, doesn't have to be seen as the enemy, but rather as seen as being the gate towards its own release. So you find in Buddhism plenty enough times where teachings Where we have things teachers like, Oh, we have to slay the hindrances in or slay the defilements, we have this terrible things called defilements in so we have to kind of be ever vigilant so they don't get the upper hand with a slave them and cut them down and do all these things, you know, and hold them at bay. And it certainly has some value, that kind of approach to practice. So don't dismiss it offhand. But it lends itself to kind of view that human nature is somehow dangerous and bad. And you'll always be vigilant, you have to overcome it. And I've noticed that some of the teachers who teach this kind of approach will teach off sometimes will teach concentration practices pure and simple concentration practice that is used to somehow override or go behind or protect you from having to deal with these things. kind of settle things out without actually facing them. And then sometimes it's a wise approach. Good thing to do. But there seems to be a correlation sometimes between really focusing on concentration practices that really focus on the breath is very tight way of cooling, and somehow not analysis idea that correlate between that and this idea that all the, our, you know, we have to be careful about this, you know, these evil tendencies or dangerous tendencies, tendencies in us. They kind of miss trust and mistrust for, you know, who we are, we stress what's deep inside. And so another approach is, you don't see these these, they're certainly things which are defilements things which are, you know, caused a lot of suffering and torment, the mind torment us, those kinds of things exist. But there's a kind of an Aikido approach to mindfulness where, rather than holding a day, you actually turn the attention into them and allow them to be there. Knowing that if you allow them to be there with awareness that don't fuel them anymore, don't interfere with them, don't act on them whenever they just hold them in awareness. But that awareness is kind of like making space for the spring to unwind. Or that space allows what needs to happen to the inner process to move itself. And so there's a there's a, there's a very appreciative understanding that there's an interpreter everything is everything is a process. Some people say Buddhism teaches everything is a process or music process. And so everything is a process but the but it isn't that it's, it's gonna be it's gonna be the processes forever because there's no perpetual motion machine. It's only continuous because it keeps getting refueled. And the natural tendency of the process is to is to for the energy systems to go to being good a piece, a tight system goes to be released.

A compressor system goes to being you know, opened up Efficiency is almost like a mechanical thing. You know, that's the direction it goes. So if you're hyper active and your mind really tight and compress, conservatism kind of thought, if you pay careful attention that you probably feel like that, that almost almost as if the desire that kind of tension being held in the body. what it wants to do is it wants to release, it wants to release. That's almost like what he wants to do. And so, some people feel that

there's inside of themselves a deep yearning for spiritual life, deep yearning for practice. And I, you know, as many causes for that yearning, but I have a feeling that that deep yearning, one aspect of this deep yearning is that there's almost a biological instinct, biological imperative, or feelings movement towards, you know, gravity's release of gravity to settle up to for spring to unwind or for the tightness to release and it's almost Like a biological thing, a mechanical thing can feel it because it's it takes effort and energy to withstand and hold back from that release. If you're holding tightly on fist really tight, and you want to keep it that way, you have to keep you're asserting the tightness, it's making effort, the natural tendency of the fish is to want to release little bit at least soften a little bit. Unless it gets frozen, which it gets it can do if you hold it that way forever, with you know, so that once it wants to release, so everything's in process, and if you don't interfere with it, things don't interfere and unhealthy ways. It's just gonna leave things alone. There are a lot of things we'll just kind of unwind on their own. Probably all these processes that are in our life are processes that go to go follow gravity, all the processes that want to go to some kind of resolution. And so the trick part of the trick of mindfulness, this kind of approach is to turn the attention to these things, not see them Something to hold that day or slay or cut down or somehow stop. But you want to turn to them in a way that allows them to unfold, unwind evolve in the way that's maybe inherent, most inherent to them, if you're not interfering with him or engaging them. So for example, if if you're really angry, anger is a mental formation, it's mental because that's when the sankharas. So you might kind of turn to the anger and not make it your enemy. You have to make it your friend either. But you can just turn to it and feel it very carefully. Allow it to be there. And incense, perhaps make space for it. And awareness and awareness can now hold it there. They were just contained to hold it there. And then teacher Buddhist teachers will use all kinds of language like being accepting of it or loving or the kind of it or generous towards it or there's many kinds of words that they kind of use that somewhere or they're trying to convey. The idea just leave it alone. Let it be and make space for it. So that whatever it is, can kind of unfold by itself unwind for itself. And, and sometimes the unwinding is, is or the process it takes sometimes it has to get tighter before it unwinds. Sometimes it has to think that you know, you think your life is just fine you know you've been busy, active, full, very full life, you know, always on the computer doing, you know, whatever and you know you're doing and, and, you know, in rushing off to, you know, rushing home to watch the next television show and you know, and then you have to go off and do your run, running around and this is great, you know, feel good, because energize is really good. I'm getting exercise that's really great. And then rushing off to do your whatever. And life is great. And we're you know, I'm no problem and you sit down to meditate and you realize you've been holding a day This is interview, exam the process. And it's pretty, pretty common, the people not to give a chance to certain things to process. It's not to be busy. I mean, some people is their grief. Some people are helping caretake for someone who's dying. And it's not the time to grieve. And sometimes it's after the person has died, that's a really good chance for the grief to kind of move through. And so sometimes things get stronger before they kind of subside and that's part of the process and make room. So this approach, the keto approach of using mindfulness to turn towards something and allow it to be there and fold is very generous. And it can lend itself to a much more positive view. View of human nature is good, because it seems like the movement of us leaving human nature alone, complete way it moves towards some kind of resolution, some kind of peace some kind of

