
SATIPANYA BUDDHIST RETREAT

Tips of the Day

Short practical tips for integrating mindfulness into daily life

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At the End of the Day (1)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching offers profound yet practical wisdom for ending each day with peace and preparing for restorative sleep. Bhante Bodhidhamma guides readers through a systematic evening reflection practice that involves reviewing the day's events from morning to night, making inward amends where we have caused harm, offering forgiveness where we have been hurt, and rejoicing in wholesome actions. This process of 'putting the day to rest' helps clear emotional residues and mental preoccupations that can disturb sleep.

The essay emphasizes the importance of stopping all activity at least thirty minutes before bedtime and suggests gentle practices like brief sitting meditation, mettā (loving-kindness), or listening to calming music such as plain chant. The teaching recognizes the practical challenges of evening meditation when sleepiness naturally arises, offering alternative approaches that support mental settling without forcing concentration.

This guidance integrates Buddhist principles of reflection and letting go with modern understanding of sleep hygiene, showing how Dhamma practice extends into the most ordinary aspects of daily life. The overall objective is to still the body, quiet the mind, and calm the heart, creating conditions for both peaceful sleep and a fresh start to the next day.

I always think the next day begins the night before. How important it is to have a good night's sleep. And the deeper the sleep the more refreshed we feel. Sometimes we can wake up early feeling particularly bright. A sure sign that our sleep has been peaceful. How then to prepare for sleep? The best practice is to stop all activity at least half an hour before we intend to go to bed. First let us put the day to rest. Sitting quietly, allow the events of the day to come to mind. It's best to do it systematically say from morn till night. As those things arise that we don't feel too good about, put it right inwardly. Apologise where we feel we have harmed and forgive where we feel we have been harmed. When things arise that please us, where we feel we have acted wholesomely, rejoice in it and determine to develop the underlying attitude even more. When others have been generous towards us, thank them. As you pass each event, put it away. File away the document, unless you wish to act upon it such as apologise to or thank someone. Make a note if so. Then let the general outlay of the morrow come to mind. No need to be too specific. And consider briefly what your attitude and actions will be, for instance, the attitude and manner with which to go to work. Then leave that 'on the back burner' for tomorrow. You may even think of writing it out as a dairy. It works even if you never

read what you have written. This sort of end of day reflection brings peace to the heart and matures our wisdom. Once we have cleared the day and set ourselves at ease for the morrow, we could do a little sitting, but at this time of night there is all the possibility of falling asleep. The evening sitting is best done before dinner. If you do wish to sit, make it short and beware of the first signs of sleepiness. There is also metta which is more a pro-active practice and therefore easier to stay awake. Or listen to some music. Plain chant or Buddhist chanting is the best because it comes out of silence and equanimity. It isn't 'emotional'. Any music that promotes calmness will do. The overall objective is to rest all excitements and tribulations by stilling the body, quietening the mind and calming the heart.

At the End of the Day (2)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores how to transform mundane bedtime routines into meaningful spiritual practice through the cultivation of sammā sati (Right Awareness). Bhante Bodhidhamma guides practitioners to approach ordinary activities like washing, undressing, and preparing for sleep with the same reverence given to precious possessions, recognizing the body as the sacred vessel for awakening.

The essay addresses common patterns of rushing through evening routines mindlessly or in semi-consciousness, offering instead a path of mindful attention that honors the body's role in spiritual development. Through practical examples, it demonstrates how Right Intention can transform even natural bodily functions from sources of aversion into opportunities for equanimity and acceptance.

Key themes include overcoming the dualistic thinking of taṇhā that categorizes experiences as pleasant or unpleasant, developing genuine care for the physical form, and cultivating gratitude through awareness of our comparative fortune. The teaching concludes with an invitation to extend mettā (loving-kindness) to those less fortunate, connecting personal practice with universal compassion. This approach exemplifies how Theravāda practice can sanctify every moment of daily life.

Spiritual practice demands that we make every moment absolutely important, not just because it is actually the only moment we have since past and future moments don't exist, but because it is only in the present moment that we can effect change. How then to bring that sense of importance into everyday routine tasks, the ones we repeat often mindlessly. Preparing for bed is a prime example. The toiletry, the undressing, nestling into the mattress. Often done at speed to get it out of the way. Or hurled through the process by the longing for oblivion. Or in a sort of semi-consciousness, exhausted from the day's stresses, sleep walking into bed. But there is a way we can make spiritual capital out of habitual rituals, and that is to turn it into a meaningful ritual. And by ritual here I mean to imbue our actions with spiritual purpose. Immediately, Right Mindfulness is brought to bear and with it the Right Intention and so on to Right Action. It's time to care for the body. To remind ourselves of its preciousness. Herein is housed the enlightened-being-to-be. It is through the body that this awakening will take place. So let's care for it. Let us appreciate it as our most valued vehicle. Let's treat it with the same reverence we treat our cars, our mobiles, iPods and jewellery. To bring the same attent-

iveness to those actions that we often care to disregard. To urinate and evacuate, such Latinate words disguise our disgust. But good old Anglo-Saxon - to piss and to shit – often reveals our true relationship. How can we overcome such negativity to what are natural and therefore neutral actions of the body unless we attend to them. When we attend to them with the Right Intention to care for the body, we can see the role of tanha - that deluded distinction we make between pleasant and unpleasant where we indulge the one and annihilate the other. But there is a transcendent way to be with both the pleasant and the unpleasant and that is the equanimity we find in open acceptance – this is the way it is. And the joyful discovery is that the pleasant and the unpleasant still exist and they are ok. To bring our mindfulness to bear to the feel of things. The feel of warm water on our hands and cheeks. The taste of the toothpaste. The comfort of the mattress. And so, to wash the face with the care a mother washes her baby. To brush our teeth as if we really treasured them, knowing how much we don't want dentures! To undress and dress for bed, treating our clothes as if they were the only ones we had. To lie on the cuddling mattress and for a moment bring to mind how lucky we are to live in such comparative luxury. How many are the men, women and children who, this night, have no soap but a stone, no clothes but rags, no bed but a pavement! Let us send them our metta.

At the End of the Day

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay offers practical wisdom for transitioning mindfully from daily activities into restful sleep. Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the common challenge of mental agitation at bedtime—whether from negative emotions like anxiety and irritation, or positive but stimulating thoughts about planning and achievements. Rather than struggling with these disturbances, he guides practitioners toward developing a "taste for the neutral" through gentle breath awareness that contacts neutral feelings rather than striving for concentration.

The teaching emphasizes three key approaches: cultivating samatha (serenity) through peaceful recollections and gentle breath awareness; practicing mettā (loving-kindness) toward benefactors or oneself with simple phrases like "May you be safe, well and happy"; and offering mettā systematically to the body from head to toes. This body-mettā practice is particularly recommended for restlessness, creating "exquisite gentle feelings" as cellular life receives this loving attention.

The essay also touches on sleep science, noting the importance of the first three-and-a-half hours for deep sleep cycles, and suggests that those living meditative lives may find seven to eight hours sufficient. This guidance integrates Buddhist mindfulness practices with practical sleep hygiene, showing how mettā and samatha naturally support both spiritual development and physical well-being in daily life.

Finally we are in bed and we want to enter into a deep sleep. Hopefully we have a cleared a lot of the day's debris with an evening sitting, the metta practice and our end of day recollection. And we have prepared for bed in a mindful and calm way. So there we are, ready to 'disappear'. But even now we can be disturbed by memories, images and thinking. They may be negative – sadnesses, irritations, anxieties and so on. Or they may be positive – thinking about planning, achieving, romance and so on. We must keep up that effort to be focused and yet relaxed. Sometimes the word concentration is used, but this I feel brings with it tension by way of association with school or work. Focused here means one-pointed. The thinking mind steadied on one object. The obvious one is the breath. Again the breath may have become associated with striving in our meditation. But here to develop the calmness for sleep we need rather to feel the breath just for the purpose of contacting neutral feelings. We need to cultivate a taste for the neutral, the unexciting and begin to see this is our default position. Once this has been cul-

tivated we can contact it easily throughout the day. To help us do this we can recall a time or place where we have felt calm and peaceful, on a beach, in a park, in our garden. And then contacting the feeling of tranquillity in the body we can sense it in the gentleness of the breath. This is a way of developing samatha, serenity. Another way is to practice metta. It is best to choose someone whom we feel grateful towards and have no or tiny bad feelings towards. If we find it easy, we can also direct metta towards ourselves, alternating between the two. Keep the phrases short and simple. 'May you be safe, well and happy.' In this way we develop a mental state saturated with loving feelings. Good, restful sleep is one of the benefits of metta practice that the Buddha pointed to. Another way is to offer metta to the body. Start from the head and go down body blessing all the parts. After you reach the toes, start again from the top of the head. Coming up the body can lift energy. Keep the blessing simple. 'May you be healthy and strong'. You may find this creates exquisite gentle feelings. The cellular life enjoys a good watering of metta. This can be very powerful if you feel very restless. If you do feel restless, try putting yourself into a comfortable position and refuse to move and scan the body with metta. We sleep in one and three-quarter hour waves, passing through four levels. The first three and half hours are the most important since it is only here that we sleep at the deepest level. Most articles I've read seem to say seven or eight hours is enough. If we live meditative lives, this is quite sufficient and you may find yourself sometimes waking complete refreshed after five or six hours. Finally make a firm determination to wake after seven or eight hours. You may be surprised to find you wake up on time. Even so don't forget to put the alarm on!

Upon Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay transforms the ordinary act of waking up into a profound opportunity for vipassanā practice. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the shock of alarm clocks creates reactive mental states, contrasting this with the natural moods that arise during gentle awakening. He provides practical guidance for developing immediate wakefulness upon rising, teaching practitioners to recognise and work skillfully with whatever mood presents itself—whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

The teaching emphasises establishing awareness in the body, particularly the mid-chest area where emotional states are felt most clearly. When pleasant moods arise, practitioners learn to acknowledge the joy without being swept into fantasy or attachment. For unpleasant states like anxiety or depression, the practice involves burying attention into the feeling itself, waiting for it to subside naturally rather than being caught in mental proliferation. Neutral states are recognised as peaceful gifts, to be cultivated as a default position throughout the day.

This approach demonstrates how even the snooze button can serve the noble purpose of providing space for mindful awareness rather than mere indulgence. The essay offers accessible wisdom for integrating vipassanā practice into daily life's most basic transition.

An alarm clock is all well and good, but it is often a rude awakening. Consider how you wake up when, on holiday perhaps, you don't put the alarm on. One wakes into a presenting mood. But the jolt of the alarm creates a shock wave in the mind and heart, and we wake into that reaction. This is hardly a good start for the day. If you can quieten the waking alarm by smothering the clock a little or go to the expense of one with a rising alarm that is the better way to waken oneself. You can always put a second alarm clock which, should you fail to wake, is guaranteed to blast you out of bed. So we awake into a presenting mood. It may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Should it be neutral, that is a peaceful start to the day. Should it be pleasant, the mood will grab an idea from the mind's library and create a reverie. It will do the same should the mood be unpleasant. These opening moments to the day offer us an immediate practice. To turn these opening gambits to our advantage, we have to be wide awake upon awakening. We will do this if we have made that resolute resolution to wake with the bell. It may take a little practice, but it is not so difficult to develop. We centre that immediate wakefulness into the body, especially attentive to that area in the mid-chest where we

distinguish our emotional life. As soon as we recognise the mood, we acknowledge it and practice vipassana. And as in sitting meditation, we become equally aware of our reaction. Should we wide-awake into a peaceful state, rest there and acknowledge it, grateful for this gift. Develop a taste for it. See it as a default position and make a resolution to return to this peacefulness as often as we can throughout the day. Should it be pleasant, from excitement as to what the day beholds, to a flowering romance, to a joyful memory, whatever the cause of the happy mood, be wakeful enough not to be transported into the dream world. But again we acknowledge the state. We see the danger of a make-believe world and we wait, if possible, until it quietens, hopefully into an inner glow. This is to take the attachment out of joy. And we make a resolution to maintain this quiet joy. Should the mood be unpleasant, from depression, to anxiety, to anger, whatever the cause of the unhappy mood, we prevent it from hurling us into a mental maelstrom. So again we acknowledge the state. We see the danger – how the mood uses the mind to wind itself up. Bury the attention into the feeling of the mood and wait at least until it begins to subside. In this way we take the sting out of these unpleasant states. And we make a resolution not to allow negativity to hold sway. This is where the snooze button comes into its own. Here, not simply for the purpose of reminding us of time passing, nor to appease the base desire to exercise one's sloth, but the very opposite, to guard us from such indulgence of dire consequence! Such is the noble duty of the snooze button.

Morning Meditation (One of Four): Ritual

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma emphasizes the importance of ritual preparation for morning meditation practice, drawing on his early experience with Zazen and guidance from his teachers. The essay explores how meaningful rituals help establish the proper mental and spiritual orientation for meditation, much like preparation rituals we perform for other important activities in daily life.

The teaching covers several preparatory practices: lighting a candle as a symbol encompassing the three spiritual paths (wisdom through light, love through heat, and action through the flickering flame), the practice of bowing as an act of surrender to the Dhamma, and the taking of the Triple Refuge and Five Precepts. Bhante addresses common resistance to bowing, explaining it as essential body language expressing willingness to follow the teachings, even when the ego resists.

The discussion of taking refuge is presented with both traditional and contemporary interpretations: refuge in the Buddha as both historical teacher and inner Buddha-nature, refuge in Dhamma as Buddha's teachings and all beneficial spiritual guidance, and refuge in Saṅgha extending beyond stream-enterers to include all spiritual companions. This approach to morning ritual preparation serves to overcome negativity and unwillingness, setting a foundation of reverence and commitment that supports the day's practice.

The next four Tips are concerned with the morning meditation. This sitting at the beginning of the day is something stressed by all my teachers. And it became a regular practice for me from the very start as Zazen. It is the time of the day when we set the position we hope to maintain throughout the day. And it always seemed to me to be a little rushed and unprepared to just plonk myself in posture and start meditating. But like all important occasions there is a 'ritual' we perform to set ourselves in the right mode. Even going to work, there is the preening to be done, the last glance in the mirror. So it is with a sitting practice. We need to remind ourselves of the importance of what it that we are about to do. A simple lighting of a candle may suffice. The candle is probably the best symbol of the spiritual path: the light symbolising the path in insight and wisdom; the heat, the path of love and devotion; the flickering of the flame, the path of action. I recommend bowing. So difficult for us! It is an act of surrender, of yielding. The Dhamma is always going to ask us to do what we (those self-serving selves) don't want to do. It is a very strong body language for 'I shall follow the Teachings'. If

you find this too bruising (the self always tells you it is silly, pointless - 'I don't do bowing.' 'If I bowed, it wouldn't be me.'). you may find it useful to bow inwardly and find for yourself a phrase which express the desire to follow the Path. If you get this far, you may even want to take the Refuges and Precepts. (If you want the chant and the literature, you can download it from the website.) We have to make sense of these practices for ourselves. Taking Refuge in the Buddha traditionally is the historical personage, putting out trust (not blind faith) in the teacher, but it is also having confidence in the Buddha Within – that which is seeking liberation. Taking Refuge in the Dhamma is traditionally the teachings of the Buddha, but in this post-modern era you may wish to include all the teachings that you find useful. And taking Refuge in the Sangha is again traditionally only those who have entered one of the Four Paths and Fruits and intuited Nibbana. For them all doubt as to the truth of the Buddha's teachings has gone. But considering how important the Buddha taught that good companionship was, we may wish to include all our spiritual companions for their confidence and practice is a great support to us. And finally the Precepts are simply the basic training rules of the spiritual life. We have to prepare ourselves mentally for any important task. So find a way – and a way that will help you overcome any negativity or unwillingness to do the practice.

Morning Meditation: Default Position: Abiding in Calm Open Attentiveness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay presents a comprehensive approach to establishing Right Awareness (sammā sati) through a foundational meditation practice that cultivates what Bhante Bodhidhamma calls the 'default position' of calm open attentiveness. Drawing from the Buddha's teachings on the Seven Factors of Awakening (bojjhaṅga), the practice balances three passive qualities (calmness, concentration, equanimity) with three active ones (interest, effort, investigation of Dhamma).

The meditation begins with establishing the right attitude through ritual, then progresses through a body-based awareness exercise that starts with gross breath observation and extends to sensing the entire body from feet to scalp, before expanding outward to include environmental awareness. This creates a spacious awareness where the boundary between inner and outer experience softens. The practice emphasizes three key attitudes: 'achieving nothing,' 'going nowhere,' and 'being nobody' – countering goal-oriented thinking and personality performance.

Once this foundation of calm attentiveness and equanimity is established, practitioners can investigate the Three Characteristics of Existence (tilakkhana) – impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and not-self (anattā). The essay emphasizes the practical value of returning to this default position throughout daily life, making it a portable foundation for continuous mindfulness practice beyond formal sitting meditation.

Having performed a ritual, small or otherwise, to enter into the meditation, which I would like to call establishing the right attitude, we need now to establish the right awareness. When we look at the Seven Factors that lead to Awakening, we see that awareness sits on its own, but is supported by three factors that are passive and three that are active and they pair each other: calmness with interest, effort with concentration and equanimity with investigation the Dhamma. In the Discourse on How to Establish Right Awareness, the Buddha starts by asking us to observe the breath in a gross way, then to use it to calm ourselves and then to turn on the curiosity and observe the characteristic of impermanence. This exercise develops the passive qualities and it is best done standing, though you can change it to suit a sitting posture. Feel the sensations in your feet and how they are changing. Then slowly come up the body both inside and on the surface feeling whatever sensations there are. When you get to the top of the

head, feel all the sensations that arise on the scalp. Then turn your attention outward to hear sounds, see colours, sense the atmosphere of the room and so on. Once that outward awareness is established, bring into it the feelings in your feet, the breath and so on. In this way a very spacious awareness is developed whereby the boundary between inside and outside becomes softened. Our attitude meanwhile is to develop calmness of the body and mind, by relaxing in the posture; a steady attention (the noting is very helpful) which is our concentration; and receptivity. That's the equanimity. Equanimity means that we are coming from a place of 'don't know' or 'not sure' and so stops concepts and opinions from distorting our experience. Once this is established we can repeat to ourselves: Achieving nothing. (To achieve means we are always doing something now for some future result. But here we are just standing. Standing for standing sake.) Going nowhere. (Since we are in the present moment in a total way, we are right here. No planning needed.) Being nobody. (Since we are in silence and only in receptive mode, we don't have to perform, become a personality. No hope of celebrity here!) Once this open awareness with the attributes of calmness, attentiveness and equanimity is the default position within which we can switch on the curiosity and begin to investigate the Three Characteristics of Existence – impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. A further importance of this is that we can return to it at any time of the day and in later Tips I shall go into more detail. But if you keep dropping into this default position throughout the day, you yourself will see the benefits.

Morning Meditation: Vipassanā – 1. Developing a steady attention

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay explores the fundamental importance of morning meditation practice in developing the sensitive awareness characteristic of vipassanā. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how sitting meditation creates a different relationship with the world than ordinary consciousness, though he humbly acknowledges that even experienced practitioners frequently slip back into greed, hatred and delusion throughout their practice.

The teaching emphasizes beginning with firm resolve to establish Right Awareness (sammā sati), using deliberate noting to anchor attention on the pleasant, subtle sensations of the breathing abdomen. The approach is gentle rather than forceful – encouraging the practitioner to find refuge in the calm rhythm of breath as a peaceful resting place, perhaps drawing on memories of natural tranquility.

Recognizing that the mind will inevitably wander to daily concerns and emotional states, the essay provides practical guidance for working with the 'monkey mind' that Buddha described. Rather than harsh discipline, Bhante recommends patient persistence, gently returning to the breath while renewing one's resolution each time. Drawing on the wisdom of Mahasi teacher Sayadaw U Janaka, the goal is to reach a state of being 'somewhat concentrated' – a subjective measure that prepares the ground for the quality of investigation that characterizes vipassanā practice.

Why is it so important to sit in the morning before we start 'doing'? It is simply because when we sit in vipassana we enter into more sensitive level of awareness, which means we find ourselves in a different relationship to the world than the relationship that a non-vipassana awareness has with the world. You know from your own practice that different principles and attitudes come into play when we develop this level of consciousness. And just in case we then feel superior, it is good to remind ourselves that even when we are sitting we rarely keep this up, never mind during daily life. More often than not we slip back down into greed, hatred and delusion. In fact, only a fully liberated person could maintain an unbroken vipassana awareness. That said, we should begin our sit with a firm resolute determination to establish right awareness. Using the noting, a deliberate noting, to keep the intellect tethered to the object, we place the attention on the feelings caused by the rise and fall of the abdomen. (Should you be feeling the breath at another point, please adjust these directions accordingly.) The easiest

way to establish a steady attention is to the pleasant and subtle feelings of these neutral sensations. To taste their gentleness and to notice how the calm rhythm also calms the mind. To acknowledge this soft breath and calm mind as a resting place, a peaceful place. It sometimes helps to bring to mind a time or place where you feel such calm restfulness – perhaps while sitting in a park or in your garden or indeed in your arm-chair. Now, just because we have made a resolute determination to stay on the breath, it very rarely happens. The day-to-come impinges on us. Our worries, aversions and excitements don't seem to obey our will! Then we may feel tired or restless. Yet we keep noting these states and gently turning away from them back to breath. And – most important – when we go back to the breath, to repeat that resolution. This resolution is not hard or harsh as if we are going into battle, but more an encouragement, a cajoling, as we might tempt a child away from some obstinate rebellion. For the monkey mind (the Buddha's description), is, alas, beyond our control such are its unwholesome conditionings. But it does offer us an opportunity to develop gentle patience and calm persistence! We keep doing this until we feel 'somewhat concentrated' – a favourite phrase of main Mahasi teacher, Sayadaw U Janaka. What that means in practice is left entirely up to the mediator. And how long it takes depends on the frame of mind we are in. The more restless or the more sleepy, the longer it may take. But hopefully the preparatory practices of some small ritual and the 'default position' of abiding in calm attentiveness will have helped. But as soon as we know ourselves to be sort of steady, then we can bring in the quality of investigation.

