
SATIPANYA BUDDHIST RETREAT

Bhante's Essays

Written essays and teachings on Buddhist philosophy and practice

Bhante Bodhidhamma

SHROPSHIRE, WALES · UNITED KINGDOM

Contents

INTRODUCTORY RESOURCES

Refuges and Precepts	1 min read	4
Pūjā: Chantings	8 min read	6
Recommended Reading for Beginners	1 min read	14
Meditation in Ordinary Daily Life	32 min read	16

ESSAYS BY BHANTE BODHIDHAMMA

Neoliberalism and Buddhadhamma	11 min read	44
Investigative Eating	12 min read	54
Reflections on the Teaching and Practice of Not-self	18 min read	64
Vipassanā as taught by the Mahāsī Sayādaw of Burma	11 min read	78
Is Armed Intervention Ever Justified?	22 min read	87
Free Will: Is It Available or Useful?	12 min read	104
Could I be a fundamentalist, even a terrorist?	3 min read	114
Perfection, Elitism and Excellence	2 min read	117
What benefit is there in becoming a temporary monastic?	2 min read	120
The 'Unlucky' Death of a Two Year Old Boy	4 min read	123
Expectation, Aspiration and Hope	3 min read	127
Assisted Suicide	9 min read	130
Vipassanā, Therapy and Medicinal Drugs	5 min read	138
Conditionality and Kamma	7 min read	143
Affectionate Awareness	2 min read	150
Climate Crisis: A Personal Reflection	17 min read	153

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS

The First Noble Truth of Suffering: Dukkha	14 min read	168
The First Noble Truth of Suffering — The Five Aggregates	13 min read	179
The First Noble Truth of Suffering — The Three Characteristics	12 min read	189
The Second Noble Truth — Desire	14 min read	198
The Second Noble Truth — The Wheel of Dependent Origination	14 min read	208
The Second Noble Truth — Kamma Vipāka	14 min read	219
The Fourth Noble Truth — Morality (Sīla)	10 min read	230
The Fourth Noble Truth — The Perfections (Pāramī)	14 min read	239
The Fourth Noble Truth — Right Understanding	13 min read	251
The Fourth Noble Truth — Mental Development (samādhi)	13 min read	262
Meditation in Ordinary Daily Life	24 min read	272

MEDITATION IN DAILY LIFE

Meditation in Ordinary Daily Life	34 min read	291
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SATIPANYA

Buddha Day Evening with Italy	4 min read	316
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Refuges and Precepts

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This foundational text presents the essential chants that form the bedrock of Buddhist practice: the Three Refuges (Tisaraṇa) and Five Training Rules (Pañca Sīla). The essay opens with vipassanā verses reflecting the Three Characteristics of existence—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā)—drawn from the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta teachings. The formal refuge-taking ceremony is presented in both Pali and English, establishing one's commitment to the Buddha as teacher, Dhamma as path, and Saṅgha as spiritual community.

The Five Precepts are given in their traditional Pali formulation with English translations, covering abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, wrong speech, and intoxicants. These ethical guidelines form the foundation of sīla (moral conduct), essential for developing samādhi (concentration) and paññā (wisdom). The text concludes with the Buddha's final teaching from the Parinibbāna Sutta, emphasizing the impermanent nature of all conditioned things and the urgency of diligent practice. This compilation serves both as a practical chanting guide and an introduction to core Buddhist principles for beginning practitioners.

PPPP UUUU JJJJ AAAA VIPASSANA VERSES

All conditioned things are impermanent

When this is perceived with wisdom

Buddham pujemi

One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy

Dhammam pujemi

Just this is the Path of Purification.

Sangham pujemi

I bow to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha

All conditioned things are unsatisfactory

VVVVAAAANNNNDDDD AAAANNNNAAAA When this is perceived with wisdom

One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy

HOMAGE

Just this is the Path of Purification.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

All conditioned things and the Unconditioned are not-self

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

When this is perceived with wisdom

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and the Fully Self-Enlightened One!

One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy

TTTTIIIISSSSAAAARRRRRAAAANNNNAAAA Just this is the Path of Purification.

THE THREE REFUGES [Dhp 20 v5-7]

Buddham saranam gacchami

I go to the Buddha as my Refuge

There is

Dhammam saranam gacchami

The Unborn, the Undying, the Uncreated, the Unconditioned

I go to the Dhamma as my Refuge

Sangham saranam gacchami Refuge, harbour and home.

I go to the Sangha as my Refuge

Perfect contentment and peace.

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami... (repeat)

For the second time I go the Buddha.... as my Refuge

Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami.... (repeat)

Just as the great ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt

For the third time..... as my Refuge

So Nibbana has only one taste, the taste of freedom.

PPPPAAAANNNNCCCCAAAA SSSS1111LLLLAAAA

THE FIVE TRAINING RULES

Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami [Last words of the Buddha -
Parinibbana Sutta]

I undertake the training rule to abstain from killing any living being All conditioned
things have the nature to decay.

Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami Work diligently for your liberation.

I undertake the training rule not to take that which is not freely given

Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule to abstain from sexual misconduct

Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule to abstain from wrong speech

Sura meraya majja pamadatthana

veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule not to take substances that cloud the mind

SSSSaaaaddddhhhhuuuu!!!! SSSSaaaaddddhhhhuuuu!!!! SSSSaaaaddddhhhhuuuu!!!!

(Well-done!)

Pūjā: Chantings

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 8 min read

This comprehensive collection presents the essential Pāli chantings used in Theravāda Buddhist practice, offering both the original Pāli text and English translations. The compilation includes the foundational vandanā (homage) verses to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, establishing the practitioner's relationship with the Triple Gem as refuge and guide.

A central feature is the complete recitation of Paṭiccasamuppāda (Dependent Origination) in both forward (anuloma) and reverse (paṭiloma) sequences, illustrating the twelve-link chain of conditioned existence and its cessation. This fundamental teaching reveals how ignorance (avijjā) conditions the cycle of suffering and how its elimination leads to liberation. The text also includes verses on the Three Characteristics of existence—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā).

The collection concludes with the beloved Mettā Sutta, the Buddha's discourse on cultivating loving-kindness toward all beings. These chantings serve both as devotional practice and as powerful reminders of core Buddhist teachings, supporting both formal meditation sessions and daily spiritual cultivation. The rhythmic recitation helps develop concentration while the meaning deepens understanding of the path to awakening.

Puja : Chantings

BUDDHAM PUJEMI.

Homage to the Buddha. (Bow)

DHAMMAM PUJEMI.

Homage to the Dhamma (Bow)

SANGHAM PUJEMI

Homage to the Sangha. (Bow)

VANDANA Homage

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened One.

BUDDHAVANADANA-Salutation to the Buddha

Iti'pi so bhagava araham, sammāsambuddho, vijja carana

sampanno, sugato, lokavidu, anuttaro purisadamma sarathi,

satha deva manussanam,buddho, bhagava'ti.

That Blessed one is such since he is accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with clear

vision and virtuous conduct, sublime, knower of the worlds, the incomparable leader of men

to be tamed,the teacher of gods and men,enlightened and blessed.

Ye ca Buddha atita ca ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖ ye ca Buddha anagata

Paccupanna ca ye Buddha ❖❖ aham vandami sabbada

Each day I humbly pay homage to - The Buddhas of ages past

The Buddhas to come - The Buddhas of the present.

Na'thi me saranam annam❖❖❖❖ Buddho me saranam varam

Etena saccavajjena ❖❖❖ Hotu me jayamangalam.

No other refuge do I seek -Buddha is my matchless refuge.

By the power of this truth, may joyous victory be mine.

Kayena vaca cittena ❖❖ Pamadena maya katam

Accayam khama me bhante❖❖ Bhuripanna tathagata

If by way of thought, word or deed I have done anything unskillful,

Forgive me, Honoured One, the most wise Tathagata

DHAMMAVANDANA - Salutation to the Dhamma

Svakkhato bhagavata dhammo, sanditthiko, akaliko,

ehipassiko, opanayiko, paccatam veditabbo vinnuhiti.

Well expounded is the doctrine by the Lord, to be realised for oneself, with immediate

fruit, inviting investigation, leading to Nibbana, to be comprehended by the wise, each by themselves.

Ye ca dhamma atita ca ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖ ye ca dhamma anagata

Paccupanna ca ye dhamma aham vandami sabbada.

Each day I humbly pay homage to - The Dhamma of ages past

The Dhamma to come - The Dhamma of the present.

N'atthi me saranam annam ❖❖❖ Dhammo me saranam varam

Etena saccavajjena ❖❖❖❖ Hotu me jayamangalam

No other refuge do I seek.❖ The Dhamma is my matchless refuge.

By the power of this truth,❖❖ may joyous victory be mine.

Kayena vaca cittena ❖Pamadena maya katam

Accayam khama me Dhamma ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖ Sanditthika akalika

If by way of thought, word or deed I have done anything unskillful,

Forgive me, Dhamma, self-realizable and timeless.

SANGHAVANDANA Salutation to the Sangha

craving has been destroyed.

PATICCASAMUPADA ♦ ANULOMA ♦

Dependent Origination in order of arising.

Avijja paccaya sankhara. ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ Sankhara paccaya vinnanam.

Vinnanam paccaya nama-rupam ♦♦♦♦ Nama-rupa paccaya salayatana.

Salayatana paccaya phasso. ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ Phassa paccaya vedana.

Vedana paccaya tanha. ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ Tanha paccaya upadanam.

Upadana paccaya bhava. ♦♦♦♦♦ Bhava paccaya jati.

Jati paccaya jara-maranam-soka-parideva-dukkha-

domanassupayasa sambhavanti.

Evam etassa kevalassa dukkha khandhassa samudayo hoti.

Conditioned by ignorance, intentional activities arise.

Conditioned by intentional activities, re-linking consciousness arises.

Conditioned by re-linking consciousness, mind and matter arise.

Conditioned by mind and matter, the six-fold sense base arises.

Conditioned by the six-fold sense base, contact arises.

Conditioned by contact, feeling arises.

Conditioned by feeling, craving arises.

Conditioned by craving, grasping arises.

Conditioned by grasping, becoming arises.

Conditioned by becoming, birth arises.

Conditioned by birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair arise.

Thus does this entire aggregation arise.

Yada hve patubhavanti dhamma ♦♦♦♦♦ atapino jhayato brahmanassa

Athassa kankha vapayanti sabba ♦♦♦♦♦ yato pajanati sahetu dhamma

When the true nature of things becomes clear to the ardent, meditating Brahman, then all

their doubts fade away, since they realise that every thing ♦ has to have a cause.

PATILOMA

In reverse order.

Avijjaya tveva asesam viraga nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ sankhara nirodho

sankhara nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ vinnana nirodho

vinnana nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ nama-rupa nirodho

nama-rupa nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ salayatana nirodho

salayatana nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ phassa nirodho

phassa nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦ vedana nirodho

vedana nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ tanha nirodho

tanha nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ upadana nirodho

upadana nirodha ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ bhava nirodho

Sabbe sankkhara dukkhata❖❖❖❖❖ Yada pannaya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe❖ Esa maggo visuddhiya
Sabbe dhamma anattati❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖ Yada pannaya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe❖ Esa maggo visuddhiya
All conditioned things are impermanent All conditioned things are unsatisfactory ...
All conditioned things and the Unconditioned are insubstantial
When this is perceived with wisdom,
One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy.
Just this is the Path of Purification.

[Dhp 20 v5-7]

Anicca vata sankhara ❖❖ Uppada vaya dhammino
Uppajjitva nirijjhanti ❖❖❖❖❖ Tesam vupasamo sukho.
Dukkha vata sankhara Uppada vaya dhammino
Uppajjitva nirujjhanti ❖❖❖❖❖ Tesam vupasamo sukho.
Anatta vata sankhara ❖❖ Uppada vaya dhammino
Uppajjitva nirujjhanti ❖❖❖❖❖ Tesam vupasamo sukho.
Truly all that is conditioned is transient Truly all that is conditioned is suffering Truly
all that
is conditioned is not-self ...

It is their nature to arise and pass away. Once arisen, they disappear. Their cessation is
happiness

Imaya dhammanudhamma patipattiya Buddham pujemi.❖ Bow)

Imaya dhammanudhamma patipattiya Dhammam pujemi.❖ (Bow)

Imaya dhammanudhamma patipattiya Sangham pujemi.❖ (Bow)

By practising according to the tenets of the Dhamma, I pay:

Homage to the Buddha, Homage to the Dhamma, Homage to the Sangha

METTA SUTTA Discourse On Developing Goodwill

1.❖❖❖ Karaniyam attha kusalena yam tam santam padam abhisamecca,

❖❖❖❖❖ Sakko uju ca suju ca suvaco cassa mudu anatimani.

2.❖❖ Santussako ca subharo ca appakicco ca sallahukavutti,

❖❖❖❖❖ Santindriyo ca nipako ca appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho.

3.❖❖ Naca khuddam samacare kinci❖ yena vinnu pare upavadeyum,

❖❖❖❖❖ Sukhino va khemino hontu sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta.

4.❖❖ Ye keci panabhutatthi tasa va thavara va anavasesa,

❖❖❖❖❖ Digha va ye mahanta va mijjhima rassaka-nukathola.

5.❖❖ Dittha va yeva adittha ye ca dure vasanti aviddure,

❖❖❖❖❖ Bhuta va sambhavesi va sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta.

6.❖❖ Na paro param nikubbetha❖ natimannetha kathacinam kinci,

◆◆◆◆◆ Byarosana patighasanna nannamannassa dukkhamiccheya.

7.◆◆ Mata yatha niyam puttam ayusa ekaputtam anurakkhe,

◆◆◆◆◆ Evampi sabba bhutesu manasam bhavaye aparimanam.

8.◆◆ Mettanca sabba lokasmim manasam bhavaye aparimanam,

◆◆◆◆◆ Uddham adho ca tiriyanca asambadham averam asapattam.

9.◆◆ Titthan caram nisinno va sayanova yava tassa vigata middhā,

◆◆◆◆◆ Etam satim adhittheyya◆ brahmam etam viharam idha mahu.

10. Ditthinca anupagamma silava dassanena sampanno,

◆◆◆◆◆ Kamesu vineyya gedham na hi jatu gabbhaseyyam punareti' ti.

If you are wise and want to reach the state of peace, you should behave like this:

You should be upright, responsible, gentle and humble.

You should be easily contented and need only a few things.

You should not always be busy.

You should have the right sort of work.

Your senses should be controlled and you should be modest.

You should not be exclusively attached to only a few people.

You should not do the slightest thing that a wise person could blame you for.

You should always be thinking: May all beings be happy.

Whatever living beings there are, be they weak or strong, big or small, large or slender, living nearby or far away, those who have already been born and those who have yet to beborn,

May all beings without exception be happy.

You should not tell lies to each other.

Do not think that anyone anywhere is of no value.

Do not wish harm to anyone, not even when you are angry.

Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life,

So you should let the warmth of your heart go out to all beings.

Let your thoughts of love go through the whole world with no ill-will and no hate.

Whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down,

So long as you are awake you should develop this mindfulness.

This, they say, is the noblest way to live.

And if you do not fall into bad ways, but live well and develop insight,

And are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses,

Then truly you will never need to be reborn in this world again.

Sadhu!◆◆◆ Sadhu!◆◆◆ Sadhu!

(Well-spoken)

Recommended Reading for Beginners

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma provides a carefully selected bibliography for those beginning their study of Buddhism and vipassanā meditation. The recommendations span several key areas essential for new practitioners.

For understanding the Mahasi method specifically, he highlights Sayadaw U Pandita's 'In This Very Life' as perhaps the finest exposition of this systematic approach to insight meditation. The doctrinal foundation is covered through accessible works like Piyadassi Thera's 'The Buddha's Ancient Path' and the more academic 'What the Buddha Taught' by Walpola Rahula, both providing clear introductions to Theravāda teachings.

The vipassanā section includes Joseph Goldstein's works and Nyanaponika Thera's classic 'The Heart of Buddhist Meditation,' offering both practical guidance and comprehensive understanding. Recognizing that insight practice should be balanced with heart practices, Bhante recommends Sharon Salzberg's 'Loving Kindness' for developing mettā. Finally, acknowledging the challenge of integrating formal practice with everyday life, he suggests works by Jon Kabat-Zinn and Jack Kornfield that bridge meditation and daily living. This thoughtful collection provides beginners with a solid foundation across all aspects of the Buddhist path.

Recommended Reading for Beginners

Mahasi

In This Very Life

Sayadaw U Pandita

(Perhaps the best book written on the Mahasi method of meditation.)

Doctrine - Theravada

The Buddhas Ancient Path◆◆◆◆◆◆

Piyadassi Thera

(A very easy beginners book)

What the Buddha Taught

Walpola Rahula

(Slightly more academic, but a good companion to the above.)

Vipassana

Experience of Insight◆◆◆

Joseph Goldstein

(A good book to begin with.)

Insight Meditation        

Joseph Goldstein

(From talks given on a course.)

The Heart of Buddhist Meditation     

Nyanaponika Thera

(A more academic full approach still considered the classic work.)

Meditation in Daily Life


Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life         

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Path with Heart

Jack Kornfield

(Both very good at helping to integrate meditation with daily life.)

Loving Kindness   

Loving Kindness          

Sharon Salzberg

(Vipassana should be balanced with Metta, loving-Kindness practice. An excellent book.)

Where to buy:

Check the Wisdom book website: www.wisdom-books.com

Order your books from them: sales@wisdom-books.com

If Wisdom Books dont have some titles try: Buddhist Publication Society: email: 

bps@mail.lanka.net

Meditation in Ordinary Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 32 min read

*This foundational essay explores how to transform ordinary daily activities into opportunities for mindfulness practice, moving beyond viewing sitting meditation as separate from daily life. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) to emphasize the Buddha's instruction for clear comprehension in all activities—walking, eating, speaking, and even mundane tasks like making tea. The teaching presents practical techniques including creating space between activities, cultivating the 'art of listening' in relationships, and developing self-reflection throughout the day. Key practices include doing one task at a time deliberately, using natural breaks for inner awareness, and approaching activities ceremonially with full attention. The essay addresses common challenges like emotional reactivity and provides methods for working with difficult mental states through acceptance rather than resistance. It concludes by connecting daily life practice to spiritual insight, explaining how *khanika samādhi* (momentary concentration) can arise naturally during fully absorbed activity, potentially leading to *vipassanā* insights into *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. This integration of formal meditation with continuous awareness represents the Buddha's vision of a truly meditative life.*

Bhikkhu Bodhidhamma

Dailylifecare

Meditation

In

Ordinary Daily Life

Bhikkhu Bodhidhamma

PUBLICATION

2002

An Offering of Dhamma

Not to be sold.

The Buddha's Basic Advice:

In the Discourse on How to Establish Mindfulness, there is the following section on Clear Comprehension:

A meditator when moving forward or backward is clearly aware of what they are doing; when looking ahead or behind, clearly aware of what they are doing; when bending, stretching ... when carrying

things , clearly aware of what they are doing; when eating, drinking, chewing, savouring ... when passing stools or urine ... when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep and waking up ... when speaking or staying silent, they clearly aware of what they are doing.

That is, whatever the meditator is doing, that is what they must be mindful of.

In other words, the sitting meditation is only a part of the practice as a whole. The Buddha wanted us to develop a meditative life. To know what we are doing at all times. A life of fulltime awareness. The danger for meditators is to raise the sitting meditation practice to the position of a magical ritual as if all we needed to do was a little sitting in the morning and in the evening (perhaps) and liberation from suffering is assured. Too often meditators think sitting meditation is the be-all and end-all of the Path. I once met a meditator because of this. He had been tremendously ardent, spending months in intensive meditation only to come out and live the 'good life'. After years of this so-called practice, achieving very little in terms of inner peace, he had achieved little but sorrow and despair. He felt the five years of so he had spent on the meditation practice had been a great waste. So, it is this dependence on meditation sitting as the one and

2

only practice that leads to disillusionment and disappointment. Eventually the meditator may abandon the practice altogether as useless! So sitting meditation is only part of the Buddha's path, though undoubtedly necessary.

The Middle Path

The rules that guide the monastic life show clearly that the Buddha wasn't teaching simply a meditation practice but a way of life, a way of living day to day. The Middle Path is a description of how life as a whole should be led by someone eager to attain liberation from all suffering. This Middle Path in its broader aspect means not to fall

prey to sensual pleasure, not to over-indulge in sensual delights. Nor should we believe that self-mortification such as long fasts will bring us anywhere nearer the goal. Moderation in all things! Secondly, that we should be careful not to transgress the basic moral laws for this produces harmful affects for us and for others. Thirdly, that we should make great effort to improve ourselves by the practice of the Perfections. This is all put as the Four Great Efforts of the Eightfold Noble Path - to eradicate existing unwholesome habits and practices, and not to allow any new ones to establish themselves; to introduce new wholesome ways of thinking and behaving and to develop what wholesomeness we already have.

Starting the Day

As an aid to this growth and as a part of the meditation, we need to bring Right Awareness and Right Concentration right into our daily lives. This is what a lot of meditators find very difficult and confusing. So, let us see what meditation in daily life might mean. The day really begins with how we have slept for we often wake with the mind that fell asleep. If I'm depressed or angry before I go to sleep, sure enough the same emotions will

3

overtake me when I wake or soon after. Therefore, we need to fall asleep in a meditative way so that at least any negative frames of mind are weakened and positive ones reinforced. So we should try to go to sleep with the mind in meditation. Just gently placing the attention on the process of breathing or observing the sensations in the body caused by our state of mind. Alternatively, a good practice is to review the whole body, starting at the top of the head and slowly working our way down to the tips of the toes, observing all the sensations on or in the body. Alternatively, following the instructions on how to practise Metta, put a loving thought in the heartmind and repeat over and over again. At some time, it is also important to make a firm resolution to wake with the alarm, to set the mind to wake up. The alarm is only an

aid. So that when we wake, we can sit up quickly and observe the mind, catching the first mood of the day and developing that watchful attitude. Once the mind is clear, we can make the next firm resolution not to let a moment of the day pass in mindlessness. All effort will be put into achieving continuity of awareness. Resolute determination plays a significant part in the meditative life. It is, in fact a Perfection to be developed. We don't have to become neurotic over breaking them. We need to see such resolutions as attempts to recondition the mind. Remember the Buddha's teaching that will is Kamma. We need to strengthen the will, to make it strong enough to carry through our skilful decisions. For instance, getting up that little bit earlier to do the regulation forty minutes or better one hour meditation is very difficult at first, but if we persevere a new habit will be established. You may also find as so many meditators do that the more mindfulness is maintained, the less sleep is needed. So we start the day with a decision to develop continuous awareness. We resolve, we determine to do it and eventually we will achieve it to a fairly high degree.

4

Deliberately Purposefully Intentionally

What form does continual awareness take? Firstly it is awareness of all the tasks we normally complete in a day, especially the normal ones, the habitual ones. The ones we would normally do on automatic pilot. These range from brushing the teeth, to drinking a cup of tea, to routine tasks at work. Anything manual and physical needs to be done with awareness. Done deliberately, purposefully, intentionally. Even closing drawers, opening cupboards should be done as if for the first time. A good technique to bring mindfulness to bear in our mundane tasks is to do them just a little more slowly and with careful deliberation. Another is to repeat the action that was done mindlessly. This sort of practice brings calmness and equanimity into our lives. This is more easily done if we approach all actions and tasks as if they

were ceremonies, as if we were doing them clearly aware of what they are doing in front of someone we respected. I often like to imagine the Buddha himself just sitting somewhere unobtrusively in the room. How mindful I'd be if he really were!

Ceremony

Drinking tea is a national habit if not neurosis, but it can so easily be turned into a real meaningful act. Instead of rushing through the preparation, filling the kettle up with the tap full on, splashing water everywhere, banging the kettle down, plugging it in, grabbing the cup and saucer, banging the cupboard door shut. Same routine at the fridge for the milk. Pouring the boiling water into the pot as quickly as possible. Tapping your fingers, eating cake, gulping it down while we wait for it to brew. And then, what we've been longing for all along, in two short gulps the tea's gone. Our minds here, there and everywhere. Not actually tasting a drop. Two, three cups go down and

5

not a single drop is truly tasted. The whole fandango is finished off with a hurried wash up. No wonder we forget whether we've had a cup of tea or not! Doing all this mindfully, deliberately, carefully, taking one's time, drinking the tea as if for the first time in our lives, lifts this ordinary mundane activity into a meditative exercise which not only increases our mindfulness, but fills that moment with order and beauty. In Japanese culture, this sort of idea produced the famous and beautiful Tea Ceremony, but it runs like a motif through a lot of how the Japanese behave, even to the ceremonial bowing before martial arts. To us, it might seem a little over the top, but if we do ceremonise our lives, we shall see it beautifies all our actions.

The Art of Listening

The second area we need to look at in our daily activities is our relationships and communication with other people. Again it is especially the usual, the ordinary, the habitual communication that needs to be de-robotised

and made meaningful. We have to observe how we are communicating with our spouse, children, friends, people at work, neighbours, and compare this to the attentiveness we devote to what the boss says or to the diagnosis of the doctor. We need to cultivate the art of listening.

When we listen attentively, giving our whole attention to what is said, we also become aware of the opinions and conditioned responses in our own minds. Sometimes we can achieve a concentration in our listening so that these are subdued. For listening to someone means to hear what they're saying as if for the first time. If this is really happening, there will always be a break before a response while the mind assimilates what has been said and thinks of an answer.

6

Too often our conversations are fencing matches. My concern is to get the other to acknowledge what 'I' am saying and to get 'that' person to agree with 'me'. The other person is doing exactly the same. There's no listening to what the other is actually saying, only as to how it affects 'my' position in the so-called 'discussion'. No wonder there are so many misunderstandings and mistaken assumptions.

When we converse with each other, there's no need to respond immediately. What is really needed is to be truly aware of what the other is saying. In counselling, there's a technique used by a counsellor to show the client that they have understood what's been said. To show the client they've really been listening and also to find out whether in fact they've understood the client's situation. At the end of the client's complaint or explanation, the counsellor will say something like: 'so what you're saying is ...' It is always a wonderful moment when the client's face brightens up and relaxes.

Finally, someone who's really listening to what they're saying. Someone who's understood. We communicate to understand each other. To know each other better. At

deeper levels, it's sharing experiences, supporting and comforting. This is all impossible for someone who can't listen. Such a person always starts from the wrong premise and usually puts a foot in it. Listening is an art and the base line of any relationship. People, who can't listen, can't relate. To listen properly is to be fully aware of what the other is saying and feeling.

Creating Space 1

The next important practice, once we are clear of what it generally means to be aware in our daily activities and

7

relationships, is to create a space. Our society with its accent on time passing, punctuality and dead lines, creates a rush, a race. Everyone's running every which way. Everyone's speeding. If you can do four jobs at once, that's good. Five, that's better. No wonder there's so much pressure about, so much stress. So much straining. No wonder the greatest killers are heart failure, blood pressure, strokes and so on.

According to Buddhist psychology, only one consciousness arises at one time. The human mind is capable of doing only one thing at a time. You can't be conscious of two things at the same time. We think we are. When we sitting the cinema, we seem to experience all the five senses at once. We see the film. We hear the music and dialogue. We taste the ice cream, smell the smoke and feel uncomfortable in our seats. We seem to be in bath of sensual pleasure all at once. But actually, each consciousness, arising at vast speeds no doubt, is aware of only thing, one incoming sense data at one time. I am either seeing the film, or hearing the sound track or eating the ice cream and so on. But such is the speed of consciousness and such is the higher power of the mind to relate and integrate all this that I believe it is all happening altogether, all at once. But we have been fooled, just like the celluloid film tricks us into believing we are seeing one continuous action and not a set of individual frames. So the important rule to establish in

the meditative life is to do one deliberate action at a time. Of course, there are many things that have now become automatic, such as walking. Here we are discussing those actions that take deliberation, that have to be done with a certain amount of awareness or thinking. Walking is normally automatic, but it isn't if we're crossing a high, narrow mountain ridge. Then we are very much aware of
8

how we are walking. And if when this walking ought to be a conscious activity, we decide to look at the scenery, we shouldn't be surprised to fall off. Here we are concerned with deliberate action, actions that need our attention.

In the morning, for instance, we might find ourselves eating our meusli and cornflakes, talking to the family and reading the gas bill all at once. No wonder we feel confused. That things are getting on top of us. At work or at leisure, it is good to organise the tasks ahead, but accept limitations, accept the reality of what's actually happening. Don't be confused by thoughts of what ought to be happening.

Suppose the day is very busy and full of interruptions. If we now view these interruptions not as disturbances and nuisances, but simply accept them as the next thing to be done, we shall free ourselves of a lot of anger and frustration and stress. Suppose I'm doing some written work, filling out forms or something and someone approaches me for information. When they 'interrupt' me, with 'excuse me' all I need say is, 'I'll be with you in a moment'. In that moment, I recollect where I am with the work I'm doing. To be aware is to remember. Then I turn to the questioner and devote myself to that request.

Once the request is answered, I note I have completed that task and go back to the written work where I have left a marker. No disturbance. No anger. No stress.

Just moving from one job to another, creating a small space to recollect. If the person approaching is full of stress and bother, I don't become involved in that. I keep

my attention to the problem and reassure the person. It's the same in a family of children, all jumping up and down for attention, just when poor old mum and dad

9

were looking for a bit of peace and quiet. What an opportunity to train! This way of working, one job at a time with a small space in between, makes for concentration and efficiency.

Creating Space 2

This small space has also another important function. It stops the accumulation of emotional states. Missing that alarm in the morning and over sleeping, Jack suddenly wakes up and realises he's going to be late. Panic. From that moment there's a world-shattering rush to get to work on time. The morning wash at top speed, water and soapsuds everywhere. The breakfast is shovelled in, scalding tea gulped with a yelp. Jack then legs it to the bus stop and spends the ride tapping his fingers and biting his lip. Or driving like a madman, swearing at friend and foe, prepared to run over man, woman and child, cats and dogs. Finally, he arrives at work. Is that the end of the panic? Of course not! Whether he's late or early, he has set the pace for the day. The whole day becomes a phrenetic onslaught with rush, anger, frustration, anxiety, stress and so on. At the end of the day, his only comfort a bottle of aspirin or worse!. All this has now, of course, stopped. For Jack is an expert meditator. Now when he's late, he notices the sense of panic and anxiety. But he doesn't respond. He talks himself out of rushing, accepting the fact he's late. He puts effort into concentrating on what he's doing. He may move faster, but not wilder. When he gets to work late he accepts this fact and realises that from now on there's no need to keep up the faster pace. He relaxes back into his normal routine. No anxiety, no frustration, no angry outbursts, no rush, no stress. This technique of letting our reactions to events subside is of paramount

importance if we want to cultivate a general state of calmness. This technique is enhanced by self reflection.

10

Self-reflection

This is the process of self-monitoring throughout the day. But not the self-monitoring of a Big Brother, full of do's and don'ts and oughts and shouldn'ts, but of a nurse who is caring for their patients. It is simply a matter of recording the state of play and deciding on action to remedy or enhance the situation. Just as a nurse takes a constant temperature reading and acts appropriately. This is another way of stopping emotions and moods from snowballing.

Now Jill, Jack's wife, got to work this morning, early enough, but feeling tired and depressed. As soon as she walks in, her boss says something she didn't like at all. She gets angry about it. All morning she is alternately, depressed, tired or angry. She angry about being depressed and depressed about being tired and tired of being angry. When she goes for a break, everything irritates her. She's really miserable and her colleagues ignore her. Now sitting on her own, depression is fuelled with self-pity. Her only consolation is to go home, shout at Jack, and the kids, kick the cat and lock herself into a room, sulk and in really bad times take Prozac!

Jill, however, is now an expert meditator too. She has learnt the technique of living with moods and emotions, of existing peacefully with them. She develops a friendly attitude towards them, one of acceptance. She still suffers from depression, but now she acknowledges it as a fact, as a result of past conditioning. She tries to feel it as it really is. She decides that though the depression is going to hang about, probably make her less efficient, her energy and attention will be directed to the job in hand, to communicating with people, to raising the will to be helpful, open and friendly. By doing this she knows the

11

depression won't dominate her life. She knows there won't be reactions to it, like anger and self-pity and anxiety. It may remain all day, all week, all month, all year, but her attitude to it now is as to physical pain, backache or headache. She's not going to let it hijack her life. She knows these sorts of attitudes are allowing the depression to lose steam, to lose energy. She knows she is reconditioning herself, re-educating herself. It's hard work. It's painful. But every so often she feels that the depressions are passing away just that little bit quicker, that they are never quite so deep, that she is no longer so suffocated by them. The moods, once so solid, now seem more soft. She feels a general lifting towards calmness, peace and joy.

The Inward Glance

Unfortunately, the Buddha neither discovered nor offered a quick magic cure. It's all hard persistent work. Jill knows that this technique, based on awareness, has to be regular and constant. She trains herself into the habit of the inward glance. Moving from room to room means opening and shutting doors. In that small moment, that break in closing the door, she pauses to look inwards, take stock and let go of whatever mood was built up in the room she's left. She clears her heart and mind, returns to an equilibrium. Walking down corridors and up stairs, during tea breaks and natural breaks, she sees in them all occasions for this gentle self-monitoring. This continual effort to let go of negative states of mind. This continual effort to establish self-awareness. And then the turning outwards to being aware of all that is around. Jill knows now from personal experience that keeping this awareness, making these sorts of decisions, leads to equanimity and clarity of mind. Her depressions come and go, but she's no longer depressed by them. In time even her depressions will pass away.

12

The Diary

An extension of this continual process of self-monitoring which is simply a way of being in touch with ourselves and of getting to know ourselves better is to keep a diary. There are many ways to keep a diary, but the purpose of keeping this diary is to heighten one's self-knowledge and to use it to encourage oneself in spiritual training.

Writing can often get things off your chest. Writing about an occasion that upset us, we can ask, what was it that actually got me upset. Why did it do so? Was it a rational response? Did the response help the other, the situation, me? What would be a better response in the future?

For instance, I knew someone who was having problems with his child. He talked about how unruly and angry the child was. As he talked he happened to mention that he often got quite angry with the child. When we discussed it, it occurred to us that maybe the child was simply reacting to his anger and even modelling himself on his father's behaviour, as any dutiful child should! A lot of the problems passed when he changed his behaviour. Perhaps if he had kept a diary, he might have been able to make this connection between the child's behaviour and his own before it became a problem.

The Tough Nut

Now that we have established as it were, a basic disposition towards daily life, we can be more proactive. We can take the offensive. We can search for techniques which will enhance our lives the more. The first one is to tackle the Tough Nut. Everyone has a habit or personality trait they would dearly love to lose. It could be a strong habit such as smoking or a social nuisance such as a loud voice or always opinionating. The first is

13

to make the resolution to change. Then we need to use our self-observation techniques and here a diary is very useful in order to observe when, where and with whom the habit is likely to occur. As we come to know the

occasions of the habit, we can form strategies, firstly so that we are not overcome by the habit and secondly so that we can undermine its hold on us.

My father used to be a heavy smoker, forty cigarettes a day and the full-blooded, thick tar stuff. He used to sing in a choir, but had to stop for continual sore throats.

The doctor even then (this is over sixty years ago mind!) advised him to stop smoking if he wanted a long singing life. He did. And he hit the habit where it hurt most. The one cigarette most difficult to abandon was the one after lunch when he would sit and relax and perhaps doze. Since he came home for lunch, he decided instead of smoking and instead of getting irritable with others, he'd take it out on the piano. Not only has he never smoked since, but he also became a dab hand at the piano. This is positive action. It hurts. We've got to work at it. But it does work!

What are the factors involved? Firstly that insight into the harm of any particular habit. Then the resolute determination to change. Then the strategy. And most important, the prize! Always make sure there's a present at the end. My father returned to the choir he loved.

Developing Goodwill

But its not only against our negative side we must take the offensive, we need also to put energy into the better sides of our personalities. Firstly we need to set the mind onto positive from the first moment of the day. After the morning meditation practice, Metta should be practiced.

14

Metta means goodwill, benevolence, open-heartedness, kindness, care: a universal, impartial love. Again it is by making this inner decision, talking to oneself, suggesting to oneself a better way to be, convincing oneself, that the ground for resolute determination is established. By setting the mind at goodwill, once negative states have been allowed to pass, that goodwill will automatically arise. This goodwill then stands as barrier to any habitual negative responses such as anger. It allows the

heart to feel things from the other's point of view. Now in this practice, it is very important to be able to offer love to oneself. At first most people think this is selfish. But actually it's self-care. It's the difference between cooking a well-balanced meal for oneself, and spending £50 on a beef Stroganoff a la nouvelle cuisine. Knowing the difference between self-care and self-indulgence is crucial to undercutting any feelings of hate we might have towards ourselves. Just as we can care and comfort others, so we can care and comfort ourselves. Just as we encourage and support ourselves, so we should encourage and support others. In this vein, it is good practice to take one of the Perfections as a special practice.

Maybe it's patience. I'm impatient with others and myself. I'm easily irritated and angered. So let this be my special practice. As we develop one Perfection, we shall discover that the whole personality is affected and all the other Perfections are also enhanced. Since our personalities and relationships are all interdependent and interrelated, this bettering of me inside myself will begin to better my relationships with others, allowing others in turn to develop their relationship towards me.

Inclining towards Nibbana

15

So far we have talked on a psychological and social level. But how does all this lead to spiritual insight, to the experience of the supramundane, of what there is beyond the psychological and the social, beyond the body and mind? This whole process, this continual effort is all to do with purifying the mind. When the mind is pure, the Spiritual Faculties can emerge and intuitive knowledge arise. These faculties are confidence, effort, concentration, awareness and wisdom. In fact, these faculties can come together at any time whatsoever. That momentary concentration of these factors, when they are all balanced is known as Khanika Samadhi. It is a well-known phenomena in the scriptures.

A laywoman became Sotapanna on intuiting anicca, transience, in the crackling of her baking bread. Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, attained arahatship, while placing his head on the pillow to go to sleep. A modern meditation teacher intuited anicca, the fundamental impermanence of the universe, while watching a dog pass by. This moment is beyond our personal control. It simply happens when all the conditions are ripe. We don't have to worry about it at all. It will arise of its own at any time, while doing anything. The Nibbanic experience is beyond conditions and arises when the factors conducive to its arising are mature. We cannot make it happen no more than we can make ourselves forget something. It happens naturally as a consequence of all our endeavours to train in the Perfections and to remain mindful.

In this connection, let me add that to be aware and alert is not necessarily to be self-aware. In Insight Vipassana Meditation, once the concentration is high, all we know is the process of the breath. Up until that moment we were aware of ourselves being the objective observers. When

16

that objective observer vanishes, and all we know is the process of breath, then that is the sort of pure awareness we need to achieve insight. This can't be brought about by an act of will. The observer cannot make itself vanish. It happens quite naturally once the concentration and focus are developed enough.

So it is in ordinary daily life. I might be doing a mental task, such as writing a letter or physical task, such as mowing the lawn. At first, since I'm trying to do the jobs mindfully, I might be aware of myself. But as I give myself to the task, I lose this self-awareness, awareness of a 'me'. Sometimes when we've done a job, we're amazed at how time has flown. It seems to have gone like a shot. We end up cutting the whole lawn or writing the whole letter perfectly and without once being actually aware of a 'me' doing them. They were just done. This is

a highly developed state of concentrated awareness and it is in such moments as these that the Factors of Enlightenment can become developed and balanced enough to give insight. No-one can manufacture this moment, because the 'one' means that self, that ego which is lost in such moments. So don't try, just do!

At the End of the Day

So now we are at the end of the day. A good practice is to spend sometime before falling asleep in bringing the whole day to mind. Here, the diary is useful. Note all the times when mindfulness was lost - when, where and with whom. See if anything can be done to put right any unfortunate consequences of mindlessness if there are any. If nothing can be done, then accept the consequences totally. What's the point of worry and sorrow? Acceptance is all that is needed and of course, the resolution not let such a thing happen again.

17

Recall moments of mindfulness, of joy, of friendliness, of handling a tricky situation well. Congratulate yourself. Then bring tomorrow to mind and determine to continue your efforts.

Finally, in bed, go to sleep with the mind rested, contented on having done your best. What more can be asked. And gently follow the breathing.

The Joy of Practice

So there we have it. The meditative life! Our objective, full-time awareness, supported by the techniques of creating space, self recollection, positive action and, of course, our sitting meditation which now comes into its true role of training the mind to develop effort, concentration and mindfulness.

It is recommended to practise vipassana early morning in order to establish our centre for the day and in the evening to allow any unwholesome emotions to be defused. Forty-five minutes will do. An hour is better. But even ten minutes is better than none. These silent times will nurture the whole day with their quiet

awareness.

When we live the meditative life, our view of living changes. To live is to experience. Life is no longer a sequence of successes and failures. Life is no longer loaded with the heavy judgements of good and bad, right and wrong. Since now we see life as experience, we are looking at what is healthy, wholesome, skilful and getting away from the unhealthy, the unwholesome, the unskilful. We need to be athletes, training for the real marathon - life itself. For most of us over 70 years and over difficult terrain! What is more, each moment is not just the training, but the testing ground too.

18

The Buddha asked us to be an island unto ourselves, a refuge unto ourselves. He wanted us to take the Dhamma, the Teaching, the Truth as our refuge. We have within each of us the potential to achieve the highest peace and joy. Not simply the joy and peace of a meditative life, but that peace beyond peace - Nibbana.

His final advice was:

Everything is transient, work diligently for your liberation.

Life is passing!

No time to faff about!

Our goals must be set.

All that's left is work.

So we'd better get on with it!

This is the real work of our lives.

The work of our own true liberation.

(cid:64)@

those meditators who delight in ever present mindfulness

and look with fear upon heedlessness

are not liable to fall into unskilful behaviour

they are in the presence of Nibbana!

(cid:64)@

DAILYLIFECARE

AIMS

Establish Satipanya in Sitting Meditation.

19

Establish Satipanya in Ordinary Daily Life.

Develop the Perfections.

OBJECTIVES

Full-time Awareness

Be mindful of all activities, especially the habitual

- eating, toiletry, routine tasks

Do things a little slower and more deliberately

Be attentive to all communication, especially the usual

- partner, children, fellow workers

: no need to respond immediately

: when really listening, a pause occurs

naturally

Sitting Meditation – Morning

Put real effort into the Vipassana

- especially the opening attempt to be concentrated

Be sure to spend at least five minutes developing Metta

Before you get up:

acknowledge any negative attitudes

resolve not to allow them to hijack you

develop positive attitudes especially to the disliked

choose a negative mental attitude or state

you are going to 'let go of throughout the day

choose a Perfection or virtue you wish to work on

throughout the day

e.g. practice patience towards some one

Creating Space

20

Do one job at a time

e.g. reading the mail in the morning, do it attentively

and make deliberate decisions about it

rather than eating your muesli and talking to

the family while you turn blue over the gas bill

leads to – concentration

Pause between every task or event

do a task or what you can do of it completely

stop! mentally put the finished task aside

create, if only for a moment, silence

allow the mind to settle

look within and know the mental state
then bring the mind to the new task
Make a conscious intention
Then do it.

leads to – efficiency

After an event, allow the reaction to subside

e.g. if you miss the alarm and get up late

watch your reaction of anxiety and haste

if the reaction continues throughout the day,

just know it is there and carry on attentively

leads to - calmness

Self - Recollection

use the inward glance to know

what state of mind you are in

and then respond a continual self-monitoring

21

stops moods and emotions from snowballing

find regular times in the day to practice this

opening and closing of doors

walking along corridors, up stairs

tea-break and natural breaks

leads to - equanimity and clarity of mind

The Tough Nut

everyone has a particular habit or personality trait

they would like to change or eradicate

study it as it occurs - when, where, with whom

find strategies to cope so you are not highjacked

Positive Attitude

Metta meditation, not just at sitting time

wait for negative moods to pass

then direct Metta to the object, person or self

constantly set your intention at 'goodwill'

Khanika Samadhi

This is a moment to moment state of concentrated intuitive

awareness - Satipanya - which is able to perceive ultimate

realities. It can come at any time as it did to one of the

disciples of the Buddha who, while attending to the bread in

the oven, intuited the characteristic of transience - anicca -

in the crackling. We can't make this happen. It happens naturally. It is the happy outcome of our effort to remain simply mindful. When we are fully concentrated on our work and have lost all 'self' awareness, this also has great potential for spiritual insight.

END OF THE DAY

22

Sitting Meditation – evening
make a special effort especially after a hard day
important in order to let go of the day's
accumulations
and ensure restful sleep
Use a diary for reflection
write what comes to mind for 15 min. every evening
don't think about what you are going to write
just 'splurge' and then put it away
don't read it after you have finished
at the end of a week, read all the writings and
... draw your own conclusions
recall moments of mindlessness
note when, where, and with whom
note if anything can be done to put right
any unfortunate consequences
determine to do so
if nothing can be done
accept the consequences totally
recall moments of mindfulness
successes in dealing with tricky situations
and with negative states
congratulate yourself!
At bedtime
determine to fulfill your goals tomorrow
determine to wake with the alarm
maintain mindfulness from that moment onwards
put your mind upon the breath or body sensations
or practice Metta

23

P U J A

Buddham pujemi

Dhammam pujemi

Sangham pujemi

I bow to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha

VANDANA

HOMAGE

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Homage the Blessed, Noble and the Fully Self-Enlightened One!

TISARANA

THE THREE REFUGES

Buddham saranam gacchami

I go to the Buddha as my Refuge

Dhammam saranam gacchami

I go to the Dhamma as my Refuge

Sangham saranam gacchami

I go to the Sangha as my Refuge

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami... (repeat)

For the second time I go the Buddha.... as my Refuge

Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami.... (repeat)

For the third time..... as my Refuge

24

PANCA S1LA

THE FIVE TRAINING RULES

Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule to abstain from killing any living being

Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule not to take that which is not freely given

Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule to abstain from sexual misconduct

Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule to abstain from wrong speech

Sura meraya majja pamadatthana

veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule not to take substances

that cloud the mind

Vipassana Gatha

VIPASSANA VERSES

All conditioned things are impermanent
When this is perceived with wisdom
One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy
Just this is the Path of Purification.

All conditioned things are unsatisfactory
When this is perceived with wisdom
One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy
Just this is the Path of Purification.

All conditioned things and the Unconditioned are
insubstantial

When this is perceived with wisdom
One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy
Just this is the Path of Purification.

[Dhammapada 20 v5-7]

25

Those meditators who delight in ever-present mindfulness
And look with fear upon heedlessness
Are not liable to fall into unskilful behaviour
They are in the presence of Nibbana.
All conditioned things have the nature to decay.
Work diligently for your liberation.

[Last words of the Buddha - Parinibbana Sutta]

I determine to make this day
a day of moment to moment mindfulness.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

(Well-done!)

Metta

Goodwill

Offer worldly and spiritual blessing to:
someone whom you have warm regard for
those who are near and dear
friends, people at work, neighbours ...
oneself

Having established metta, begin to radiate it outwards to:
all those in the room/house
all in the surrounds

the whole country
all people on earth
Putting a phrase in one's heart which most expresses
the quality you wish to develop and share,
radiate it outwards to all beings in all directions.

26

VIPASSANA

GUIDELINES

Whatever the sitting posture, it should be comfortable and fulfill three conditions - an energised spine with its natural curvature, the rest of the body relaxed and the head poised on top. The hands are placed on the lap and the eyes are gently closed.

Then the attention is fixed on the process of breathing - just the normal and natural breath. It is the sensations at the abdomen caused by breathing which are to be observed. And a noting word is used to focus the thinking mind onto these sensations. As the abdomen rises, the word 'rising' is repeated. As it falls, 'falling'. And in the gap before the in-breath begins again, a feeling in the body is felt and observed, using the noting word 'touching'.

When the mind is somewhat steady, the attention should be allowed to observe whatever draws it within the field of awareness - sensations and feelings, moods and emotions, mental images and thoughts.

Using a simple word to note and without any interference whatsoever, all these passing phenomena are to be directly experienced and carefully observed. Should the mind wander, let it be brought back gently but firmly to observe sensations at the abdomen in order to cultivate a sharp attentiveness.

27

In this way, right awareness with intuitive intelligence - SATIPANYA – becomes established.

This bare attentiveness –
simply watching all that arises and passes away

This choiceless awareness –
that does not control or manipulate
This impartial observation –
that does not judge or question
This intuitive introspection –
fully experiencing each physical, emotional and
mental event as it really is,
leads to the realization that everything is
impermanent and insubstantial and that to
identify with or to become attached to anything
whatsoever, will bring dissatisfaction.

These VIPASSANA-INSIGHTS into the Three
Characteristics of Existence, impermanence,
unsatisfactoriness and not-self - ANICCA, DUKKHA,
ANATTA – lead to the complete liberation from all
suffering, the experience of the Unborn, the
Unbecome, the Uncreated, the Unconditioned; Refuge,
Harbour and Home; Perfect Contentment and Peace.
Those who are mindful are in the presence of Nibbana.

The Buddha

SADHU! SADHU! SADHU!

28

ESTABLISHING

SATIPANYA

• Posture

Sit comfortably. Energise the spine. Sit tall. Let the rest of the body relax. The head gently poised on top. Natural easy breathing. If you change posture in a sitting, do so mindfully, slowly, noting all the movements, or it will disturb your concentration. If you find yourself sagging, put more energy into the spine. If the neck or back begins to ache, check the posture, but also that you're not putting 'wrong effort' into the practice, causing tension. You may use a cushion or a meditation stool, but only those with physical problems should use a chair.

• Breathing Process

Observe the rising and falling of the abdomen. Should you be concentrating elsewhere e.g. at the nostrils,

please make sure you receive instruction. Concentrate on the exact beginning of the inbreath, stay steady throughout the whole middle process and catch the exact end. Concentrate on the exact beginning of the outbreath, stay steady throughout the whole middle process and catch the exact end. In the gap before the inbreath begins, become aware of a particular feeling or the feeling of the whole posture and again concentrate on the abdomen as soon as the inbreath starts again.

- Feelings and Sensations of the Body

Do not search for them. Allow them, whether from the outside (such as hearing) or from the inside to draw your attention and observe them with the same acute, energetic watchfulness with which you observe the sensations caused by the breath process, using appropriate noting words.

29

- Emotions and Moods

These are felt in the body as feelings. As with all sensations, note and observe them carefully.

- Wandering: Talking: Fantasising Mind

As soon as you wake from a daydream, acknowledge it with a noting word and plunge into the body and see if you can feel the emotion which is causing the restlessness of mind. If it is too subtle to catch, then resolve to stay with the breath process. If the whole day is spent doing this, it is not wasted. This is the training we must do with calm but firm perseverance.

- Walking Meditation

Use the first 15 minutes or so as exercise, walking as fast as you wish, noting - left ... right. Then begin to walk slowly, noting - lifting ... moving ... lowering. Continue to slow down, noting - lifting ... moving ... lowering ... placing. Return to the sitting posture at a speed that will not undermine the strength of concentration you've developed. Attention is to be placed on the feelings in the foot. And don't forget to note the intention to walk and turn. If you are going very slow indeed, note - intending to step - before each step.

- Daily Activity

It is very important indeed to keep up continuity of practice and to note your intention before doing anything is a powerful aid. Then complete the action slowly and deliberately. The slower you go, the more you will notice.

This technique is a great aid to concentration and mindfulness. Practice this all the time, even when opening and closing doors, during toiletry and while eating.

Moment to moment awareness is the secret of success.

The Maha si Sayadaw

30

Discourse on Metta – Good-will

If you are wise and want to reach the state of peace, you should behave like this:

You should be upright, responsible, gentle and humble.

You should be easily contented and need only a few things.

You should not always be busy.

You should have the right sort of work.

Your senses should be controlled and you should be modest.

You should not be exclusively attached to only a few people.

You should not do the slightest thing that a wise person could blame you for.

You should always be thinking: May all beings be happy.

Whatever living beings there are, be they weak or strong, big or small, large or slender, living nearby or far away, those who have already been born and those who have yet to be born,

May all beings without exception be happy.

You should not tell lies to each other.

Do not think that anyone anywhere is of no value.

Do not wish harm to anyone, not even when you are angry.

Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life,

So you should let the warmth of your heart go out to all beings.

Let your thoughts of love go through the whole world with no ill-will and no hate.

Whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down,

So long as you are awake you should develop
this mindfulness.
This, they say, is the noblest way to live.
And if you do not fall into bad ways,
but live well and develop insight,
And are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses,
Then truly you will never need to be reborn
in this world again.
Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

31

THE TEN
PERFECTION
DAILY AFFIRMATIONS

1. May I be generous
and be of service to others.
(dana)
2. May I be morally correct
and self-disciplined.
(sila)
3. May I not be selfish and possessive
but selfless and sacrificing.
(nekkhamma)
4. May I be wise and be able to give others
the benefit of my understanding.
(panna)
5. May I be willing and energetic.
(viriya)
6. May I be patient and quick to forgive.
(khanti)
7. May I always be truthful.
(sacca)
8. May I be resolute and keep my word
(adhitthana)
9. May I be friendly, joyful and compassionate.

32

(metta)

10. May I be calm and peaceful.

(upekkha)

NOTES

33

A Gift of Dhamma

No other gift excels the gift of Dhamma.

The Buddha

Give generously that others may benefit.

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34

Neoliberalism and Buddhadhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min read

This essay presents a Buddhist ethical critique of neoliberalism, the dominant economic ideology of the past four decades. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how neoliberalism's core principles—unrestricted competition, individual entrepreneurship, and the primacy of market forces—fundamentally contradict the Buddha's teachings on interdependence, compassion, and contentment.

The essay explores how neoliberalism promotes greed (lobha) and antagonistic competition as evolutionary forces, creating a society where individuals compete against each other rather than collaborating for mutual benefit. Drawing on the Itivuttaka and Buddhist principles, Bhante critiques how this ideology destroys social cohesion and commonwealth, leading to inequality and suffering. He particularly addresses the misuse of mindfulness practices by corporations to manage stressed employees rather than addressing systemic workplace problems.

The teaching emphasizes practical Buddhist responses: developing contentment rather than endless consumption, recognizing the interconnected nature of our economic choices, and cultivating generosity as an antidote to the selfishness that neoliberalism promotes. Bhante argues that true liberation from dukkha requires moving from 'me' to 'we'—from individual self-interest to community care, guided by the brahmavihāras of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

Neoliberalism and Buddhadhamma

I don't pretend to know anything about economics as such. This is an ethical critique of Neoliberalism, not an economic one. There has been the success of globalisation and enormous

industrial output, innovation and the lifting of living standards for some. But at what cost? I centre

on some of the destructive consequences. I hope you will be encouraged to do your own research.

There is a lot of literature and YouTube videos. I would be grateful for any corrections and

constructive comments.

The ideology

First of all, it is important to understand that the economic system we have been under

for the past

40 years is Neoliberalism, which is a type of free-market capitalism and that Neoliberalism is an

ideology – a view of the human condition and a consequent set of principles that go to form a

policy and a belief it will bring a bright future towards which everyone is heading.

Consider the

other secular ideologies of the last century – Communism and National Socialism.

The problem with ideologies is that they are mental constructs, not grounded in present moment

reality. They distort the present to fit the future goal. So an ideology at its very conception, has ‘the

seeds of its own destruction’ (Ironically, Karl Marx said this of Capitalism.) At some point, there is

bound to be such a dis-location that the system begins to falter and collapse. That has been

happening to Neoliberalism, especially from the economic collapse of 2008.

The Buddha did not fashion a Buddhism, a Buddhist ideology. There is no Shangri la we are

heading towards. Nibbana is not a place! Such conceptual thinking was not developed anyway in a

pre-literate culture. He taught the principles and ethics to liberate ourselves from

unsatisfactoriness and to create a harmonious society. The Dhamma, the Teaching, is grounded on

the understanding of the human realm as Samsara, where acquisitiveness, aversion and delusion

will always be at play. And that our struggle will be to act from the motivations of love,

compassion, joy and peacefulness. The Buddha himself was liberated from dukkha¹, living in the

inner freedom of Nibbana within the world of Samsara.

Basic Attitude – Me versus everyone else

At the centre of Neo-liberalism is the Market. This has to be given free reign and everyone must

work towards being an active member, an entrepreneur.

The fundamental driving attitude that motives the whole Market is the accumulation of money.

For with money, you can get anything you want. And this promotes a basic attitude of greed and

selfishness.²

Western culture is especially driven by the concept of the individual self, of personal exceptionalism, celebrated by Margaret Thatcher, 'there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families.' (my italics) This self-centredness expresses itself as 'I should have what I want when I want it.'³

Neoliberalism understands the role of acquisitiveness as the evolutionary force. In Oliver Stone's Movie Wall Street, 1987, villain Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) says: The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed -- for lack of a better word -- is good. Greed is right. Greed works.

1 Dukkha usually translated as unsatisfactoriness, but also suffering, even stress.

2 1 Paul - Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

3 Amazon spent billions to make sure it had the fastest delivery. The faster the gratification, the more people will buy from you than your competitors. 'I should have what I want when I want it. And I should have it now!'

Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms -- greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge -- has marked the upward surge of mankind.

It is a form of Social Darwinism that supports 'unrestricted competition'.

Everything is up for grabs and people do not have any birth right to society's wealth. You have to compete for it. The winner takes all.

Darwin actually said:

'It's not the strongest of the species that survive, not the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change'. That means a creative response to the ever-changing present moment reality. The first hominids did not have a futuristic ideology leading them to homo sapiens.

The Buddha taught us to be responsive to change in an ethical and moral way; to acknowledge our inter-dependency; to develop caring relationships.

