So before I offer this last talk on the theme of the week, self, mindful of ourselves, a couple of announcements. One is that I thought the end of today 7:45 here, California, that I could stay here on YouTube for a while. And if you have any questions you'd like to make around what I've been teaching or something else, I could take for a while, we can just do a little q&a session. And I'll talk a little bit about how we'll do that at the end. And I apologize for a few weeks ago that I used the wrong zoom account for us here and Fridays, to have a community meeting after one of these sessions, and we'll do one next time I'm here. Maybe on a Friday, maybe. I'll be gone for the next two weeks, taking a vacation. And so next week, Nikki Mirghafori will be back. And the following week, Diana Clark will be back. Wonderful teachers here at IMC. And in and then in terms of community meetings, we're going to have a community meeting for the Sunday morning group on on on zoom this Sunday after the Sunday morning Dharma talk. So if some of you'd like to join, and kind of be more connected to this IMC community, you could come then on Sunday, that the meetings are 10:30. And the information is on the calendar for Sunday morning.

So this question of what is the self, who are we, is a very profound question and a very rich question that is multifaceted and doesn't lend itself especially in the English speaking world, to a singular idea, singular concept, even of what self is. I think psychologists, neuro psychologists, people have been looking for, philosophers have been looking for this self, what is the self and trying to define it. And to a great extent, people keep coming back that it's very hard to define. And perhaps lots of modern researchers are coming up with the kind of the Buddhist idea that there is no self. Rather what we are is a conglomeration of many different mental forces that operate, and physical and mental forces that operate, that have some way in which they get put together in some feeling of unified self for central
self or something. But that, to really investigate deeply and really kind of explore what that is, it begins to unravel and begins to show itself as being up made up many of different sub parts that are arising and passing and permanent changing and flux.

And so there are some modern researchers who will say it's such things as there is no self inherently, the Buddha didn't say that explicitly. He didn't say there is no self. In fact, as I quoted earlier, he thought that was actually a quagmire kind of quicksand to kind of go into that a notion that there is no self. But he did say that there are ideas of self. There are doctrines of self. There are philosophies of self that exists, and he said that any doctrine of self and the philosophy of self will involve some degree of suffering.

There's something about the coming together and holding something of view and idea this is what itself is, that makes it very difficult to really be completely free and open and with infinite possibilities and allow for the full range of what our psychophysical functioning might be like. So in this regard, I think of kind of a little bit you know, as a metaphor, maybe it's like the humorous metaphor, maybe. One definition I have for yourself, is that the self is wind drag. Put your, you know, you have a lot of wind drag when something's moving down, you're going in the bike, biking along, it'll slow you down. So it self is what slows us down.

Or self is a coagulation, something that's fluid, and then it becomes solid, is coagulates. And so the fluidity of who we are and how we function gets somehow solidified and tightened into something. And that tightening or that coagulation into something called self, can feel like it's this is really something here, after all, it feels solid, or it feels central, it feels well localized. But it turns out when in mindfulness practice, if we go in and look more deeply, we find that that thing that anything that we identify hold on to self is actually made out made up of sub particles, sub sub particles, sub components, and that fluid and dynamic. And it kind of breaks down the idea of a saw any kind of solid idea, central idea or essential idea, this is who I am.

But the Buddha didn't ever want it to go say there is no self because that itself is a kind of coagulation, that self is a becomes an idea that we hold ourselves by. And what the Buddha was looking for was a freedom from suffering. And so there's freedom is the, you know, that's what's being looked for. And that's what's being championed. And the goal to that, in doing Vipassana practice, insight meditation, involves having three insights. And what these insights are understood to be, are aspects of characteristics of our experience. So they're characteristics as opposed to things themselves, they characterize our experience. And those three insights are not biographical. So they're not considered personal insights that are only true for yourself. Those are very valuable to understand something how you would tick and what happened to us earlier in life and what our personal beliefs are, and how that influences our way of living. That's part of the value of mindfulness is to highlight that, but the insight of insight meditation is not personal in nature. But rather, it's understanding the building blocks for all experience. Building blocks of what we call personal experience. And so it's to see something
universal, something is universally true for all human beings. And that is that all experiences we have are somehow characterized by being inconstant. As being dukkha, stressful, suffering, unsatisfactory, characterized as in some way. And that and all experiences are not self.