Morning Meditation: Vipassanā 2. – Developing Insight

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay provides detailed instruction on progressing from basic mindfulness to vipassanā insight practice. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how to cultivate the Seven Factors of Awakening (bojjhaṅga) in sequence, beginning with calmness, steadiness of attention, and equanimity as the foundation. He emphasizes developing philosophical curiosity—a wondering attitude that investigates experience without seeking attainment—which naturally energizes joy and right effort.

The teaching focuses extensively on Right Attitude (sammā saṅkappa) from the Noble Eightfold Path, describing it as faith in our inherent intuitive wisdom (paññā) and the intention to investigate the Three Characteristics of Existence (tilakkhana). The essay offers practical guidance for observing impermanence (anicca) through breath awareness, understanding the role of desire in creating suffering (dukkha), and developing insight into not-self (anattā) through the separation of knowing from the known.

Bhante Bodhidhamma warns against the corruption that arises from goal-seeking in meditation and emphasizes the simplicity of just watching whatever arises with childlike curiosity. This teaching bridges formal meditation practice with the psychological understanding necessary for genuine insight development.

So now having developed ‘somewhat’ three of the Seven Factors of Awakening, namely calmness especially of the body; steadiness of attention, sometimes called concentration which I think makes people tighten up, so I prefer this other phrase or steady focus; and equanimity, openness, a passive receptive attitude. Awareness, the controlling Factor, is presumed! Now as it were we raise a question mark in the mind which arises out of a desire to know, to understand. This is wonder, the emotion of the philosopher within us, a curiosity. This curiosity is not looking for something, but looking at something with the attitude of, ‘Am I seeing, feeling, experiencing this as it really is’. This juices up the joy of interest. And it raises effort, another Factor. Effort is already there, of course, supporting the quality of awareness and steadiness of attention, but checked by calmness. When we introduce curiosity, however, one can often feel the energy rising. Should at this point any idea of attaining something, achieving something sneak into the process, it will corrupt. We will find ourselves getting tight; feeling bored since our desire is not being fulfilled; feeling exhausted since the wrong energy does not replen-

ish but keeps drawing on the reserve. So we need to have the Right Attitude, second on the Noble Path. That attitude is to have faith in the 'Buddha within', this very intuitive intelligence (panya) which is but the active side of awareness (sati). All we have to do is to watch, feel, experience whatever arises and passes away that draws our attention within the field of awareness. This Right Attitude also includes the intention to investigate the Three Characteristics of Existence. The first, impermanence, is best seen in the breath. Each inbreath, each outbreath arises only to pass away. Seeing impermanence is to undermine our attachment to what we thought was permanent or continuous. Secondly, we explore the role of a desire based on the understanding that this transient world can deliver true happiness. This desire expresses itself in meditation in indulging what it finds pleasant such as when we plan, daydream of love fulfilled and so on. And it also expresses itself in resisting any experience it finds unpleasant such as anxiety and guilt. Here lies the psychological reason for our suffering and feelings of unsatisfactoriness. And thirdly, not-self. This is not a metaphysical proposition. 'There is no self!' But a teaching tool. As we experience whatever draws our attention it becomes 'an object'. The Knowing knows 'it'. There's a feeling of distance from the object. Instead of - I'm in pain, we note 'pain' - there. There, not here! This separation of the knowing from the known is the beginning of understanding that everything we experience is 'not me, not mine'. We can prime this curiosity by purposefully seeing one of these characteristics. The Buddha suggests we see the impermanence of the breath. Then we can just watch, just feel, just experience whatever draws our attention. That's enough! It really is as simple as that. We don't believe it. We always think we have to do something. Just sit back and watch the show with the curiosity of a child. (See meditation mp3 on website and related talks and essays for further clarification. Should you have questions about your practice do email me.)

Morning Meditation: Mettā: Developing Goodwill – the Theory

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses a crucial aspect of balanced Dhamma practice by exploring mettā (goodwill) as both complement to and foundation for vipassanā meditation. He begins by identifying a common pitfall in vipassanā-only practice: the development of detached indifference that, while useful for investigating the Three Characteristics during meditation, can create coldness in relationships and daily interactions. Drawing from the structure of the Noble Eightfold Path, he shows how Right Understanding must be accompanied by Right Attitude to manifest skillfully in speech, action, and livelihood.

The essay carefully distinguishes mettā from attachment, romantic love, and mere emotion, defining it instead as an attitude of impartial goodwill—the qualities one would expect from a true friend, including honest communication when necessary. This perspective illuminates the teaching to 'love your enemy' as treating all beings with the same basic respect and benevolence, regardless of personal preferences. Bhante Bodhidhamma places mettā within the framework of the four brahmavihāra (divine dwellings), explaining how genuine goodwill naturally gives rise to compassion and sympathetic joy, all underpinned by equanimity as non-attachment.

Practically, he recommends ending all meditation sessions with at least five minutes of mettā practice, but emphasizes the Buddha's instruction to cultivate it continuously throughout daily activities—while waiting, traveling, or in any moment of 'doing nothing.' This integration of formal practice with informal cultivation offers a path to transform both inner development and outer engagement.

Let us first understand the importance of metta practice. One of the problems that can occur with vipassana only practice is that the inner onlooker, the observer becomes too detached. That detachment is necessary for clear comprehension and close investigation of the Three Characteristics, but the equanimity there soon degrades into indifference once we take this position into the world of action. A woman told me that after practising vipassana her husband found her cold and unresponsive. I suggested she practice metta. The last report was positive. That's what metta is all about. Re-engagement. It's there in the Eightfold Path. After Right Understanding comes Right Attitude. Whatever wisdom we gain from our practice remains sterile unless translated into an attitude and then with both this understanding and attitude we can progress through to

Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. However, this re-engaging must also not be confused with other forms of love. Metta is not attachment. It's not that in our present deluded state we can love, especially those close to us without attachment, but it's important to know that metta isn't that. It's not erotic love either. And it's not an emotion! Metta is an attitude. The heart may indeed respond with warm and delicious feelings, but that's not metta. That's why I prefer the translation of goodwill as opposed to loving-kindness, though it is also that. Metta is all the virtues you would ask of a good friend. And sometimes a good friend may tell you something you don't want to hear. Metta allows people to be truthful with us. Likewise we should treat those who dislike us or whom we dislike with the same impartial goodwill. This is the meaning of 'love your enemy'. You don't have to 'love' someone to treat them with metta. In this way metta is the basic relationship we should have towards everyone. Indeed all beings. It can even affect the way we treat objects. How often have you closed the fridge door gently and kindly? Metta is the default position in our relationship to the world. From this the other two qualities of compassion and joy arise naturally. Would it not be perfectly normal to want to help friend in distress? And goodwill makes it easy for us to rejoice in a friend's success. These attitudes – metta, compassion, joy – are called Illimitables. Their development is indefinite. For there are innumerable number of beings and the depth of development is unfathomable. Like a number, no matter how big it is, you can always add one. These are underpinned by equanimity, the other Illimitable, which here means non-attachment or non-prejudice. And all together these four are known as the Brahmavihara – Dwelling Place of the Gods. In other words, they create the bountiful heart and beautiful mind. How often should we practice? All sittings, no matter how long, should end with some metta. At least five minutes. You will find a five minute metta at the end of both the Detailed Guided Meditation and Metta on the website. <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audio.htm> But the Buddha's advice is to practice it all the time! Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down. Whenever there is 'nothing to do' – sitting on a bus, waiting at the traffic lights, climbing stairs – that's the time to practice. If we were to use up all the minutes when we are 'doing nothing' with metta practice, just that would change our lives radically. For metta is the only true revolutionary force.

Discourse on Mettā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This essay presents Bhante Bodhidhamma's accessible translation and teaching on the Mettā Sutta (Sn 1.8), one of Buddhism's most beloved discourses on loving-kindness. The text begins by outlining the moral foundation necessary for mettā practice—being upright, gentle, humble, and content with little—before moving into the heart of loving-kindness meditation itself. The essay explores how mettā extends beyond formal sitting practice to become a complete way of living, encompassing our relationships, speech, and moment-to-moment intentions.

Bhante Bodhidhamma's commentary illuminates the sutta's famous simile of a mother's protective love for her only child, showing how this natural human capacity can be extended to all beings without exception. The teaching addresses practical aspects of daily life—how to handle anger, relate to difficult people, and maintain loving awareness throughout all postures and activities. The essay concludes by connecting mettā practice to the ultimate goal of liberation, showing how the cultivation of boundless love supports the development of insight (vipassanā) and freedom from attachment to sensual desires, leading toward the end of rebirth.

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.

Morning Meditation: Developing Goodwill and Forgiveness – the Exercise

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This practical guide presents a comprehensive framework for developing mettā (loving-kindness) and forgiveness through structured meditation exercises. Drawing from traditional sources including the Mettā Sutta and the Visuddhimagga commentary, Bhante Bodhidhamma outlines the classic four blessings: safety, wellness, happiness, and ease of living. The teaching provides a systematic sequence for extending goodwill, beginning with benefactors and gradually expanding to include difficult people, one's community, and ultimately all beings everywhere.

The essay includes detailed instructions for forgiveness practice, covering three essential aspects: asking for forgiveness when we have caused harm, offering forgiveness to those who have hurt us, and the crucial practice of self-forgiveness. Each process involves mindfully observing arising mental states, acknowledging how we create our own suffering through unwholesome reactions, and making sincere determinations for future conduct.

This accessible teaching offers concrete tools for transforming difficult emotions like guilt, shame, hurt, and spite into opportunities for spiritual growth. The practices support both formal meditation and daily life application, helping practitioners develop the brahmavihāra (divine abiding) of mettā as a foundation for wisdom and compassion.

There are many ways in which we can develop metta. The chanting of the metta discourse we do in the morning and this evening chant taken from a commentary, the Visuddhimagga, are two of them. The traditional blessings can be whittled down to four: May you be safe (from dangers outside and within ourselves) May you be well (free from all sickness and disease). May you be happy (free of all mental distress). May you enjoy ease of living. (May you live contented and in harmony with the world – alternative.) The sequence of offering starts with :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 the neighbourhood ('relocate' to where you live) all in our country all in Europe all people on earth all beings in all directions

Developing Forgiveness Asking for forgiveness: bring an event or person to mind. Experience the arising states of mind – guilt, shame, remorse, self-justification. Acknowledge how we have caused our own suffering : reflect on the unwholesomeness of these states : apologise : determine not to be-

have in this way again. Forgiving: bring an event or person to mind. Experience the arising states of mind : hurt, revenge, spite. Acknowledge how we have caused our own suffering : reflect on the unwholesomeness of these states : offer forgiveness : determine to forgive in future. Forgiving oneself: Bring events to mind where we have harmed ourselves : consider the meaning of ignorance and delusion and how they manifest : accept that to suffer the consequences of past actions is enough, no need to punish oneself : determine not to repeat the same folly. May All Beings Be Happy! Sabbe satta sukhita hontu (x3) Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu Well done! This accompanies the Heartcare (metta) mp3 on website <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audio.htm>

Morning Meditation: Resolution

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay examines the concluding practice of morning meditation: making conscious resolutions for the day ahead. Bhante Bodhidhamma connects this practice to sammā saṅkappa (Right Intention), the second factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, showing how daily resolution reinforces both Right Understanding gained through vipassanā and Right Attitude cultivated through mettā meditation.

The teaching explores the mechanics of intention and action through the lens of paṭicca samuppāda (Dependent Origination), explaining how intentions become choices, and choices manifest as kamma through sustained thought, speech, or deed. The essay emphasizes the practical wisdom of making resolutions for just one day rather than longer periods, drawing parallels between spiritual commitment and other life commitments that require daily renewal.

Bhante addresses the challenge of transforming habitual patterns, explaining how accumulated energy in unwholesome habits creates resistance to change, while beneficial habits may lack energy due to underdevelopment. The resolution practice becomes a tool for systematically undermining unskillful patterns while strengthening wholesome ones. The teaching concludes with practical guidance for crafting achievable daily resolutions - both positive commitments and clear refusals - that can be sustained and reinforced throughout the day, fostering gradual spiritual growth through consistent daily practice.

The final part of the morning practice is the act of resolution. Resolution, resolve, determination are all part of the second step of the Eightfold path – Right Attitude or Right Intention. If vipassana brings Right Understanding and Metta turns that into Right Attitude, then the act of resolution reinforces both and commits us to a day of determined commitment to Buddhaddhamma. I say a day, because one day at a time is quite enough. To determine something for a week is possible, but for a month that resolve dissolves unless reinforced. And to determine for a year can be depressing! One day, this day, is feasible. Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves! It is often the case in our lives that we take on certain commitments and then fail to reinforce their intentions. The situation begins to move away from us and we lose it. A marriage vow given to witnesses lasts that day. From then on presumption leads to laziness and carelessness, and disagreements and annoyances may grow to wither the original vow. Our commitment to the work we do unless reinforced with daily commitments allows

original enthusiasm to slip into apathy. Even more so with the Dhamma, for the Dhamma is constant in its demands and relentless in its labours. It's no easy thing to grow spiritually. The Buddha warned us this is a 'gradual path'. What is a resolution then? To understand the role of intention, an intentioned intention, we need to understand Dependent Origination and how we create our own conditioning and kamma. An intention is an idea or thought laced with desire. It may be wholesome or unwholesome, but at the point of intention no karmic act had been performed. To hold an intention long enough so that we can determine its ethical value is to give us the only real choice we have. I say 'choice' tentatively for who in their right mind would choose to do something that leads to unhappiness. Once we have agreed to make that choice we have identified with it. This is what 'I' am going to do. There is still no karmic act. Only when that choice manifests into action of sustained thought, speech or deed, do we create a kamma (the technical Pali word in Theravada). What was it that made manifest a desire, that brought something out of potential into the actual. That force is the will and that is what the Buddha calls kamma. Now the original intention will have a lot of stored up energy depending on habitual action or indeed addiction. Anything compulsive - eating, watching TV, talking and talking - are all habits that are hard to tame because of their accumulated energy. On the other hand it may be that acts of generosity, of service, of truthfulness, of commitment are weak in energy because they have not been developed through beneficial habit. So a habit in itself is not the problem. It's the purpose and content of the habit that we need to be clear about. And of course it is a collection of these habits that we call our personality and character and it is this that determines our destiny. So if we see we are going in the wrong direction, we need to undermine those unskillful, perhaps immoral habits and if we see ourselves following a wholesome, virtuous way then we should reinforce those habits. That re-enforcement begins with the resolution. And a good time to make a resolution is just then at the end of our morning practice. One should be to further our virtue and the other should be to undermine unskillful habits. Today, just this day, I will practice ... live mindfully ... with a good heart ... Today, just this day, I will not ... won't go down that road ... refuse to ... And, of course, one has to repeat these as often as one can throughout the day, but definitely when occasions arise to demand your resolution. Make them easy to attain so that you can congratulate yourself every evening and you will slowly grow from strength to strength. This is especially true of New Year Resolutions! And don't be put off by the occasional collapse into old ways. As Ginger Rogers admonished Flatfoot Fred in *Swing Time*, 'Take a deep breath, pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start all over again!'

Developing the Perfection of Determination

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This essay explores adhiṭṭhāna pāramī (the perfection of determination), one of the ten pāramīs essential for spiritual development. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws inspiration from the Buddha's own exemplary determination under the Bodhi Tree, where the Bodhisatta resolved to either achieve Awakening or die in the attempt. The teaching presents a practical four-step contemplation method for strengthening commitment to wholesome actions and abandoning unwholesome ones. The process involves cultivating conviction in one's capability ('I can'), understanding moral responsibility ('I ought to'), developing genuine aspiration ('I want to'), and establishing firm resolve ('I will'). Each step requires repetition until the practitioner feels genuine conviction, emotional engagement, enthusiasm, and gut-level determination respectively. This systematic approach can be applied both to overcoming negative habits and developing positive virtues. The essay emphasizes that like vipassanā meditation and mettā practice, this cultivation of determination requires consistent daily application and cannot cease until full liberation is achieved.

Determination is one of the Ten Perfections. It is exemplified in the relentless search the Bodhisatta Siddhartha Gotama made to become a Fully-Self -Enlightened Buddha. And especially so when he sat beneath the Bodhi Tree and determined with resolute resolution that he would either find the answer to his quest or die. To help us strengthen our commitment, we need to contemplate these four areas: our capability (can), our responsibility (ought), our aspiration (want) and our determination (will) to undermine what is unwholesome and develop what is virtuous. We can determine to overcome an unwholesome conditioning. Bring to mind a trait within yourself that you see is not wholesome, skilful or virtuous. 1. I am able to, I can resist this temptation. This has to be repeated until there is a conviction of this ability. 2. I ought to for my own benefit and the benefit of others. This has to be repeated until the heart is moved by it. 3. I want to. This has to be repeated until an enthusiasm arises. Where there is resistance, it is spoken kindly to cajole the heart into acceptance. We need to develop ways of encouraging ourselves. 4. And I will resist this temptation whenever it arises. This has to be repeated till one feels the determination in the gut. In the same way we can determine to develop a virtue. Bring to mind a virtue you would like to develop. I am able to, I can develop this virtue. I ought to for my own benefit and the benefit of others. I want to. I will develop this virtue whenever the occasion arises. This exercise is best done every morning. Such practice has an immediate but not a lasting effect. So one has to keep re-

peating it. The more often the better. We can do this every time an unwholesome or wholesome desire arises we go through this process, even if speedily. Just like the practice of vipassana, metta and constant mindfulness, this practice cannot be stopped until we are fully liberated. That's the way it is!

Breakfast at Last!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores how the simple act of mindful eating can become a profound spiritual practice that supports our journey toward liberation. Bhante Bodhidhamma emphasizes the Buddha's teaching that this 'fathom-long body' is our world, where we can discover both the causes of suffering and the path to freedom. The essay presents a practical reflection adapted from the Buddha's guidance to the Saṅgha, encouraging practitioners to eat 'not to indulge sensual pleasure' but to nourish the body wisely while developing appreciative joy.

The teaching provides detailed instructions for a mindful eating practice that can be done even with just a cup of tea, making it accessible to busy practitioners with families. Through careful attention to the arising and passing of hunger, thirst, taste, and satisfaction, we learn to distinguish between the body's genuine needs and the insidious arising of greed (lobha). The practice helps develop self-discipline and contentment while undermining unwholesome habits around food consumption.

This approach to mindful eating serves as both a daily meditation practice and a means of generating merit through gratitude for all beings who contributed to our nourishment. By learning to recognize when 'enough' arises and allowing greed to pass without acting, practitioners strengthen their capacity for wise discernment and move closer to the contentment that leads toward Nibbāna.

If you have a young family or for some other reason you cannot practise this mindful eating, then do make sure you have that quiet cup of tea, just by yourself, you with your body. And of course, it can be done whenever we have a drink or eat, though that first break-fast is a special time for it sets the attitude for the day. Consider the importance of the body especially so that the Buddha pointed to this form of existence as the best to attain liberation. Here we have joys and woes and the intelligence to seek and find the escape. Let us remind ourselves that we cannot be here without a body, that through the body we come to receive knowledge, that we can communicate, relate, take part in society, create good kamma and practise meditation. To feed the body is to nourish a space, sacred specifically to ourselves. The Buddha says that this fathom long body is the world, and it is here we can find the causes of suffering and the end to it. So, having made your cup of tea and holding it before you, now is the chance to reinforce your commitment to the Path of Dhamma. Here at Satipanya we have devised a reflection based on the one the Buddha gave to the Sangha. 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 Nibbana of those who have kindly provided this food. The final paragraph is a grateful acknowledgement of the efforts of thousands of people and plants, and the sacrifice of animals if you are not a vegetarian, that have brought this food to our table. Even if we only do the following exercise once a day and that with just a cup of tea, it will keep alive within us the spiritual practice around food. To continue: Closing the eyes, contact the body and get in touch with feelings of thirst or hunger. Acknowledge that some of those feelings will be natural appetite, the body manifesting its needs. But that insidiously intermingled are those feelings of greed. Making a very clear resolution to nourish the body, take the first sip or bite and simply sit back within yourself and observe, feel and experience the arising and passing of different tastes, the action of tasting and chewing, all the while mindful of arising delight. Purposefully intend the action of swallowing, follow the beverage or food and stay with whatever feelings arise. Momentary satisfaction of appetite insidiously intermingled with the gratification of greed! Wait till 'More!' arises and repeat the process. At some point there will be feelings of 'Enough' coming from the body and here it may be that greed steals quietly from its hiding place. Go on, just this once. Just that one more piece of toast! Just sitting till that sensual desire passes, means we have got the better of the habit of indulgence. Our self-discipline has been strengthened. Our body is healthier for putting its needs first. When the 'More' passes, there may arise contentment – the heart without greed. Discerning the difference between contentment and gratification is crucial. One leads to Nibbana, the other to Realm of Hungry Ghosts! And that realm is right here manifesting as a feelings of unsatisfactoriness, of never enough, nagging compulsions and dictatorial addictions. Buon appetito!

Traveling to and from work

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

In this practical teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma transforms our understanding of daily commuting from mundane necessity to precious opportunity for dhamma practice. He examines how we typically spend travel time—listening to music, reading, daydreaming, or engaging in idle conversation—and challenges us to consider what mental habits we're cultivating through these choices.

The essay emphasizes that whatever we put our attention on becomes a means of conditioning, either wholesome or unwholesome. Rather than falling into daydreaming or consuming mindless entertainment, Bhante suggests we can use travel time for constructive thinking, beneficial conversation, reading dhamma texts, or formal meditation practices like mettā (loving-kindness) and vipassanā insight meditation.

Drawing on the Buddha's emphasis on appamāda (diligence), this teaching highlights how continuity of practice—even during brief daily journeys—is essential for spiritual progress. By consciously choosing wholesome activities during travel, we avoid the pattern of 'one step forward, two steps back' and instead cultivate steady momentum on the path to awakening.