A society is not just a collection of individuals. The whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. A society is also a community.

The role of acquisitiveness.

Acquisitiveness fosters and operates best in a Market of Competitors.

Industrial competition need not be a bad thing. It can lead to greater efficiency and invention.

Even war propels efficiency and invention – WWII produced jet engines, radar and, of course, the

computer! But in war time, people pull together in a common cause within the society against a

common enemy. But for Neoliberalism the common enemy is everyone else! We need to battle

against each other for a share of the market in an Antagonistic Competition. (Hostile Takeovers).

In academia, many scientists will be working on a project. They share their discoveries and at

some point there is a breakthrough, a discovery. They are not motivated by power or money,

though some may covet the Noble Price. They are driven by interest in the scientific investigation

and the possibility of new discovery or invention. It engenders a Collaborative Competition.

However, here rival competition reaches down to every individual. We are to be individual

entrepreneurs who must make their own way against everyone else. And since everyone is in

competition with everyone else, the other is a rival at best, an enemy at worst.

As for employees, they do not have any rights as such but must negotiate with the employer.

Competition between workers determine that those who cost less will get the work. The lower the

pay, the better for the Market since profit will be greater for those who own the assets – the

rentiers. In this way, the ‘Gig economy’ supports the race to the bottom.– ‘a competitive situation

where a company, state, or nation attempts to undercut the competition's prices by sacrificing

quality standards or worker safety (often defying regulation), or reducing labour costs’⁴.

What those individuals who fail in the market of jobs, the unemployed? They have only themselves to blame. The Market is open to all. It is up to the individual to work for a

piece of it. In this way, inequality is justified. As little as possible is to be spent on the caring services. 4 The most recent example of this is when P&O Ferries that sail across the Channel sacked 800 workers. The most recent example of this is when P&O Ferries that sail across the channel sacked 800 workers. The holding company in Dubai blamed yearly losses of £100 million, yet paid shareholders £270m dividend. They went on to hire staff at lower wages.

So wealth inevitably accumulates to those who can successfully play the Market. Depending on the role an individual has in the Market, Wealth is supposed to 'trickle down' to everyone. But, in fact, it overflows upwards.^{5 6} And what of those who cannot participate in the 'Market Place' – the 'unemployable', the many physically and mentally sick and the old. They are draining money from the Market which could be used for greater profit. Indeed, all Welfare, any Government or Charitable effort towards the basic physical and material well-being of people in need (those who have failed to be successful entrepreneurs), will undermine the entrepreneurial spirit of competition and so should be greatly limited. What is more, any framework of social care will be at the expense of those who have accumulated wealth, which is not 'fair'. So, taxes should be kept at the bare minimum. The only way, then, to sustain social services is to privatise. As for Governments, they are not to interfere but let Market Forces have their sway. Therefore, there should be few regulations if any. However, when businesses and banks collapse (too big to fail), Governments should come to their aid since a collapse of the Market will harm everyone. We know how criminally greedy the Banks have been, yet no-one has been prosecuted. Why should this surprise us. The market supports greed. Hence this basic attitude of acquisitiveness, of greed, prevents a 'society of individuals'

from
establishing a sense of community. A Neoliberal Society destroys any commitment to
Commonwealth.
And what of the rich and super rich. They must now guard their accumulated wealth.
They donate
heavily to Political Parties who support Neoliberalism. Any sign of opposition such as
XR
Rebellion, Green Peace or any organisation working to undermine the destruction of
the planet,
must be curtailed and hobbled by legislation and if possible banned. The ‘society of free
individuals’ becomes more repressive as the inequality and injustices of Neoliberalism
become
more dominant.⁷

5 According to the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, the world’s richest 1 percent,
those with more than
\$1 million, own 45.8 percent of the world’s wealth.

6

7 See recent legislation on holding marches - Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill
was passed on April
26 on restrictions on people’s liberty to protest.

Why is it most people don’t realise that Neoliberalism is an ideology. Most people are
not even
familiar with the word. Unlike Communism and National Socialism, it was never
publicly and
widely named. It entered as economic operational tool. At first it did lift the economy.
But instead
of the profits going back into industry and welfare, it gathered into assets – the process
of
financialisation. A simple example is shareholding. A person buys shares to ‘earn’ from
the profits
of the company. What goes to the shareholders is, therefore, not re-invested into the
company. The
more the profits go to shareholders, the less there is for the workers. Indeed, anyone
who owns
something can charge for its use. Hence the rentier capitalism. Rentiers don’t do
anything. They
don’t make anything. There are no laws that govern how much they can profit and how
much

needs to be put back into the real economy of goods and services.

Why do we so willingly support Neoliberalism? Consumerism has been with us for a long time.

However, now with the enormous growth of industry, goods are cheap enough for many to have

what they want. The advertising industry fools us into thinking that excitement is the same as

happiness. But excitement is indulgence. We are ensnared by greed. The more we buy, the more

we want to buy.

Finally, why is it so difficult for Neoliberalism to respond to climate crisis? As greed works in the

individual so does it work in the corporate. Greed by definition is insatiable. It is a monster that

demands feeding even if it causes its own destruction.(Investigative Eating)

Buddhadhamma

The role of Mindfulness and the abuse of staff.

The rich and powerful who gather at Davos for World Economic Forum that seeks to put the world

aright through Neoliberal measures. The participants, business and political leaders, were

delighted to hear about Mindfulness. Now they could tell stressed employees to undergo a

Mindfulness and Stress Reduction Course. All they needed to do was sit quietly in some corner and

deal with it. Their mental states and illnesses were not the responsibility of the company. They can

now learn to cope.

This wonderful gift that the Buddha gave us to bring all our suffering and discontent to an end is

being used by a world economic system which is fundamentally evil. Evil, the Dhamma teaches, is

that which draws us into the world of sensual pleasure as the only happiness worth seeking. The

world of Mara, the Tempter, of Samsara, the ever-ongoing unsatisfactoriness and suffering that

world of Excitement, of Sensual Pleasure, ultimately offers! Exactly what the Buddha was trying to

free us from! Exactly what the Buddhadhamma, the teaching and the practice is trying

to liberate
us from.

Part 3 of the Act gives police forces broad authority to place restrictions on protests and public assembly.

Under previous UK legislation, police must show that a protest may cause "serious public disorder, serious damage to property or serious disruption to the life of the community" before imposing any

restrictions. Under this Act, police forces will be allowed to place restrictions on protests they believe would

otherwise constitute an existing offence of public nuisance, including imposing starting and finishing times

and noise limits, and will be able to consider actions by one individual as "protests" under provisions of the

Act. Protestors disobeying such instructions from the police may be committing a criminal offence. Wikipedia

(my italics)

What then can we do?

A system that is based on greed and antagonistic competition, creating individual entrepreneurs,

each vying with one another to get a share of the wealth, has no duty of care for citizens, especially

those unable to enter the market. It destabilizes social cohesiveness, leading to more crime and

more physical and mental illness

How can we, each of us tiny, almost powerless individuals do?

Consumerism: Be aware that every time we act as consumers, every time we buy something, we

may be supporting the satanic factories of Bangladesh, Cambodia and even China. That we are

putting even more pennies into the treasure chests of the 1%.

How we get rid of our depression and anxiety. Retail therapy, holidays

Developing the attitude of contentment. Not so much to get what we want, but be grateful for what

we have.

The rediscovery of the deep joy of generosity. If we are talking about the joy of interconnectedness, of friendliness, of a caring society, have you noticed that the joy of caring for

your self lasts a while. You feel good about yourself.

But have you noticed that when you give to others – wealth, time, care, the joy remains much

longer.

"If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving & sharing, they would not eat without having

given, nor would the stain of miserliness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their

last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their

gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving & sharing, they eat without

having given. The stain of miserliness overcomes their minds." Iti 26

The joy in life is immense, but we undermine it because we have barricaded ourselves in this little

castle we call the self. Me!

We must struggle to convert the me to we. Sounds glib. But that's the way.

And it is when the attitude change that a new way of running the economy will rise. And that way

has to be pragmatic, guided by the attitudes of love, compassion, joy and peace. But I dare we will

end up with yet another ideology. More and more unnecessary suffering. But then that's samsara.

Excellent articles:

Neoliberalism - the ideology at the root of all our problems. George Monbiot

Neoliberalism has brought out the worst in us Paul Verhaeghe

Secularising Buddhism Edit. R Payne How do secular values impact Buddhism in the modern

world? What versions of Buddhism are being transmitted to the West? Is it possible to know

whether an interpretation of the Buddha's words is correct? See especially, Secular Buddhism in a

Neoliberal Age, Ron Purser

The Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis, Sally Weintrobe shows how the wealthy nurtured the Concept of Neoliberalism through Right Wing Think Tanks and captured the

Republicans and ultimately the Conservatives in UK and how Neoliberalism has created an

uncaring society.

A Brief History of Neoliberalism, David Harvey, a Marxist philosopher, shows how the wealth and power moved away from the working classes to the rich and powerful. Many of the gains of the working classes since WWII have been lost in the Gig Economy.

Investigative Eating

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min read

This extensive teaching uses eating meditation as a profound method for investigating the nature of desire, attachment, and suffering. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how indulgence in food—and by extension all sensual pleasures—leads to five forms of suffering: attachment and compulsive behavior, frustration, grief, anxiety, and boredom. Drawing from the Brahmāyu Sutta (MN 91), he presents the Buddha's approach to eating with awareness but without greed.

The essay provides detailed practical instructions for tea and biscuit meditation, emphasizing three key distinctions: between body and mind (sensation versus emotion), between desire and action (the role of will), and between enjoying and indulging. Through careful attention to the processes of tasting, chewing, and swallowing, practitioners learn to experience pleasure without the overlay of excitement that characterizes indulgence.

The teaching includes specific reflections used at Satipanya Buddhist Retreat for mindful eating, along with traditional contemplations on gratitude, impermanence, and the support of spiritual practice. This approach transforms ordinary eating into a vehicle for developing wisdom, contentment, and freedom from the psychological dependencies that fuel suffering in all areas of life.

Eating Meditation

How bad can greed get?

Erysichthon, the Greek King of Thessaly, had the temerity to build a banqueting hall over the shrine

to Demeter, Goddess of Earth's fertility and protector of harvest.ⁱ She cursed him with insatiable

hunger. First, he ate everything there was to eat. Then he started on his people and even ate his own

family. Still famished he ate himself!

While I was staying at Kanduboda Meditation Centre in Sri Lanka, a man told me that once when out

in the wilds, he had got lost and over a period of a few days became so hungry that when he finally

caught a pigeon, he ripped it open and ate it raw. He was a meditator!

Hopefully, we will not have to suffer such extreme conditions.

Even so there are other good reasons to investigate of the process of eating:

To distinguish between enjoying and indulging

To distinguish between the body and mind, ie sensation from emotion/thought

To distinguish between a desire and an action: the role of will.

Distinguishing between enjoying and indulging.

We will want to distinguish between enjoying and indulging when we come to realise the suffering that indulgence causes.

The first complication that arises from indulgence is attachment and compulsive behaviour. When we

indulge some unwholesome but pleasing habit, it means that we are using something to create a certain

mental state that we enjoy. It's not the biscuit we want, but the mental state it produces, be it happy or

comforting. But this also produces a dependency and just like any addict we are compelled to raid the

biscuit box. Only a strong act of will and refusal to have biscuits in the house can break the habit. It is

precisely at the time we renounce the biscuit that we suffer the strength of that habit and the hold it has

over us. But, of course, the potential is always there. Just as the person who gives up smoking and after a

long time thinks they are immune to becoming habituated, on surrendering at a party to have 'just one',

finds themselves buying a packet. That is, attachment is none other than a dependency on something or

indeed someone to create a mental state of happiness

The second suffering is frustration. Anger rises when we can't get what we want or what we have is denied

us. We live at a time of almost immediate gratification. Consider fast food! Amazon has spent millions on

delivery, knowing that to satisfy a customer as quickly as possible is to ensure their loyalty. 'You want some

beer (non-alcoholic!). We'll get it to you tomorrow morning!' We can even be angry with ourselves for

forgetting to buy tea or coffee. We get angry if the bus, the train, the taxi is late. We get angry if someone

doesn't turn up for a meeting. Frustration doesn't help. It just burns us.

The third is grief. The misery we feel if we have to diet! The shock we suffer when we

lose our mobile. The distress of leaving an expensive hat or bag behind at the restaurant, only to find it has 'disappeared'. But although we believe in possessing things, in reality we can only use them. If a thief has run off with our mobile, for all intents and purposes it is their mobile, no matter how much we keep moaning and complaining about the loss of 'my' mobile. And grief takes on a different intensity when we lose a spouse, a partner, a family member, a friend.

Fourthly, anxiety always sits beneath everything we possess. The run on flour, pasta and bewilderingly toilet paper at the start of lockdownii is driven by fear of what may or may not happen in the future. The more we possess the more we fear loss. And the more we have to possess to cushion any blow. A billion pounds to a billionaire are never enough. They must cushion it by moving to towards a trillion. We are afraid of loneliness so build up a coterie of friendships and lots of things to do. We feel insecure so we accumulate excessive insurance or power which manifest in controlling and bullying. Finally, there is boredom. If you remember, Mara, the Evil Tempter, the sensual life personified, sent his three daughters to inveigle the Buddha to return to the 'good life' – sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure and boredom. Boredom is that state where what once gave such pleasure and excitement is now stale, over-indulged and unpleasing. It is an aversive state and to escape it we seek some other pleasure. Variety is the spice of life is the basic motto of the consumerist. Consider the foodies' who chose their holidays depending on variety of restaurants. And just as all the other consequences of indulgence can become mental illnesses, boredom can drive you into depression. Indeed, what would be the purpose of living when there is nothing or anyone who can raise any degree of excitement. Here lies the distinction between happiness and excitement. True happiness is based of contentment.

Excitement that passes for true happiness is based on an insatiable appetite for the new and the thrill. This excitement is what fuels consumerism. The underlying engine is boredom, caused by a lack of excitement, that drives the consumer to seek relief in more excitement. This is none other than the psychology of addiction. Just as a drug addict feels normal when under the influence and abnormal when in need, so the consumer feels they have to buy something and go somewhere, do anything that excites no matter how little in order to feel 'happy'. Retail therapy is no therapy at all. It's an addiction. 'The Second Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering is the insatiable thirst which generates moment to moment becoming, accompanied by obsessive indulgence, finding fresh excitement now here, now there, namely the insatiable hunger for sensual pleasures, for continued becoming and non-becoming.'

So what do we have to do?

Firstly, we need to make a clear distinction between the body and the mind, between on the one hand sensations and physical feelings and on the other hand the heart-mind - emotions and moods, thoughts and imagination. This is part of the endeavour to undermine the sense of self. That is the sense we have of being one entire, undivided integer; a single uncompounded being, whole and absolute. By drawing apart what the body does through the senses and what the heart-mind does, is to begin to realise that we are but a compound, made up of many pieces all depending on each other to create an embodied 'person'. We being to undermine this delusion: I am what I feel or think I am.

Secondly, we need to distinguish a desire from an action. This will give us that chink of freedom where we can change the conditioning we don't want to a conditioning we do want. Remember our personality is but a collection of habits and will always be so. Our work is to rid ourselves of habits that bring any degree of suffering and dissatisfaction and develop those that bring a sense of well-being. So long as there is only a desire, nothing has actually happened. It remains an idea

laced with the energy of wanting. It arises out of a state of discomfort and is itself uncomfortable till gratified. If we are fully aware of a desire we will not be caught up in its demands, but will have the occasion to ask whether it is wholesome, whether it is beneficial to myself, to another or both myself and another. If we determine it is unwholesome, all we have to do is bear with the desire until it burns itself out. In so doing, the habit that it expresses is weakened and will eventually lose all power over us. If a desire is judged to be wholesome, then we empower it. It produces an act of body, speech or mind. This reinforces the habit. In this quite simple way we can change ourselves, though as we discover, it is not easy. We need a highly alert attentiveness, or we are quickly gratifying those habits we don't want and so developing them.

Brahmayu Sutta MN 91.14 (Bhikkhu Bodhi) A passage describing how the Buddha receives food and eats it.

Here is described what he experiences.

He takes the food experiencing the taste, though not experiencing greed for the taste.

In other words, just the pleasant sensations.

This is on occasion chanted by monastics at mealtimes:

The food he takes has eight factors: it is neither for amusements or for intoxication (indulgence) or for the

sake of physical beauty and attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of his body, for

ending discomfort and assisting the holy (spiritual) life; he considers, 'Thus I shall terminate old

(unwholesome) feelings without arousing new (unwholesome) ones and I shall be healthy and blameless

and live in comfort.

(My brackets)

Attitude

An attitude is a way of relating. It is not specific to a particular object. So as we undermine greed around

food, we are undermining all indulgence for the same psychology applies to everything that delights us.

Whether it is a sensual pleasure, art, nature, even people and animals, the same problem of attachment arises. Once we have understood, I repeat, that attachment is a psychological dependency on some object or other for 'happiness', we begin to be more aware of other dependencies and slowly begin to let go of all obsessiveness.

The Buddha tells us 'The taste of Nibbana is freedom'. Freedom from unwholesome desires.

A warning! I once sat next to a monk whom by the look of him, you would presume a true ascetic – hollow cheeked and gaunt. When the delicious fruit salad and buffalo curd was offered, he placed it before him.

And while the other monks continued to eat, he simply stared at the bowl. As we were finishing, he picked up the bowl and as quick as lightening spooned it down his throat.

Now, of course I may be judging him very wrongly, but it seemed to me that he was afraid to enjoy the food for fear of indulging. Such an attitude if taken to all we enjoy would turn life into a sour grape. As

always in our spiritual practice we have to tread the narrow path between direct enemies and subtle

enemies of virtues. Here between indulgence and self-mortification. The pleasures and joys of life are a

human birth right. But they come and go like everything else. What are we actually holding onto?

In conclusion

Since our personality is made up of a compendium of habits, our psychotherapeutic task is to liberate

ourselves from their control, but not the habit itself when it is wholesome. After all we have to eat! So our

task when it concerns anything which is pleasurable and enjoyable, is to begin to experience what it is like

to enjoy and not indulge. Just enjoy!

Our insight task is to see clearly how we create suffering. Suffer the renunciation of unskillful desires. Arrive

at unalloyed joy.

The Practice

Tea Break

The process of drinking a cup of tea and eating a biscuit. This is where biscuits can be a path to liberation

from all suffering! Noting words are suggested.

Distinguishing between the body and the mind

Sit with the tea and biscuits before you and feel the desire.

Remind yourself of how the food has come to be in your hands. Raise gratitude.

Intending to drink.

Take it slow and raise the cup to your lips. Lifting, lifting. Take a sip and hold it in the mouth to taste.

Tasting, tasting. Bury your attention into the taste, the feel of the tea.

Intending to swallow. Swallowing, swallowing. Stay with the whole process.

Then feel the afterglow. That's the mental state as a learnt reaction to taste of tea.

Comfort, comfort, or,

joy, joy.

Distinguishing desire from action

Take the biscuit. Holding, holding. What are you actually feeling? Hard, hard. What do you see? Round,

buff, beige?

Remind yourself of how the food has come to be in your hands. Raise gratitude.

Thankyou.

Feel the desire to take a bite. Stay with it. What is the feel of a desire? Desiring, desiring.

Know you could put it away into the tin. But don't give in to the desire for austerity! In this case eating the

biscuit is wholesome, a spiritual exercise.

Intending to nibble. and be aware of that moment of decision when the power of the will activates the

desire. Raising, raising (biscuit to the mouth)

Tasting, tasting. Follow through just tasting. The texture, the taste.

Become aware of the mental state. Happiness, happiness. Gratifying, gratifying.

Wait till the pleasant taste has all but gone and there is but a sloopy mush in the mouth.

What's the reaction? Disliking, disliking. Disgusting, disgusting.

Intending to swallow. Decide to swallow. Feel the afterglow. Happiness, happiness. ?

Distinguishing enjoying from indulging

Repeat until such times as there is just tasting, just swallowing. All the overlay of 'excitement' has gone.

Stay with the afterglow. Stay with whatever feelings arise?

Reflection

When finished, ask yourself – as I lost the excitement and equanimity replaced it, was I enjoying it as much?

Don't be surprised to find yourself saying you did not 'enjoy' as much. Therein lies Mara. The excitement comes from indulgence, but that brings the suffering.

The more we practice, letting go of indulgence, the more we will begin to appreciate just eating with equanimity. The more we will come to feel those indulgent feelings are gross.

A young man came to meditate with us at the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara. He returned the next week to tell us he couldn't listen to heavy rock anymore!

Seeking excitement is more often than not seeking the same experience that made us excited. If we had an amazing pizza, we would want a pizza that will give us the same 'wow factor'. It will distort the experience

of the pizza we are eating. We will be laying on to the present pizza that memory of the 'amazing one'. We

will both be disappointed, and we will fail to appreciate the pizza we have – which may have been an even

better pizza. I remember this happening to me with sticky toffee pudding.

Mealtime at Satipanya

Reflections

Wisely reflecting, I eat this food not to indulge sensual pleasure or to seek comfort. Being mindful of every

mouthful, I shall undermine unwholesome habits and develop appreciative joy.

I eat only to sustain and nourish the body, thinking thus:

I will allay hunger without overeating so that I may continue to live blamelessly and at ease.

This offering brings me health, long life, strength and happiness.

May the merits of my practice support the happiness, health, long life, rebirth in the heavenly realms and

ultimately the Awakening of those who have kindly provided this food.

Mealtime Investigation

Reflection before eating:

the preciousness of human life : the singularity of the body

image passage of food – the tasting : the swallowing, the digesting and - the evacuation

how this is an opportunity to eat with appreciation and joy and not to indulge

Consider the food on your plate:

Mother Earth and her fruitfulness : the farmers and labourers

The distribution and workers : the cook and the donors

Food tastes so much sweeter for the honey of gratitude.

Continuing Investigation

Clear distinction between the physical process of tasting, chewing and swallowing from mental process of emotional feelings, comments, judgements – and desire.

Clear distinction between desire arising from natural appetite and desire arising from greed – seeking to develop a happy mental state dependent on tasting.

*Clear distinction between indulging and enjoying.

Reflections at the end of the meal.

Let gratitude arise again for the gift of food.

Goodbye! I shall not taste this food again ever.

This is one less meal I shall have to eat in this life.

Tips

Go slow! Relax! Take your time. The slower the more we see.

Do everything gently. Treat plate and cutlery as precious items.

Slowly : Gently : Quietly

The Buddha ‘takes his food experiencing the taste, though not experiencing greed for the taste’ M91.14

From Sutta Central : A.Sujato

When receiving rice, he holds the bowl neither too straight nor too bent, neither too close nor too loose.

So odanaṃ paṭiggaṇhanto na pattaṃ unnāmeti, na pattaṃ onāmeti; na pattaṃ sannāmeti, na pattaṃ vināmeti.

He receives neither too little nor too much rice.

So odanaṃ paṭiggaṇhāti nātithokaṃ nātibahuṃ.

He eats sauce in a moderate proportion, and doesn’t spend too much time saucing his portions.

Byañjanaṃ kho pana bhavaṃ gotamo byañjanamattāya āhāreti, na ca byañjanena ālopaṃ a tināmeti.

He chews over each portion two or three times before swallowing.

Dvattikkhattuṃ kho bhavaṃ gotamo mukhe ālopaṃ samparivattetvā ajjhoharati;

But no grain of rice enters his body unchewed, and none remain in his mouth.

na cassa kāci odanamiñjā asambhinnā kāyaṃ pavisati, na cassa kāci odanamiñjā

mukhe ava

siṭṭhā hoti;

Only then does he raise another portion to his lips.

athāparaṃ ālopaṃ upanāmeti.

He eats experiencing the taste, but without experiencing greed for the taste.

Rasapaṭisaṃvedī kho pana so bhavaṃ gotamo āhāraṃ āhāreti, no ca rasarāgapaṭisaṃvedī.

He eats food thinking of eight reasons:

Aṭṭhaṅgasamannāgataṃ kho pana so bhavaṃ gotamo āhāraṃ āhāreti—

‘Not for fun, indulgence, adornment, or decoration, but only to sustain this body, to avoid

harm, and to support spiritual practice. In this way, I shall put an end to old discomfort and

not give rise to new discomfort, and I will live blamelessly and at ease.’

neva davāya, na madāya na maṇḍanāya na vibhūsanāya, yāvadeva imassa kāyassa ṭhitiyā y

āpanāya, vihiṃsūparatiyā brahmacariyānuggahāya: ‘iti purāṇaṅca vedanaṃ paṭi-
haṅkhāmi

navaṅca vedanaṃ na uppādessāmi, yātrā ca me bhavissati anavajjatā ca phāsuvihāro
cā’ti.

i The Romans also honoured her as Ceres (cereal).

ii For a deeper reason concerning the connection between faeces and death: The Denial of Death by Ernest Becker

Reflections on the Teaching and Practice of Not-self

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 18 min read

This comprehensive essay examines one of Buddhism's most challenging teachings for the Western mind: anattā or not-self. Bhante Bodhidhamma guides readers through the Buddha's second discourse, the Anattalakkhāṇa Sutta (SN 22.59), which completed the liberation of the five ascetics after the first turning of the Dhamma wheel. The essay systematically explores each of the five khandhas (aggregates) - body, feelings (vedanā), perceptions (saññā), mental formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāna) - demonstrating how none can be considered a permanent, controllable self or soul (atta). Through practical investigation, readers learn to recognize their limited control over these aggregates and their impermanent, unsatisfactory nature. The text connects this ancient teaching to modern psychological insights about self-development, particularly Margaret Mahler's separation-individuation theory, and explains how vipassanā meditation practice helps objectify inner experiences. Bhante details the progressive stages of insight, from recognizing the separation between knower and known, to the ultimate realization that even the sense of being 'the knower' must be transcended to discover the unconditioned happiness of Nibbāna. This essay serves both as doctrinal explanation and practical guide for understanding and realizing the profound teaching of not-self.

A Reflection on the Teaching and Practice of Not-Self.

INTRODUCTION

No doctrine of the Buddha has so challenged the western mind as the teaching of not-self, anattā. It is easy to fall into what the Buddha would call wrong views (ditthi), the opposite of annihilation and eternalism. Either everything dies at death or something lives on. Here, our exploration begins with basic understandings and uses the Buddha's first teaching, The Discourse on Not-self. By following the practice he explains there, we can begin to experience what he means. It is a start.

The Self

We can describe a 'self' in various ways. It is an entity; it is substantial; it is whole and singular in the present moment and throughout time. Because it can perceive, it therefore exists. It is the

subject, the one who feels, thinks and experiences. It is the doer. It is distinct from other selves and has its own discrete character and personality. It is a mental construct, a concept.

What description attracts you most from this list?

Self as Identity

When we say 'me', what are we referring to? Normally we would have a sense of this 'me' as some central identity, a

central self-reference point that is experienced as solid, unchanging and in control.

When we point to 'me',

paradoxically we usually point to the middle of the chest (the heart chakra), whereas we experience our self-

awareness in the head. This tells us that 'me' has a feeling and a thinking part – the one knows, the one who feels,

that is, the one who experiences and experiences. When it comes to the body, we would usually say 'my' body. It

rarely becomes 'me'. When we fall gravely or terminally ill, then we see how intertwined the sense of me and the

body is: 'I am going to die.'

We are aware of me: I can perceive myself so I must exist and as I perceive myself, I see I am distinct from others.

They are not me. I have a personal and distinct character.

This sense of me is made even more real because we do things: I act; I am what I do.

(There are those who suffer from a conflicted or weak sense of self. It is understood that such a person needs to

develop a strong sense of self before they can begin this sort of exploration.)

Should you say: this is the essential me, what might you mean by it?

Self as Eternal Soul

The self presumes itself to be permanent. While we are awake, a feeling of continual presence is experienced as

always being here. It feels other than the body, emotions or thought. Just being here. A self-awareness. It is,

therefore, eternal or timeless – in other words, outside time and so unchanging.

Do you have this sense of 'something' in you being always there? What do you make of it?

Contradiction?

These two descriptions of self and soul are not the same. Whereas the sense of self includes the body, heart and

mind, the soul suggests something ethereal that is in the body, heart and mind, but is

beyond them and is self-aware

– it knows itself.

Atta – the Self

During the Buddha's time, the word *atta* was understood to refer to that within a being that was unchanging and so immortal; solid and so substantial; in control and so all-powerful within itself. The spiritual search for the *atta* led to freedom from suffering, happiness. Because it was all powerful over itself, the *atta* would always be able to be in a state of continual happiness, in whatever way it wished to define it: contentment, peace, bliss and so on. Thus if the soul said: 'Let there be happiness', that's the way it would be. There were many sects and each had their own definition and paths to liberation. It was within this atmosphere of spiritual searching and confusion that the Buddha clarified his teaching.

The Buddha's Understanding

After his awakening, the Buddha set out to teach. The first people he sought were his five former companions *samanas* or wandering ascetics. In the ensuing days, the Buddha explained what he had come to realise and he constantly asked them if they had ever heard him speak like this before. His was a revolutionary message: There is an end to suffering in all its forms, from the slightest to the greatest.

These explanations and discussions have come down to us formalised as the first two discourses. The first presents

the platform of his teaching, the Dhamma – the Four Noble Truths. It is, therefore, known as a Turning the Wheel

of the Dhamma (Start the Wheel of the Dhamma Rolling) *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. His friends were

impressed and one *Kondañña* had a deep insight, known as Stream Entry. He had broken through the delusion of his personality, *sakkaya-diṭṭhi*, as a permanent self.

The second talk, the Discourse on Not-self, completed the process of liberating all five companions. So this is the discourse we need to understand: it is the platform of this particular teaching about not-self.

THE DISCOURSE ON NOT-SELF: ANATTALAKKHANA SUTTA

To make the text easier to understand, I have translated it liberally. This link allows you to see how it is more literally rendered:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.059.than.html>

In our culture, a religious person tends to think of the human being as made up of three parts: body, mind and spirit or soul. Scientific materialists would not believe in a soul or spirit and would go so far as to say that mind and consciousness are ‘emergent properties’ arising out of the body which, again from a strictly physics point of view, is just sub-atomic energy fields.

The Buddha, keeping his teaching around dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), divided the human into five khandas or aggregates: the physical body; feelings and sensations of the senses; perceptions; volitional formations, our habits formed by our intentions; and consciousness. We shall see the purpose of this as we go through the different sections of the Discourse.

SECTION 1: IDENTITY AND OWNERSHIP:

The Body

Friends, the body is not-self. Were my body my self, then this body would not be experienced as suffering and unsatisfactory for I could say to the body: ‘Let my body be like this; let my body not be like this.’ But because the body is not-self, it will still suffer and remain unsatisfactory, for no one has such power over their body to say: ‘Let my body be like this; let my body not be like this.’

So the Buddha asks us to investigate and see for ourselves what power we have over the body. Now we can wave our arms about and walk here and there. When it comes to Olympic stature, it is amazing what we can do with the body.

But this is similar to a driver of a car. We can make it go slow or fast, turn left or right, but when the car coughs and grinds to a halt, then we know we are not fully in charge, even though it feels like that when we are driving.

So it is with the body. Consider: who heals the body when we cut ourselves? Our job is

to keep it antiseptic. The body does the rest. Can we stop the body from falling ill or dying? Do we have direct control over organs such as liver, stomach, intestines and so on? Generally speaking we don't have a clue what they are doing and certainly not how they are doing it. The body has a life of its own. When we sit down and really go through the body bit by bit and ask ourselves: 'Do I know what this is doing or how it is doing it. And what control do I have over it', we find that the sense of 'This body is me or this body is mine' is pretty deluded. We would be better off thinking we were renting the body.

Feelings

Friends, feelings are not-self. Were feelings my self, then feelings would not be experienced as suffering and unsatisfactory. For one could say: 'Let me experience this feeling; let me not experience that feeling.' But because feelings are not-self, we will still suffer from them and find them wanting, for no one has such power over feelings to say to it: 'Let me experience this feeling; let me not experience that feeling.'

The word 'feelings' here translates from the word vedana which includes all bodily sensations caused by the body, such as pain in the knees from the sitting posture. These also include the sensations coming from the other four senses – sight, hearing, smelling and tasting. And it refers also to all the feelings in the body caused by the mind, such as heat and restlessness when we are angry. Any sensations or feelings in the body are all vedana.

Let us consider. If you bang your head against an open cupboard, can you stop the pain by ordering it away? When you wake in the morning and feel anxious, can you stop the mild nausea by ordering it to leave? Can you command yourself never again to feel angry, distressed or anxious? Can you make any feeling of happiness continue indefinitely?

When we explore the power we have over painful sensations or feelings we again experience our limitations. We can only ignore or soothe them to a point, such as rubbing our bruised heads or

hugging ourselves in our distress.

Even when we want to cause ourselves unpleasant sensation such as sipping tea to test its heat, or unpleasant feelings such as watching a horror film, we do not directly cause feelings and we have no control over them when they emerge.

Perceptions

Friends, perceptions are not-self. Were perceptions my self, then perceptions would not be

experienced as suffering and unsatisfactory. For one could say: 'Let me experience this perception; let me not experience that perception.' But because perceptions are not-self, we will

still suffer from them and find them wanting, for no one has such power over perceptions to say

to them: 'Let me experience this perception; let me not experience that perception.'

Perception here translates the word *sañña*. When we experience anything, the mind makes a mental picture of it and

these pictures turn into concrete concepts. We then attach a word to them, shorthand for that concept. On first

tasting tea, the mind makes a copy and calls it tea. Next time, we recognise the taste. If we taste many types of tea,

our perception will grow finer and finer. We may even become professional tasters. In this way, a collection of

perceptions arrives at a concrete concept. This also happens at the more refined level of art and philosophy and so

we reach abstract concepts. All these perceptions and concepts lie dormant until circumstance brings them to mind.

Consider this. When you direct your eyes towards a flower, the eye as the primary sense base and the brain-mind

complex cause us to see a shape and the colour. Past experience tells us it is a red rose. Only when the mind offers

that definition do we know what we are looking at. We know when we are looking at a flower we have never seen

before because we have no former perception of it nor a concept-word for it. If we take this formula into everyday

experience – nature, people, places and so on – we shall find the same mechanism.

What power or control do we have over this process? Can we stop the perception of 'tea' when tasting tea? Can we

change the perception of a red rose when we are looking at it? When a person is mentioned whom we know, can we stop their image or name from arising? And if we have forgotten the face or name, can we make it come back into memory? You may understand, as you read, how the free market and monetarism work, but then have difficulty recalling the facts. Sañña here refers not to reasoning, but to the percepts and concepts that reasoning uses, much as a painter uses different hues to produce a picture. But again we find our power over the process of perceiving is limited. We cannot stop the eye seeing once it is open, though we can intentionally look at something. We cannot stop the ear from hearing, though we can deliberately listen to something. We can put what we want onto the tongue, but we rely on the taste buds for the taste. We can enjoy art, nature and relationships only in so far as our sense bases will allow us. Only in so far as our brains and minds can remember and process the data.

Habits

Friends, habits are not-self. Were habits my self, then habits would not be experienced as suffering and unsatisfying. For one could to say: 'Let me experience this habit; let me not experience that habit.' But because habits are not-self, we will still suffer from them and find them wanting, for no one has such power over habits to say to them: 'Let me experience this habit; let me not experience that habit.'

The word 'habit' here translates saṅkhâra, a difficult word to explain. It has been variously interpreted as volitional conditionings, volitional formations, mental fabrications, determinations, preparations, and even concoctions. For our purposes, saṅkhâra are the mental states or mental habits that we create through our intentions and will. It's the will (cetana) that is crucial here for it is that power that actualises our desires. Up until now with body, feelings and perceptions, we have seen we have very minimal control. But in this instance we do create our own mental states from all the joyous, happy ones to all the miserable and despairing ones. And it is here

we develop our habits of thinking and imagining. However, once we have developed a habit, we find again we have minimal control. If we have taught ourselves to get angry when the bus is late, whether we want to or not, when the bus comes late anger arises. If we have taught ourselves to get excited about and glued to the TV screen when Wimbledon is on, we find it painful when we can't gratify that desire. If we have taught ourselves to daydream a lot, we find the mind daydreaming even when we don't want it to. Habits cannot be annihilated at will. What causes these mental habits to control us is that they are attitudes that can be transferred onto other objects. We can get angry with anything that displeases us and excited about anything that pleases us. We can intellectualise or fantasise about anything. And so we swing from negative to positive depending on the situation. When we meditate, we find these mental habits arise, often without reason. If they are negative, we can choose to ignore them by distracting ourselves, react with anger or fear, or bear with them. We can, of course, practise vipassana on them. But we can't get rid of them simply by an act of will. We can determine as much as we may: 'I will not be angry ever again'; 'I will not allow myself to get so insanely excited about tennis'; 'I will stop daydreaming!' But it usually doesn't work and if it does, we will be suppressing them and we know that won't do us any good. Paradoxically, we don't want to get rid of habits. What we want is for them to help create happiness and support our endeavour to become liberated. The Buddha had habits. They were always beautiful and spontaneous to the situation for even he could not stop rejoicing when someone accepted his teaching and training. Indeed he says of those who attain nibbanic consciousness that they are 'happy and with it, contented'. Because they are beautiful, in harmony with the situation and especially spontaneous, they no longer cause suffering. Suffering arises because of clinging, attachment, expectation and so on.

Consciousness

Friends, consciousness is not-self. Were consciousness my self, then this consciousness would not be experienced as suffering or unsatisfactory, and one could say to consciousness: 'Let consciousness be like this; let consciousness not be like this.' But because consciousness is not-self, it is experienced as suffering and unsatisfactory, for no one has such power over cognition to say to it: 'Let consciousness be like this; let consciousness not be like this.' The word 'consciousness' here translates *viññāna*. These days consciousness has come under the scrutiny of science and its usage now as before is varied. You can access Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness> to find out the various usages of consciousness. The situation is made complicated by the various ways the Buddha uses *viññāna*.

The best way I can describe consciousness as an Aggregate is to ask you to imagine a multidimensional screen which can hold sensations and feelings; moods and emotions; thoughts and images. That screen is *viññāna*. And it is within this screen that habits manifest and activate. So what control have we over the processes of consciousness? It happens automatically if the information coming into the brain-mind complex is sufficiently strong enough. Sometimes because we are engrossed in something, we fail to hear the doorbell. Other times, we are not so concentrated and we become conscious that a door bell is ringing.

SECTION 2: IMPERMANENCE AND UNSATISFACTORINESS

In this section, the Buddha introduces the other two Characteristics of Existence: impermanence and unsatisfactoriness. Here it is set out as a dialogue.

Friends, what do you think? Is the body permanent or impermanent?

It's impermanent.

When the body is ever changing [and not under our control] does that satisfy us or not? It does not satisfy us.

So if the body is impermanent and unsatisfactory because it is subject to change, should we be saying, 'This body is mine. I am my body. My body is my Self, my Soul?'

No, we shouldn't.

The same questions are asked about the other four khanda or aggregates: feelings, perceptions, habits and consciousness. All are impermanent and unsatisfactory and therefore we cannot say of them: 'This is mine. I am this ... My ... is my Self, my Soul.'

The Buddha is not saying here that we cannot enjoy the pleasures and joys of life. He is instead arguing that they cannot be permanent and therefore from a Self or Soul's point of view, they are just not going to satisfy.

He then drives the point home.

Therefore, friends, considering any kind of body or indeed any material form, whether of the past, the future or as we experience it in the present, whether it is obvious or subtle, within oneself or outside oneself, near or far, we must correctly say of any of it, "This is not mine, this is not me, this is not myself.'

And the same formula is repeated for feeling, perception, habits and consciousness.

A WAY OF PRACTISING TO REALISE ANNATA

Vipassana – Insight Meditation

In our practice of vipassana we are attempting to realise these insights for ourselves. One advantage of the noting technique is that it directs us to what is being observed or felt. On the breath when we note 'rising', we could say 'there's rising'. If there's a pain, we could note, 'there's pain'. If there is anxiety, 'there's anxiety'. By doing this we create a separation between that which knows and what is known. There is a mental distance between the two.

When this becomes clear to us, the sense of being the knower becomes more acute. And this process of objectifying what we experience has been going on since birth.

Margaret Schönberger Mahler

Margaret Mahler (May 10, 1897 – October 2, 1985), a Hungarian physician became interested in psychiatry. She was one of the most important figures within psychoanalysis. Her main interest was in normal childhood development, but she spent much of her time with psychiatric children and discovered how they

arrived at a sense of self. Mahler developed the Separation-Individuation theory of child development. She observed three stages of development: The first, 'autistic' stage lasts from birth for about four weeks. It begins with the infant inhabiting its own world, unaware of anything outside its 'self'. There are no 'objects'. From the fifth week, it starts to objectify. Usually the first object is the mother since she is tending to its needs. This process of objectifying into a 'symbiotic' relationship lasts until the fifth month. Yet even so the other is as yet not entirely separate from the infant. There is a vague understanding that somehow someone soothes and feeds. The baby begins to smile, but it is still within an interpersonal relationship so it reacts to the mother's moods as if they were its own. Mahler says that at this stage the infant is categorising the pleasant from the unpleasant (in other words beginning to experience vedana, feeling, whereby we begin to experience the world as either pleasant or unpleasant.) As yet the baby is still 'pre-objectal'. The third and final stage to individuation is more complex and has a series of steps. From the fifth month to the tenth month, (these times are approximate), the 'differentiation' sub-phase, the self and object become more differentiated. One sign is that the infant becomes afraid of strangers. It is as though up until then the infant has been looking and now realises that 'others' out there are looking at it! Then the 'practising' sub-phase begins where the infant can crawl away and physically separate itself from mother. Mahler calls this 'hatching'. The infant still needs mother for 'emotional refuelling' and returns constantly. By the end of this phase, the infant is upright and actively exploring the world. Finally there is the 'rapprochement' sub-phase, between 15 and 18-30 months and even to two and half years, the child now begins to speak to others and significant others, like father, appear. There is a great self-assertion (the terrible twos for example) and slowly the child establishes its 'self' as himself or herself. In all it is not until the age of three that the child has objectified the outer world from itself and is able to say

confidently, 'I am a girl.', 'I am a boy'.

Objectifying the Inner World

The process of 'awakening' is the slow realisation that we are not 'the world'. Just as the infant begins to separate from the outer world to discover itself as a unique individual, the meditator is taking this process into the inner world.

We discover that we have been internally 'autistic'. We have believed ourselves to 'be' this psychophysical organism.

We then begin to differentiate between the observer, the feeler, the experiencer and what is being observed, felt and experienced, that is the knower from the known.

In terms of the khanda, the five aggregates, the body with its movements is seen as an object. We can watch our hands washing pots. Feelings derived from emotions and sensations in the body are clearly separate from the experiencing of them, just as the carpet felt is separate from the foot feeling it. At a more subtle level, when the

eyes are closed, perceptions are seen as images or cognised as concepts arising in the mind. Yes even thoughts can be perceived as objects. And at the most subtle level the screen upon which all this is happening can be experienced as an object – the screen of consciousness*.

Through this process of objectifying the interior life, the knower individuates. Yet a strong sense of a self persists: 'I am the knower.'

Beyond the Knower

So now we come to the final barrier to realising what the Buddha refers to as the 'not-born, not-created, not-subject to conditions' and so on. The feel of presence, what I earlier referred to as the 'soul', is the mirror image of the 'knowing' in the screen of consciousness.

When we see our reflection in a mirror we think this is how our face looks. If we take another mirror to view the first reflection and look into that, then we see how our face really looks like. (If you haven't done this you may be in for a shock ... or surprise.)

Similarly, we believe 'self-awareness', awareness-of-me, is what we are. However, in the same way that we have come to realise that whatever we experience as an object, whatever we are aware of, cannot be 'me', so we can't 'be' the 'self' in the self-awareness! So now we must investigate this 'feeling of presence', self-awareness.. By making this feeling of a self the object of our vipassana, that is, just to sit in its presence with curiosity – and this is best done when tranquillity of body, heart and mind are established – the realisation, by direct experience, of the Nibbana dhatu, the principle or element of Nibbana is available. To know the Nibbana dhatu is also to know the Tathagata dhatu, the Buddha principle or element. (Southern Buddhism tries to avoid 'personalising' the experience. Northern Buddhism feels at ease referring to this as Buddha Nature/Mind.) That's the why Buddha says in the Dhammapada No.372: those who are steady in attention and insightful are in the presence of Nibbana.

Spiritual Purpose of Human Life

Now we come to know the purpose of being here as humans. This is the realm of existence the Buddha points to as the best for awakening. It has the inherent pain of the body and the unsatisfactory nature of all the pleasures and joys of life – and the intuitive awareness to know it. It is the dukkha, the unsatisfactoriness of the world that drives us to seek the end of dukkha. All we ever wanted was to be happy. All we are doing is seeking it in the wrong place. Yet even the Buddha continued to suffer physical pain and pleasant sensations; sorrowful occasions arose and so did joyful ones. A different relationship to this world was established, however. Seeking undiluted and ever present happiness in the sensual world, both inner and outer, was over, for the Buddha was grounded in the inner unchanging happiness of Nibbana.

CONCLUSION

We know through our practice that the outer and inner worlds become more bearable when burdensome and more enjoyable when delightful. But can we have some idea of what Nibbanic happiness might be like?

When we have clearly established the knower within ourselves, when the body is still, the heart calmed and mind silent, after we have been in that state of the equanimous observer, feeler, experiencer, we can ask ourselves what were the inner factors of the knower. When we recognise the inner qualities of the one who knows, we will know why all spirituality is drawn to silence.

Vipassanā as taught by the Mahāsī Sayādaw of Burma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 11 min read

This essay explores the transformative vipassanā meditation system developed by the Mahāsī Sayādaw (U Sobhana Mahāthera, 1904-1982), one of the most influential Buddhist teachers of the 20th century who revolutionized meditation practice by making it accessible to lay practitioners. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the three key characteristics of the Mahāsī method: observing breath sensations at the abdomen rather than the nostrils, the systematic noting technique that guides practitioners beyond conceptual thinking, and the practice of deliberately slowing down all activities to sharpen awareness.

Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), the essay explains how the Mahāsī approach emphasizes the direct path of vipassanā (ekayana magga) to develop momentary concentration (khaṇika samādhi) that supports Right Awareness (sammā sati) and wisdom (paññā). The noting practice serves as a skillful means to halt mental proliferation (papañca) and enable direct perception of the Three Characteristics of Existence—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā)—leading ultimately to the Progressive Stages of Insight (vipassanā ñāṇa) and liberation.

This comprehensive overview offers both theoretical understanding and practical guidance, making it valuable for newcomers seeking to understand this influential meditation tradition and experienced practitioners wanting to deepen their comprehension of the Mahāsī system's psychological and spiritual dimensions.

Vipassana as taught by the Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma

The Mahasi Sayadaw

Its been over two and half thousand years now since the Buddha first expounded the teachings. As time passes, the teaching becomes dulled. But there are always reformation

movements throughout the history of Buddhism, some large and some small which revitalise the teachings, the Dhamma. And the Mahasi Sayadaw must be accredited as one of the key teachers in revitalising the practice of vipassana in Theravada Buddhist countries. ♦

U. Sobhana Mahathera was born in 1904 in Upper Burma. So, this year marks the centenary

of his birth. He joined the order as a mature boy and went on to complete the tradition-

al

studies with distinction. He finally returned to his home town, Seikhum, where he became

the abbot of the Monastery, known the Mahasi, The Big Drum. In Burma/Myanmar, monks

are often referred to by the place name where they were born or dwell in, hence he became

known as the Mahasi Sayadaw.

It was after the Second World War that some high-ranking people, including the then prime

minister, U Nu, went looking for a teacher to start a meditation centre in Rangoon/Yangon.

The centre was not to be just a monastery, but a place where lay people would be able to

practise vipassana. This, it seems, was a little revolution since up until then it was generally

presumed that only monastics could gain anything from meditation. This has indeed become

special quality of a Mahasi centre in that there are lay teachers and lay practitioners and

many of the centres are within the city or town boundaries easily accessible to lay people.

It was at this centre, in 1947 situated just on the boundary of Yangon that the Mahasi Sayadaw, U Sobhana Thera, began to teach a technique which he had developed through

his own renowned teacher, U Narada, known as the Mingun Jetawun Sayadaw in Upper Myanmar. It has three main characteristics observing the breath at the abdomen, noting

and going very slow.

Observing the Breath at the Abdomen

We observe the breath, or rather the sensations caused by breathing, in order to bring a moment to moment concentration. It calms the heart-mind because it is a neutral object.

There are various places where people feel these sensations more acutely. Some feel them

at the nostrils or upper lip, others the rising and falling of the chest and still others in the

abdomen. All these places are valid in terms of vipassana mediation. The Mahasi, however,

favoured the abdomen.

The first reason is that it is related to slow walking. Just as we observe and experience the foot rising and falling, so we experience the abdomen rising and falling. This means that for the better part of the day, a meditator is aware of the characteristic of transience

in a very obvious way. Transience or impermanence (anicca) is one of the ways in which

the Buddha asks us to investigate ourselves. Is there anything we experience which is not

impermanent? The other two avenues of investigation are unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) and

not-self (anatta). It is the insights into these Three Characteristics of Existence that lead to

liberation from all suffering.

The second reason for favouring the abdomen is that when the attention is placed on the

breath at the nostrils, there is a tendency by way of concentration to lose contact with the body. That is why observing the breath at the nostrils is a popular and effective way of achieving those higher states of concentration known as the absorptions, jhana. Here,

there is a danger. For when concentration becomes locked into one pointedness on a single

object, the effect is to suppress everything else and this stops the process of purifying the

heart, our emotional life. This is not to say that concentration practice cannot go hand in

hand with vipassana. Indeed, that is well supported in the discourses. Rather, the Mahasi

espoused the direct path of vipassana only (ekayano maggo) as it is taught in the Discourse

on How to Establish Mindfulness (satipatthanasutta MN 10). Nor does this mean that observing the breath at the nostrils is not a valid technique in vipassana meditation. Indeed,

although the Mahasi preferred the abdomen as a place of primary observation, he did not

ban anyone from observing sensations at the nostrils.

However, when we do centre on the abdomen or the chest (when the breath is shallow), we remain very much in contact with body. This allows any turbulence in the body

caused

by our states of mind to manifest and burn off. This is the psychotherapeutic effect of vipassana. For our emotions, moods and mental states express themselves through the body often as blocks, aches and pains and so on and sometimes as raw emotion. All this mental turbulence has to be allowed to express itself within consciousness and it all has to be born patiently.

Noting

The second technique, which is specific to the Mahasi Method, is noting. Paradoxically this is a technique to take a meditator beyond thinking. Its not an end in itself. The Mahasi was a highly respected scholar. As a young man he had passed Dhammacariya (Teacher of the Dhamma) examination with distinction. At the Sixth Buddhist Council in 1945, when all the texts were reviewed and for the first time all the commentarial literature was edited, the Mahasi Sayadaw was given the task of Pucchaka (Questioner) and Osana (Final Editor) of the texts. Although a scholar, he was not one to confuse intellectual understanding with true experiential insight. Indeed he put that intellect to the service of the Dhamma. He wrote many books on Dhamma and the best introduction to his system still remains his opening talk to beginners satipatthana vipassana: Discourse on the Basic Practice of the Application of Mindfulness. A more detailed description will be found in his book: Practical Insight Meditation.

According to the Buddhas teaching, there are two stages of concentrated thought before full concentration is established. ♦ The first is a simple noting or naming of the object. This simple labeling, naming, noting whereby the attention is pointed at the object is known as vitakka and is likened to a bee flying towards a flower. It is a word which encapsulates the whole experience. In a child this is very obvious and simplistic. When a two year old is beginning to speak theyll rejoice at being able to name an object. Car! Car! For that mind

at its level of language the word car simply points at the object. There's not much thought around it since language itself, which allows us to think about an object, is not developed enough for this to happen. For us, the word car conjures up a host of memories and desires. This is thinking about an object. This mentation is known as, proliferation (papanca), and the purpose of thinking and daydream is to keep us off the presenting object and distract the mind. ♦ The Buddha likened this to a monkey, jumping from branch to branch. This is exactly what we have to bring to a stop. Shrinking thought down to a single word is the preliminary effort. But at this stage the meditator is forever having to pull the attention out of wandering and into observing. Indeed this is what the training through a technique is all about - reconditioning consciousness to be present, to be attentive to what's happening now. To be effective, this noting has to be done with precise effort. It has to be an acknowledgement of what the body, heart or mind are doing. For instance, when one wakes from a fantasy, there is the first note and then there is a second note and consequent noting, which is an acknowledgement of what is obsessing the mind. In the same way, if a sensation or feeling arises in the body, the first note is a recognition and the second note and all consequent notes are acknowledgements. This is what is really happening now. But although there is careful noting, the attention is always placed not on the word, but on the experience - the feeling of a sensation, the feeling of an emotion. (Knowing of a thought or image is always an , of course.). It is as though the intuitive intelligence sees through the word and experiences the presenting object directly. In this way the intellectual faculty is

brought into the service of that intuitive intelligence, rather than the intuitive intelligence being fogged by conceptual thinking.

Now thought itself can be split into two categories conceptual and image making. At the breath, for instance, as we note, there will be a concept of rising and falling and also an image of the abdomen in the mind. We do not try to destroy them or in any way obliterate them. We just keep pointing the attention at the feeling of movement, the sensations. This attention, as it grows in strength, will eventually take all the energy out of thinking to the point where there is just the noting word. This is now the second stage of development. The meditator is still noting, but the attention instead of wanting to wander off, becomes stuck as it were on the object. This is likened to a bee landing on and sucking on a flower. This is the second stage of developing right concentration and is called vicara. If the meditator now continues to note, placing the attention more and more on the object, really feeling those sensations, really experiencing them as they arise and pass away, all the energy will be drawn out of the thinking mind. It will stop.

Thinking is always about something. It is an attempt to categorise. What we experience is seen in the light of past experience. What we have experienced in the past is filtered through the way we look at things, our dispositions (sankhara). That is why thought will not allow us to see things anew. If we really want to experience things as they really are, then all conceptual thinking about those things must come to an end. When thinking stops, we must therefore be right there with what is happening. And it is at that point that true vipassana consciousness, samma sati, right awareness, arises and our intuitive intelligence, panna, free of the distortion of thought and image, can finally begin to understand and see the way things really are (nanadassana-yatha-bhutam).

So we don't have to worry about when to stop the noting. It will just stop once we have

arrived at a high enough level of awareness and concentration. Such moments of pure vipassana are usually of very short duration, but they have great potential for insight. These moments are known as khanika samadhi, momentary concentration which lengthen

into a moment-to-moment concentrated awareness. This sort of concentration does not depend on a single object as does absorption concentration (arambana samadhi). It takes

anything that arises within the mind as its object, but for the purpose of seeing the Three

Characteristics of Existence (lakkhana samadhi). In other words, the concentration in vipassana is only there to support awareness (sati) and that intuitive intelligence (panna).

It is that steady gaze and exploration of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self that

leads to liberation.

For some meditators noting comes with difficulties. For instance, the word is very loud and

dominates the meditation. This is simply showing the meditator how blocked they are in

conceptual thinking. By patiently pointing the attention at feelings, that intelligence will extricate itself from the conceptual mind. This is often quite a discovery for such meditators

that there is another way of experiencing the world. Another is the difficulty of finding the

right word. One starts to look for a word as a poet might. But the simplest word is enough

and if one does not arise, a general word, such as , will do.

This noting, of course, is not just limited to the sitting posture. Indeed, it has to become continuous from the moment we wake to the moment we fall asleep. The Mahasi was fond of saying, the continuity of awareness is the secret of success. Therefore, it becomes

important to note the most actions of the day, such as opening a door. Indeed, we have to

abandon all hierarchy, thinking that sitting is more important than walking which is more

important than eating and so on.

However, it is not only sensations, emotions, wandering mind and actions that have to be

noted, but also that category of thought that we experience as intentions. An intention

is

thought laced with desire and not all desires are unskilful. In fact, we are trying to empower

those intentions that are skilful such as the desire to meditate. The reason we note intention

before we do anything is because all actions of body, speech and thought have as their

instigator an intention. To note an intention gives us the time to acknowledge it as either

wholesome or unwholesome. We can then let go of those intentions we discern will lead us

to dissatisfaction and empower those that will lead is to contentment.

This is the understanding of kamma. And it is the will (cetana) that the Buddha calls kamma. Will is that power that takes something out of potential into the actual. We have

to empower an intention to realise it. If we take a standing position and note our intention

to walk, we can do so for a long time. Then suddenly the foot moves. The power that has

translated that intention into an action is will and in so doing has committed an act of kamma. ♦ These actions when repeated create our habits and a compendium of habits is but our personality. It is this personality that is driving us to our destiny. So noting intentions becomes an essential part of the progress towards liberation.

Noting then is a technique, a contrivance, whereby we can begin to train the attention to

remain still on the presenting object and more importantly trick the intellect into coming

to a full-stop. For it is all that conceptual thinking that is distorting the way sees. It knows

only by way of categories, memory and concepts. By halting that process of conceiving and

keeping perception in its simplest form at the point of contact, this intuitive intelligence sees everything again as a child. But not with a child's understanding. Now that intelligence

is primed to observe the Three Characteristics and that is why it liberates itself from the delusion of a mistaken ♦♦ identity and possession of the psychophysical organism.

This

body, this heart, this mind is not me, not mine and do not in themselves constitute a

self.

