



Welcome to the first week of our Online Retreat. My name is Kittisaro. I want to look at a very important principle in the Buddhist teachings for awakening. This principle of papanca, conceptual proliferation, the way in which the mind entangles us and though we might imagine that we can think and reflect on things to clarify a situation, I think we all know the state where we get assailed, hijacked, wrapped up, swept this way and that way by thoughts.

The Buddha identifies papanca, conceptual proliferation and the ending of that as essential objects of contemplations, as very important in our awakening process. In the Digha Nikaya, one of the texts, there was a situation where Sakka, king of the gods, came to question the Buddha and he said, “Lord Buddha, why do beings who wish to live in peace and harmony, why do we end up living in conflict and hate?” The Buddha traces the root cause that gives rise to this situation where there is conflict, discord, contention, hate within and without; traces it back to papanca. So, when there is papanca, this way of thinking, conceiving, perceiving the world that’s tinged with ignorance, not understanding clearly, clearly divides, separates, complicates and that this papanca gives rise to more and more thinking, to desire, to the distinction, to the setting apart what we really cherish, what we like, what we don’t like; very real, very separate and if that then leads to what the Buddha called stinginess and envy, the sense of this grasping, hoarding, keeping, “Me,” “Mine,” and very much the separation of not wanting to lose it to them; the state of envy. Again, constellation, concretization of separation; “They, what they’ve got. Why don’t I have? How can I get there? It’s not fair;” the way the mind works, papanca, root cause.

Now, in the discourse to Sakka, king of the gods, Sakka asked, “Well, how do we allay this process, this conceptual proliferation that entangles us?” The Buddha lays out a path, a path to the ending of papanca called Nippapanca. He doesn’t, the Buddha doesn’t deny the usefulness of thought. In fact, he reflects that thinking is helpful when we’re considering whether something is wholesome or not. It can be really useful to decide. Like if we’re wanting to eat that extra piece of cake or something like that, it tastes good and we really want more and thinking can help us consider, “Hmm. Is this wise? Where is this going to go?” The Buddha is not dismissing thinking; using thinking to decide whether an activity, a speech, an action is skillful or not skillful. But in laying out the path to the ending of papanca, the Buddha said if there’s a happy state, meaning a pleasant state that can be accompanied by thinking or pondering or that state can be not accompanied by that; in other words, where there’s no thinking or pondering. The latter



is more excellent. The Buddha puts it like this: “Now of such wholesome happiness as is accompanied by thinking and pondering and that which is not so accompanied, the latter is more excellent.” A training where we learn to reflect on letting thoughts subside, not only true of happiness, but even being with painful states, learning what it’s like to be with thinking, pondering and also learning to train ourself to savor the spaces, the places when thought subsides; same with neutral experiences.

The Buddha realized in his awakening, somewhat surprisingly, that nothing was attained. It’s not like he got something. He realized that the heart is luminous. It’s radiant, timeless, what the Buddha called Pabhassara Sutta, radiant heart, but that we lose touch with this radiant heart by what moves through the heart. Like right now, what’s moving through the heart, Kittisaro, the week one, of our online retreat, the sounds of my talk and noticing whether you like it or not so sure, noticing the nature of what’s moving through the heart, the sounds coming and going; the phrases arising and dissolving. Can we get a feeling of that which remains? The flow of sensations right now is moving through the heart; the recognition of what posture we’re in mixed with sounds, sights of my image, changing, perception, all this flow. Yet, notice how the sensory process, which is, when it’s honest, is in touch with something that’s like a torrent, a cascade of shifting, changing perceptions. A concept can come in and say, “Me, you.” As soon as you get a “me,” you’ve got a “you.” A “Here,” which seems so solid by the nature of language because it’s stable. It’s public. It helps objectify, concretize the sense of reality of these nouns, these verbs, these descriptions. You get a thing and then when it shifts and changes, we’ve got to bring time in. So, even this even little sly thought of “I”, it’s really associated with the sense that there’s something really solid there. That’s the shortest thought in our language and in many languages, “I/you, here/there.” Now and because of changing, we’ve got time and then we have yesterday. We’re recollecting, remembering, tomorrow, speculating, anxious, all solidified, concretized by the sense that these concepts are referring to something solid. Then when there’s all this this complexity and then trying to locate ourselves somewhere, we get glued to, stuck to what’s moving through the heart and lose touch with this background, ever present, knowingness where each sound, each reflection keeps returning to.

The Buddha compared our nature to the sky. It’s a simile, but he’s not saying you are the sky, but it’s like the sky. One of the famous sayings of the Buddha in the Dhammapada, “There are no footprints in the sky; you won’t find the sage out there.” Worldly people delight in papanca, this complexity. Buddhas delight in the ending of that. “There are no



footprints in the sky; you won't find the sage out there. There are no eternal conditioned things. Buddhas never waver.” No footprints in the sky. Even when there's a vapor trail, it dissolves. Like lightning flashing, appearing and subsiding; trying to catch the lightning because it sounds like a thing. We live in the Drakensberg Mountains of South Africa and the big storms in the summertime and it's so thrilling to see them, but try to catch one. One holds more lightly, honoring their ephemeral nature. The lightning flashes and subsides and one can get the sense of that unmoving background. The Buddha realizes the true ephemeral nature of all conditions. Trying to grasp one is like-- he described it like grasping at space. You exhaust yourself. The Buddha never waivers because that grasping has subsided.