How do we spend our time travelling? Do we see it as an opportunity to practise or as a time to get through. If we are in a car, do we turn on the radio, play music? If we travel by public transport, do we do the same or read? If we are on a long journey, do we do the same? And how much do we daydream? Whatever we put our attention on, that becomes a means of conditioning. We are creating or reinforcing a habit. The question then is: what sort of habits do we want to develop? I think we would have little objection to wholesome, skilful, virtuous habits. In which case, daydreaming is out, for when we daydream we are being carried along by some unwholesome attitude. The thought stream may be beautiful. We may be saving the world from ecological disaster, but it won't bear upon reality. It will be dreaming. So whatever thought we wish to have, we need to make it constructive, deliberate, purposeful thinking. A book helps. Or if travelling with a companion some mutually interesting topic. Of course, when travelling with someone the danger of daydream turns into useless speech. We find it hard to be silent in company. So at least make the conversation beneficial. Listening to the radio or listening to mp3's presents us with the same question. What sort of mental state does what I am hearing develop? If we know the input is going to do harm, no matter how little,

then we need to find the strength to stop it. It helps if we can replace it with something wholesome. But the important point is that these times are precious moments for practice. Why waste them? Apart from developing wholesome mental states through reading, listening and conversing, especially when we are on public transport, we can practise metta, vipassana or just abiding peacefully in the present moment. It's the continuity of practice that will bring results. One of the most favourite words of the Buddha was *appamādo* – diligence! It doesn't take all that much effort to decide to do something wholesome. Otherwise it's a case of one step forward, two steps back. No wonder we sometimes feel we are getting nowhere.

Back Home

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This practical teaching addresses the crucial transition period when returning home after a day's activities, whether work or other engagements. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how our mental states upon arriving home—whether anxious, restless, disappointed, or fulfilled—can either strengthen dukkha or be skillfully transformed through mindful awareness and meditation practice.

The essay provides concrete techniques for this daily transition: using travel time for breath awareness, taking moments to review the day's experiences, and identifying what mental states we've 'brought home.' Whether returning to a quiet or busy household, the teaching emphasizes the importance of brief meditation to establish equilibrium and prevent negative states from spiraling into depression or grandiose expectations.

Central to the practice is ending with mettā (loving-kindness) to re-engage with the right attitude and making skillful resolutions for the evening ahead. Drawing on the Buddha's reminder that 'Life is uncertain, death is certain,' this teaching transforms an ordinary daily experience into an opportunity for wisdom and mental cultivation, preventing the accumulation of unsatisfactoriness in our domestic lives.

Back home after a day out, whether at work or for some other reason. It depends on what sort of day it has been. But for sure the worse it was, the less we want to sit. And what is it we are coming home to? So many imponderables. Yet to sit quietly for a while, no matter how hard, can truly re-energise the system. For it is a rare day we arrive back suffused and suffusing calm equanimity. And if we were, we would want to sit and deepen the state. You may be lucky as I was to take public transport. It does allow you to sit and rest. Instead of looking mindlessly out of the window, we can sit and let the breath calm or energise us. I have to confess I fell asleep most times and on occasion missed my stop. But I always felt the better for it. If you are returning to a quiet home, then take some refreshment, but make time to sit quietly. It may not be in a formal sitting posture. Let the day run through your mind, from the time you left the house till you arrived back. And see what you have brought home. Is there some anxiety there, some irritation? Was it an overly busy day, but exhilarating and there is lots of restlessness? Disappointing and exhausting? Or do you feel it was a fulfilling day, satisfying? If you don't take time for meditation then there is the risk – the near certainty – that whatever you have brought home will strengthen dukkha. Unattended disappointment

can so easily spiral downward into depression while exhilaration may fool us into grandiose plans and expectations which will eventually come crashing down in exhaustion. Very sad. Whatever state you are in, use the techniques you know to level everything off towards equilibrium. Wait till calm equanimity begins to rise. If you are returning to a busy home, then suggest everyone sit together quietly for a moment. Or if this isn't possible, then perhaps you could ask to be allowed a few minutes' meditation and then find a place of quiet for yourself. And do end with metta no matter how short. It is so important to re-engage with the right attitude. Then make resolutions as to how you will spend the evening skillfully. The Buddha reminds us, 'Life is uncertain. Death is certain' Let's not waste even a moment.

Relations, Friends, Acquaintances and Spiritual Companions

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This contemplative essay guides readers through a careful examination of how relationships—whether with family, friends, acquaintances, or spiritual companions—gradually deteriorate rather than collapse suddenly. Bhante Bodhidhamma invites us to look back on failed friendships with honest self-reflection, identifying the initial strains, unspoken resentments, and recurring patterns that led to their breakdown.

The teaching explores common relationship pitfalls: unreciprocated support, accumulated small hurts from sarcastic remarks, growing disagreements that become entrenched, jealousy masquerading as simple dislike, and boundary violations. Through personal anecdotes, including his own experience of miscommunication with a longtime friend, Bhante illustrates how even well-intentioned people can damage relationships through thoughtless actions.

The essay emphasizes that we are "creatures of habit" who tend to repeat the same relational mistakes until we develop awareness. By recognizing our own patterns—both our problematic characteristics and our reactions to others' behaviors—we can catch ourselves in the moment and consciously establish an "attitude of goodwill." This practice of mindful relationship awareness becomes a form of spiritual cultivation, transforming how we navigate the complex dynamics of human connection and supporting our growth as practitioners of patience and loving-kindness.

Cultivators of Patience. Our friendships rarely collapse in a moment. It takes time for the rot to creep in. Look back now on a friendship, whether with a close relation, friend, acquaintance or spiritual companion, that went off or worse. What were the initial strains? Where did the antagonism begin? Were we fully aware of it then? Or had it mushroomed unexpectedly into an argument? And after the argument was there an attempt at reconciliation? Was that really heart felt? Or was it a patch? A patch through which in time the sore began again to fester. Had you put yourself out for someone and they had not returned the favour when you needed them? Or was it you who had not come to their aid? Had they spoken a sharp word, a judgement, a dig which you took in good part? But they kept doing it. Little snidey remarks that finally got under your skin. Or were you the one doing that and didn't realise that your sarcasm was actually hurting, because they laughed. Was it a growing clash of opinions that at first were agreeing

to differ, but then got a little edgy until excuses were made and meetings stopped? Was there envy which over time gathered an aversion towards the person and progressed into jealousy? Were you aware that it was jealousy and not that you just didn't like them anymore? Or was it that they were jealous of you and that you knew it, but didn't know how to work with it? Did a friend overstep a boundary, become too familiar? Presume. How did you react? Were you brusque? Did you get angry with them? Or was it you suddenly finding yourself 'told off'. I was once lodging with a longtime friend. He was on the telephone to his daughter. I had told him I was waiting for a phone call. As the time got closer, I shouted to remind him. Unfortunately, maybe because of my anxiety around losing the call, it sounded like a command. Well, that took a while to iron out. I What about your spiritual teacher? Did you have a bad time with them? Are you still blaming them? Or if you took the role of guiding someone, are you truthful about the role you played in the breakup? Contemplating lost friendships is important for we are creatures of habit and tend to make the same mistakes over and over until we 'wake up'. Once we recognise what the mechanisms in us are that undermine friendships, whether they are our own characteristics or our reaction to such characteristics in others, we can become aware of the first signs and train ourselves to stop – even in mid-sentence – establish the appropriate attitude of goodwill.

Contemplating Relations, Friends, Acquaintances and Spiritual Companions

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This teaching explores the rich tapestry of human relationships and their role in our spiritual development. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how we relate differently to family members, friends, acquaintances, and spiritual companions, noting how each type of relationship serves unique purposes in shaping our character and supporting our growth.

The essay draws upon the Upaddha Sutta (SN 45:2), where Ānanda initially suggests that good friendship constitutes half the spiritual life, only to be corrected by the Buddha who declares it is the entirety of the spiritual life. This profound teaching reveals how spiritual companionship creates the supportive conditions necessary for cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path.

The teaching offers practical wisdom about accepting the limitations of different relationships while finding joy in each. It distinguishes spiritual friendship from ordinary friendship, noting that we don't need to 'like' our spiritual companions—rather, they support our deepest aspirations for Awakening. The essay concludes with a contemplative practice: pausing after each encounter to appreciate the treasure of relationship, allowing gratitude to arise, and savoring the joy that genuine human connection brings to our spiritual journey.

Fountains of Joy. How varied our relationships are! And how we change in the presence of others according to how we feel the circumstance demands. And if we accept the limitation of certain relationships, they are all causes for joy. Relations can be difficult. There is often family history to contend with. Just because we happen to share genes doesn't mean we will get on. There are so many other factors. But contemplating that shared family history may give relations a depth even deeper than close friendships. I was surprised how close I felt to a cousin of mine dying from pulmonary embolism even though we had hardly seen each other since childhood. The closer the relation – parents and siblings as opposed to cousins and distant cousins – the deeper can be our commitment to their well-being. Friends, from close lifelong companions to social, political, work related, hobby co-enthusiasts and so on – all fill important roles in our lives. They help us develop our personalities and characters as we meld with their varied personalities and characters in the process of sharing the interests that drive us. And on the outer reaches, our friendships shade into acquaintances which given circumstance

can grow into friendships. But of all friendships it is spiritual friendship that is to be most treasured and celebrated for they are helping us to realise the deepest goals of our lives. Ananda, the Buddha's companion for the last twenty years of his life, would often have only partial understanding. One day, he offered the opinion that good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship is half the spiritual life. Good here does not mean like. One of the liberating qualities of a spiritual friend is that you don't have to like them! No, no, the Buddha tells him. It is the entirety of the spiritual life. For if we have good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship, then we can expect to cultivate the Eightfold Path because of that support. (SN 45:2) How important is that! So after each meeting with a relation, a friend, an acquaintance or a spiritual companion, pause for a moment, appreciate the treasure, allow gratitude to arise and savour the joy.

Intimate Relationships: The Erotic, the Romantic and Love

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this thoughtful exploration of intimate relationships, Bhante Bodhidhamma distinguishes between three fundamental dimensions of human connection: the erotic, the romantic, and love itself. He examines how erotic pleasure, while genuinely enjoyable and grounded in physical experience, can become self-seeking and reduce the other person to an object of gratification when isolated from deeper feelings. The essay then explores romance as 'the eroticism of the heart' - the touching of two personalities that can bring kaleidoscopic delight but may also blind us to the fuller reality of our beloved.

The teaching culminates in an examination of genuine love, which Bhante describes as rooting itself in the complete personhood and humanity of the other. Unlike erotic pleasure or romantic feelings, love involves commitment that transcends conditions and time restrictions - a moment-to-moment renewal of care that may demand sacrifice. Drawing on traditional marriage vows, he emphasizes love's unconditional nature: 'for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer.'

This dharma reflection offers practical wisdom for anyone in intimate relationships, showing how genuine love provides the foundation within which erotic pleasure and romantic feelings can fulfill their proper roles. The essay demonstrates how Buddhist understanding of attachment and selflessness applies to our most personal relationships, offering guidance for developing healthier, more authentic connections.

The erotic is truly pleasurable. There is something about fleshy pleasures – eating, drinking, sex, swimming and so on which have a groundedness that is palpable in a way that mental states are not. So much so that the erotic can be isolated from romantic feelings and love. It is choosy and wants only what conventionally conforms to physical beauty or as near as can without slipping into disgust. It becomes self-seeking and in so doing turns the other into an object to gratify its lust. Lust is sexual greed and like greed consumes the other or wishes to be consumed. The other as commodity. Hence obsession and pornography and when mixed with darker motives sexual crime, some of which sinks into insanity. Romance is the eroticism of the heart. It is the touching of two personalities. It is equally choosy, but unlike sexual activity which is usually too short, the flight of romantic feelings can tinge days with kaleidoscopic delight. To be in the beloved's company, indeed to even bring them to mind, jets the lover into the seventh

heaven. And such is the sweetness of it, that this also becomes a self-seeking aim. Again the other becomes an object, a commodity, to be consumed in or by. And it blinds to the fuller personality of the beloved, which when it peaks through the gossamer veil, punctures and often utterly deflates. If unrequited, it then turns vengeful, at times crimes of passion or despair to suicide. Love roots itself in the personhood of the other. In their humanity in all its fullness. Their beingness. It reaches beyond the pleasurable or the delightful to a commitment that may demand sacrifice. For better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in health and in sickness. And it has no time restriction. To love and cherish till death do us part. Indeed, time passing is not important, only time present. So no matter what the relationship – girlfriend, boyfriend, partner or spouse - it is a renewed commitment from moment to moment. Difficult! It is only when both are embedded in love can the erotic and romantic play their roles of full-filling at times the whole intimate relationship with physical pleasure and heart's delight. So it doesn't matter what sort of relationship you are in – boyfriend, girlfriend, partner or spouse.

Celibacy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma examines celibacy not as deprivation but as a skillful means for developing universal love (mettā). Drawing parallels with Churchill's famous phrase about greatness, he explores how some are naturally celibate while others grow into it through practice. The essay addresses Western misconceptions about celibacy, explaining that sexual desire, while natural, is not a necessity like food, and that freedom from sexual craving can bring profound relief and redirect energy toward spiritual pursuits.

The teaching distinguishes between particular loves—romantic, familial, and friendship bonds—and the Buddha's ideal of universal love that extends to all beings without preference or hatred. While acknowledging that particular loves aren't evil, they are understood as unskillful (akusala) due to their limiting nature and the psychological dependency they create. True universal love can only arise through relinquishing particular attachments.

The essay offers practical guidance for developing what might be called 'momentary celibacy'—giving full attention to whoever we encounter without the hindrance of erotic, romantic, or preferential love. This involves cultivating affectionate awareness while observing our internal reactions and responding from goodwill. The teaching concludes with reflective questions about why the Buddha maintained celibacy after his Awakening and established the monastic Saṅgha, inviting contemplation on how celibacy might be practiced even within relationships.

To coin a Churchillian phrase: some are born celibate, some have celibacy thrust upon them and some grow into celibacy. (Churchill had said this of greatness.) In more religious times and even now in Buddhist countries, a woman may boast she is still a virgin. And a man is not considered any less a man who joins the Sangha as a child or young teenager and never has any sexual encounter throughout their lives. How strange to a Westerner. Sounds even perverse. A life without sex! But we fail to remember that the 'sexual revolution' of the 60's is not that long ago. And such has been the sexualising of our society – with easy pornography – that even children are caught up in lust - and themselves lusted. No-one needs sex. It's not like food. And since sexual desire is probably our greatest driver, can you imagine the relief when you are no longer hounded by sexual cravings as someone with OCD may feel when relieved of their compulsion. And can you imagine the energy released for other purposes? For those who find themselves temporarily celibate, take the opportunity to find out how it feels when

you let go of lustful thoughts. As with all acts of renunciation, you have to resist the fantasies and suffer the desire, feel it in the body, till the compulsive need exhausts itself completely to feel the release, the relief and the joy of liberation – even if only once! And there is romance which blossoms often into an intimate relationship. This is also forsaken in celibacy. To someone seeking a greater love, such love is confining. There are also all the other loves - parent and child, friend with friend, even spiritual friendships and so on – all will have some psychological dependency. This ‘attachment’ is not to be seen as evil, but unskillful. It has unwanted consequences. Such loves cannot be universal by definition. True universal love arises when there are no particulars. And this can only be arrived at through relinquishing particulars. The Buddha says our love should go out to the whole world, ourselves included, without any hatred or preference. In other words, whoever we meet within that given moment, whether we like them or not or whether they like us or not, they are focus of our goodwill. Such will not be perfectly possible to do till the delusive sense of self which creates fences is taken down. But we can begin the process of dismantling them. When we are with someone, let us give them our full attention with the desire to know where they are coming from, how they feel, what they are saying. And at the same time to be aware of the background of reactions and responses that arise within us. To develop an affectionate awareness. And respond from the heart of goodwill. In this way we can all in given moments, unhindered by erotic, romantic or specific loves, be ‘celibate’. For this is the reason for celibacy – to develop unhindered love. Difficult! Ponderings: Why do you think the Buddha did not return to his family and the household life after his Enlightenment? Why did he create a celibate institution, the monastic Sangha? How might you practice celibacy within a relationship?

When Does Love Become Control?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the Buddha's insight into how the sense of self generates a desire to control others, particularly in intimate relationships. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how genuine love becomes corrupted when our unwholesome 'needs' — for praise, success, romance, or validation — drive us to manipulate and control those close to us. The essay reveals how these compulsive desires, stemming from a lack of self-acceptance and inner worthiness, transform others from equals into mere instruments for our gratification.

The teaching offers practical guidance for recognizing when love is turning into control by observing our reactions when others refuse our requests. Key practices include learning to pause and wait for unwholesome states to pass, communicating with others as equals rather than servants of our needs, and taking time to contemplate and resist the demands of our compulsive desires. The essay emphasizes that true love treats the other as equal — not there to serve us, though they may choose to do so.

Drawing on fundamental Buddhist principles of dukkha and the not-self teaching, this accessible guide provides both psychological insight and practical tools for transforming relationships through awareness and kindness toward our own unwholesome patterns.

The Buddha points out that there comes with the sense of self a desire to control. The self feels safe when it is in control. And why do we want to control? Is it not that it is necessary for us to gratify an unwholesome desire in order to feel happy. This strong desire is often called a 'need', though a 'need' really ought to be applied to something essential – food and sleep on a physical level, for instance. Such unwholesome 'needs' include anything we feel we controls us– need for praise, for success; for sex, for romance – even addiction to drugs and porn. This need, that has become so essential for my happiness, stems from a lack of self-love, self-acceptance. A deficit of inner worthiness. A want of dignity. And such is the strength of the desire it cannot see anything but from the vantage point of 'me'. In other words, it very much becomes a definition who 'I' am. At the point where a desire, take it or leave it, becomes a desire I need to fulfil, the other becomes the 'one' to fulfil that 'need'. If the other can't or won't do that, then there comes the need to control. All sorts of tactics are employed: anger, withdrawal of services, silence, ignoring. Blackmail – if you don't .. I will. Petty spite. Threats of revenge. Threats of self-harm, suicide. Accusations of not really loving me. Anything to bully them into doing what we want them to do. This way we can control children,

friends, workmates, partners and spouses and all the rest of our relationships. So paradoxically such unskilful needs that control us drive us to control others to fulfil them. And the more we feed them, the more they demand. It's a vicious circle. It's not that we don't love the other. We show that when we treat the other as equal to us, not there to serve us, yet they may do so. Just as we are not there to serve them, yet we may do so. We will know when our love is turning into control by our reactions whenever the other person refuses any of our requests. Can we hold still? Wait for the unwholesome state to pass. Communicate with the other as other. If unable to, to postpone – let's talk later. And to find the time to contemplate our unwholesome 'needs' and resist their demands. At least then we feel we are gaining back some control. But it is often the case that all we have to do is allow the need to manifest, hold it in kindness, let it speak its feelings without words. Wait for the turbulence to exhaust itself. The heart knows how to comfort itself. It knows how to heal itself.

Work

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This foundational essay examines the spiritual dimension of work through the lens of Right Livelihood (sammā ājīva), one of the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the common modern experience of work as either fulfilling or burdensome, exploring why the Buddha gave livelihood its own distinct place in the path rather than including it under Right Action. The teaching traces how the historical separation of secular and spiritual life has contributed to contemporary workplace dissatisfaction, contrasting this with medieval understanding of work as divine calling or vocation.

The essay identifies four different relationships people have with their work: those with a clear sense of calling, those generally content with their role, those confused about their direction, and those who view work merely as a means to earn money for other pursuits. Rather than suggesting career changes, Bhante emphasizes the transformative potential of approaching any work situation as spiritual practice, regardless of whether it feels meaningful or enjoyable. This practical approach acknowledges the economic realities that shape our work lives while offering a path to integrate spiritual development with daily livelihood, turning any workplace into what he calls 'a spiritual work shop.'

What does that word conjure up for you? Is it a warm glow? Or do you feel a great weight descend on the chest? Do you find yourself filled with bright energy? Or is it the hot, burning energy of stress, frustration and anxiety? Right there in the Eightfold Path, the Buddha places Right Livelihood. That's how important he felt it was. He could have included it in Right Action, but no, he gives it its own importance. In a broader sense, we need to ask ourselves, what am I doing with my life. My life, for heaven's sake! How serious can a question be? Do I feel I am wasting my life? Do I feel I am wasting my life at work? For most of us that's around 40 hours a week – and our most energetic time. There is within us a spiritual calling. Something within us that demands to be, to be developed. These days we think of spiritual calling as something to do with becoming a religious, a nun or monk. But in the Christian Middle Ages, it was understood that God had called you to a profession or skill, usually what your family was already involved in. It is the modern separation of the secular from the spiritual that has caused so much of our malaise. For once the accent is put on the secular then we are into the 'things of this world' – riches, fame, power and pleasure. A life devoted to these must necessarily end in disappointment if only because it will all pass away. When we put the spiritual back into secular, the whole world of work takes on a completely different

place. It becomes a spiritual work shop. How does the spiritual manifest in Right Livelihood? In some people it is so strong, it is felt to be a calling, a vocation. I knew a child of five who told me she was going to be a doctor and that's what she became. For others, it's not so strong, but a general feeling of doing what they were meant to be doing with their lives. Then there are those who live in confusion as to what they should be doing and wait for inspiration, to be told, in hope that something will turn up. And there are those who have no hope of making sense of their work life. It is a means to earn money so they can do what they want to do after work. A great deal of our work life is, of course, dependent on society and the economic situation. We may very well have experienced all four types just mentioned. At one or other time inspired, feeling content, depressed and lost about our work situation. Indeed we may suffer these very same swings in the very job we are doing – even in one day! So the first thing we have to do, if you have not already done so, is to make a determination to turn our present work, no matter whether we enjoy it or not or whether we think it is meaningful or not, into a spiritual practice. How would you go about doing that? The following Tips will centre on work and if there is some area you would like us to explore, do email.