Going Slow

Going slow, doing things slowly, refers to all those areas of activity the Buddha talks of in the Discourse on How to Establish Mindfulness in the section on doing things mindfully

(sampajana-kari hoti), whether looking, dressing, toiletry, eating and so on. ♦ When we perform these actions very slowly and deliberately, it sharpens our attentiveness and makes

easier to perceive. This is much the same as slowing a film down. The more you slow a film

down the more you can see. The flick of a frog's tongue as it catches a fly. Usually we simply

do not see it. But with this film technique, we can discern the whole process. Indeed, you

can see the process frame by frame. In the same way, the more we slow down movement,

the more easily do we perceive how the body, heart and mind inter-react.

Progress of Insight

Such is the power of this technique that it is possible to guide a meditator through the classic stages of the Insight Knowledges (vipassana nana). These are the insights that lead to a direct experience of nibbana, the first time known as Stream-entry (sotapanna).

This whole process is repeated four times to attain the Path and Fruit of the Once-returned

(sakadagami), the None-returned (anagami) and Arahant, the enlightened being. The Mahasi

explains all this in clear detail in his book, *The Progress of Insight*.

The Mahasi went on to complete tours in Southeast Asia, USA and Europe. In Britain, he came to lead courses at the Oakenhalt centre near Oxford, owned by the Burmese Saw family. After him came his chief disciples, Sayadaw U Janaka and Sayadaw U Pandita.

Unfortunately, the Saw family had to sell Oakenhalt on the sad passing of Mr. Saw and the

impetus faded. However, now there are cities in London and Manchester where Mahasi monks

dwell and teach this system. It is hoped that the Satipanya Trust will raise enough interest

to establish a Mahasi meditation centre and carry on the work of one of the most eminent

vipassana teachers of the last century, the Mahasi Sayadaw.

Is Armed Intervention Ever Justified?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 22 min read

This thoughtful essay explores one of Buddhism's most challenging ethical questions: whether armed intervention can ever be morally justified. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the crucial distinction between pacifism (an absolute ideological position) and non-violence (a skillful attitude), drawing on the Buddha's warnings in the Kālāma Sutta against rigid adherence to 'isms' and views. The essay distinguishes between force (energy used to correct wrongdoing) and violence (the same energy tainted with anger and revenge), applying this distinction from personal meditation practice through to international conflicts.

Referencing canonical incidents including the Buddha's intervention in disputes between the Sākya and Koliya clans, and his encounter with King Viḍūḍabha, Bhante explores how even the Buddha faced limitations in preventing violence. The essay examines Christian 'just war' theory through a Buddhist lens, considering proportionality, legitimate authority, and protection of non-combatants. A particularly profound section contrasts conventional morality (based on self-defense) with 'supramorality' (the not-self perspective of the Arahat), exploring whether enlightened beings might choose sacrifice to absorb violence from the world.

The essay concludes with Bhante's personal reflection on being 'caught between two ethics' - the renunciate path that absorbs violence through non-resistance, and the engaged path that uses compassionate force to protect others. This nuanced exploration offers no easy answers but provides a framework for approaching these difficult questions with wisdom rather than rigid ideology.

Is Armed Intervention Ever Justified?

Pacifism, Non-violence and the Just War.

There are times when we are faced with acts of international violence, which force us to

contemplate our attitude to war. In my youth it was the Kennedy/Khrushchev confrontation

over Cuba. Today it is the Twin Towers of New York and its aftermath. There have been many articles written since from many points of view in the Buddhist press. Here, I would

like to draw on that reading and make the following distinctions: between pacifism and non-

violence; between force and violence; and between two levels of consciousness, the one

of

the moral self and the one of the 'supramoral' not-self.

Pacifism vs. Non-Violence

Pacifism is an ideology. It has a creed. A creed binds itself around a central statement which

is believed to be true no matter what the circumstance. It is a universal statement. It says

there is no such thing as a Just War.

The Buddha lived in a simpler philosophical age. There were no great socio-economic ideologies and systems theories. There was a momentous shift occurring in society away

from the smaller pastoral, oligarchic tribes towards larger agricultural, monarchical societies whose kings came to subjugate local peoples. Indeed, the Buddha's own family were 'vassals' to Pasenadi, King of Kosala. But it seems to have been driven by better farming techniques and the growth of trade, not by well-worked ideologies such as Communism. Even so, the discourses concerning the All-Righteous, Dhamma Wheel Turning Monarch (the Bodhisatta's 'alter ego'?) show that a lot of thought went into what

constituted 'Right Monarchy'.

In the Nipta Sutta, in the chapter on Eights, there are a number of discourses where the Buddha warns against debates between 'isms'. The Buddha constantly asks his followers not

to get caught up in useless exercises, 'a thicket of views', where everyone holds on to their

opinion, their 'ism'. The purpose is simply to defeat the other as if defeat of another 'ism'

meant that one's own was vindicated! In the Culaviyuha Sutta, (880) the Buddha makes this observation. 'If one who does not tolerate another's view is a fool, a dolt and stupid, then all of them are fools without understanding, because all of them abide by their own

views alone.'

The Kma Sutta reinforces this message. The Kmas were confused by all the often-times conflicting views of various teachers and each one's insistence that theirs was the Way. But the Buddha asked them not to believe anything because it was a 'revelation, tradi-

tion, report, product of mere reasoning, true from a particular position, superficial assessment of

the facts, conformed with preconceived notions, authoritative or because of the prestige of

the teacher.'

For to hold on to a point of view is to blinker oneself to other perspectives. In this way an 'ism' focuses only on those parts that fit the theory, thereby blinding one to what is actually happening. An 'ism' will rationalise everything to fit the theory. Suppose, for instance, we make not to kill any living being an absolute law. What does Buddha Dhamma

say to the Inuit? Eat snow? And what does Buddha Dhamma say to people suffering from

diseases caused by tiny creatures - viruses, bacteria and worms? Suffer gladly?

So if by Pacifism is meant no use of force, no war, in any circumstance whatsoever, we fall

into the trap of an 'ism'. Rather than intellectual positions, perhaps we are on safer ground

if we talk more of attitudes, of dispositions. In the Punishment Section of the Dhammapada

we find not rationalisations but a call for empathy.

All tremble at the rod.

All fear death.

Comparing others with oneself,

One should neither strike nor cause to strike. (Dhp 129)

Although the Buddha offers these sentiments, nowhere in the scriptures does he directly

ask the authorities to stop all corporal punishments. As we shall see later on, even though he tries to stop a king from attacking his people, he does not ask his people not to

defend themselves. And there is no rule in the Vinaya forbidding a monk or nun to defend

themselves from a physical attack. The Shaolin monks translated this in late Buddhist history in a pro-active way.

Is there a way then that non-violence could mean other than an outright ban on all war?

This becomes clearer when we make a distinction between violence and force, war and armed intervention. Force is the energy used to put right what is wrong. Violence is the same energy laced with anger, revenge, spite and so on.

Violence vs. Force inwardly

Let us begin where the Buddha himself began his own investigations: inwardly. Let us see if

our meditation draws this distinction between force and violence and let us see what

might

be meant by non-violence as an attitude towards ourselves.

Whenever something negative arises in our hearts or minds, we indulge it if it is pleasing or

we suppress it if painful. Staying, for the purpose of this essay, with those emotions around

anger, revenge and hatred, there's nothing more delectable to the self than to get one over

another or, if beaten, to avenge oneself! And if it can only be done in the virtual reality of

fantasy, well that is better than nothing! But what we discover is that our inner life becomes

more and more inflamed and it's only a matter of time before we act out these fantasies in

our daily life and engulf everyone around us in the same blaze.

If, on the other hand, we decide to suppress them, perhaps by practising loving-kindness

as a sort of palliative balm, we find the hatred and anger is only dampened. Should the hot

winds of anger fan some new irritation, a great roar ensues. Such outbursts of rage are warning signs that we are not actually dealing with that anger or hatred.

The first sign is a clear indulgence in anger. The result is more anger and hatred since indulgence is the technique we use to develop a conditioning. The second is a more subtle

case of the first. For whereas the first believes that the way to rid ourselves of anger and

hatred is to annihilate the object, the second believes it can be done by 'annihilating' ♦the

anger and hatred inwardly. The technique here is to suppress them even with something

beautiful such as metta, as if laying a bed of flowers over toxic waste gets rid of it! These

are both acts of violence, violence towards ourselves.

What we discover through the teachings of the Buddha and the practice of vipassana is that

there is a third position we can take, one that bypasses these two. We sit and bear it. By allowing the flames to roar within us, we allow that conditioning to burn itself out. But we

have to bear the pain of it! That is what is so difficult. We have to suffer the con-

sequences

of our own conditioning.

And we have to use force! We have to 'force' ourselves to sit and bear it! To bear it patiently and gladly. This is Right Effort. Emotions lose their hold over us by observing and

experiencing them as mental phenomena. We can 'let them go'. By insisting we endure them rather than fighting against them, we have followed the path of non-violence. This is

the psychological underpinning of the attitude of non-violence within society.

Again, in ordinary daily life, the Buddha asks us to 'restrain the senses' (indriya samvara).

This is force, not violence. We are not to beat ourselves, but to be firm in putting ourselves

out of the way of enticements that foster our defilements. We all have a reservoir of unresolved anger and hatred which loves to indulge itself. Therefore, we need to be careful

even when watching scenes of violence on TV or film. This restraint, this turning away from

what is pleasurable, but unwholesome, demands strong resolution. One has to be forceful

with oneself, but it becomes violence if it is done with self-hatred or self-anger.

The distinction between being firm with oneself and treating oneself violently is crucial.

It is often a difficult distinction to make because restraining the senses can feel very uncomfortable, and sometimes downright awful. Yet, the result after the struggle will be

freedom from that particular compulsion. Unfortunately indulging anger and hatred does

feel like a release. People like to use the word 'express', but this can be very delusory. If over a period of time 'expressing anger and hatred as a form of catharsis' seems to have had little effect on one's behaviour, or has made it worse, then such 'expression' needs to

be investigated. And sure enough, it will be found to be none other than acts of indulgence,

that is, acts of violence.

Violence vs. Force in Interpersonal Relations

When it comes to the rearing of children, parents must often use force to be obeyed, yet it can so easily slip into violence. But if this distinction is not clear, then a parent may

be confused as to how far they can go to demand obedience. It demands clarity on the parent's part as to what is allowable and then for them to stand their ground. Whether it's the age of the terrible twos, disobedient child, or a fractious teenager, when reasoning and cajoling have failed, it may be that no treat, no pocket money or curfew respectively is the appropriate action. If this is done in a temper, then the penalty will be inappropriate. There will be that added force of anger. The demand for obedience will be too rough, the fine too great, the curfew too long.

When it comes to the unacceptable behaviour of adults, the law demands that force be used. And that is what we expect of the police. After all, it is a Police Force! We do not expect them to be violent. We are very sensitive to police brutality. We know when the police are using protective force and not punitive action in public demonstrations. We are rightly disgusted if the police use an incident to beat up an individual. When such scenes are caught on video, it horrifies us. But when we see the police behaving rationally, using force to restrain someone, even to the point of having to kill them, then we are grateful for that protection. We admire their bravery.

There is a telling incident in the Vinaya Pitaka, the monastic rules. On one occasion at a recital of the Patimokkha, the Buddha did not give the signal to begin. After a long wait, Mogallna asked him why. The Buddha said there was someone in the gathering who was not pure and should not be there. Mogallna called upon that person three times to leave the assembly but there was no response. Because of his power to read minds, Mogallna knew who it was. He went to him, took him by the arm and 'showed him the door'. Mogallna, as an Arahant, would be unable to react with anger. As far as he was concerned some direct action was needed for the meeting to proceed. Such is the use of force.

In the wider society, we see that individuals are by law allowed to defend themselves against physical attack. The law allows a right to self-defence. But even then it has to be appropriate. Should a person be attacked and then in defence kill the attacker, he may

very

well find himself going to jail! Any hint of revenge and that person is guilty of murder!

It all

comes down to attitude. There is a difference between assertion and aggression.

In China during the periodic persecution of Buddhists, Shaolin monks began to defend themselves. They had developed the art of kung-fu in which, true to Buddhist principles, the

aim was not to do violence to the attackers but to turn their violence back on to themselves.

That does not preclude stopping the attacker in his tracks, but the intention was purely self-

defence.

War vs. Armed Intervention

So finally we come to war.

War is a very loaded word. It cannot really be used in any neutral sense, but always carries with it the horrors of armed conflict. Westerners, in general, and Europeans in particular, have had such a history of bloody conflicts that there is a sizeable number of the

population for whom any hint of war is anathema. They see only the killing of innocents and

destruction. If we use the term 'armed intervention' this helps to bring a little balance back

into the argument.

What are the reasons to justify war? This was a great debate in the late Christian Roman

Empire and Medieval Ages. These are the reasons given by St. Thomas Aquinas for a 'just

war' (jus ad bellum).

First, war could only be undertaken by a legitimate authority. That's a bit dodgy in these

post-modern days. Is the war waged by Basque separatists illegitimate because they are a minority in the country of Spain or legitimate if they have the support of majority of Basques in their fight for independence? In general, most would agree that a common vote within a given community or nation state, so long as the decision is made by the due

process of open democracy, would constitute legitimate authorisation.

Secondly, it must be a just cause. Well, here is another debate. Who is to decide that?

Both

sides of a war would necessarily believe their cause to be just. It is important to realise that

people will only fight if they believe they have good cause. These days the only just cause

most people will agree to is a response to aggression, hence the Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan. This, of course, is compared with the right of self-defence.

However, whereas in individual cases it can be argued that the would-be murderer has forfeited his right to life, in the case of a country, do all civilians forfeit their right to life if

the rules take them into war when they themselves feel strongly against it? What about conscientious objectors?

And is it right to kill other human beings in order to defend one's borders, one's culture and

civilisation? What price human life?

But then again, is life worth living without liberty? This is something Westerners take for

granted, but a yearned-for aspiration in countries which are ruled by dictatorships such as

Myanmar, where people are ready to die for this freedom, as Westerners once were.

Thirdly, it must be the last resort. Although definitely correct, this is a problem if a nation

has such superiority of arms that it does not have to explore all the channels of diplomacy.

Just as during the period of European empires, the gunboat was an easy resort, why wait

for the last resort? Hence the actions of America and Britain in Iraq - here perhaps not only an abuse of power but a case of arrogance arising out of a sense of superior moral righteousness.

Fourthly, there must be a formal declaration of war. This seems to be nice protocol, but easily dispensed with to get the upper hand as the Japanese at Pearl Harbour. And indeed Al

Qaeda in New York.

And finally, there needs to be reasonable hope of success. Foolish not to believe that!

When it comes to the right way to conduct a Just War (*jus in bello*), there are two main guidelines.

Firstly, the means ought to be proportional. That is, that the war itself should not be a greater evil than the evil it is supposed to be fighting! This is a difficult one to decide because if the intention is to create better conditions, then it might be argued that no

matter how bad the war is, in the long run it will create the conditions for a better situation.

If World War One still contained the seeds of future conflict after the terrible slaughter, then

it could be argued that it was a bad war. If World War Two succeeded in putting an end to

European internecine aggression then it might be argued that the slaughter was the last blood-letting necessary for a Pax Europa and the European Union and so a just war.

Secondly, it is not allowable to kill innocents. This refers to non-combatant civilians. This

is very much in line with today's thinking. We deplore 'collateral damage'. But then, how

can you fight a modern war without such unwanted casualties? The point perhaps is that

civilians are not targeted as such. This would mean a proper warning is to be given should

installations such as electricity generation plants and government propaganda offices be

targets.

Now although this refers to non-combatants, it may also be argued to refer to armed personnel who do not support the war, for they in a sense have been 'made to fight'.

They

must follow orders whether they want to or not, for if they do not they will be executed for

mutiny.

Others will argue, of course, that military personnel forfeit their right to freedom of choice

in these matters; otherwise, the army would be full of factions. Perhaps it is more the responsibility of those joining the armed forces to consider this carefully before joining.

What country would want soldiers who say they will fight only when they personally think it

correct to do so, no matter what the common will?

So, from a Buddha Dhamma point of view, could there be a Just War? There were two occasions in which the Buddha was directly involved in conflict. The first concerns a dispute

that arose between his own people, the Sakka and the people of the neighbouring clan, the

Koliya. It was an argument about the rights to the water of a river that divided their two

counties and it was nearing war. There is a rather ironic part of the tale in which the Buddha asks the different strata of society what the quarrel is about and none really knows until he gets down to the farmers. These days it might be the other way round! Anyway, he asked the two sides to come together and simply asked them what was more precious, the water in the river or the blood in their veins. They came to their senses and war was averted. And it does raise the question: what cost human life? Is there anything worth dying for? The second occasion was when King Viddhudabba, the overlord of the Kosala and the Sakka people, learned that the woman the Sakka had given him to be his bride had come from a low caste. It seems the Sakka were too proud to intermarry with this king's caste. The insult was too great to bear and the king decided to destroy the Sakka. On two occasions the Buddha stood before the king's army and argued against vengeance. What he actually said is not recorded. I am sure the Buddha would have agreed with the Chinese proverb which warns that whoever seeks vengeance should prepare two graves. However, when the king set out a third time, the Buddha said the karma was too great. He did not approach them. He did not stand before them. The army went on to destroy his people. This is a salutary lesson for all who work in a peace process. Even the Buddha has limitations. There is only so much one individual can do. One of the great dangers is the way the rational mind can bend around obstacles to support war. We know now how much the Zen roshis supported the Japanese government before and during the Second World War. But we should not be surprised. Philosophers when called upon will support their country. In the First World War, the German philosophers such as Max Scheler depicted the war as a battle between the profound German culture and the

shallow Anglo-French culture. On the side of the allies, Bergman wrote about the battle between life force and matter. Guess who 'matter' were? A more glaring case is that of Martin Heidegger who was a member of the Nazi Party, nor did he later express any regret for the Nazi crimes. So, returning to the Kma Sutta in which the Buddha warns us to beware of rationalisation masquerading as wisdom, we need to be suspicious of the philosopher in us. But what can one do against an immoral enemy for whom the ends justify the means, who

argues that weapons of mass destruction are legitimate since they serve the ends? Think of a Stalin, a Hitler, a Pol Pot, Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, or indeed any fundamentalist terrorist?

However, was the dropping of atom bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima or the fire bombing of Dresden justifiable? Both were ordered on the grounds of saving allied troops and to bring the war to a speedy end, yet both had horrific consequences for the civilian population. Surely it is also immoral when even those who act out of self-defence argue that their correct moral reasons permit the use of any means to achieve their ends.

Morality vs. Supramorality.

So far the arguments put forth are from a position of a 'self'. Can we distinguish a different

morality for one who has gone beyond the self, what I have termed 'supramorality'. If there

is a difference of perspective, should we always be acting from the view of supramorality in

a world where such a view is hardly ever found? Indeed might it cause more suffering?

On the one hand, we have someone who has a self. So long as there is a self there will be

someone to defend. There will be possessions, a country to own. There will be borders, cultures, a way of life to defend. And here we have the definitions of a Just War and the Geneva Convention to guide us.

On the other hand, we have the not-self attitude of the Arahant. Nothing to defend. Nothing

to own. Hence no resistance. That seems too easy. It takes the humanity out of the

Enlightened Being. It feels too unfeeling, lacking empathy, even callous. Detachment as cold and uncaring. But detachment means that the attitudes of love and compassion are not dependent on the object, be it kith and kin, friends or love of one's country. In this sense it is universal.

Supposing we were to see human beings as vortices of energy, some loving and kind, others ferocious and destructive. From a higher level of understanding, is it not that all that is happening is that the forces of rising and falling, birth and death, are being played out; that the game is governed by consciousnesses that are unwholesome or wholesome, deluded or wise? Is it possible for someone to see himself or herself as the means by which turbulent energy is calmed; that their deaths are the means by which violence is drawn out of the universe? What happens if a bull should charge a mound of soft sand? People who were and are ready to follow that path - Jesus Christ, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Su Kyi, the people who joined Arafat in the siege of his compound in Ramala - such people are not armchair pacifists. If they were not killed, they definitely had to undergo hardship. They have the courage to undergo physical suffering, even death. Yet paradoxically, suffering arising from compassion is borne gladly and brings joy to the heart.

When we look at the level of consciousness of our politicians and indeed the general populace, it may be too much to ask of them to behave in a sacrificial way. But we can demand that they do not follow a route of violence. And what of ourselves who are still part of the Great Unenlightened Masses? We need to remember the importance of intention and that whatever action we do or support of that we must bear the fruit. So, are there then two paths we can follow? The one, based on a self, a self to defend, allows us self-defence and use of force but not violence. The other, based on not-self, allows the use of force to put right what is wrong, but also offers the choice of sacrifice on the

understanding that it draws violence out of the system.

So, if someone were about to fly an aeroplane into a office block, would it be wiser to allow

this as an unfolding of kamma, or would compassion intervene even to the point of killing

the hijacker? ♦ Or take the recent massacres in Liberia, or former killings in Rwanda and

Burundi or the present situation in Darfur. Is it better in the long run to allow the blood-letting, or to intervene? The question, surely, is one of motivation, of intention. Is this

beginning to sound like the ancient Hinayna versus Mahna arguments?

However, for the supramorality of not-self, there is the choice of sacrifice. Just as in our meditation, we allow inner negative states to burn out, so we allow the same of outer negative states. It is also understood that violent creeds and attitudes always have a self-

destruct mechanism. Witness how capitalism is destroying its own feeding grounds. In this

way the violence is drawn out of the system.

Oh disciples!

Should a cruel bandit savagely carve you up

Limb from limb with a two-handed saw

And should you indulge your heart in hatred and anger

You would not be following my teaching.

M.21.20

Addenda

A Choice between Two Evils

Life rarely offers us a choice between good and evil. For the most part it is a choice between

two evils. The main reason given for the war against Iraq was the inherent danger of weapons of mass destruction and, later, to rid the country of a brutal dictator. If we thought

armed intervention was necessary, but knew that there was another agenda to seek revenge and to control oil output, would we be guilty of supporting an unjust war?

When

there are all sorts of reasons given for war, some of which may be morally incorrect, can we

then still support armed intervention?

Do we not face the same dilemma with political parties? We support a party because of its

overall ethos or because of a particular policy. We may disagree with other policies. Does this mean we do not vote? Would this not be an abdication of responsibility? Surely, we vote to support the party that most coincides with our desires for society, even when we may think that some of its policies are actually unethical. There will never be a cause where all participants have exactly the same objectives. Nor will there ever be a cause where every objective fits into the Buddhist ethical framework. Yet we vote and have effect. Even should we decide not to vote, we have effect.

We can see this more clearly in international politics. It is the desire of many to find non-violent solutions to existing conflicts. Yet there was general agreement that force was necessary in Afghanistan even though it was understood that American soldiers might fight with revenge in their hearts.

The conundrum of Social Karma

It is often the case that we do good in the world, only to see it create suffering. There was a case of a charity which sent clothes to an African town. It ruined the tailors' trade and undermined the local economy! We should not be surprised if Iraq becomes a catalyst for

democratic change in the Middle East. The theory of chaos is at work at a moral and social level too.

The Monastic Sangha

The Buddha did not want the monastic sangha to get involved in the running of societies as such. Since his aim is to create an institution for the sole purpose of spiritual practice, he forbids involvement in politics. And when those politics come close to war, there is the third

Parajika rule:

'Should any bhikkhu intentionally deprive a human being of life, or search an assassin for him, or praise the advantages of death, or incite to die thus: 'Dear friend, what use is

this

wretched miserable life to you? Death would be better for you than life', or with such an

idea in mind, such a purpose in mind, should in various ways praise the advantages of death or incite them to die, he is also defeated and no longer in communion.'

It may be construed that any monastic who argues for the case of a Just War may by default fall into this error. This highly constrains a monastic and can force them to take positions closer to Pacifism than non-violence.

Is it the inability to accept that often we are caught between two evils and not a simple choice of good or evil that can make an absolutist stance of Pacifism untenable?

A Just War without Just Warriors?

I would like to pass onto you these thoughts sent to me by a friend, Peter Herissone-Kelly, a

researcher at the University of Central Lancashire, who writes on ethics:

"Let's suppose that WWII was fought for entirely unwholesome motives. It was still a good

that the Nazi regime was toppled, wasn't it? In other words, someone ought to have waged

a war against it. The justness of the war is not affected by the motive from which it is waged. In the western philosophical tradition, there are, broadly speaking, three major ways in which the subject of ethics has been conceived: the Utilitarian, the Kantian, and the Aristotelian. Utilitarians would say, in such a case, that the right action was done, even though the agents who performed the action were not good. Kant might say that the

action was in accordance with duty, and so far was praiseworthy, though it was not done

from duty, and so had no specifically moral worth. And the Aristotelian could say that the

action was such as would have been carried out by the virtuous person, and so was right,

even though it was lacking in moral status, as it did not proceed from a virtuous disposition

possessed by an agent."

Hindu Understanding

Hinduism, through the advice of Krishna to Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita, sees conflict in

cosmic terms. This is his advice to Arjuna who is on the battlefield facing an army composed

of his evil relatives whom he does not want to fight.

'The wise grieve not for those who live; and they grieve not for those who die - for life and death shall pass away.' 'No-one can bring to an end the Spirit which is everlasting. For beyond time he dwells in these bodies, though these bodies have an end in time; but he remains immeasurable, immortal. Therefore, great warrior carry on thy fight.'

The onslaught of Islam was enormously destructive to Buddhism in India. The Hindus had a

philosophy which allowed resistance. So the question arises:
Does Buddha dhamma have an answer to gratuitous violence?

Renunciates versus Lay

Is it possible that there are two ethical callings here? The first, the calling of the renunciate who, following the metaphor of the Saw, sees himself as one who absorbs violence and offers a mirror to the violent. The second is of the lay person, who has responsibilities to those near and dear and the wider community of protecting them against such violence.

A Personal Statement:

I am caught between two ethics. I shall call them: the ethics of the renunciate and the ethics of the engaged.

As renunciate, I understand the psychology of inner violence and I see outward manifestations of violence as simply a continuing projection of that inner psychology. Unless

we stop somewhere along the line, there is no hope to the end of war. It may call for great slaughter before all violent energy is drained. But then: No greater gift has a human being than to give up his life for another.

As engaged, I am moved by compassion. Could I stand idly by while others are humiliated, tortured and killed? Would I really allow one human being to destroy the lives of hundreds of thousands at the press of a button? How far could I go? Maybe I would kill. The better of two evils. Yet paradoxically, my motivation would have been to save lives out of compassion. I make, here a distinction between force and violence. Force: that which is needed to put a wrong right. Violence: the same with malevolence.

Is it not possible to use force to stop violence?

Bhante Bodhidhamma

June 2006

Free Will: Is It Available or Useful?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min read

This essay examines the Western philosophical problem of free will through the lens of Buddhist psychology and understanding. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores three Western positions—fatalism, libertarianism, and determinism—showing how each reflects different feelings about control and choice that arise from the fundamental delusion of selfhood. Drawing on the Brahmajāla Sutta (DN 1) and the Buddha's second discourse to the five companions, he demonstrates how our sense of having free will stems from the self's desire to control experience and avoid suffering.

The essay reveals how the Buddha reframes the entire question: rather than asking whether we have free will, we should ask how to end suffering. True freedom is not the ability to choose according to our desires, but liberation from the very self that experiences choice as a dilemma. On the spiritual path, clarity replaces choice—when we understand what needs to be done according to Dhamma, there is no hesitation or doubt, only purposeful action guided by Right View.

This teaching offers profound insight into how attachment to personal agency creates suffering, and how the Eightfold Path provides a clear direction that transcends the illusion of individual choice. The ultimate freedom is not free will, but the Arahant's complete surrender and release from the burden of selfhood.

Free will: is it available or useful?

In truth, it is preferable not to have choice...'

Free will has been a problem since the dawning of consciousness. Are we completely at the mercy of the gods or do we have some control over our lives? Is there a measure of free will? Do we really have choices? Is having choice the same as free will? In the highly

individualistic culture of the West, the sense of being an individual as opposed to a social

being or indeed another animal embedded in nature, makes the notion of free will, freedom

of choice, very much part of our self definition.

However, from the Buddha's point of view it is not a question we should be asking because

it is leading us astray ... But let us first look at the notion of free will.

Our culture, with its biased emphasis towards thought, rationalises our desire for freedom.

We generally think only in terms of what we are free to 'think and do'. There is our much

vaunted freedom of thought and speech. And freedom to act whether it be something trivial, such as which soup to buy, or of great importance, such as the decision to take a job. As to exactly how free we really are becomes a bone of contention between different philosophies.

However, in ordinary daily life, whatever the arguments are, we 'feel' ourselves to be in turn

restricted and confined or 'free and easy'. ♦ And this is the starting place for the Buddha.

In the Discourse on the Supreme Net (Brahmajala Sutta, No 1 in the Long Discourse), he lists many views around such speculative topics as whether the world is eternal or not, whether it is infinite or not, whether the self is eternal or not and so on. All such views he

says are 'merely the feeling of those who do not know and see, the worry and uncertainty of those immersed in craving'. ♦

So how do our feelings influence our view of free will? According to the Buddha's psychology

whatever we come to know is dependent on contact, by which is meant stimuli coming from

one of the six senses, the sixth being that part of our mind (some would prefer brain) that

receives not only these outer stimuli but stimuli arising within the mind by way of memory.

From contact arise feelings which are perceived as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Feelings

and perceptions arise simultaneously. As soon as we perceive something, we begin to think

about it. And this thinking proliferates, fuelled as it were by that feeling (emotions and moods) which finds expression and relief in thinking and imagining.

If, for instance, boredom arises in my mind, there will be an immediate desire to seek distraction.

I decide to eat something. If there is nothing to snack on, I feel frustrated. My free will is thwarted. So all thinking and imagining turns out to be but metaphor for our feelings.

This

may come as a surprise. But think of the 'isms' of the last century, for example Fascism and Communism. Each has elicited a tremendous amount of emotion from its followers. Now, the root feeling-perception we have is of being 'me'. That self-awareness, the feeling of presence, lies at the heart of our relationship to the world. At its most deluded, the 'me' believes itself to be this body and personality. The fundamental aim of the self is to feel safe and happy in this body and heart-mind and in the world. So, in order to fulfil that aim, it desires to control the body, emotions and thinking as well as the world with all its sentient beings, including humans of course, and objects and the whole of nature to boot! It is fearful of the body falling sick and dying. It likes to live in an interior atmosphere of happiness so it suppresses anything it experiences as painful, such as fear and depression and indulges whatever it experiences as pleasurable, such as sex, greed, attachment to people, love of arts and so on. When the self can fulfil these desires and feel happy, it has exercised its free will freely.

In the second talk that the Buddha gives to the five companions soon after his enlightenment, however, he points out how this self wants to be in control. He states: 'If the self were in control of the body, it would be able to say: Be like this, or be like that, but

since it is not in control of the body, it therefore cannot be the body.' Here, the Buddha is not talking about simple movements, but the body as an organism. We cannot make it grow any taller or prevent it from growing old and so on. This wanting to control is what the Buddha would have said we really mean by free will. For after all, if we are to receive all that we desire then we need to be in control of the pleasure we seek. With money, for instance, we can satisfy our sensual pleasure. But then we need to be in control of how much money we have. So it is because we fail to achieve this that

different views have arisen on this subject. And in our Western philosophy and religious tradition we have three main positions: fatalism, libertarianism and determinism. Fatalism is the view that the self is impotent. Acts of will by the self have no effect. It is that feeling of having no control over our lives. Everything that happens has been previously ordained and the self can do nothing about it. ♦ It does not matter whether I run, walk or skip blindfolded across the road, I shall only be knocked over if it was bound to happen anyway. Such a view can engender a hopeless resignation or sanguine optimism that we might be lucky. It is all in the stars. Or then a person may respond with stoic patience and fortitude. Even though this is an extreme position, there is plenty in our life experience that seems to support this view. After all, we did not choose to be born, nor do we know the hour or day of our death. We have had no choice in the cultural conditioning we have received. We can do little about the economic-social-political conditions we find ourselves in. We are at the mercy of the elements. We do not even choose to fall in love. Indeed, when we look back on our lives we can get a feeling that what we thought in the moment were choices were actually no choices at all, but simply what was going to happen anyway! Such belief also has spiritual consequences. For what then is the point of choosing to do good or bad? It will not make the slightest bit of difference to what is going to happen. In the Buddha's day, such a belief was taught by a certain Makhali Gosala. He said if one were to go down one side of the Ganges, murdering and pillaging or come up the other side with great acts of generosity and compassion, it would not make the slightest bit of difference. It is also the doctrine first propounded by St. Augustine that since God knew everything, he

knew who was to be saved and who was to be damned. Taken to its extreme, the doctrine of predestination, especially as it was explicated by Calvinistic Protestantism, meant that no matter how you behaved, it was already ordained that you would spend eternity in hell or heaven.

Islam can also be fatalistic in the same way, saying it is all the Will of Allah. Indeed, when

one considers the inherent suffering in being alive, the inability to find permanent comfort,

it is not difficult to take a fatalistic position. Albert Camus, the existentialist novelist and philosopher, felt that it was absurd to suffer a life that only offered dissatisfaction and death. He thought the only way human beings could maintain their dignity in the face of a

purposeless existence was either by stoic acceptance or by committing suicide! In the end,

a fatalist feels disempowered. The Buddha, on the other hand, empowers us to seek our true destiny to become like him a completely liberated being.

Libertarianism, on the other hand, is the understanding that we do have free will. That 'we

can do our own thing in our own way, in our own time'. Such a person feels empowered to

make choices and believes in the power of positive thinking. Again looking back on our lives,

we can see that decisions made in childhood are still having their effect, such as choices we

made about what we wanted to study and what sort of work we wanted to do. It is we after

all who create our own perceptions of the world and then try to manipulate the world to fit

in with our desires. We may not always get what we want, but we would not get anything

were it not for the freedom of our will to choose what we want. Indeed, when we take the

time to ponder situations, we can make rational and responsible decisions which effect the

situation. Such actions are not, therefore, predetermined nor are they random. For instance,

rather than be ensnared in power games with people at work, I can sit back for a moment, think about the way things are and make decisions to undermine those power games and

work towards harmony.

Such a view supports the notion of individual rights, free voting and free speech and even

on a more abstract level, a capitalist market left to its own communal dynamic, its own 'free

will'. However, it can tend to put the accent too much on the individual and underplay the

effects of society. The individual is made entirely responsible for their acts without any mitigating circumstance. For instance, in high unemployment, the fault can be placed on

the worker for not searching for work, dismissing as unimportant the prevailing economic

situation the worker finds themselves in, or blaming the worker's lack of skills training which,

of course, does make them unable to respond creatively. Such extreme forms of capitalism

lead to a dog-eat-dog society, where some gain the exercise of free will that comes with power and others find themselves utterly disempowered to make any choice that might change their situation.

At a spiritual level, libertarianism gives lie to the idea that there is a rational self somehow

detached from the world which, from a godlike position, can intervene in events. It is that

feeling of 'me' again. A 'me' that floats within the world untouched by it, yet able to act upon it. A 'me' that is not part of the chain of cause and effect. From the Buddha's point of

view, this is the source of all our misery! The self is as conditioned as everything else.

We say the Buddha was self-enlightened. But what do we actually mean by that? Does it equate to the Western idea of the self-made man, the self-made woman? Such ideas give the impression that such people arrived at their achievements without the help of any other

person whatsoever. But riches, fame and power are gained by the support of others - if not

on their backs. The Buddha would have been the first to acknowledge his indebtedness

to

all the teachers who had influenced him. For surely, it was gratitude that made him think

of offering his teaching to his two main teachers. It was the fact that no-one in his day, as far as we know, had reached the full enlightenment, and the final leap, as it were, had

to be into an unknown that made him self-enlightened and thereby able to start a new dispensation.

The third position is determinism. Here, unlike fatalism, personal decision-making does have

an effect on events. But unlike libertarianism, it understands that personal decision-making

is also part of the cause and effect chain. In the Buddhist scriptures, the Jains are said to hold this view, but only as a strictly historical sequence. It meant that the work of a spiritual

seeker was simply to put an end to the effects of past kamma. So, one stopped doing anything and finally one stopped eating altogether. This was the proper end of whoever sought the Jain path to liberation. The Buddha's response was that this did not take into account present decisions. Even the present decision to stop eating was an act of will and

therefore would have karmic effects. There was no escape from karma. Even an enlightened

being produces karma, but since all delusion of self is gone, there is no more attachment

and so no self-becoming.

As for these perspectives, fatalism, determinism and libertarianism, it might be argued that

it is when we look back on events that there may arise that feeling that everything has turned out just as it was meant to. We can feel that events have occurred and would have

occurred despite our decision-making. But when we are struggling in the present with a choice - whether to change jobs or not, whether to get married or not - we can have the feeling that we do have a freedom of choice and that our choice will have a considerable, if

not at times a revolutionary, effect on our lives.

However, from the Buddha's point of view, we are asking the wrong question. Free will or

no free will, the problem lies in the inherent unsatisfactoriness of life. At the most profound

level, the level from which all consequent illusions arise, we find the 'me', this nebulous idea

of a self. The self discovers that the world is full of pleasant experiences and unpleasant experiences. It creates a dualistic world, itself opposed to other - whether accomplice or rival - and the pleasant opposed to the unpleasant. It enters a game driven by greed and aversion - indulging and accumulating or rejecting and annihilating. So it is that the self feels itself to have power, the power to choose.

The right question, then, is how do we put an end to suffering? And to do so means to cut

at the very root. First of all we need to correct our understanding about conditionality.

There is indeed cause and effect coming through from past events. But there are also conditions that arise from different sources, which add a chaotic element to the otherwise

preconditioned moment. At the beginning of any course on meditation that I teach, a group

of people arrives from different starting points, different lines of cause and effect. Coming

together, they now influence each other, in the creative, dynamic present. The outcome of

the course will depend on that unforeseeable mix of people.

Secondly, because the aim is to put an end to suffering, the concern is not with freedom of choice arising out of the self's definition of free will, but with discovering the Path to liberation - a liberation from that delusion of a self. In truth, it is preferable not to have choice but simply to be clear as to which way to go. When we set out for a country walk, we are clear about the destination. We have a map and compass and we set out. Should we come to an ambiguous fork, we stop and consult the map. The walk is a process of discovering a piece of countryside with the joyous grand finale at a teashop! The Eight-fold

Path is a blueprint which saves us from the dilemmas of seeing the world as a procession of

choices which lead to success or failure. It presents life more as an exploration, one of trial

and error. Even error is part of the Path. It is learning what is not the Path.


So, choices turn out to be but doubt. On the one hand the ignorant self, driven by greed and aversion; on the other hand a growing wisdom, driven by the desire to be liberated from that very self. The search is for clarity. With clarity arises the knowledge that this has

to be done. Freedom of choice does not come into the reckoning. For choice on the spir-

itual

path is a manifestation of dilemma, of 'don't know'. 'Should I follow this path or that path? Should I stay with this teacher or find another? I seem to be getting nowhere in my

meditation, what should I do?' When we do discover what it is we ought to do to follow the

Path, we feel safe, satisfied and eager. That is why we are  at our happiest when all choice

is removed and we are doing exactly what we ought to be doing according the Dhamma.

Yet there is will. The Buddha equates will with action. It is a power that produces a thought,

word or deed out of a desire. It is what actualises our wishes. In itself, it is neither good nor

bad, skilful nor unskilful. All that is determined by our attitude, which again arises out of our

wisdom or lack of it. So it is that Right View heads the Eightfold Path. And the will supports

that desire to be liberated. This is known as dhamma cetana. It is the force that powers the

seeker along the Path.

So when choice arises out of the self, the self deludes us into thinking, 'I should be able to exercise my free will to satisfy my desire'. But in the spiritual life, when choice arises, it arises because of doubt as to what to do. That is why we go to the Dhamma, to the teaching, for guidance. It is the Buddha within seeking the Path and it is usually exactly what 'I' don't want to do.

So when someone is liberated, it is the freedom from that self, from the illusion of choice

arising out of the notion of free will, that the Buddha says is the one taste of Nibbana just

as salt is the one taste of the ocean. Not the unsatisfiable freedom of the hungry self, but the freedom of one released from prison. That is why whenever someone is liberated and

attains the end of the path and becomes an Arahant, there is no mention of free will, but of

surrender. Here is the normal scriptural refrain of someone who is liberated:

Birth is destroyed.

The holy life has been lived.

What had to be done has been done.

There is no more rebirth into any state of 'self' existence.

Could I be a fundamentalist, even a terrorist?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this provocative essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how anyone might develop fundamentalist tendencies by examining the Buddha's teaching on the three psychological components that create rigid ideological positions: diṭṭhi (wrong view), māna (conceit), and taṇhā (attachment). Drawing from the Nipāta Sutta's warnings about becoming caught up in debates, he shows how even right views can become dangerous when held with conceit and attachment.

The essay analyzes the three forms of conceit identified by the Buddha - feeling superior, inferior, or equal to others - and how attachment gives these views emotional power, leading to 'righteous anger.' Bhante examines how constrained love and fear of cultural annihilation can drive fundamentalist thinking, citing historical examples from Buddhist countries including Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

Through honest self-reflection, Bhante demonstrates how to recognize fundamentalist tendencies within ourselves by observing our thoughts and emotions when encountering opposing views. He suggests viewing our opinions as partial perspectives rather than absolute truths, requiring us to release conceit and attachment. This practical approach offers a path toward greater tolerance and genuine dialogue, moving beyond the adversarial positions that characterize fundamentalist thinking.

Could I be a fundamentalist
even a terrorist?

The Buddha talks about views and opinions as a 'thicket, a wilderness, a contortion, a vacillation and a fetter'. In an early collection, the Nipata Sutta, he is for ever telling his followers not to get caught up in debates. If you win you suffer from the conceit that, therefore, you must be right. (Gandhi warns that truth can be in a minority of one!) And if

you lose you feel humiliated - even though you may be right.

To take up this position of 'I'm right you're wrong', we need to have three components: ditthi, mano and tanha. Ditthi is the wrong view. However, even when a right view is held

with mano and tanha, then it can still be dangerous.

Mano is conceit. The Buddha points us to three conceits: I am better than; I am worse than;

and, at a more subtle level, I am equal to. The bigheadedness of 'I am better' is the most obvious. 'I am worse' often masquerades as false humility. Humility is being content with

just the way we are. Why compare? Indeed 'all comparison is odious!' With 'I am equal to', we feel more comfortable, but then the group we join is either superior or inferior to

another group. It is a collusive conceit. As a fundamentalist, of course, mine is THE truth -

and I have the support of others who believe likewise.

Tanha is the attachment. Whereas ditthi and mano tend to be heady, it's the attachment that gives them stuffing. The heart clings to it. Here is the spring that torrents righteous anger.

So to be a good Buddhist fundamentalist, I will need to have a wrong view, (it could simply

be that my view is exclusively right), the conceit that I or we are right and everyone who disagrees with me or us is wrong and the attachment that supports my position with 'righteous anger' and often 'cold hatred', righteously justified.

But there needs to be more, I think. Love! A constrained love, a exclusive love, no doubt.

But none the less love. A love of one's religion which one can even interpret to support killing. A devotion to an ideal which would make the world a heaven if I make every-one

everyone believe and follow. If I were to take the next step and do away with the enemy, I

would also need a good dose of courage and believe in the reward- whether it be Nibbana or

a heavenly rebirth.

But there is also a darker side. It would seem that fundamentalists fear annihilation. They

experience the dominant culture of modernism with its commitment to cold rationality, 'pure

science', disregard of past 'holy texts', libertarian morals and a selfish capitalism that supports hedonistic materialism as not only deeply offensive, but an overwhelming enemy.

Buddhism is not immune from such tendencies. There have been many cases of fundamentalist thought and action. To mention only one. In the early years of independence

in Sri Lanka a senior Buddhist monk, Talduwe Somarama Thero, thought with other conspirators that the government was undermining Buddhism and Buddhist culture.

He

shot the Prime Minister, Hon S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who later died of his wounds. Even today, in Sri Lanka, there are monks who have established a political party and won seats

in Parliament on the platform nationalism and fundamentalism. And there are still dreadful

things going on in Myanmar for similar reasons.

For myself, I have not found it difficult to catch some ingredients of fundamentalism within

me. I need only catch my thoughts and attendant emotions when I hear, see or read something I disagree with or when I find myself in conversation with someone who holds

opposing views.

The trick, perhaps, is to see one's views and opinions more as perspectives. By doing so, we may be able to accept even opposing views and come to a fuller picture and an easy compromise (a foul word to fundamentalists, whether religious or secular). For personal

views and opinions are, by definition, never the full perspective. And this demands we let go

of conceit and attachment. No bad thing!

I dare say it may mean the end of adversarial politics and the antics of Parliament. Pity?!

Perfection, Elitism and Excellence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the psychological suffering that arises from perfectionism and elitism, contrasting these with the healthier approach of excellence. Drawing from his own experiences in Sri Lanka, he recounts how observing incomplete tasks by gardeners and monks initially frustrated him, until he realized he was placing the same impossible pressure on his meditation practice. Through the simple act of deliberately leaving a corner of his room unswept, he learned to accept imperfection and found relief from self-judgment.

The essay examines how perfectionism creates anxiety and competition, leading to the three types of conceit (māna) that the Buddha identified: feeling superior, inferior, or equal to others. Bhante distinguishes between destructive perfectionism and healthy excellence, which is relative and personal—doing one's best within present circumstances and capabilities. He illustrates this with examples ranging from children's drawings to philosophical achievements, showing how elitism judges people's worth by their performance rather than their inherent dignity.

This teaching offers practical wisdom for meditation practitioners who struggle with self-criticism and competitive attitudes in their spiritual practice, encouraging a more compassionate and realistic approach to personal development.

Perfection, Elitism and Excellence

What a pain perfection is!

What do we mean by it? Can there ever be a perfect painting? Can there be a perfect cake?

Or a perfectly washed plate! Can there ever be a perfect meditation period?

Who decides?

Are we not talking about personal interpretation? What is perfect to one is not quite up to

the mark for another.

And everything becomes tight. This is how it should be. There

And when I fail, as I must, the misery. m no good. It stand myself.

And how can one possibly reach perfection in a changing world? In a relative world?

Where

is there an objective standard? And if there is one, who decided it was? Cant be that objective then!

I was cured of a lot of my obsession for perfection in Sri Lanka. I just installed myself in a kuti (monastic hut). A gardener came to cut back the weeds and sweep out the leaves and so give me a head start. As he was leaving, I pointed out that he hadn't finished the job. There was still a strip of garden to be cleared. , he said. I never saw him again! I was annoyed. Why couldn't he finish the job properly! It was the same with the monks. They swept the leaves on the paths and open ground, but there it was. A little bit left. I was so miffed!

Then I woke up! I saw what pressure I was putting on myself and my meditation to be perfect. Right, I thought, enough of that! Every morning I swept out my room, thoroughly.

But now I decided to leave a corner unswept. How it clawed on the mind! A few days passed and I was ok with it. I even stopped being so judgemental about my meditation. What a relief!

Now excellence is something else. It is relative. It is dependent on the person. When a child drew a picture of me without my nose, it was excellent. When an artist friend painted a portrait of me, it was excellent.

Itt do better. Nor that another couldns just that now, this very moment, Im doing the best I can.

Thatt it?

So wheres the anxiety coming from?

It might be real. I might not be good enough. Maybe I will lose my job. But thatve to accept Ive over-reached myself.

But I still feel anxious. And jealousy of others? Am I still in competition? Still competitive?

Ive slipped into the error of elitism. Here I am comparing! Im worse than you. And at a more subtle level I in equal, of course, simply means Ive found a companion in conceit. Someone I can join to compare ourselves against all those who are superior or inferior to us!

When I win, I feel great! When I lose, I feel miserable!

Thats the three conceits the Buddha talks about.

Thats grief.

And worse.

Elitism judges the person by how good they are at doing something, achieving something.

Take reading. Some people are poor readers, some speed readers. Bertrand Russell, the philosopher, read an Agatha Christie novel in 15 min. Dont we tend to rate people according

to their cleverness. To be clever is to be a good person. Hence, a slow reader cant be a very

good person. So if a slow reader thinks they are no good till they can speed read, then they

suffer from the effects of elitism.

Best to stay within my limits.💎💎 No pain! What a joy it is just to do things the best I can.

Now thats excellent!

What benefit is there in becoming a temporary monastic?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay examines the inspiring South-East Asian Buddhist tradition where laypeople temporarily enter monastic life, sometimes for as little as a week or up to three months during the Rainy Season. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how this practice benefits individuals by offering a taste of contemplative life, deepening understanding of the Dhamma, and strengthening meditation practice within a supportive community.

The essay highlights how temporary ordination cultivates respect for the ordained Saṅgha and encourages wholesome generosity without expectation of return. More importantly, it shows how monastic experience should flow back into daily life through the Noble Eightfold Path, manifesting as Right Understanding that naturally gives rise to Right Attitude, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood in ordinary circumstances.

Bhante also discusses the mutual benefits for permanent monastics, who gain fresh energy and challenging questions from lay practitioners engaged with contemporary issues. The essay concludes by connecting this tradition to Satipanya's mission of establishing a meditation centre where laypeople can follow either strict Mahāsī vipassanā practice or simply live the contemplative life, demonstrating how the Buddha's monastic institution remains relevant for modern spiritual seekers.

What benefit is there in becoming a temporary monastic?

One of the most inspiring practices of South-East Asia where Theravada Buddhism is practised is the easy passage of men and women in and out of the monastic order, especially in Burma and Thailand. The practice of young men and women entering the order

even for a week, is understood to be beneficial. Many of any age will spend up to three months at a monastery, especially during the Rainy Season.

In terms of the individual, it means that there is an opportunity to taste monastic life and understand what it has to offer. Hopefully, they will find an atmosphere conducive to

contemplation, a community of people all and a discipline that allows them to further their

understanding of the Dhamma and their practice of meditation.

It also inculcates in them a respect for the ordained Sangha and a willingness to

support the monks and nuns who have made a lifelong commitment. It may be that they want to build up a store of merit for a better rebirth. But a more wholesome reason is that they identify with monastics as ordinary people who want to put an end to their dukkha, their suffering and dissatisfaction. The lay supporter who provides the necessary needs to a monastery has the opportunity of offering from a pure heart without hope of return. This is true generosity. It is hoped that this experience will now flow into society. If the monastic interlude is used to reflect on the teachings and to purify the heart, this ought to manifest in ordinary daily life. After all this is the flow of the Eightfold Path. Because of Right Understanding, Right Attitude arises in the heart. Because there is a wholesome attitude, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood follow naturally. Indeed, it is only in ordinary daily life even for the monastic that such virtue can express itself. And this virtue needs to be expressed in all areas of life from individual relationships, to the work place, to society at large with its local, regional and country socio-politics and finally to concern with world issues. In this way the effect of the Dhamma can manifest in the world and affect it for the good. There are, of course, benefits for the monastics. Lay practitioners bring fresh energy. Their enthusiasm is infectious. Their questions make it necessary to keep revising the Dhamma and because of their involvement in the world force monastics to reconsider the Dhamma in the light of present day science, economics, politics and so on. The Dhamma is of little use confined to the boundary of a monastery! The main aim of the Satipanya Buddhist Trust is to establish a monastic meditation centre where lay people can either follow a strict meditation regime in the Mahasi Tradition

or
come to live the contemplative life. They may not actually want to shave their heads,
but
simply follow the rule. Indeed, that would be enough to savour the benefits of an insti-
tution
the Buddha established so that people could devote their whole energy to spiritual
practice
in an environment free of worldly distractions.

The 'Unlucky' Death of a Two Year Old Boy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

Drawing from a tragic news story about a two-year-old boy killed by a falling wall during storms, Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a deeply honest exploration of death, karma, and our human need to find ethical meaning in random events. The essay challenges common misconceptions about karma as cosmic justice, instead presenting the Buddhist understanding of multiple laws (physical, biological, psychological, karmic) operating simultaneously to create each moment. Central to the teaching is the practice of death contemplation from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), where practitioners regularly reflect on the body's inevitable subjection to sickness, aging, and death. Through personal anecdotes including his own near-death experience in a bathroom fall, Bhante explores how meditation prepares us for death's certainty while distinguishing between the body's vulnerability and the mind's capacity for transformation. The essay emphasizes that while we cannot control external circumstances, we can cultivate the right relationship with our embodied existence, seeing through the delusion of identification that creates our fear of death and pointing toward the ultimate goal of Nibbāna.

The Death of a Two Year Old Boy.

Reflections on my 60th year!

Life is uncertain : Death is certain.

The Buddha.

Sometimes the simple, bare truth needs a simple, bare statement. Can we be as honest as

the Buddha and look this truth straight in the eye?

During the gales and storms of last January, you may remember a news item. A section of

wall about 3 metres long in a road-long wall was blown over. The child's minder escaped

with bruises, but the little two year old boy died of injuries.

A small life snuffed out. We immediately look for reason, for some justice, for some sort of

karmic culpability. Are we really to believe that such is the law of karma that nature with

her Herculean winds and a tiny human decision to go for a walk conspired to manufacture

a delicately balanced event where the child should be crushed to death by a specific small

section of wall, while the minder should escape with minor injury! Such is our human-centredness that we cannot bear the thought that the world does not run along ethical guidelines. Indeed, ethics is a human invention. There is no justice outside the , only laws.

Each of us lives on consecutive sparks of instantaneous becoming where all the laws that

govern the universe gather to create a single event. There are the psychological laws within

us, the social laws between human beings, the laws of biology, of chemistry and of physics

and the law of karma. All expressing relationships at differing levels of existence and all

conspiring, unconsciously, to create each and every moment. All these laws, and who knows

how many more, create a multi-layered, multi-eventful universe.

And these laws are here within this . The same laws that killed the little boy. Not only out there in the vast cosmoscape of the universe. But here, right here within the intimate

inscape of our own body and mind.

Here the Buddha tells us we will find dukkha unsatisfactoriness, suffering. And its deep cause is wrong relationship. The identity we have with the body. The body as Me. Have you ever woken with an inexplicable pain and the consequent electrocution of shock.

The

fear we have of death is the measure of our delusion. This is why meditation on sickness,

old age and death is central to the techniques the Buddha offers us to discover the right relationship we ought to have with the body. Its right there in the jewel Discourse on

The

Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

The following contemplations take no more than five minutes, and can be done everyday,

anywhere - after your regular period of meditation, on the bus, during a break. They prepare us mentally for the inevitable. And of course we may also be .

This body is subject to disease.

This body is of a nature to fall ill.

This body has not gone beyond sickness.

This body is subject to ageing.

This body has not gone beyond ageing.

This body is now in a process of ageing.

This body is subject to death.

This body has not gone beyond death.

This body will die!

Repeating these statements quietly to ourselves, accepting their truth value, not confusing

this with wishing ourselves to be sick, old and die, we contact our suppressed and ignored

fears and anxieties. Let them rise. Feel them. Know them to be the hearts delusion. Allow

them to express themselves and die away.

The Buddha said the only annihilation he taught was the annihilation of greed, hatred and delusion. So once we have practised this, it is good to recall our destiny unshakeable

liberation of the mind from all unsatisfactoriness and suffering - Nibbana.

That wall was the universe out there crushing into the body and mind of the child in here.

Whatever happened out there was all in here. Within that tiny body there was only the experience of the pain and the mental anguish. The pain belongs to the body and is outside

the control of the mind. The body is the intimate material universe we inhabit. But the mind

is something else.

Through our meditation we come to realise that the inscape of our minds, the interior milieu

which is our most private experience, is created by ourselves. Though we may be at first

shocked by the ingredients and ungovernability of thoughts and emotions, yet we do come

to see that this can be transformed.

I was taking a shower in a bath where the shower unit overhung the end that slopes. I had

soaped the body and turned round to step under the shower. My head rested on the sloping

side and in one lightening swoosh, I found myself prostrate, my mind swimming and some

small perception of a pain at the back of my head. I thought I must be dying and after

an

initial fright, a lay back as it were into the experience.

Am I to believe that some dastardly past deed had finally blossomed into this . Or should I

rather think that certain factors came together at that point in time to almost end this my

lifes time? As far as I am concerned, the karma that pertains to the process of liberation,

was how I experienced the fall. It gave me hope that when death comes ll be all right with it

after the initial shock that is.

One of the central contemplations the Buddha advises is the contemplation of death.

Who can know the state of that childs mind? It may be that unlike my own, he fell into a deep coma and finally left the body.

What am I trying to say? Be ready! We dont know when death will come. The importance of

meditation on death. The of the Death of a Two Year Old by a Falling Wall.

I met a woman who told me that after the destruction of the tsunami and the countless deaths of both mainly good ordinary people and a few bad ones, she could no longer hold

with the idea of God. That is God as some suprahuman entity who had heart and ethics like

we do.

Expectation, Aspiration and Hope

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this thoughtful essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines three distinct mental attitudes we hold toward the future and our spiritual practice. He begins by exploring expectation as a manifestation of the ego's need for control and security, showing how it inevitably leads to disappointment when reality fails to match our projections. Drawing on the example of the Bodhisatta's own struggles before his awakening, Bhante illustrates how even spiritual expectations can become sources of suffering.

The essay then turns to aspiration, which Bhante describes as having an 'ethereal' quality - a humble movement toward wise and beautiful goals without the presumption of guaranteed success. Unlike expectation, aspiration embraces uncertainty and sees setbacks as clarification rather than failure. This attitude allows for genuine spiritual progress without the burden of prideful attachment to outcomes.