unnecessary tension make some kind of metaphysical view about human nature here. Sometimes people have that kind of view, who take them more than you know their key to approach when you avoid dealing with your inner life mental sankharas and sometimes they can take they go, you know, the mind has a mind of its own and sometimes they, you know, they could take unhealthy directions and unhealthy manifestations in OCD ignore certain tendencies, or they persist for a long time and, and become kind of fester sometimes or they come out in strange behavior. Sometimes, when we don't, we ignore parts of our life that way. Some people leave kind of truncated lives. They're not really living full

lives. fuller lives that part or they're cut off from part of themselves. So it's not uncommon for people to feel somehow numb or cut off and unknown parts of who they are and the approach to Concentration practice by itself. In practice is the farm that's at the cutoff. I've noticed sometimes it's like people more often than not, to not know themselves completely. They know themselves a certain ways and they can have deep efficient experience even there's whole realms of the life, they don't really know that well. The Akita approach turns towards whatever is arising is a little bit more a little more likely to create a rounded person understands more of who they are. And maybe you don't get concentrated as quickly that way. But it's even more rounded you more kind of take everything you're willing to take everything into account and be present for things. So then allowing allowing things to be the movement over time is the movement of relaxing, becoming more of a more relaxed about this life law is what's going on. And sometimes just learning to be more relaxed about things which are painful. So there can be resistance to mental and physical, emotional, emotional pain. And so there's all this activity around resisting, bracing ourselves against it trying to figure out solutions, you know, kind of getting up in the heads and everything. And, and so if it kind of settled that mental activity, all the all the things around the edges of it, then it can be easier just to be with the emotional pain by itself. There's a calming that happens around it. And once a calming around it happens, then perhaps it would be a calming of that situation itself. This can be addressing, working with and seeing. And I certainly have appreciated a lot of people who've met you know, many, many of you many practitioners, who have been willing to sit down and meditate and allowed these difficult emotions to bubble up difficult. issues coming up, and sometimes takes tremendous courage to be willing to sit there and allow things to move through and things that you know, seemingly, the lawyer in the mind might say, any reasonable reasonable person should You sit with us. And but you know, you've ever realized that I've tried everything else. So I might as well try this now. Or whatever I mean, it's about appreciation for them. And then, and then with time, learn, learn, where can we relax, relax, sometimes you're learned. Sometimes it's intentional, we want to relax in space and relax the physical body. It's so useful. So I think it's one of the great gates, to deepening practices, let the body become more relaxed, softer, relaxed. And, and with time, we might also learn to learn to relax and settle brings some kind of peace, some of the mental agitation and constriction. And in fact, sometimes it can be more useful to focus on the inner process, the immediate process here and now of tension and tightness of holding and the release of that in the immediate present than it is to rehearse and remember the whole story of what happened, you know, two years ago and who said what to who When, and, you know, or, you know, try to do a deep, deep, you know, inner analysis of all the different kind of, you know, causes and conditions of why you are the way you are, psychologically, that's all useful things to do. I don't want to dismiss it at all. But sometimes, sometimes it is a much faster route. So, you know, why am I having such a tight pistol? It's like, my face is always tight. I bet when I was, you know, seven years old, actually, I punched someone out last night, I punched someone out, I was six. So,

you know, I can do a whole analysis about you know, punching this guy up and I was six. And, you know, how that created this condition and, and justification why it's important to always be protective and you know, it's dangerous world in mind and why I have this bigger worldview and, and I'm going to take a philosophy class at Stanford and there's maybe there's a different worldview to have that helped me to relax this, you know, you could spend a long time doing all that analysis while you're fisticuffs, you No more more painful, or, or, or you can just like, go like that. Just release it. So it's a silly example. But the idea sometimes the advantage of mindfulness reading present moment awareness staying in the present moment. And you can enter into the felt sense of constriction and tightness around all these things and release it something that's a faster route, then, you know, all the kind of other ways that you might think. Sometimes it can be a little bit disconcerting to realize how quickly it is because it's kind of it's kind of unsophisticated. You know, we want to be we want to know how to get to sophisticated proach really late and get, maybe sometimes people want to be very honest, and they really want to try

to understand the full dimension of it, and becomes, you know, they want to spend on honesty that keeps them kind of engaged, and it's good, but sometimes, there's a asked around, just relax. So it's the nature of all sankharas to be impermanent. They have the nature of arising and passing away. It's inherently what they are, they arise and pass away, nothing is fixed. None of these mental formations are solid or stuck forever. I guess nowadays neurologists are finding that the mind is more and more malleable than they used to think it was for adults. And more and more than your mind can change both physically, physiologically, but also psychologically. And, and it can be brought to it can be settled to convert to peace. And this is the direction that Buddhism at least Buddhist practice is going is is to be able to feel alive, present in this world, with a heart and mind at peace at peace with itself and peace with the world around Doesn't mean that the world is at peace with you. But you can be at peace with the world. And then so, nature water sunkara vida y yo Domino Bercy to the region the song boo pasamos who co co means happy. So now it reminds me of Arjun, Joni and a teacher. Our teacher comes through spirit rock speaks very little English. But he everybody sitting there very seriously meditating when he comes in. And you know, and then he comes in uses is one of his one of his few English words, walks down the aisles is happy, be happy, be happy.

So bringing them sankharas to peace is the greatest happiness so in case you're worried that the settling and stilling of the middle formations is kind of makes you dull, you know, wants to make you happy so that you will be happy. And, but don't don't be happy too quickly if you have some major process that has to happen first. And, and make me happy to know that you're going through your process.