So whatever we actually experience, if you look deeply at it, that experience, we say, well, that's not really the self. That's not really the self. And so, you know, the more we go into our direct experience with strong mindfulness practice, we start having this insight that this is not self, this is not self. So not self is not a belief that we have to believe. It's not a philosophy. You don't have to hear the teaching of not self, and then try to make yourself believe it or argue with it, because it doesn't make sense. That's not really the point of it. It's not philosophy. It is not something to believe. But rather, it's something to see something, that's revealed in the course of time, as mindfulness becomes strong. When mindfulness is really strong, concentration is strong, then it becomes clear that our experience we have experiences, well, this is not self, this is not self. And I emphasize this wording of it, to make a point when I say this is not self, it's always about this, it's always about something particular turns out in deep meditation practice, that all the different things that are can be called a direct particular experience, that's used as a building blocks for conceptual understandings of who we are and what life is all the individual building blocks of direct experience. We see very clearly Oh, that's not self. There's no, we don't plan it. We don't intend it. It doesn't. It just kind of arises without any will or planning or any association with any central control tower or central authority or place of being.

And even you know, one of the most powerful places of personal freedom is on personal choice, and some people want to say the ability to choose affirms that there is a self. So that's a philosophy or an idea that comes out of even seemingly comes out of experience. But in deep meditation, even it's quite fascinating, when the mind is really quiet and really sees what's arising in the mind, that even this idea of choice doesn't quite seem to be personal, doesn't quite seem to be, this is who I am. And it just there is, is there really choice if the choice is happening, kind of, without what you think, is self choosing? So it gets kind of fascinating this whole world, but we don't get lost in it when we're doing deep meditation practice, which is really where the not self teaching really comes alive. Because that's just kind of wind drag, that just kind of getting caught up in ideas. And what becomes clearer and clearer, is that this experience this is not self, this is not self, reveals tremendous freedom. Freedom from selfing, freedom from the attachments that are so often associated with self. And to experience this is not self, this is not self in this deep, revolutionary way, then we can look around and nothing in our experience in that moment, no self is found. And some people will say they're having a no self experience. And that's completely appropriate to call it that in a sense, but it's a little bit abstract. And what's dangerous is to come out of that deep meditation, and come to the conclusion kind of like a philosophy, there is no self.

The Buddha didn't say that. And it kind of lends itself to all kinds of philosophical and personal difficulties, if we start saying there is no self, we don't say there is a self. But there is personal responsibility, there is personal self awareness, personal awareness, we might want to say. There is
personal choice at a different level of how the mind operates and how it sees. But to really have experienced this not self insight, means that we come back from that experience, much less inclined to get attached, much less inclined to be involved in greed, hate and delusion, and much more inclined to have a clear sense of feel for liberation, for freedom, for the emptiness of self. And that emptiness of self, that sense of lack of self as an experience, to step into that emptiness. To relax and open to that possibility that we don't have to always be measuring and thinking and feeling and deciding about things, about self. That we can step through into that emptiness. And the tradition calls it the door of emptiness. And that door step through that door allows for some of the deepest letting go that's possible. And that's called liberation and freedom.

And we come out of that experience appreciating that generally, this idea of self that is so important for many people, generally, it's a bit overrated. And we're better much better off not to give it such a high priority, and obsession that often our culture really supports us to to have. That freedom from self doesn't mean that we have to kind of discard everything that we might call self. Because as I said, there's many different viewpoints of what the self is. But we now we can hold it all lightly, wisely, and ethically, without kind of operating with a self that is devoted or committed to greed, hatred and delusion, to attachments.

So that is my attempt to talk about this topic of self and not self, I hope it was clarifying over these days. And I'll be back here for in you know, in a couple of weeks, and I'd be kind of doing a series now and mindfulness you know, mindfulness of breathing mindfulness of thinking, mindfulness of emotions, mindfulness of the body, and now mindfulness of self here. And I thought that when I come back, I it might be interesting to do a week on mindfulness of Nibbana, mindfulness of Nirvana, of liberation itself. And that might be interesting. Five days.

So that's what I'm hoping. So thank you very much. And as I said, now, I can stay here a little bit then if you want to ask some questions in the chat. And I'm going to treat the chat as a basket that you drop your questions into, and just kind of kind of pull them out randomly. In the past, I've tried to read them in order, because just out of, you know, respect for each one. But I think that it proves too hard with all the chats and it moves so quickly moving between them. So I'll try to go, you know, go around and get them but please allow me to just let it be a basket that I pull the questions out of.