Finally, Bhante introduces a special understanding of hope as 'Dhamma joy' - the mudita that arises from virtuous living and deepens as one progresses along the Path. He traces this hope through different stages of practice, from initial intellectual conviction through direct experience of the Path, culminating in the unshakeable hope of the Stream-enterer who has tasted nibbāna. This teaching offers practical wisdom for approaching both meditation practice and daily life with greater freedom from the suffering inherent in expectation.

Expectation, Aspiration and Hope.

Expectation what suffering there is in that! The self likes to be in control. It likes to know what's going to happen. It needs to feel safe, secure. And there, of course, lies its underbelly of weakness. We expect the summers to be sunny. We expect a pay rise. We expect to go on holiday. We expect friends to help us. Mothers expect babies. And we expect spiritual progress from our practice. The list is forever. Expectation assumes, presumes, takes for granted. It's a manifestation of arrogance.

Expectation is bound to fail us one way or another for it projects an ideal, a concrete goal

on the future whose parameters we don't know. We simply don't know what is going to happen. So when our expectation fails to materialise we are disappointed, depressed by it.

Suddenly my job's gone. Did I really expect it to last for the whole of my life especially these

days? Did I really expect not to fall ill? Did I really expect this relationship to last for ever?

Unfortunately, if our expectation does come mainly to manifest, then, of course, weI told

you so! I knew it was going to happen! But that just increases our sense of being in control,

being able to predict. More pride, more hubris and then the fall. Consider the dictators of

the last century. The tragic-comic figure of Saddam Hussein. A life that rests on expectation

is forever falling into ditches.

The Bodhisatta also sat dejected by the road. All the practice, all the mortifications he had

done, all had been of no avail. Then on the seat of his awakening beneath the Bodhi tree,

the arrogance manifested. Mara comes with his hoards. Who was he to sit there and find

the end of suffering? Only by virtue of his generosity, that he was doing it also for the benefit of others, was the Great Doubt dispelled. Lucky for us!

Consider how many times weve been disappointed in our lives. Such is the measure of expectation. Enough of expectation, then!

Aspiration is a lovely word. Its root is the same as respiration. s ethereal. Aspiration does

not expect, assume, presume. It does not have a success time or finishing date. Yet it espouses beautiful aims and objectives. It has a nobility, a dignity about it. One aspires to produce art, to assist others, to shape the future. An artist, a nurse, a politician (no cynicism please!). And of course one aspires to be liberated, to be awakened.

Aspiration does not presume fulfilment, does not presume on others. It is simply a movement in the mind, a desire for the wise, the beautiful and the virtuous. An inclination

towards a goal. And thats how the Buddha expressed it. We should . And so aspiration gathers all the necessary qualities and support to move in that direction.

Aspiration is humble. Not the false humility of a prideful self. A cover to prevent the humiliation of failure in others eyes. Genuine humility is that groundedness that comes with

seeing life not as success and failure, but as trial and error. If things dont work out, well, at

least I know what is not for me. It clarifies future action. Many westerners join the Sangha

with great commitment and faith, only to find it is not the right lifestyle for them. Their time

in the order will not have been wasted.

Hope, I am using here in a special way. It is usually a humbler word than expectation.

It expresses an uncertainty, a hesitation. It is often a well-wishing, a prayer. But here I am pointing to something more certain. To a Dhamma joy. It is a quality of mudita often translated as sympathetic joy, but this misses the point of joy in oneself, such as the joy that comes from knowing we live virtuous lives.

Here hope is the joy of knowing there is a future arrival, a completion, as when the doctor

tells us that the illness will pass. This hope in future liberation comes even when we become

intellectually convinced of the Path. Everything seems to make sense. Life is profoundly meaningful. There will be a fulfilment. But this hope is poor hope compared to the joyful

hope that arises in someone who, through the practice, begins to experience the path and

sees clearly how it leads out of delusion into the light of wisdom, out of the quagmire of suffering and dissatisfaction into the meadows of happiness and contentment. How deeper

then is the soft joy of hope in someone who has entered the Path, the Stream-enterer, the

One Who Knows by direct experience the bliss of Nibbana! Such hope of future liberation

is unwavering, undilutable. They know that some day they will join the legion of arahants.

There hope will meld into the contentment and happiness of one who has lived the Holy Life

and reached the true goal.

Assisted Suicide

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 9 min read

This essay examines complex end-of-life ethical issues—including assisted suicide, euthanasia, and abortion—through the lens of Buddhist teachings. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the third pārājika rule from the Vinaya, which prohibits monastics from intentionally depriving human beings of life or encouraging death, establishing the foundation for Buddhist medical ethics.

The essay emphasizes that human birth represents a precious opportunity for spiritual development within saṃsāra, referencing the Buddha's analogy of the rare turtle surfacing to strike a floating log. Drawing from both Theravāda understanding of the nibbānic element and insights about the Tathāgatagarbha teaching, Bhante presents life as a complete training ground where even suffering offers opportunities for wisdom and compassion.

Practical applications include the doctrine of double effect in medical decisions, discontinuing life support, and patient autonomy in terminal care. The essay distinguishes between legal and ethical considerations, emphasizing how Right Understanding must inform Right Intention to produce skilful action. Through the lens of kamma and anusaya (underlying tendencies), it explores how even well-intentioned actions can carry unwholesome consequences if based on delusion rather than wisdom.

Abortion, Suicide, Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide and Murder

I think the title just about covers different words we have for purposely bring to end a person's life,

whether it's one's own or another's. The argument around this area boils down to what is called in

religious circles the sanctity of life or the preciousness of human birth. Murder, the wilful taking of

another's life out of greed, hatred and delusion, would, I think, be considered clearly unethical by

most of us. The others present a variety of ethical dilemmas. The purpose of this essay is not to go

into the intricacies of all the arguments. Here I wish only to lay the platform of ethic upon which we

can base our actions, specifically around the recent topic of assisted suicide.

Approaching these

issues by way of the Noble Eightfold Path, with clarity around Right Understanding, the Right

Attitude or Intention arises and so Right Action should then follow suit.

We need to establish the meaning of life and death according to the Buddha's teaching and then to

understand the law of kamma. Rarely is any decision to be made a simple choice between right and

wrong since ethical decisions are tempered by circumstance and context. That is why the Buddha

states the ethical law not as commandments but as 'training rules' sikkhapada, literally 'footsteps of a trainee'.

The Vinaya, the rule established for the Sangha of bhikkhus and bhikkunis, is not something the

Buddha thought out, but practical and wise as he was, it was only when someone acted unskillfully,

did he declare a rule. Some rules are to do with the definition of an institution and others with moral

law. The first four are a group known as parajika, end of life or defeat. Should a monastic transgress

these rules they are no longer a member of the order whether they confess or not. Even should they

continue to live deceptively in the order, they will know in their hearts that they are no longer a

bhikkhu or bhikkhuni.

The rule that is of interest here is the third parajika:

Should a member of the Sangha intentionally deprive a human being of life, or search for an assassin for them, or praise the advantages of death, or incite them to die saying for instance, 'Friend, what use is this wretched, miserable life to you? Death would be better for you than life,' or with such an idea in mind, such a purpose in mind, should in various ways praise the advantages of death or incite them to die, that is a defeat and they are no longer in communion.

Please note: life according to Buddhadhamma begins at conception.

This Rule states the highest form of moral rectitude and is expected of a monastic. What then would

be the arguments against abortion, euthanasia, suicide and assisted suicide? The answer lies in the meaning of life.

A young man came to see me once and told me his partner wanted a child, but he saw no reason why he should bring another being into samsara, a world of dukkha, an ever ongoing becoming that cannot deliver any real happiness. I reminded him that the Buddha spoke of human birth as the most advantageous of all in order to make spiritual progress because here we have that mixture of joy and woe and the intelligence to see where the escape lies. In which case I said to him, in my opinion, apart from attaining one of the four spiritual paths and fruits, there was no greater act of compassion than to bring another being into this life and educate them in the Buddhadhamma. I didn't see him again!

I dare say it was a bloke thing about commitment to marriage.

The Buddha gave an image to show how rare a human birth is. He asks us to imagine a vast ocean

with one log floating on the surface. Every hundred years a turtle rises to the surface. What would be

the odds of it hitting its head on that log?

Although I am a Theravada monk, I warm to the later Mahayana teaching of the Tathagatagarba

Discourse for the accent here is on that which seeks its liberation, called rather mysteriously in

Theravada the Nibbanic element, nibbana dhatu. It gives a positive spin to our quest. It points not to

the experience of Nibbana, which admittedly is the Buddha's own preference in teaching, but what it

is that experiences Nibbana. The Buddha referred to himself as the Tathagata which translates as

Thus Gone or Thus Arrived. He refers to Nibbana as the 'other shore'. The Buddhas and the arahants

are the ones who have arrived 'over there'. They are the ones who have transcended this life form.

And what is it that has transcended this life form but that which knows, our intuitive awareness, sati-

panya.

Therefore, when we really grasp that this life, the whole of this life from the moment of

conception to
the moment of death is a training ground, where not a moment is wasted so long as we understand
there is always something to learn – even in the most severe pain, in the most terrible depression,
despair and anguish – all of it offers us an opportunity to grow in wisdom and compassion. It cannot,
therefore, be seen as a skilful act to end one's life prematurely or to help another do so – even at
conception.
Now that's the ideal! But the relative world rarely offers an easy, straight forward situation and I am
sure you can think of many occasions where a persuasive argument could be made for abortion,
euthanasia, assisted suicide and suicide. It is important here to understand that unskilful does not
mean evil in the way that word is commonly used. It is evil to murder someone, but hard to call it evil
to assist someone in their suicide – someone, for instance, who may be driven to distraction with pain
or perhaps to put an end to a so-called vegetative state for we cannot know that person's inner state.
Yet it is still unskilful to terminate a life for whatever reason for it takes away the potential for
spiritual understanding to arise within the person's lifetime and who knows when such an
opportunity may arise again. This may seem very harsh when our dominant purpose is compassion
and indeed the wholesome result from compassion may outweigh any unwholesome result from
ending life whether it's our own or of another. It may be a case of a willingness to bear any
unwholesome results out of compassion for another.
So from our understanding comes our intention that imbues an act with wholesomeness or
unwholesomeness. And according to the law of kamma, if we think, say or do something
unwholesome, then we will reap some unwholesome result. The same law applies, of course, to

wholesome acts. It is, then, up to us to be very clear as to our motivations should we find ourselves in a situation where the premature ending of life seems to be an answer. It may be a smoke screen for other subliminal intentions to argue for the alleviation of suffering, such as not wanting to suffer pain or unable to be with someone in pain. Just because we are not aware of underlying intentions doesn't mean they will not affect our conditioning. We know from Western psychology that suppressed or repressed wishes cause psychological damage. In Buddhaddhamma these are our anusaya, proclivities, inclinations, tendencies. And should we think our intention is benevolent, but is in fact unwise and morally wrong, that will also produce unwholesome kamma. For instance, I knew someone who was a-when-it-suits-me-communist – any way he took to Proudon's declaration that that all property is theft with fierce logic. He built up quite a library, thieving books and for some reason never saw the irony! But then any unskilful act that is seen as skilful by the perpetrator reinforces their delusion. I lost contact so I don't know if he was ever caught or suddenly seeing the self-deception under which he was amassing volumes had pangs of conscience and felt obliged to pay for them. So we need to make sure that our main intention is ethically correct. Often it is only through insight meditation, vipassana, that we become aware of our anusaya, subliminal intentions and the strength of these ignored conditionings. Nor would it be right to think that in committing suicide or assisting someone to do so that thereby they escape the consequences of the act or of past actions. At the Birmingham Vihara one of our members committed suicide and I asked Ven. Dr. Rewata Dhamma, our resident teacher, what happens to such a person. He said he would go on committing suicide through a hundred lives.

'Rubbish!' was my first reaction – not out loud of course. But after some thought, I realised to commit suicide was a very strong act of will that would produce a very strong conditioning. It was plausible to say that every time that being came across great difficulty that would continue to be their escape. Only when they turned around on that conditioning and refused to obey would the real escape manifest – calling for courage and patient endurance.

These days there is often confusion between illegal and immoral. In a liberal society more and more ethical decisions, more of personal than those of wider social effect (or so it is thought) such as divorce, abortion, suicide, all of which were once criminal offences, are laid at the door of the individual. Unfortunately in making unethical behaviour legal, it takes away the social stigma and such actions soon become normal and ordinary – and easily accepted as 'moral'. The consequence of this is to blind people to the effect of harmful behaviour especially within themselves. In denial of shame and guilt, there is no possibility of remorse. This turbulence in the heart is repressed by self-righteousness which becomes ever more callous. Witness the philosophy supporting eugenics that lead Nazis to justify killing people with mental and physical disability. So should we find ourselves in a position of advising someone or indeed having to make such decisions for ourselves, we must be rigorous in honesty and not fool ourselves. Let us for the sake of discussion take three cases: those that involve the doctrine of double effect, those that terminate life by turning off a life support machine and those that involve a patient's desire to die. The doctrine of double effect concerns in the main doctors, but the patient and relatives may be part of the decision making. A patient is in a terminal condition. A doctor administers medicine to

alleviate suffering of a dying patient knowing it will kill the patient. The patient may have asked for this or may not know it. Should the medicine be administered with the purpose to hasten death that would be unskilful – and a criminal offence. Should it be to ease the condition of the dying that would be skilful.

In the case where a family is asked permission to turn off a life support machine, they have to be sure that the advice given is clearly one of no hope of survival. If there is hope of survival, then it would be unskilful to end that person's life, no matter what their situation. Here, of course, the questions around so-called 'vegetative states' and artificial life support machines loom large. It is well to remind ourselves that there are no absolute moral laws in a relative world. Each case will have to be dealt with according to the circumstances. And 'best intentions' have to arise out of Right Understanding.

Where a person is terminally ill, should they wish to die out of aversion, depression, sense of pointlessness to suffering and so on, it would be unskilful to stop taking the medicine or sustenance or receive other life supportive measures. However, should they see the futility of further treatment, even though they want to live, to ask that no further life supportive measures be taken, that would be skilful.

Now we all know that such situations can be far more complex than this. But hopefully such clear standpoints give us a basis from which we can act as skilfully as the situation will allow us.

I have here tried to point to the highest ideals of Buddhadhamma. I aspire to them, yet hope I am never tested. And should I fail, there will surely arise another opportunity for growth! In the teaching of the Buddha, even unskilfulness, fully acknowledged, can become a cause for spiritual advancement.

If you want to find a good web based source for discussion the BBC has a very readable site on all the

important ethical issues www.bbc.co.uk/ethics

The site that best covers ethical issues from the point of view of Buddhadhamma is:

www.buddhistethics.org

Vipassanā, Therapy and Medicinal Drugs

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 5 min read

In this thoughtful essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses two frequently asked questions about vipassanā practice: the role of therapy and medicinal drugs in spiritual development. Drawing on his experience with traditional Theravāda teachers in Birmingham, he contrasts the continuous guidance available in traditional Buddhist societies with the isolated retreat-based learning common in the West. Without ongoing 'pastoral' care from qualified teachers, Western practitioners often face psychological and social challenges that arise during meditation practice without adequate support.

The essay provides practical guidance for selecting compatible therapists, emphasizing the importance of finding professionals who understand or respect Buddhist practice. Bhante discusses Buddhism-informed therapies such as Core Process Psychotherapy and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, while warning against therapists who oppose meditation. He also addresses the controversial topic of psychiatric medication from a Buddhist perspective, arguing for a compassionate middle way that views medication as skillful means for severe conditions like clinical depression, anxiety disorders, and schizophrenia.

Ultimately, Bhante emphasizes personal responsibility in healing while acknowledging the value of appropriate support. This essay offers essential guidance for contemporary practitioners navigating the intersection of spiritual practice with mental health care in the absence of traditional monastic guidance systems.

Vipassana, Therapy and Medicinal Drugs.

There are two questions concerning the practice of vipassana, insight meditation that arise frequently. Is

there a role for therapy in spiritual practice? Is there a role for medicinal drugs?

In the Buddhist Tradition in general, but especially so in Theravada, a student would live close to their

teacher, usually a monastic, or live with their teacher in a monastery as a layperson, and as a samanera

(lower orders) or a junior monastic would stay with their teacher for at least five years.

In other words,

the contact would be continuous and most probably long lasting. The relationship would be about a

person's understanding of the Buddhadhamma and spiritual growth. Spiritual growth

would include vipassana and mindfulness in ordinary daily life where both social difficulties and personal difficulties may arise. When it comes to relationships both within the family, local community, at work or in the wider society, the teacher would be there to consult. And when it comes to personal psychological problems – and any continuous practice of vipassana will unveil unresolved conditionings - the teacher would be the person to approach for guidance.

In the West this system rarely pertains. I, myself, was lucky. I had two very good teachers resident in Birmingham, Ven.Dr.Sayadaw Rewata Dhamma and Ven.Sayadaw U Nynaponika. Over time they became familiar with our western ways and although it was difficult for them to give specific advice they were always there to re-enforce general guidelines and, of course, any problems arising through vipassana were always addressed. However, what normally happens now is that students may go for a week's vipassana course and contact is then lost till the next time which is normally a year. Some go to various teachers, but again rarely see them. In other words there is little or no follow-up support or 'pastoral' care. And I cannot see this gap being filled until teachers, both lay and monastic, settle in cities.

Even in my own situation, it would be only the immediate surroundings where I could offer full on-going support, although email and skype do offer greater contact.

In the meantime we have to find solutions. Fortunately these days, there have developed many psychotherapeutic and counselling techniques and many charities and groups have formed to deal with specific sufferings such as grief, anxiety and depression. The danger here is conflict of teachings and guidance. So much depends on the therapist or group leader as to the orientation of their therapy and group. For instance, one of my advanced students was told by her therapist that meditation would do her

harm! So beware of therapists who have limited or no understanding or practice of vipassana and have yet formulated clear opinions. I also attended a self-help group for people suffering from depression and from a Buddhist perspective they were actually making things worse for themselves. So it would seem that a student, who is grounded in Vipassana and perhaps in Buddhadhamma (the teachings of the Buddha), when they look for help with personal or social problems, needs to find someone who is tuned in to their way of thinking. It may even be the case that for particular problems, a therapy may be even more effective than vipassana. The reason for this is that vipassana is a specific practice aimed at spiritual insights, although it does purify the heart and mind. But, for instance, in the case of severe problems such as alcoholic addiction, vipassana brings insight into the cause of the suffering and allows personal psychological trauma to be healed, but the programme run by AA is credited to be extremely effective in dealing with the psychological and habitual nature of such a problem.

I asked a practising therapist and long time meditator, Richard Gilpin, about seeking a therapist. He replied that 'the standard party line amongst therapists is that the most important thing is to find the therapist that works for you. This can only be a trial and error process (i.e. check out a few and decide who you want to spill your beans to). The model of therapy your therapist trained in will generally become of secondary importance. It's the relationship that counts, as the old line goes. The other reason for the therapist being more important than the therapy is that most therapists have, to some degree, integrated different models into their own therapeutic style - often one, say, Gestalt therapist's style will

be unrecognisable to another for a particular client. Therapy tends to be a lot more idiosyncratic than practice schools, although of course the latter also have huge variety.' And I agree with him when he goes on to say, 'I guess this all fits similarly to how one might be drawn to a particular spiritual teacher and how that teacher will offer the teachings in a way quite distinct from another in the same tradition.'

I was surprised when I met other vipassana teachers how varied their methods were, often intermingling techniques from other Buddhist traditions. This would be most rare in the East where each vipassana tradition tends to be seen as whole and entire and where respect for one's teacher would prohibit any experimentation. And I must confess I am guilty myself!

So it would seem that just as hatha yoga and chi kung/t'ai chi complement vipassana both as physical exercises and exercises in calm concentration, so certain therapies may also be good supports. There are certain therapies that are grounded in the Buddhadhamma such as Core Process Psychotherapy, taught and based at the Karuna Institute www.karuna-institute.co.uk , Tara Rokpa, a Tibetan Buddhism based therapy www.tararokpa.org/, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy www.mbct.com/ , and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and some that are influenced by or have similar understanding to Buddhadhamma such as Focussing, Gestalt, Psychosynthesis and Jungian therapy. I am informed that Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) has interesting Buddhist parallels. Needless to say, I know virtually nothing about psychotherapy since I never had cause to use it myself, though I have had tasters to find out what it's all about.

As for taking medicinal drugs, there was a time it was a no-no in Buddhist circles, but now is seen more as skilful means. The hard line is that all suffering is due to karma and therefore you have to endure. But I think a more skilful and compassionate line is the use of drugs to relieve severe

conditions and
establish a balance of mind wherein understanding and virtue can grow. For in such
severe conditions as
clinical depression, anxiety disorder and schizophrenia, and even for periods when cir-
cumstances
become intolerable, a person is caught as in a storm and only in exceptional cases are
they able to find
that objectivity wherein insight can be made as in the film, 'A Beautiful Mind' (highly
recommended).
Hopefully, in time patients will be able to wean themselves off the drugs under medical
supervision.
There is a very good article on this very subject in Buddhadhamma, spring 2009 –
'Medicate or
Meditate' which centres on depression. Again it very much a matter of finding a
therapist or doctor with
whom one resonates.
Finally, it is important to acknowledge that whether we practice with a vipassana
teacher with or without
a therapist, with or without medicinal drugs, it is we who have to do the work. And it is
we who heal
ourselves. We can only be assisted in the process. The Buddha only points the way.
There is no easy way.
Alas!

Conditionality and Kamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 7 min read

This essay provides a comprehensive introduction to two fundamental Buddhist principles: the Law of This and That Conditionality (idhapaccayatā) and the Law of Kamma. Bhante Bodhidhamma begins by examining the Four Noble Propositions that explain how phenomena arise through both immediate contingency and causal continuity, avoiding the extremes of pure randomness and rigid determinism.

The teaching explores how kamma operates within a matrix of five natural laws (niyāma): physical laws (utu), biological laws (bīja), psychological laws (citta), ethical laws (kamma), and spiritual laws governing liberation. This framework demonstrates that not everything we experience is personal kamma - natural disasters, hereditary conditions, and intellectual abilities arise through various causes beyond individual ethical choices.

Central to the discussion is the distinction between kamma (intentional action) and vipāka (consequence), emphasizing how our interior life of thought, speech, and deed creates volitional conditioning (saṅkhāra). The essay clarifies that Buddhist ethics transcends simple moral categories, addressing how even 'natural' attachments can cause suffering. Through understanding conditionality, practitioners can skillfully transform unwholesome mental habits into wholesome ones, creating the foundation for spiritual progress toward liberation from the very sense of separate selfhood.

Conditionality & Kamma

A Basic Introduction.

The law of kamma (karma in Sanscrit) is fundamental to the teachings of the Buddha.

We find it right

at the point of enlightenment, enveloped within the Three Knowledges (tevijja) that came to the

Buddha on liberation. The first was that his heart and mind were clear of all defilements; the second,

that he could review his countless rebirths and see they were driven by his ethical decisions; and

third, was his ability to see beings moving from one plane of existence to another driven by the same

law.

What was at first a law that pertained to him alone became a universal law. And the

law was
inexorable.

But before we go into this area of ethics, we must understand the Buddha's explanation of why things

happen the way they do. This is the Law of This and That Conditionality (idhappaccayatā). Just as a

five-letter equation, $e=mc^2$, belies enormous scientific knowledge and potential, so these simple

propositions explain at the fundamental level how things come to be:

When this is, that is.

When this is not, that is not.

From the arising of this, that arises.

From the cessation of this, that ceases.

The first two propositions tell us why things happen simultaneously by way of immediate

contingency. For instance, at Satipanya, people come from various trajectories to form a group. The

opposite of this is that if they didn't come, there would be no group. This is an immediate

interdependency. Our bodies are alive because certain functions work together at the same time. If we

stopped breathing or the heart stopped, then the body would stop.

If we take these propositions at a universal level, then we have a situation where everything happens

only because it arises or doesn't arise in this present moment. Presumably, it would be quite chaotic:

where would order come from save in the occasional, haphazard arrangement? From a kamma

viewpoint, thinking that good arises from good and bad from bad would be no use. There would be no

perceptible consequences from actions, since every happening would be entirely random. The reason

for a moral code or ethical understandings would be missing. We would live in an amoral society.

The final propositions tell us that events now happen because of an effect coming from the past, no

matter how near or distant. It has some original beginning. A group forms at Satipanya because

various people have made a decision in the past to come here. Their arrival is a present

consequence
of past decisions and consequent actions. And the consequence of the ensuing present actions will
have some effect on future actions. This is a linear cause and effect law. Our bodies are alive because
of past feeding and caring for them. If we stopped feeding the body, at some point it would stop
functioning.
On a universal level, if everything happened as a direct consequence of something in the past, then
the future would be pre-destined. In this scenario, how would creativity manifest? Presumably, the
universe would be repetitive. Again from a kamma viewpoint, we would experience everything as fate.
If everything is fate and pre-determined then again there would be no need for ethical laws and moral
standards. Indeed a teacher in the Buddha's time, Ajita Kesakambali,
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajita_Kesakambali)

said that if one were to go down one side of the Ganges creating mayhem and up the other performing
great acts of compassion, it would not make the slightest difference. We would again be living in an
amoral society.
The Buddha says present contingency and past conditionality operate in unison. So we have some
order within creativity, some creativity within order. In art the order is represented by technique
which underpins all creative arts. It is much the same in sport.
Apart from the basic Laws of Conditionality, we are embedded in more obvious laws of nature. These
Niyama come together to create any given moment. There are five which equate fairly well with our
modern way of seeing the world. The first is the Law of Heat (utu). Heat or Fire was understood to be
the primal energy of the world. It equates to our physical sciences. The Law of the Seed (bija) equates
to our biology. The Law of the Mind (citta) equates to our psychology and from this we can infer

sociology which is but a society of minds. Then there is the Law of Kamma. Finally there is the Spiritual Law which equates to the Buddha's teaching on the end of suffering and the transcendent state of Nibbana. These Laws tell us that not everything that happens to us is our personal kamma. We don't 'deserve' everything that happens to us. When it comes to natural disasters, to be caught up in a tsunami or earthquake doesn't mean we deserved to have all our property destroyed or lose our lives. If a person is born with a hereditary disease, it doesn't mean they did something terrible in their past life. Our genetic history is governed by our forebears. When it comes to the mind, our intellectual abilities don't mean that we did something wonderful in the past life to end up a genius or something terrible because we were always bottom of the class. When we enter the Path of Dhamma impersonal laws of kamma and all the teaching implied in the Four Noble Truths govern our progress towards liberation. So what does the Law of Kamma refer to? In terms of the process of liberation from suffering it has little to do with the consequences of our actions as they affect the world. Our goodwill actions support the process of purifying the heart and leading us to liberation, but they may not have their desired effect on the world. For that we need to know the matrix into which our action is being thrown. And we can never know that in its entirety. A charity that collected clothes to send to a poor country unwittingly destroyed the local tailor trade which in turn had a knock-on effect. They had to stop sending clothes. Many people argued and still argue against the Iraq war. But perhaps in the fullness of time, it might be seen as a catalyst that released the Arab Spring: a country could be free of its dictator and could move towards democracy. So the kamma that pertains to liberation is that which pertains to our interior life. In

Pali, the language of the Theravada scriptures, the word, kamma, strictly refers to the intentional act, and the consequence is properly termed vipaka. as used to Kamma refers to a conscious act, whether by a deliberate act of will or by way of habit, which occurs when it has an ethical dimension. The intention can be either wholesome or unwholesome. And when we empower such an intention, an act is performed. It can be a mental act of interior thought and emotion such as when we get lost in an angry or exciting daydream, or it can be an act of speech or a deed. (This is to be distinguished from the present day meaning of karma which signifies fate.) Now once an act, a kamma, is completed, it will go on to have an effect, vipaka. Vipaka is not unalterable fate, for on recognising the consequences of an act, a person can change the them. For instance, if we upset someone, we can apologise. So when we allow the mind to wander into unwholesome daydreams, we are developing the attitude that drives it. Anger will drive hateful scenarios; love, affectionate scenarios. When thoughts are expressed in the spoken word, the same is happening. And when an angry thought leads to banging

doors, shouting and worse, the underlying attitude of anger is being developed. In the same way, a caring action will develop love and compassion. Such kamma of thought, word and deed, are creating, because they are willed, our volitional conditioning, saṅkhāra. This is where we store all our wholesome and unwholesome attitudes.

It is important here to make a distinction between what we might term moral behaviour as a contrast to unskilful behaviour. When we talk of immoral behaviour we usually refer to actions that are grave such as stealing or hurting someone, no matter how small. But there are actions which

come from attachment, that cannot be called 'evil', but nonetheless cause suffering. For instance, the attachment a parent has to their child is 'natural'. It would be difficult to imagine otherwise. But this attachment is a cause of suffering for the parent and a catalyst for the suffering of the child. How do we know when attachment is manifesting? Whenever we feel disappointed, angry, overly fearful for the child, and so on. Such reactions are good indicators. It is also important to understand that we do not know fully the consequences of our thoughts, words and deeds on our internal life, since we don't know the strengths and weaknesses of our own conditioning. In certain circumstances, heroic actions can come to people who would never have thought themselves especially courageous. And the opposite is true, of course. Road rage, computer rage and other such rages often take people by surprise. In other words, as we do not know an action's outcome when performed in the matrix of the world out there, we don't know what an intentional act of thought, word or deed, will have upon the internal matrix of our heart and mind. So, from the laws that express conditionality, we can see that we will never know the consequences of our decisions. Even in the Buddha's case, he had to sometimes adjust rules that he had previously made because of an unforeseen consequence. We live both outwardly and inwardly in an uncertain world. But the Law of Karma tells us that the effect of a goodwill action whether of thought, word or deed, will have wholesome effects. Inwardly, we will be rewarded with wholesome habits and a growing beautiful heart. The opposite, of course, should we behave unwholesomely. This tells us we can change ourselves. The Buddha does not deny the self. He simply says it has no intrinsic reality. It is dependent on inner and outer circumstances. So we can begin to change the self away from one that is unhappy and lacking in self-esteem to one that is happy and high

in self-

esteem. It is from the basis of a beautiful self that spiritual progress, which includes the loss of this

very sense of a separate self, can be realised. For our unwholesomeness is a measure of our delusion.

Wisdom arises as purity of heart grows. This leads to a compassionate engagement with oneself and

the world. All this is the result of understanding and accepting the Law of Conditionality

(idhapaccayatā) and the Laws of Nature (niyama) within which the Law of Kamma is embedded.

Affectionate Awareness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay explores how to skillfully work with challenging emotions like fear, anger, guilt, and shame that arise during vipassanā meditation. Bhante Bodhidhamma introduces the concept of 'affectionate awareness' - a heart-centered approach that combines objective noting with tender loving care (TLC). Rather than pushing away difficult mental states or using noting as a weapon against them, practitioners learn to create distance through noting while simultaneously embracing these states with warmth and compassion. The teaching uses the metaphor of a physiotherapist working with a patient in pain - being both firm and gentle in the healing process. The essay provides practical guidance on how to deconstruct emotions by investigating their constituent sensations, emphasizing that this compassionate approach should not be used to get rid of emotions (which would be aversion in disguise) but to develop ease and acceptance. This balanced method helps prevent difficult mental states from hijacking one's meditation practice and daily life, ultimately supporting their natural dissolution through the process of liberation.

Affectionate Awareness in Vipassana

When we practice vipassana, the importance of equanimity cannot be overstated.

Equanimity

supports the investigation of the Dhamma. In order to investigate impartially, without aversion, fear,

preference or expectation and clarity, we need to establish a very open-minded, open-hearted

attitude. This we can call pure vipassana.

However, sometimes while sitting, stuff comes up which is scary or very painful. Fears, anger, guilt,

shame and so on. Our normal reaction is to shy away from them. We try to push them away by using

the noting word as a pointing finger, stabbing at them. Or we simply bounce off them into happy

daydreams. Or we push them down by falling asleep. If these mental states are too much to bear, we

become very restless and go for a cup of tea.

Here is one way we can help ourselves bear with these heavy emotions and moods. We bring the heart

into play. Imagine yourself as a physiotherapist with a suffering patient who needs to stretch and exercise their limbs after a severe car accident. The excruciating pain is a necessary part of the healing process and the physio has to be firm, but also kind, gentle and encouraging. So it is within ourselves. Should an intense emotion or mood arise, we note it, and create a distance from it. The noting word, e.g. fear, fear, helps us to create that distance. Once that objectivity is there, not matter how tenuous, raise that old TLC, tender loving care, and as it were, hold the mental state in a warm embrace. You might even imagine your hands surrounding it. If you find this difficult, don't stop trying. At first it may even feel false, but eventually the willed intention will move the heart. Then once that feels stable, move towards the feeling of fear or nausea in order to explore its qualities. What subtle sensations are involved in such emotions or moods? We do this to deconstruct an emotion and in so doing it loses its solidity. When we see that emotions felt in the body are 'just' sensations, it helps us to lose our fear and aversion towards them. If you find you still cannot stay with the mental state, then pull back again and gently breathe that TLC into the emotion and saturate it. It is most important not to do this to get rid of it. That is just a manifestation of aversion and it will only subtly suppress it. Do it in order to undermine the reaction of aversion and fear and begin to feel at ease with the presenting mental state. Needless to say if it all gets too much, change posture, go for a walk, have a cup of tea. Remember we're not trying to defeat a mental state! When we become adept at doing this, these mental moods and emotions will stop hijacking our lives. We shall still have to deal with them in vipassana, but now they are truly beginning to burn out. Over time they will not be so painful, so insistent and so long lasting.

Eventually, of course, come the moment of liberation, they will disappear for good.
That's the
Buddha's good news!

Climate Crisis: A Personal Reflection

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 17 min read

In this deeply reflective essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the climate crisis through the lens of Buddhist teachings, offering a personal exploration of how to maintain spiritual equanimity while facing potential civilizational collapse. Drawing on fundamental Buddhist concepts of anicca (impermanence) and kamma, he contextualizes current environmental threats within the broader framework of saṃsāra and the inevitable cycles of arising and passing away that characterize all conditioned existence.

The essay examines the psychological responses to climate crisis—denial, anger, grief, and despair—through the Buddha's encounter with King Viddhudhabba's destruction of Kapilavatthu, illustrating how even the Buddha had to accept certain karmic consequences. Bhante emphasizes three key opportunities the crisis presents: confronting our deepest fears about death and impermanence, growing in virtue (sīla) through conscious action and reduced consumption, and developing insight that transforms selfish concern into compassionate engagement for all beings.

Including the Upajjhaṭṭhāna Sutta (AN 5.57) on the five subjects for contemplation and teachings on maraṇasati (mindfulness of death), the essay provides practical guidance for daily contemplation. Bhante advocates balancing realistic acceptance of our limitations with committed action, suggesting that spiritual liberation remains possible even amid global catastrophe. The work concludes with recommended practices including mettā meditation and contemplation of nibbāna's qualities, emphasizing that genuine spiritual development requires acting not just for personal liberation but for the benefit of all beings.

Climate Crisis : A Personal Reflection

Work for the best : Prepare for the worst.

Once the report came out from the UN scientists giving us about 10 years to mend our ways or face

the destruction of the planet as we know it, the temperature around Climate Change is measured

in the now named Climate Crisis or Climate Emergency. Even so, the last COP meetings in Madrid

deepened the crisis with their inability to agree on viable agenda to end global warming. More and

more people are alarmed, and understandably especially the young. This brings with it

all the negative mental states of anger, anxiety, grief and waiting in the wings, despair. There is already a lot of literature concerning a Buddhist response to Climate Crisis and this is but a personal response, reflections which have helped me come to terms with what is happening. Firstly, the need to see the 'bigger picture', a wider perspective. The Crisis may bring untold suffering and in a comparatively short time the deaths of billions of people, not to mention all the other creatures. So it is as well to remember that all are individual deaths. Each will die in their own way. Some will die in peace, others in despair. We do not die each other's death. What is more, we are all going to die anyway! And some will peacefully, some not so. Even if the Crisis is averted, every human being and all creatures living now will eventually die. It is the scale and possible manner of death that horrifies, not the individual experience for there are millions of people dying every day and many also in dreadful circumstances. David Attenborough, who presented all those wonderful nature programmes, warned of the loss of civilisation as we know it. This is another death. But there is nothing remarkable about that. Civilisations have come and gone – Mohenjo-Daro, Mesopotamia, Egypt – and all those lesser ones wiped out in the last 500 years since the expansion of European civilisation. It's just we think ours is supreme and would a terrible loss. In many ways we are superior – scientifically, technologically, even artistically, but ethically? It was the pre-industrial civilisations that flourished a Buddha, a Moses, a Socrates and a Lao Tse. And then there is destruction of life on earth, but that will not include Gaia herself. She will continue to bring forth life. There have already been five extinctions. And each time there has been a regeneration and there has been one creature to survive who then developed even further in the

next flourishing. It would seem each time there were even more sophisticated beings. Homo Sapiens is the crowning glory so far. But who knows what she will produce after a few million years? I get the sense Gaia is becoming more canny with every collapse and that, of course, works well with Darwinian Theory. The cockroach has survived all extinctions! But my money is on the frog who got through the last one. As an amphibian, it has that adaptability and spawning creates so many tadpoles. It may be that in millions of years' time, we may be taking rebirth again as Frogo Sapiens. And if I am right, Frogo may be even more sophisticated than we are – Superfrogo. But will it be any different. Not at all. They will still suffer from greed, aversion and delusion. And the whole round will start again, though considering their super abilities, they will probably bring about their demise even more quickly. This is the world of Samsara – the world of ongoing vagabonds. And we must not forget that the sun is also time bound. There will come a time when it explodes into a supernova and that's the end of Gaia. That exquisite pale blue pearl, tiny amidst the vast cosmos, will fade into a wandering rock. This is the teaching of impermanence, anicca: everything that manifests will perish; nothing remains; nothing is reliable. These are not contemplations easy to accept, but they give a basic platform to work from.

If we are indeed heading to our self-made destruction, why are people so reluctant to do anything? Even deny the science? There are many factors that have driven us into this crisis: economic, social, ecological, but the underlying cause is ethical - greed. The world is in the grip of Consumerism, a religion we all follow to some extent or another. And this issues from the deluded desire to seek true

happiness in
the sensual world. We know intellectually it is not possible since everything changes,
nothing lasts,
but even so we try. We build walls of safety around us by acquiring wealth, fame and
power. We
hold tight onto what we have. We fend off those who would undermine us or run away
from them.
Rooted right there in our entrancement with the world is the cause of our inability to
let go of the
simplest of habits. In the extreme we will rather kill than give up a treasured
dependency –
addictions of every description. Even if we determine to give up our morning tea or
coffee, we will
be proud to do it once, even a few times, but for good? No that's too much! And this
crisis is asking
us to change our very lifestyles.
Anyone who has done a week retreat knows the first three days to be blood, sweat and
tears until
we have adjusted to the routine, very different from our ordinary daily lives. Yes, we
can change,
but it may take outer conditions to make us do so. Already hurricanes are wiping out
the Bahamas,
seas swamping islands, typhoons emptying cities and fires consuming whole forests
and their
creatures. But it hasn't touched the majority – and especially the majority of the richer
nations.
And therein lies our paradox. We don't usually do anything until it really hurts and by
then it may
very well be too late.
Added to all this is denial. There are those who simply don't want to think about such
things (and
who can blame them such is the feeling of impotency?) and there are those whose
investment in
the status quo will not allow them do so. So, even as this human world is rent with
regional wars,
local political upheavals and fundamentalists, we are chained to a neo-liberal economic
system
that has no social responsibility.
It does look bleak! And the situation may arise where nothing can stop runaway global

warming.

There is a telling event in the Buddha's life. King Pasenadi of Kosala was a dedicated disciple of the

Buddha. His son, Viddudhabba was not so. He had married into the Buddha's clan, the Sakyas, but

they thought his caste was too low for them and they tricked him into marrying a slave girl. The

king came to know of it and in a rage, took his army to destroy the Sakyas. The Buddha was able to

intervene three times. And three times the Viddudhabba turned back. But on the fourth time he

set out, the Buddha said he could do nothing. He accepted that Viddudhabba would exact his

revenge. Kapilavatthu, the Sakyan capital was razed to the ground and many killed. No doubt the

Buddha went to console his people who founded another city. Even the Buddha could not stop the

karmic consequence of Sakyan duplicity.

We may now be tempted to think that humankind is hopelessly lost in delusion; that nothing can

be done. But acceptance is not resignation. That leads to despair. Acceptance brings a realistic

appraisal of the situation and so reveals possibilities. But those of us dedicated to the Dhamma

have deeper reasons to combat global warming.

The Buddha told us this was the best of rebirths. The human condition offered the most fruitful

circumstance for liberation. Even for those who do not believe in rebirth or transcendence, living

according to the Dhamma brings beneficial results in the here and now. Considering the preciousness of this human birth we owe it to ourselves to take advantage of this opportunity.

Firstly it is an opportunity to work with our deepest fear - coming to terms with death. Many will

know the work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross who pointed to five stages in the dying process: denial,

anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. This is not a linear process, nor is death the only

time we would go through such a process. We might experience all or some of these

stages when someone close to us is dying. And even if we lose our mobile phone! Contemplating our death is

one way of getting in touch with these reactions and working with them. The fear of death is the measure of our delusion. Our insight practice will make us feel at ease with the fear and finally undermine that fear. And that releases energy to engage in the struggle against global warming.

It is also an opportunity to recognise our limitations as the Buddha did with Viddhuhhabba. We

can only do what is in our power to do. Beyond that we may be able to influence others. But

beyond that is only frustration and burn out. To recognise our limits is again to be realistic so we

do not fall into reactions of false guilt and shame.

Secondly, it is an opportunity to grow in virtue. To acknowledge we can do something, no matter how

little, brings with it a moral obligation. We have to do what we can, not just for our own benefit,

but also the benefit of all. Even in a situation where everyone is perishing, we still have a moral

obligation to help others. It may be we can only offer donations, write letters, send emails. It may

be we can only send out metta. But we can always examine our own carbon footprint by

questioning what we buy, how we use electricity, how warm we keep the house and the use of the

car and planes – even how much water we boil when we want a cup of tea. It is not about getting

neurotic over these, but just recognising what is sufficient and what is indulgence or carelessness.

Thirdly it is an opportunity to grow in insight and liberate ourselves from suffering. And here we

come across the great paradox of the spiritual life. If whatever we do, is done solely with the aim of

liberating ourselves, we are doing it for selfish reasons. This is the do-gooder syndrome. We simply

end up scoring points, convincing ourselves that such have been our meritorious deeds we are bound to be liberated by them. Instead, they have all increased the sense of the deluded self.

This is true even for retreatants. If we practice just to liberate ourselves, it becomes a self-centred practice. If we practice also for the benefit of others, it becomes a communal act. It gives a greater incentive too. The Great Doubt came to the Buddha as he sat under the Bodhi Tree. The doubt was fuelled by the isolation of doing it for himself and Mara, the Tempter, suggested he drop the whole escapade and return to his family and lay life. But he grounded himself by touching the earth and the Earth Goddess rose to reassure him that he had perfected the virtue of generosity. He wasn't 'striving diligently' just for himself, but for all beings.

When our actions are for our own benefit, then we should acknowledge that as self-care, not selfishness. And when we act on behalf of others, we should not consider that as not caring for ourselves. The extent of our generosity is an indication of our 'selflessness'. In the same way, where we find negativity, we act towards its opposite. Where we find anger, we generate forgiveness and undermine resentment. Where we find resistance, we develop patient forbearance and where we find suffering, we offer assistance as best we can. And it is contemplating the Dhamma that all beings, no matter how evil, how foolish, will eventually liberate themselves from suffering, that will transform despair into hope.

This is all best done in community. It is with others, whether the wider movement of Extinction Rebellion or a small local group of activists or a virtual group that we will find moral support, opportunity for concerted action and comfort of heart.

Whatever happens we must seize the opportunity to develop our spiritual life. The way lies in

paradox. The more we give, the more we receive; the more we protect others, the more we are protected; the more ready we are to face disaster, the more we are fearless in our endeavour to save all beings. Even in the most dire circumstances, liberation is at hand. So we should do what we can to bring an end to the crisis. But it is well to consider failure and steel ourselves for such an outcome. And here the contemplation of kamma and death are the most powerful healers for such contemplations will help us greatly undermine despair.

These two Discourses by the Buddha on kamma and death will greatly help us if we make these contemplations a daily practice. A few minutes of reminder is enough. Whenever we do this sort of exercise we should balance it with Metta practice and qualities of Nibbana which are listed below.

These texts are downloaded from Sutta Central
AN 5.57 Upajjhatthana Sutta: Subjects for Contemplation
Translated by Sujato Bhikkhu

“Mendicants, a woman or a man, a layperson or a renunciate should often review these five

subjects. What five?

‘I am liable to grow old, I am not exempt from old age.’ A woman or a man, a layperson or a

renunciate should often review this.

‘I am liable to get sick, I am not exempt from sickness.’ ...

‘I am liable to die, I am not exempt from death.’ ...

‘I must be parted and separated from all I hold dear and beloved.’ ...

‘I am the owner of my deeds and heir to my deeds. Deeds are my womb, my relative, and my refuge.

I shall be the heir of whatever deeds I do, whether good or bad.’ A woman or a man, a layperson

or a renunciate should often review this.

What is the advantage for a woman or a man, a layperson or a renunciate of often reviewing this: ‘I

am liable to grow old, I am not exempt from old age’? There are sentient beings who, in-

toxicated

with the vanity of youth, do bad things by way of body, speech, and mind. Reviewing this subject

often, they entirely give up the vanity of youth, or at least reduce it. This is the advantage for a

woman or a man, a layperson or a renunciate of often reviewing this: 'I am liable to grow old, I am

not exempt from old age'.

What is the advantage of often reviewing this: 'I am liable to get sick, I am not exempt from

sickness'? There are sentient beings who, drunk on the vanity of health, do bad things by way of

body, speech, and mind. Reviewing this subject often, they entirely give up the vanity of health, or

at least reduce it. This is the advantage of often reviewing this: 'I am liable to get sick, I am not

exempt from sickness'.

What is the advantage of often reviewing this: 'I am liable to die, I am not exempt from death'? There are sentient beings who, drunk on the vanity of life, do bad things by way of body,

speech, and mind. Reviewing this subject often, they entirely give up the vanity of life, or at least

reduce it. This is the advantage of often reviewing this: 'I am liable to die, I am not exempt from

death'.

What is the advantage of often reviewing this: 'I must be parted and separated from all I hold dear

and beloved'? There are sentient beings who, aroused by desire and longing for their dear and

beloved, do bad things by way of body, speech, and mind. Reviewing this subject often, they

entirely give up desire and longing for their dear and beloved, or at least reduce it. This is the

advantage of often reviewing this: 'I must be parted and separated from all I hold dear and

beloved'.

What is the advantage of often reflecting like this: 'I am the owner of my deeds and heir to my

deeds. Deeds are my womb, my relative, and my refuge. I shall be the heir of whatever

deeds I do,
whether good or bad? There are sentient beings who do bad things by way of body,
speech, and
mind. Reviewing this subject often, they entirely give up bad conduct, or at least reduce
it. This is
the advantage for a woman or a man, a layperson or a renunciate of often reflecting
like this: 'I am
the owner of my deeds and heir to my deeds. Deeds are my womb, my relative, and my
refuge. I
shall be the heir of whatever deeds I do, whether good or bad.'
Then that noble disciple reflects: 'It's not just me who is liable to grow old, not being
exempt from
old age. For all sentient beings grow old according to their nature, as long as they come
and go,
pass away and are reborn.' When they review this subject often, the path is born in
them. They
cultivate, develop, and make much of it. By doing so, they give up the fetters and
eliminate the
underlying tendencies.

'It's not just me who is liable to get sick, not being exempt from sickness. For all
sentient beings get
sick according to their nature, as long as they come and go, pass away and are reborn.'
When they
review this subject often, the path is born in them. They cultivate, develop, and make
much of
it. By doing so, they give up the fetters and eliminate the underlying tendencies.
'It's not just me who is liable to die, not being exempt from death. For all sentient beings
die
according to their nature, as long as they come and go, pass away and are reborn.'
When they
review this subject often, the path is born in them. They cultivate, develop, and make
much of
it. By doing so, they give up the fetters and eliminate the underlying tendencies.
'It's not just me who must be parted and separated from all I hold dear and beloved. For
all
sentient beings must be parted and separated from all they hold dear and beloved, as
long as they
come and go, pass away and are reborn.' When they review this subject often, the path

is born in
them. They cultivate, develop, and make much of it. By doing so, they give up the fetters
and
eliminate the underlying tendencies.

‘It’s not just me who shall be the owner of my deeds and heir to my deeds. For all
sentient beings
shall be the owners of their deeds and heirs to their deeds, as long as they come and go,
pass away
and are reborn.’ When they review this subject often, the path is born in them. They
cultivate,
develop, and make much of it. By doing so, they give up the fetters and eliminate the
underlying
tendencies.

For others, sickness is natural,
and so are old age and death.
Though this is how their nature is,
ordinary people feel disgusted.
If I were to be disgusted
with creatures whose nature is such,
it would not be appropriate for me,
since my life is just the same.
Living in such a way,
I understood the reality without attachments.
I mastered all vanities—
of health, of youth,
and even of life—
seeing safety in renunciation.
Zeal sprang up in me
as I looked to extinguishment.
Now I’m unable
to indulge in sensual pleasures;
there’s no turning back,
until the spiritual life is complete.”

Many of you will be familiar with my own development of the contemplation of
sickness, disease
and death:
This body is subject to disease.
This body of a nature to fall ill.

This body has not gone beyond sickness.

This body is subject to ageing.

This body has not gone beyond ageing.

This body is now in a process of ageing.

This body is subject to death.

This body has not gone beyond death.

This body will die.

A.N Book of the sixes

20. Mindfulness of Death (2)

Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

I have heard that at one time the Blessed One was staying at Nadika, in the Brick Hall.

There he

addressed the monks, “Monks, mindfulness of death—when developed & pursued—is of great fruit

& great benefit. It gains a footing in the Deathless, has the Deathless as its final end. And how is

mindfulness of death developed & pursued so that it is of great fruit & great benefit, gains a footing

in the Deathless, and has the Deathless as its final end?

“There is the case where a monk, as day departs and night returns, reflects: ‘Many are the [possible]

causes of my death. A snake might bite me, a scorpion might sting me, a centipede might bite me.

That would be how my death would come about. That would be an obstruction for me. Stumbling,

I might fall; my food, digested, might trouble me; my bile might be provoked, my phlegm...

piercing wind forces [in the body] might be provoked. That would be how my death would come

about. That would be an obstruction for me.’ Then the monk should investigate:

‘Are there any evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by me that would be an obstruction

for me were I to die in the night?’

If, on reflecting, he realizes that there are evil, unskillful mental qualities unabandoned by him that

would be an obstruction for him were he to die in the night, then he should put forth extra desire,

effort, diligence, endeavour, undivided mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very

same evil, unskilful qualities. Just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire would put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavour, undivided mindfulness, & alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head, in the same way the monk should put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavour, undivided mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskilful qualities. But if, on reflecting, he realizes that there are no evil, unskilful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him were he to die in the night, then for that very reason he should dwell in joy & rapture, training himself day & night in skillful qualities.

“Further, there is the case where a monk, as night departs and day returns, reflects: ‘Many are the [possible] causes of my death. A snake might bite me, a scorpion might sting me, a centipede might bite me. That would be how my death would come about. That would be an obstruction for me. Stumbling, I might fall; my food, digested, might trouble me; my bile might be provoked, my phlegm... piercing wind forces [in the body] might be provoked. That would be how my death would come about. That would be an obstruction for me.’ Then the monk should investigate:

‘Are there any evil, unskilful mental qualities unabandoned by me that would be an obstruction for me were I to die during the day?’ If, on reflecting, he realizes that there are evil, unskilful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him were he to die during the day, then he should put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavour, undivided mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskilful qualities. Just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire

would put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavour, undivided mindfulness, & alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head, in the same way the monk should put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavour, undivided mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskilful qualities. But if, on reflecting, he realizes that there are no evil, unskilful mental qualities unabandoned by him that would be an obstruction for him were he to die during the day, then for that very reason he should dwell in joy & rapture, training himself day & night in skilful qualities.

“This, monks, is how mindfulness of death is developed & pursued so that it is of great fruit & great benefit, gains a footing in the Deathless, and has the Deathless as its final end.” That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Metta Practice

Make up your own phrases and offer them to those whom you see frustrating attempts to bring the Crisis to an end to those working towards bringing the Crisis to an end.

Nibbana

It is the Unformed, the Unconditioned, the End, the Truth, the Other Shore, the Subtle, the

Everlasting, the Invisible, the Undiversified, Peace, the Deathless, the Blest, Safety, the Wonderful,

the Marvellous, Nibbana, Purity, Freedom, the Island, the Refuge, the Beyond. S43.1-44

Reading

Climate Crisis:

This brings in the Discourses and is a very fulsome treatment of the situation.

Mindfully Facing Climate Change by Analayo Bhikkhu

Still the classic for Metta:

Loving-Kindness : Sharon Salzberg

Lots of books about death!

Living in the Light of Death : On the Art of Being Truly Alive : Larry Rosenberg

Mindfully Facing Disease and Death : Analayo Bhikkhu (based of Discourses)

For a thorough exploration of Nibbana and the Path leading there, see:

The Island : Ajahn Passano and Ajahn Amaro

Mind Like a Fire Unbound : Thanissaro Bhikkhu

The First Noble Truth of Suffering: Dukkha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min read

This foundational essay examines the First Noble Truth through the lens of dukkhadukkha—ordinary suffering—as taught by the Buddha. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how Prince Siddhattha's encounter with sickness, aging, and death led to the Great Renunciation and ultimate Awakening. The teaching draws from the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, where the Buddha first expounded the Four Noble Truths, explaining how birth, decay, death, sorrow, and separation constitute the unavoidable suffering inherent in existence.

The essay addresses our typical responses to pain: false optimism that denies life's difficulties, or pessimistic despair that sees only hopelessness. Instead, it presents the Buddha's Middle Path as a realistic acceptance of both pleasure and pain. Through practical examples—from coping with illness to facing mortality—the text demonstrates how vipassanā meditation enables us to observe our reactions to suffering without aversion or attachment.

Particularly valuable for newcomers, this teaching includes reflective questions and meditation guidance for observing bodily sensations of emotions like depression, anger, and anxiety. By learning to face dukkha directly rather than escape through rationalization or submission, practitioners develop the equanimity that sees both fortune and misfortune as passing phenomena, laying the groundwork for deeper insight into the nature of unsatisfactoriness.

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING : DUKKHA

◆ Ordinary Suffering◆◆◆

(dukkhadukkha)

Questions to Ask Oneself

What is my normal inclination towards life?◆

Is it over optimistic?◆ Is it is pessimistic?◆ Or is it realistic?

How would you answer the following:

1. How do I cope with physical pain?
2. How do I cope with◆mental pain e.g. boredom, anxiety, anger, depression and so on
3. How do I cope with others in these moods?
4. When something unfortunate last happened to me, how did I react?

Dukkha literally means hard (du) to bear or difficult to endure (kha). So Dukkha is variously

translated as pain, suffering, misery, discontent, discomfort, unhappiness, frustration, unsatisfactoriness and such like. It is very difficult to translate into English since it has so many shades of meaning much as our word has. ❖ But we need to know these meanings because Dukkha is a central concept of the Buddha's teachings. In fact, it's the starting point of his whole doctrine. The First Noble Truth states that life itself is suffering, is unsatisfactory. ❖ Because of this bold statement Buddhism is accused of being life negating, of being negative and pessimistic. ❖ And it would be so, were it not for the Third Noble Truth ❖ which states in equally bold fashion that there is an end to suffering. ❖ The Buddha summed up his whole teaching, saying that he only taught two things: the truth of suffering and the end of suffering. ❖

It was his experience of life as unsatisfactory that led the Buddha to leave home and follow the hard ascetic life. ❖ The Buddha was born into the Khshatriya caste who were the rulers, governors, 'landed gentry' of those times. ❖ The other castes ❖ were and still are in Hinduism: the Brahmins, the highest caste, who were the 'priests' of the society. ❖ Beneath them the Khshatriya, then the Vaisya who were the merchants and tradesmen, and finally the Suddra who were the artisans and workers. ❖ All other peoples such as the slaves were outside the cast system - the Pariahs, the Untouchables. The Buddha's father was the leader of a small group of Khshatriya families known as the Sakya, their clan name, who ruled in an area of North India on the border of present day Nepal. ❖ Life for the young Siddhatta Gotama was, we can believe, easy and pleasant, and may even have been luxurious. It seems, however, that this courtly upbringing did not hide from him the suffering inherent in life and a legend tells how he came to face this. While out riding and hunting on various days, he first saw a sick man, then a dying man and finally a corpse. Here is a passage from

one of the discourses, where the Buddha explains his experience.

First he tells us how luxurious his life was: I was delicate, most delicate, extremely delicate. ♦ Lily pools were made at my father's house solely for my benefit. ♦ Blue lilies flowered in one, white lilies in another, red lilies in a third. ♦ I used no sandalwood that was

not of Benares. My turban, tunic, lower garments and cloak were all made of Benares cloth.

A white sunshade was held over me day and night, so no cold or heat or dust or grit or dew

might inconvenience me.