So in this pathway to the ending of papanca, it's not a question of just crushing thought, exiling it, but gathering an appreciation of the nature of thought. Practicing, noticing, even right now at this talk, which sounds like a thing, Kittisaro's talk, “Well, I'm not so sure if I really like it, mmm,” or “It's great.” But as we go closer to it, we notice that the actuality, the thoughts keep subsiding. Start noticing the silences before, after the thought. Get a sense of the true nature of these concepts that seem so solid. “I'm great. I'm hopeless. I think I've got it. I'm not really sure.” Start noticing that they all keep dissolving, learning rather than so much delighting in the complexity; not overlooking the subsiding into this sameness, this unmoving skylight, listening.

The first training related to that teaching of the Buddha to Sakka where he says the path to the Nippapanca or the ending of papanca is learning to have activity that's accompanied by the-- not accompanied by thoughts. Our first training was... in our sitting we can do that, practicing, composing, sitting comfortably, perhaps a few deep breaths, and with a subtle thought, just calming on the outbreath so that we relax our forehead, jaw... heart, belly. Let the awareness be relaxed, sky-like. Within that sky, there will be some shimmering, shifting of the sensations of our body; the feeling tones and the thoughts.

But, we're going to use a thought with each outbreath. We were trained to use the thought butto. “But,” being awake, “to.” Butto means Buddha, but not the Buddha out there; this Buddha. Being awake, butto, or the simple thought “Let go.” A thought. “Let,” breathing in, “Go.” Or breathing in quietly, “Let go” and that thought, we're moderating thought. Rather than just thinking big, long essays about things, we're just having a short what the Buddha call directed thought. As we think this thought, “Let go,”



or "Butto," we notice it begin and end. Hear the silence after the thought. Notice the thought begin, let go. Notice the texture, the silence after the thought. We don't keel over dead when there's no thought. Noticing as the thought dissolves even right now, as these thoughts dissolve listening remains, knowingness. Let go.

Even just a moment, giving ourselves permission to notice the space after a thought, the space before the next thought. While "Let go" can be helpful, it's associated with a softening of volition, a relaxing and resting in this radiant heart, this ground of being where every sound, every percept returns. Complexity is created when we believe in it, me, you, here, there, better, worse, and when that's all we know, life is so complicated and we're trying to carve out our stable bit, but because of the-- an exorable changing nature, it's futile because everything keeps dissolving. But, in noticing an ending of a thought, an ending of a sound, and minding that gap; what our teacher used to say, "Mind the gap." Give yourself permission to notice the spaces after a thought before the next one, getting that sense of that unifying background where all things merge. The Buddha taught that every condition has liberation as its essence, Abhidhamma. If we notice the changing nature, all things merge in the deathless, amatogada Abhidhamma. When we keep allowing, recognizing how everything keeps vanishing, dissolving back into this place where in the silence there's non-separation.

So, practice this coming week, I encourage you again and again to use a thought like "Let go," like "Butto" and notice the space after the thought, extending a capacity to savor the gap and think an ordinary thought, not one trying to figure something out, like "I am sitting." Notice the space before, the resonance, "I.. am.. sitting." And like that lightning that appears and vanishes in the night sky, can we really begin to recognize how concepts, thoughts appear and vanish in that sky, that spaciousness of awareness. An ordinary thought many times through the day, pausing, just having a thought that maybe recognizes what's happening, "Standing." I notice the need to keep having a commentary going if there's that feeling of having to rely so much on papanca, the ever-increasing complexity that defines our place. Letting a word like "Standing" and notice the silence, it lets us just be with that process. Minding that gap or sitting or we're washing up, notice if there's a tendency to be planning the next thing, but what if as we're washing up just that short thought, washing up, to remind ourselves to be here, to return to that ground of listening. Notice the gap right before the thought, washing up, let it dissolve and practicing, extending moments. Being. What it like when the mind is silent?



A gardener has tools, rakes, mowers, shovels. Does he or she have to carry them to the dinner table, around everywhere? Never know when I might need the tool. Does he or she sometimes lay them down? Thinking is a tool. I really encourage us to practice.

Repeatedly, this is this path, the Nippapanca. Practice noticing the changing nature of a thought, not hating them, and resting in those gaps. I need to rest in the heart when it's not creating separation. This is important. Sariputta, the Buddhist chief Disciple says the foolish person who indulges in and delights in papanca is far removed from Nibbana, the incomparable freedom from bondage. The one who has given up papanca and delights in the path to Nippapanca, the path to nonproliferation, that one attains Nibbana, the incomparable freedom from bondage. Practicing, giving oneself the opportunity to hear all these thoughts that seem so real. “I’m a mess.” Space before. “No, no, no. Don’t play with me, Kittisaro. This is true. I’m a mess. I’m.. a.. mess..” Dissolving. “I figured it out. I’ve got it. I’ve got it.” Arise and dissolving like lightning in that sky. As we give ourselves the opportunity this week to practice illuminating thought, especially its dissolving nature, extending that capacity to rest when we lay down that tool, we’ll get the feeling for this brightness that ever remains. From the Buddha in the Shurangama Sutra, “The primary misconception about the mind and body is the false view that the mind dwells in the physical body. You do not know,” he says, “That the physical body as well as the mountains, the rivers, empty space and the great earth are all within the wonderful bright, true mind.” Taking everything back to awareness, each thought, each sound. If we’re patient, as it dissolves, returns to that undying, unborn place, to the unshakeable heart.

Next week, Thanissara will be continuing this theme. We’re very delighted to have this chance to practice with you. Thank you for your attention.