How do you sit selflessly with pain and bodily malfunction? Yes, it's actually easier to sit with pain, and bodily dysfunction if there's not a lot of selfing going on. I learned that one of my first lessons when I started sitting retreats. I was doing Zen retreats, and you weren't allowed to move during the 45 minutes sitting and we're sitting repeatedly through the day, that way. I had a tremendous amount of knee pain, and wasn't really limber enough and stuff. And I could see that I was very clear at some point, that if I had self pity there, I think the little micro muscles around the knees got tighter, and the pain got worse. And if I had no self pity, it was easier be with the pain. So self is often a magnet for fears and magnet for judgments, comparisons, ideas, what should and shouldn't be. The self is not an
innocent kind of little thing that just sitting quietly and just watching what's going on. The self has a lot to do with reactivity. And it's often the seat the house of reactivity. And so for really caught up in this notion of self, then pain and bodily malfunction can be a lot more difficult. If there's less self less, need to be a particular kind of self and to always measure ourselves, this is the kind of self I need to be, then it can be easier to be with pain. It's not you know, a breeze to be with pain and whenever we respect the difficulty of it. But it actually can be a lot easier if we're not doing a lot of selfing around it.

If reincarnation in karma, something continues ongoing in this conglomerate conglomerate, yes. Buddhists don't tend to use the word reincarnation, they use the word rebirth. I think because reincarnation for Buddhists suggests that there's something that's really specific, that travels between one birth and the other. Rebirth, for Buddhists, at least is supposed to be the idea that there is no thing that travels, but rather it's a momentum, kind of like a wave that goes across an ocean. The wave doesn't actually, there's no water that travels with the wave in across the ocean. The wave is the echoing the momentum that's pushing like billiard balls, pushing these particles of water up and down. And so it's the up and down the momentum that goes across the ocean. And so Buddhists a little bit document more about rebirth. And the karma is the momentum which creates that momentum is the idea. But it's a little bit hard to understand. I mean, Buddhists don't I never felt that Buddhists really explained very well what the mechanism of rebirth is and how it really fits with this teaching of not self. But maybe the teaching of not self wasn't meant to explain too many things. Where philosophers human beings often are always trying to explain things and make things line up in an explanatory way. And perhaps this freedom that the Buddha is looking for, doesn't need everything explained. And so we discovered this door of not self for the purpose of freedom. We don't have to use that experience of not self then to build explanations about how things work.

Does the ego fight one to achieve freedom or does it diminish as time goes on? Or rear its head again and again? Yeah, the ego. I think the attachment to self, the self definitions we have. Yes, I think that the desires we have, the aversions we have that lends itself to a lot of impatience, a lot of restlessness, a lot of attachment to the have things being a certain way. And so anything that threatens those attachments, threaten those ideas of self that we hold on to, then there's a rebellion, there's a protest, there's running away, there's frustration, there's, you know, there can be anger, there can be all kinds of things. And sometimes it can be fantasy that we go into. And it can be very convincing. And so there are ways in which we get tricked out of the path of liberation, because of, you know, maybe what we call the ego. And so we have to be very attentive and alert, to really see how all this works in our minds. And that's one of the benefits of developing mindfulness. As we get more and more clear, we see more clearly what's really going on in there. And so we are wiser about it and freer about it.

Would you speak more about respect, it seems very conditional to me, I understand self pride, vanity, compassion, love and care, but have a hard time understanding self respect. Well, you know, this, again, it's a it's such a, you know, quicksand or, you know, labyrinth of challenges, when we start using
the word self. People have so many different references for it understandings of its philosophies of it, that, and different cultures may even have different standing and use that word differently. So there are some people who say that, you know, there's a tendency, sometimes in Buddhism to very shy of using the word self, so self respect, the but that's why the talk I gave on Monday, was to emphasize that the personhood of who we are, that there's something here that we become a person of respect, we become someone with a certain dignity and value, we are valuable beings. But because of the word self is becomes a magnet for all this luggage, all these cultural, personal familial ideas of what a shelf self should be, what it is, what the right self is, the wrong self is. So it's a kind of a very complicated word. So but to use it, you know, some of these words very lightly, self respect, is the ability to be present, to see clearly be present, without disrespect without animosity, demeaning criticism, feeling that we're inadequate, somehow. It's the ability to be present in a clear and dignified way, without any fear of diminishing of the value of who we are. That's kind of my definition of it. So I hope that was, you know, useful.