So now we have an idea of his courtly life style, but he continues: Whilst I had such power

and good fortune, yet I thought: When an ordinary, untaught person, who is subject to sickness, not safe from sickness, sees another who is sick, they are shocked, humiliated and disgusted, for they have forgotten that they themselves are no exception. ♦ But I too am

subject to sickness, not safe from sickness and so it cannot be right for me to be shocked,

humiliated and disgusted when I see another who is sick. When I considered this, the vanity

of health completely left me. I thought: When an ordinary untaught person, who is subject

to ageing, not safe from ageing, sees another who has aged, they are shocked, humiliated

and disgusted, for they have forgotten that they themselves are no exception. ♦ But I too am

subject to ageing, not safe from ageing and so it cannot be right for me to be shocked, humiliated and disgusted when I see another who has aged. ♦ When I considered this the

vanity of my youth completely left me. I thought: When an ordinary untaught person, who is subject to death, not safe from death, sees another who is dead, he is shocked, humiliated and disgusted, for they have forgotten that they themselves are no exception.

But I too am subject to death, not safe from death and so it cannot be right for me to be shocked, humiliated and disgusted when I see another who is dead. ♦ When I considered

this the vanity of life completely left me.

Given the additions of an oral tradition for the scriptures were not actually written

down for

500 years after the Buddha's death, what we can accept as fact is that the whole problem of

suffering had become a major concern for the young nobleman. ♦ The last straw, it seems,

was when he woke up in the early morning after a night of revelry and saw about him bodies lying about in ungainly and disgusting positions, the air foul with the smell of alcohol

and vomit. ♦ His sense of disgust, coupled with the growing weariness of trying to find any

real or meaningful happiness in a life geared to sensual pleasure, finally caused him to leave

home. That morning he left early on his favourite horse, Kanthaka, and with his faithful servant, Channa, rode beyond three kingdoms and crossed the River Anoma. ♦ He cut off

his hair as a sign of renouncing the life devoted to sensual pleasure. ♦ He then gave his ornaments and jewellery to Channa and went in search of a teacher. ♦ It is said that such

was the distress of his horse, Kanthaka, that he died of a heart attack! In other discourses,

reasons of a more philosophical nature ♦ are given by the Buddha to explain how he came

to this momentous decision, known as the Great Renunciation.

In this way, before I was enlightened ... because I was subject to birth, I wanted to find out the nature of birth ... So I thought to myself, since I am subject to birth what if I were

to find out what birth really is and discover the unsatisfactoriness of the nature of birth.

So I set out to discover the unborn, the supreme of Nibbana. And he says the same of sickness, old age and death. ♦ In other words, he left the court, confident there was an end to suffering, which, by the way, is not annihilation. So what constitutes this Dukkha? ♦

Suffering or unsatisfactoriness is divided into three categories. ♦ The first is called ordinary

suffering (Dukkha Dukkha); the second is called the suffering caused by the changing nature of life (Viparanama Dukkha); and the third is that caused by our conditioning or conditioned states (Sankhara Dukkha). Here we shall concern ourselves with the first category.

This is how the Buddha expounds the basic teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the

Eightfold Noble Path in his first discourse after his enlightenment. It is called the 'Discourse

on the Turning of the Wheel of the Law'.

"This is the First Noble Truth of Suffering : birth is suffering, decay is suffering, death is suffering; ♦ sorrow, grief, lamentation, physical and mental pain, despair are all suffering. ♦

To be with what we dislike is suffering, to be separated from what we like is suffering. Here it is important to grasp that the Buddha is talking about those things people normally

associate with suffering and pain: the whole birth process, teething, acne, hormonal changes, middle age crises, the aches and pains of growing old and the final agony of death. ♦ He also means the emotional pains of frustration, anxiety, depression, despair and

so on. ♦ He is also saying that this is part and parcel of life itself. ♦ We are subject to this

suffering. ♦ It's the package we accept when we're born. When we really contemplate this,

really think about it, it's depressing! Yes, it's true. ♦ The only thing I can say with absolute

certainty about my life is that I will die. My life will end whether I like it or not. But it is only when we find the courage to face this hard fact, rather than avoid it, that there can be any possibility of discovering if there is anything beyond this cycle of birth and death. ♦

That is what the Buddha did as a young man. ♦ He decided to face the facts and it led him

to discover that which is beyond birth and death, Nibbana. Much of our suffering lies in the fact that we find it hard to face this sort of reality. ♦ It is a good exercise to look over the past and see how we have approached and tackled problems, upsets, catastrophes and traumas. ♦ One way we deal with the painful is to avoid it, to shun it, to try to escape

from it. We prefer to do anything but feel the pain, physical or mental. ♦ On a physical level, as soon as even a small ache is felt in the head, we reach for the bottle of pills. ♦ Sometimes if we get a slight pain in the body, we'll ignore it. ♦ We'll pretend it's nothing. ♦

But underneath the apparent easygoing attitude is the fear we daren't face that it may be

a cancer or a dangerous illness. ♦ On the emotional level, if we feel depressed, we'll try and drown it out with a drink. If we feel bored, we'll try to escape by turning on the

TV.◆

If we feel lonely or anxious, we'll phone a friend.◆ Anything not to feel the boredom, the

depression, the anxiety, the loneliness and so on.◆ We don't want to feel them. Why should

we! If these escape routes are blocked, if we can't use my usual means of pushing these negative feelings away, we'll talk 'about' them.◆ We'll spend hours groaning, complain-

ing, whingeing and whining to family, friends, colleagues, doctors - anyone who will listen. Even

the cat gets an earful!

For instance, very few people will face up to the fact of death.◆ You can joke about it, but you can't talk about it seriously.◆ That can get too close to the feelings of terror and horror it arouses.◆ Some will have long conversations 'about' death.◆ What is death?

◆

What is it to die?◆ To be or not to be.◆ Wonderful questions, but all intellectualisa-

tions, all rationalisations.◆ It makes you feel good to talk 'about' or 'around' death.◆ But it's still

escapism.◆ It's just a mental exercise.◆ It separates us from the real feelings we have about death.◆◆ If we really want to know what it is to die, we should visit mortuaries and

look upon actual corpses!◆ Not for ghoulish fancies, but to arouse our subconscious fears.

This is what the monks in Buddha's time used to do.◆ They would visit the charnel grounds

and gaze upon dead bodies in different states of decay. Some do it even to this day. By such an exercise, we come to know not what death is but rather how we relate to it.◆

We

can never know death as it really is, till we actually die. So what's the point of a talking about it! It's just another way of escaping◆ our painful feelings, our suffering. The peculiar

thing is that this sort of attitude, constantly turning away from what is painful, blocking it, rationalising it, always escaping, causes the mind to dwell on the good side of life, the pleasures, the excitements, the 'bright future'.◆ It produces an unreal optimism. Things always turn out all right.◆ Life's great.◆ I'm happy! Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow

we die.◆ Not now! Anyway it won't happen to me, not in the foreseeable future.◆ So

what's all this talk of ◆ This sort of optimism is obviously false, leading to false beliefs

and false hopes. ♦ And beneath it all sit a lot of repressed fears and anxieties. ♦ Such a person is not prepared for the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'. ♦ When the Buddha states that life is unsatisfactory, he is asking us to see life as it really is and not to shy away from its inbuilt suffering.

The opposite of this approach to life is when we submit passively to suffering and misfortune. ♦ 'Life's hard and then you die!' ♦ A helplessness. A loss of reason for living. ♦

What's the point? ♦ It's all work, work, work. ♦ Why bother, we're all going to die anyway.

♦ At first sight, compared to the optimist, this might seem a little more realistic. At least the pessimist is accepting totally the one fact of life of which we can be certain. Indeed in the face of ♦ overwhelming evidence that life does end, what is the point of effort, of success?

Death mocks all our ambitions and achievements. ♦ The logical conclusion of such an understanding is despair and suicide, or a brave stoicism where life just has to be suffered

and you may as well make the best of a bad job. ♦ For such people, living can take on a certain desperation, and sometimes, quite paradoxically, a compulsiveness to achieve, to

win, to fly in the face of despair. No doubt we have all faced certain events in our lives in

these two ways to some degree or another. ♦ But is there another way of seeing life which

neither leads us down the garden path of foolish hopes nor drags us into tunnels of despair, despondency and gloom?

The Buddha would have us investigate life impartially, to see it as it really is, accepting the situation totally. ♦ Within that clarity of view it is easier for us to act. ♦ That is what he called the Middle Path, and it is often the name given to his teachings. His teachings were very clear on this point. Seeking happiness in the pleasures of the senses suffering because such things don't last. ♦ The person who concentrates his life on the next exciting

thing to do, is doing exactly this. ♦ Forever seeking enjoyment, distraction and pleasure. Such persons are blind to the suffering that surrounds them. ♦ On the other hand, people who try to deny all pleasure and happiness and are overcome by the sufferings of life, have become blinded to the possibility of the real peace and joy to be found in living. What is worse is that both are blinded to the higher reality that transcends both the pleasure and the tribulations of life. ♦

The Buddha asked us to take a realistic approach, not to pin our hopes on the transient pleasures of life, nor to be overcome by suffering and death, but to accept this dual situation totally, work within it and try to discover what lies beyond it. ♦ This realistic approach can be experienced at first hand in our meditation. ♦ What is it we are doing but facing and accepting all the negativity that arises, observing all the pleasurable and joyful feelings and thoughts, and seeing all of this for what it really is, just passing phenomena, momentary mental objects. ♦ Realising the passing nature of things undercuts false hopes.

Seeing the arising of things, the birth of every moment, undercuts despair.

Let us take the threat of nuclear war. ♦ Not so long ago, many people felt the threat of a nuclear holocaust as an ever-present reality. ♦ They were fearful and anxious, angry and frustrated, depressed and despairing. Others didn't seem to see the danger at all. ♦ They felt secure under the nuclear umbrella, the deterrent. ♦ Anyway, they say, a nuclear war is unthinkable. What's the point of fighting it? ♦ No one would win. ♦ Humans wouldn't be so mad. ♦ Here we have two opposite reactions to a given situation, the pessimistic and the optimistic. ♦ Contemplating the possibility of a nuclear holocaust, even if it were to happen by mistake, might awaken these never-will-happen believers to the potential harm and motivate them to support disarmament. Accepting the possibility of nuclear holocaust with all that that means, especially to ourselves personally (for a lot of our fear of nuclear war is a fear of our own death), both fear and anxiety may be lessened. ♦ Once they are, we

are much more capable of positive action. ❖ Anxiety and fear drain our energy, bring about panic and confusion. ❖ With a clearer mind, a more firm direction can be found. ❖ But we can only do what we can do. For some it may mean joining a march, for others influencing heads of state. We have to accept our limitations. ❖ If we don't, we will suffer from anger, frustration, depression and despair. ❖ This polarity of pessimism and false optimism needs to be steadied towards a calm grasp of reality - seeing the situation just as it is. ❖ We need to be very much aware of how our emotions colour a situation.

Here lies the importance of meditation practice, Insight Vipassana Meditation. This was the Buddha's great discovery in his Enlightenment. He discovered that by just developing awareness, we are able to heal all our negativities and slowly purify the heart. ❖ When we sit, this is an opportunity to observe, really experience our moods and emotions, our states of mind. ❖ But investigate here does not mean to analyse, to ask questions, to wonder about the causes. It means simply to experience, to feel the emotions and moods as they really are. ❖ Equally important is to observe also our feelings about them, our reactions to them. ❖ When I feel depressed, how do I feel about it? Do I get angry? ❖ Do I get

fearful and anxious? ❖ Do I get depressed about being depressed? ❖ The first step in the meditation is to begin to lose our fears and aversion towards states of mind. ❖ This is the first step in purifying the mind. Having established some concentration on the breath, we observe any state of mind that arises, any mood or emotion that comes to our attention. ❖

Observe them as bodily feelings. ❖ There may be feelings of heaviness from depression, heat from anger, wobbliness from fear and tightness from anxiety. ❖ These feelings manifest in different parts of the body, sometimes in the chest, or stomach or abdomen for instance. We just watch it all calmly, noticing, observing. ❖ We see that everything is changing, everything is arising and passing away. What is it we are achieving here? ❖
By

this simple observation, we are losing our fears of and ❖ aversion to negative states of mind

as they arise. ❖ By not repressing these negative states of mind, they display themselves and to our amazement pass away. ❖ We are healing our hearts. We are purifying our minds.

We must also be equally aware of pleasant feelings, observing them just as keenly, but this time observing how mind grasps for them, longs to indulge in them. ❖ Of course, they pass away too. ❖ Observing the passing of pleasant states of mind stops us being falsely optimistic. ❖ Observing the passing away of painful states of mind stops us being pessimistic. Seeing both as passing phenomena leads to a realistic view of life. When the

mind is realistic - knowing things as they really are - it is equanimous, peaceful. ❖ To win

a million or to lose a million does not ruffle this inner calm. ❖ This is the joy of the Middle

Path. ❖ This is what the Buddha wanted us to do - to know ourselves as we really are.

Meditation helps us to realise this. ❖ But it shouldn't stop there. ❖ We should keep this frame of mind, this understanding throughout the day. Everyday.

May the Teachings of the Buddha shed light into your life!

May you quickly attain the Supreme Goal!

1. THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING

Notes : ORDINARY SUFFERING dukkhadukkha

DUKKHA : ❖ pain, sorrow, misery, discontent, suffering, unsatisfactoriness

THE BUDDHA:

experienced suffering as a young man

The Three Heavenly Messengers:

the sick, the dying, the dead

The Great Renunciation

The First Noble Truth of Suffering:

ordinary suffering

suffering of change

suffering of conditioned states

Our Usual Reactions to Suffering:

Aversion : escapism : rationalization : false optimism

Submission (passive) : pessimism (despair)

Acceptance ❖❖ and ❖❖ pro-reaction ❖❖❖ realism ❖ (equanimity)

Daily Life:

Coping with physical pain

Coping with mental pain

Coping with this in others

Reaction to fortune and misfortune

Meditation:

Observing pleasant and unpleasant feelings, both physical and mental (emotions)

Observing reactions to pain and pleasure

Observing them all as passing and unstable.

Using these notes can you write a small essay or give a small talk♦ (into a cassette perhaps?), using examples from your own life.

Finding a way of thinking about Dhamma makes for a deeper, more personal understanding.

The First Noble Truth of Suffering — The Five Aggregates

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min read

This foundational essay introduces the Buddha's analytical framework of the pañcakkhandhā (five aggregates) as a practical tool for understanding the First Noble Truth of dukkha. Bhante Bodhidhamma uses the analogy of disassembling a car to explain how the Buddha divided human experience into five categories: rūpa (material form and our sensory contact with it), vedanā (feelings/sensations), saññā (perceptions and mental labeling), saṅkhārā (volitional formations including emotions and mental states), and viññāṇa (consciousness that cognizes experience).

The essay emphasizes a crucial insight for meditation practice: our emotional reactions and mental states are self-conditioned responses, not caused by external circumstances. Through detailed examples, including the story of Jack's anger at his neighbor's music, Bhante demonstrates how understanding the aggregates reveals our personal responsibility for our mental conditioning. This recognition becomes the foundation for developing Right Awareness and transforming habitual reactive patterns.

Particularly valuable for beginning meditators, the teaching explains how consciousness can become an 'impartial observer' of the other aggregates, leading to wisdom and insight. The essay bridges theoretical understanding with practical application, showing how aggregate analysis helps pinpoint exactly where dukkha arises in our experience and how mindful awareness can transform our relationship to difficult emotions and perceptions.

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING : ❖ DUKKHA

The Five Aggregates

(pancakkhanda)

QUESTIONS

1. Which is right? ❖ You only need tick.

Other people, ❖ society, ❖ the other, ❖ cause ❖ my ❖ emotions ❖ and moods. ❖ ❖ ❖

Other people, society, the other, and myself cause them. ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

I, myself alone, am the cause of my emotions and moods.

2. What is a car? ❖ What is it made of?

We can take a car apart

We can divide the components up in different ways.

e.g. Transmission (moving Parts) : body work (static parts)

Different materials : ♦ metal, plastics, rubber, etc.

Individual components : carburettor, distributor, etc

Molecules : subatomic particles

Into what parts would you divide a human being?

What do you believe a human being is made of?

When we look at any object in the world, be it natural or man-made, we tend to see it as a whole, a total or integral thing. ♦ Take, for instance, the car. ♦ We see it parked or moving. ♦ We see it as an object in itself. We see it as one substantial thing. ♦ But this is just a concept. ♦ We lose sight of the fact that it's made up of parts. ♦ It's only when the car breaks down that we remember, or perhaps realise for the first time if we're not mechanically minded, that it is an object made up of many other objects, all in relationship

to each other. ♦ Only when all these pieces are assembled, do we call it a car. ♦ The petrol

pump, for instance, is hidden away, hardly known by most drivers. ♦ Suddenly, the car stops. We call the Services. The mechanic says it's the petrol pump. We realise this little object is crucial to the well-being of the car. We realise that this car we once took as whole

and entire is simply an intricate relationship of parts to parts.

This might be a layman's view of the car, but specialists may see it in a different light. ♦

The mechanic sees it as transmission and bodywork. The metallurgist as a collection of different materials - metals, plastics, natural substances, such as wood and rubber. ♦

Scientists see it as molecular structures or subatomic particles. ♦ Whatever! ♦ The point is

that the car can be pulled apart and heaped into different piles depending on how you look

at it, how you perceive it.

When it comes to the human being, it is astounding how many ways this poor being has been divided and subdivided. ♦ Every religious, philosophical and psychological school, east and west, has its own definition or division of the human being. ♦ In the west, materialist biologists and behavioural psychologists, see the human as simply a collection

of physical parts. Mind or personality is simply brain. Grey matter indeed! ♦ Freudians categorise humans as a process, moving from one stage of development to another. Social

psychologists and sociologists see the person in terms of relationship to others. Christianity

and Islam as more than just body and mind. They posit an everlasting soul. ♦ Ever since the philosopher, Descartes in the seventeenth century, we in the west have looked upon

the human being essentially as a machine. ❖ Only recently have scientists begun to look at

the human as an 'integrated circuit', in holistic terms, rather than just a set of parts that happen to be together, but work independently. ❖❖

The list of categorisations is endless.

Now as for the Buddha's point of view, everything arises from his own self designated area

of teaching. ❖ Whatever he knew about the human being, he confined what he said to the

Noble Truths and to his aim to teach only the fact of suffering and the end of suffering. ❖

For the Buddha, it was of paramount importance to be able to pinpoint for people where

their suffering arose and what in fact constituted suffering, so that the way or path leading

to the end of suffering would be made clear to the listener. He simply wasn't interested in

anything else. ❖ So when we read ❖ the teachings of the Buddha, it's important to keep in

mind the perspective he is coming from.

The Buddha divided the human being into what is known as the five Khanda, translated as

aggregates and sometimes a little unkindly as heaps. ❖ So just as the metallurgist might divide the car into metals, plastic, glass, rubber and oils, the Buddha divided the human being into matter, sensations, perceptions, volitional formations and consciousness, and each category is to be seen as a heap of similar things, like five distinct scrap yards.

At base the human is made of two separate phenomena - matter and mind. Matter is the

body itself - the bones, muscles, ❖ blood and so on, including brain. ❖ But mind is different

from matter, a more subtle phenomenon that infuses the body like dye in water. ❖ Matter

is rupa in Pali which is the language that ❖ all the scriptures of the Theravadin tradition of

Buddhism are written in. ❖ It is a dialect of one of the ancient languages of India. However,

here rupa not only refers to the actual physical matter, but to how the mind experiences

this matter. And for the meditator this is very important.

The mind infuses the body and comes in contact with matter through the body. ♦ This contact, this interface, we can say is the base of mind. It is the sensual base. ♦ It is at five points that mind comes to know matter - the five sense bases. ♦ For example, light as a physical phenomenon. The photons strike the retina. This is all that is known by the . ♦ Without the retina, without the eyes, a person simply does not know or experience

light. ♦ When the photons are 'felt' by mind ♦ at the point of contact on the retina, ♦ mind

experiences matter. ♦ So it is with all the other senses.

This initial contact with matter is experienced as a combination in varying degrees of what

Buddhism calls the Four Elements. ♦ They are descriptively known as earth, fire, water and

air. ♦ The earth element refers to the quality of weight and is sensed as pressure, light or

heavy. ♦ Fire is temperature from extreme heat to extreme cold. ♦ Water is cohesion or elasticity. It's what keeps things together. ♦ Air is movement, pure movement. ♦ The last two are difficult to experience, purely by themselves, but can be done in meditation. ♦

The

first two, pressure and temperature, are gross enough for us to be aware of them even in

daily life. ♦ When someone stands on our toes in the bus queue, that's the earth element

we are experiencing at base sense level. ♦ When we touch a hot panhandle by mistake, what makes us howl is the fire element at the sense base, the nerve endings in the hand. ♦

It is only after this is sensed that the mind recognises it as pressure or heat, and then if mind perceives signals as 'too much', we react to avoid more of the 'pain'.

If we just ponder for a moment, we come to realise that we don't actually 'know' our bodies. ♦ For instance, we carefully comb our hair. We spend a lot of money at the barbers

and hairdressers, but when one falls out, we never shed a tear, unless it becomes an epidemic as it did with me! In fact, we don't have any feeling in the hair, in the hair itself.

And it's not just my hair! ♦ What of nails? ♦ Of blood? ♦ Do we feel our blood? Even when

we cut ourselves and some flows out, do I feel the blood in itself flow out of me. ♦ Do I experience 'me' flowing out with 'my' blood. When the blood falls and hits the floor, do

I shout 'ouch!' In Buddhist understanding, the mind, by which I know things, is only in contact with the material body through the senses. So although the cut signals pain, I do not experience each skin cell, nor the blood that flows. The point of contact is the nerve ending. If the nerve goes numb or is destroyed, I don't feel the cut. What I know of my body is what I can sense. That's all. I can see its shape, hear the heart beat, feel pleasurable and painful sensations and so on. And I experience this through the different

interactions and combinations of the Four Elements. When we meditate, especially if we do a long course of say a week, these elements can become quite obvious to us. We begin to see that they form a category of mental experience.

The next category is the aggregate of sensations, called in Pali, Vedana. This is where we experience pleasurable, painful or neutral sensations. Whatever combinations of elements

go to make up the original contact, this contact is experienced as pleasing, painful or neutral. When we chew an apple, a good juicy one, contacts are made all over the tongue.

Each individual contact at the end of each taste bud on the tongue is experienced as sweet and tasty. All these sensations - and there is never a moment when the body is not sending sense data to the mind - can all be collected into one heap, the aggregate of sensation.

The third aggregate, sanna, is to do with that part of the mind that labels these sense objects. It includes all our perceptions. When the air vibrations of a sound puts pressure on the ear drum, that pressure is mostly the earth element. This contact causes sensations to arise that are pleasant and that are then perceived as music. If the sensations are unpleasant, the sound is perceived as noise. If neither pleasant nor unpleasant sound is perceived as simply sound. Included then in the aggregate is not just the labelling of things, but also all our value judgements, including all our biases and prejudices. The important thing for the meditator is to be able to listen to these perceptions objectively. And not only in the sitting posture, but throughout the day. If we heighten our general awareness we come to know that many of our perceptions are

subliminal. We are barely conscious of them. And we are often not conscious of how our perceptions are prejudiced. We take the way we think for granted. At base, then, this aggregate of perceptions, Sanna, is just the recognition of the object, but this recogni-

tion

has built-in values. ♦ It is these value judgements that can be wrong and so bring about suffering for others and ourselves. ♦ We need to investigate all our value judgments.

We

need to become more and more aware of the aggregate of perceptions.

The next aggregate is called Volitional Formations or Conditioning, Sankhara, and refers to

all those states of mind, negative, positive and neutral. It is all our emotions and moods. ♦

It is in this aggregate that we can say we experience the sufferings and the joys of life. ♦

It is one of the aims of meditation to cleanse this aggregate of all the negative states and move towards those states of mind the Buddha called the Divine Abodes! That is, abiding in

loving Kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

These volitional conditionings are that part of the mind that reacts to incoming data, sensations and perceptions. ♦ It is very important here for the meditator to grasp what is happening if such negativity is to be undermined. ♦ By negativity here is simply meant

all those states of mind that we experience as unpleasant, disagreeable and painful, depression, anxiety, fear, frustration, guilt, sorrow and so on.

Jack sits in the armchair with a cup of tea after a hard day's work, finally enjoying a bit of

peace and quiet. Suddenly through the dividing wall heavy rock comes bursting through

from next door. The insistent thud beats its rhythm on Jack's eardrum. ♦ Feelings arise perceived as unpleasant. This perception of 'noise' sharpens the focus and the reaction arises. This reaction is how Jack has taught himself to respond to such a perception.

He's

fuming with anger, more so because he'd asked his neighbours not to play their 'music' so loud. ♦ Now, at first glance, it seems that Jack is justified in his anger. ♦ That his anger

is caused' by next door who are not being neighbourly. ♦ But is his anger really caused by

their lack of neighbourliness, or by the heavy rock? Or is his anger the way he has taught

himself to react when he hears such a 'noise'?

This is a crucial point and once we've grasped the mechanics here and actually see what is

happening within ourselves, we will be able to make great headway in reducing the

amount

of emotional suffering we bear. This is one of the reasons for meditation, to become more

and more aware of our passing moods, how they arise and how they pass away.❖

This

aggregate, translated as volitional formations or volitional conditionings, is precisely so called because these mental states are the product of our own will. Nobody has made Jack

angry.❖ Nothing at all in fact makes Jack angry. Jack's anger is his own learnt response, willed by him and him alone. When Jill, his teenage daughter, comes in, looking for something, she quite unconsciously starts humming the tune, subliminally delighted by that

very same 'noise' that Jack, her dad, says ruins his tea!

Indeed, if anger were caused by an outside object, then we could argue that there must be

an object in the world that makes everyone angry as soon as they see or hear it.❖ But this

is not so.❖ We all have our own conditioning and individual conditionings have their own

individual reactions.

Now you might ask, Well, how is it I get angry even when I don't mean to. If it is really all

to do with me conditioning myself, if it is all to do with my will, why don't I have immediate

control? The fact is that will has conditioned this category of mind.❖ Habits have been formed.❖ That part of the mind which contains our emotional reactions and moods has

been habituated, trained, conditioned to respond in certain ways.❖❖ The first step in undermining this conditioning is to realise for ourselves the role of the❖ will.❖ Then we can

see clearly that our emotions and moods are truly the result of past acts of will. We then realise that by refusing to will, refusing to entertain these states of mind, they will pass away.

Jack believes he is right to get angry with his neighbours.❖ He believes it is justified.❖

In

fact, he's tricked himself into believing that the music and the neighbours themselves are

directly causing his anger!❖ So long as he believes this, every time anger arises because

of the music and neighbours, he will indulge that anger. ❖ When he indulges that anger, he is actually saying, Yes I will get angry. ❖ If only Jack would meditate! ❖ If he did, he would soon come to realise that it is he himself who wills his own anger. ❖ By refusing to will it, to indulge it, he would undermine his own learnt response! ❖ Eventually, he would come to perceive the noise as simply sound! ❖ He may even be influenced by his teenage daughter and come to recognise some musicality.

When a meditator who has always believed that others were the cause of their anger, depression, stress and so on, realises that they are in fact self-taught responses, a great insight has been made. ❖ For from now on, the state of their mind will come more and more under his personal control. They realise that they can control it, given time and ardent

practice. This practice is two fold. ❖ Firstly, not to indulge in any negative states of mind, thereby allowing old conditioning to die out. Secondly, not to will any new negative states of mind, thereby keeping the mind pure. This is a very liberating insight.

Finally, there is the aggregate of consciousness. ❖ This is the faculty in the mind that just cognises. ❖ It knows. ❖ It is the 'mirror' in which all the rest of the mind displays itself. ❖

But it is also capable of discriminating, knowing this from that, black from white, table from chair and so on. This consciousness in meditation takes on the quality of awareness,

an objective viewing or knowing. ❖ From this standpoint of watching all the sensations, emotions, thoughts, and imaginings, ❖ insight into the true nature ❖ of mind arises. ❖ This is the first step for the meditator - to become the impartial objective observer. ❖

Just knowing what's going on is enough for wisdom and insight to arise.

So to recap. ❖ The Buddha divided the human being into five aggregates or heaps. ❖❖❖

They are: firstly, matter and mind's initial contact with matter through the six senses (the sixth sense being mind itself); secondly, all the sensations experienced as pleasant,

unpleasant or neutral; thirdly, all the perceptions, recognitions, images and concepts; fourthly, all the mental states, our moods and emotions, and lastly all our consciousness that knows all this.

The importance of these categorisations is that they help us to pin point where suffering

arises. ❖ When I first walked around the streets in my robes, I was very much aware of people's reactions to this alien. One of the most difficult reactions for me to handle with equanimity was the look of distaste. ❖ Now what actually happened to me on such an occasion?

The retinas of my eyes simply respond to incoming light. ❖ That is the simple contact. ❖ This

light is conveyed to the mind where perception recognises it. ❖ It is pigeonholed as 'woman

with disgusted look, with disgusted look at me!' and with it - 'bad! Meaning - no one should

look at the noble likes of me with disgust! ❖ With the perception of a disgusted face, there

arises in me the feelings of what these perceptions mean. ❖ I feel her disgust for me. ❖ I empathise. ❖❖ Unpleasant feelings fill my body. So this is what she feels for me! ❖ I now

get angry, because I believe that if someone is disgusted with me for no logical reason, from my point of view that is, I am justified in getting angry with that person. ❖ Who is she to feel disgust at me! Doesn't she know I'm a monk! How ignorant! It's disgusting! ❖ This disgust and the ensuing anger is simply how I've trained myself to respond to such looks. ❖ My consciousness totally identifies with this. This is the me, the ego! ❖ Anything

can happen! Next morning the headlines read, Buddhist Monk Breaks Begging Bowl on Old

Woman's Head!

It's disgusting!

Of course, it is hoped that this monk has learnt his lesson. ❖ And that now, realising that the woman did not actually make him disgusted and angry, he understands that the

woman's perception and feelings are her own too. That, in truth, the more skilful response

may have been a smile!

SUMMARY

THE FIVE AGGREGATES (panca khanda)

The First Noble Truth of Suffering — The Three Characteristics

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 12 min read

This foundational essay examines the tilakkhana — the three universal characteristics that define all conditioned existence according to Buddhist teaching. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how anicca (impermanence) reveals that everything, including our physical bodies and mental states, is in constant flux, changing so radically that we cannot truly call anything 'the same' from moment to moment. He demonstrates how our failure to understand this transience leads to dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) — not just ordinary suffering, but the deeper frustration that comes from trying to find permanence in an impermanent world.

The essay provides a detailed analysis of anattā (not-self), showing how our identification with the five khandhas (aggregates) creates a mistaken sense of selfhood. Through scientific analogies — such as the complete cellular renewal of the body every seven years and the weekly replacement of the eye's cornea — Bhante illustrates the radical nature of change that undermines any solid sense of self. The teaching emphasizes that true awareness can only exist in the present moment, making meditation practice essential for directly experiencing these characteristics.

Drawing from the Buddha's first teachings to his disciples after awakening, this essay connects theoretical understanding to practical meditation experience, showing how recognizing the three characteristics leads to non-attachment and ultimately to liberation from suffering.

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING :◆ DUKKHA

The Three Characteristics

◆◆◆ (tilakkhana)

QUESTIONS

What do you mean by the word, time?

What do you think it is?

When you say a person has changed, what do you mean?

Supposing you were describing the 'Human Experience',

What it is to be human

What words or phrases would you use?

Limit the choice to three main characteristics?

The Buddha taught that there were three basic characteristics of the human condition:

dukkha, often translated as unsatisfactoriness or suffering; anicca, impermanence, transience, change; and anatta, not-self or insubstantiality. When he said that our condition

was fundamentally unsatisfactory, he meant not only ♦ ordinary aches and pains, emotional

and personal problems, and the sufferings of old age and death, he also meant it in two other respects which are, in fact, the other two characteristics of our existence, namely transience and not-self.

The third characteristic of our human condition, anatta, translated best as not-self, has to do with how we identify with the wrong things. We take on a mistaken identity. ♦ We believe ourselves to be the body and mind, the body and the ego or personality. ♦ He divided the human phenomenon into five categories, known as khandha or aggregates, or less lovingly heaps. ♦ The first heap consists of the material body and how mind experiences this; the second, all our sensations; the third, all our perceptions and thinking;

the fourth, ♦ all our states of mind which have been produced by our will and are called

volitional conditionings or formations. These are all our moods and emotions. The fifth is

the knowing of all this, our consciousness. ♦ To understand how this is a mistaken identity

it is necessary to investigate the second characteristic of the human condition which is not

only applicable to all humans but to the whole of nature. This is the characteristic of change,

anicca. ♦

Built into the idea of change is the concept of time. ♦ It is interesting to see how we use this word. ♦ We say we live time, or we've been bad times. ♦ The underlying concept is that time is a tunnel or a container within which we live, in which we act out all our lives. ♦

Time is somehow separate from us, existing apart from us. ♦ Secondly, we seem to think

we have some control over this called time. We often say, I lost time I'll make time. These

underlying concepts that time somehow has an independent existence and that somehow

we have some control over it are what we must investigate to determine the essential quality of change of which time is simply the measure.

One of the rituals in any family gathering is to bring out the photo albums with all the

usual
comments, delights and laughter.◆ But one of the interesting things is to observe the
tense
that people talk in. There I am when I was a teenager. That is me at your wedding last
year.◆ You can see there is quite a confusion here between the present and the past
with
the in the present is confused.◆ This , this ego, this personality conceives itself as being
the
same whether in the past, present or indeed in the future.
However, the fact is that this is simply not true. Let us examine the human at the biolo-
gical
level.◆◆ The body I had as a baby is simply not the body I have now.◆ In fact it is said
the body completely changes every seven years.◆ All that food and drink we have day
in
and day out go to fuel this process.◆ Cells duplicate and die, all to an internal pattern
no
doubt, a pre-set blueprint, the DNA, but none the less the cells are not so much chan-
ging

as themselves but dying while other cells take their place.◆ Even brain cells which
don't
actually die change completely within themselves so they cannot be called the same
cells as
the ones we were born with.

This is an important point to grasp.◆ By change, we don't mean that the same thing is
simply changing shape.◆ A piece of clay can be moulded into a cup and then into a sau-
cer
so that we can see it is the same piece of clay.◆ But when it comes to the body cells,
they
reproduce and die. They are not the same cells changing shape.◆◆ This came home
very
strongly to me when I once went to an optician.◆ My left eye, it seems, had got a little
better.◆ I was surprised by it, but the optician told me it was surprising that eyesight
remained so static since the actual cornea, the large lens we look through, changes not
once in seven years, nor in a year or in a month, but once in a week!◆ Yes indeed!
Every
week I'm looking at the world through a new cornea.◆ And I didnt know it!◆ In my
blithe
ignorance, I thought the body changed alright but not radically. Now I come to realize

that

the change is radical.◆ The body I have now is simply not the one I had seven years ago - at all!

In other words, it's the difference between an organisation saying it, meaning training and

redeployment and another organisation which says it's going to meaning it sacks every-

one it now employs and takes on a totally new work force! Our bodies change radically. They are

changing radically even now. When we perceive this, when we realise this, this transi-

ence, this changing nature, then we begin to understand why the body cannot be a substan-

tial . The ancient Greeks understood this idea and the philosopher, Heraclitus, used the image of

the river for life.◆ He said no one steps in the same river twice for it is forever chan-

ging.◆ The Buddha I'm sure would have pointed out that no one steps into the same river with

the same foot for that too is ever changing.◆ We can't say this is my body because as soon

as we say this is body and thereby identify with it, define the self by it, it's gone, it's

changed. It is like trying to grasp water. It just flows out of the hand.

Not realising this factor of change causes us to identify with the wrong things and this in turn is a cause of our suffering.◆ It never occurs to a young person in any real sense that they are growing old.◆ The first signs of wrinkles on the face, the first grey hairs are

traumas. I knew I would grow old, but I didn't think it would really happen ...now.

Growing old, losing one's powers, watching the changes on the skin, all cause us tremendous suffering.◆ We identify so much with our bodies, desiring them to be as

we want them to be, that we are for ever compensating for the process of change, of grow-

ing old, of decay - even to the point of cosmetic operations!◆ And death, of course, every

time we have a little brush with it, be it a near accident or a close shave or death of another, fills

That is a very small moment of existence indeed, and the Buddhism teaches that within that

moment of matter existing, seventeen consciousnesses, thought moments, arise!

Let us recap then on time. ♦ First it doesn't exist by way of extension. There is no past whatsoever. ♦ It has collapsed into nothingness. ♦ There is no future. ♦ It's not here. ♦ There exists only this infinitesimal moment. This is the only existence we have. ♦ It arises

out of nothing, sustains itself for that infinitesimal length of time and then ceases. ♦ When

we watch the breath in meditation we are time in a gross way. The inbreath begins. It is sustained and then ends. ♦ That's it. One inbreath gone. ♦ The outbreath begins, sustains

and ends. ♦ That's it. One outbreath gone. ♦ By observing the breath process we are observing, getting to know intimately, this passage of moments of time. ♦ Each breath, outwardly similar, yet a totally different creation from the last. ♦ We don't live in or through

a time object. Real time is just our actual existence. This existence is here and now. ♦ We

can't lose it or hold on to it. ♦ It can't be repeated. ♦ Each moment of existence is unique

and total. ♦ It arises and passes away. ♦ This transience, this anicca, is a fundamental characteristic of the physical and mental world. It is a fundamental characteristic of the 'me', the human being.

Just as this is true of our physical bodies and sensations, so it is also true of the third khanda or aggregate, our perceptions. ♦ We can only perceive what there is now. ♦ I can

only see a cup when a cup is there and perceptions of the cup arise and pass away. These

perceptions are purely mental images, words, ideas, value judgements of good or bad. They

also arise and pass away. ♦ ♦ And they never arise again, but new ones affected by new information arise. ♦ So our perceptions, our ideas, our thoughts, are always changing.

Again these same arguments pertain to our states of mind, the volitional conditionings, be they moods or emotions of depression, anxiety, anger or joy, happiness and peace.

Whatever the state of mind, it never repeats itself. ♦ So which state of mind shall I identify

with? ♦ Which one shall I call me or mine? ♦ If I define myself in my depression - what am

I when happiness arises? ♦ If I say I am all my moods and emotions, then I fall into the

error of believing is existing yesterday when I was depressed, now when I am angry and tomorrow when I will be happy! ❖ But this is only now, and this now passes away. ❖ It is delusion to identify with the past and the future.

The same is true of the final khanda or aggregate of consciousness. Often people will argue: ❖ yes I agree I am not my body or other mental factors since its all arising and passing away. ❖ I see that now. But my consciousness is steady. I am my consciousness, my knowing of these things. However, in meditation this last hold onto our false identity begins to evaporate, for we begin to realise that there can only be consciousness when there is an object to be conscious of. ❖ If I was to enter a space with no objects at all and the mind itself produced no thinking, what would I be conscious of? ❖ Consciousness begs an object. Without an object, there is no consciousness, no knowing. ❖ Indeed there are times when we are , not conscious. ❖ If I say I am my consciousness, who am I when I'm in

deep sleep or anaesthetised on the operating table, or knocked unconscious? So here we have investigated the First Noble Truth from the point of view of the three characteristics of existence: transience (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) and the insubstantiality or the not-self of the personality (anatta). The Buddha, when he was enlightened, at first thought his discoveries too subtle for people to understand. ❖ But persuaded otherwise he sought out his five former companions. ❖ They'd left him a while earlier because he ate some milk rice and they thought he had given up the training of the ascetic and gone soft. ❖ But in fact this meal gave him the energy to reach full enlightenment. When he approached them, they were reluctant at first to receive him, but as he came closer, his presence was all too powerful and they prepared a seat for him and he taught the Dhamma by way of the Four Noble Truths. At the end of this first Discourse, known as The Turning of the Wheel of the Law, one of the four, Kondanna was enlightened or, as the scripture says, 'the spotless immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in him'. ❖ Later that same day after they had all shared the food brought in from alms round, he gave the

second discourse, in which the three characteristics of existence are taught for the first time. ❖ This is how it ends.

When a wise disciple understands (that the five aggregates are transitory, unsatisfying and do not constitute a permanent self), non-attachment to the body, sensations, perceptions, emotions and consciousness arises. As non-attachment arises, sense desires

and attachments fade away. ❖ With the fading away of sense desires and attachments, the

heart is liberated. With liberation, the knowledge arises, .

This is the fundamental teaching of the Buddha. ❖ Through meditation and throughout our

daily life, these characteristics should become more and more plain to us. ❖ Life is changing.

This body, this mind is not me, not mine. ❖ Identifying with it causes me to have wrong expectations, false hopes. This wrong identification is the cause of my suffering. Not to identify with them is to lose my attachment to them, to be non-attached. These insights lead us to a proper relationship with ourselves and others and ultimately leads us to the

experience which is beyond body and mind, Nibbana. ❖ We can say that the experience of Nibbana is the discovery of our true identity and it establishes a new way of relating to

ourselves and the world. ❖ What is this new relationship? It is simply that since everything

arises and passes away, I do not regard it as me or mine or self. I come to realise that when I identify wrongly with all this, it is a cause of suffering. ❖ I become non-attached. ❖

But let me hasten to add this is not a cold detachment! ❖ Far from it! Because of this perspective, 'the heart is liberated! We begin to find real wisdom and true compassion.

In conclusion, the more we become aware of the transient changing, radically changing nature of our lives, the more we realise there is no stopping place, no rest, no stability, no

security. ❖ The more we accept these facts, the more we live within the flow of living, and

work within it. ❖ Through meditation, coming to terms with the ever-changing nature of our

lives, we free ourselves of false fears and frustrations, fearing the loss of what we cannot

actually keep, frustrated by not being able to achieve what is actually unachievable. ❖ It leads to a greater realism and in that greater realism we will find the peace and joy we

all

so dearly seek.

May the Teachings of the Buddha shed light into your life!

May you quickly attain the Supreme Goal!

SUMMARY

ANICCA ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖

ever-changing nature, transience, arising and passing away of every moment

radical change

DUKKHA

ordinary suffering and pain in life

unsatisfactory nature of living in a world that is forever changing

suffering that comes from wanting what we cannot have

from wrong identity

ANATTA ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖

not-self, insubstantiality

not believing that my body and mind are unchanging

realising that my body and mind cannot be permanent

cannot be a 'me' or 'self'

TIME ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖

a mental concept that helps us order events in our history, construct a future

does not actually exist in the past or the future

the only real time is NOW, the presenting moment

When we understand this, we are beginning to see our lives in a realistic way.

Meditation is a technique whereby we experience these three characteristics within ourselves.

At first, this way of thinking about ourselves seems strange, even threatening, but the Buddha said these discoveries would lead to our liberation, liberation from all suffering.

The Second Noble Truth — Desire

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min read

This foundational essay examines the Second Noble Truth from the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, exploring how taṇhā (craving or desire) serves as the root cause of dukkha in our lives. Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the progression from fundamental ignorance (avijjā) through delusion to the three types of craving: kāma-taṇhā (sensual desire), bhava-taṇhā (desire for becoming/eternalism), and vibhava-taṇhā (desire for annihilation). Using contemporary examples from materialistic society, the essay illustrates how our attachment to pleasures creates a cycle of temporary satisfaction followed by boredom, leading to intensified craving. The text explores how we create identity through our desires ('I am what I want'), leading to suffering when these attachments are threatened or lost. Through meditation practice, particularly vipassanā, we can observe these mental patterns as mere phenomena, developing insight into their true nature and gradually undermining their power over us. The essay concludes with practical guidance for daily life investigation of desire and aversion.

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING

QUESTION

Make a list of people's objectives as you see them in a 'post-industrial, post-modern, materialistic society. ♦ What motivates people? ♦ Why do they work? ♦ What do they live for?

Divide the items on your list into those you think lead to happiness and those to unhappiness.

The Second Noble Truth was formulated by the Buddha in his first ever discourse after his

Enlightenment at Isipatana Park near Benares on the Ganges River. It is called ♦ ♦ ♦ The Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of the Law Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta.

'This, O Monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering: that craving which leads to rebirth combined with pleasure and passion, finding satisfaction now here now there,

namely the craving for sense pleasure, the craving for new existence and the craving for annihilation.'

So the cause of suffering or unsatisfactoriness in our lives is desire or craving for sensu-

al

pleasure. ♦ To understand why this is, we need to go down one step further and ask why

is it that we desire in the first place. ♦ According to the Buddha our fundamental, call it existential position, is that we are ignorant. ♦ This ignorance is not stupidity or blame-worthy

lack of education. This ignorance means the same as the root meaning in English - not knowing. We simply don't know. ♦ And what is it we don't know? It is the cause of our suffering and how to put an end to it. ♦ Because we are ignorant of this, this ignorant mind which doesn't know, seeks to find an answer. Since this answer is based on wrong understanding, sometimes even a guess or fantasy, for the real truth of the matter is hidden, delusion is produced in the mind. ♦ This delusion is the active side of the passive ignorance.

We often see this in our daily life. ♦ The TV suddenly goes funny. ♦ We haven't a clue how

a TV works or why it has gone funny. ♦ But since we can't get someone to service it, we'll

mess about with the knobs, and even lead ourselves to ♦ believing that a thump to the casing might work! No wonder the first words of the exasperated service person is 'Whos

been messing about with this?' We, of course, adopt the posture of innocent ignorance.

More seriously, in earlier times, when people were really exasperated with disasters such

as floods, famines, droughts, suddenly gods needed to be appeased. Animal and human sacrifice called for! ♦ The great problem with delusion and its manifestations is that we don't

know they are delusions ♦ This is by definition the meaning of delusion. ♦ In mental illness

the problem with the paranoid person, for instance, is that he has no insight. ♦ They don't

not realise in any way that their thinking does not match reality. No matter how much you

explain, yet the disturbed thinking persists. ♦ Delusions are rock hard.

Now this ignorance and its consequence, delusion, are the fount of two further manifestations: desire and hatred. ♦ Desire (tanha) here always refers to sensual desire (kama). ♦ It is first of all believing that life is about sensual indulgence, and secondly that

happiness is to be found in sense pleasure. This is what constitutes the delusion. Herein

is

our great confusion. ♦ We, as human beings, have five senses which respond to the world

and through which we enjoy a lot of pleasure, be it food, lovely sights, the feeling of a sea breeze or sexual pleasures. Even within the mind itself, the sixth sense in Buddhism,

there is great pleasure to be had in fantasies and mental states of excitement, infatuations

and so on. ♦ In fact, for most of us a lot of the time, life can be very pleasurable. ♦ Our technological society goes out of its way to try and turn this life into a sensual delight from

compact discs, TVs, Jacuzzis. You name it, there is some machine somewhere to heighten

our sensual pleasure.

Unfortunately, pleasure has an inbuilt obsolescence. ♦ No matter how wonderful, how

exciting, how pleasurable our experience is, there comes a time when we tire of it. ♦ We

get bored. ♦ So now this desire, which has caused us to find pleasure with its attendant emotional high, drives us on to seek more and more pleasure. ♦ If we watch ourselves closely throughout the day, we will see how tireless we are in trying to make ourselves comfortable and to enjoy some sort of 'new' pleasure all the time. ♦ As soon as I write, I think, What new cereal can I have? I need to look for something interesting. Can you imagine a weekend with nothing to do? ♦ For others who lead stressful, busy lives, they may look forward to a weekend of 'nothing to do'. If something turns up they have to do,

they're very unhappy! ♦ When we see this merry-go-round desire forces us to ride, we realise there is no end to the demands. We desire this. This gets boring. So we want that,

and so on. The search for pleasure can never end, for desire itself as a disposition of mind

can never be fully satisfied.

This, however, is only the surface of things for underneath the merry-go-round sits fear and anxiety. ♦ The more we attach to our pleasure, the more we define ourselves by it. ♦

This self-identification with pleasure and pleasurable emotions and feelings is the ultimate

delusion. ♦ I have a job; it gives me wealth and status. ♦ When I walk the streets, I can

hold myself high. I am a prime minister, a nurse, a bus driver or a teacher. ♦ It doesn't matter what it is so long as I identify with it, so long as I say, . Suddenly I lose my job!

♦ Now what am I? ♦ No wonder people go into severe depression when they are made redundant. To be made redundant is to rip someones badge off. It's to denude them. It's to say, That person thought she was a prime minister, nurse, bus driver or a teacher, but in fact she's not. ♦ These job definitions aren't us in any essential or real way at all. But we think they are. That's the delusion. ♦ That's why it causes us so much suffering to lose our jobs. As if the drop in standard of living were not suffering enough, we compound it with the loss of self-esteem and confidence. Even when we know our redundancy is not caused by our bad work or unpunctuality or anything like that, we react with depression, anxiety and so on. ♦ When we realise the connection between pleasure and identify, between pleasure and the fear of loss of pleasure, then at least we can begin to look for another way of looking at life which won't cause us to suffer. ♦

In order to find out how we can undermine our personal suffering, we need to observe ourselves in daily life. ♦ We need to question our attitudes, all our greeds as opposed to needs and see what stands up to reason.

If my father comes home from the pub with a black eye, I'm furious. I go to the pub. ♦ I want to know how it happened. ♦ I want the attacker punished. ♦ I'm very angry. ♦ I'm very upset. ♦ If Jimmy, the neighbour I argued with last week, gets beaten up, I think it serves him right. He was asking for it. ♦ If my car is stolen, it's a shock. ♦♦ My car! ♦ How can I live without my car? ♦ I'm full of hatred towards the thieves. ♦ I find no peace of mind until my car is restored to me, or the insurance is paid and the thieves brought to justice. ♦

When my next door's car is stolen, I am full of commiseration about the rottenness of the world today. No shock. ♦ No anger. ♦ I don't feel depressed. ♦ Why should I? Its not my car!

This is what the Buddha meant when he talked of desire and all its ramifications. Desire arises out of a particular delusion that somehow our happiness rests on the quantity and quality of sensual pleasure and the emotional delights it creates. ♦ This delusion sits

on, arises out of that fundamental ignorance of not knowing. This delusion sits on the fundamental ignorance of not knowing where we are to find our ultimate happiness. ♦ This ignorance, this delusion, this desire create craving for things and so life is a continual 'finding satisfaction, now here now there', but with no rest, no permanent satisfaction at all.

It is good practice to listen to ourselves and write down the words of desire we use: I want,

I wish, I would like, etc. ♦♦ Next to see how we use the words of obsession: I have to, I must, I need, I should, I ought, etc. Then to make two lists of those things we desire and those things we think we need and see how many are realistic. ♦ Of course, I need to

eat, but do I need to go out to a restaurant. ♦ When we become more aware of how we use these words, we become aware of our attachments and obsessions. The way we use language reveals our delusions. ♦♦ It's a good practice to make this list and really question

what is ♦ . ♦ It surprises us to find how little we do actually need. ♦ The Buddha wanted to

reduce the monk's needs to the absolute basics. He called these the Four Requisites: food,

clothing, shelter and medicine and in each case the rules go on to show that it is only the

basic rudimentary kind of these four requisites that is sufficient. Sufficient means that which

is actually needed. ♦

This came home to me when I once attended a meditation course in India. The food for the three weeks I was there was simply chapatti, a flat unleavened whole wheat bread and dhal or lentil soup. ♦ Now and again I got other vegetables and fruit, but in no way consistently. ♦ It was only for three weeks, but I remember how worried I became! ♦ I thought my body would fall apart for lack of proteins and vitamins. ♦ In fact I never felt

healthier and people remarked on how healthy I looked! ♦ It made me realise all the fears

and obsessions I had about food. Such fears and obsessions cause me suffering.

So here we have the deluded human being thinking that sense pleasures are the be all and end all of life. This is hedonism. ♦ Such a person who really thinks that 'pleasure to be the greatest good' (Oxford Dictionary Definition) is a hedonist. ♦ But in reality, this pleasure, this greatest good is a wild goose chase. Running after this, only to find boredom.

Running after that only to find dissatisfaction, disillusionment. And so on and on and on. ❖

But worse. ❖ When we move from one pleasure to another, we want it to be better. ❖

We don't just want films to continue, the same old cowboy movie with the same old plot. ❖

We want it to be different, more spills, more thrills. ❖ So the old cowboy movie becomes a sexy musical or realistic Sam Peckinpaw film, ❖ showing bullets exploding out of cowboy chests. ❖

The horror movie of yesterday makes us laugh. ❖ We want real horror, real terror. ❖

Love stories have to have desperate twists and turns. And if this is true of movies, how much truer it is of our lives. ❖

We so much want to be in the movies. ❖ We so much want to emulate the film stars, be heroine/hero. ❖

Whatever! ❖ We have to succeed, but this success especially in our greatly materialistic western civilisation is measured simply by how much pleasure we can buy, be it consumer goods or services. Last year I went to Spain. ❖

This year I'm booked on the spaceship to Mars. Now this delusive desire has established an identity and this identity is what I call 'me'. As far as I am concerned, I am what I want. ❖

I am what I have. ❖ I am the satisfaction of my desires. ❖❖

And through this 'me', I define and identify what is 'mine'. ❖ If I lose what is 'mine', I also lose a bit of 'me' and that is when this 'I' reacts with anger or depression or fear or what have you. ❖❖

In extreme cases, this 'I' thinks it will go mad or even loses the desire to live. ❖

When we are at the point of 'to be or not to be', we are at the second and third type of desire the Buddha described. ❖

The desire in this sense is really the desire to become, to keep on renewing life, to keep on living. ❖

Whenever death comes near, either by way of the loss of a dear one or a life threatening illness to our own person, great terror arises. ❖

Essentially the terror we feel now at the possible loss of ❖ life, is no different from the ❖ fear or anxiety we feel if our jobs are threatened, or loved ones ❖ leave us. ❖❖

The quantity of terror, fear, anxiety we feel is the measure of our identity with the loved one, the job and this 'my-self'. And yet we

know

we will die! ♦ We know very well we will grow old and die! We know it very well. There is undeniable evidence that everyone else, even my loved ones, will die, will grow old and die.

But even though we know it, we don't seem to really accept it. There's something in us that keeps blinding us to the fact, and we carry on behaving as if it happens to everyone else, but not to us! How deep our delusion is! ♦ So much so that because we can't face the death of 'my-self', we create all sorts of heavens where we shall be able to enjoy the pleasures of life forever. Transitory, fleeting pleasures, mind! ♦ Here then is the fallacy of eternalism. ♦ Whatever is eternal cannot in itself be fleeting. It cannot in itself change! ♦ And yet such is our inability to conceive of a life that is not transitory, and therefore nothing to do with fleeting pleasures, that we create happy hunting grounds, eternal realms, everlasting heavens where we can eat forever, or drink forever or have any pleasure you care to name - forever. This is eternalism. The belief that the same person carries on in the same way, but in continuous perfect happiness after death. ♦ It is but an extended hedonism. But what we really see here is the problem of ignorance and delusion. ♦ Delusion cannot see beyond itself. ♦ It has no other option but to recreate itself, even though all the time the feedback is ♦♦ saying, No, this doesn't last! This isn't permanent! ♦ Even though experience ♦ tells us pleasure, the search for pleasure, the dependency on pleasure only accumulates worry, obsession, anxiety, frustration, depression and worse! Now when I fail to achieve the great pleasure-drome, then awful feelings of inadequacy arise, a loss of self-esteem. ♦ In my depression, I face this horror. Realising that in fact pleasure does not deliver the permanent good, I see only death, only annihilation. ♦ In my

despair, I believe death will be some total ending. A permanent relief. ♦ Even in ordinary life, if things get too much I run away. ♦ If a relationship gets too hard, I divorce. ♦ If the job gets too much, I change. ♦ If I'm unhappy, I go to bed. ♦ I annihilate myself in sweet sleep. ♦ When pain and suffering arise, the desire to get rid of it, arises. ♦ ♦ This is the twin to desire the desire to do away with what is painful. If I want pleasure, I don't want pain. ♦ Aversion is just the negative side of desire. And this, in its extreme delusive form, produces the escape mentality. The running away. ♦ At worst from oneself, by killing oneself. From life by suicide. Death ends all. ♦ This is the annihilator. Believing in annihilation at death is the logical outcome of believing that human life is only about sensual pleasure. That it will end. And there's nothing else worth living for. So where have we got to? We've said that because of our fundamental ignorance, the not-knowing what suffering is, nor the cause of it, nor how to put an end to it, we produce solutions. Since these solutions are based on wrong understanding, our delusions are born. Because we want to be happy, desire arises and we attach to what gives us immediate gratification - our sense pleasures. ♦ The mistake is then made of believing that that is what we really are. ♦ When pleasures fail us, we are thrown into an identity crisis. ♦ Faced with disease, old age and death, most believe either we will be able to take it up again in some heavenly plane forever or we will all annihilate into nothingness. In meditation, this merry-go-round should become more and more obvious to us. ♦ All sorts of emotional states and fantasies assail us. ♦ Some highly pleasurable: some painful. ♦ ♦ Some full of hate and fear and sorrow: others full of excitement, sentimentality and delight. ♦ All sorts of mental states with their accompaniment of daydream and internal dialogue. ♦

Films indeed! But in meditation, our work is to become the detached observer. ♦ We must begin to take a side seat from which we can be attentive to every passing conscious moment. Whatever the object of our meditation, be it good/bad, painful/pleasurable. No matter what the object, we watch with keen attentiveness. All that happens in our mind is to be considered so much phenomena, so much mental stuff. ♦ As we come to know, perhaps for the first time in our lives, how much our mind is filled with desires and aversions, insights begin to arise. ♦ Just look at all this stuff! ♦ It really is suffering. It is just coming up and I've no control over it. All these desires, these wants, these obsessions! All these petty dislikes, hatreds, grudges! All these self-definitions, self-identifications, opinions, beliefs, criticisms! They are all a source of suffering for me. ♦ Then the question arises. Can I live without desire and attachment? ♦ Can I live without aversion and hatred? ♦ Can I live without continually reconditioning myself to look at life as if it was one huge birthday cake for me! ♦ For no and me and one else. With these thoughts, we move into daily life. ♦ We begin to question all these little people in our heads, shouting at us, ♦ 'I want this. I need that. ♦ I can't live without this. ♦ I may as well kill myself if I don't get that'. By questioning our desires and aversions, by seeing them for what they really are, we begin to discover the Path that leads out of all this mess. And this is exactly what the Buddha did himself. ♦ Realising that no amount of pleasure was ever going to satisfy him, he set out to discover the Path that leads out of suffering. ♦ But before he could discover the Path, he had to discover the cause. ♦ Remember the Dhamma, the teaching of the Buddha, is not a pill to be taken every morning. It's a handbook, a guide which we ourselves have to put into practice. ♦ Discovering that desire for sensual pleasure is not something we should indulge in, is at first painful. ♦ But I like my beer! I like my food! But as we come to let go of our obsessive, grasping natures, we will discover a kinder nature, one of peace. A

nature

that does not feed off grasping and expectation, but allows generosity and sits squarely balanced in reality. ♦ A nature no longer pushed about by internal compulsions, but free to

respond to others with love and care. ♦ It all leads to a greater satisfaction with our lives. ♦

All we need to do is get to know these desires and aversions and to see them for what they

really are. ♦ They pretend to lead us to happiness, but in fact they are wolves in sheep's clothing. ♦ They will lead nowhere but to unhappiness. Here is the power of meditation,

Vipassana Insight Meditation. ♦ It helps us see these mental states for what they really are. ♦ In daily life we need to activate these insights. We mustn't allow ourselves to get caught up in greed, hatred and delusion. We must undermine every greed, every hatred.