Success and Failure: Trial and Error

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this reflective essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the painful cycle of failure, identity crisis, and despair that arises when we become emotionally attached to outcomes and define ourselves through success. He identifies three key factors that lead to suffering: over-aiming, emotional attachment, and identity investment in our projects. Drawing from Christian spiritual concepts of humility as 'knowing oneself' and Buddhist wisdom about the nature of attachment, he proposes a transformative shift in perspective.

Rather than viewing life through the lens of success versus failure, Bhante suggests adopting the scientist's approach of 'trial and error' — seeing life as exploration and hypothesis-testing rather than competition. This reframing removes the emotional devastation of 'failure' and replaces it with natural learning processes. He references Samuel Beckett's wisdom to 'fail better' and draws parallels to the Buddha's countless attempts to express the Dhamma through different approaches for different audiences.

The essay concludes with the insight that nature itself operates through creative exploration rather than success-failure paradigms, encouraging readers to align with this natural creativity. This perspective offers practical wisdom for approaching work, relationships, and spiritual practice with greater resilience and less attachment to outcomes, embodying key Buddhist principles of non-attachment and right understanding.

I am not sure I should be confessing this, but my life is a catalogue of failures. Failure, of course, is what happens when you don't succeed. It's a pretty depressing state. As the realisation of failure dawns on you or hits you between the eyes, there's that shock moment when your stomach sinks. And then the nausea. Then there's the anger and hatred towards those or the system that beat you, succeeded where we failed. Then there's the soul searching, the self-recriminations, followed by the further woundings of guilt and shame and into the yawning chasm of despair. Indeed, failure is always a painful experience. We shouldn't be surprised at this. After all it's a mini-death. And it can at worst lead to suicide, such the French chef who did not get his Michelin stars. When we come to define failure, it is always a measurement against success. Always a comparison to how it ought to have been. But what did we set ourselves? If you're a sanguine character, you tend to overreach. Even the most circumspect and morose often expect what is beyond their capabilities or the capabilities of the situation to deliver. In Christian spiritual language, however, this failure is known as a humili-

ation. Not a humiliation in the belittling sense, but a sharp correction to 'the way it is'. To be humble did not mean to be weak and worthy of beating, it meant to know oneself. Humility is another word for 'know thyself'. Aiming at success will always be in danger of overreach because it is the self trying as always to accumulate. And the more it has, the safer it feels whether riches, power, fame or simply pleasures. It invests itself in the project and defines itself by its success. You'll always find these three factors : over-aiming, emotional attachment and identity. When we fail, we suffer to some extent an identity crisis, emotional turmoil and loss. In despair we may give up, become despondent. And life stagnates. Is there another way we can approach our goals for we do not want to lose our aspirations, be it relationships, work, spiritual aims? Suppose we change the language. Suppose we look at life as a challenge and an exploration, rather than success, competition and possible failure. Suppose we talk of trial and error. Surely now the world changes. We are no longer in a world of conflict. We are working on a hypothesis like any scientist. We are co-operating with the world to see if our idea will work or not. It may work out, it may not. No matter. Samuel Becket is renowned for his sayings and the one I truly like is: Fail. Fail better. (I'm presuming Becket is here using the word 'fail' as in trial and 'error'.) Writing is an exacting art. Indeed so is all creative pursuit. One never quite expresses what one wants. True art is all trial and forever error, for the real never meets with the ideal, not that a piece of work may not give satisfaction. Yet try again we must. The Buddha tried in so many ways to express the Dhamma. People were forever misinterpreting his words. He tried all sorts of ways depending on who he was talking to. Yet we say all the teachings are just pointing the way. The finger points to the moon. There's nothing to be gained by looking at the end of the finger! Seeing life as trial and error excludes us from the pains of failure. Once the error has played itself out, there often follows a fallow period. I say fallow for this was a time when fields were left to regenerate. I do not say barren! And that former desire to explore possibilities arises again. Creativity is natural to all nature. Nature isn't into success and failure. Nature is about finding growth in any given situation. We are embedded in a world that is forever creating. How foolish not to join the party!

Creating Space (1)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay addresses the challenge of living wisely in a society that commodifies time and demands ever-increasing efficiency at the expense of our life energy. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws on the wisdom of Ajahn Thate's teaching to 'take it easy, make it simple, stay with the one who knows, do one job at a time' as a foundation for skillful engagement with work demands.

The teaching offers three practical strategies for conserving energy: doing one task at a time with full attention to enhance concentration; creating mindful pauses between activities to maintain inner calm and clarity; and taking silent breaks to reconnect with the equanimity established in morning meditation. The essay emphasizes 'going with the flow' through present moment awareness rather than rigid resistance to interruptions.

A key concept introduced is maintaining a 'Dhamma intention' before each activity—such as speaking kindly when answering the phone—which transforms potentially irritating interruptions into opportunities for skillful action. This approach demonstrates how Buddhist principles of sati (awareness) and right intention can be practically applied to reduce the agitation and energy waste that comes from compulsive, scattered attention in daily work life.

We live in a society that puts a price on time. It was not always so. But that's how it is at the moment and we have to not simply live with it, but live wisely with it. The growing demands of efficiency and productivity strain the last ounce of energy each moment has. And that energy is ours. In fact it's our life-energy. Our work can demand the better part of our energy resources at the expense of personal welfare, our family and our social life. If this rings true for you to any extent then you will need to see how you can conserve energy. Try creating space, temporal space. Here is one of my favourites quotes. It comes from Ajahn Thate, acknowledged of high attainments, whom I met in Thailand. He summed up the spiritual life: Take it easy. Make it simple. Stay with the one who knows. Do one job at a time. It's not that we can do two jobs at the same time. It's just that we try to. Have you ever found yourself having a conversation with someone and filling in a form and/or writing up a piece of work and/or working on the computer? You can sometimes get away with it with an automatic manual task, but it's still taxing the brain. Even if we are expert multi-taskers, it's still necessary to actually fully attend to what is being done. Failing to do this is one reason mistakes are made and ac-

idents happen. So we need to do one task at a time. That means paying attention to what we are actually doing. The effect is to increase our focus and span of attention. That is, our concentration is enhanced. Create a pause between every task. How do you react when the phone rings? Do you launch yourself at the phone? Have you noticed how mobile calls trump everything else? This sort of compulsive behaviour simply increases our agitation. And agitation is wasted energy. When you come to the end of a task. STOP. Reflect on what you have done. Acknowledge it. And 'put it aside'. Take a breath and relax. Let this be as long as it takes to feel inwardly calm. Most often it's less than a minute. And then intend the next task and remind ourselves of our Dhamma intention (see below). Take the phone call for instance. Surely most people will wait for three to five rings. At the first ring, just acknowledge where you are with your work. At the second, stop and breathe, at the third calmly pick up the phone. Should the caller ring off, call the person back. If we can begin each task with a mind uncluttered, with clarity, our efficiency is increased. That should make the powers that be happy! Take a silent break. Tea breaks and lunch breaks are times to really establish that quiet, equanimity and still mindfulness that the morning meditation put us in touch with. Again, it doesn't have to be long. Five minutes may be enough before we join others. It's also so refreshing to get away from the work place for a while. To sit in the local park, or just quietly walk the streets, or as I used to, sit in the local church. Go with the flow. I once received a card with a fish floating in a river. It said only dead fish go with the flow! But we won't be dead so long as we are aware. We're as if dead if we lose our sense of present mindfulness. If the river happens to be in torrent or in flood, then we will surely be lost if we don't exercise some still awareness. Going with the flow means to be able to let go of what we are doing when something needs to be attended to. That phone call again, that colleague approaching, at home the child calling for attention, can all seem unwelcome interruptions, in which case they become irritations. And any form of anger is wasted energy. A Dhamma intention. This could be anything. For instance before I answer the phone I might remind myself to speak kindly, openly and appropriately. So there we have. Three simple tips that help us work better, feel better and conserve our life energy. Easy weasy peasy?

Creating Space (2)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This practical teaching explores how to create emotional space through the cultivation of equanimity (upekkhā) and brief vipassanā practice, particularly in work environments. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws from his experience as a teacher to show how stopping the cycle of rushing and anxiety can transform our daily experience. The essay addresses the common pattern of being caught in emotional reactivity—from morning rush to persistent mental states like anxiety, boredom, or restlessness that can dominate our workday. Key concepts include developing equanimity as 'stillness of the body, calmness of the heart, silence of the mind and an attitude of openness,' and the skillful practice of temporarily setting aside difficult emotions without suppression or aversion. The teaching emphasizes the difference between suppressing emotions and consciously putting them aside with the intention to address them later through proper vipassanā practice. Practical applications include taking brief moments for Right Awareness throughout the day, using mettā (loving-kindness) to restart with goodwill, and establishing a daily practice routine. The essay concludes with a practical framework for mindful work: focusing on one task at a time, making dhamma resolves, maintaining steady attention seasoned with care, and gently returning the wandering mind—all building toward completing each job with full presence.

Apart from creating temporal space, there is emotional space, by which I mean to be able to drop back into a spacious heart, the state of equanimity. This is the more important, the greater the emotional upsurge. When we are in a rush, stop! Let it all subside. Have you ever failed to hear the alarm and found yourself speed washing, gobbling breakfast, running to the bus stop or driving with hands clenched to the steering wheel? Even if you arrive in time for work, does that anxious rush career you through the day. Sometimes it is as if we have put ourselves on a roller coaster and don't quite know how to get off. This is where a shot of vipassana comes in most useful. Just finding those few minutes to sit down, close the eyes and let everything calm down. Even to others around, you can say, 'I just need a few minutes to collect myself. To chill out!' This had a great affect on me when I was working as a teacher. I would often find myself in the mode of rushing. Trying to get things done! I got in the habit of just stopping even if only for a moment. And I also found it useful to talk myself down. Down to what? Equanimity which is stillness of the body, calmness of the heart, silence of the mind and an attitude of openness. From here we can bring in metta, some goodwill intention, and start again calmly. Working with a persistent mental state. When we stop the rushing and

still ourselves, we often encounter a deeper mental state such as anxiety, boredom, depression and restless energy. These sorts of emotional states can hang around all day sometimes. For some people, they are virtually a constant. Here, is one way of handling them when we don't have the time to do vipassana. It is a case of putting them to the side. This is not the same as suppression, because suppression presumes negativity towards them. We simply ignore them because we don't want to feel. But by putting them to one side, we are acknowledging them and intend to deal with them at a more appropriate time. In this way we don't add aversion to the problem. Indeed, we can do this with kind gentleness as if bandaging a sore knee and yet we keep walking. Then, of course, it is important to find a time in the day when you can work with them. And this is better as soon as you get home from work before you eat, even if only for twenty minutes. Something to pin on the wall, place on the desk. Adjust according to personal experience. One Job at a Time Intend New Action Make Dhamma Resolve Steady Attention, Season with Care Bring back Wandering Mind with Gentle Insistence STOP Let Reactions Subside One Job Well Done!

Creating Space (3)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay explores how to bring the core principles of vipassanā meditation directly into our working lives, particularly when dealing with interruptions and challenging interpersonal encounters. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws parallels between the balanced awareness we cultivate on the meditation cushion—where we remain focused yet loose, observing whatever arises without attachment—and how we can maintain this same quality of attention in our daily work environment. The teaching emphasizes practical strategies for maintaining equanimity when colleagues approach us in states of stress, irritation, or urgency. Rather than reacting with equal agitation, the essay suggests creating a moment of space to acknowledge both our own state and that of the other person, then turning our full attention to their needs. Key guidance includes listening more to what people are saying rather than getting caught up in their emotional states, and allowing time for our own reactive emotions to subside after difficult encounters. The essay concludes with the understanding that consistently applying these vipassanā principles to workplace interactions naturally increases our overall sense of calm and equanimity, transforming ordinary work situations into opportunities for mindful practice.

After a disturbing event or encounter, wait for the reaction to subside. When we sit in vipassana, we are instructed to watch, feel and experience anything that draws our attention. We're meant to be both focused and yet loose, not attached or caught up in any particular object. So if we are experiencing pleasant states and pain in the knees starts, it is simply something else to turn our attention to. If our calm concentration is such that we are locked onto the breath and someone sneezes, we're not supposed to desire the annihilation of that person's nose, but to observe, 'hearing, hearing' and also to note any reaction that might come up. Why can't we be like this all the time - and at work? We happen to be 'getting on with job', feel a bit pressured even, and someone comes. They may come calmly and excuse themselves, but often they come loudly, or in a rush or in some sort of irritated state. What is our reaction? Are we irritated? Do we feel panicked? Do we despair! Why not bring the lesson of vipassana directly into our lives. Even when we are working under considerable pressure, or working with enthusiasm and don't want to be disturbed, we can still be relaxed. All we have to do is remind ourselves that someone may come and ask for our attention. When that someone comes, we only need say, 'Just one moment' and acknowledge where we are, most important acknowledge what mood the person is. It may demand patience! And turn our attention

entirely to the person. No fuss. No wasted energy. This turning our attention towards someone is to be completely open to what they are offering. Should it be anger, anxiety or some other unpleasant state, we need to feel it and listen to what they are saying. Their emotional state can resonate strongly within us and we need to hold steady instead of reacting with equal impatience or anxiety. I have found it most helpful to listen to what they are saying more than attend to what they are feeling. That way I find it easier to remain equanimous. And then to genuinely answer their concern. If, of course, they have come quietly and calmly, then it's good to note how that brings the best out in us. So that if we should find ourselves irritated and rushing, we can remind ourselves, that if we want to get the best out of someone, this is not the way to approach them. So we need to attend to our own state and wait till it calms down. Should we fail to behave skilfully or if we lose it somewhere in the middle, then whatever mental state has arisen from an incident or encounter, we need to give it time to subside. If not the emotional state tends to escalate through constantly revisiting the event in thought and imagination. And if it starts to do that, to keep stopping, contacting the emotional feeling and a give it time to burn out even if only a little. This way of bringing the practice into our daily life increases our sense of calm and equanimity.

The Limits of Power and Mission Creep

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma examines a common workplace phenomenon—mission creep—through the lens of Buddhist psychology, revealing how the ego's fundamental need for control and power manifests in professional settings. Using relatable examples of well-intentioned employees who overstep their job boundaries, he illustrates how even good-willed actions can become expressions of self-centered desire when they fail to consider others' positions and responsibilities. The essay explores how the self's constant craving for 'more'—whether power, control, or recognition—leads to actions that, despite good intentions, ultimately serve the ego's need to feel important and in control. Drawing on his own experiences, Bhante shows how this tendency to expand beyond our designated roles not only creates workplace friction but also undermines colleagues and damages relationships. The teaching connects this everyday scenario to deeper Buddhist insights about how the self consistently turns others into objects for its own purposes, even when motivated by apparent goodwill. He emphasizes the practical wisdom of consultation and staying within appropriate boundaries, offering both a meditation on the nature of ego-driven behavior and practical guidance for more skillful workplace conduct.

There is nothing that makes the self feel more comfortable than more – of anything. This is especially so of power – which means, 'I am in control'. Every job has its boundary. It has a job description. When we go for the interview we want to know what is expected of us and at first we are satisfied with just doing the job. Although the job may be taxing, after a little time we begin to feel on top of the work – that is to be in control. We enter a period of ease. Then something starts to creep in. We see possibilities. And with all the good-will in hearts we do something that is not in our job description. And we are astonished how it causes such hurt and anger. Jack starts to work for a charity as an accounts person. Before long he gets to know how the firm works and realises that the website could be better. He knows someone who designs websites whom he thinks is very good and invites them to come and meet the boss. The next morning he tells the boss what he has done – without prior consultation. The boss is visibly angry, but out of good will sees the designer. Nothing comes of it. Jack feels snubbed. For days there is a distance between Jack and his boss. Again without anything being said, things sort of smooth over. But has Jack understood that his good-will was seen as mission creep, that it encroached on another's work, that it took no account of the position of the boss? I must confess I was very good at this sort of thing and my manager accused me of want-

ing her job! And I didn't. Honestly. It cost me an apology and box of chocolates. As things turned out, when she moved up, I was offered her job – by which time, of course, I did want it. So I must have got something right. In the same way if you are in charge, mission creep undermines others. I always think it is a good idea at some point before I start work to remind myself what my job is. Since I have set up this centre, this has become all too important, since I am the sort of person who has the tendency to do everything themselves. This undermines those whom we have asked to help and generally puts them off offering us assistance in the future. So here we have a basic manifestation of the self as power. It wants to be in control. It gives itself any good reason, but never really takes into account the other, save in that the other serves its purpose. Remember no matter how good-willed the self is, it always turns the other into an object of its desire as a means to achieve an object of desire. To understand the reaction of others to our good-will mission creep, we need to ask ourselves how we feel when someone does that to us. And really, what harm is there in consultation?

Not an Emotion

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This teaching examines the fundamental difference between temporary emotional states and genuine happiness. Bhante Bodhidhamma distinguishes between moods (longer-lasting dispositions) and emotions (transient feelings), showing how both are inherently impermanent and unreliable sources of contentment. The essay explores how defining ourselves through our emotional states—'I am happy' or 'I am unhappy'—creates psychological dependency and suffering when these states inevitably change.

The teaching reveals how the modern pursuit of happiness as a 'right' or 'natural state' paradoxically increases frustration and striving. When we try to recreate or maintain happy emotions, we become psychologically dependent on conditions beyond our control. True liberation comes through non-attachment—appreciating pleasant experiences without clinging to them or trying to recreate them.

This understanding has profound implications for vipassanā practice, where observing the impermanent nature of all mental states (anicca) leads to wisdom. By learning to say goodbye to happy moods without resistance, practitioners develop equanimity and discover a deeper contentment that doesn't depend on fleeting emotional experiences.

When you say you are happy, what do you mean? However you define happiness, are you referring to a mood or emotion? A mood would be a present disposition and it stays around for a while. It may be caused by some good fortune that has come your way. A distant relative has died and to your surprise has left you quite a bit of money. Or it may be that something you had been striving or hoping for had actually materialised. You had applied for a job and you had succeeded. An emotion is something more transient. To cheer yourself up, you go for a walk in the country towards a pub (for tea, of course!) or local park where they serve teacake and decent coffee. You are feeling good so you visit someone. You want to do something exciting so you take flying lessons. But there is obviously a great flaw in this for it cannot be maintained. It is by nature transient, impermanent and, therefore, unreliable. But worse! For when I say 'I am happy', that is how I am defining myself. So that when 'I am not happy', I start wondering why. I start blaming myself or others or society for my inability to be happy. I may feel that happiness is how I ought to be, that it's how everyone ought to be. That it's 'natural'. That it's 'unnatural' to be unhappy. Suddenly it's writ large in national declarations and international treaties – the 'pursuit of human happiness'. It's become a 'right'! Unfortu-

nately this just adds more striving with the potential of more frustration. The happier we try to be, the more unhappy we seem to get!" Happy moods and happy emotions are all right in themselves. But will they ever give the sort of substantial happiness that our hearts seek? If we can appreciate these transient experiences and not try to re-create them or better them, then they will stand on their own as delightful times to be delighted in. To be able to say goodbye to a happy mood or emotion is to liberate ourselves from a psychological dependency. When there is no psychological 'need' for such states, we will enjoy them the more. This is the meaning of non-attachment.

Relationships

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines how our deepest happiness emerges not from solitary pursuits but through meaningful relationships with others. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Buddha's wisdom on cultivating harmonious relationships, drawing particularly on the example of Venerable Kassapa's approach to communal living among the saṅgha. The essay addresses the reality that all relationships require ongoing effort and skillful navigation through difficult periods, noting that even marriage succeeds only one-third of the time, yet emphasizing how working through challenges deepens our connections.

The core teaching centers on the Buddha's counsel about acting sometimes for ourselves, sometimes for others, and ideally for both. Through Kassapa's daily practice of setting aside personal preferences to consider what others want to do first, we learn a profound method of generous love that loosens our attachment to rigid plans while creating space for others to express themselves. This skillful means (upāya) transforms potential conflict into cooperation and prevents resentment from taking root.

The practical application extends beyond formal meditation to daily life, showing how Right Action and loving-kindness (mettā) manifest in our closest relationships. Rather than viewing relationship difficulties as failures, this teaching reframes them as opportunities for deeper spiritual practice and genuine happiness through selfless service to others.

Our lives are spent mainly in the company of the others and doing things. If we can rate our happiness by our relationships, perhaps we are on a surer footing. When people enter into a relationship, it always has some purpose beyond the present gratification. It has a long term aim. It may be a simple friendship – friends who meet to shop, to walk, to talk. Some may form a partnership to set up a business, or a charity. It may be quite a small enterprise or just getting together to help someone. We may form deeper relationships as partners and spouses, as parents and guardians of children. These are much longer term commitments. Such relationships are never ‘happy’ from start to finish. After the first flush of joy, the work starts to ‘make it work’. And at times it can be very difficult as we find the other has different ideas, different aims and so on. When it comes to marriage, two out of three fail. Some may judge this as a measure of our ‘broken society’. But considering how difficult it is for individuals to be together, we should instead marvel that so many continue lifelong. Working with the other through difficult patches makes for a deeper relationship. The deeper our relationships, the

more nourishing they are. The Buddha tells us that sometimes we do things that are good for ourselves, at other times, good for others and at others good both for ourselves and others. On a visit to a small group of three monks, the Buddha asks the head monk how it is they live so peacefully with each other. Ven. Kassapa replies that every morning he says to himself, 'What if I put aside what I want to do and do what the others want to do.' We can see the wisdom in this approach. It allows us to loosen our grip on tightly held plans and ideas and allows the other to feel free to express theirs. Of course, for this to work, all involved must have the same attitude. This is such a wonderful skilful means the Buddha offers us. To put aside what we want to do until we have found out what the other/s wants to do, is an act of generous love. Even at times when we have to agree to differ, this attitude supports co-operation and undermines resentment.

Being Good rather than Being Good At

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines how modern culture has shifted from valuing character to valuing achievements, creating a competitive mindset that pollutes the heart with envy and inadequacy. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws on the Maṅgala Sutta to highlight the Buddha's emphasis on inner qualities like generosity, ethical conduct, humility, contentment, and patience as the highest blessings, rather than worldly success.