After being free of self, what is left? What is left is, is our ability to respond to the world without greed, hate and delusion. And the idea that and the response to the world, is just what the system is set up for here. Once we drop, greed, hate and delusion, it's more the surface of the mind, the surface of the heart. And when that surface crust is dissolved, then the depth of who we are has a chance to kind of feel and experience what's happening in this world. And the depth of who we are, as it's a place where we have the opposite of fight and flight. It's where we approach and soothe where we step forward with care and compassion and kindness and friendliness. And so the absence of self or clinging, allows for that deeper wellspring of attention of sensitivity and goodwill to operate. Exactly how it's going to operate for different people is very personal. We should be very careful not to make it any kind of essential idea of what a person should be like when they are free, liberated from self. I think what we're free to do then, is for our own deep personality and our uniqueness to come forward and be what it is. And one person might, two people, 10 people, a million people, each of them might have a very different expression of what freedom looks like, or how they're deep sensitivity and care for the world gets expressed. And it might be radically different in ways. And so it's like the idea that we want to give people who are free, the freedom to really be who they are, and to trust it. Or yourself who you are.

Yeah. Is the arising of self considered within the aggregate of Sankara? Yeah, probably, that that's where the mental formations, it's a formations construct in the mind, and wouldn't be anywhere else that idea that form. I guess it could be a little bit saññā. Yeah, I could be part of, you know, recognition of things.

How to approach self loathing with love without engorging yourself? Yeah, that's a very good question. And it's, you know, it's a little bit hard to answer such an important question like that, in just, you know, without more information, but sometimes what helps, is to feel the heartbreak of self loathing, feel the suffering of it, and how painful it is to be that way. And sometimes they're really feeling the pain of it,
something can break, maybe maybe something we know, the heartbreaks, broken heart of it all. And they only then do we soften and relax when the tears come. And we feel you know how, how sad and how difficult that is to live that way. And the other is to another way is to begin actually doing the opposite. And to offer metta to oneself, loving kindness and compassion, to actually engage in that both, you know, as a meditation practice, but also with kind acts to actually live and do things that expresses or even if you don't feel like you want to be, have general self generosity or self love, sometimes just you can just act your way to it by treating yourself the way that way and feeling benefits. And then third thing is because such an important one is is to is to talk to people, a friend, someone really wise and that you really trust and just kind of very simply just talk about it kind of like maybe it's an unfortunate choice of words, but maybe a little death, I can confession just a little bit opening up and sometimes opening up around self loathing can break the trance can feel like us, we can hear ourselves speak about it. And we realize, wait a minute, may you know it may be I don't really believe this, or maybe it's not really true. Or maybe it kind of breaks out of the shell to talk about it. Because sometimes self talk is very hard to become free of.

The notion that thoughts are not self, I can see not giving them authority not picking them up, but to disown them as as not self need help with this. Yes, this is against it's so hard with this notion of self and what we're talking about here, but anything that we cling to a hold on to this as the self least for that we understand the clinging to it, the holding on to it is painful is not worth not worth doing. And it turns out that if you really focus on the non clinging aspect, not clinging to self, that most ideas of self that people operate on under do in fact, have some clinging involved with it. And this shedding of clinging, shedding of clinging is part of his you know, as part of this freedom we begin discovering, for ourselves. And, and I think we don't dis we don't want to disown anything in the sense of, we have to degree to which we have choice about how to relate to our thoughts and our impulses and our desires. It's we want to be able to do that wisely. In deep meditation, the choice is to leave them alone. The choice is not to be involved to let them just be there. And then we can see them as not self. But in ordinary life. We have to if we don't have you know, we have to actually choose to do things we don't just leave things alone. And, and so we have to be clear, we are responsible for what we think and how we think them and tracking them and questioning them and and deciding you know, how to listen to them in the right way. All this is important part of who we are. There's no need to do so in anything.

And that's why it's very, very important not to take this not self teaching that's out of its native Buddhist context. And the obvious thing to do, it's so easy for us human beings to do this, is to hear these teachings and then want to apply them outside their context. Well, if this teaching is true, the Buddha emphasizes so much, then how does it work here and here and here and here. It's really a, I like think is not to be used to be applied, use your common sense in how you live your life. But as we have a deeper and deeper experience of how this revelation, this is not self, this is not self, as that becomes strong in vipassana practice. Some of that then changes our view about how we live our ordinary life. And we start seeing that even our thoughts, there's a way in which they are not self. They arise. So there's no shame, or no grander for the thoughts that we have. But we still have to be careful about
how we pick them up and how we're involved with them. And if we don't automatically attribute them to the self, then sometimes they're less sticky. And if they're less sticky, we have more choice, and we can handle them more wisely and good.