We must question every opinion and belief in case they are deluded. Not simply act upon

their command. We must discover for ourselves what is good, what is right, what leads to

happiness and peace. To the happiness and peace of ourselves and of all beings.

May the Teachings of the Buddha shed light into your life!

May you quickly attain the Supreme Goal!

SUMMARY

1. ♦ Sense Desire

Hedonist

2. ♦ Desire for Becoming ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Eternalist

3. ♦ Desire for Annihilation ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Annihilationist

Make Up Your Own Word List:

Words of desire : ♦ ♦

Words of obsession:

Meditation leads to insight into how desire and ♦ aversion work.

How we create suffering for ourselves

Daily Life ♦

investigating how much we are driven by these states of mind

refusing to obey them ♦

finding other reasons, doing other things

which are beneficial to ourselves and others.

The Second Noble Truth — The Wheel of Dependent Origination

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min read

This comprehensive essay examines paṭicca samuppāda (Dependent Origination) as the centerpiece of Buddhist psychology and the detailed explanation of the Second Noble Truth. Bhante Bodhidhamma presents the twelve-link chain from ignorance through to aging and death, showing how our conditioned responses perpetuate cycles of suffering in daily life. Drawing on the story of Ānanda's encounter with this teaching, the essay emphasizes its profound depth despite apparent simplicity.

Using practical examples like religious prejudice and simple desire for an apple, the teaching demonstrates how ignorance leads to intentional activities, consciousness, mind-and-matter, sense contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, and rebirth moment-to-moment. The essay explains how wholesome and unwholesome mental conditioning shapes personality and destiny through repeated volitional choices.

Crucially, the text shows where freedom lies: while we cannot control the arising of conditioned thoughts and feelings up to the point of contact and feeling, we can choose our response. By refusing to act on unwholesome impulses and cultivating beneficial states, we gradually undermine ignorance and approach the cessation of suffering. This practical understanding transforms both meditation practice and daily life, offering a clear path toward the peace of Nibbāna.

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING :❖ DUKKHA

The Wheel of Dependent Origination

(paticca sammupada)

Questions to Ask Oneself

If we examine our lives, we seem to often make the same mistakes.❖

For instance, we usually have arguments about the same things. Even though we keep changing jobs, we're never satisfied. If we stay in the same job, we seem to go through cycles of enthusiasm and depression.

Why do you think, we do this?❖

Why do we keep repeating the same mistakes?

Why does history, personal or global, repeat itself?❖

It is also true that success leads to success. Is it the same underlying process?

There came a time in the Buddha's life in late middle age when he decided to appoint

one of his monks as a permanent attendant and he asked Ananda, a cousin, to be that person. ♦ Ananda agreed to do so, but only on the condition that he could hear every word the Buddha spoke and if he were to miss any talks that the Buddha would relate to him what had been said. The Buddha agreed. ♦ When the Buddha died, a great council was held to bring together all the discourses and make a compilation. ♦ It was this very same Ananda who came to be relied upon to supply the discourses. He seems to have had quite a extraordinary audial memory, lucky in an oral tradition which was to hand down these discourses by rote learning for five hundred years before they were finally committed to paper. ♦ So it is that all the discourses are prefaced with, Thus have I heard (evam me sutam) and then there follows the place and ♦ occasion for the discourse. On one particular occasion it is this same Ananda who tells the Buddha that although the teaching on the Wheel of Dependent Origination is deep and profound, yet he, Ananda, found it to be self-evident and fathomable. The Buddha rebukes him: t say that, Ananda. ♦ Don't say it. ♦ This teaching of mine, the Wheel of Dependent Origination is not only deep and profound, it also bears the signs of being so. Then the Buddha goes on to say that it is because people have not grasped this, that their lives continue to be miserable. In a way, the teaching of the Wheel of Dependent Origination is the centrepiece of the Buddha's doctrine. It encapsulates not only the Four Noble Truths, but the whole of Buddhist psychology. ♦ It is an explanation of how we come to suffer and why we do so. ♦ It describes this in detail. Although the formulation of the Four Noble Truths came first during his reflections after the Enlightenment, it is said that after a period of seven days following the Enlightenment, the whole formula of the Wheel came to the Buddha as he emerged from concentration in the early night and that later he understood it in reverse order. Here we can only hope to get a general idea of this teaching. ♦ We shall look at it as a day-to-day psychology and how it helps us to understand the meditation we do. How it can help us in daily life, for the

Buddha's teaching is not some empty, descriptive philosophy, it's a theory we must prove to

be true for ourselves by putting it into practice, by trying it out.

The Wheel of ♦ Dependent Origination is made up of twelve links and reads as follows:

Conditioned by ignorance, intentional activities arise.

Conditioned by intentional activities, consciousness arises.

Conditioned by consciousness, mind and matter arise.

Conditioned by mind and matter, the six-fold sense base arises.

Conditioned by the six-fold sense base, contact arises.

Conditioned by contact, feeling arises.

Conditioned by feeling, craving arises.

Conditioned by craving, grasping arises.

Conditioned by grasping, becoming arises.

Conditioned by becoming, birth arises.

Conditioned by birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair arise.

In this way, does this entire aggregation arise.

The first link, Ignorance, is not to be considered a 'first cause', but an underlying precondition out of which all our suffering and indeed existence arise. ♦ Ignorance here

means, not-knowing, just as I might not know your name since I've simply not heard it. ♦ This not-knowing produces wrong understanding about life, delusions in fact.

These

delusions are inbuilt in our psychology. These delusions cause us to make decisions and act in certain ways which are unskillful and bring about unwholesome results. It is in this

way that mind is conditioned. ♦ Our mental life, our psychology is full of habits which have

been produced by our own decision making - our wills. ♦ However, because our wills have

acted upon wrong information, those delusions of ours, so the mind ends up with unskillful

or unwholesome conditioning which in turn causes further suffering.

When I'm a child, because I don't know any better, because I'm ignorant, I accept what is given to me. ♦ If, for instance, I'm told that people of other religions are evil and to be avoided, at first I believe it. This wrong understanding now produces an attitude, which in turn produces words and actions, a particular behaviour, whenever I should meet such

people. ♦ I have internalised my parents' prejudice. ♦ An interesting word, prejudice. To form an opinion about something before the facts are known. Deluded by this prejudice,

I'm on my guard. ♦ I feel fear. 'These people are evil!' ♦ 'I must get away before they do me harm' Or worse! 'If only we could be rid of them'. Upon these thoughts I avoid them. ♦

The important point to understand here is that although I have received a prejudice from

my parents and although I have been taught an attitude, in the final analysis, I make the

decision to act upon it. In this way, I reinforce it so that it now becomes ♦ prejudice. All these decisions, acts of will, build up in the child's mind until the way I behave with people

of other religions will be simply a blind conditioned response. I may even have forgotten

the reasons why I behave like that. In fact, to the child become adult such behaviour comes

to be accepted as perfectly proper and self-evidently righteous. So if we take any point in our lives, say when we wake up, we bring with us from the past, all our ignorance and

our delusive conditionings, the mental habits we have developed. Upon this twin base of

ignorance and conditioned mental states, we perform all our activities.

As soon as we wake, the next ♦ five links on the Wheel come into being also. The first is Consciousness itself. ♦ Just that faculty in the mind that knows. With this arises all the rest of the mind - the mental aggregates of sensations, perceptions and volitional conditionings and at the same time as the body itself. ♦ Because of this Mind and Body, the Six Senses are activated. ♦ The sixth sense being the mind itself as a sense base receiving information from the other five senses. ♦ Because of these senses, Contact is made with the world out there. When this Contact is made, Feeling arises experienced ♦

as either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Here then is the human being as a receiver of information : the consciousness, the mental faculties and the body, the sense bases, contact with the world through these senses and feelings caused by these contacts. Again,

it is important to remember that everything has arisen because of something else. ♦

The

human being comes into life at every moment of life in this way. ♦ Even in deep sleep, there

is some form of consciousness and sense contact or how else could we pull a blanket over us when cold? This moment is a product of all the past and contains in it the effects of all our yesterdays' decisions, skilful and unskilful. Some are realised, others lie potential in this moment, to be realised at some future time.

To look at it another way. As soon as I see an apple, the first light that strikes the retina,

the sense base, is the contact and from it a percept arises. ♦ Upon the contact, feeling arises. ♦ I know this feeling. I am conscious of it. All this has happened by way of the physical and mental properties. ♦ In other words, the whole process is dependent, one thing

on another, hence the Wheel of Dependent Origination. Perhaps it should be better called

Inter-dependent Origination since all these functional properties inter-relate and work one

upon the other.

However, this is not the end of the story. ♦ There are yet more links. In the previous five links, ignorance has been the latent factor effecting all our perception of things, the way we understand. ♦ It is the next link where the ignorance factor comes again more obviously into play. ♦ As soon as pleasurable feelings are experienced, because of our past

deluded conditioning, desire for them arises. ♦ ♦ As soon as desire has arisen, there is a strengthening of it if the Wheel is to progress onto craving, grasping, even obsession. Once

this has happened, the will comes into play and the desire is realised, activated, satisfied.

If we return to my apple, as soon as I saw the apple, there arose in me pleasurable feelings

conditioned by past apple eating. As soon as this happened, desire for more of those pleasurable feelings, not the apple itself, notice! ♦ arose in me. This desire takes hold of my

mind in the form of wanting and grasping. Before I know it I've made the decision to eat

it. ♦ When I actually eat the apple, I become the eater of the apple. I become absorbed in

it, lost in, totally self identified with it. ♦ This is becoming. ♦ This is what Buddhism means

by kamma. ♦ Kamma is simply becoming, being my actions, whether verbal or physical. ♦

And it is all brought about through my own will.

What about aversion and hatred? ♦ Here it is simply seen as a type of desire. ♦ ♦ If, for instance, I don't like apples, my conditioned response may be to ignore it, that is, not wanting, not wishing to see it. ♦ If I have a disgust for it, I may throw it away in the bin. ♦

My desire is to remove it. Aversion and hatred are simply the obverse of desire. I want it.

I don't want it. It's all want. ♦ It's all a matter of desire. Fear also is desire. ♦ In this case, the desire is to remove myself. ♦ If I had a phobia of apples, I might shrink away when I see one or run off. If they are neutral feelings, we usually remain ignorant of them, such as

the sensations of our breathing process. ♦ Here I'm using the words sensations and feelings

to mean the same. What separates them into pleasant, unpleasant and neutral is our perception of them, how we name or label these sensations through our past experience.

The Wheel has not yet finished turning. Having made visual contact with the apple, felt all the attendant sensations of delight, and knowing this, having reacted with desire and

craving, I eat it. ♦ Now, of course, I've finished. ♦ I've eaten the apple. It took a little time, but I saw the apple coming to an end. ♦ My sensual pleasure coming to an end.

Suddenly I'm left with just a core and few pips. ♦ The apple is no more and my delight is

gone. These are the last two links. ♦ Having decided to do something, I am 'born' into that

action. This 'birth' is the becoming, is the beginning of a act of kamma. ♦ It is in this way

that we are 'reborn' from moment to moment. But as soon as I am born again, reborn into

anything, that thing must begin to decay or decline. Everything decays and dies. However,

in the process, I have also reinforced my conditioning, those volitional conditionings that

sit as potential in the mind. ♦ I shall react in very much the same way when next I espy an

apple. And the Wheel of Dependent Origination will turn yet again.

This is an explanation of the whole of moral human behaviour. Although this is a harm-

less

example of apple eating, it's the same psychology that produces negative habits of smoking, alcoholism, sexual deviancy, crimes of violence, murder, and the same that causes selfishness, and egotism to enter into the acts of love and compassion. If a young teenage boy, continually bombarded with sexual images, uses the medium of sex to develop

feelings of hate or the pleasures of cruelty, is it any wonder that sooner or later there is a rape. ♦ Indeed this Wheel can be formulated in a slightly different way that brings this

personality development more into relief.

It is taught in Buddhism that upon the arising of an intention, there is an action. A intention

here includes all the underlying ignorance/delusion, the basic human faculties of body and mind needed to bring this about and the deluded thought underpinning the desire. ♦

Action is that point of decision which is an act of will. ♦ Upon a set of actions, a habit is established. ♦ So we see that if we turn the Wheel in a certain direction often enough, it will

keep turning that way. It gathers momentum. ♦ Habits are hard to break. Long established

habits harder still. ♦ Now a collection of habits is a personality. ♦ That's worth pondering

on. ♦ A personality in Buddhism is just a whole collection of conditioned responses. This is

not to say that humans are automatons, for remember we condition ourselves. Its when we

don't know this, or forget this, that we lose the ability to direct our lives. ♦ ♦ And so it is that this personality determines our destiny! ♦ How important it is to become aware of our

intentions. ♦

If you were to say to an ordinary person in the street, whats worse, the intention to murder,

the threatening of murder or the action of murder? The answer would be the action itself

since up to that time no actual harm had been done. ♦ And indeed from the victim's and

society's point of view, this is quite right. ♦ But from a mental process point of view and the

murderer's point of view, the most important was the intention. For without the intention, the action would never have arisen, nor indeed the threatening. ♦ From our point of view, as meditators, this is something we have to grasp very deeply indeed if we're to eventually escape this Wheel of Dependent Origination, this Wheel of Suffering. In longer periods of meditation practice such as a weekend or weeklong course, this process becomes more obvious to us. ♦ But with the practice of moment-to-moment awareness in our daily life, we can begin to catch this process and see how it's doing us harm and more important, see how we can put a stop to it. So how do we undermine this Wheel? ♦ First of all, we have to accept that all the links up to feeling, that is, all the ignorance, volitional conditionings, consciousness, mind and body, the six senses, contact and the feelings that arise, are a given. ♦ They are conditioned. ♦ We can do nothing about thoughts arising in the mind. ♦ They will come of their own. Let me return to the problem of religious prejudice. Now because of this conditioning, when I come to know a person who is of a different religion to me, unpleasant, perhaps hateful thoughts and feelings arise. ♦ This is my conditioning, prejudicial, caused by a combination of my upbringing and past acts of will. ♦ It's a combination of my believing misinformation and acting upon it. ♦ But at that moment when I see this other person, there is no act of will. I am not actively prejudicial. ♦ Upon the seeing, there arises a conditioned response. ♦ There is nothing in the world I can do to stop that arising. ♦ It is in the next links that this conditioned prejudice already arisen in my mind, is acted upon. It is at the actual point of reaction, the desire, the craving and the action or becoming, where the choice arises to develop, reinforce these prejudicial conditioning, or to let them go, to just observe them. ♦

If I decide to act upon them, to obey their suggestions, then I will strengthen my religious prejudice. I will feed it, develop it. But if I refuse to do so, if I just observe them, let them go, refuse to obey them, I undermine that conditioning. For that conditioning needs my continued active wilful support to grow, to develop, to sustain. ♦ More! ♦ In deciding, in willing, not to act upon their suggestions, I set up a more wholesome conditioning of positive values. I am creating a new response, a new conditioning which not only counteracts and undermines the older negative one, but is also producing something new. ♦

In short, initial thoughts and feelings are products of past action and conditioning. ♦ It is what I do with them that matters.

Now you will have noticed that I have used the concepts of wholesome and unwholesome.

Indeed, this is Buddhist training. ♦ It is to begin to recognise what is unwholesome, harmful

for us and other beings and to refuse to develop any further those very conditionings.

Secondly, it is to foster and to develop thoughts and feelings within ourselves that are beneficial, wholesome. In this way, we purify the mind. In this way, we are slowing down,

wearing out the Wheel. So long as we react to and indulge in unwholesome states of mind,

so long are we deepening our ignorance and so worsening our suffering. When we begin

to let go of unwholesome states of mind and develop wholesome states of mind, we rid ourselves of ignorance. ♦ As we begin to rid ourselves of ignorance, the mind, clear of its

obscuring wrong attitudes, opinions and prejudices, becomes more and more insightful until

it can begin to plumb the depths of our being and see what it is we really are. This seeing

ourselves as we really are, beyond greed, hatred and delusion, is the Nibbanic experience. ♦

Every time we undermine an unwholesome conditioning, we come to understand more deeply the insights the Buddha had on the night when he discovered the Wheel of Dependent Origination in its reverse order. Indeed, as ignorance is destroyed, so are all the

links on the Wheel, one upon the other. And with it goes our suffering. ❖ This doesn't mean annihilation. ❖ The Buddha continued to live another 45 years after his enlightenment, but in perfect peace and joy. ❖ When he was asked what happened to a Buddha or a totally purified one upon death, his answer was that it was simply ineffable, not describable. Parinibbana is beyond this Wheel of Becoming : the Wheel of Dependent Origination. So this is our task. To recognise unwholesome conditioning, thoughts and feelings for what they are. ❖ Let them go! ❖ We have to train ourselves in more wholesome ways of thinking and feeling. ❖ We can do this. ❖ This is our freedom of choice.. ❖ We have the power through our own wills to change our states of mind. ❖ In meditation, we see these conditionings, these states of mind, these emotions and moods, just as passing events, transient phenomena. We mustn't attach to them. ❖ We mustn't identify with them. And so to in daily life, while going about our day-to-day activities. In this way our lives will become happier, more peaceful. When all conditions ripen, wholesome conditions, insight will arise naturally into that state beyond change. ❖ Nibbana is assured. May the Teachings of the Buddha shed light into your life! May you quickly attain the Supreme Goal! The Wheel of Dependent Origination : Paticca Sammupada. The Law of Causality:Conditioning in the present moment: This being so, that is ❖ This not being so, that is not Conditioned by the past: This having arisen, that arises. This having ceased, that also ceases. ❖In order of arising. Conditioned by ignorance, intentional activities arise. Conditioned by intentional activities, consciousness arises. Conditioned by consciousness, mind and matter arise. Conditioned by mind and matter, the six-fold sense base arises. Conditioned by the six-fold sense base, contact arises. Conditioned by contact, feeling arises. Conditioned by feeling, craving arises. Conditioned by craving, grasping arises. Conditioned by grasping, becoming arises.

Conditioned by becoming, birth arises.

Conditioned by birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair arise.

In this way, does this entire aggregation arise.

In order of cessation.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the entire cessation of this ignorance, intentional activities cease.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of intentional activities, consciousness ceases.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of consciousness, mind and matter cease.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of mind and matter, the six-fold sense base ceases.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of the six-fold sense base, contact ceases.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of contact, feeling ceases.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of feeling, craving ceases.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of craving, grasping ceases.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of grasping, becoming ceases.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of becoming, birth ceases.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ With the cessation of birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair cease.

In this way does the cessation of this entire aggregation of suffering result.

The Second Noble Truth — Kamma Vipāka

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min read

This foundational essay examines the Buddhist understanding of kamma-vipāka (action and result) as integral to the Second Noble Truth. Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies common misconceptions about karma, distinguishing the Buddhist teaching from popular Western interpretations. The essay explains how kamma refers to our intentional actions, while vipāka denotes their results, operating within a web of interdependent relationships.

Using practical examples like workplace conflicts and daily habits, the teaching demonstrates how we condition our own minds through volition (cetanā). The Buddha's statement 'Volition, O Disciples, is what I call Kamma' anchors the discussion in personal responsibility rather than external blame. The essay explores the law of reciprocity—how wholesome actions produce wholesome results and unwholesome actions yield unwholesome consequences.

Addressing common objections about apparent injustice and mass suffering, the text distinguishes between different types of natural laws while emphasizing that suffering is fundamentally a mental state. The essay concludes with practical applications for vipassanā meditation and daily life, showing how understanding kamma-vipāka empowers genuine transformation. Verses from the Dhammapada (119-120, 124) illustrate the timing and inevitability of karmic results.

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH

Kamma ❖

(Vipaka)

QUESTION

How do you people generally account for things happening to them?

Take a position such as : ❖ ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖

fate/fortune

an all-powerful deity

any other

How do you explain a great tragedy such as the Mexico earthquake '87?

Kamma, more commonly known in its Sanskrit version Karma, (another language the Buddhist scriptures are written in) has become part of our language ever since the hippie

sixties. ❖ But unfortunately, the meaning of the word has been overloaded with Hindu

and

western ideas. In Buddhism, the Law of Karma is understood within the framework of the

Four Noble Truths, and without this law, the Truths would not make sense.

The Buddha taught there were fundamental laws that governed our lives and if we were

able to perceive them we would be able to understand why we suffer and how we could rid

ourselves of suffering. ♦ Nowadays, the word karma tends to be used when something bad happens to us, but actually it refers to everything that happens to us: good, bad and indifferent. Strictly speaking, Karma means what we actually do. ♦ The of our actions is

properly termed vipaka. ♦ So, these two words, karma-vipaka mean cause and effect, action and result.

The law of cause and effect is accepted without question by western science. Nothing happens without something having caused it. ♦ There is nothing that just appears out of

nowhere, so to speak. ♦ Everything is caused by something else. ♦ At its most obvious, the

seed is the cause of the plant and the plant of the fruit which in turn produces the seed. Buddhism takes this law of causality and places firmly within the moral sphere of human

existence.

Here we need to stand back a minute and consider what human beings are in relationship

to each other and ♦ the world. ♦ I am autonomous in the sense that I have all my own apparatus, body, senses, mental abilities and so on, which perceive the world and make sense of it. ♦ In this sense I'm an individual unit. ♦ However, this unit is in a state of total relationship with the world, not just other human beings, but animals, plants and minerals. ♦ I have a relationship with the stones in the street. I kick them! ♦ In other words, although I, in myself, have my own understandings, thoughts and so on, as soon as I speak or act, I form a relationship with someone or something, and this relationship in

turn effects the way I think and understand. ♦ In a way, I can say I am my relationships. For instance, when Jim goes to work, he always sits at the same table. In the same chair. ♦

He has a relationship with these two objects - little do they know! - whereby they are singled out from all the other tables and chairs in the room, singled out by him as his, belonging to him. He knows this to be true for him. ♦ The chair and table don't, but it

does
affect them because no one else uses them. ♦♦ Their use, their relationship' is limited
to
him. And everyone else who works in that room agrees ♦ with that relationship. ♦ It's
all
very reciprocal and harmonious since everyone else in the room has their own table
and
chair. ♦ One day he walks in, and lo and behold! someone is sitting at his table. ♦ This
person is new to the place. ♦ She doesn't realise. ♦ In fact, she's only there temporarily
to do a quick jotting, but her posture suggests that she owns the table and chair. ♦ She's
pulled the chair up and is sitting comfortably and squarely at the table. ♦ She's taken his
space!

What is Jim's reaction? ♦ Anger! ♦ He might clothe it with sarcasm, 'Been promoted
then?' ♦ , ♦ she says. Collects her things and shoots off with an angry glance. ♦ You
can see that in this little scene, Jim's relationship to that chair and table has been an
underlying factor in making an enemy of someone who in all innocence was just using
them
temporarily. ♦ These attitudes we have within ourselves, our inner dispositions, affect
our
relationship to the world, both bad and good.

Here is the Buddha firmly placing the centre of all our relationships:

In this fathom long body, I declare is the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of
the
world and the path leading to the cessation of the world.

This is another formulation of the Four Noble Truths, but from the point of view of
Kamma. ♦ As far as I am concerned, this me-in-myself, my existence, my sufferings, my
joys, my birth and my death is the world, the world as I know and perceive it. The
world as

I experience it. That world is me. ♦ I make divisions between me-in-myself and me-
with-

others, and also between me and the world. ♦ But actually this 'me- in-the-world', is just
the 'me-in-myself' portrayed upon the world, affecting it. ♦ And the 'me-within-myself'
is

the world portrayed in me, affecting me. The division of subject and object is very much
needed in ordinary daily life, but we think of them as two totally ♦ separate things in-
stead

of realising their intimate interrelationship.

The table, chair and woman in the office have their own existence in the world, their

relationship to the world, but when Jim entered the scene, their existence in the world, their relationship to the world, includes him in it. ❖❖ When he entered the office he fell into an immediate relationship with these three. ❖ What matters to Jim is exactly this interrelationship. The way he understands, perceives others also includes the way others perceive and understand him. The way Jim understands and perceives things is very much effected by the way things effect him. When Jim doesn't see this, he lives in dual world of 'me and them', 'me', the isolated being in a world of things and others. But in actual fact, everything is interdependent, interrelated. ❖ Its like a huge folk dance. Each one of us is an only individual in that we have a specific role to play within the whole dance. How we play that role is up to us, though our decisions will be affected by the other dancers. ❖ We say it takes two to start a quarrel, but you can bet your last penny, that the protagonists will blame each other. ❖ They won't see it as an interrelationship! If the woman was sitting at another desk, Jim might have barely noticed her. ❖ If the woman had been a friend, he would have greeted her. ❖ So you can see, within this fathom long body is the whole world with all its suffering and, of course, the path leading out of suffering too. This whole world is the whole of the interdependent interrelationships we are. Now within this world of interdependent interrelationships, when we think or do something, which is kamma, we create a result, vipaka. ❖ In our minds, we either create a different way of thinking or we reinforce an old way of thinking. ❖ In other words we are conditioning ourselves. ❖ Everyday when Jim gets to work, he has a cup of coffee. ❖ As soon as he walks into the office, his first thought is coffee. ❖ Why? ❖ Because for the past few years that's what he's always done. ❖ He sometimes looks forward to the coffee even on the way to work. ❖ His thoughts keep reminding him of the delicious coffee awaiting him. ❖ His mind and his body

are conditioned to wallow in the taste of hot coffee before he settles down to work. One day

Jim gets to work...no coffee! ♦ He's so angry! ♦ Who's turn was it to buy the coffee? ♦ He's

so embarrassed about his anger when other staff ♦ tell him it was his turn. ♦ Now where

does this desire, anger and embarrassment come from?

The desire, virtually obsession, has been cultivated by Jim in himself over the years!

♦

Every time he gets to work he's satisfied his desire, his wish for coffee! ♦ The coffee didn't

make Jim do it. ♦ The coffee has not created his obsession. ♦ He could have decided to have

coffee only if he felt tired, to pep him up. ♦ The coffee is a passive object. ♦ Jim's used it as

he's wanted to and it is Jim himself who is totally responsible for his obsession.

Did the coffee cause Jim's anger! Did the lack of coffee cause his anger! Of course not! ♦

Anger was Jim's internal learned reaction when he doesn't get what he wants. When Jim has

to suffer the pain of not satisfying a craving, he gets angry. Worse! The angry mind looks

for a scapegoat! Jim wants to blame someone!

As it turned out, it was his own fault and he feels embarrassed about his display of anger

and petulance. ♦ Did his colleagues make Jim embarrassed, or the coffee? ♦ Or the lack of

coffee! ♦ Of course not! ♦ Embarrassment is what Jim feels, what he's taught himself to feel, when he makes a fool of himself.

It is the mind which suffers from its own internal conditioning. ♦ Next day Jim reads in the

papers an article about the harmfulness of caffeine. He decides he won't have any more coffee. ♦

But the smell of coffee keeps distracting him. ♦ He feels angry, depressed. His body for lack of coffee feels uncomfortable. ♦ But Jim holds out. ♦ Within a week or two he's

dropped the habit. He's off the drug.

Reading the article influenced his opinion, his understanding of coffee. he ponders, he decides it better not to drink it. ♦ This decision leads to action, to avoiding coffee. Although

Jim has to suffer the consequences of past conditioning, his past obsession with coffee, he reconditions himself. Jim purifies his mind of that obsession. ♦ In the end, he's lost it. ♦ He doesn't care whether he has coffee or not. ♦ Jim has reached a state of perfect equanimity about it. ♦ The importance here is to realise that he's conditioned himself, that he's responsible for his own mind and that he can no longer blame his parents, colleagues, friends, politicians, the system or whatever for his state of mind. In other words, should Jim be made redundant, he could blame bad management for the collapse of the firm, but not the ensuing depression and so on. ♦ The mental reaction is his own self-imposed conditioning. Others might be very happy to receive redundancy pay and start a new life! This is extremely hard for most people to understand and accept. ♦ Our whole vocabulary and use of language is based on the understanding that others make us angry, or happy. ♦ Others make the anger in me, not me! One of the insights of meditation is to see that states of mind from the darkest to the lightest are our own personal conditioning. ♦ That's why what angers one person may bring joy to another. ♦ One person's delight is another person's anguish. In the Buddha's teaching this understanding is crucial if we are to cleanse the mind of all negativity - to purify it. ♦ If Jim thinks his wife, Jane, is the cause of his depression, he'll have to change her or leave her. If Jane says John is always making her angry, she'll have to get rid of him before she gets any relief! ♦ This point of view which presumes that somehow I will be perfectly happy and life perfectly wonderful for me if only the world, especially the people in it, would change, is one of the causes of our great unhappiness and frustration! When we realise we are the makers of our own mental states, suddenly we have real power, real opportunity to change. ♦ If I make 'me' angry and depressed, ♦ I can make 'me' un-angry and un-depressed. When we accept this, we can now look for the kernel agent that produces this conditioning.

The Buddha isolated the agent: ♦

Volition, O Disciples, is what I call Kamma.

It is through will that a person does something in the form of thought, word or action.

So, an idea comes to mind. ♦ At that point I decide to stop it or develop it. ♦ If I decide to

develop it, it will produce a train of thoughts, which may translate into words or actions. ♦

From a mental development point of view, it is so necessary to decide whether the initial

thought or idea is good in terms of it being right. ♦ However I react, whatever I do, will reinforce the conditioning in my mind or undermine it.

This leads us to the next law of Kamma: that of reciprocity, like produces like. ♦

The Buddha taught very clearly that wholesomeness produces wholesomeness, and unwholesomeness produces unwholesomeness. ♦ I use 'wholesomeness', (another possible

word is 'skilful') ♦ rather than 'good' and 'bad', to get away from any idea of supernatural

forces of good and evil or a rewarding and punishing deity. ♦ The Buddha taught that everything that happens to us is the product of past and present conditions. ♦ There is no concept of punishment in Buddhism. Everything that happens to us are consequences.

Punishment, as such, is something human beings have produced for themselves!

It's something human beings do to each other out of revenge or a sense of so-called righteousness. Yet another result, another consequence of unwholesome conditioning in the mind!

An objection is usually raised here. ♦ How is it people get away with murder - literally? ♦

How is it that people who are good, end up suffering? The point is that a person's action has a two-fold effect.

When a person does something, two stones drop into two pools. ♦ The first pool is the outside world, setting up a chain of reactions that effects the 'me-in-the-world'. ♦ Since I am in relationship with the world, as soon as I do something, it effects it. ♦ These effects go on and on, until they come back to the original doer. ♦ In other words, the initial action

changes the world. ♦ As the world changes so it affects the doer of that action. When Jim

got angry about his coffee, others formed new opinions of him. ♦ These opinions of theirs

now effect his relationship with them. If his boss was involved, they may even affect his career prospects!

The second stone drops inward into the pool of the mind, setting up a chain reaction which

effects the 'me-in-myself'. ♦ Jim's anger over the coffee goes to reinforce his ♦♦ disposition

of anger. ♦ When he goes home and finds there's no coffee there too, his angry response,

now just that little more developed, makes for a greater explosion and Jim finds myself flinging the empty coffee jar out of the window!

In other words, the unskilful person and the skilful person are simply developing different minds within themselves and they are also developing different worlds around

themselves. ♦ At some point the consequences of their actions will be experienced. ♦ Even if

a murderer gets away with it in the world, his heart won't!

The Buddha said:

According to the seed sown

So is the fruit reaped.

There is no escaping these karmic results in Buddhism. ♦ Penance, prayer, offerings to a god of Karma, won't help in the least. ♦ However, there are ways to assuage, to soften the effects of unwholesome results, the vipaka. ♦ Jim's display of petulant anger upset his

colleagues. ♦ They were surprised and disappointed. ♦ The next morning, Jim brings two

jars of coffee and leaves a note of apology. ♦ Old relationships are re-established, but, of course, it will take greater proof to convince them Jim is not the 'angry type'.

The next question normally asked is how does Buddhism account for mass suffering, especially seemingly innocent suffering in earthquakes or civilian war casualties.

The first point is that the law of karma is only one of the laws that govern the universe. ♦

When we are born, we have to accept the whole package. Not everything that happens to

us, is the result of our personal past or present actions. ♦ When Jim threw that jar out of

the window, it landed on the head of a poor old man. He died there and then! And Jim went for jail for manslaughter. Now, he didn't make the man walk under the window just as the jar came down. ♦ So you see, we have to be careful with what we do or say. ♦ There are other factors abroad that can maximise or minimise the effects of what we do. ♦ Wholesome actions, for instance, may not mature since the conditions are not there to support. The second point is that suffering is a state of mind. ♦ In meditation, when pains come from the sitting posture, we try to see these so-called pains for what they really are. ♦ Calling them pains, puts a value judgement on them: they ♦ are 'bad', 'terrible'. ♦ We react with fear or aversion. But in meditation, if we concentrate just on the sensations, the pains as sensations, the mind will empty of its normal reaction and we will suddenly experience what we thought of as pain as just sensation. When we experience just sensations, what is the state of mind? ♦ Peaceful and calm. ♦ Not suffering. So in a disaster such as the Mexico earthquake of '87, thousands of people suffered pain. ♦ Some died instantly, with very little pain indeed. ♦ Others died slowly in great pain and in great anguish. ♦ Others died in great pain, but equanimously. ♦ How each individual reacted to their tragedy was determined to a large extent by their conditioned state of mind. From the outside, from the TV pictures, we are filled with horror at so much suffering. ♦ From the inside, there are only individuals, each suffering their own lot according to their self developed conditioning. ♦ ♦ That is why, some trapped but not physically suffering, may have been screaming with fright: others in terrible physical agony may have been calm and died peacefully. So to recap. ♦ Firstly, the law of kamma states that everything we suffer or enjoy belongs to the moral sphere which is governed by the law of cause and effect as is the world of

atoms and molecules. ❖ Secondly, that there is a direct reciprocity in that wholesome, skilful thoughts, words and actions produce wholesome, skilful thoughts, words and actions. And that unwholesomeness and unskillfulness produce unwholesome and unskilful results. Thirdly, that the root cause of kamma is to be discovered in our own volition, our will. ❖ This means that through the power of our own decision making, we can change our personality, the way we are and act. And so we can change the world about us. ❖ Fourthly, that the results of any intentioned thoughts, words and actions are inescapable, but that we can effect the outcome of ❖ unskillfulness in the past with present skilfulness. Vipassana Insight Meditation allows us to see our present conditioning of mind. ❖ In the clearing of awareness, the mind displays itself. ❖ By not joining in, not indulging, not developing, we can allow unwholesome states of mind to burn themselves out. ❖ With the practice of loving kindness, metta meditation, we suggest to ourselves more skilful ways of thinking and behaving. ❖ In our daily life, we constantly try to behave in more skilful ways. ❖ In this way the meditative life changes us, moves us away from unwholesome states of mind towards the wholesome, from darkness to light.

The Dhammapada is often referred to as the 'Buddhist Bible'. ❖ It is a collection of many of

the Buddha's sayings under different headings. Here are three verses on Kamma ❖ ❖ (119/

120/124):

Even a wrong doer may still find happiness,
 So long as his unskilful behaviour does not bear fruit.
 But when his unskilful behaviour does bear fruit,
 He will meet with their unwholesome consequences.
 Even a good person may meet with suffering
 So long as his skilful behaviour does not bear fruit.
 But when that skilful behaviour does bear fruit,
 He will enjoy the benefits of that skilful behaviour.

The Fourth Noble Truth — Morality (Sīla)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min read

This foundational essay examines the Fourth Noble Truth — the Noble Eightfold Path — with particular focus on sīla (morality) as the essential foundation for spiritual development. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws from the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta to explain the Middle Way between self-indulgence and self-mortification, showing how the Buddha's approach transcends both extremes through balanced practice.

The essay systematically explores the Ten Wrong Actions (dasa akusala kamma-patha) divided into wrong thought (avarice, ill will, wrong views), wrong speech (lying, slander, harsh speech, idle chatter), and wrong action (killing, stealing, sensual misconduct). Through stories like that of the executioner Tambadāṭhika from the Dhammapada, practical guidance is offered for navigating moral complexities in contemporary life, including challenging areas like Right Livelihood and sexual conduct.

Central to the teaching is understanding morality not as divine commandment but as natural law — kamma operating through cause and effect. The essay emphasizes how ethical conduct creates both social harmony and inner peace, establishing the mental foundation necessary for meditation and wisdom to flourish. The traditional formula 'Such is morality, such is mental development, such is wisdom' illustrates this progressive relationship essential to Buddhist practice.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

Morality ❖❖

(Sīla)

QUESTION

If you wanted to create social harmony and peace, what rules or laws would you recommend people to follow? ❖

Try to limit your number to four ❖ or five.

The manner in which the Four Noble Truths were formulated was that of the physicians of

the time ❖ concerning any illness. Firstly, the illness was described and named. ❖ The cause

was then stated. ❖ Then, the prognosis or likely outcome of the disease and finally the treatment. So if we were following the normal course, we should go onto the Third Noble

Truth, The Truth of the End of Suffering.❖ But for clarity's sake, we shall instead go on to the treatment of our dis-ease, the Fourth Noble Truth, in which the Buddha lays down the Path that leads to the perfect cure for life's sufferings.

This is how it is put, in the first ever talk, the Buddha gave after his Enlightenment - The Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of the Law.

These two extremes, O Disciples, should not be practised by one who has gone forth from the world.❖ What are these two?❖❖ That which is to do with passions - low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and useless.❖ And that which is to do with mortification - painful, ignoble and useless. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata has attained the knowledge of the Middle Path which gives perception❖ and knowledge and leads to peace, to insight, enlightenment and Nibbana.

'What, then, is this Middle Path?

It is the Eightfold Noble Path, namely, Right Understanding, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. Buddhism is often called the Middle Path or the Middle Way : that between self-indulgence, governed by desire for pleasure and by the passions, and self-mortification, involving penances and self torture. The path of self-indulgence is the way of those who believe happiness is to be found in pleasure.❖ The path of mortification is the way of those who believe that the destruction of the physical appetites leads to liberation. The Middle Path lies between these two in this sense. Bodily appetites are natural to human life.❖ We need to eat and our appetite depends on tasty food.❖ However, once we begin to indulge these appetites, indulge the delights of taste, caring little for what the body actually needs, our appetites grow 'coarse and vulgar'. We become gluttons.❖ This tightrope, distinguishing between what the body needs as opposed to what the mind greeds, is the Middle Path.❖

It helps us to purify the mind of gross appetites and emotions and to establish a peaceful disposition.❖ But this Middle Path also suggests a hierarchy, an apex of a triangle

which

transcends the two points on either side of the base. ❖ When insight is gained into Nibbana, then we can say that by destroying the very roots of our discontent, the Path now

completely transcends these two options of indulgence and mortification. Indeed this is one

way of describing the Buddhist 'saint' or Arahant as one who is beyond self-indulgence and

self-mortification.

The Eightfold Noble Path, The Middle Path, is laid out in this order. The first two, Right Understanding and Right Intention come under the division of Wisdom. ❖ Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood come under the ❖ division of Morality. ❖ Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration come under the division of Mental Development.

However, in the later talks, the Buddha turns his presentation around to show how the theory is put into practice. ❖ There is a passage cropping up time and time again at the end

of the Discourses. ❖ We have to remember those were the days before cassette recorders,

videos and even books. ❖ News travelled by word of mouth and slowly. ❖ As the Buddha

wondered around the area of India north of the Ganges, ❖ he had to constantly repeat the

message. ❖ All discourses have some nuance to add to the teaching, but many of them end

with what must have been one of his most well known formula.

'Such is morality, such is mental development, such is wisdom. ❖

Mental development when based on morality is rich in result and of great effect. ❖ Wisdom,

based on mental development, is rich in result and great in effect.'

In the Buddha's understanding, morality is the key to further development, so we shall concentrate on the meaning of morality and ❖ its importance. Here we will deal with the

negative side. ❖ Positive morality, virtue, will be dealt in the next talk.

Morality these days is still something of a dirty word with heavy Victorian overtones. ❖

Behind this sits the notion of an angry deity who judges and punishes every

transgression. ❖ To understand Buddhist morality, we have to keep in mind that first

there is no such concept of a punishing or rewarding god. ❖ And secondly, that morality

is bound up with the Law of Cause and Effect, Kamma, which states that what is wholesome produces wholesomeness and what is unwholesome produces unwholesomeness. ♦ So on one level, morality is about our actions in the world, realising that our actions are producing effects all the time. ♦ If this is so we need to know what sort of action brings about a good result and happy, peaceful situations and what sort of action brings about painful situations, unhappy results. On another level, morality is about our state of mind within. According to the law of Kamma, it is our wills that produce our states of mind. ♦ It is by willing to think about and ♦ so to produce acts of generosity and compassion that loving states of mind arise. ♦ It is by willing to think about my personal benefit at the expense of others that brings about the selfish, jealous, anxious states of mind. On one level, then, the moral laws in Buddhism are about creating a peaceful and caring society. They are the basis for real social harmony. On the other hand, they are laws of mental health which when followed create a mind full of compassion, joy and peace. The simplest formulation made by the Buddha is recorded in the discourses in verse: Cease from harm. Do good. Purify the mind. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas. We can call these three, the Primary Precepts. ♦ The first is the negative morality - what we ought not to do by way of harm to ourselves others. The second is the positive morality - what we ought to do for our own benefit and the benefit of all beings. ♦ The third is to do with clearing out all negative tendencies in the mind and replacing them with positive attitudes. So what is the Buddha's formulation of 'Cease from evil' in detail? What are those thoughts, words and actions which produce unwholesome states? They are known as the Ten Wrong Actions and they are split into three divisions: wrong thought, wrong speech and wrong

action.

Wrong thought takes up the first three of the ten: avarice, ill will and wrong views. ❖ Avarice is to do with all those fantasies and mental projects we indulge that have their motivation in greed. ❖ Self-indulgent, lustful, selfish thoughts. ❖ Fantasies of wealth, fame and power. ❖ It's the mentality of accumulation, of acquisition. ❖ Ill will includes all those thoughts based on hatred, from jealousy to anger, from grudge to revenge. ❖❖ Wrong views here means our tendency to indulge in what is harmful, kidding ourselves that it isn't so. ❖ It means especially not to understand or know of the law of Karma. In this negative morality, this means ❖ that unskilful behaviour necessarily brings unhappy results. ❖ It

includes the conceit that our opinions are always right even when they are obviously getting us into trouble. ❖ It demands we check all our opinions in ❖ the light of our own experience and the experience of others. ❖ The kernel of wrong view in terms of the Ten Wrong Actions is to believe that since we have got away with some unskilful behaviour, that that's the end of the story.

Wrong Speech takes up the next four of the Wrong Actions. ❖ The first is lying, saying anything untrue. For those of finer conscience, it includes what is often euphemistically called exaggeration. ❖ The second is malicious talk which only furthers backbiting and disharmony. Slander often joins together lying and malicious talk. ❖ The third is coarse speech, the use of four letter words and so on. ❖ We need to ask what sort of mental state lies behind the use of such words. ❖ Finally useless talk, idle gossip. Again we are looking at the state of mind indulged in, the whingeing, complaining, bored, empty, rattling mind. There is a quaint story attached to one of the verses spoken by the Buddha in the Dhammapada, a collection of the Buddhas sayings. ❖ A certain Tambadathika had been the king's executioner for forty-five years. ❖ He had retired and had asked one of the Buddhas chief disciples, Sariputta, to receive alms food at his home. Sariputta was one of the two chief disciples of the Buddha. ❖ He was known as the General of the Dhamma. ❖ After

he had eaten, the Elder gave a talk about the Dhamma, but he could see that Tambadathika was very agitated and unable to concentrate. ♦ Tambadathika explained that memories of all the deaths he had caused as executioner was the reason for his agitation. ♦ Sariputta asked him if he was the one who had decided they had to be executed. ♦ He said that had been the king's work and that he himself had never wanted to kill anyone. ♦ He had done so because he was ordered to. ♦ He had had no option. ♦ Sariputta told him that if that were so, he was not guilty of murder as such since it had never been his intention to execute the condemned. Tambadathika ♦ was greatly relieved in his heart. ♦ That same afternoon, it seems, he was accidentally killed by a cow. ♦ When the Buddha heard of this, he said that although Tambadathika had followed an unwholesome profession, because of the Dhamma he had heard, he had been reborn in a place where he would be able to handle the results of his actions much better. ♦ Then he uttered this verse concerning the teaching of the Dhamma:

Better than an thousand words that are senseless
 And unconnected with the realisation of Nibbana,
 Is a single word of sense
 If upon hearing it, one is calmed.

These days, this concept of useless talk is very much overlooked. ♦ If we examine our media: the TV programmes, the serials and soap operas, the newspapers, ♦ so much of it is filling our minds with hogwash. ♦ Don't you think?

Finally there's wrong action, the final three. ♦ The first is not to kill any living being and it also includes not doing them any harm. ♦ The second is not to steal which is phrased as 'not taking what is not freely given'. The third is sensual misconduct such as gluttony, drunkenness and ♦ self-indulgent sexuality. ♦ These days the whole area of sexuality is very confused. There are fundamental Christian sects for whom sex is a bad thing in itself.

And

there is the libertine view that their personal freedom to satisfy any desire means virtually a

right to have sex on demand.◆◆

In traditional Buddhist countries, sexual activity is seen as something limited within the bonds of marriage.◆ In the west, since there is no consensus, it is best left to the individual

to decide what is unskilful and what is skilful in such behaviour.◆ These are some of the

questions that a Buddhist perspective would want to ask.◆ What is the reason for the sexual pleasure?◆ Is it just for self-indulgence?◆ Is there any real affection involved in the relationship?◆ Is it just habitual?◆ Are the factors of reproduction being taken into

account? The fundamental guiding principle is that of not doing harm.◆ No matter how

important sexual pleasure may have become for us in our culture, we need to investigate

and see what is the outcome of all this sexual activity.◆ What is the effect both within the mind and between people? We need to be quite truthful about it to ourselves.◆ We need to be prepared to change if our experience and understanding asks for a change in

behaviour.◆ It is surprising, for instance, how many smokers until fairly recently would

still say that the link between tobacco and cancer is not yet proved conclusively.◆ Surely a

warning signal should be enough, but such is the dependency, the craving, that people will

kid themselves along◆ - even to death!

These Ten Wrong Actions give us in some detail what the Buddha meant by Right Speech

and Right Action in the Noble Eightfold Path.◆ There is also included here part of Right Intention.◆ And all of it naturally is included in Right Livelihood.◆ It is interesting that the Buddha was all too aware of how much our jobs and work dominate our lives, how they affect our minds and social relationships.◆ Wrong Livelihood is really an extension of

Wrong Speech and Wrong Action, but it did give the Buddha the opportunity to pinpoint

some trades which he said ought not to be practised.◆ They will not come as any surprise

Slander
Coarse/Harsh Speech
Useless Talk

Wrong Action: ❖❖❖❖ ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖

Killing
Stealing
Sensual Misconduct
WRONG LIVELIHOOD
Dealing in Arms and Lethal Weapons
Dealing in Animals for Slaughter
Dealing in Human Beings
Making or Selling Intoxicating Beverages
Dealing in Poisons
LAY BUDDHISTS TRAINING RULES ❖❖❖❖ pancasila
I undertake the training rule to refrain from:
harming any living being
taking what is not freely given
misusing the senses
wrong speech
taking drugs or drinks that tend to cloud the mind

The Fourth Noble Truth — The Perfections (Pāramī)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 14 min read

This introductory essay explores the ten perfections (pāramī) as the Buddha's teaching on positive morality—virtues that take us 'to the other shore' of Nibbāna. Moving beyond the negative precepts of 'ceasing from harm,' Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how developing generosity (dāna), morality (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), wisdom (paññā), effort (virīya), patience (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), resolution (adhiṭṭhāna), loving-kindness (mettā), and equanimity (upekkhā) creates the foundation for spiritual attainment.

The essay illuminates how these virtues interconnect, showing how practicing one perfection naturally develops the others. Through practical examples—from charitable giving to sitting with discomfort in meditation—readers learn how the perfections transform everyday challenges into opportunities for growth. Drawing on Jātaka tales and personal anecdotes, the teaching demonstrates how patience can be developed even in extreme circumstances, and how loving-kindness must include care for oneself as well as others.

Special emphasis is placed on equanimity as the highest mental state in Buddhism—not cold detachment, but a clear, calm awareness that allows wisdom to shine. The essay concludes with practical guidance on how to begin developing these qualities through gradual, joyful experimentation rather than overwhelming self-discipline, making the path to liberation accessible and sustainable for modern practitioners.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

Positive Morality : The Perfections (Parami)

QUESTION

Virtue/virtuous are not common words these days.◆

When you bring people to mind like Martin Luther King or Mother Therese of Calcutta, what

is it about them that excites our admiration?

What qualities would you say go up to making an exemplary human?

The Buddha taught that morality was the basis of spiritual attainment. By morality, he didn't

mean a set of commandments imposed by a wrathful deity.◆ He meant simply those rules

whereby a harmonious society would be established and a peaceful and loving mind

could be developed. ❖ Since all human beings are interdependent, an individual's progress through life is greatly affected by those around and about them. ❖ Buddhism often talks about the kalyana mitra, the good friend and the Buddha himself is often seen as such a friend, a companion, a true guide who has our best wishes at heart.

The Primary Precepts are the basic guidelines. They begin with a negative morality: to cease from harm. Then comes: to do good. A positive morality to develop virtue. ❖ This was codified in the Theravada Tradition as the Ten Perfections. ❖ Actually the translation gives a wrong idea as to their aim. ❖ The word for them in Pali is Parami which means 'the other shore, an image often used for Nibbana. ❖ So really these ten virtues when practised help us to find our way to liberation. ❖ There's no idea of perfection in terms of coming to some sort of end in their development. They can be practised and developed as long as we are alive, to any degree.

The Ten Perfections are: ❖ generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, resolution, unconditional love and equanimity. Here we can only give pointers and I'm sure none of the virtues comes as any surprise.

First, then, is generosity, dana. Dana is a word you will often hear in Buddhist circles. ❖ If the lay people offer food to monks and nuns, for instance, it's called dana. ❖ Dana means really to share one's wealth and one's time with others with no thought of return. Our word donation comes from the same root. ❖ This is very important, because it teaches us to let go of our attachment to wealth and ❖ frees us from thinking that our lives are to be simply lived for our own personal benefit. ❖❖ It stops us becoming greedy and miserly. ❖❖

Walking around the city centre on a flag day for a charity, do I ignore the change jangling boxes? ❖ Do I instinctively reach into my purse? ❖ If I do and find only a pound coin, do I

still put it in? ♦ Or do I listen to the barrage of voices in my mind, crying - Too much!
Too
much!

Generosity with time softens our unwillingness to spend time for the benefit of others,
those
precious moments of our lives we would normally devote entirely to our own pleasures
and

interests. ♦ How do we feel when the children ask for help with homework, or a parent
asks

for help, or a friend makes a social call . ♦ Do we say were too busy, too tired. Generos-
ity

with our wealth and time helps to put our life, our life's work, our relationships into a
greater perspective. The question arises. Why should I give my money to another? ♦

Why

should I spend any time of my life helping another? ♦ It is only in so doing and reaping
the

benefits that we can discover the answer.

The second is morality which means to guard against any unskilful actions and to pro-
duce

eventually a mind free of greed, hatred and delusion. This is one description of a
Buddhist

saint, the Arahant. Arahant literally means to kill one's enemies. ♦ What enemies? ♦ The
enemies within: greed, hatred and delusion!

The third is renunciation. ♦ Although this can often have a feel of sacrifice about it,
that

is not the kernel of it. ♦ It's being able to give something up, once you know it's no good
for you. ♦ We like to drink, but when we come to know what alcohol does to the body
and

mind, we may decide to cut back or stop altogether. ♦ Either way, renouncing drink
means

we have to go through the barrier of obsessive desires, ♦ the very habit of drinking. Of-
ten

renunciation comes about because of weariness with some old habit. Perhaps a person
stops drinking because they suddenly realise it's just an empty social habit, devoid of
any

intrinsic meaning. ♦ Renunciation includes having the strength of character to give up
what

is harmful to us. ♦

Wisdom, the fourth perfection, means to undermine our delusions and illusions about ourselves. ♦ By the practice of awareness both in meditation and during our daily lives, we

can begin to see ourselves more objectively. As we do this, ignorance about ourselves is dispelled and wisdom, real self-knowledge, grows.

The fifth Perfection, effort, is raising the will to do, to act. ♦ Its raising the energy needed

to accomplish the task and in ♦ the spiritual field that means the Primary Precepts. ♦ We

must make effort to cease from doing harm. ♦ We must put in effort to do good, good for

ourselves and others. We have to raise the effort to purify the mind. ♦ This constant effort

to raise energy undermines our unwholesome tendency towards sleepiness, laziness, not

bothering, leaving it to others, apathy. ♦ It won't allow boredom and depression to trick us

into escape routes and hopelessness.

The sixth, Patience, the Buddha said was the highest form of asceticism. The Pali word, khanti, is variously translated as patience, forbearance or forgiveness. ♦ Our own word patience is interesting also. ♦ Its Latin root means suffering. ♦ Patience is the willingness to

accept suffering. In our meditation, this is a virtue of great importance. When we sit, all our

negative states of mind begin to surface, our great angers, grudges, depressions, anxieties,

fears, doubts and soon. ♦ All of them nasty feelings in the body, some very uncomfortable

indeed. What is more, the pain of the sitting posture, especially at the knees, can become

quite sharp. Being able to sit still in the midst of this suffering is a prerequisite for insight

and wisdom. ♦ That attitude which says, 'Yes there's a lot of pain in me. ♦ I feel it. But I'm

just going to sit here patiently, equanimously and put all my effort into watching it keenly,

is the sort of attitude is absolutely paramount to the whole process of mental purification.

Up until now, we've run from pain to pain either dousing it with pills or finding some

way to
distract the mind.❖ Anything but face up to it. But as the Buddha has pointed out so
clearly
in the First Noble Truth, this is but foolish escapism.❖ By facing pain and suffering it
gladly,
we lose our fear of it.❖ When we see pain and suffering for what it really is, then we
can
say we have achieved an important insight into the human state and it is this under-
standing
that leads us towards our final emancipation from all suffering.

The Jataka Tales which comprise many volumes are stories made up after the death of
the Buddha purportedly telling of his past lives. Before his enlightenment, the Buddha
is
called the Bodhisatta, one who is seeking enlightenment. In this interesting little story,
he is said to have been born an ascetic, called Kundaka.❖ It shows us how far patience
can be taken.❖ It would seem that the King, Kalaka, had gone with his dancing girls for
a
lavish picnic in a pleasure grove.❖ He fell asleep and the girls wandered off to delight
in
the grove.❖ They came across the❖ ascetic, Kundaka.❖ They fell in conversation with
him
about the Dhamma.❖ When the king woke up and found out what had happened, he
was
furious with jealousy. But for the intervention of one of his favourite ladies, he would
have
cut❖ the Bodhisatta down there and then. Instead, maliciously, he asked the ascetic
what
he taught.❖ The ascetic answered, 'It is to have no anger when another abuses, strikes
or humiliates you'.❖ The cruel king, Kalaka, decided to put him to the test and had his
executioner lash him 2000 times. When asked for his response, the ascetic Kundaka, the

Bodhisatta, replies, 'I teach patience, Sire, but you think my patience is only skin
deep! It is
not! My patience is rooted deeply in my heart'.❖ The king then had his hands chopped
off.

Then his feet.❖❖ Again the ascetic declared, 'You think, sire, my patience is in my
hands
and feet.❖ But it is deep within my being'.❖ Off came his ears and nose! But the ascetic
Bodhisatta declared his patience was deep in the heart.❖ Annoyed by this defeat, the

king

kicks him and departs only to be swallowed up into the deepest of hells, the Avici.❖

That

same day, the Bodhisatta also died, but not without this verse of forgiveness:

The King who had my hands, feet, ears and nose cut off,

Let him live long!