The essay explains how focusing on our underlying attitudes and intentions transforms both our actions and our sense of self-worth. When we prioritize wholesome attitudes over skillful performance, our deeds naturally enhance our feeling of goodness without carrying negative undertones. This connects directly to the Noble Eightfold Path, where Right Attitude (sammā saṅkappa) leads to Right Action (sammā kammanta).

The practical guidance offered is simple yet profound: before any action, examine your underlying attitude. If it's negative, consciously replace it with a wholesome intention, even if it initially feels forced. This practice cultivates genuine happiness and worthiness from within, independent of external validation or comparison with others.

It seems as though obituaries have changed. Where once they would talk of a person's qualities with examples, they now only mention what the person 'did'. Achievements rate the person rather than character. The consequence is that we come to believe that those who have been successful in the world – fame, riches and power – are necessarily good people. Yet we know today's culture favours the bully, the callous entrepreneur, the ones who can muscle their way to the top. Whether we like it or not, it will affect the way we think about ourselves. If we have to judge ourselves by our achievements, the work we do, our status, then I should think very few of us are satisfied. We are into the game of comparison. This leads to great effort to 'prove oneself'. This, in turn, leads to envy and jealousy of others. In all, we may end up being successful in the eyes of the world, but our hearts will be in turmoil. If our hearts are polluted with all the negativity that comes from aggressive competitiveness, keeping up with the Jones' and so on, this cannot be conducive to happiness, to an inner sense of worthiness. We never feel ourselves to be quite good enough. In the Discourse on Blessings, the Maṅgala Sutta, as well as such social qualities such as being 'well educated and skilled, a highly trained discipline', the Buddha lists such qualities as: generosity, ethical conduct, blameless actions, reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude, patience, gentleness self-discipline

... these are the Highest Blessing. Whose mind does not flutter by contact with worldly contingencies, theirs is sorrowless, stainless, and secure. It's not that what we do doesn't matter. Far from it. What we do is an expression of our attitudes and the intentions that arise out of them. However, if we put the accent on our attitude and intention, making sure they are wholesome, and then do the deed, that deed will enhance our feeling of goodness. And the deed, no matter how well done, will not carry negative undertones. If a person is skilful in doing something, and yet they carry about with them a negative attitude, they may very well be chosen to do the jobs, but they won't make many friends. So if we want to feel good about ourselves - and want people to feel good about us - all we need do is get the attitude right. Next time you are doing something whether for yourself, for a friend or at work, just stop before you do and ask yourself, 'What is the underlying attitude that is accompanying the work?' If it's negative, put it to the side. Park it. And put a wholesome attitude into your heart. If it feels false, that's ok. It can take a while for the emotional heart to catch up. Then do the work. Hum the old song - T'ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it. (Ella Fitzgerald) Right Attitude leads to Right intention, leads to Right Action, leads to a feeling of goodness within which is also a form of happiness.

What's Wrong with a Bit of Attachment!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the Buddha's Second Noble Truth through the lens of taṇhā (clinging or attachment), explaining how our relationships with sensory and mental experiences create suffering. Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies that the Dhamma isn't about attaining happiness but discovering the joy, compassion, love, and equanimity that already exist beneath our attachments. The essay explores how attachment creates a false belief that our happiness depends on external conditions, leading to frustration when we can't get what we want, grief when we lose what we cherish, and anxiety about potential loss. Drawing from the Buddha's core teaching on the cause of dukkha, it explains how clinging enslaves us in cycles of craving, boredom, and endless seeking. The practical approach involves contemplating these truths until they penetrate deeply, acknowledging the arising and passing of all experiences, and cultivating an attitude of 'no preference' – accepting whatever comes without resistance. This wisdom offers a path from the compulsive patterns of consumer culture toward genuine contentment through understanding the impermanent nature of all phenomena.

Attachment is one of those hackneyed words that crop up over and over again in Buddhist literature. They used to talk about being 'detached', but that sounded really hard and cold. So now you will read 'non-attached'. The word they are referring to is taṇhā which is usually translated as 'clinging'. It all refers to a type of relationship we have with the world. The world as we experience it through the senses and the mind. Now we always have to remember that the Buddha's teaching is only concerned with suffering and unsatisfactoriness and the end of it. The end of it is happiness. So we could say that the Dhamma is all about attaining happiness. But that would be wrong. Indeed that's what the Buddha, before his liberation from suffering was trying to do, either by way of ecstatic mental states or self-mortification. But the fact of the matter is that happiness is always there. It simply needs to be discovered. That thick sticky layer of attachment has to go and lo and betide, there's happiness – and it has been there all the time. Happiness here refers to any amount of quiet joy, resonating compassion, warm love or sublime equanimity. And for this to appear from beneath the suffering and unsatisfactoriness of life all we have to do is drop the attachment. Yes, of course, easier said than done. But we will do it once we realise that is the cause of suffering. The Buddha's the Second Noble Truth: the cause of suffering and unsatisfactoriness is taṇhā. Attachments mean that we believe that our happiness is dependent on some-

thing or someone. It causes us to cling to it and defend it against loss. While we are indulging ourselves, there's no problem. It's a sensual Nibbana. Consider how we 'lose ourselves' in a film, in a hobby, in our work, in food, in sex and in romantic love. But what happens when we can't get what we want? Is there not frustration? Is there not grief should we lose our delight? Is there not an abiding anxiety of possible loss, of fear of someone or something taking it away? And there's the compulsive need, the overbearing habit demands gratification. We are truly enslaved. And then we get fed up with it. We get bored and then have to go in search of another excitement. If greed fuels the consumerist society, the escape from boredom is the unacknowledged accelerator. So the first thing to do to rid ourselves of this suffering is to contemplate these facts till they really sink in. And even then keep contemplating them. Then at the beginning and end of every delightful experience, acknowledge it has arisen and passed away and will never return. It is more dead than Monty Python's parrot. And finally, the Buddha advises us to develop the attitude of 'no preference'. 'How do you like your tea?' 'As it comes.'

Sacrifice: The More We Give, the Greater the Return

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines sacrifice as both a universal spiritual principle and the heart of the Buddhist path to awakening. Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the concept from its Latin origins through various religious traditions to its profound meaning in Buddhism, where true sacrifice transforms from personal renunciation into selfless offering for all beings.

Drawing on the Buddha's own journey, the essay explores how the future Buddha's Great Renunciation became the Great Sacrifice when his quest shifted from personal liberation to awakening for all humanity. The teaching emphasizes that it was the pāramī of generosity (dāna-pāramī) that gave the Bodhisatta the spiritual authority to seek full liberation, as witnessed by the Earth Goddess during his final confrontation with Māra.

The practical application begins with encouraging small sacrifices for worthy causes—spiritual charities, social welfare, animal protection, and environmental care. These prepare us for the ultimate sacrifice: relinquishing hope of lasting happiness in the sensual world. The essay connects everyday acts of giving, including family sacrifices, to the spiritual path, showing how generosity and letting go cultivate the courage needed for complete renunciation and the greater happiness of Nibbāna.

Sacrifice comes from two Latin words – sacer : sacred and facere : to make. One sacrifices to a god to propitiate the deity or to ask a favour. At the time of the Buddha, there were huge ritual slaughters of horses and cattle in the King's sacrifice. Abraham offered his son to the harsh desert God who softened. Christ is said to be the 'blood of the lamb', the sacrifice of his own life for the benefit of all human beings. Sacrifice then is an offering of something we treasure for a higher cause. It is the point where generosity demands great courage and conviction. 'No greater gift has man than to offer his life for another'. It is said of arahats, those who are fully liberated, that they engender an inestimable field of merit. The power of their goodness is limitless. This is the meaning of puñña, merit. Just the very fact that they have arrived at that station of non-suffering, Nibbana, makes real the aim for all. Once Everest was conquered, it becomes climbable. To become fully liberated we have to give up everything - eventually. And we are asked to give up everything on a promise. We don't know what the outcome will be. We trust on hearsay. However, we do gain confidence as the Path becomes clearer through our practice. But it is always going to be in the end a leap of faith. A faith that sacrificing

everything we treasure will bring a boundless return. Few have the qualities it takes to go give up everything immediately as did the *Bodhisatta* when he left home. This is why it is called the *Great Renunciation*. And it is so called because it was a personal quest. However, at the point of the *Great Doubt*, as it is put metaphorically, *Mara*, the *Evil One*, approached and asked him who he thought he was to seek such a goal as full liberation. When the *Bodhisatta* then called upon the *Earth Goddess* to witness his right, it was the *Parami*, the *Perfection of Generosity* she says that gave him the right to seek full liberation. What had been *Renunciation* now became *Sacrifice* for he was no longer doing it for himself but for all humankind. So let's start small. There are so many causes in the world that we can give something up for. There are all the spiritual charities that aim to heal our deepest dis-ease. There are all the social charities to alleviate suffering. There are all the charities that try and do something about the enormous suffering we cause animals by way of greed. And there's mother earth. What will we sacrifice for her? Letting go of something we really treasure is hard. It may be wealth or time. Even the situation we are in at present may call upon us. Parents are often called upon to make sacrifices for their children. Children called upon to look after ageing parents. These are also paths to liberation. Every time we give something that demands a sacrifice we are preparing ourselves for the greatest of all sacrifices: letting go of any hope of achieving a lasting happiness in the sensual world. Only when we have accomplished this can the greater happiness arrive. There's a saying in Italian 'che va piano va lontano' – who goes slow, goes far. *Bodhisatta* in Theravada Buddhism is someone who determines to become a fully self-enlightened Buddha. There are said to be four such monks in Sri Lanka at this present time.

Not What We Believe, but How We Live

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Buddha's warning against becoming entangled in speculative debates and rigid views. Drawing from the Majjhima Nikāya and Sutta Nipāta, he explores how both ancient and modern debates between materialists and eternalists miss the essential point of the Buddha's teaching. The essay discusses the Buddha's approach of avoiding metaphysical questions in favor of practical methodology that addresses the immediate reality of suffering.

Bhante Bodhidhamma shares his personal journey into Buddhism, explaining how he was drawn not to beliefs but to a practical method for transformation. He emphasizes that while understanding the teachings intellectually is important, it is the actual practice of meditation and moment-to-moment awareness that brings experiential understanding and genuine change. The teaching highlights how the Buddha was less concerned with why we suffer than with providing tools to understand how we create our own suffering.

This reflection offers valuable guidance for practitioners who may become caught up in philosophical speculation rather than focusing on the transformative power of practice. It encourages readers to examine what they are actually doing to make their lives more meaningful, rather than getting lost in theoretical debates about concepts like rebirth or nibbāna.

The Buddha warned his followers not to get caught up in 'debates'. In his day, these were very popular it seems. Every full moon, in the bright glow of the cool tropical evening, people gathered at the shrines to hear religious teachers. Their views conflicted. There were materialist annihilationists, much as the atheists of today, and there were eternalists, much in the same way as present day 'believers'. Talking about speculative beliefs, whether it is the materialist atheist who reduces everything to chemicals or the religionist belief in life everlasting, he warns us not to get caught up in 'a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views.' M.2.8 The debates between religion and science tend to be about provable facts. Neurobiologists say that because certain parts of the brain light up and certain chemicals function as we experience emotions, that therefore these are emotions. But no-one experiences emotions as electro-chemical happenings. Believers and the Buddha talk of a soul, a subtle body, the mind-made body. Only those who have had such an experience can be sure of it. And then how are they going to prove it? If religion is about be-

liefs, statements of facts, then all we will do is repeat the well-worn arguments of 'experts'. In the Sutta Nipata, one of the earliest collections of the Buddha's Sayings he says 'The one who is full of rigid views, puffed up with pride and arrogance, who deems himself 'perfect' (expert), becomes anointed in his own opinion ...' SN IV.12.12 When I became interested in Buddhism, I wasn't in search of a belief, but of a methodology that would help me out of the hole I'd got myself into. What was said, of course, made sense. But it was what I 'did', that led me to commit myself to Buddhadhamma. Such questions about rebirth and Nibbana weren't important to me. I left them to stew. Maybe in time I'd find out. What mattered was how the practice of meditation and moment to moment mindfulness was revolutionising my life. And this of course meant to understand how I was creating my own suffering. The Buddha eschews philosophical or metaphysical questions. He's not concerned as to why we suffer. I think it would have been of little interest to him to know about Darwin's theory of evolution. How does it make life more meaningful, knowing we are biologically descended from early mammals? It may as well have been a potato. Or knowing that our psychology is based on early human experience as hunter gatherers? Since when did life become any safer? Religion is about how we live. This is dependent on our understanding. But it's what we do that gives this understanding an experiential meaningfulness. Knowing all about mountain climbing is one thing. Actually climbing one is something else. So the question is, 'What am I doing that is making my life more meaningful; what more meaningless?'

Towards the Greatest Happiness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching addresses a common misconception about Buddhist practice—that it's only for those who are suffering. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how conventional happiness, whether from music, relationships, or sensory pleasures, remains dependent on conditions and circumstances that inevitably change. The Buddha points to Nibbāna as the greatest happiness: an unconditioned state of peace that transcends dependence on external factors.

Through vipassanā meditation, practitioners learn to observe all experiences as objects of awareness, discovering that the observing awareness itself is distinct from bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts. This realization can initially feel unremarkable or even dull compared to the excitement of sensory pleasures—reactions that Bhante identifies as Māra's temptations, our delusion still enchanted by worldly stimulation.

The essay offers practical guidance for developing appreciation for stillness and peacefulness as antidotes to sensory intoxication. Whether through observing nature, quiet walks, or simply sitting with the breath, practitioners can cultivate a taste for serene stillness. As this appreciation deepens, one naturally progresses toward the ultimate happiness of Nibbāna, which the Buddha teaches is always present when we are truly mindful.

Very occasionally when I talk to someone about the Buddha's teaching and how it's all about bringing an end to suffering, they will say, 'But I am happy!' What they don't see is that their happiness is dependent on conditions and circumstance. Someone said to me once, when we were talking about spiritual happiness, that he got it all from music. I didn't ask at the time, and I regret not doing so, 'What happens if you go deaf?' The Buddha points to a way of being which is a happiness not dependent on conditions or circumstance. He calls this Nibbana (in Sanskrit Nirvana). And he says we are in its presence or in its vicinity when we are mindful! In other words, Nibbana is staring us in the face, but we don't see it. This is the importance of vipassana practice. Every time we sit in meditation in this way, we make an object of everything we are experiencing. This means the locus of the self, that self-awareness, feels itself to be other than what it is experiencing. If it is other than what it is experiencing then it can't be the sensations and feelings that come from the body, nor the emotions and moods the heart offers, nor the thoughts and images that pop into the mind. What's it like when we are hovering like this amidst the all – all that we are experiencing? This is something we can reflect upon within a sitting and at the end of it. What we might say to ourselves is, 'So what?'

It's not pleasant or unpleasant. It's not exciting in any way. It's dull. In fact I don't want to be like this all the time. I want to have some fun!"These thoughts belong to Mara, the Enticer. This is our delusion in action. We are still bewitched by the kaleidoscopic pleasures of the sensory world. We still don't see the danger of it and the consequent suffering of attachment and indulgence. In order to wean ourselves off the intoxication of 'the world', we need to develop a taste for stillness, for peacefulness – for silence. In the country, nature is the great teacher, but in the city we need to make do. Sit by the window and watch the clouds, or take a walk at a quiet hour in the park or even down a road. Or just sit in position for no other reason than to allow the sensations of the breath to calm, to quieten, to develop our taste for serene stillness. When that also loses its taste, we shall naturally seek the greater happiness – Nibbana.

New Year Resolution

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay explores the spiritual dimension of New Year resolutions through the lens of Buddhist practice and wisdom. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the Latin etymology of 'resolution' as 'to solve again,' connecting this to the Buddha's constant encouragement for wise reflection (yoniso manasikāra). The teaching emphasizes how spiritual life cannot be separated from daily existence but must imbue all our actions with ethical meaning.

The essay addresses the relationship between intentions, attitudes, and understanding, showing how guilt and shame can actually manifest compassion and lead to positive change through remorse and reconciliation. Central themes include the development of forgiveness—both toward others and ourselves—as essential for inner peace and spiritual progress. The text explores how unwholesome thoughts, words, and deeds create suffering, making it natural to resolve to guard our conduct.

Drawing on the Ten Perfections (dasa pāramī) and Four Illimitables (brahmavihāra), the teaching shows practical ways to strengthen character while maintaining a soft heart. The essay concludes with the famous Dhammapada verse about ending harmful behavior, doing good, and purifying the heart, emphasizing that successful resolutions require humility and realistic self-assessment. The key insight is to start small with achievable goals, as success in small matters builds confidence for greater spiritual accomplishments.

Resolution comes from the Latin which means literally to 'solve again'. And that's what the New Year offers us. An opportunity to reflect on the past year, indeed our lives and consider how we can do better. The key is in that reflection. One of the Buddha's constant exhortations is to reflect wisely. There are many ways in which we can and indeed should reflect on our lives. The meaning of our work and our leisure time, our relationships and our community, city life and nature. How we spend our wealth and our time. Some of our reflections may be pragmatic, artistic, social and so on. Here we are concerned with the spiritual life. It is not that we can split off the spiritual life from any other part of our lives. It is more how to imbue everything we do with spiritual meaning. And by spiritual here, we mean in the main ethical, for it is in the motivation with which we behave that manifests our wisdom or lack of it. Our objective, of course, remains liberation from all mental distress and awakening into a different relationship with ourselves and the world, free of strife. What we do arises out of intentions and our intentions are present expressions of our attitudes. And our attitudes arise from our

understanding. In reflection we can correct any misunderstanding that has arisen and in unsure cases a spiritual confident can be very helpful. When we behave in an unskillful way that causes others to suffer, we also create suffering for ourselves. The guilt and shame we may feel manifests a measure of compassion. For if we did not love and care, we would not feel guilt or shame. So whenever these two mental states arise in our reflections, we know that we have acted unskillfully, but we also know that we have the compassion and love to do something about it. This is what leads to remorse. And remorse compels us to put right what we did wrong. Asking for forgiveness is a salve that facilitates reconciliation. And so does forgiving. It is in acknowledging the suffering of the one who has done us harm and the suffering we cause ourselves by holding on to our grudge that leads to the desire for reconciliation. No matter how painful that may be. And it is worth it. For such pain is the pain of healing. In the same way we need to develop that same attitude of forgiveness towards ourselves. What ease there is in a heart free of guilt and shame! What ease when free of grudge and revenge! What ease when free of self-hatred and self-recrimination! Seeing the suffering caused by unwholesome thoughts, words and deeds, how easy it is to resolve to guard our thoughts, speech and actions. But we must go further and that is to develop virtue. The Ten Perfections and the Four Illimitables offer us ways we can strengthen our characters and yet soften our hearts. And finally, to reflect on the absolute necessity of our practice. We have been initiated and empowered into a practice, vipassana, that leads to liberation. We access a level of consciousness that rises above the mundane and prevents us from entanglements and bewitchments. This in itself is a purification. Here is one of the Buddha's best known aphorisms: Put an end to hurtful behaviour. Do what is good for ourselves and others. Purify the heart. This is the teachings of all the Buddhas. Dhammapada The success of a good resolution lies in humility. And humility is to see ourselves as we really are. One resolution taken to heart and practised is better than a thousand we fail to accomplish. The path to hell is paved with good intentions. Therefore, we need to resolve what we know we can do. Start small. Do what we are sure is do-able. This leads to success and success breeds success. Surely in 2010, our resolutions will bear great fruit! You may find the following on the website of some use: On Reflection: <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audioLinks/xmas07.htm> New Year Reflections If you want take the theme of forgiveness further, you may find Towards the End of Forgiveness helpful: www.satipanya.org.uk/essays/angulimala.htm For some ideas on Perfections and Illimitables: <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audio.htm> and click on The Perfections Turned Inward and The Illimitables

Neighbourly 'Sounds'

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This practical teaching addresses one of modern life's common challenges: dealing with disturbing sounds from neighbors. Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a Buddhist approach that transforms irritation into wisdom and peace. The essay begins by exploring how aversion creates suffering—not the sounds themselves, but our resistance to them. Drawing on fundamental Buddhist insights about dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), the teaching shows how our ears become 'glued to the wall' through aversion, amplifying our distress.

The practice involves several steps: first recognizing aversion as it arises, then accepting the situation with the phrase 'This is the way it is' until the heart releases its demand that things be different. The teaching emphasizes cultivating equanimity and compassion by recalling times when we ourselves may have been inconsiderate neighbors. Practical advice includes approaching neighbors calmly when necessary, making long-term plans if situations become truly unbearable, and developing the mind's natural ability to filter out accepted background sounds.

Through personal anecdotes from monasteries in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, Bhante illustrates how the mind can adapt to any soundscape once aversion is released. This teaching demonstrates how everyday challenges become opportunities for developing patience, acceptance, and skillful communication—core aspects of the Buddhist path applicable to urban dharma practice.

You would be lucky person if you have not had to bear with 'sounds' coming through the wall. It might be sound of the base line pounding though the wall paper or the periodic flush or the muffled conversation of the TV or loud conversation.No doubt, you have your own way of managing such a situation. If not, here are some tips that might help.The first is to become aware of the aversion. And how aversion makes the ears glue themselves to the wall. Then to remind oneself that this is suffering, not the sounds. It is aversion that labels them as noise.It may also help to recall when we have been neighbourly nuisances. It will cool our righteousness.Then – and this is the hard bit - always start with accepting the situation as it is. 'This is the way it is'. Keep repeating it gently in the heart until the heart lets go of, 'This is not the way it ought to be.' You may find the suffering disappears with the aversion.Then ask, 'What can I do about the situation?' If there is something you can do, of course, do it. If not, just get on with what I have you have do, as best you can. And as the aversion keeps raising its

snarl, repeat the exercise. It's surprising how the mind can blanket out sounds once it has accepted them as normal auidial back ground. When I was a student we rented a house right next to a rail line. The house shook with every passing. After a day or so, it never woke me up. But then the beer might have helped! Every time I returned to the east I had to used to all the sounds. At Kanduboda it was the squirrels and other wild animals. In Yangon, it was the traffic and the dogs. Two or three days down the line, and I didn't 'hear' it. But if it truly becomes invasive, then we can approach the neighbour and we will always get a better result if we are calm and equanimous, if we explain why the sounds are disturbing. Throw it gently back to them, 'I'm sure you wouldn't like it either if I played loud music'. Hopefully it works. I had a neighbour who played Elvis – a lot. I was trying to prepare work for my classes. I gave up, mainly because I like Elvis and couldn't stop myself singing! I asked her to turn it down a bit. She bellowed, 'I pay my rates'. I answered so did I, but it didn't include an Elvis disco. She did turn it down – after explaining and appealing to her better nature. I was lucky. If the situation becomes unbearable (and there are such situations, especially if the sounds interrupt sleep), then it is best to make a long term strategy to move away, put it out there as an aspiration and work gently towards it. May your neighbours be quiet, gentle and peace-loving!