These mornings are wonderful ... Oh so far they are not penetrating the density of selfing that manifest during the day. Can you speak honestly about what's necessary to actually end our suffering? So the density of selfing that manifests during the day. So if you're motivated, to really penetrate the density, the coagulation, that we have around self, the attachments to it. There's you know, depends you know, what you've been doing. So if if. I mean, this is the whole path of Buddhism, is to really become free of that of clinging, including the clinging to self, not to come to a new philosophy of self, but the clinging to self, the attachment to it. And what's left after that, you know, a lot of Buddhists don't want to say that that's self anymore. But they are still very, you know, self responsible in English language. But it's really dense. So the deep meditation practice, that's the vipassana way, really, really requires deep concentrated mindfulness, that the kind of mindfulness or attention that usually for most people only available on retreat, we really are practicing for a long time. This is where the deep insight of vipassana, this deep insight into the context we're really experiencing this not self is most relevant. If a person has done a lot of retreats and feels like they haven't, you know, penetrated that, then they should either talk to a teacher or to teachers and get some advice and ideas what's going on. Or it might be that there's other modalities that can penetrate through the shell of self that maybe for some people work better than this meditation path.

This detachment from self, dispassion, disillusion, have negative implications in English. Wish there were a word that imparts the positive nature of these efforts, states and intentions. Yes, the word detachment, I think that most western Dharma teachers who speak English, Buddhist English, don't use the word detachment very well because of its negative associations, but rather use the word non attachment. And the idea that that doesn't quite have the same negative kind of distancing or indifference that detachment can suggest. Dispassion. Yeah, some people are fine with the word dispassion and disillusion. But I agree that it can have very negative associations for some people. The the word passion apparently originally comes from word suffering, The Passion of Christ. So dispassion is to end suffering. In Buddhism, in Buddhist English, dispassion means the absence of very strong craving like lust. Passion here is not seen as being zest for life or enthusiasm for life, but rather passion is kind of a passion for you know, kind of a greed. And disillusion. I think that maybe we should adopt that word more but I don't think that Buddhist use it too much disillusion. We use the word disenchantment a lot, but they both kind of has just the idea of not being and not living in illusion, not living in enchantment and not living in delusion. disillusion. But I think I appreciate this very much in the desire for def positive nature of these efforts, states and intentions, I think is very good. And you know, the primary one in Buddhism is freedom, liberation. And sometimes they use the word happiness or great happiness. And sometimes we use the word peace, ease, to live with ease, to live with peace, that doesn't have the agitation that comes with attachment, the agitation that comes with craving, the agitation that comes from living in illusion or delusion. Yeah, so very good point.
Where do thoughts come from? Well, where do thoughts come from? Thoughts arise from the combined, interrelated functioning of the whole planet. Everything contributes to the rising of a thought. And I say that that kind of, you know, kind of little bits, phantasmagorical way, is that, actually it’s fascinating, the birth of a thought, and to the mind is really quiet and really still, to see a thought arise. And not see it coming. It suddenly arise without any. Sometimes we see that thoughts arise clearly because of something prompts the thought. And we can see Oh, I thought x, because someone told me about y and you know, and I was reminded of something or, or, you know, if I say the phrase, the hills are alive with the sound of ... many people of a certain age would fill in that those lyrics of a song, and the thought music would appear. And so where did that come from? Well, I was kind of like, prompted by my silly example. So you can sometimes kind of see the causes and conditions that precede their birth of a thought. But sometimes it just arises kind of completely without any seeming causes and conditions. And it’s it you know, what, what is a combine forces and conditions that allow the thought to arise? It’s fascinating. But what’s more fascinating is how then it’s hard to take that thought, as this is myself. The thought music, if some of you know there’s lyrics to that song, then it was that word music appearing in your mind, was that you? Would you that that really who you are? Or did you have a choice in that word appearing? And did you plan it? And, you know, it’s in a different than the breeze of being felt across in your skin? You know, some parts of the mind just operate without really kind of an automatic. So these are fascinating questions and about yourself, the birth of thoughts. And the idea in doing Buddhist practice, when you really get into the flow of it is, not to get distracted by questions like that. Because the task is to really have very clear mindfulness about what’s actually happening in the moment, as we’re experiencing it, so that we come to this place of freedom.

So, I hope my answers are good. I hope this has been interesting. And I appreciate all the questions. They are, you know, it shows me how important it is to have an exchange. It’s a little bit the limitation of this YouTube or big limitation is YouTube, time and world that we have to live with a little bit. And I hope that I look forward to the time that we can be more in person and also have more dialogue.

So thank you, and I’ll see you in a few weeks or maybe Sunday, if some of you come there.