Those who are as I am, cannot be angry.

So you see there's no limit to how much we can develop the Perfections!

Truthfulness is the seventh.❖ To strive for that absolute honesty, not only with others but

with ourselves too.❖ It may take courage sometimes to face others and ourselves, but truthfulness means the inability to deceive.❖ It means to search for the authentic.❖ To do what is right and proper in our relationships, in our society and towards ourselves.❖ It

asks us to see things as they really are - warts and all.❖ In it's perfection, it is to seek the

ultimate truth, Nibbana.

The eighth is Resolution.❖ The path to hell is paved with good intentions! How true. If only

we'd done this, done that, we'd be so happy now.❖ Resolution is stickability!❖ The stamina

to keep going on regardless of how hard it is, regardless of the temptations to leave off.❖

It's to go on going on.❖ The Buddha himself exercised this Perfection when he made his historic decision not to rise from the sitting posture until he had attained enlightenment.

What a resolution!❖ It took six hours before his breakthrough came.❖ We can do it!❖

We can.❖ We can take up the posture and refuse with all our will not to rise until we're enlightened.❖ It would be a real test of our resolution, wouldn't it?❖❖ This is one of the

reasons it's so difficult to become enlightened. Our Perfection of resolution is not developed

enough. Perhaps a little more realistically, it means to see our decisions through. If I decide

to do something, I should do it.❖ I should complete the task, and complete it to the best of

my ability.❖ If I say I'll help someone with their garden, I should do it.❖ And I should get

there early, even if everything in me wants to go shopping instead. If I say I'm going to

sit

for half an hour, I should do so to the last minute and add a couple for good measure.

This

sort of self-training helps to develop a strong unwavering will. This is not to be confused

with headstrong will, do-or-die business. It's a matter of honouring our commitments to others and to ourselves. ♦ It leads to self-reliance and to the trust of others. People know

you do as you say. And you know you can do what you say you will do. ♦ Ultimately, it's all

training us for that time when we will make our own personal historic decision not to rise,

not to be dissuaded from the Path until our total liberation is won. ♦

The ninth is metta. ♦ A difficult word this, to translate. ♦ Loving-kindness is the usual but some say it's too sloppy. ♦ It's an openheartedness, friendliness. It's a universal, unprejudiced, unbiased, impartial love. Love as care, benevolence, empathy. ♦ There are

no favourites. ♦ Even if someone dislikes us, we still develop this attitude towards them. ♦

If I dislike someone, and I want to practise metta, I first of all don't indulge that dislike. ♦ I

develop first an attitude of no harm and as the nasty feelings pass, I can begin to develop

more kindly attitudes, looking at that person's better side. Of course, this is all very difficult. ♦ ♦ We're bound to have a greater affinity, greater feelings for those who are close

to us, for those whom we meet everyday rather than for people we hardly now, let alone

those we never see. ♦ But it's an ideal we aim to move towards - an unbounded love where

all beings are seen through the eye of love and compassion. ♦ It's a generalised attitude, a

disposition of care and well-wishing. Someone I know held a correspondence with a prisoner

who later in a letter confided he had committed rape. ♦ ♦ My friend was filled with anger

and disgust. In a later letter, the prisoner explained how through this terrible mistake he had lost his family. No one wanted to know him. How he had lost his career. And all that on top of being locked away in prison. When my friend now saw it from the prisoner's angle he was able to re-establish a sense of sympathy for the man. This is metta. There is another side of metta which people find difficult to accept and that is to realise that we cannot achieve the goal of universal love if we can't also include ourselves in there. That is why when we practice Metta Bhavana, Loving-Kindness Meditation, we develop these attitudes towards ourselves. 'May I be free of suffering. May I be peaceful! May I be liberated.' Some think this is selfishness, but there's a vast difference between eating to live and living to eat. The one is caring for oneself, looking after oneself. The other self-indulgence. We tend to have a lot of dislike for ourselves. We are often full of self-recriminations, self-accusations. All those little voices, 'I'm no good. I'm useless. I'm ugly. I'm disgusting. I don't know how anyone can possibly like me. I'm not good enough. No one loves me'. And so on. We need to undermine these negative feelings towards ourselves by first of all not indulging them. Just listen to them and smile. No one's perfect! Then we should develop self-acceptance, self-care. What would you think of someone who never washed their own clothes and went around like a ragamuffin? We'd say that woman doesn't care for herself. That man has no self-respect. What would you think of someone who never washed their own clothes, went round like a ragamuffin, but wanted to wash everyone else's clothes! That's what we're like, isn't it? We like to take care of everybody else's problems, while we haven't a clue what to do with our own. Sometimes, we're so self-deluded, we don't think we have any problems! Being able to take care of ourselves is a qualification for being able to take care of others. Finally, equanimity, the tenth perfection. Equanimity is considered to be the highest state

of mind in Buddhism.❖❖❖ It is not to be confused with cold detachment or intellectual indifference.❖ It is a mental state, undisturbed by any negative emotions or feelings.❖ There is no sentimentality here.❖❖❖ It is a state of mind, clear, calm and cool like a still pool in which all the sky is clearly mirrored.❖❖❖ It is within this equanimous mind that the intuition, the faculty of insight, can exercise its power to see, to understand and eventually to liberate the mind of all its illusions and delusions.❖ It is when our hearts are calm and peaceful, that wisdom shines.❖ The practice of meditation is especially important in developing this sort of mind. No matter what comes into our attention, we constantly take the position of the objective observer; just watching, just noting what arises and passes away.❖ Eventually all this commotion in the mind begins to die down. You can sometimes feel this relaxation even after a few minutes sitting.❖ As the mind's agitation calms, you may experience little gaps of empty mind where there seems to be no emotion or mood or thought or image.❖ Just pure awareness being aware of this stillness, this silence. This is the mind as a calm pool and awareness is the sky. When sensations, feelings or mental states arise out of the depth of this pool, the awareness can perceive quite clearly the arising and passing away of all this mental phenomena.❖ It is with this sort of concentration that there is a possibility of glimpsing what is beyond all these phenomena, the Nibbanic Peace Beyond.

Now in daily life, it is not necessary for us to get all neurotic and keep a tally on what Perfection we're practicing and how well were doing.❖ The easiest and simplest approach to the development of virtue is to take one of the list which you feel you would like most to develop. You will find that in its practice that many of the others are included. However, the Buddha did single out, Dana, Generosity. Firstly, he said that even immoral people could practice that. But more significant, in its development we can see how all the Perfections are lifted. First, it means I'm undermining greed and I shall hardly be developing the

habit

of taking what is not freely given to me. That's Morality. ♦ As soon as I give, I also have to

renounce a little of my wealth or time. ♦ Renunciation. As I practice Generosity, I come to

know it's importance. ♦ I come to see how interdependent people are. Such insights are all

developing my Wisdom. To practice any virtue takes Effort and I need to suffer willingly my

discomfort at the loss of wealth or time. That's Patience. ♦ I've learnt how to give gladly. ♦

In all this I need to be honest with myself. ♦ I must be aware of my reasons, both overt and

covert. ♦ Sometimes I think I'm giving with a pure heart, but in fact I'm very upset if the

person doesn't thank me. Honesty might mean becoming aware of our impure motives. ♦ I

develop Resolution too, in that I carry out my decisions. ♦ In giving, my heart is opened. ♦

I'm giving because I see the other needs my assistance. I'm giving because I see no reason

why I should have more than the other. This is Metta, Loving-kindness. ♦ All this naturally

leads to undermining the negative attitudes I have in my mind, the negative feelings I have

in my heart, especially if I give to someone I dislike. ♦ The clearer the heart and mind is of

negativity, the greater is the equanimity. ♦ Through the practice of Dana, Generosity, I am

developing all the Perfections.

It's important not to make heavy weather of all this, but rather see it in the light of experimentation. ♦ ♦ When I decided to become a monk, I decided to give a ring away. ♦

It

was a silver ring with a Buddhist design on it. ♦ I liked it very much. ♦ This was going to be

a great act of renunciation. I decided I would give it away to the first person who showed

any interest in it. ♦ As it happened, a young woman expressed ♦ a liking for it not a few



8. Resolution (adhitthana)

9. Loving -kindness (metta)

10. Equanimity (upekkha)

By practising one, we affect them all.

The Fourth Noble Truth — Right Understanding

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min read

This foundational essay examines sammā ditṭhi (Right Understanding) as the first and most crucial step of the Noble Eightfold Path. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores four types of wisdom: learning from others, personal reflection, experiential insight through meditation, and wisdom gained through compassionate action. Drawing from the Buddha's first discourse at Sarnath, the essay explains how Right Understanding encompasses the Middle Path between sensual indulgence and self-mortification, the Three Characteristics of existence (anicca, dukkha, anattā), and the law of moral causation (kamma). The teaching emphasizes that true wisdom must progress from intellectual understanding to direct experiential knowledge through meditation practice. Special attention is given to the concept of Cūḷasotāpanna (Lesser Stream Entrant) and the 'Light of Analytical Knowledge of Causation' - understanding that our actions have consequences but that we retain agency in shaping our spiritual destiny. The essay concludes by connecting Right Understanding to compassionate action in daily life, showing how proper comprehension naturally leads to ethical conduct and the gradual purification of mind that characterizes the Buddhist path.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

Right Understanding

(samma ditthi)

◆QUESTION

We have now covered all the basic understanding of Buddhism. There is in later Buddhist

commentaries an understanding which is drawn from the Buddhas words. It is the idea that

if someone understands certain things, this will lead to right thinking, words and action and

that this will in turn produce, in the goodness of time, circumstances around the meditator

which will be supportive of the quest to liberation and enlightenment.

What do you think these understanding are?

So we come full circle, back to the problem of wisdom which in Buddhist terms means the solution to the problem of suffering.◆ If the Buddha had left just a philosophy or psychology, he would no doubt be considered these days to be one of the greatest thinkers

of mankind. ♦ But what sets the Buddha apart from philosophers was that he also left a methodology, a systematic practice whereby each and every individual could make their

own discovery of what he himself had discovered.

The Fourth Truth is the Eightfold Noble Path. It is divided into three sections: morality, mental development and wisdom and it contains this practice, this methodology. Wisdom

is what is gained in terms of our personal experience. These guidelines, culled by the Buddha from his own experiential wisdom, act as guidelines directing the whole process of

self-enlightenment. There is the wisdom we gain through insight and the wisdom we gain

through compassionate action or ordinary daily experience. Both of these are supported by

what we learn from other sources such as books, magazines, TV and, of course, people and

by how we ourselves think.

I'm sure everyone has had the experience of buying a do-it-yourself furniture kit, a sort of adult . ♦ If you're like me you take everything out, quickly work out in your head how

it's supposed to go together and start fixing it up - only to come to the end of the labour to find one metal bracket or something left over. Because of this missing piece, the whole

construction keeps falling over. So it all has to be dismantled and started again. Only this

time with a humbling and grudging read of the instructions. ♦ Others, who do not suffer

so much from overweening self-confidence, will carefully read the instructions or get a friend to instruct. ♦ Some will get a friend to do it so that although they might say they it

themselves. ♦ In all these cases, one or more of the above types of understanding has been

employed, but the Buddha would have us tackle even such mundane things as building a

DIY stool, by first of all reading the instructions, then thinking about it so we've actually understood it for ourselves and then construct it. ♦ In this way we can say we truly know

what it means to construct a DIY stool. ♦ Now we're in a position to help others. ♦ I'm sure

everyone has a friend who can 'fix things', and it ends up costing twice the professional fees. We can say that knowledge and wisdom is the more profound and authentic to the individual, the more it is discovered and experienced by that individual.

So, it's the same sort of attitude the Buddha wants us to apply to his teaching. When he explains to me that there is no lasting entity or soul to be found in body and mind, I understand it, but I'm not convinced. Then I go away and ponder over it and check it out

with my own logic, arguing with other beliefs I have within myself.❖ If after all my thinking,

I understand it to be right, then it becomes almost my own argument as it were.❖ But as yet its all head stuff.❖ I have-not actually experienced the insubstantiality of my body

and mind. Scientists, for instance, tell me there is no difference between my body and the

computer Im working on in terms of subatomic particles, but I don't experience myself as subatomic activity!❖ Through the meditation practice I can experience the teaching of

insubstantiality. I do begin to experience for myself the insubstantial nature of my body

and mind and when this happens my knowledge is the wisdom of seeing these things as

they really are. It becomes experiential knowledge. This is 'realisation, to 'real-ise the truth.

According to the Buddha, this is the only true wisdom.

Herein lies the importance of different types of wisdom in Buddhist practice. The progression from received knowledge to one's own personal conclusions to realisation through actual experience is expressed by the Buddha like this

There are two conditions to the Arising of Right Understanding,

Namely, instruction by another and one's own wise consideration.

The importance of Right Understanding is that it is the first step.

If our first step is wrong, we might very well get lost!❖

The Buddha says it in a more poetic way:

❖❖ Just as the red morning sky is the forerunner and first indication of the rising of the sun,

❖❖ Just so is right understanding the forerunner and first indication of karmically wholesome things.

So here expressed very clearly is the link between Right Understanding, kamma and our

destiny.❖ Before we make any decision, we do it by way of understanding.❖ If I'm

going to

buy one of these DIY kits, I'd be very foolish if I didn't understand what it entails. Once I understand, my decisions put ideas into force, into action. Right Intention, the second part

of the Wisdom division of this Noble Eightfold Path is just that. It is the will putting force

into ideas, plans, projects which run along the lines laid down by Right Understanding. ♦

Having understood the meditation, what the actual practice and theory is, I then decide to

sit. ♦ This decision is Right Intention. And this develops a Right Attitude which is another

way the second step on the Noble Eightfold Path is sometimes translated.

Right Understanding undercuts delusion, whereas Right Intention undercuts greed and hatred. ♦ In this way Right Understanding and Right Intention destroy the roots of all unwholesome kamma. Indeed, of all suffering! We will never intend to keep the Three Primary Precepts or the Five Training Rules, we will never intend to practice the Perfections

and we will never intend to meditate, if we have no knowledge or understanding ♦ of them.

Right Understanding is the foundation of the Middle Way, the Path of Purification.

So what is Right Understanding? ♦ It is, of course, enshrined in the Four Noble Truths which

were succinctly expressed in the Buddha's first talk: the Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of the Law.

Here, the first distinction that he made is what should be avoided by. This doesn't just refer to monks and nuns, but to anyone who is turning towards a spiritual dimension. ♦

There are three paths, the path of sensual pleasure, the path of self-mortification and the

Middle Path. ♦ The whole of the Buddha's teaching can be seen as the destruction of sensual

desire. ♦ Remember this doesn't mean there's no tastiness anymore in our food. ♦ It means

the end of greed. ♦ To end greed we need also to end its twin, hatred. ♦ Self-mortification,

thinking that the body and mind are bad or evil and must somehow be destroyed, is wrong

understanding. ♦ There's nothing evil in nature. ♦ Nature is perfect just as it is. ♦ It is

our
view of things that cause us suffering and there is no escape in self-hatred or repression
or
by means of self-mortification such as long fasts and so on. ❖ The Middle Path is simply
to
understand the crucial point that our greed and hatred are the roots of our misery.
Once we
have understood that, we have gone along way to destroying our delusions. ❖ Our wis-
dom
is growing. ❖ Over Christmas and New Year, for instance, everyone drinks and eats so
much. ❖ We get fat. ❖ That's the path of personal pleasure. ❖ Afterwards, we worry
about
cholesterol and heart attacks. We suffer ourselves to eat less and cut out what we like. ❖
That's the path of mortification. The Middle Path is to eat when we are hungry and until
the body has had enough. ❖ The Middle Path is hedged both with the thorny bush of moral
laws which safeguard us from doing anything unwholesome, unskilful or harmful and the

flowering bushes of the Perfections that perfume and beautify our journey. ❖ The
Path itself
is our steps, our actions, what we do and how we do. ❖ It is the meditative life in which
sitting meditation trains us to live our lives in a mindful and careful way.
In the second of the Buddha's talks, given to the same five monks, he is concerned to
extend their understanding of the underlying characteristics of human nature. ❖ Delu-
sion
causes us to identify with our pleasures. We think that's what we are. ❖ We think that's
what life is about. ❖ This delusion is the theory upon which our greeds and hatreds are
founded. ❖ To understand the nature of our delusion is paramount if we are going to
achieve the Right Understanding without which all our intentions and all our actions
will be
leading us towards suffering, not away from it.
The Buddha converses with his disciples: ❖❖
What do you think? Is the body permanent or impermanent?
Impermanent Lord.
And is this impermanence something that brings happiness or unhappiness?
Unhappiness Lord.
And is it right to understand what is impermanent,
and what destroys happiness as mine, me, or myself? ❖

No Lord.

And so he questions them concerning feelings, thoughts, emotions and even consciousness. ♦ All are not permanent, do not bring happiness and do not constitute a 'me' or 'soul' or 'self'.

If we really understand this, that there is nothing in our body and minds that we can hold

on to since it is all arising and passing away, if we really understand that we can't call any

of it a permanent me, or ego, or soul or self, then says the Buddha:

Understanding this, a wise noble disciple loses his passion for things of the body, his passion for feelings, for thoughts, for emotions, for consciousness. ♦ When he loses the passion for these things, his greeds and obsessions fade away. ♦ When greeds and obsessions fade away, the heart is liberated. ♦ When the heart is liberated, then he comes

to know - this is liberation. ♦ He understands: this is the end of birth, the Holy Life has been

completed, what had to be done has been done. There is no more rebirth for me.

Please notice! The heart is not lost with destruction of desire. It is liberated!

This talk was so clear to the five disciples and they were all totally liberated as their new

understanding coupled with their meditation practice came to fruition. There and then they

were released from their delusions. Becoming more and more aware of the changing nature

of our lives will always undermine our attachment to it. ♦ When someone dear to us dies,

it is extremely painful. ♦ Yet if the mourning process is successful, most of our sorrow will

have passed within a year. Within five or ten years there may not even be a sad memory. ♦

Instead we will remember the person with warmth, joy and gratitude. Virtually all suffering

caused by that separation will disappear. This is what the Buddha taught. ♦ If we can accept

that life is impermanent and uncertain, our attachment to it will be questioned. As we come

to see that life is forever on the move, we won't hold onto anything. ♦ We expect things to

change, be it for the better or the worse. It doesn't matter anymore. ❖ What matters is how we react to it, how we are affected by it. ❖ It is of no use to our dead loved one, if we spend the rest of our lives in misery at their passing away! ❖ Its hardly what they'd want. ❖ They'd want us to get on with living! That's what the Buddha taught. Don't hold on to life. Just get on with living here and now, but with Right Understanding and Right Intention, of course. The Path that Buddhists follow, the Middle Path, also contains different levels of commitment and insight. A person, who experiences Nibbana, is known as a Sotapanna or stream entrant. ❖ It is said of a Sotapanna that their faith in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha is unshakable, for now they know by their own experience the Third Noble Truth, the End

of Suffering. Unfortunately, however, this is not the end of training. ❖ Even though total liberation to such a person is assured, there are three further Noble Paths to be attained. ❖ The second is called Sakadagami and at this stage the bonds of attachment and hatred are only loosened. ❖ It is only on achieving the third path, Anagami that these bonds that tie us to sensual pleasure are finally cut. Even so the training must still go on. ❖ Final liberation is achieved with the attainment of the Arahat which literally means to have killed all enemies. ❖ The enemies are, of course, greed, hatred and delusion. ❖ These four types of persons are known as the Noble Community, Ariya ❖ Sangha. ❖ They are the Buddhist saints. ❖ When a Buddhist bows three times towards a shrine, he is taking refuge in the Buddha, the historical personage and his enlightenment, the Dhamma, the doctrine and the Sangha, this community of saints. ❖ Taking refuge means to put one's trust in the Triple Gem or the Three Jewels as they are sometimes called. ❖ This act of refuge, plus the taking of the Five Training Rules is how a person becomes a Buddhist. ❖ But the formula is

repeated by devout Buddhists everyday.❖ And it is common to make a special effort, every quarter moon, approximately once a week.❖ These four days per lunar month are known as Uposatha Days.❖ Lay people often go to the monastery on these days to meditate or just to spend a quiet reflective day within monastic grounds.

For those who have not attained one of the paths, there is an understanding that if certain teachings are truly understood and development towards the first Aryan Path, Sotapanna, the Stream Entrant who intuitively Nibbana is assured.❖ That teaching is called the Light of the Analytical Knowledge of Causation.❖ There are three types of wrong understanding concerning the Law of Causation, the Law of Cause and Effect, the Law of Karma. The first is to say that existence, life, what we do, what happens to us, arises without a cause. Right Understanding states that everything happens because of something else.❖ Everything is caused.❖ Everything is the effect of a cause.❖ The second is to say that existence, life, what we do, what happens to us arises spontaneously or because of some deity. This is also not Right Understanding.❖ Every birth and action is conditioned by past and present actions.❖ Thirdly, to say that only past actions condition the present and future is not Right Understanding either.❖ To believe this would be to believe in predestination, in sealed fate.❖ In reality, the present moment and the future are also effected by our present decisions. If this were not possible we would not be able to effect any change within ourselves.❖ We would simply be doomed by fate.❖ It is knowing that we can take certain control especially of our decision making that makes the whole process of purification and eventual liberation possible.

In other words to have truly understood the Law of Karma is to have the light which will lead meditators out of the dark.❖ The Buddha talked of four kinds of persons.❖ Those going from dark to dark, from light to dark, the unfortunates; and those going from

dark

to light and from light to light, the fortunates. Understanding that we can be in control of

this process through our will means we have the ability to start moving in the right way.◆

Understanding that unwholesome thoughts, words and actions produce the same, and that

wholesome thoughts, words and actions produce the same, means we can now see the light.◆ At least at this level we are beginning to see the connection between what we think,

say and do and what happens to us. Even if the outer consequences of our actions are not

immediately obvious, by our meditative practice we come to know their immediate effect

on the mind and heart.◆ If I'm angry with someone, maybe he'll try to get his own back.◆

Of that I'm not sure.◆ I don't know what the outer effect will be.◆ But when I meditate and see how this anger affects me in myself, then at least I am aware of its negative and unhealthy effects on me.◆ I notice the effects are quite the opposite if I'm kind, gentle and

helpful.◆ Slowly, this Analytical Knowledge of Causation begins to be our guiding light.◆

Then we can say such a person is a Cula-Sotapanna, a lesser Stream Entrant.◆ We can

be sure that such a person will try to develop the Perfections and practise meditation.◆

The later commentaries on the Scriptures assure us that such a person will not end up in

situations where his training will not be able to continue.◆ In other words his mentality and

actions will lead to situations conducive to training.

To guide such a person, the Buddha clearly laid out the Noble Eightfold Path.◆ By following

this, especially the sila, Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood, the fourth type of

wisdom arises. Wisdom in action, Compassion.◆ For this is also the aim of any meditation.

To help other fellow beings towards their enlightenment.◆ That doesn't mean to preach

Buddhism. It means to help others in whatever capacity a person feels able. ♦ To guide a child in moral understanding, to feed a sick person and comfort them with encouraging

words, to listen to the problems of some friend or colleague, to give to good causes.

Whatever is compassionate is to practise the Perfections. ♦ It's a two way stream learning

to be patient with the angry child is to learn to be patient with our own internal worrying

childish thoughts. ♦ Learning how to care for and comfort ourselves is to learn how to care

for and comfort others.

So this is it. ♦ This is all the Buddha would have us do. ♦ To study ourselves, our lives. ♦ To

make the connections. ♦ To decide to follow what is wise.

To cease from harm. ♦ To do good. ♦ To purify the mind.

This is the teaching of all the Buddhas!

Like most things, easy to say, hard to do. ♦ But it's worth the effort for the fruits of our

labour are sweet. ♦ The Middle Path really does bring peace, joy, love and harmony and in

the end liberation and an end to all suffering. When the Buddha was asked what is the taste

of Nibanna, he said:

Just as the great ocean only has one taste

The taste of salt

So there is only one taste to Nibbana

And that taste is freedom

May the Teachings of the Buddha shed light into your life!

May you quickly attain the Supreme Goal!

SUMMARY

RIGHT UNDERSTANDING (Samma Ditthi)

Ways of Understanding : ♦

By instruction, from others ♦

One's own thinking

By insight experience in meditation

By compassionate action in the world

The Importance of Right Understanding

As the forerunner of all karmically wholesome things.

What is Right Understanding?

1. The Middle Path: neither indulging nor repressing;

The Fourth Noble Truth — Mental Development (samādhi)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 13 min read

This essay provides a comprehensive introduction to the second division of the Noble Eightfold Path: mental development (samādhi). Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how the three mental factors—Right Effort, Right Concentration, and Right Awareness—work together in vipassanā meditation practice to purify the mind and develop wisdom. The teaching covers practical aspects of meditation posture and breath awareness, emphasizing the importance of sitting still and observing the mind objectively, like a scientist studying natural phenomena. The essay explores how meditation allows repressed emotions and mental states to surface and naturally exhaust themselves through mindful observation, rather than through suppression or indulgence. A significant portion addresses the development of insight into the three characteristics of existence—impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā)—through direct meditative experience. The teaching culminates in explaining how sustained practice leads to the purification of mind and the development of spiritual faculties (faith, effort, concentration, awareness, and wisdom) that eventually enable the realization of Nibbāna. This practical guide serves both as instruction for meditation technique and as spiritual encouragement for the path of Awakening.

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

Mental Development ❖❖

(samadhi)

Hopefully you have been practising meditation, so this essay should complement your practice. If you have any question concerning your practice, feel free to email me.

The Fourth Noble Truth which is the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to liberation from all

suffering, is divided into morality, mental development and wisdom.❖ However, this isn't

meant to be a progressive list, but a threefold development.❖ So while we are protecting

ourselves from doing harm and keeping as best we can the moral precepts as codified in the Five Training Rules, and while we are also developing the Perfections, we need to develop our mental faculties and wisdom. And the one powerful practice to achieve this is

the practice of vipassana meditation.

Meditation in the Buddha's practice holds the central place of the Middle Way. ♦ It's importance lies in two fields. ♦ The first is the purification of the mind : the last of the Three Primary Precepts. The first two, to cease from harm and to do good, are covered by the morality division. The second ♦ is the realisation of supramundane Truth, Nibbana. ♦ Both the purification of the mind and the enlightenment also include the third division of the Eightfold Path, Wisdom, but here we are concerned with how to develop the mind so that it can make the necessary insights into itself and eventually to experience Nibbana. There are three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path that go to make up this division: Right Effort, Right Concentration and Right Awareness. And there are two areas where they are applicable: in the meditation practice itself and in ordinary life. ♦ The practice and art of meditation in daily life will be dealt with in the next essay (no 11), here we shall investigate the meditative process to see how and why it works. The first thing we do when we begin to meditate is to take up a sitting posture and sit still. ♦ For most of us, this will be the first time we have ever sat in one position without moving for any length of time. Even when we are engrossed in a film or a TV programme, quite unconsciously we are moving and shifting about all the time. ♦ In the practice of meditation, all that has to stop and we have to make a resolution not to move for a given period of time. ♦ We start with 20minutes, but we ought to build up to close on an hour as possible. ♦ The actual posture itself is not all that important. ♦ You can meditate sitting on a chair, but the cross-legged posture is worth developing for its future benefit. ♦ Believe it or not, when the legs have settled on the floor, it is a most comfortable position and more important gives us sense of balance, steadiness and groundedness. It's always a bit of a shock if you've fallen asleep for a moment while sitting on a chair, to suddenly find yourself sprawled on the floor! However, although comfort and good posture are important, it is the

state of mind that carries more weight. ♦ The mind must be alert and this is expressed in the body through the spine. ♦ If the spine is not held with energy, the body sags and pain can result in the back. ♦ If there's too much energy, pain also arises, usually in the neck. ♦

The spine must be held erect and alert with the head balanced gently on the top. ♦ Finally the hands are placed on the lap, one on the other or apart, it doesn't matter. This is Right

Effort when it comes to the sitting posture: comfortable, still and energised.

The second thing we notice when we first meditate is the silence we sit in. Some experience

it as peace. ♦ All interpersonal interaction is stopped. ♦ We don't communicate with anyone. ♦ No one tries to communicate with us. ♦ ♦ The outer person, the one whom everybody knows, is shut down. This allows us to build up the concentration and sets up the

conditions whereby we can observe and ♦ get to know the inner person.

In order to build up the concentration, we use an object which is obvious to us and so can

draw the attention. ♦ Most people find it's not all that difficult to keep the body still for

some time, but when it comes to the mind, it's a very different kettle of fish! ♦ In fact, most meditators comment on how surprised they are to find that the mind is so unruly. The Buddha described it to be like a monkey, jumping from branch to branch. ♦ Now the

object we choose is the breath, just that simple action of breathing in and breathing out. ♦

We don't interfere with it. ♦ We just allow the body to breathe. ♦ Some watch the breath

coming in and out of the nostrils, others the rise and fall of the stomach. ♦ If you wish to

develop the Mahasi Method, it is better to centre on the abdomen or if the breath is shallow

at the chest.. ♦ The particular merit of watching and feeling the breath at the abdomen is

that it keeps in contact with the body. Whichever we choose, we should stick to it. For the

purpose of watching the process of the breath is to train the mind to be still, concen-

trated
and alert.

So now we have Right Effort and Right Concentration. ♦ Right Effort here is to put in the energy needed to keep the mind steady on the breath. If this energy is used for any other purpose, then it will begin to undermine the third factor, Right Awareness. ♦ If we concentrate on the breath to achieve something or to discover something, then we are beginning to direct the mind, putting ideas and concepts in the way of pure awareness. We need to develop a very different sort of mind to the one our education system tries to develop.

If we consider our educational system for a moment, we see it is firstly about the mind storing information and learning skills. ♦ Secondly, when once this has been achieved, it is about teaching that trained mind to express ideas and feelings through writing, art, music and so on. But the meditation the Buddha would have us practise is about training the mind to observe itself. ♦ To see itself as it really is. That's what we mean by the word Vipassana.

It means literally, really or truly seeing. We become the objective observer of our own minds.

To achieve this, we need to consider how a scientist comes to know the world in an objective way. ♦ Suppose they're an ornithologist studying the habits of the Common Dreadful Warbler. ♦ Do they ride on the back of the warbler? ♦ Of course not! ♦ Do they in any way interfere with the warbler? ♦ No! ♦ To do so would be to distort the behaviour of the bird, interfere with its natural habits. ♦♦ To do so, would not be to observe the Dreadful Warbler as it really is, but as it is interfered with. ♦♦ If we want to observe the mind as it really is, we must take up a position within ourselves that won't interfere with the workings of the mind.

The mind will offer us no end of entertainment. ♦ It is full of imaginative plots, day-dreams, dialogues and emotions. ♦ Before we meditated, we used to indulge in such things. ♦ We'd sit on the bus or drive the car and allow the mind to wonder off to sunny

beaches.❖

Wed lie in bed and conjure❖ up plans on how to get more money or win promotion.❖

We

wouldn't be able to sleep for the agitation in the mind, chewing over the day's traumas and tribulations.❖ But since we've begun meditating, we've pulled away from these habits

because we have discovered them to be unwholesome and actually harmful.❖❖ This is not to say that there is not a place for constructive fantasy and directed thinking.❖

What

is unwholesome is when our minds indulge in escapist fantasy and thought that develop

unskilful negative states of mind such as lust and grudge. There's a world of difference between using our imagination to think about how we will gather the money together and organise our trip to the Costa del Sol and using our imagination to fantasise for three or four hours wandering up and down beaches attracting the opposite sex! Allow-

ing the depressed mind to construct a fantasy-fabricated world as a totally depressing and despairing place, is very different from trying to solve real problems in our relationships and

at work which may be depressing us.❖ But in meditation practice we don't indulge either;

neither the constructive, skilful use of the mind nor the destructive, unskilful use of the

mind.❖ In meditation we are trying to observe the mind as it is.❖ When we are indulging in

any kind of fantasy or thinking we are riding on the back of the Common Dreadful Warbler. If

we keep doing this we'll never come to know what the mind really is.

Many things in our mind cause us suffering.❖ Old memories, present problems, negative

emotions and moods that we'd prefer not to look at, not to acknowledge.❖ Usually when

something negative comes up, we tend to want to escape.❖ If we feel bored, for instance,

we'll turn on the TV. If we feel lonely, we'll call a friend or get drunk.❖❖ If we get angry

with someone whom we're not supposed to show anger towards, we'll swallow it. Anything

but to feel the painful states of the mind within ourselves.❖ All these strategies and tac-

tics

we employ to escape this suffering in the mind are all repressive measures. ♦ They work

in a very subtle way. ♦ They push these unwanted feelings and thoughts back into the subconscious ♦ This is like putting the Rare Dreadful Warbler into a cage. ♦ We might like

to see it there. ♦ It's pretty, but it's not natural. ♦ It's not how the warbler really is. ♦ It's natural habits are not allowed free expression. ♦ It will find other ways of behaving which

are unnatural to it. In time the warbler may sicken and die so unused is it to confinement. ♦

Or it's behaviour will become strange for its species, neurotic. ♦ ♦ Just as our ornithologist

will get a distorted view of the bird by studying it in a false situation, so we will get a very

distorted view of ourselves if ♦ a great part of us is unseen, unknown, buried deep in the

subconscious.

Right Awareness is to be able to see the mind as it really is, as it displays itself to us. When

meditators first practice Vipassana Meditation, they are often surprised to find how much

suffering there is in the mind. ♦ 'I knew I had anger in me, but this anger that's coming up is frightening. I knew I was depressed, but not this depressed. I am an anxious type,

but this is terrifying!' ♦ Sometimes it unfortunately happens that the meditator blames the meditation. ♦ But in reality all that's happening is that the lid is being taken off the

dustbin. ♦ All our lives we've trained ourselves to bottle up, to can our feelings. ♦ As soon

as we meditate, all the repressive ploys and tricks are suddenly taken away and out of the subconscious there arises a welter of unresolved guilts, angers, frustrations, sorrows,

depressions, anxieties, fears. You name it, you'll find it!

A great deal of our meditation practice is to allow these painful feelings to surface into our

awareness and to observe them. ♦ To feel them. To really feel them as they really are.

Now we see why we must sit still. ♦ When these feelings, emotions, moods come up, our reactions have always been to escape, to run away, but now our bodies are still there's nowhere to go. ♦ There's no way in which these negative states can now be avoided.

Indeed, as meditators we don't want to avoid them anymore. ♦ We've come to a point in

our lives when we've decided to sort things out, to get the mind straight, to purify the heart. In order to realise how it works we need to remind ourselves how these mental states were created in the first place. ♦ The Buddha taught it is our desire and our will that play a crucial role. ♦ Desire with its corollary, aversion, creates the motivation. The will activates it, orders the mind to develop it and hence a state of mind is produced. All our lives we've indulged our likes and dislikes and felt frustrated or depressed when we've not got what we wanted. ♦ When we have what we want we're afraid to lose it. ♦ It's not so bad if it's a watch or a book, but if it's my job or a relationship, my moods, emotions, states of mind can be very painful indeed. ♦ When we meditate in the light of awareness, all these negative states arise, but we don't indulge them and we don't push them away. ♦ So what happens to these mental states? They die away. ♦ They lose energy. ♦ They fade out. ♦ The Buddhas description of the process was of a fire. Throwing logs on a fire, will not press it out. They create a bonfire! ♦ This is repression. ♦ We can't draw the energy out of the fire by throwing sawdust on it. ♦ This only makes the fire flare up the more. ♦ If we want the fire to die out, we simply leave it alone and let it burn itself out. ♦ It's the same with our negativities. ♦ Just watching, just observing everything that comes into the mind, allows it to spend its energy and exhaust itself. ♦ It simply fades out, dies away. But more! ♦ This watching is not just a passive activity, allowing this to burn out before our very eyes as it were, it is also active in that the attention is directed to a particular quality of all that arises into the awareness. That quality is the characteristic of transience, of change. ♦ It is at this point that Vipassana Meditation moves from being a psychotherapy, a way of healing and purifying the mind and heart, to a spiritual practice. ♦ Here by spiritual

practice is meant the discovery of what lies beyond this apparent realism of our body and mind. ♦ For as we observe the arising and passing nature of our breath, our thoughts, our emotions and our sensations, we slowly begin to experience ourselves as more and more the 'objective observer'. ♦ A distance is created between the objects of our awareness and the awareness itself which grows wider and wider and more and more distinct in its separateness. ♦ As this distance grows so does our identity, our self-definition. Our egos grow dimmer and dimmer. ♦ For we realise that everything we are experiencing which we once took to be a sort of permanent and substantial personality, is but a mass of passing phenomena. There comes a time when even the observer vanishes. ♦ For instance, pain might arise in the knees. (In fact it will! Its part of the course.) We put all our effort into keeping the attention centred on the sensations so that our concentration grows narrower and narrower, until we are aware of only a very small area. ♦ There comes a time when we are aware of just sensations arising and passing away at very fast speeds and although we once perceived them as unpleasant we do not do so now. ♦ We experience them as just pure sensation, just arising and passing away. ♦ After such an experience we might also reflect, we might also realise by our own personal experience, that the consciousness of these sensations was separate from the actual sensations themselves. ♦ In fact the consciousness was not the sensations. ♦ Consciousness is one thing, sensations another. The human mind, just like the human body is made-up of parts. ♦ This is beginning to experience what is known in Buddhism as anatta. That is the teaching particular to the Buddha that no permanent soul or self or substantial entity is to be found in the body and mind. This is another of the basic characteristics of our existence. And because everything is transient and insubstantial, no everlasting happiness can be found here either. In this way we come to realise for ourselves the essential unsatisfactoriness of the human condition. This is experiencing the third characteristic,

dukkha. As these characteristics become more and more obvious and as the concentration

and awareness become more and more fine, more penetrating, the intuitive faculty that 'realises' all these things, intuits Nibbana, that which is beyond all these changing, unsatisfactory and insubstantial phenomena. ♦ This the Buddha put clearly in three famous verses. ♦

All conditioned things are impermanent
When this is perceived with wisdom,
One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy.
Just this is the Path of Purification.

All conditioned things are unsatisfactory.
When this is perceived with wisdom,
One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy.
Just this is the Path of Purification.

All conditioned things and the Unconditioned are not-self
When this is perceived with wisdom,
One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy.
Just this is the Path of Purification.

Now the whole of this meditation process rests upon Faith (saddha). Faith (saddha) here

does not mean belief. ♦ The Buddha was quite clear in all his ♦ teachings that he didn't want blind belief. ♦ Belief can be understood here as the uncritical acceptance of statements

about something that have not or cannot be proven. ♦ The Buddha states there is Nibbana,

an end to suffering which is not annihilation, that transcends the experience of body and

mind. ♦ He mostly describes it in the negative.

There is an unborn, an unbecome, an uncreated , an uncompounded, an unconditioned.

But he does also say:

There is a consciousness without object, without boundary and in all directions full of light.

He does not ask us to believe this, but he does ask us to put trust, to have confidence in him. ♦ To give him the benefit of the doubt. ♦ Unless we can do this, all our efforts at concentration will be undermined. All the time we'll be wondering and questioning and doubting. All precious energy wasted, irreclaimable, lost for ever. ♦ And whats the

point!

The Buddha is only asking us to try and see if it works for us, just as a doctor offers us medicine on the understanding that we trust his medication. ❖ So with trust, effort and interest are aroused. With these, our concentration is that much easier to achieve and with it awareness comes easily. ❖ Within this watchful and alert awareness, the faculty of intuition, that which makes insight, lies potential. ❖ When these spiritual faculties are

balanced and highly enough developed, vipassana insight, arises.

Whenever we sit in this way, we can presume that two things are happening. Firstly, that

there is a healing process of the mind and heart, allowing all the negativities to arise and

pass away. ❖ This fulfils the third Primary Precept: to purify the mind. ❖ And secondly, that

the spiritual faculties of faith, effort, concentration, awareness and intuitive wisdom are

being developed. ❖ Given constant practice, the meditator is bound to succeed in achieving

a happier and more peaceful life and is all the time laying ❖ the foundations for the eventual

experience of ❖ insight knowledge into ❖ the ultimate, ❖ that liberation from suffering, ❖

Nibbana. There's no doubt about this!

May the Teachings of the Buddha shed light into your life!

May you quickly attain the Supreme Goal!

Meditation in Ordinary Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 24 min read

This foundational essay explores how to develop a truly meditative life by bringing Right Awareness (sammā sati) into all daily activities, not just formal sitting practice. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), Bhante Bodhidhamma explains the Buddha's teaching on clear comprehension (sampajañña) - being clearly aware of what we are doing when moving, looking, eating, drinking, and in all activities. The essay addresses the common pitfall of treating sitting meditation as a magical ritual while living mindlessly the rest of the time, which leads to disappointment and eventual abandonment of practice.

The teaching covers practical techniques for maintaining continuous awareness: doing routine tasks deliberately and slowly, creating space between activities, practicing mindful listening and communication, and developing self-reflection throughout the day. Special attention is given to starting and ending the day mindfully, working with difficult emotions and habits, and cultivating mettā (loving-kindness) as a foundation for all interactions. The essay emphasizes that this comprehensive approach to mindfulness naturally develops the spiritual faculties and creates conditions for spontaneous insight (khaṇika samādhi) to arise during ordinary activities, ultimately supporting progress toward Nibbāna.

Meditation in Ordinary Daily Life.

The Buddhas Basic Advice:

In the Discourse on How to Establish Mindfulness, there is the following section on Clear

Comprehension:

A meditator when moving forward or backward is clearly aware of what they are doing;

when looking ahead or behind, clearly aware of what they are doing; when bending, stretching when carrying things, clearly aware of what they are doing; when eating, drinking, chewing, savouring when passing stools or urine when walking, standing, sitting,

falling asleep and waking up when speaking or staying silent, they clearly aware of what

they are doing.

That is, whatever the meditator is doing, that is what they must be mindful of.

In other words, the sitting meditation is only a part of the practice as a whole. The

Buddha wanted us to develop a meditative life. To know what we are doing at all times.

A life of fulltime awareness. The danger for meditators is to raise the sitting meditation practice to the position of a magical ritual as if all we needed to do was a little sitting in the morning and in the evening (perhaps) and liberation from suffering is assured.❖

Too

often meditators think sitting meditation is the be-all and end-all of the Path. I once met a

meditator because of this. He had been tremendously ardent, spending months in intensive

meditation only to come out and live the 'good life'.❖ After years of this so-called practice,

achieving very little in terms of inner peace, he had achieved little but sorrow and despair.❖

He felt the five years of so he had spent on the meditation practice had been a great waste.

So it is this dependence on meditation sitting as the one and only practice that leads to disillusionment and disappointment.. Eventually the meditator may abandon the practice

altogether as useless! So sitting meditation is only part of the Buddha's path, though undoubtedly necessary.

The Middle Path

The rules that guide the monastic life show clearly that the Buddha wasn't teaching simply

a meditation practice but a way of life, a way of living day to day. The Middle Path is a description of how life as a whole should be led by someone eager to attain liberation from all suffering. This Middle Path in its broader aspect means not to fall prey to sensual

pleasure, not to over-indulge in sensual delights.❖ Nor should we believe that self-mortification such as long fasts will bring us anywhere nearer the goal.❖ Moderation in all

things! Secondly that we should be careful not to transgress the basic moral laws for this

produces harmful affects for us and for others.❖ Thirdly, that we should make great effort

to improve ourselves by the practice of the Perfections.❖ This is all put as the Four Great

Efforts of the Eightfold Noble Path - to eradicate existing unwholesome habits and practices,

and not to allow any new ones to establish themselves; to introduce new wholesome ways

of thinking and behaving and to develop what wholesomeness we already have.

Starting the Day

As an aid to this growth and as a part of the meditation, we need to bring Right Awareness

and Right Concentration right into our daily lives. This is what a lot of meditators find very

difficult and confusing. So, let us see what meditation in daily life might mean. The day really begins with how we have slept for we often wake with the mind that fell asleep.

If I'm

depressed or angry before I go to sleep, sure enough the same emotions will overtake me

when I wake or soon after. ♦ Therefore, we need to fall asleep in a meditative way so that

at least any negative frames of mind are weakened and positive ones reinforced. So we should try to go to sleep with the mind in meditation. Just gently placing the attention on

the process of breathing or observing the sensations in the body caused by our state of

mind. ♦ Alternatively, a good practice is to review the whole body, starting at the top of the

head and slowly working our way down to the tips of the toes, observing all the sensations

on or in the body. Alternatively, following the instructions on how to practise Metta, put a

loving thought in the heartmind and repeat over and over again. At some time, it is also important to make a firm resolution to wake with the alarm, to set the mind to wake up. ♦

The alarm is only an aid. So that when we wake, we can sit up quickly and observe the mind, catching the first mood of the day and developing that watchful attitude. ♦ Once the

mind is clear, we can make the next firm resolution not to let a moment of the day pass in

mindlessness. ♦ All effort will be put into achieving continuity of awareness. ♦ Resolute determination plays a significant part in the meditative life. ♦ It is, in fact a Perfection to be

developed. We don't have to become neurotic over breaking them. ♦ We need to see such

resolutions as attempts to recondition the mind. ♦ Remember the Buddha's teaching that

will is Kamma. We need to strengthen the will, to make it strong enough to carry through our skilful decisions. ♦ For instance, getting up that little bit earlier to do the regulation forty minutes or better one hour meditation is very difficult at first, but if we persevere a new habit will be established. You may also find as so many meditators do that the more mindfulness is maintained, the less sleep is needed. So we start the day with a decision to develop continuous awareness. We resolve, we determine to do it and eventually we will achieve it to a fairly high degree. ♦♦

Deliberately ♦ Purposefully ♦ Intentionally

What form does continual awareness take? ♦ Firstly it is awareness of all the tasks we normally complete in a day, especially the normal ones, the habitual ones. ♦ The ones we

would normally do on automatic pilot. These range from brushing the teeth, to drinking a cup of tea, to routine tasks at work. ♦ Anything manual and physical needs to be done with awareness. Done deliberately, purposefully, intentionally. ♦ Even closing drawers, opening cupboards should be done as if for the first time. ♦ A good technique to bring mindfulness to bear in our mundane tasks is to do them just a little more slowly and with

careful deliberation. ♦ Another is to repeat the action that was done mindlessly. This sort

of practice brings calmness and equanimity into our lives. This is more easily done if we

approach all actions and tasks as if they were ceremonies, as if we were doing them clearly

aware of what they are doing ♦ in front of someone we respected. I often like to imagine

the Buddha himself just sitting somewhere unobtrusively in the room. ♦ How mindful I'd be

if he really were! ♦

Ceremony

Drinking tea is a national habit if not neurosis, but it can so easily be turned into a real meaningful act. ♦ Instead of rushing through the preparation, filling the kettle up with the

tap full on, splashing water everywhere, banging the kettle down, plugging it in, grabbing

the cup and saucer, banging the cupboard door shut. ♦ Same routine at the fridge for the milk. ♦ Pouring the boiling water into the pot as quickly as possible. Tapping your fingers, eating cake, gulping it down while we wait for it to brew. ♦ And then, what we've been longing for all along, in two short gulps the tea's gone. ♦ Our minds here, there and everywhere. ♦ Not actually tasting a drop. ♦ Two, three cups go down and not a single drop is truly tasted. ♦ The whole fandango is finished off with a hurried wash up. ♦ No wonder we forget whether we've had a cup of tea or not! Doing all this mindfully, deliberately, carefully, taking one's time, drinking the tea as if for the first time in our lives, lifts this ordinary mundane activity into a meditative exercise which not only increases our mindfulness, but fills that moment with order and beauty. ♦ In Japanese culture, this sort of idea produced the famous and beautiful Tea Ceremony, but it runs like a motif through a lot of how the Japanese behave, even to the ceremonial bowing before martial arts. To us, it might seem a little over the top, but if we do ceremonise our lives, we shall see it beautifies all our actions.

The Art of Listening

The second area we need to look at in our daily activities is our relationships and communication with other people. ♦ Again it is especially the usual, the ordinary, the habitual communication that needs to be de-robotised and made meaningful. ♦ We have to observe how we are communicating with our spouse, children, friends, people at work, neighbours, ♦ and compare this to the attentiveness we devote to what the boss says ♦ or to the diagnosis of the doctor. ♦ We need to cultivate the art of listening. ♦ When we listen attentively, giving our whole attention to what is said, we also become aware of the opinions and conditioned responses in our own minds. ♦ ♦ ♦ Sometimes we can achieve a concentration in our listening so that these are subdued. For listening to someone means to hear what they're saying as if for the first time. ♦ If this is really happening, there will

always be a break before a response while the mind assimilates what has been said and thinks of an answer. Too often our conversations are fencing matches. ❖ My concern is to get the other to acknowledge what person to agree with. ❖ The other person is doing exactly the same. ❖ There's no listening to what the other is actually saying, only as to how it affects 'my' position in the so-called 'discussion'. No wonder there are so many misunderstandings and mistaken assumptions. ❖ When we converse with each other, there's no need to respond immediately. ❖ What is really needed is to be ❖ truly aware of what the other is saying. ❖ In counselling, there's a technique used by a counsellor to show the client that they have understood what's been said. To show the client they've really been listening and also to find out whether in fact they've understood the client's situation. At the end of the client's complaint or explanation, the counsellor will say something like: ❖ so what you're saying is ... ❖ It is always a wonderful moment when the client's face brightens up and relaxes. ❖ Finally, someone who's really listening to what they're saying. ❖ Someone who's understood. We communicate to understand each other. ❖ To know each other better. ❖ At deeper levels, its sharing experiences, supporting and comforting. ❖ This is all impossible for someone who can't listen. Such a person always starts off from the wrong premise and usually puts a foot in it. ❖ Listening is an art and the base line of any relationship. People who can't listen, can't relate. ❖ To listen properly is to be fully aware of what the other is saying and feeling.

Creating Space 1

The next important practice, once we are clear of what it generally means to be aware in our daily activities and relationships, is to create a space. ❖ Our society with its accent on time passing, punctuality and dead lines, creates a rush, a race. ❖ Everyone's running every which way. ❖ Everyone's speeding. ❖ If you can do four jobs at once, that's good. Five, that's better. No wonder there's so much pressure about, so much stress. ❖ So

much

straining. ♦ No wonder the greatest killers are heart failure, blood pressure, strokes and so

on.

According to Buddhist psychology, only one consciousness arises at one time. The human

mind is capable of doing only one thing at a time. You can't be conscious of two things at

the same time. ♦ We think we are. When we sitting the cinema, we seem to experience all

the five senses at once. We see the film. ♦ We hear the music and dialogue. ♦ We taste the

ice cream, smell the smoke and feel uncomfortable in our seats. ♦ We seem to be in bath

of sensual pleasure all at once. But actually, each consciousness arising at vast speeds no

doubt, is aware of only thing, one incoming sense data at one time. ♦ I am either seeing the

film, or hearing the sound track or eating the ice cream and so on. ♦ But such is the speed

of consciousness and such is the higher power of the mind to relate and integrate all this

that I believe it is all happening altogether, all at once. But we have been fooled, just like the celluloid film tricks us into believing we are seeing one continuous action and not ♦

a

set of individual frames. So the important rule to establish in the meditative life is to do one

deliberate action at a time. ♦

Of course, there are many things that have now become automatic, such as walking. ♦

Here

we are discussing those actions that take deliberation, that have to be done with a certain

amount of awareness or thinking. Walking is normally automatic, but it isnt if we're crossing

a high, narrow mountain ridge. ♦ Then we are very much aware of how we are walking. ♦

And if when this walking ought to be a conscious activity, we decide to look at the scenery,

we shouldn't be surprised to fall off. Here we are concerned with deliberate action, actions that need our attention.

In the morning, for instance, we might find ourselves eating our meusli and cornflakes, talking to the family and reading the gas bill all at once. ♦♦ No wonder we feel confused.

That things are getting on top of us. ♦ At work or at leisure, it is good to organise the tasks

ahead, but accept limitations, accept the reality of what's actually happening. Don't be confused by thoughts of what ought to be happening. ♦

Suppose the day is very busy and full of interruptions. If we now view these interrup-

tions not as disturbances and nuisances, but simply accept them as the next thing to be done, we shall free ourselves of a lot of anger and frustration and stress. Suppose I'm doing some

written work, filling out forms or something and someone approaches me for informa-

tion. When they 'interrupt' me, with excuse me' all I need say is, 'I'll be with you in a mo-

ment'. ♦ In that moment, I ♦ recollect where I am with the work I'm doing. ♦ To be aware is to remember. ♦ Then I ♦ turn to the questioner and devote myself to that request. ♦ Once the request is answered, I note I have completed that task and go back to the written work

where I have left a marker. ♦ No disturbance. ♦ No anger. ♦ No stress. ♦ Just moving from

one job to another, creating a small space to recollect. ♦ If the person approaching is full of

stress and bother, I dont become involved in that. ♦ I keep my attention to the problem and

reassure the person. ♦

It's the same in a family of children, all jumping up and down for attention, just when poor old mum and dad were looking for a bit of peace and quiet. What an opportunity to

train! ♦ This way of working, one job at a time with a small space in between, makes for

concentration and efficiency.

Creating Space 2

This small space has also another important function. It stops the accumulation of emo-

tional

states.❖ Missing that alarm in the morning and over sleeping, Jack suddenly wakes up and realises he's going to be late.❖ Panic.❖ From that moment there's a world-shattering rush to get to work on time.❖ The morning wash at top speed, water and soapsuds everywhere. The breakfast is shovelled in, scalding tea gulped with a yelp. Jack then legs it to the bus stop and spends the ride tapping his fingers and biting his lip. Or driving like a madman, swearing at friend and foe, prepared to run over man, woman and child, cats and dogs. Finally, he arrives at work. Is that the end of the panic?❖ Of course not!❖ Whether he's late or early, he has set the pace for the day.❖ The whole day becomes a phrenetic onslaught with rush, anger, frustration, anxiety, stress and so on.❖ At the end of the day, his only comfort a bottle of aspirin or worse!❖ All this has now, of course, stopped. For Jack is an expert meditator. Now when he's late, he notices the sense of panic and anxiety. But he doesn't respond. He talks himself out of rushing, accepting the fact he's late.❖ He puts effort into concentrating on what he's doing.❖ He may move faster, but not wilder. When he gets to work late he accepts this fact and realises that from now on there's no need to keep up the faster pace.❖ He relaxes back into his normal routine.❖ No anxiety, no frustration, no angry outbursts, no rush, no stress. This technique of letting our reactions to events subside is of paramount importance if we want to cultivate a general state of calmness. This technique is enhanced by self-reflection.❖

Self-reflection

This is the process of self-monitoring throughout the day.❖ But not the self-monitoring of a Big Brother, full of do's and don'ts and oughts and shouldn'ts, but of a nurse who is caring for their patients.❖ It is simply a matter of recording the state of play and deciding on action to remedy or enhance the situation.❖ Just as a nurse takes a constant temperature reading and acts appropriately.❖ This is another way of stopping emotions and moods from snowballing.

Now Jill, Jack's wife, got to work this morning, early enough, but feeling tired and depressed. As soon as she walks in, her boss says something she didn't like at all. She gets angry about it. ♦ All morning she is alternately, depressed, tired or angry. She angry about being depressed and depressed about being tired and tired of being angry. When she goes for a break, everything irritates her. ♦ She's really miserable and her colleagues ignore her. ♦ Now sitting on her own, depression is fuelled with self-pity. ♦ Her only consolation is to go home, shout at Jack, and the kids, kick the cat and lock herself into a room, sulk and in really bad times take Prozac!

Jill, however, is now an expert meditator too. ♦ She has learnt the technique of living with moods and emotions, of existing peacefully with them. She develops a friendly attitude towards them, one of acceptance. ♦ She still suffers from depression, but now she acknowledges it as a fact, as a result of past conditioning. She tries to feel it as it really is. She decides that though the depression is going to hang about, probably make her less efficient, her energy and attention will be directed to the job in hand, to communicating with people, to raising the will to be helpful, open and friendly. ♦ By doing this she knows the depression won't dominate her life. ♦ She knows there won't be reactions to it, like anger and self-pity and anxiety. ♦ It may remain all day, all week, all month, all year, but her attitude to it now is as to physical pain, backache or headache. She's not going to let it hijack her life. ♦ She knows these sorts of attitudes are allowing the depression to lose steam, to lose energy. ♦ She knows she is reconditioning herself, re-educating herself. ♦ It's hard work. It's painful. ♦ But every so often she feels that the depressions are passing away just that little bit quicker, that they are never quite so deep, that she is no longer so suffocated by them. ♦ The moods, once so solid, now seem more soft. She feels a general lifting towards calmness, peace and joy.

The Inward Glance

Unfortunately, the Buddha neither discovered nor offered a quick magic cure. ♦ It's all

hard

persistent work. ♦ Jill knows that this technique, based on awareness, has to be regular and constant. ♦ She trains herself into the habit of the inward glance. ♦ Moving from room to room means opening and shutting doors. ♦ In that small moment, that break in closing the door, she pauses to look inwards, take stock and lets go of whatever mood was built up in the room she's left. ♦ She clears her heart and mind, returns to an equilibrium. ♦ Walking down corridors and up stairs, during tea breaks and natural breaks, she sees in them all occasions for this gentle self monitoring. ♦ This continual effort to let go of negative states of mind. This continual effort to establish self-awareness. ♦ And then the turning outwards to being aware of all that is around. Jill knows now from personal experience that keeping this awareness, making these sorts of decisions, leads to equanimity and clarity of mind. ♦ Her depressions come and go, but she's no longer depressed by them. ♦ In time even her depressions will pass away.

