

## International Chairs Course – week 6 – *Being Chair as Spiritual Practice*

By Jnanadhara, International Movement Coordinator

These notes are rough only and intended to accompany the video of the session which you'll find on YouTube [here](#).

### Being Chair as Spiritual Practice

last week I mentioned story of order member visiting Chatrul Rinpoche

*'how do attain success in my sadhana?'*

→ *'do it for others'*

you are doing your sadhana for others

you are working for others as your sadhana

not *either* benefitting yourself *or* benefitting the local sangha

doing both

not so much a matter of *keeping them in balance*

that metaphor is too static

more a matter of *working with a creative tension*

dynamic

So far course has been more focussed on the objective development of your centre

benefitting others

what is needed from a chair

I want to devote this whole week to our 'subjective' development as individuals working as chairs

about benefitting self

understand more deeply how chairing can be a means for growth in the Dharma

extremely effective means

if we are benefitting others will benefit

*'Take whatever arises as the Path'* – (Guru Padmasambhava)

there is always the opportunity for the arising of insight

because things are always arising!

insight = *knowledge and vision of things as they really are*

we don't see things as they really are

viparyayas

we see things topsy turvy / upside-down / back to front

need to reflect on their true characteristics

impermanent / anitya

insubstantiality / anatman

unsatisfactoriness / dukkha

strictly speaking *conditioned/compounded* things

talk about them in that order:

look at *asubha* / unbeautiful later

### **Anicca – Impermanence**

to see clearly you need to reflect

home in on one particular phenomena

can't be aware of everything all at once

need to pay *very close attention* to something in particular

penetrate beneath the surface

reflection & attention come together

coalesce as insight

A Buddhist centre / a Sangha is working ground for insight

the particular phenomena that you are engaging with

because it's your responsibility you pay closer attention

it intensifies your attentiveness

like a mother watching over her child

she knows that the child is entirely dependent on her attention for its survival

in part because *the bucks stops with you*

you pay attention more deeply because you *care*

you want things to go well

you care about people and therefore you care about the situation

most fundamental reason you are doing it!

(mettā again)

because more is at stake your attentiveness is enriched and your sensitivity to reality is heightened

it is a gift – a golden opportunity!

Because of that you are more likely to know and see that the situation is *constantly changing*

don't we know it!

e.g.

the paint is peeling off, the roof is leaking

no one is coming to the Sangha night that has been going really well for years

a key person is leaving

it's often our responsibility to lead the response to the changing or changed situation

means not putting our head in the sand

starts with a personal acknowledgement of what has changed

*'mmmm, what are we going to do about that?'*

recognition that we have to do *something*

we feel the attachment to the way things were

let go of it

when someone leaves

*don't gooooooooooooo!*

topsy turvy views – viparyasa

*'...are not just a matter of incorrect information [...] but attitudes as deeply rooted almost as sentient existence itself.'*

emotional / volitional matter as well as a matter of incorrect perception

emotional maturity

be grown up !

Buddhism is growing up for adults

→ for others

see my friends who've had children

enabled *them* to grow up

part of the reason I decided to become chair

I don't have children

I knew I needed to be responsible

→ for *others*

in order to grow

we need to modify what we are doing according to the new situation

not acting is acting

the status quo is a choice – an action

even if it's not conscious

false dichotomy in conversations about strategy

we can act or not act

not a questions of acting or not acting

doing something that has consequences & status quo which has no consequences

it's always about choosing between different kinds of action

putting off acting – postponing or prevaricating – is also an action

often need to point this out to your council!

one of the key lessons from reflection on impermanence:

we need to respond to the *actual situation*

not the situation as it *was*

as you or others would *like it to be*

boldness, courage, promptitude, creativity

the objective demand brings that forth

Vajrapani

Correspondence with impermanence

More later

you never know how things are going to work out

Conditioned arising

can't know all the conditions

instability

there is always **risk**

this is energizing

beginning of the pandemic

very challenging

I felt really alive

death was near

made priorities clearer

you can't make it safe for people

can exemplify that kind of courage

what *can* you know → trust the Dharma

are you acting in accordance with the Dharma?

sometimes hard to tell what this means

are you acting with skilful intention?

Keep coming back to that

Wisdom

Meditation

Ethics

if you are it will turn out for the best

whatever the circumstances!

### **Anatta - insubstantiality**

*'A common misapprehension is to think of Insight and egolessness in abstract, even metaphysical, terms rather than as comprising concretely-lived attitudes and behaviour. But realizing the truth of egolessness simply means being truly and deeply unselfish. '*

Sangharakshita, Living with Kindness pp134

I've been talking along these lines already

two points:

#### **letting go of getting our way**

making it all about me – selfish perspective

in decision making processes

even if we are right!

What is best?

near enemy → disengagement / passivity

Am I really relinquishing my egotism?

or am I just disengaging

test: are you actually going to help?

is there energy there for following through on the decision?

very freeing

relinquishing your inner tyrant

is it about being helpful? or is it about getting your way?

#### **letting go of needing people to know that it was *our idea***

don't point that out

rejoice in someone else

very freeing

relinquishing your inner 4 year old

*Mummy look at me!*

let other people move into taking responsibility

can't do that if you always have to be front and centre

sometimes you'll need to be

often you won't

can stand back and rejoice!