Sickness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines how sickness served as one of the divine messengers that sparked Prince Siddhatha's spiritual quest, and how illness can become a profound opportunity for awakening rather than merely suffering. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how our attachment to bodily health creates a delusional sense of permanent wellbeing, making illness a shocking confrontation with reality.

The essay reveals how sickness acts as a 'mini-death' that tears us away from our attachments and forces us to confront the three characteristics of existence. Through developing Right Awareness (sammā sati), we can find an 'unassailable place' within - the objective observer that remains stable even amid physical discomfort. This perspective transforms our relationship with illness from despair to acceptance.

Practical guidance includes daily reflections on bodily vulnerability ('This body is subject to disease') and cultivating mettā (loving-kindness) toward our physical form. These practices act like 'toothpaste on teeth,' cleaning the heart of accumulated fear and anxiety. The teaching emphasizes that accepting illness's reality paradoxically frees us to live more fully, transforming constraining fear into caring wisdom.

Sickness was one of the ‘messengers of the gods’, an awakening call that set Siddhatha Gotama on the path to an astounding spiritual discovery. When sickness befalls someone we know - a dangerous illness, a crippling accident - it comes as a jolt. It’s happening around us all the time, but now it’s in our face. But still we rarely ‘get it’. When such misfortune happens to us, it’s a shock. Depending on the circumstances, it may drive us to despair. A young policeman, all-body paralysed by a shot, chose to commit suicide. Even though it is happening all around us, we continue to live as if it won’t happen to us. If we reminded ourselves, every day, of how vulnerable the body is, it would take away the tinsel armour of ignoring, of self-deception. Should we have to suffer, it won’t be such a shock. But a shock it will be, because so much of who we are, the Self, is tied up in the body. Sickness is a mini-death. It tears us away from what we love – ‘the things I do; the friends I see; the job I have’ - and offers us what we don’t want – the discomfort, the pain, the disability. The mind works on this and offers a future of horror, of terror. Yet, here lies a gateway. An opportunity of escape. Escape from the delusive world we have conjured up within ourselves and take for real. The escape cannot be yesterday, drowning in nostalgia. It’s gone. Nor tomorrow, a world only in dreams. It

hasn't arrived. The answer must be present. Right here. Right now. That was the Buddha's astounding spiritual discovery. Through developing right mindfulness, we can stand back within ourselves to discover an unassailable place. Even as the objective observer, the feeler, the experiencer, whenever it is stabilised, we've already found a haven. Indeed, when we have been patient enough to let all fear and aversion subside, this haven tells us there is physical discomfort or pain and disability to smaller or greater degree. And that's all! There is no denying that is not an easy task. Indeed depending on the severity of the illness, it can be a great struggle. So let's start with the easy ones. Next time you are ill, even a cold, try saying to yourself. 'There is this discomfort or pain and this illness prevents or hinders me from doing this. That's all.' This sort of acceptance helps to establish patient forbearance which is uncomplaining and a realistic optimism which sees possibilities. Here are some daily reflections to prevent us living in a make-believe world of continuous health: This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. Such reflections act on the heart as toothpaste on teeth. If we want to free the heart from the accumulation of plaque from fear and anxiety, each day we need to face such possibilities. We get in touch with these unpleasant mental states and in accepting them, they manifest and evaporate. Far from glooming our lives, such reflections, undermining the constraining effects of fear and anxiety and have the opposite effect of allowing our lives the more to bloom. Recognising the body's paramount importance in human existence and that this life form the Buddha tells us is the best for liberation, we need then to turn our loving-kindness, metta, towards the body. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong. I determine to look after my body. Such blessings transform the energy of fear into care. (There is a longer Bodycare mp3 <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/audio.htm>)

The Tough Nut

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This practical teaching addresses how to work with persistent unwholesome habits and addictive patterns that we retreat to during difficult times. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the nature of taṇhā (craving) and how these escape routes become entrenched problems in themselves, whether around food, substances, or other compulsive behaviors.

The essay emphasizes the crucial importance of 'bright mindfulness' - catching the moment of craving's arising before it gains momentum. Drawing on Buddhist understanding of desire and aversion, it explains how sammā sati (Right Awareness) accompanied by calmness allows us to pause, observe the energy of craving, and wait patiently for it to subside naturally.

Practical strategies are offered including understanding the conditions that trigger cravings, developing inner resolution, and using wholesome distractions when needed. The teaching advocates for investigating these patterns in meditation rather than mere suppression, suggesting walking meditation as particularly skillful for examining mental states while removing oneself from tempting situations. The essay concludes with encouragement for persistent effort when we inevitably find ourselves caught in old patterns.

I'm sure you know what your own 'tough nut' is. I know a little about 'tough nuts' since I took a couple of cars apart in those halcyon days when I had nothing better to do. You have to apply WD40 and sometimes a bit of welly. There's usually habit – unwholesome, of course – we retreat to when things go bad or even a bit off. It could be around eating or sex or drugs or sleep or alcohol or any number of more or less unwholesome pursuits. But we begin to realise that it doesn't deal with the original problem and it becomes an obsession and addiction and so a problem in itself. It can become an escape route so entrenched that it will probably be the last to be filled out and transformed. There are many self-help books, therapies and systems such as the Twelve Steps that are used for alcohol and drug addiction. But here I'm addressing a more 'normal' level of addiction. Even though I say normal it can be equally tenacious. Even giving up that extra piece of toast can bring tears to the eyes. As meditators we know that the key lies in tanha, wrong desire and craving. It's catching the moment that it arises, before it gets a head of steam in action. That is the key to overcoming it. Once we've even budged a foot towards the biscuit tin, it's difficult to pull back. 'Just one!' We're easily fooled. This is why that bright mindfulness is so necessary. It catches the arising of a

desire. Right mindfulness is accompanied by calmness. So there's no rush. There's time. We can inwardly stop, watch and feel the energy rise and wait patiently till it subsides. When we know the conditions for such desires to arise; when we know when, where and/or with whom; that's when we prick the inner ears, gather the inner resolution and stand firm. It is also good to have some ploy to remove oneself from the scene of possible folly. Some wholesome distraction. Listen to music, read a book, watch good TV, call a friend. Of course, there is the danger of suppression, if we don't find time to investigate it in meditation. Perhaps the best ploy is to take the 'dog' for a walk. It gets us away from the object of desire and allows us to 'vipassana' the mental state. And should we find ourselves dashing along the addictive escape route, let's at least not be routed! What then is required? Persistence! Dogged perseverance!

Impulsive or Spontaneous

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This teaching examines the crucial distinction between impulsive behavior and genuine spontaneity in our daily interactions. Bhante Bodhidhamma illustrates how impulsive actions stem from thoughtless habit patterns, often leading to regret, internal conflict, and even dishonesty when we agree to things we don't truly want to do. Through relatable examples and a humorous Mullah Nasruddin story, he demonstrates how impulsive responses can trap us in cycles of discomfort and deception.

The essay then shifts to explore authentic spontaneity, which appears effortless but actually requires dedicated cultivation. Drawing parallels with athletic training and artistic performance, Bhante shows how genuine spontaneous responses emerge from consistent practice and conscious development of virtues like goodwill, generosity, and patience. This reflects core Buddhist principles about the cultivation of wholesome mental states through mindful effort.

*The practical wisdom offered here directly supports meditation practice and ethical development. By distinguishing between reactive impulses and skillful spontaneity, practitioners can better understand how to cultivate *sīla* (ethical conduct) and develop the mindful awareness needed to respond wisely rather than react habitually to life's demands.*

When we act impulsively, we do so out of habit. A thoughtless reaction. There's no reflection involved. And the word impulsive suggests that it is not skilful. We often regret what we have done. Somebody asks us to come and help in the garden. And we find ourselves saying, 'Yes, I'd love to!' And immediately comes that sinking feeling that we really didn't want to do it. And that we don't have the time. We would prefer to be doing something else. It scratches on the mind and we think of excuses. It can lead to fibbing. 'Woke up feeling terrible. I've got a job to do. Someone I must see. Forgot all about it.' Of course, we are prolific in our apologies. But it leaves an uncomfortable feeling. That's the dread of being found out. The shame of it. There's a Mullah Nasruddin story. He is tired of his neighbour asking for the use of his donkey. So on the next request, he tells him the donkey is being used by someone else. Just then the donkey brays. And when his neighbour raises his eyebrows, he asks, 'Who are you going to believe? Me or my donkey?' We all want to be spontaneous. It suggests skillfulness and joy. And we think that spontaneity should arise spontaneously! But it's hard work to train ourselves towards a genuine, unaffected naturalness about what we do. Consider sport! How

many times do tennis players practise their shots? And in the immediacy of the game their strokes are spontaneous. Not that they are always as accurate as they would want them to be. Consider performance artists whether actors or musicians. Although their performance seems so natural, there has been an enormous amount of practice beforehand. So it is with virtues. We need to consciously develop them – goodwill, generosity, patience and so on. And then every so often we shall surprise ourselves at our spontaneous, wise and joyful response.

Joy!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores joy (muditā) as one of the four brahmavihāras or Divine Abidings, alongside loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity. Bhante Bodhidhamma distinguishes between genuine peaceful joy and the restless excitement that often masquerades as happiness, explaining how our fixation on dramatic emotional highs can cause us to miss the subtle sweetness of calm contentment.

The essay offers practical guidance for recognizing and cultivating quiet joy in everyday moments—during a peaceful cup of tea, a mindful walk, or moments of rest. Once this joy is appreciated and stabilized, the practice extends to sharing it with all beings through the traditional brahmavihāra formula: 'May you be joyful and may your joy increase!' This reflects the understanding that 'a joy shared is a joy squared.'

Drawing on the Buddha's approach to positive mental cultivation, the teaching also addresses how to work skillfully with difficult emotional states. Rather than wallowing in negativity or unconsciously spreading it to others, practitioners learn to offer themselves compassionate blessings and gradually shift toward joyful intentions. This practical approach to emotional transformation demonstrates how the cultivation of joy becomes both a personal practice and a gift to the world.

It's spring and the daffodils are out. So I am hoping there is a sense of joy in the air for you. Joy is one of the Illimitables along with love, compassion and equanimity. And just like them it can be developed without boundary, limitlessly. Often in a rushed and overly busy day or in a slow, dull one, our attention fixates on the downers. But notice that there are times when some form of happiness does arise. Often if we are used to excitement we miss out on the sweetness of a quiet joy. Excitement is the subtle enemy of this joy for it is an expression of that desire to be happy in an overly emotional way. High! Quiet, peaceful joy often arises, but because we are so used to joy as excitement we miss it and fail to appreciate it. Perhaps it comes when, after some engagement, you have a quiet cup of tea; or while walking from here to there in a park or along a quiet street; or stopping and resting from what you are doing for a moment. When you notice this calm joy, say to yourself, 'I am feeling a calm joy'. Sit with it and appreciate its qualities. And notice how you feel gently energised by it, not just physically but mentally. Then when you are settled in it and have drunk your fill, offer the cup to others and to all beings. 'May you be joyful and may your joy increase!' After all a joy shared is

a joy squared, for now you are happy because others are happy. Then there's the power of 'positive thinking'. The Buddha is very much into this practice. Even when you feel down, you can note that. Offer yourself a blessing: 'May my unhappiness decrease. May my unhappiness come to an end.' After a little while, offer the same blessings to all beings. And then as it were, put it to the side. And start offering joyful blessings to yourself, something sympathetic to oneself. As you begin to lift, offer it to all beings. This is a much better strategy than one offered by self-pity and resignation. 'I am depressed. I am so depressed. May all beings be depressed!' Or at work: 'I'm bored. I'm so bored. May all beings die of boredom!' So throughout the day, train yourself how to lift the heart with goodwill intentions of joy and see how you feel at the end of the day.

Thank You

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This warm and accessible teaching explores gratitude as a foundational Buddhist virtue that naturally leads to generosity and renunciation. Bhante Bodhidhamma guides readers through various objects of gratitude—from parents and society's gifts to the natural world and even difficult circumstances that serve as teachers. He emphasizes how our human birth itself represents the supreme blessing, offering the most advantageous conditions for spiritual liberation.

The essay demonstrates how cultivating genuine appreciation counters our natural tendency toward criticism and complaint, creating what the author calls a "virtuous circle of gratitude, generosity and renunciation" that gently leads toward awakening. Drawing from both Buddhist wisdom—including the Buddha's teaching about our debt to parents—and Christian mysticism through Meister Eckhart's insight that saying thank you constantly would be sufficient spiritual practice, this teaching presents gratitude as a complete path in itself.

Practical suggestions include spending a day consciously expressing gratitude to everyone and everything encountered. This accessible approach to Dhamma practice shows how appreciation can transform ordinary experiences into opportunities for spiritual development, making this teaching particularly valuable for both newcomers to Buddhism and experienced practitioners seeking to deepen their daily practice.

What a heart-warming, heart-delighting virtue is gratitude! But how often do we contemplate the blessings of what we have received? How often do we consider the graces and fortunes that have fallen our way? Many unasked for. How often has a thank you been heartfelt and not just a social nicety? Anyone who has entered the Dhamma, reflecting on the supreme gift of this life form, the most advantageous for liberation, cannot but feel an aching gratitude towards one's parents. Many may harbour grudges about their upbringing. But do we imagine our parents to be awakened beings? One person said to me that it was only when he became a parent did he stop complaining about his parents! The Buddha said, even if we were to carry our parents on our shoulders all our lives, we would not have repaid the gift of life they gave to us. Thank you! And what about the gifts we have received from our society? Our whole early education is paid for by others. Both the education system and the National Health system arose out of a desire to educate and heal. They arose largely out of the

ideals of egalitarianism and compassion. What about the police? Do we ever feel gratitude when we see a policeman or a police car? Or are we still teenagers, hating authority figures still! And our politicians? Do we really expect them to be saints? Most enter with idealism. They really do want to do something for society – no matter how misguided we may think they are. Would we do any better? It's not that gratitude should blind us to faults, but more that it balances our more 'natural' tendency to criticise, moan and complain. What about a bit of appreciation? A bit of praise? So thank you! What about the gifts of friends, of workmates, of countryside and parks, museums and libraries and a myriad other things. Thank you! And our practice even allows us to see those who dislike us and even do us harm as our teachers! Thank you! Even when things go wrong. We lose our spouses or partners, our friends, our jobs, we can see this as 'an opportunity for growth' – even if we say it through bared teeth. Thank you! And there are things. Things encapsulate the imagination, the skills and the work of hundreds of people. Next time you are holding your mobile, just think how many people were involved in getting the basic materials, in design, in manufacture, in distribution. We can do it with food, clothes, the humble door-stop. An eternity of thank yous! And what about the body that carries us around all day. The mind that can be so clear and precise. The heart that can fill our interior with such delight. Let's not dwell on the empty half of the bottle. Thank you! Gratitude engenders a generous heart. And when our gifts do not carry the heavy labels of 'me' and 'mine', then truly we are renouncing what time and wealth we could have spent on ourselves. So we also develop the virtue of renunciation. In this simple way the virtuous circle of gratitude, generosity and renunciation twirl us gently towards liberation. This is also a path in itself. Meister Eckhart the 13th Century mystic said to say thank you all the time would be enough. If gratitude is not something that comes easy to you, try spending a day saying thank you to everyone and everything and see how you feel by the end of it.

Need, Sufficiency and Greed

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines our relationship to material possessions and consumption through the lens of Buddhist wisdom. Bhante Bodhidhamma uses the Buddha's Four Requisites for monastics—food, shelter, clothing, and medicine—as a framework to reflect on what we truly need in lay life versus what we simply desire. The essay encourages practical contemplation of our spending habits and consumption patterns, particularly relevant during times of economic uncertainty.

The teaching moves from necessity through sufficiency to greed, offering a graduated approach to material contentment. Rather than advocating extreme austerity, it suggests finding balance through honest assessment of genuine needs. The discussion extends beyond personal restraint to consider our relationship with the earth and community, including gratitude for shared resources like healthcare.

This reflection provides practical guidance for developing contentment (santuṭṭhi) and examining the roots of craving (taṇhā) in daily life. It offers concrete exercises like imagining emergency evacuation to clarify true priorities, making Buddhist principles immediately applicable to modern consumer culture and environmental responsibility.

On the positive side, the national debt now laid upon us offers us an opportunity to consider our relationship to consumer goods, indeed everything we spend money on. Some of us, who will have to bear with unemployment, will sadly be forced to do so. So what do we really need? The Buddha defined Four Requisites without which it would be impossible to live the monastic life. Monastics should be happy with the food that is offered to them. But from a lay point of view, what does the body need. Tiramisu? I'm not arguing against tiramisu, you understand. Heaven forbid. But when we look at our eating habits, what do we actually need for nourishment and a healthy body. It is actually surprisingly little and what is more good fresh food is untaxed and therefore, comparatively cheaper than other consumer goods. But it does mean we have to cook for ourselves. As for shelter, the foot of a tree. Well, that's ok in the tropics, but what do we need but a roof over our heads and basic heating. Do we need the fine furnishings? Do we walk around our house in mid-winter in a tea shirt? There was a time when you could buy house coats. Then there's clothing. Monks are to be content with clothing sewn together from rags. Just open up to the fullness of your wardrobe and shoe rack. Make sure you have a glass of water handy. Finally, medicine. The Buddha asked his

monastics to be content with fermented cow's urine. I think I'd have to be pretty desperate to go for that one myself. But consider what a wonderful communal gift the NHS is, especially in this day when a sense of compatriotism, of citizen communion is so lacking. Do we take it for granted? Do we find nothing but fault? Supposing we were suddenly given 5 minutes to evacuate because of a tsunami. What would you take with you? Presuming one has considered this before, I dare say we would take only what we really do need. Then there is the idea of sufficiency. This is a bit more lenient. It's the old adage of 'moderation in all things'. We need clothes for work, clothes for leisure and clothes for pottering about. Food is often a case of conviviality and celebration. Shelter is also home. And we should try to get medicine best to cure our ill health. This is not an exhaustive list of 'consumer goods'. One obvious exception is transport. And this reminds us that sufficiency isn't only about a personal struggle with greed, but also about our relationship to the earth and so to other people. If we approach sufficiency from need, we probably have a better measure of moderation. And then there's greed or if you prefer – retail therapy!

What Values Govern Our Lives?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the fundamental question of what drives our actions and how we measure success. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how motivation based on external validation—seeking power, wealth, and fame for social image—inevitably leads to conflict, hardness of heart, and loss of empathy. When we compete for the same limited resources and recognition, we develop manipulative behaviors and judgmental attitudes that breed pride, envy, and hatred.

The essay clarifies that the problem lies not in success itself, but in our relationship to it. Politicians, entrepreneurs, and artists serve important functions, and influence or wealth may be necessary for positive change. The crucial difference is whether we act from right understanding and right attitude, or from ego-driven motivations.

Bhante offers practical guidance for recognizing wrong motivation through awareness of our negative thoughts and reactions—particularly when we feel unappreciated or disrespected. Following the Buddha's teaching on wise reflection, he advocates cultivating wholesome values like generosity, service, respect, integrity, and loyalty as the foundation for both spiritual development and meaningful engagement with worldly responsibilities.

What values do we have and how do we rate them in importance? How much of our lives is motivated by success in other people's eyes? If this is where most of our energy goes, it will be given to gaining such totems of success as power, riches and fame. When the self is involved in self-aggrandisement, only caring for or overly caring for one's social image, then we are in conflict with the world, for our aim is to accumulate whether it's power, riches or kudos. This puts us into areas where others also seek the same. Conflict, whatever intensity, brings a hardness to the heart for it doesn't care for the rival. This loss of empathy, when generalised, leads to uncaring attitudes towards such areas as human rights – 'Just as I have to fight my gains, so should you!'; and nature, 'Why should I stop plundering the earth until everyone else stops?'. Furthermore, in fighting for what we want in order to look good, we have to learn the tricks of winning such as manipulation, deceit, and making sure we know how to take advantage of hierarchy. And it puts us into a judgemental position, constantly rating others, measuring ourselves against others, leading to pride, envy, jealousy and outright hatred. However, the problem does not lie in power, riches, fame or any other signal of celebrity success. If you want to change the world for the better, you

need to have either influence or power. If you happen to have a good commercial idea or a special international skill, money flows towards you. We may have some talent which lots of people want to enjoy. We would be the poorer society without politicians (beware the cynic!), entrepreneurs and artists. The problem as always is how we relate to this. How do we gain our self-worth without these negative consequences? The answer is to make sure we are coming from the right place: the right understanding and the right attitude. Luckily, there is an easy way to recognise that we are acting out of wrong understanding and attitude. It's when we become aware of our negative and conceited thoughts and any other unwholesome reactions. It's when we don't 'feel appreciated', 'praised enough', 'valued'. When people don't 'show the respect owed to us' and so on. This is why the Buddha asks us to reflect wisely. For the best spiritual results we need to imbue what we do with such virtues as generosity, service, respect for others, appreciation of others' work, integrity, loyalty – the list goes on.