The Diary

An extension of this continual process of self-monitoring which is simply a way of being in touch with ourselves and of getting to know ourselves better is to keep a diary. ♦ There are many ways to keep a diary, but the purpose of keeping this diary is to heighten one's self-knowledge and to use it to encourage oneself in spiritual training. Writing can often

get things off your chest. ♦ Writing about an occasion that upset us, we can ask, what was it that actually got me upset. ♦ ♦ Why did it do so? Was it a rational response? ♦ Did the response help the other, the situation, me? ♦ What would be a better response in the future.

For instance, I knew someone who was having problems with his child. He talked about how unruly and angry the child was. ♦ As he talked he happened to mention that he often got quite angry with the child. ♦ When we discussed it, it occurred to us that maybe the child was simply reacting to his anger and even modelling himself on his father's behaviour, as any dutiful child should! ♦ A lot of the problems passed when he changed his behaviour. Perhaps if he had kept a diary, he might have been able to make this connection between the child's behaviour and his own before it became a problem.

The Tough Nut

Now that we have established as it were, a basic disposition towards daily life, we can be more proactive. ♦ We can take the offensive. ♦ We can search for techniques which will enhance our lives the more. ♦ The first one is to tackle the Tough Nut. ♦ Everyone has a habit or personality trait they would dearly love to lose. ♦ It could be a strong habit such as smoking or a social nuisance such as a loud voice or always opinionating. ♦ The first is to make the resolution to change. Then we need to use our self-observation techniques and here a diary is very useful in order to observe when, where and with whom the habit is likely to occur. ♦ As we come to know the occasions of the habit, we can form strategies, firstly so that we are not overcome by the habit and secondly so that we can undermine its hold on us. ♦

My father used to be a heavy smoker, forty cigarettes a day and the full-blooded, thick tar stuff. ♦ He used to sing in a choir, but had to stop for continual sore throats. ♦ ♦ The doctor even then, this is sixty years ago mind! advised him to stop smoking if he wanted a long singing life. ♦ He did. And he hit the habit where it hurt most. ♦ The one cigarette most difficult to abandon was the one after lunch when he would sit and relax and perhaps doze. ♦ Since he came home for lunch, he decided instead of smoking and instead of getting

irritable with others, he'd take it out on the piano. ❖ Not only has he never smoked since,

but he became a dab hand at the piano. ❖ This is positive action. ❖ It hurts. ❖ We've got to

work at it. ❖ But it does work!

What are the factors involved? ❖❖ Firstly that insight into the harm of any particular habit. ❖ Then the resolute determination to change. Then the strategy. And most important,

the prize! ❖ Always make sure there's present at the end. My father returned to the choir he loved.

Developing Goodwill

But its not only against our negative side we must take the offensive, we need also to put energy into the better sides of our personalities. Firstly we need to set the mind onto

positive from the first moment of the day. ❖ After the morning meditation practice, Metta

should be practiced. Metta means goodwill, benevolence, open-heartedness, kindness, care;

a universal, impartial love. ❖ Again it is by making this inner decision, talking to oneself,

suggesting to oneself a better way to be, convincing oneself, that the ground for resolute determination is established. ❖ By setting the mind at goodwill, once negative states have

been allowed to pass, that goodwill will automatically arise. This goodwill then stands as

barrier to any habitual negative responses such as anger. ❖ It allows the heart to feel things

from the others point of view.

Now in this practice, it is very important to be able to offer love to oneself. ❖ At first most people think this is selfish. ❖ But actually it's self-care. ❖ It's the difference between

cooking a well balanced meal for oneself, and spending ❖50 on a beef Stroganoff a la nouveau cuisine. Knowing the difference between self-care and self-indulgence is crucial to

undercutting any feelings of hate we might have towards ourselves. Just as we can care and

comfort others, so we can care and comfort ourselves. Just as we encourage and sup-

port

ourselves, so we should encourage and support others. In this vein, it is good practice to take one of the Perfections as a special practice.

Maybe it's patience. ❖ I'm impatient with myself and others. I'm easily irritated and angered. ❖ So let this be my special practice. As we develop one Perfection, we shall discover that the whole personality is affected and all the other Perfections are also enhanced. ❖ Since our personalities and relationships are all interdependent and interrelated, this bettering of me inside myself will begin to better my relationships with

others, allowing others in turn to develop their relationship towards me.

Inclining towards Nibbana

So far we have talked on a psychological and social level. ❖ But how does all this lead to spiritual insight, to the experience of the supramundane, of what there is beyond the psychological and the social, beyond the body and mind? ❖ This whole process, this continual effort is all to do with purifying the mind. ❖ When the mind is pure, the Spiritual

Faculties can emerge and intuitive knowledge arise. These faculties are confidence, effort,

concentration, awareness and wisdom. ❖❖ In fact, these faculties can come together at any time whatsoever. ❖ That momentary concentration of these factors, when they are all

balanced is known as Khanika Samadhi. It is a well known phenomena in the scriptures. ❖ A

lay woman became Sotapanna on intuiting anicca, transience, in the crackling of her baking

bread. Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, attained arahatship, while placing his head on the pillow to go to sleep. ❖ A modern meditation teacher intuited anicca, the fundamental

impermanence of the universe, while watching a dog pass by. This moment is beyond our

personal control. ❖ It simply happens when all the conditions are ripe. ❖ We don't have to worry about it at all. ❖ It will arise ❖ of its own at any time, while doing anything. ❖

The Nibbanic experience is beyond conditions and arises when the factors conducive to its arising are mature. ❖ We cannot make it happen no more than we can make ourselves

forget something. ❖ It happens naturally as a consequence of all our endeavours to train in

the Perfections and to remain mindful.

In this connection, let me add that to be aware and alert is not necessarily to be self-

aware. ♦ In Insight Vipassana Meditation, once the concentration is high, all we know is the process of the breath. ♦ Up until that moment we were aware of ourselves being the objective observers. ♦ When that objective observer vanishes, and all we know is the process of breath, then that is the sort of pure awareness we need to achieve insight. ♦ This can't be brought about by an act of will. ♦ The observer cannot make itself vanish. It happens quite naturally once the concentration and focus are developed enough. ♦ So it is in ordinary daily life. I might be doing a mental task, such as writing a letter or physical task, such as mowing the lawn. ♦ At first, since I'm trying to do the jobs mindfully, I might be aware of myself. But as I give myself to the task, I lose this self-awareness, awareness of a job done, we're amazed at how time has flown. ♦ It seems to have gone like a shot. ♦ We end up cutting the whole lawn or writing the whole letter perfectly and without once being actually aware of doing them. They were just done. ♦ This is a highly developed state of concentrated awareness and it is in such moments as these that the Factors of Enlightenment can become ♦ developed and balanced enough to give insight. ♦ No-one can manufacture this moment, because the means that self, that ego which is lost in such moments. ♦ So don't try, just do!

At the End of the Day

So now we are at the end of the day. ♦ A good practice is to spend sometime before falling asleep in bringing the whole day to mind. ♦ Here, the diary is useful. ♦ Note all the times when mindfulness was lost - when, where and with whom. ♦ See if anything can be done

to put right any unfortunate consequences of mindlessness if there are any. If nothing can be done, then accept the consequences totally. ♦ What's the point of worry and sorrow? Acceptance is all that is needed and of course, the resolution not let such a thing happen again.

Recall moments of mindfulness, of joy, of friendliness, of handling a tricky situation well. ♦

Congratulate yourself. ♦ Then bring tomorrow to mind and determine to continue your efforts. ♦

Finally, in bed, go to sleep with the mind rested, contented on having done your best. ♦
What more can be asked. And gently follow the breathing.

The Joy of Practice

So there we have it. ♦ The meditative life! ♦ Our objective, full-time awareness, supported

by the techniques of creating space, self recollection, positive action and, of course, our sitting meditation which now comes into its true role of training the mind to develop effort,

concentration and mindfulness. ♦

It is recommended to practise vipassana early morning in order to establish our centre for

the day and in the evening to allow any unwholesome emotions to be defused. Forty-five

minutes will do. An hour is better. ♦ But even ten minutes is better than none. These silent

times will nurture the whole day with their quiet awareness.

When we live the meditative life, our view of living changes. ♦ To live is to experience. Life

is no longer a sequence of successes and failures. Life is no longer loaded with the heavy

judgements of good and bad, right and wrong. ♦ Since now we see life as experience, we

are looking at what is healthy, wholesome, skilful and getting away from the unhealthy, the unwholesome, the unskilful. ♦ We need to be athletes, training for the real marathon

- life itself. ♦ For most of us over 70 years and over difficult terrain! ♦ What is more, each

moment is not just the training, but the testing ground too. ♦

The Buddha asked us to be an island unto ourselves, a refuge unto ourselves. He wanted

us to take the Dhamma, the Teaching, the Truth as our refuge. We have within each of us the potential to achieve the highest peace and joy. ♦ Not simply the joy and peace of a

meditative life, but that peace beyond peace - Nibbana. ♦

His final advice was:

Everything is transient, work diligently for your liberation.

Life is passing! ♦ We'd better get on with it! No time to fuff about!

Our goals must be set. ♦ Our aims distinct. ♦ All that's left is work.

This is the real work of our lives.

The work of our own true liberation.

Daily Life Care

Objectives

Establish Satipanya in Sitting Meditation.

Establish Satipanya in Ordinary Daily Life.

Develop the Perfections.

Aims

Full-time Awareness

Be mindful of all activities, especially the habitual

- eating, toiletry, routine tasks

Do things a little slower and more deliberately

Be attentive to all communication, especially the usual

- partner, children, fellow workers

: no need to respond immediately

: when really listening, a pause will occur naturally

Sitting Meditation Morning

Put real effort into the Vipassana

- especially the opening attempt to be concentrated

Be sure to spend at least five minutes developing Metta

Before you get up:

acknowledge any negative attitudes

resolve not to allow them to hijack you

develop positive attitudes especially to the disliked

choose a negative mental attitude or state you are going to 'let go of throughout the day

choose a Perfection or virtue you are going to work at throughout the day e.g. practice patience towards some one

Creating Space

Do one job at a time

e.g. reading the mail in the morning, do it attentively and make deliberate decisions about

it rather than eating your meusli and talking to the family while you turn blue over the gas

bill

leads to concentration

Pause between every task or event

do a task or what you can do of it completely

stop!

mentally put the finished task aside create, if only for a moment, silence
allow the mind to settle

look within and know the mental state

then bring the mind to the new task

Make a conscious intention

Then do it.

leads to efficiency

After an event, allow the reaction to subside

e.g. if you miss the alarm and get up late watch your reaction of anxiety and haste if the
reaction continues throughout the day, just know it is there and carry on attentively

leads to - calmness

Self - Recollection ❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖❖

use the inward glance to know what state of mind you are in and then respond or act
a continual self-monitoring

stops moods and emotions from snowballing

find regular times in the day to practice this

opening and closing of doors

walking along corridors, up stairs

tea-break and natural breaks

leads to - equanimity and clarity of mind

The Tough Nut

everyone has a particular habit or personality trait

they would like to change or eradicate

study it as it occurs - when, where, with whom

find strategies to cope

so you are not highjacked

Positive Attitude

Metta meditation, not just at sitting time

: wait for negative moods to pass then direct Metta to the object, person or self

: constantly set your intention at 'goodwill'

Khanika Samadhi

This is a moment to moment state of concentrated intuitive awareness - Satipanya -
which

is able to perceive ultimate realities. It can come at any time as it did to one of the dis-
ciples

of the Buddha who, while attending to the bread in the oven, intuited the characteristic
of

transience - Anicca - in the crackling. We can't make this happen. It happens naturally.

Meditation in Ordinary Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 34 min read

This foundational teaching explores how to transform ordinary daily activities into opportunities for continuous meditation practice, moving beyond the common misconception that sitting meditation alone leads to liberation. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta's instructions on clear comprehension (sampajañña), Bhante Bodhidhamma outlines practical methods for maintaining Right Awareness throughout the day - from mindful eating and listening to creating space between activities and developing emotional equanimity.

The essay addresses the Buddha's vision of a truly meditative life, emphasizing that formal sitting practice is just one component of the Noble Eightfold Path. Key practices include: deliberate, ceremonial approach to routine tasks; cultivating the art of listening in relationships; creating mental space to prevent emotional accumulation; self-reflection and diary practice for spiritual development; and working with difficult personality traits.

Practical guidance covers starting each day with meditation and mettā practice, maintaining awareness through transitions, handling interruptions skillfully, and ending the day with reflection. The text explains how continuous sati can lead to moments of khaṇika samādhi - concentrated awareness that can give rise to insight into the Three Characteristics at any time. This approach transforms daily life into a complete spiritual training ground for developing the Ten Perfections (pāramī) and progressing toward the ultimate goal of Nibbāna.

MeditationInOrdinary Daily Life

Bhikkhu Bodhidhamma

2002

Meditation in Ordinary Daily Life

The Buddha's Basic Advice:

In the Discourse on How to Establish Mindfulness, there is the following section on Clear Comprehension:

A meditator when moving forward or backward is clearly aware of what they are doing; when looking ahead or behind, clearly aware of what they are doing; when bending, stretching ... when carrying things, clearly aware of what they are doing; when eat-

ing, drinking, chewing, savouring ... when passing stools or urine ...when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep and waking up ...when speaking or staying silent, they clearly aware of what they are doing.

That is, whatever the meditator is doing, that is what they must be mindful of.

In other words, the sitting meditation is only a part of the practice as a whole. The Buddha wanted us to develop a meditative life. To know what we are doing at all times. A life of fulltime awareness. The danger for meditators is to raise the sitting meditation practice to the position of a magical ritual as if all we needed to do was a little sitting in the morning and in the evening (perhaps) and liberation from suffering is assured. Too often meditators think sitting meditation is the be-all and end-all of the Path. I once met a meditator because of this. He had been tremendously ardent, spending months in intensive meditation only to come out and live the 'good life'. After years of this so-called practice, achieving very little in terms of inner peace, he had achieved little but sorrow and despair. He felt the five years of so he had spent on the meditation practice had been a great waste. So, it is this dependence on meditation sitting as the one and only practice that leads to disillusionment and disappointment. Eventually the meditator may abandon the practice altogether as useless! So sitting meditation is only part of the Buddha's path, though undoubtedly necessary.

The Middle Path

The rules that guide the monastic life show clearly that the Buddha wasn't teaching simply a meditation practice but a way of life, a way of living day to day. The Middle Path is a description of how life as a whole should be led by someone eager to attain liberation from all suffering. This Middle Path in its broader aspect means not to fall prey to sensual pleasure, not to over-indulge in sensual delights. Nor should we believe that self-mortification such as long fasts will bring us anywhere nearer the goal. Moderation in all things! Secondly, that we should be careful not to transgress the basic moral laws for this produces harmful affects for us and for others. Thirdly, that we should make great effort to improve ourselves by the practice of the Perfections. This is all put as the Four Great Efforts of the Eightfold Noble Path - to eradicate existing unwholesome habits and practices, and not to allow any new ones to establish themselves; to introduce new wholesome ways of thinking and behaving and to develop what wholesomeness we already have.

Starting the Day

As an aid to this growth and as a part of the meditation, we need to bring Right Awareness and Right Concentration right into our daily lives. This is what a lot of meditators find very difficult and confusing. So, let us see what meditation in daily life might mean. The day really begins with how we have slept for we often wake with the mind that fell asleep. If I'm depressed or angry before I go to sleep, sure enough the same emotions will overtake me when I wake or soon after. Therefore, we need to fall asleep in a meditative way so that at least any negative frames of mind are weakened and positive ones reinforced. So we should try to go to sleep with the mind in meditation. Just gently placing the attention on the process of breathing or observing the sensations in the body caused by our state of mind. Alternatively, a good practice is to review the whole body, starting at the top of the head and slowly working our way down to the tips of the toes, observing all the sensations on or in the body. Alternatively, following the instructions on how to practise Metta, put a loving thought in the heart mind and repeat over and over again. At some time, it is also important to make a firm resolution to wake with the alarm, to set the mind to wake up. The alarm is only an aid. So that when we wake, we can sit up quickly and observe the mind, catching the first mood of the day and developing that watchful attitude. Once the mind is clear, we can make the next firm resolution not to let a moment of the day pass in mindlessness. All effort will be put into achieving continuity of awareness. Resolute determination plays a significant part in the meditative life. It is, in fact a Perfection to be developed. We don't have to become neurotic over breaking them. We need to see such resolutions as attempts to recondition the mind. Remember the Buddha's teaching that will is Kamma. We need to strengthen the will, to make it strong enough to carry through our skilful decisions. For instance, getting up that little bit earlier to do the regulation forty minutes or better one hour meditation is very difficult at first, but if we persevere a new habit will be established. You may also find as so many meditators do that the more mindfulness is maintained, the less sleep is needed. So we start the day with a decision to develop continuous awareness. We resolve, we determine to do it and eventually we will achieve it to a fairly high degree.

Deliberately Purposefully Intentionally

What form does continual awareness take? Firstly it is awareness of all the tasks we normally complete in a day, especially the normal ones, the habitual ones. The ones we would normally do on automatic pilot. These range from brushing the teeth, to drinking a cup of tea, to routine tasks at work. Anything manual and physical needs to be done with awareness. Done deliberately, purposefully, intentionally. Even closing drawers, opening cupboards should be done as if for the first time. A good technique to bring mindfulness to bear in our mundane tasks is to do them just a little more slowly and

with careful deliberation. Another is to repeat the action that was done mindlessly. This sort of practice brings calmness and equanimity into our lives. This is more easily done if we approach all actions and tasks as if they were ceremonies, as if we were doing them clearly aware of what they are doing in front of someone we respected. I often like to imagine the Buddha himself just sitting somewhere unobtrusively in the room. How mindful I'd be if he really were!

Ceremony

Drinking tea is a national habit if not neurosis, but it can so easily be turned into a real meaningful act. Instead of rushing through the preparation, filling the kettle up with the tap full on, splashing water everywhere, banging the kettle down, plugging it in, grabbing the cup and saucer, banging the cupboard door shut. Same routine at the fridge for the milk. Pouring the boiling water into the pot as quickly as possible. Tapping your fingers, eating cake, gulping it down while we wait for it to brew. And then, what we've been longing for all along, in two short gulps the tea's gone. Our minds here, there and everywhere. Not actually tasting a drop. Two, three cups go down and not a single drop is truly tasted. The whole fandango is finished off with a hurried wash up. No wonder we forget whether we've had a cup of tea or not! Doing all this mindfully, deliberately, carefully, taking one's time, drinking the tea as if for the first time in our lives, lifts this ordinary mundane activity into a meditative exercise which not only increases our mindfulness, but fills that moment with order and beauty. In Japanese culture, this sort of idea produced the famous and beautiful Tea Ceremony, but it runs like a motif through a lot of how the Japanese behave, even to the ceremonial bowing before martial arts. To us, it might seem a little over the top, but if we do ceremonise our lives, we shall see it beautifies all our actions.

The Art of Listening

The second area we need to look at in our daily activities is our relationships and communication with other people. Again it is especially the usual, the ordinary, the habitual communication that needs to be de-robotised and made meaningful. We have to observe how we are communicating with our spouse, children, friends, people at work, neighbours, and compare this to the attentiveness we devote to what the boss says or to the diagnosis of the doctor. We need to cultivate the art of listening.

When we listen attentively, giving our whole attention to what is said, we also become aware of the opinions and conditioned responses in our own minds. Sometimes we can achieve a concentration in our listening so that these are subdued. For listening

to someone means to hear what they're saying as if for the first time. If this is really happening, there will always be a break before a response while the mind assimilates what has been said and thinks of an answer.

Too often our conversations are fencing matches. My concern is to get the other to acknowledge what 'I' am saying and to get 'that' person to agree with 'me'. The other person is doing exactly the same. There's no listening to what the other is actually saying, only as to how it affects 'my' position in the so-called 'discussion'. No wonder there are so many misunderstandings and mistaken assumptions.

When we converse with each other, there's no need to respond immediately. What is really needed is to be truly aware of what the other is saying. In counselling, there's a technique used by a counsellor to show the client that they have understood what's been said. To show the client they've really been listening and also to find out whether in fact they've understood the client's situation. At the end of the client's complaint or explanation, the counsellor will say something like: 'so what you're saying is...' It is always a wonderful moment when the client's face brightens up and relaxes.

Finally, someone who's really listening to what they're saying. Someone who's understood. We communicate to understand each other. To know each other better. At deeper levels, it's sharing experiences, supporting and comforting. This is all impossible for someone who can't listen. Such a person always starts from the wrong premise and usually puts a foot in it. Listening is an art and the base line of any relationship. People, who can't listen, can't relate. To listen properly is to be fully aware of what the other is saying and feeling.

Creating Space 1

The next important practice, once we are clear of what it generally means to be aware in our daily activities and relationships, is to create a space. Our society with its accent on time passing, punctuality and dead lines, creates a rush, a race. Everyone's running every which way. Everyone's speeding. If you can do four jobs at once, that's good. Five, that's better. No wonder there's so much pressure about, so much stress. So much straining. No wonder the greatest killers are heart failure, blood pressure, strokes and so on.

According to Buddhist psychology, only one consciousness arises at one time. The human mind is capable of doing only one thing at a time. You can't be conscious of two things at the same time. We think we are. When we sitting the cinema, we seem to experience all the five senses at once. We see the film. We hear the music and dialogue. We taste the ice cream, smell the smoke and feel uncomfortable in our seats. We seem to be

in bath of sensual pleasure all at once. But actually, each consciousness, arising at vast speeds no doubt, is aware of only thing, one incoming sense data at one time. I am either seeing the film, or hearing the sound track creating the ice cream and so on. But such is the speed of consciousness and such is the higher power of the mind to relate and integrate all this that I believe it is all happening altogether, all at once. But we have been fooled, just like the celluloid film tricks us into believing we are seeing one continuous action and not a set of individual frames. So the important rule to establish in the meditative life is to do one deliberate action at a time.

Of course, there are many things that have now become automatic, such as walking. Here we are discussing those actions that take deliberation, that have to be done with a certain amount of awareness or thinking. Walking is normally automatic, but it isn't if we're crossing a high, narrow mountain ridge. Then we are very much aware of how we are walking. And if when this walking ought to be a conscious activity, we decide to look at the scenery, we shouldn't be surprised to fall off. Here we are concerned with deliberate action, actions that need our attention.

In the morning, for instance, we might find ourselves eating our muesli and corn-flakes, talking to the family and reading the gas bill all at once. No wonder we feel confused. That things are getting on top of us. At work or at leisure, it is good to organise the tasks ahead, but accept limitations, accept the reality of what's actually happening. Don't be confused by thoughts of what ought to be happening.

Suppose the day is very busy and full of interruptions. If we now view these interruptions not as disturbances and nuisances, but simply accept them as the next thing to be done, we shall free ourselves of a lot of anger and frustration and stress. Suppose I'm doing some written work, filling out forms or something and someone approaches me for information. When they 'interrupt' me, with 'excuse me' all I need say is, 'I'll be with you in a moment'. In that moment, I recollect where I am with the work I'm doing. To be aware is to remember. Then I turn to the questioner and devote myself to that request. Once the request is answered, I note I have completed that task and go back to the written work where I have left a marker. No disturbance. No anger. No stress. Just moving from one job to another, creating a small space to recollect. If the person approaching is full of stress and bother, I don't become involved in that. I keep my attention to the problem and reassure the person.

It's the same in a family of children, all jumping up and down for attention, just when poor old mum and dad were looking for a bit of peace and quiet. What an opportunity to train! This way of working, one job at a time with a small space in between, makes for concentration and efficiency.

Creating Space 2

This small space has also another important function. It stops the accumulation of emotional states. Missing that alarm in the morning and over sleeping, Jack suddenly wakes up and realises he's going to be late. Panic. From that moment there's a world-shattering rush to get to work on time. The morning wash at top speed, water and soapsuds everywhere. The breakfast is shovelled in, scalding tea gulped with a yelp. Jack then legs it to the bus stop and spends the ride tapping his fingers and biting his lip. Or driving like a madman, swearing at friend and foe, prepared to run over man, woman and child, cats and dogs. Finally, he arrives at work. Is that the end of the panic? Of course not! Whether he's late or early, he has set the pace for the day. The whole day becomes a frenetic onslaught with rush, anger, frustration, anxiety, stress and so on. At the end of the day, his only comfort a bottle of aspirin or worse!. All this has now, of course, stopped. For Jack is an expert meditator. Now when he's late, he notices the sense of panic and anxiety. But he doesn't respond. He talks himself out of rushing, accepting the fact he's late. He puts effort into concentrating on what he's doing. He may move faster, but not wilder. When he gets to work late he accepts this fact and realises that from now on there's no need to keep up the faster pace. He relaxes back into his normal routine. No anxiety, no frustration, no angry outbursts, no rush, no stress. This technique of letting our reactions to events subside is of paramount importance if we want to cultivate a general state of calmness. This technique is enhanced by self reflection.

Self-reflection

This is the process of self-monitoring throughout the day. But not the self-monitoring of a Big Brother, full of do's and don'ts and oughts and shouldn'ts, but of a nurse who is caring for their patients. It is simply a matter of recording the state of play and deciding on action to remedy or enhance the situation. Just as a nurse takes a constant temperature reading and acts appropriately. This is another way of stopping emotions and moods from snowballing.

Now Jill, Jack's wife, got to work this morning, early enough, but feeling tired and depressed. As soon as she walks in, her boss says something she didn't like at all. She gets angry about it. All morning she is alternately, depressed, tired or angry. She angry about being depressed and depressed about being tired and tired of being angry. When she goes for a break, everything irritates her. She's really miserable and her colleagues ignore her. Now sitting on her own, depression is fuelled with self-pity. Her only consolation is to go home, shout at Jack, and the kids, kick the cat and lock herself into a room, sulk and in really bad times take Prozac!

Jill, however, is now an expert meditator too. She has learnt the technique of living with moods and emotions, of existing peacefully with them. She develops a friendly attitude towards them, one of acceptance. She still suffers from depression, but now she acknowledges it as a fact, as a result of past conditioning. She tries to feel it as it really is. She decides that though the depression is going to hang about, probably make her less efficient, her energy and attention will be directed to the job in hand, to communicating with people, to raising the will to be helpful, open and friendly. By doing this she knows the depression won't dominate her life. She knows there won't be reactions to it, like anger and self-pity and anxiety. It may remain all day, all week, all month, all year, but her attitude to it now is as to physical pain, backache or headache. She's not going to let it hijack her life. She knows these sorts of attitudes are allowing the depression to lose steam, to lose energy. She knows she is reconditioning herself, re-educating herself. It's hard work. It's painful. But every so often she feels that the depressions are passing away just that little bit quicker, that they are never quite so deep, that she is no longer so suffocated by them. The moods, once so solid, now seem more soft. She feels a general lifting towards calmness, peace and joy.

The Inward Glance

Unfortunately, the Buddha neither discovered nor offered a quick magic cure. It's all hard persistent work. Jill knows that this technique, based on awareness, has to be regular and constant. She trains herself into the habit of the inward glance. Moving from room to room means opening and shutting doors. In that small moment, that break in closing the door, she pauses to look inwards, take stock and let go of whatever mood was built up in the room she's left. She clears her heart and mind, returns to an equilibrium. Walking down corridors and up stairs, during tea breaks and natural breaks, she sees in them all occasions for this gentle self-monitoring. This continual effort to let go of negative states of mind. This continual effort to establish self-awareness. And then the turning outwards to being aware of all that is around. Jill knows now from personal experience that keeping this awareness, making these sorts of decisions, leads to equanimity and clarity of mind. Her depressions come and go, but she's no longer depressed by them. In time even her depressions will pass away.

The Diary

An extension of this continual process of self-monitoring which is simply a way of being in touch with ourselves and of getting to know ourselves better is to keep a diary. There are many ways to keep a diary, but the purpose of keeping this diary is to heighten one's self-knowledge and to use it to encourage oneself in spiritual training. Writing can often get things off your chest. Writing about an occasion that upset us, we

can ask, what was it that actually got me upset. Why did it do so? Was it a rational response? Did the response help the other, the situation, me? What would be a better response in the future?

For instance, I knew someone who was having problems with his child. He talked about how unruly and angry the child was. As he talked he happened to mention that he often got quite angry with the child. When we discussed it, it occurred to us that maybe the child was simply reacting to his anger and even modelling himself on his father's behaviour, as any dutiful child should! A lot of the problems passed when he changed his behaviour. Perhaps if he had kept a diary, he might have been able to make this connection between the child's behaviour and his own before it became a problem.

The Tough Nut

Now that we have established as it were, a basic disposition towards daily life, we can be more proactive. We can take the offensive. We can search for techniques which will enhance our lives the more. The first one is to tackle the Tough Nut. Everyone has a habit or personality trait they would dearly love to lose. It could be a strong habit such as smoking or a social nuisance such as a loud voice or always opinionating. The first is to make the resolution to change. Then we need to use our self-observation techniques and here a diary is very useful in order to observe when, where and with whom the habit is likely to occur. As we come to know the occasions of the habit, we can form strategies, firstly so that we are not overcome by the habit and secondly so that we can undermine its hold on us.

My father used to be a heavy smoker, forty cigarettes a day and the full-blooded, thick tar stuff. He used to sing in a choir, but had to stop for continual sore throats. The doctor even then (this is over sixty years ago mind!) advised him to stop smoking if he wanted a long singing life. He did. And he hit the habit where it hurt most. The one cigarette most difficult to abandon was the one after lunch when he would sit and relax and perhaps doze. Since he came home for lunch, he decided instead of smoking and instead of getting irritable with others, he'd take it out on the piano. Not only has he never smoked since, but he also became a dab hand at the piano. This is positive action. It hurts. We've got to work at it. But it does work!

What are the factors involved? Firstly that insight into the harm of any particular habit. Then the resolute determination to change. Then the strategy. And most important, the prize! Always make sure there's a present at the end. My father returned to the choir he loved.

Developing Goodwill

But its not only against our negative side we must take the offensive,we need also to put energy into the better sides of our personalities.Firstly we need to set the mind onto positive from the first momentof the day. After the morning meditation practice, Metta shouldbe practiced. Metta means goodwill, benevolence, open-heartedness,kindness, care: a universal, impartial love. Again it is by makingthis inner decision, talking to oneself, suggesting to oneself abetter way to be, convincing oneself, that the ground for resolute determination is established. By setting the mind at goodwill,once negative states have been allowed to pass, that goodwill willautomatically arise. This goodwill then stands as barrier to anyhabitual negative responses such as anger. It allows the heartto feel things from the other's point of view.

Now in this practice, it is very important to be able to offerlove to oneself. At first most people think this is selfish. Butactually it's self-care. It's the difference between cooking awell-balanced meal for oneself, and spending £50 on a beef Stroganoffa la nouveau cuisine. Knowing the difference between self-care andself-indulgence is crucial to undercutting any feelings of hatewe might have towards ourselves. Just as we can care and comfortothers, so we can care and comfort ourselves. Just as we encourageand support ourselves, so we should encourage and support others.In this vein, it is good practice to take one of the Perfectionsas a special practice.

Maybe it's patience. I'm impatient with others and myself. I'measily irritated and angered. So let this be my special practice.As we develop one Perfection, we shall discover that the whole personalityis affected and all the other Perfections are also enhanced. Sinceour personalities and relationships are all interdependent and interrelated,this bettering of me inside myself will begin to better my relationships with others, allowing others in turn to develop their relationship towards me.

Inclining towards Nibbana

So far we have talked on a psychological and social level. Buthow does all this lead to spiritual insight, to the experience ofthe supramundane, of what there is beyond the psychological andthe social, beyond the body and mind? This whole process, this continual effort is all to do with purifying the mind. When themind is pure, the Spiritual Faculties can emerge and intuitive knowledgearise. These faculties are confidence, effort, concentration, awarenessand wisdom. In fact, these faculties can come together at anytime whatsoever. That momentary concentration of these factors,when they are all balanced is known as Khanika Samadhi. It is awell-known phenomena in the scriptures.

A laywoman became Sotapanna on intuiting anicca, transience, in the crackling of her baking bread. Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, attained arahatship, while placing his head on the pillow to go to sleep. A modern meditation teacher intuited anicca, the fundamental impermanence of the universe, while watching a dog pass by. This moment is beyond our personal control. It simply happens when all the conditions are ripe. We don't have to worry about it at all. It will arise of its own at any time, while doing anything. The Nibbanic experience is beyond conditions and arises when the factors conducive to its arising are mature. We cannot make it happen no more than we can make ourselves forget something. It happens naturally as a consequence of all our endeavours to train in the Perfections and to remain mindful.

In this connection, let me add that to be aware and alert is not necessarily to be self-aware. In Insight Vipassana Meditation, once the concentration is high, all we know is the process of the breath. Up until that moment we were aware of ourselves being the objective observers. When that objective observer vanishes, and all we know is the process of breath, then that is the sort of pure awareness we need to achieve insight. This can't be brought about by an act of will. The observer cannot make itself vanish. It happens quite naturally once the concentration and focus are developed enough.

So it is in ordinary daily life. I might be doing a mental task, such as writing a letter or physical task, such as mowing the lawn. At first, since I'm trying to do the jobs mindfully, I might be aware of myself. But as I give myself to the task, I lose this self-awareness, awareness of a 'me'. Sometimes when we've done a job, we're amazed at how time has flown. It seems to have gone like a shot. We end up cutting the whole lawn or writing the whole letter perfectly and without once being actually aware of a 'me' doing them. They were just done. This is a highly developed state of concentrated awareness and it is in such moments as these that the Factors of Enlightenment can become developed and balanced enough to give insight. No-one can manufacture this moment, because the 'one' means that self, that ego which is lost in such moments. So don't try, just do!

At the End of the Day

So now we are at the end of the day. A good practice is to spend some time before falling asleep in bringing the whole day to mind. Here, the diary is useful. Note all the times when mindfulness was lost - when, where and with whom. See if anything can be done to put right any unfortunate consequences of mindlessness if there are any. If nothing can be done, then accept the consequences totally. What's the point of worry and sorrow? Acceptance is all that is needed and of course, the resolution not let such a thing happen again.

Recall moments of mindfulness, of joy, of friendliness, of handling a tricky situation well. Congratulate yourself. Then bring tomorrow to mind and determine to continue your efforts.

Finally, in bed, go to sleep with the mind rested, contented on having done your best. What more can be asked. And gently follow the breathing.

The Joy of Practice

So there we have it. The meditative life! Our objective, full-time awareness, supported by the techniques of creating space, self-recollection, positive action and, of course, our sitting meditation which now comes into its true role of training the mind to develop effort, concentration and mindfulness.

It is recommended to practise vipassana early morning in order to establish our centre for the day and in the evening to allow any unwholesome emotions to be defused. Forty-five minutes will do. An hour is better. But even ten minutes is better than none. These silent times will nurture the whole day with their quiet awareness.

When we live the meditative life, our view of living changes. To live is to experience. Life is no longer a sequence of successes and failures. Life is no longer loaded with the heavy judgements of good and bad, right and wrong. Since now we see life as experience, we are looking at what is healthy, wholesome, skilful and getting away from the unhealthy, the unwholesome, the unskilful. We need to be athletes, training for the real marathon - life itself. For most of us over 70 years and over difficult terrain! What is more, each moment is not just the training, but the testing ground too.

The Buddha asked us to be an island unto ourselves, a refuge unto ourselves. He wanted us to take the Dhamma, the Teaching, the Truth as our refuge. We have within each of us the potential to achieve the highest peace and joy. Not simply the joy and peace of a meditative life, but that peace beyond peace - Nibbana.

His final advice was:

Everything is transient, work diligently for your liberation.

Life is passing!

No time to fuff about!

Our goals must be set.

All that's left is work.

So we'd better get on with it!

This is the real work of our lives.

The work of our own true liberation.

those meditators who delight in ever present mindfulness

and look with fear upon heedlessness

are not liable to fall into unskillful behaviour

they are in the presence of Nibbana!

DAILYLIFECARE

AIMS

Establish Satipanya in Sitting Meditation.

Establish Satipanya in Ordinary Daily Life.

Develop the Perfections.

OBJECTIVES

Full-time Awareness

Be mindful of all activities, especially the habitual

- eating, toiletry, routine tasks

Do things a little slower and more deliberately

Be attentive to all communication, especially the usual

- partner, children, fellow workers

: no need to respond immediately

: when really listening, a pause occurs naturally

Sitting Meditation – Morning

Put real effort into the Vipassana

- especially the opening attempt to be concentrated

Be sure to spend at least five minutes developing Metta

Before you get up:

acknowledge any negative attitudes

resolve not to allow them to hijack you

develop positive attitudes especially to the disliked

choose a negative mental attitude or state you are going to let go of throughout the day

choose a Perfection or virtue you wish to work on throughout the day

e.g. practice patience towards some one

Creating Space

Do one job at a time

e.g. reading the mail in the morning, do it attentively and make deliberate decisions about it rather than eating your muesli and talking to the family while you turn blue over the gas bill

leads to –concentration

Pause between every task or event

do a task or what you can do of it completely stop! mentally put the finished task aside create, if only for a moment, silence allow the mind to settle look within and know the mental state then bring the mind to the new task

Make a conscious intention Then do it.

leads to –efficiency

After an event, allow the reaction to subside

e.g. if you miss the alarm and get up late watch your reaction of anxiety and haste

if the reaction continues throughout the day, just know it is there and carry on attentively

leads to -calmness

Self - Recollection

use the inward glance to know what state of mind you are in and then respond a continual self-monitoring

stops moods and emotions from snowballing

find regular times in the day to practice this

opening and closing of doors walking along corridors, up stairs tea-break and natural breaks

leads to -equanimity and clarity of mind

The Tough Nut

everyone has a particular habit or personality trait they would like to change or eradicate

study it as it occurs - when, where, with whom find strategies to cope so you are not hijacked

Positive Attitude

Metta meditation, not just at sitting time wait for negative moods to pass then direct Metta to the object, person or self

constantly set your intention at 'goodwill'

Khanika Samadhi

This is a moment to moment state of concentrated intuitive awareness- Satipanya - which is able to perceive ultimate realities. It can come at any time as it did to one of the disciples of the Buddha who, while attending to the bread in the oven, intuited the characteristic of transience - anicca - in the crackling. We can't make this happen. It happens naturally. It is the happy outcome of our effort to remain simply mindful. When we are fully concentrated on our work and have lost all 'self' awareness, this also has great potential for spiritual insight.

END OF THE DAY

Sitting Meditation – evening

make a special effort especially after a hard day important in order to let go of the day's accumulations and ensure restful sleep

Use a diary for reflection write what comes to mind for 15 min. every evening don't think about what you are going to write just 'splurge' and then put it away

don't read it after you have finished

at the end of a week, read all the writings and draw your own conclusions

recall moments of mindlessness note when, where, and with whom note if anything can be done to put right any unfortunate consequences determine to do so if nothing can be done accept the consequences totally

recall moments of mindfulness successes in dealing with tricky situations and with negative states

congratulate yourself!

At bedtime

determine to fulfill your goals tomorrow determine to wake with the alarm maintain mindfulness from that moment onward put your mind upon the breath or body sensations or practice Metta

P U J A

Buddham pujemi

Dhammam pujemi

Sangham pujemi

I bow to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha

VANDANA

HOMAGE

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Homage the Blessed, Noble and the Fully Self-Enlightened One!

TISARANA

THE THREE REFUGES

Buddham saranam gacchami

I go to the Buddha as my Refuge

Dhammam saranam gacchami

I go to the Dhamma as my Refuge

Sangham saranam gacchami

I go to the Sangha as my Refuge

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami...(repeat)

For the second time I go the Buddha.... as my Refuge

Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami...(repeat)

For the third time..... as my Refuge

PANCA SILA

THE FIVE TRAINING RULES

Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule to abstain from killing any livingbeing

Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule not to take that which is not freely given

Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule to abstain from sexualmisconduct

Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule to abstain from wrongspeech

Sura meraya majja pamadatthana

veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the training rule not to take substance that cloud the mind

Vipassana Gatha

VIPASSANA VERSES

All conditioned things are impermanent

When this is perceived with wisdom

One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy

Just this is the Path of Purification.

All conditioned things are unsatisfactory

When this is perceived with wisdom

One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy

Just this is the Path of Purification.

All conditioned things and the Unconditioned are insubstantial

When this is perceived with wisdom

One becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy

Just this is the Path of Purification.

Those meditators who delight in ever-present mindfulness

And look with fear upon heedlessness

Are not liable to fall into unskilful behaviour

They are in the presence of Nibbana.

All conditioned things have the nature to decay.

Work diligently for your liberation.

[Last words of the Buddha - Parinibbana Sutta] I determine to make this day a day of moment to moment mindfulness. Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu! (Well-done!) Metta Goodwill Offer worldly and spiritual blessing to: someone whom you have warm regard for those who are near and dear friends, people at work, neighbours ... oneself Having established metta, begin to radiate it outwards to: all those in the room/house all in the surround the whole country all people on earth Putting a phrase in one's heart which most expresses the quality you wish to develop and share, radiate it outwards to all beings in all directions. VIPASSANA GUIDELINES Whatever the sitting posture, it should be comfortable and fulfill three conditions - an energised spine with its natural curvature, the rest of the body relaxed and the head poised on top. The hands are placed on the lap and the

eyes are gently closed. Then the attention is fixed on the process of breathing - just the normal and natural breath. It is the sensations at the abdomen caused by breathing which are to be observed. And a noting word is used to focus the thinking mind onto these sensations. As the abdomen rises, the word 'rising' is repeated. As it falls, 'falling'. And in the gap before the in-breath begins again, a feeling in the body is felt and observed, using the noting word 'touching'. When the mind is somewhat steady, the attention should be allowed to observe whatever draws it within the field of awareness - sensations and feelings, moods and emotions, mental images and thoughts. Using a simple word to note and without any interference whatsoever, all these passing phenomena are to be directly experienced and carefully observed. Should the mind wander, let it be brought back gently but firmly to observe sensations at the abdomen in order to cultivate a sharp attentiveness. In this way, right awareness with intuitive intelligence - SATIPANYA - becomes established. This bare attentiveness — simply watching all that arises and passes away — this choiceless awareness — that does not control or manipulate — this impartial observation — that does not judge or question — this intuitive introspection — fully experiencing each physical, emotional and mental event as it really is, leads to the realization that everything is impermanent and insubstantial and that to identify with or to become attached to anything whatsoever, will bring dissatisfaction. These VIPASSANA-INSIGHTS into the Three Characteristics of Existence, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self - ANICCA, DUKKHA, ANATTA - lead to the complete liberation from all suffering, the experience of the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Uncreated, the Unconditioned; Refuge, Harbour and Home; Perfect Contentment and Peace. Those who are mindful are in the presence of Nibbana. The Buddha SADHU! SADHU! SADHU! ESTABLISHING SATIPANYA. Posture Sit comfortably. Energise the spine. Sit tall. Let the rest of the body relax. The head gently poised on top. Natural easy breathing. If you change posture in a sitting, do so mindfully, slowly, noting all the movements, or it will disturb your concentration. If you find yourself sagging, put more energy into the spine. If the neck or back begins to ache, check the posture, but also that you're not putting 'wrong effort' into the practice, causing tension. You may use a cushion or a meditation stool, but only those with physical problems should use a chair. Breathing Process Observe the rising and falling of the abdomen. Should you be concentrating elsewhere e.g. at the nostrils, please make sure you receive instruction. Concentrate on the exact beginning of the inbreath, stay steady throughout the whole middle process and catch the exact end. Concentrate on the exact beginning of the outbreath, stay steady throughout the whole middle process and catch the exact end. In the gap before the inbreath begins, become aware of a particular feeling or the feeling of the whole posture and again concentrate on the abdomen as soon as the inbreath starts again. Feelings and Sensations of the Body Do not search for them. Allow them, whether from the outside (such as hearing) or from the inside to draw your attention and observe them with the same acute, en-

ergetic watchfulness with which you observe the sensations caused by the breath process, using appropriate noting words.. Emotions and Moods These are felt in the body as feelings. As with all sensations, note and observe them carefully.. Wandering: Talking: Fantasising Mind As soon as you wake from a daydream, acknowledge it with a noting-word and plunge into the body and see if you can feel the emotion which is causing the restlessness of mind. If it is too subtle to catch, then resolve to stay with the breath process. If the whole day is spent doing this, it is not wasted. This is the training we must do with calm but firm perseverance.. Walking Meditation Use the first 15 minutes or so as exercise, walking as fast as you wish, noting - left ... right. Then begin to walk slowly, noting- lifting ... moving ... lowering. Continue to slow down, noting- lifting ... moving ... lowering ... placing. Return to the sitting posture at a speed that will not undermine the strength of concentration you've developed. Attention is to be placed on the feelings in the foot. And don't forget to note the intention to walk and turn. If you are going very slow indeed, note - intending to step - before each step.. Daily Activity It is very important indeed to keep up continuity of practice and to note your intention before doing anything is a powerful aid. Then complete the action slowly and deliberately. The slower you go, the more you will notice. This technique is a great aid to concentration and mindfulness. Practice this all the time, even when opening and closing doors, during toiletry and while eating. Moment to moment awareness is the secret of success. The Mahasi Sayadaw Discourse on Metta- Good-will If you are wise and want to reach the state of peace, you should behave like this: You should be upright, responsible, gentle and humble. You should be easily contented and need only a few things. You should not always be busy. You should have the right sort of work. Your senses should be controlled and you should be modest. You should not be exclusively attached to only a few people. You should not do the slightest thing that a wise person could blame you for. You should always be thinking: May all beings be happy. Whatever living beings there are, be they weak or strong, big or small, large or slender, living nearby or far away, those who have already been born and those who have yet to be born, May all beings without exception be happy. You should not tell lies to each other. Do not think that anyone anywhere is of no value. Do not wish harm to anyone, not even when you are angry. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, So you should let the warmth of your heart go out to all beings. Let your thoughts of love go through the whole world with no ill-will and no hate. Whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down, So long as you are awake you should develop this mindfulness. This, they say, is the noblest way to live. And if you do not fall into bad ways, but live well and develop insight, And are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses, Then truly you will never need to be reborn in this world again. Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu! THE TEN PERFECTIONS D A I L Y A F F I R M A T I O N S 1. May I be generous and be of service to others. (dana) 2. May I be morally correct and self-disciplined. (sila) 3. May I not be

selfish and possessive but selfless and sacrificing. (nekkhamma)4. May I be wise and be able to give others the benefit of my understanding. (panna)5 May I be willing and energetic. (viriya)6. May I be patient and quick to forgive. (khanti)7. May I always be truthful. (sacca)8. May I be resolute and keep my word (adhitthana)9. May I be friendly, joyful and compassionate. (metta)10. May I be calm and peaceful. (upekkha)NOTESA Gift of DhammaNo other gift excels the gift of Dhamma.Give generously that others may benefit.Tapes and publications are made possible by generous donations.If you wish to support such Dhamma projects,please contact or send donations to:

I determine to make this day

a day of moment to moment mindfulness.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

(Well-done!)

Metta

Goodwill

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Those who are mindful are in the presence of Nibbana.

The Buddha

SADHU! SADHU! SADHU!

ESTABLISHING SATIPANYA

. Posture

Sit comfortably. Energise the spine. Sit tall. Let the rest of the body relax. The head gently poised on top. Natural easy breathing. If you change posture in a sitting, do so mindfully, slowly, noting all the movements, or it will disturb your concentration. If you find yourself sagging, put more energy into the spine. If the neck or back begins to ache, check the posture, but also that you're not putting 'wrong effort' into the practice, causing tension. You may use a cushion or a meditation stool, but only those with physical problems should use a chair.

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Observe the rising and falling of the abdomen. Should you be concentrating elsewhere e.g. at the nostrils, please make sure you receive instruction. Concentrate on the exact beginning of the inbreath, stay steady throughout the whole middle process and catch the exact end. Concentrate on the exact beginning of the outbreath, stay steady throughout the whole middle process and catch the exact end. In the gap before the inbreath begins, become aware of a particular feeling or the feeling of the whole posture and again concentrate on the abdomen as soon as the inbreath starts again.

. Feelings and Sensations of the Body

Do not search for them. Allow them, whether from the outside (such as hearing) or from the inside to draw your attention and observe them with the same acute, energetic watchfulness with which you observe the sensations caused by the breath process, using appropriate noting words.

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These are felt in the body as feelings. As with all sensations, note and observe them carefully.

. Wandering: Talking: Fantasising Mind

As soon as you wake from a daydream, acknowledge it with a noting word and plunge into the body and see if you can feel the emotion which is causing the restlessness of mind. If it is too subtle to catch, then resolve to stay with the breath process. If the whole day is spent doing this, it is not wasted. This is the training we must do with calm but firm perseverance.

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Use the first 15 minutes or so as exercise, walking as fast as you wish, noting - left ... right. Then begin to walk slowly, noting- lifting ... moving ... lowering. Continue to slow down, noting- lifting ... moving ... lowering ... placing. Return to the sitting posture at a speed that will not undermine the strength of concentration you've developed. Attention is to be placed on the feelings in the foot. And don't forget to note the intention to walk and turn. If you are going very slow indeed, note - intending to step - before each step.

. Daily Activity

It is very important indeed to keep up continuity of practice and to note your intention before doing anything is a powerful aid. Then complete the action slowly and deliberately. The slower you go, the more you will notice. This technique is a great aid to concentration and mindfulness. Practice this all the time, even when opening and closing doors, during toiletry and while eating.

Discourse on Metta– Good-will

If you are wise and want to reach the state of peace, you should behave like this: You should be upright, responsible, gentle and humble. You should be easily contented and need only a few things. You should not always be busy. You should have the right sort of work. Your senses should be controlled and you should be modest. You should not be exclusively attached to only a few people. You should not do the slightest thing that a wise person could blame you for. You should always be thinking: May all beings be happy. Whatever living beings there are, be they weak or strong, big or small, large or slender, living nearby or far away, those who have already been born and those who have yet to be born, May all beings without exception be happy. You should not tell lies to each other. Do not think that anyone anywhere is of no value. Do not wish harm to anyone, not even when you are angry. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, So you should let the warmth of your heart go out to all beings. Let your thoughts of love go through the whole world with no ill-will and no hate. Whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down, So long as you are awake you should develop this mindfulness.

This, they say, is the noblest way to live. And if you do not fall into bad ways, but live well and develop insight, And are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses, Then truly you will never need to be reborn in this world again.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

THE TEN PERFECTION

DAILY AFFIRMATIONS

1. May I be generous and be of service to others. (dana)
2. May I be morally correct and self-disciplined. (sila)
3. May I not be selfish and possessive but selfless and sacrificing. (nekkhamma)
4. May I be wise and be able to give others the benefit of my understanding. (panna)
5. May I be willing and energetic. (viriya)

6. May I be patient and quick to forgive. (khanti)
7. May I always be truthful. (sacca)
8. May I be resolute and keep my word (adhitthana)
9. May I be friendly, joyful and compassionate. (metta)
10. May I be calm and peaceful. (upekkha)

NOTES

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Buddha Day Evening with Italy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

This Buddha Day celebration document records a special online gathering between Satipanya Buddhist Retreat in Wales and the Italian sangha of Pian dei Ciliegi on the full moon of May 2020. The evening included teachings on the Buddha as teacher and exemplar; the formal taking of refuges (tisarāṇa) and the five training precepts (pañca sīla), and guided meditation practice.

The text provides both English and Italian versions of the traditional Pali formulas for taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, along with the five fundamental training rules that form the ethical foundation of Buddhist practice. The session concluded with extensive mettā (loving-kindness) and muditā (sympathetic joy) meditation, systematically extending goodwill from benefactors and loved ones to all beings everywhere.

This document serves as both a practical guide for conducting Buddha Day observances and a testament to the international connections within the Theravāda community, demonstrating how traditional ceremonies can bridge cultures while maintaining their authentic spiritual essence.

Buddha Day Celebration

07 May 2020

The Sanghas of Pian dei Ciliegi and Satipanya

Greetings

Talk

The Buddha as Teacher and Exemplar

Reasons for taking Refuges and Precepts

Meditation Practice

At the Beginning

Contemplation of Sickness Ageing and Death

Sitting

Ending Contemplations

Developing Metta and Joy

Buddha Day Celebration

Full Moon of May on Thursday 07

Joining the Sangha of Pain Dei Ciliege Zoom

Zoom entrance 15 minute time slot: UK 19.50-20.05 : EU 20.50-21.05

You'll need to download the YouTube app

Meeting ID: 830-5337-7084 Meeting Password: 689352

Talk on the Buddha and Taking Refuges and Precepts : Taking the Refuges and Precepts : Sitting

Finishing Contemplations - Compassion, Joy and Metta

Finishing UK 21.30 : EU 22.30

Taking Refuges and Precepts

Buddhaṃ puṇemi Dhammaṃ puṇemi Saṅghaṃ puṇemi

I bow to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to the Blessed, Noble, and Fully Self-Enlightened One

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

I go for refuge to the Buddha, to the Dhamma, to the Sangha

Dutiyampi ... Tatiyampi ...

For the second time.... For the third time ...

Sikkhāpada

The Five Training Rules

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

I undertake the training rule to refrain from killing living beings.

Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

I undertake the training rule

to refrain from taking that which is not given.

Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

I undertake the training rule to refrain from sexual misconduct.

Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

I undertake the training rule to refrain from false speech.

Surāmeraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā

veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

I undertake the training rule to refrain from intoxicants.

Buddham pujemi

Dhammam pujemi

Sangham pujemi

Mi inchino al Buddha, al Dhamma e al Sangha

VANDANA

OMAGGIO

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa!

Omaggio al Buddha, al Beato, Nobile e Pienamente Auto-Illuminato

TISARANA

I TRE RIFUGI

Buddham saranam gacchami

Dhammam saranam gacchami

Sangham saranam gacchami

prendo il Buddha : il Dhamma : il Sangha come mio rifugio

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami... (ripetere)

Per la seconda volta prendo...come mio rifugio

Tatipampi Buddham saranam gacchami.... (ripetere)

Per la terza volta prendo...come mio rifugio

PANCA SILA

I CINQUE PRECETTI

Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

Mi impegno a non uccidere o far del male ad esseri viventi

Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

Mi impegno a non prendere ciò che non mi è liberamente dato

Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

Mi impegno ad astenermi da un comportamento sessuale scorretto

Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

Mi impegno a non usare la parola in modo scorretto

Sura meraya majja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

Mi impegno a non assumere sostanze che offuschino la mente

At the start of our Meditation Sitting

At the End of the Meditation Sitting

METTA

Portiamo alla mente – i nostri benefattori, le persone care, gli amici e i colleghi, le persone neutrali, noi stessi, una persona difficile, gli uni gli altri - i nostri compagni spirituali, le persone nella vostra zona, nel vostro paese, tutti i popoli d'Europa, tutte le persone sulla terra, tutti gli esseri in tutte le direzioni – e offriamo loro le nostre benedizioni.

Let us bring to mind: our benefactors (with gratitude goodwill arises naturally)

those who are near and dear, friends and co-workers, a neutral person (someone we see, but don't know)

towards myself, a difficult person, those around us, those in our neighbourhood, all in our country

all in Europe, all people on earth, all beings in all directions

SYMPATHETIC JOY : MUDITA

LA GIOIA COMPARTECIPE: MUDITA

Consider the blessings we have received. Let gratitude arise.

Let us offer ourselves sympathetic joy.

Speak softly and directly into your own heart

May I be joyful! May my joyfulness increase.

May I experience the bliss of Nibbana

Bring to mind someone we know who has cause to be joyful.

May you be joyful! May your joyfulness increase.

May you experience the bliss of Nibbana

Consider all those who also enjoy the blessings of life.

Who are happy and content with their lives

Who are enjoying the warmth of friendship

Who are enjoying the delights of art and nature

Who find their work meaningful

who enjoy the fruitfulness of their spiritual practice

those who rejoice in the success of others

May you be joyful! May your joyfulness increase.

May you experience the bliss of Nibbana

Reaching out to all beings:

May all beings be joyful. May their joyfulnes increase.

May they experience the bliss of Nibbana

Sabbe satta sukhita hontu!

May all beings be happy! x3

Considerate le benedizioni che abbiamo ricevuto. Che possa sorgere la gratitudine

Offriamo a noi stessi la gioia compartecipe

Parliamo dolcemente e direttamente ai nostri cuori

Che io possa essere gioioso! Possa la mia gioia aumentare. Possa sperimentare la beatitudine del Nibbana

Portiamo alla mente qualcuno che ci ha dato gioia

Che tu possa essere gioioso! Che la tua gioia possa aumentare. Che tu possa sperimentare la beatitudine del Nibbana

Considerate tutti quelli che godono delle beatitudini della vita

Che sono felici e soddisfatti della loro vita

Che apprezzano il calore dell'amicizia

Che apprezzano le bellezze dell'arte e della natura

Che trovano significato nel loro lavoro

Che apprezzano i frutti della loro pratica spiritual

Quelli che gioiscono del successo di altri

Che voi possiate essere gioiosi! Che la vostra gioia possa aumentare. Che voi possiate sperimentare la beatitudine del Nibbana

Estendendo gli auspici a tutti gli esseri:

Che tutti gli esseri siano gioiosi. Possa la loro gioia aumentare.

Possano sperimentare la beatitudine del Nibbana

Sabbe satta sukhita hontu!

Possano tutti gli esseri essere felici! (x3)

Satipanya Buddhist Retreat

Bhante's Essays

Written essays and teachings on Buddhist philosophy and practice

33 essays · Bhante Bodhidhamma

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