This sort of attitude takes you to places you wouldn't go left to your own devices

go beyond yourself

### **Dukkha - unsatisfactoriness**

seeing conditioned things as conditioned things

unsatisfactory

unreliable

they are not the ultimate

**no matter how good you are you can never get things perfectly right**

you are operating in a conditioned world

you are not in control of all the conditions

if something goes wrong

discern where it went wrong

let go of being responsible for things that are not your fault!

even if you are being blamed!

where it was your mistake apologize and make amends

then move on!

being responsible clarifies this

our clarity is enriched

**mistaken assumption: there is a perfect solution to this problem**

if only we could find it

you sometimes feel - internal pressures and external pressures – that you have to make the *perfect* decision

that solves the problem perfectly

that keeps everyone happy, spends money wisely, has no risk attached to it, etc

sometimes any decision is the right decision

the decision that moves things forward is the right decision

that solves *some* of the problems

*'The perfect is the enemy of the good'*

*Voltaire*

e.g. looking for a new premises for your centre

list of what you'd like

if you are always holding out for the perfect you don't engage with what you actually already have

a species of eternalism perhaps?

nirvana fallacy

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana\\_fallacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana_fallacy)

**mistaken assumption: there is a perfect person to be the chair**

and you aren't it

Bhante

2016 there was a fresh round of criticism

maybe mainly in the UK

apology / confession - December 2016

reiterated - *'I wasn't the best person to start a new Buddhist Movement'*

*'I mean it literally'*

When Bhante says he means things 'literally' it has an impact

a huge relief to me personally



I'm not the best person to be chair of the Dublin Buddhist Centre

I don't have to be the best person to be chair

I'm doing it and its working

I'm good enough

Sangharakshita's Verses of Acknowledgement

*Though one's Insight is not perfect  
It is enough to reveal the emptiness of mundane existence.*

*Though one's Guru is not perfect  
He is enough to show one the Right Path.*

*Though one's Centre chair is not perfect  
He or she is enough to give inspiration, clarity and friendship.*

I used to ask myself - *what sort of person is needed here?*

e.g. *what sort of thing shall I wear?*

aware different attires would appeal to different people

→ wear what you are comfortable wearing

You can only do it as yourself

you are the only person you can be

*Samgrahavastus*

exemplification – exemplify the process of Going for Refuge

I can be who I am, you can be who you are

you'll chime with some people, not with others

you'll be good at some things, not at others

it's okay

dukkha means the conditioned will never be perfect

deep relaxation of the effort of trying to make it so

you know what you can do and what you can't do

you don't waste effort trying to do what's not possible

you won't find perfection in the conditioned

looking for it in the wrong place

What I been trying to point out this talk is that taking responsibility brings us into a more vivid relationship with the way things are

draws out spiritual qualities that would have remained dormant if we had not taken it on

insight has a dynamic aspect

not just a passive seeing

a responsiveness and a vitality

volitional aspect → *Vajrapani*

affective aspect → *Avalokiteshvara*

cognitive aspect → *Manjughosha*

it enables personal growth

that might not happen in any other way

Questions:

1 How do you engage with the lakshanas in your work?

2 How has being chair helped you to grow in the Dharma?

3 What have you learned from the course that you'd like to remember?

## Beauty

a short piece from Bhante

<https://www.sangharakshita.org/articles/green-tara-and-the-fourth-laksana>

finished the beginning of 2018

the year that he died

60 years previous

Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche

towards the end of his life

October 1957 initiation

four practices

they formed a set

four bodhisattvas were in a relationship of 'correspondence'  
with the *lakṣaṇas*, the *samādhis*, and the *vimokṣas*.

*Concentrating on the insubstantiality of things,*

*one enters into the śūnyatā samādhi*

*and 'sees' **Mañjuṣa**.*

*Concentrating on the unsatisfactoriness of things,*

*one enters into the wishless (apraṇihita) samādhi and*

pure responsiveness → responsibility

*and 'sees' **Avalokiteśvara***

*Concentrating on the impermanence of things,*

*one enters into the signless (animitta) samādhi and*

*and 'sees' **Vajrapāṇi***

these three been with us since the beginning

three key qualities we've been touching in to

clarity

love

determination

*Concentrating on the repulsiveness of conditioned things,*

*one enters into the samādhi of pure beauty,*

*and 'sees' **Green Tārā***

This week Tara has also been there

wall behind me

No doubt been there in others ways all the time

*beautiful* → seeing people *grow*

spray of lotuses in each hand

from both hands

represent growth

left hand - Three Jewels mudra

right hand - giving mudra

personal gift

brings people what they need

Tara with Bodhisattvas above her head

bringing pure beauty into being is always difficult

something of the unconditioned coming into people's lives

blue lotuses

all things that are most worth doing are difficult

when that growth happens all the effort is worth it

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making this work possible

I want this course to be the beginning of a much deeper connection between our centres worldwide

all helping each other

Do get in touch with me - anytime

any ideas of things that could help you or your Centre

help the Movement in your Area, etc

***Transference of Merit and Self-surrender***

*May the merit gained  
In my acting thus  
Go to the alleviation of the suffering of all beings.  
My personality throughout my existences,  
My possessions,  
And my merit in all three ways,  
I give up without regard to myself  
For the benefit of all beings.*

*Just as the earth and other elements  
Are serviceable in many ways  
To the infinite number of beings,  
Inhabiting limitless space,  
So may I become  
That which maintains all beings  
Situated throughout space,  
So long as all have not attained  
To peace.*

*om tare tutare ture svaha!  
om tare tutare ture svaha!  
om tare tutare ture svaha!*