Values in Mine Own Eyes

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the fundamental difference between seeking validation through external success and developing genuine self-acceptance. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how our psychological dependence on others' approval creates relationships based on 'what can you do for me' rather than authentic care and generosity. When we cultivate self-acceptance, we naturally become more interested in others' wellbeing, can rejoice in their success without jealousy, and form relationships based on love rather than psychological need. This inner freedom extends to caring for family, community involvement, and developing personal values that arise from wisdom rather than social conformity. The essay provides practical guidance on developing these qualities through awareness of our motivations, particularly noticing our reactions when we don't receive expected appreciation or face criticism. By applying sati (Right Awareness) and wise reflection to examine our underlying intentions, we can gradually shift from ego-driven motivations to wholesome intentions rooted in mettā (loving-kindness) and genuine care for others' welfare.

Generally speaking, we have part of us that seeks our values dependent on what society calls success in order to make us feel good about ourselves. But there is also a part of us that is self-accepting. The more we are self-accepting, the less we will feel the need for others to praise us. So we don't care so much for the trappings of 'success'. Our work in itself and our life-style are self-satisfying. Because we are not so caught up in how we look in others' eyes, we can open up to the other. We relate not from a position of 'what should you do for me to make me feel good' or 'what should I do to make you think highly of me, so I can feel good about myself', but 'what can I do for you', 'What can we share'. We will find ourselves more interested in the other, more caring. When this is generalised we begin to care about the environment, about human right issues, about other people's sufferings. Because we don't seek praise, since self-acceptance brings joy-in-oneself, we can admire others and rejoice in their success. Because we don't need friends for our psychological well-being, we can enter into generous friendships. Because our relationship with our family is based on love rather than psychological need, we care for them without a feeling of imposed obligation or demand – even should they be demanding or try to make us feel obliged. We are willing to put ourselves out to do what we can for the sick and elderly. We don't experience them as a burden. When this is generalised, we may find ourselves more involved in society as a whole, perhaps in some charity work. Because we don't set our values by the standards

of others, we can be more objective about social standards and we find we can form standards that are true to ourselves. They need not necessarily be any different, but they arise from within us. We don't impose them on ourselves because we want the admiration of others. How to develop these qualities? As usual, we have to be aware of our motivations. Many are by now so habitual they are subliminal. We are not always aware of them. It is by way of the reaction we have that tells us what the original motivation was. Should we notice any painful or unwholesome reaction, we can stop and reflect, and thereby see any unwholesome aspect of our original motivation. Why are we upset when someone doesn't say 'thank you'? Or why do we feel so belittled when someone criticises us? Or why do we feel bored or averse to what we are doing when we were once very interested and engaged? Once we become aware of unwholesome intentions, we can make sure that when we do something similar or meet the same person again we approach with the right motivation. As always, the trick is mindfulness and wise reflection – and Right Intention.

Living in the Now: Planning for the Future

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores the apparent paradox between Buddhist present-moment awareness and the practical necessity of planning for the future. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how we can engage in future planning while remaining grounded in the here and now, rather than becoming lost in fantasy or expectation.

Using the vivid example of planning a trip to Acapulco, the essay contrasts two approaches to future planning. The first approach involves realistic, purposeful planning based on genuine interests and clear intentions—appreciating art, food, and natural beauty. This type of planning remains rooted in present-moment awareness while making practical arrangements. The second approach involves getting carried away by glossy advertisements and romantic fantasies, leading to unrealistic expectations and inevitable disappointment.

The teaching reveals how mindful planning actually supports present-moment living by creating space for open-minded exploration and genuine experience. When we plan with clarity rather than desire-driven fantasy, we arrive at our destination—whether literal or metaphorical—with the capacity to engage authentically with whatever we encounter. This practical wisdom applies equally to major life decisions like marriage, children's education, and retirement, showing how Right Intention and clear seeing can transform necessary planning from a distraction into a support for mindful living.

There are so many times when we have to plan for the future. Marriages have to be organised; children's schooling has to be sorted; and always the shopping list and the shopping – and what will I do when I retire. How can we live in the here and now, if we are forever planning a future? Future planned events impact upon the present. You wouldn't be getting up so early but for the budget flight at an ungodly hour that happens to go to the place we've decided to visit - Acapulco. For this to have materialised there was a time in the past when the initial idea came to mind. Perhaps it grew from a love of Mexican art - you really want to see those murals by Diego Rivera. And you are interested in Mexican food. And there are miles of beaches and the possibility of scuba-diving in sea laced with tropical fish, shipwrecks and even an underwater statue of the Virgin! The idea, laced with desire as such ideas usually are, soon evolved into a plan. Information was gathered. Decisions were made and the flight was booked. But we did not let desire confound us into a daydream. We have good purpose to go there – to appreciate the art, the food, the sea. Let's take different tack. Leafing through a magazine,

there's an advert for Acapulco. There it is, everything dreamed of. Beautiful bodies on the beach soaking up the sun, glitzy nightlife, gorgeous restaurants, dancing till dawn. The adventure, the food, the romance. Waking out of the reverie, the tea has gone cold. No matter, Acapulco it is. The first planning was realistic and purposeful. The second, ungrounded, pie in the sky. The first should allow us to land with an open mind, exploring what has to be discovered. The second is mired in expectation. When we get there it rains, there's a nationwide strike and no-one turns up remotely attractive. The first returns you home contented with the fruit of open-minded experience. The second dumps you back home disappointed, disconsolate and that awful feeling of having wasted hard earned money. The first planning was living in the now, planning for the future. The second was, while planning, living in a daydream and on arrival unable to live in the here and now!

Music

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay examines the profound influence of music and sound on our emotional and physical well-being from a Buddhist perspective. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how music functions as 'the language of the heart,' capable of transforming or deepening both positive and negative emotional states. He discusses the essential role of chanting in monastic traditions, explaining how even doctrinal recitations like paṭicca samuppāda (Dependent Origination) become imbued with devotional feeling when chanted, and how the Metta Sutta creates joy and relief from life's burdens.

The essay offers a practical meditation technique for using peaceful music therapeutically. When experiencing negative emotions like anxiety, practitioners are guided to feel the emotion purely as physical sensation without mental elaboration, then introduce calming music (such as Allegri's Miserere) to create a contrasting peaceful mood. By holding both the original negative feeling and the music-induced calm in awareness simultaneously, one can allow the peaceful energy to penetrate and soothe the distress.

While acknowledging that complete healing requires the eradication of the three unwholesome roots (lobha, dosa, moha), Bhante Bodhidhamma presents music and natural sounds as skillful means for providing temporary relief and healing to burdened hearts, emphasizing the importance of mindful attention to what we expose ourselves to through sound.

Music is the language of the heart and therefore can change our moods or deepen them, both negative and positive. No-one doubts the power of music over the heart whether it be pop songs, patriotic marches or symphonies. So just as it is important to know what we put into our minds by way of adverts, reading matter, visual entertainment and so on, so it is important what we put into our heart by way of sounds. The sounds of nature be it the trill of a bird or the bark of a crow; the rustle of wind through grass or the clash of thunder, all create resonances within the heart. And where there is emotion there is the body so that our emotional life also affects our physical well-being or lack of it. In all monastic forms music plays an essential role. The chant offers the heart the ability to develop devotion. Even chanting Dependent Origination, which is none other than a list of physical and mental properties that show how suffering arises and ceases, becomes something more when chanted. It is imbued with feeling. It may be peacefulness or praise or thankfulness. This swells the heart with joy, welcome relief if the heart is otherwise weighed down with the worries and cares of

life. This is more so if we chant the Metta Sutta, the Discourse on Loving Kindness. And there are many other auspicious chants to lighten the heart and fill it with quiet joy. Here is a way that sound can be used to heal the heart of its negative states. Sitting with a negative mood, say anxiety, we bury our attention into the feel of it, not allowing it to escape into the mind and create stories. (Remember it is through thought and imagination that the heart develops its attitudes both unwholesome and wholesome.) Feeling an emotion or mood as simply a physical feeling, allows us to see it for what it is - just a form of energy. Indeed if we sink into it, we can describe its contents - agitation, nausea, heat, and so on. Holding our position steady there, should we now listen to some peaceful music - I suggest Allegri's Miserere Me (Oh pity me!) - see how the music creates another mood. Holding this mood in attention while not losing the feel of anxiety, sink that peaceful, loving mood into the agitation, the nausea, the heat. This can never be a complete healing, of course, until the Three Roots of Acquisitiveness, Aversion and Delusion are eradicated. Indeed, until they are, unless mindful, we will continue to develop unwholesome states of mind. But even so, music and the sounds of nature can be a balm to a burdened heart. (You may be interested in this website: www.collegeofsoundhealing.co.uk/)

Time

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This contemplative essay examines the difference between objective time as measurement and our subjective experience of time's passage. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores various ways we relate to time - from feeling rushed and controlled by it, to finding it boring without stimulation, to procrastinating with spiritual practice. The teaching draws parallels between our relationship with time and the development of mindful awareness, suggesting that our task is learning to be with events in an equanimous way rather than being tossed about by circumstances. Using the metaphor of the ocean's deep steady flow beneath surface movement, the essay points toward finding inner stillness while remaining present with life's constant changes. This reflects core vipassanā principles of developing sammā sati (Right Awareness) to observe the arising and passing of phenomena without being caught in reactivity. The teaching concludes with the paradox of 'going with the flow' while maintaining conscious presence - finding the balance between acceptance and wise engagement with life's unfolding moments.

What is time? Objectively it is a way of measuring the distance between events: morning to evening, the passing days and years, between dentist appointments, work and vacation. But this is not how we experience time. Sometimes time is so slow : at others we wonder where it's gone. So how do you feel about time? How do you experience the passage of time? And how does your relationship to time, make you use time? Do we want to dominate it? Be in control. Are we frustrated when we don't get the things done we ought to have got done in a certain time? Don't feel there's enough time to get all the things done that have to be done? Time as a perpetual rush. Crying out for more time! Or is time fulfilling only when we are spending time with others. Time on my own seems pointless, boring, unfulfilling. Or is time a bore unless there is something exciting going on. The greater the emotional intensity - the romance, the joy, the success - makes time worth living. Does time have to be useful? Always doing something. Doing nothing brings a hopelessness, even a despair. What's it all about if it's not about doing something, anything. Do I feel I have all the time in the world? If it doesn't get done today, tomorrow will do. Why force this whole liberation thing. Meditate, meditate, meditate!!! Crazy. Relax. We're not going anywhere. There's nothing to achieve. Progress! For heavens sake, lets just be happy with the way things are. Let me rest. Let me sleep. I once watched a clock second finger ticking round and round for two hours. I was pleasantly surprised that by the end of it, I felt calm and equanimous. But the time spent to

that time was full of a feeling of 'wasting time'. Now if time is a measure between events, our task is a way of being with events in a basically equanimous way. Just as the ocean has a deep, steady flow and the surface is full of movement, so we need to find this deep steadiness and yet stay with the surface movement. So here by time we mean living, we mean life as lived. But it also suggests awareness. For without awareness we will be tossed hither and thither by the waves. Time as flux : time standing still. To be still in the flux, that's the discovery - and the attainment. Or to put it another way - 'go with the flow'. But then we must beware! As one wit pointed out - only dead fish go with the flow! (Christian mystics talk of nunc stans and nunc fluens - the still now and the flowing now.)

Our Daily Breaks

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This practical teaching explores how ordinary moments like having tea and biscuits can become opportunities for Dhamma practice. Bhante Bodhidhamma begins by examining the intention behind our desire for these small pleasures, questioning whether they arise from greed (lobha) while acknowledging that the Buddha did not teach self-mortification. The essay emphasizes that pleasure itself is not unwholesome when approached skillfully.

The teaching provides detailed guidance for transforming a tea break into mindful ceremony: waiting attentively at the kettle, preparing the drink with deliberate care, and sitting in contemplation of the labor and natural processes that brought the tea and biscuit to us. Each sip and nibble becomes an opportunity to cultivate present-moment awareness, bodily pleasure, and mental delight while sharing joy with all beings through loving-kindness (mettā).

The practice concludes with mindful observation of how we feel when the break ends—whether with craving for more, gratitude, or peaceful ease. This simple yet profound approach demonstrates how daily activities can support the development of Right Awareness (sammā sati) and transform routine moments into gateways for spiritual growth and the cultivation of wholesome mental states.

If at home or at work and alone, we decide to have a cup of tea, herbal or proper, or coffee - with a biscuit. How can we turn that into a Dhamma practice? First of all there is the intention. Always, the intention needs to be investigated. It may not be a physical thing. The body does not need tea and definitely not coffee. Nor does it need a biscuit. In fact bread and water will do. Is it just greed, then? How do we feel if we say – yes it is greed? Sad? Sad at losing those little delicious moments that brighten up the day. Sad, knowing at the same time that we simply can't renounce tea and biscuits and that this may very well be the great stumbling block on our way to Nibbana? Tea or Nibbana, is that the question? First, let us remember that the Buddha did not teach 'self-mortification'. In other words, he did not say that pleasure in itself was unwholesome, unless unethical of course. Taking pleasure in pinching someone else's biscuit - and eating it, is surely 'taking what is not freely given'. Now pleasure brings happiness. It affects our mental state. Happiness, born of pleasure that is not by way of indulgence, has in turn a good effect on the body. So let us use this occasion to establish a wholesome state of mind. To do everything deliberately and with a sense of ease, we stop and make clear to

ourselves our intention - to turn this tea break into a delightful ceremony. Having chosen the beverage, why not stand sentinel at the kettle and wait for it to boil, continuing to let go of any agitation. Wait till the boiling has all but stopped. Take time to make the drink. Stir the drink gently and quietly as an expression of our mental state. Sit comfortably and gaze upon the tea and biscuit. Contemplate all the labour and expense involved - and the wonder of nature. We pay full attention to the process, to the tasting. We feel the bodily pleasure. We experience the mental state. Sip after sip, nibble upon nibble, we bring delight to the body, delight to the mind. Sip after sip, nibble upon nibble, we take the opportunity to share our joy with others. Family, friends, colleagues ... all beings. May you be joyful! May your joy increase! We sit with the empty cup and the plate, dotted with crumbs. How do we feel coming to the end? Are we still aching for more, just one more biscuit? Was there some subliminal desire that now arises as unsatisfactoriness? Are we suffering the consequences of not acknowledging our indulgence? Does an existential angst arise at the thought that all good things also come to an end? Or is there a quiet joy arising from an act well completed? Or perhaps we are sitting with a heart aglow with gratitude? Or simply at ease. The body still, the heart calm and the mind silent and spacious. Ready and open to the next moment. Let this be our aspiration: Oh, may my life end like this!

On the Virtue of Visiting a Cemetery

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the profound spiritual value of contemplating mortality through visiting cemeteries, drawing on both medieval Christian traditions of memento mori and Buddhist teachings on death meditation. The essay examines how the Buddha categorized different levels of awakening to death's reality—from those who wake up merely hearing about death to those who only understand when facing their own mortality.

The teaching emphasizes that while death contemplation initially appears morbid or depressing, it serves as a gateway to deeper understanding of impermanence (anicca) and the ultimate refuge of Nibbāna. Walking among gravestones, observing family names spanning centuries, and reflecting on our shared human destiny can transform fear into wisdom. The essay suggests that by directly confronting our terror of death—'entering the monster's jaws'—we discover it to be merely a creation of our own fearful minds.

This contemplation connects to traditional Buddhist death meditation practices and the understanding that there exists a 'sphere of experience' beyond birth and death. The teaching offers practical guidance for using cemetery visits as a form of insight meditation, helping practitioners move beyond resignation or hopelessness toward the transcendent understanding that characterizes the Buddha's path to awakening.

(Best in Spring! No better time than to contemplate our mortality.)Every city, every town, every little village, they all have cemeteries. They are ubiquitous. They are everywhere where there is human habitation. And it's because people die. In fact everyone who has lived has died.Pretty obvious?!Yet even so we need to remind ourselves that life is short: 'life is hard and then we die'.At first this seems so negative. We love life. We want to live. Why talk about death, for heaven's sake. We all know death comes. We don't need to rub our noses in it.In medieval times it was thought good practice to have a memento mori,some object that reminded you of death in the house. The skull was thought to be especially beneficial.In Buddhist understanding too, death acts as a reminder of deeper truth. The Buddha said that there are those who wake up even on the mention of death, others not till someone famous dies, still others not until someone close dies, and there are those unfortunates who don't wake up till it is their turn to die.Fat lot of use making sense of our lives on the point of death!So there's a deep wisdom to be had in walking around the local cemetery. We see the same surnames cropping up. Stones dating back two, three hundred years. Here they all are, our forebears.

Their actions made our history. Now at this very moment I am also making history and there will come a time when it stops and this body will join them in some field, or its ashes scattered into water or into the wind - somewhere here on this earth. 'The way they came, I must also go. As their body is now, mine will also be.' 'Life is uncertain : death is certain.' There's a certain comfort in knowing others have trod the same path. There's a relief in embracing a certain fate. 'This is the way it is.' But such reflections may bring a poignancy into our lives, may lead to resignation and eventually hopelessness. However, our path is imbued with a transcendent understanding. The Buddha taught there is a 'sphere of experience' where there is no birth and no death. How can the contemplation of death and dying help us to experience Nibbana? It is by contemplating death, we enter directly into the monster's jaws. Feel the terror, hold firm, knowing it is but a chimera. When the roaring ceases, we find it to have been but our own poor, sweating self.

Pity, Sorrow and Compassion

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this insightful reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines three distinct emotional responses to others' suffering, revealing how our sense of self can distort our reactions. He begins by exploring 'pity' in its negative sense - a feeling that maintains separation and may harbor hidden smugness or even schadenfreude. Through honest vipassanā observation, practitioners can become aware of these subliminal attitudes that contradict our self-image.

Bhante contrasts this with genuine sorrow - a direct resonance with another's pain that can be physically felt, illustrated through poignant examples including his own encounter with a suffering child in Calcutta. However, he identifies compassion as the essential transformation: the active desire to alleviate suffering that moves us beyond mere feeling into beneficial action.

The teaching emphasizes practical application in daily life and meditation practice. Rather than self-condemnation when we notice the conceit of pity arising, Bhante advocates for simple acknowledgment without acting on these impulses, allowing genuine sorrow to naturally develop into compassionate action. This approach offers a concrete method for practitioners to work skillfully with the persistent delusion of self while cultivating the brahmavihāra of genuine compassion.

Pity - feeling sorry for: I'm using this term in its negative sense. When we hear ourselves say, 'I pity Jack', how does this 'I' define itself? There may be a genuine sorrow for the person and their situation, but somehow this 'I' stands apart from it. It is saying to itself: he does deserve it; he's such an idiot; I'd never get myself into that situation; thank heavens I'm not like that. There may be somewhere a smug satisfaction. Indeed, there could be there, quietly ignored, a feeling of schadenfreude, a sense of joy in another's suffering. Just because we are not aware of these subliminal feelings, doesn't mean they don't have effect. I'm sure we've heard that false tone in another's voice, that overly affectation of sorrow on the face. But are we aware when we also 'pity' someone. It's often a case that in vipassana, if we honestly note what the mind is thinking, that we wake up to these hitherto quietly suppressed attitudes which don't fit into our esteemed self-definition. Sorrow is a genuine feel for the suffering of another. It can actually be felt as a direct resonance of the other's pain, both psychological and physical. I know someone who felt the pain of her daughter when she broke her arm.

She had to have her arm in a sling. The daughter felt nothing. This sort of 'sorrow' is very rare of course, but all of us are touched when we see someone suffer, especially if it is a child or animal, for their innocence and vulnerability add poignancy to the situation. I was once in Calcutta and as I turned a corner there was a little girl, squatting in the dry, dirt road sucking on a black-brown desiccated banana skin. To this day I can still feel the shock in my heart. But did it move me to do anything? That to me is the difference between sorrow and compassion. Compassion is the desire to alleviate suffering. It moves one to do something. Anything – even if it is only to try to influence someone else to do something. I'm sorry to say I did nothing to help that little girl. And I'm left with an unrequited sorrow. That is the penalty when sorrow does not transform into compassion. So, since the delusion of self is always active, how might we proceed? It is to acknowledge the conceit of pity, but not denigrate oneself for it. It's enough to acknowledge it and determine not to act on it. To feel instead the genuine sorrow and to act on that. In this simple way, our pity diminishes and our compassion increases.

Why Are We Asked to Observe Impermanence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores the profound practice of observing impermanence (anicca) as taught in the Mahasi vipassanā tradition, revealing how this fundamental perception transforms our relationship to experience and leads to liberation. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how slowing down through careful noting allows practitioners to witness the momentary arising and passing away of individual acts of cognition, including all five khandhas (aggregates of form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness).

The essay demonstrates how perceiving impermanence at this refined level naturally leads to understanding both dukkha (the unsatisfactoriness of attachment) and anattā (not-self), as we recognize that we are not these passing mental and physical phenomena. When moments of cognition end, awareness itself remains present—revealing what the Buddha called 'the deathless' and pointing toward the true nature of Buddhō, the One Who Knows.

Practical guidance is offered for bringing this understanding into daily life through simple stopping practices—acknowledging when actions of body, speech, or mind come to an end, allowing any arising attachments to be witnessed and released. This accessible yet profound teaching shows how the careful observation of impermanence becomes a direct path to momentary glimpses of Nibbāna.

First as we become aware of how everything we are experiencing is simply a flow of events, coming and going, this slowly percolates through the system and changes our relationship to beings and things. As the Buddha says: nothing in the world is worth holding on to. Why? Because nothing remains anyway. This is how clearly perceiving impermanence undermines the dukkha—suffering and unsatisfactoriness of attachment. However, in Mahasi vipassana we are asked to look more closely, more minutely. This is why we make the great effort to slow down. Slowing down the body, slows the mind. Stopping and noting intention brings us back into an awareness of momentary moments. As this gathers in focus, time collapses into minute moments of arising and passing away. We are not seeing the world out there arising and passing away, but individual acts of cognition. The amazing thing is that when a moment of cognition comes to an end, still there is awareness. This is how we come to realise that we are not acts of cognition, which include all the khandas. The Aggregates of our physicality, perceptions, feelings, mental states and acts of cognition are not me, not mine, not a substantial self. This is how by perceiving impermanence helps us to realise anatta—Not-self. The co-

rollary is to experience what we are – that awareness. Awareness is the deathless. This is momentary dropping of the fetters of ignorance and delusive desire. A moment, like a flash of lightening into Nibbana. So it is through the observation of impermanence that both suffering/unsatisfactoriness and anatta not-self are comprehended. But more, we come to realise that awareness, sati, is itself the One Who Knows, Buddho! How can we bring this sort of observation into ordinary daily life? Very simple. Whatever you are doing, when it finishes, STOP! Acknowledge that that action of thought, speech or deed has come to an end and will never happen again. It may be that the emotional attachments begin to rise there and then – nostalgia, grief, disappointment and so on. If we can wait for these to pass, all well and good. Otherwise recall the incident at the evening meditation and let them burn out there. In this way, in ordinary daily life, we become aware of impermanence, of how attachment causes suffering and in allowing it all to rise and pass away, we realise it was all not me, not mine.

Sublimation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the natural process of spiritual sublimation, where unwholesome mental states transform directly into wholesome ones without intermediate stages. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws from the scientific concept of sublimation—matter changing from solid to gas without becoming liquid—to illustrate how selfishness becomes generosity, aversion becomes love, and cruelty becomes compassion as described in Right Attitude (sammā saṅkappa), the second step of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The essay explores the Four Brahmavihāras (Divine Abodes)—mettā, karuṇā, muditā, and upekkhā—as sublime states that arise naturally through purification of mind and heart. Drawing from the Mettā Sutta, it emphasizes that while we must actively cultivate virtue, the transformation of negative emotions happens spontaneously within awareness. The key insight from vipassanā practice is that we need only observe unwholesome states with patient attention rather than actively trying to change them.

This teaching offers practical guidance for meditation practitioners on working skillfully with difficult emotions, emphasizing the importance of opening to inner negativity with awareness rather than suppression. It demonstrates how not-self (anattā) manifests in the natural arising of positive qualities without personal effort or control.

Sublimate comes from the Latin, *sublimare* : to lift up. It's used in science to describe the action of a solid turning into a gas without becoming a liquid. Ice, for instance, has to turn into water before it vapourises, whereas naphthalene, the smelly bit in moth-balls, vapourises without turning into a liquid. In the second step of Eightfold Path, Right Attitude, the Buddha lists three sublimations: from selfishness to generosity, from aversion to love and from cruelty to compassion. There's no in-between state. We might use the word transformation, but sublimation gives the idea of rising to something higher – indeed towards the 'sublime'. The Four Illimitables, since there is no perceived extent to which they can be developed are: love, compassion, joy and peace. But they are also termed Brahmavihara, The Dwelling Place of the Highest Gods, i.e. the most sublime of exalted states. The important insight is to see that it happens naturally. In Zen they say: with wisdom compassion arises naturally. As we purify the mind of its delusion and the heart of its negativity, all that is negative sublimates into its opposite. Vipassana has a key role to play here for when we are in contact with the raw feelings of an unwholesome emotion or mood, we are allowing it to sublimate. The real insight is the

realisation that we don't have to do anything! It happens all on its own. This is also another insight into not-self, not me. What we have to do, of course, is to bear patiently with it, feel it, observe it. We have to attend to it. For sublimation can only happen within awareness, otherwise negativity remains suppressed. Therefore, we need to open up to our inner 'demons'. This doesn't mean that we should not actively develop virtue. The Buddha tells us in the Metta Sutta, the Discourse on Goodwill that we do need to develop all the attitudes associated with love. He uses a mother's love for her children to illustrate this: Just as a mother protects with her child at the risk of her own life, So one should cherish all living beings. We can understand metta here to be love in the widest sense of that term. Love as to how we develop our connection with all beings and the world as right relationship. And the sublimation of negative, unwholesome states is a necessary part of this process.

Righteous Anger: Plain Anger

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This practical teaching examines the Buddhist understanding that there is no such thing as 'righteous anger' - all anger is unwholesome and unskillful according to the Buddha's teachings. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws a crucial distinction between anger-driven aggression and skillful assertiveness, which arises from equanimity and compassion rather than heated emotion. The essay provides detailed guidance for working with anger both when it arises in ourselves and when we encounter it in others.

The teaching emphasizes mindfulness of the physical signs of anger - heat in the chest, bodily tightness, and aggressive intentions - as key moments for intervention through conscious breathing and bodily relaxation. When facing others' anger, the guidance focuses on listening to what is being said rather than how it's expressed, allowing the person to feel heard while maintaining one's own emotional equilibrium.

Practical examples from daily life situations, including workplace conflicts and phone confrontations, illustrate how compassionate assertiveness can defuse anger while still maintaining appropriate boundaries. The essay demonstrates how Right View can be upheld without rigidity, remaining open to others' perspectives while standing firmly in one's understanding. This teaching offers valuable tools for transforming potentially harmful emotional reactions into opportunities for practicing patience, compassion, and wise speech in challenging interpersonal situations.

There's no such thing as righteous anger in the Buddha's teaching. All anger is unwholesome and unskillful. You may get what you want, but there'll be a price to pay. We talk about assertiveness and aggression. This is such a useful distinction to make. Assertiveness arises out of equanimity, compassion - and righteousness. We seem to have forgotten the old maxim to count to ten before you do anything when angry. For anger will always distort in some way, mainly by exaggeration. Allowing the anger to calm, we get a balanced view. We can actually see the situation from the other's point of view. This means we are equanimous, that is, impartial. To see the other's point of view is an act of love, of compassion and it allows the other to be heard. When someone is heard, their anger usually subsides. And there is a right view about things. And we should stand by our understandings, but not in a tight way. It may be the other has something to say which modifies our view, if only a little. When we are angry, should we be mindful, we will feel the heat arise in the chest. We shall feel a tightness - the first signs of attack!

We shall see the beginnings of angry intentions. At that point, relax the body. Breathe in deep and breathe out slowly. No need to make it obvious! If the situation is too much, it's often best to excuse oneself. But what if someone is angry with us? Before you react with anger, take your attention to what they are saying, not how they are saying it. Give them all the time they need. When they have finished, indicate that you have been listening. Then answer appropriately in a calm voice. 'You've got the wrong person.' 'Are you sure ...?' 'Sorry, I didn't realise ...' My first job was as a rep for a company making audio-visuals for school. At one school a teacher came blazing at me, accusing us of illegal practices. I remember I quickly apologised if this were true. I asked to phone the boss who said there had been a misunderstanding or mistake and all monies would be repaid. The teacher went out of his way to introduce me to other members of staff. What if you work in an office and abuse spews down the phone? Same as above, but I hear so much about this, that maybe it's time for zero tolerance. Try this: let the person express their anger. Then remain silent. They should come back with something along the lines – 'Are you listening?' or 'Are you there?' Then to say calmly, 'I understand what you're saying. And I can understand why you are angry. But can I ask you to phone back when you are in a calmer mood so that we can talk about this rationally?' Or some such indication that you are not prepared to talk in the teeth of anger and put the phone down. (If you try this, tell me how it goes – thanks.)

A Pet's Endgame

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This compassionate essay examines how Buddhist teachings guide our ethical decisions regarding dying animals, contrasting Western philosophical views with Buddhist understanding of animal sentience. Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the Western dismissal of animal consciousness from Aristotle through Descartes, who viewed animals as mere machines without souls or capacity for suffering.

In stark contrast, the Buddha recognized animals as sentient beings capable of both taṇhā (unwholesome desire) and virtuous action, subject to the same laws of kamma and rebirth as humans. This recognition fundamentally changes how we should approach end-of-life care for our animal companions.

The essay provides practical guidance for pet owners facing difficult decisions, emphasizing the importance of examining our true motivations. Are we acting from genuine compassion to relieve the animal's suffering, or from self-centered concerns about cost, convenience, or our own emotional discomfort? The teaching offers a method for ensuring wholesome intention guides our actions: consciously empowering compassionate motivation through mindful repetition when making these profound decisions.

This exploration of Buddhist ethics in everyday life demonstrates how ancient wisdom applies to modern dilemmas, helping practitioners cultivate genuine compassion while understanding the karmic implications of our choices.

This essay came about because someone got in touch with me about their poorly cat. They decided in the end to attend to her until she died. Western understanding of animals begins with Aristotle. He argued that animals have no moral responsibility and therefore no rights. But then slaves also had none – and women! St. Thomas Aquinas, the great Christian philosopher of the middle ages, then declared they did not have souls. That means that they are temporary creations by God who annihilate on death, for only souls are eternal. The final nail in the coffin took away sentience from animals. Descartes said they were simply machines, automata – they cannot reason or feel pain. <http://www.animaethics.org.uk/descartes.html> The Buddha on the other hand, as do the other religions of India, declared that animals are sentient beings. Anyone who has owned a pet intuitively knows when their dog or cat is suffering just as we do when another human suffers. (After all we only take their word for it. We cannot feel another's pain!) Again the Buddha taught that all sentient beings have taṇhā – unwholesome de-

sire, but also that all beings could act virtuously. Do Animals Have Morals TED And that they also take rebirth! And that it was their ethical actions, just as for ourselves that was the determinant factor as to how they would fare on. This only makes sense if we define ethics in the broadest terms as relationship. It seems, therefore, that we ought to treat dying animals as we would humans. We should try to take as much pain out of their dying process, make them as comfortable as we can, and let nature take its course. If the pain cannot be relieved, then to end their lives maybe the compassionate thing to do. This brings into sharp relief what might our personal intention be to put an end to a suffering animal's life? Is it because we ourselves can't bear to see them suffer? Or is it because it will cost too much to keep her going and she will die anyway. It may, of course, be too costly. Or because we are not acknowledging that we don't want the bother of caring for an old or sick animal and rationalise the killing. Such motivations are unwholesome, and will not improve our own karmic fruit. The one wholesome motivation would be compassion for our pet and the wish to relieve their suffering. Supposing now we have various intentions in the mind – a situation we find more often than not. When the time comes to make a decision, we make sure that the right intention is the fully conscious one by repeating it to ourselves. This means that intention has been empowered and not the other ones.

Downers

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this deeply personal teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma distinguishes between ordinary life 'downers' and clinical depression, sharing wisdom learned from his mother's resilience through love and humor. He explores how resistance to difficult emotions—getting 'depressed about being depressed'—often transforms manageable low moods into serious suffering.

Drawing on the Buddha's instructions to 'feel feelings in feelings' and experience 'mental states in mental states' from the Satipaṭṭhāna teachings, Bhante demonstrates how vipassanā meditation offers a radical alternative to avoidance strategies. Rather than seeking distraction through entertainment or consumption, the Buddhist path invites us to meet dark emotions with radical acceptance, equanimity, and patient forbearance.

This teaching reveals how non-aggressive awareness allows difficult emotions to express themselves fully and naturally exhaust their energy, preventing them from hijacking our lives. Bhante shows how this mindful relationship with suffering becomes a doorway to understanding the Buddha's fundamental teaching: how we create dukkha for ourselves and how we can bring all suffering to an end through the transformative practice of Dhamma.

There was a time when depression was not so psychologised and medicalised. People talked of being 'under the weather'. It was seen as part of life. Sometimes you were 'a bit down'. You were told to 'pull your socks up' and 'get on with it'. These downers are to be distinguished from mental illness. So long as we are feeling 'a bit depressed', the big problem is we get depressed about it. Or angry about it. Even anxious about it. That's what can drive 'a bit depressed' into a serious depression. My first teacher was my mother. She would now be considered to suffer from some degree of clinical anxiety driven depression. She ended up with a concoction of pills so beloved of doctors. But she that age group and complained of lacking energy, an anxious stomach and headaches. She told me later in life that what kept her going was her mothering of four children. That was the first lesson. Just keep doing what you have to do - and do it with love. She was a sanguine type and enjoyed a slapstick type humour. She'd stick a needle in your bum while watching TV. And she transformed when she was with friends. No matter how she felt, she engaged and found happiness and fun in their company. That was the second precious lesson. You've got to laugh! These two strategies I believe kept me from going under, but they did not tackle the problem at root which was my rela-

relationship to my 'downers'. It was not until I began to meditate that I was able to really grapple with them. The Buddha asks us to really confront these feelings. Not in an aggressive way, but in a welcoming, kind, open-hearted way. He has a way of expressing this intimate embrace. He instructs us to 'feel feelings in feelings', to experience 'mental states in mental states'. In other words no barriers caused by aversion or fear. For when we do not want to feel them, we seek distraction. Anything will do. Watch TV. Eat chocolates. And worse! And if these poor strategies fail, then we truly begin to go under. It takes a lot of trust to open up to these dark whirlpools. At times we may feel overwhelmed. That's when we need the teacher or the therapist. But as we persist we see we are creating a different relationship towards aching states of mind and harrowing emotions. This is one of radical acceptance: this is the way it is; equanimity: open-hearted, open-minded, no resistance; and patient forbearance: a willingness to bear with mental pain. When we discover this new relationship of non-aggression and non-fear, something magical begins to happen. It is as though all that dark, oppressive turbulence is allowed to express itself fully and in so doing exhausts itself. Slowly these moods no longer hijack our lives. They become less dense and don't hang around so long. Then we begin to realise we have found the way not simply to bring depression to an end, but all suffering. This is the gift of Dhamma the Buddha gave to humanity - the understanding of how we create suffering for ourselves and how we can bring it all to an end.

Discipline: Self-discipline

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay reframes the concept of discipline from its Victorian associations with punishment to the Buddha's approach of gentle, progressive training. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how the original Latin meaning of 'disciplina' as instruction and knowledge aligns more closely with Buddhist training than later harsh interpretations. Drawing from the Amballaṭṭhikā-rāhulovāda Sutta, where the Buddha gently instructs his seven-year-old son Rāhula about truthfulness, the essay demonstrates how spiritual development flourishes through encouragement rather than self-recrimination.

The teaching advocates for 'positive reinforcement' in spiritual practice—acknowledging the natural consequences of unwholesome actions without adding unnecessary self-punishment, while celebrating progress in virtue. When we act unskillfully, experiencing the inner consequences of shame or remorse is sufficient; what matters is the firm resolve not to repeat the mistake. The essay also references the Buddha's joyful response to Koṇḍañña's first attainment of stream-entry, showing how spiritual mentors celebrate students' achievements.

This approach offers practical guidance for developing the self-discipline necessary for abandoning unwholesome habits and cultivating beautiful ones, essential foundations for both sīla (ethical conduct) and the broader path to awakening. The teaching emphasizes developing inner strength through wisdom and compassion rather than force.

Dolphin<http://understanddolphins.tripod.com/dolphintraining.html> Discipline is one of those Victorian words we don't like the sound of. It stings with 'corporal punishment'. But that's not where the word began. It's always interesting to go back to the root word and see how it transforms with usage and time. Discipline in Latin means instruction and knowledge and the one who wanted this was called a discipulus/a disciple. By the Middle Ages it had come to mean 'mortification by scourging oneself'! In other words a rather harsh way of developing self-discipline. It now has the meaning of 'the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behaviour, using punishment to correct disobedience'. There is no punishment in any of the Buddha's teachings. And he found self-mortification to be just more suffering. Yet, he demands of his ordained Sangha, the highest level of self-discipline. And of the lay Sangha a set of training rules which when followed diligently, lead to a base of purification. So how can we develop self-discipline without beating ourselves up? Or getting someone else to beat us up? First of all, we

need to find a definition for discipline which encapsulates our aim. Our spiritual aim is twofold. We want to abandon unwholesome habits and develop beautiful ones. And we want to develop the inner strength to do this. Here, the way dolphins are trained may be of some help. When a dolphin fails to do a trick such as jumping through a loop, the trainer does not criticise, but as it were ignores the mistake. Instead they renew their encouragement. On completion of the trick a present is given. It's known as 'positive reinforcement'. It works just as well on human beings! There's not much gained in blaming oneself, in harsh self-criticism, in self-recrimination, in threatening oneself. When we do something unwholesome, it's good to rest with the inner consequences. These may be a sense of failure, shame, guilt, remorse, anger and so on. Bearing with this is the 'punishment'. There's no need to pile on further misery. What is more, the action was done. We determine to bear whatever consequences equanimously. That's enough. And putting right what was wrong where possible. That's all that's asked of us. Then a firm decision not to do that again. Finally, consider how we might give ourselves a treat whenever we overcome a temptation. No matter how many times we fall back into the old habit, we keep repeating this process until slowly but surely, old unskilful habits lose their power. There is a touching discourse where the Buddha teaches his young son, Rahula, who took the lower ordination, samanera, at the age of seven, about the dangers of lying. He is gentle and progressive, always appealing to Rahula's better nature. You do not hear the Buddha calling him a bad boy or denouncing his action as those of a devil. This is how we should talk to the child within us. In time, Rahula became fully liberated. You can find the Ambalatthika-Rahulovada Suttanta (The Ambalatthika Exhortation to Rahula.) in this BPS Wheel Publication No.33 : <http://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh033-p.html> When we do something wholesome, in the same way we accept the inner consequences of some form of joy and delight. This is our just reward, our treat. Of course, we have to be careful not to do something wholesome in order to feel good, but putting aside this error, we accept that our inner atmosphere, the heart's delight, is the treat we receive from wholesome actions. That's enough. Whatever praise or gift comes our way, let that be a welcome consequence of reciprocal joy and gratitude, but never the purpose. Again the Buddha delights in another's success. Witness his exclamation when Kondañña achieves first Path and Fruit of Stream Entry after the first discourse, The Turning of the Wheel of the Law. "Then the Blessed One exclaimed: "Truly Kondañña knows. He really knows." And that is how Ven. Kondañña acquired the name Añña-Kondañña — Kondañña, the one who knows.' Again you can find various translations: BPS Bodhi Leaf 1 <http://www.bps.lk/olib/bl/bl001-p.html> Or <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html> In the same way, we can assume the character of the Buddha within us, and gently coax ourselves towards a consummate, gentle self-discipline and rejoice in our development of virtue.

Fairness and Equality

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay examines the human desire for fairness that begins in childhood and persists into adulthood, questioning what fairness truly means in a world of manifest inequality. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how Western concepts of equality often assume a level playing field that doesn't exist in reality, whether in education, economics, or social systems.

Drawing from the Buddha's teachings, the essay presents the law of kamma as a fundamental principle of justice that operates equally for all beings. Unlike worldly notions of fairness, kamma represents an ethical law where harmful intentions naturally produce harmful consequences, while wholesome actions generate beneficial results. This process unfolds within a complex matrix of relationships and conditions that are largely unknowable and uncontrollable.

The teaching emphasizes that while we cannot control how karmic consequences manifest, we can cultivate virtuous intentions that gradually improve both our inner and outer worlds. Ultimately, the essay points to Nibbāna as the supreme fairness—a happiness independent of worldly conditions that remains equally available to all beings. This perspective encourages practitioners to navigate life with mindful awareness, ready to use both fortunate and challenging circumstances for spiritual development.

Children often have an acute sense of fairness. 'It's not fair!'. They feel they've been treated unjustly. There's indignation and anger and often tears. And we take this into adulthood. But what do we mean by fairness in a world that is manifestly differentiated. We talk about equal opportunity. But that presumes that we are all starting on the same line. In the hundred metre dash, it would not be 'fair' if the starting blocks were unevenly spaced; if in the 1500 metre race the curves were not taken into account. But that's not real life. We manifestly don't all begin on a 'level playing field'. Consider our educational system; banking system; the pays awarded in the celebrity system and indeed now to CEO's of charities; the whole capitalist system. That's when the doubt gives us some idea that fairness has also to do with some understanding about equality. This morphs into we should all have the same, even though we are not the same. It seems the concept of equality came about in the West with the idea of an all-powerful, but ethical God. Although he made everyone different, i.e. not equal, in His justice we are all equal. And this is enshrined in our law – we take into consideration mitigating circumstances. After all that's only fair. There is something about fairness that strikes true for it is such

an enduring concept. In the Buddha's teaching as to why things happen, there is the concept of unknowability and uncontrollability. Things happen because of causes from the past and in the very present which we could neither foresee nor influence. Life is a series of happenings. A series of events over which we do not have total control, or only minimal control and sometimes no control at all. Sometimes we win a jackpot and at others we get hit by a kipper – out of nowhere. However, the Buddha does point to a fundamental justice, a fairness, an ethical law – the law of kamma. When we think, speak or act with harmful intent, we do harm to ourselves and others and there are consequences. And vice versa- goodness will produce goodness. This law applies equally to all. But this tells us nothing about how consequences unfold. For whenever we think, speak or act, we do send a force into a matrix of relationships both out into the world and inwardly into our interior world. Eventually, though it might not seem so at first, our virtuous empowered intentions will begin to manifest in better inner and outer worlds. But our final goal is a happiness not dependent on these inner and outer worlds, Nibbana. And that also is equally available to us all. Fair enough! But it does mean we have to tread carefully, wide awake and ready to take spiritual advantage of the unexpected, both fortunate and unfortunate.

Unforgivingness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines unforgivingness as a manifestation of hatred (dosa), one of the three unwholesome roots. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the various levels of our demand for justice and reparation when we feel wronged, from simple apologies to compensation to revenge. He distinguishes between legitimate physical harm and the mental suffering we create through our reactions, showing how grief stems from attachment while sorrow can lead to compassion.

Drawing from the opening verses of the Dhammapada, the essay demonstrates how dwelling on thoughts of being wronged perpetuates anger and hatred, while releasing such thoughts brings freedom. The key insight is that our hurt and grief are self-generated through our mental reactions, not caused directly by others' actions. True forgiveness becomes possible through vipassanā practice, which reveals how we injure our own hearts through clinging to resentment.

This practical teaching offers a path beyond the cycle of anger and revenge, showing how insight meditation can dissolve the suffering we create around being wronged. The essay provides both psychological understanding and contemplative tools for working with one of the most challenging aspects of human relationships.

Unforgivingness is yet another form of hatred. We have been injured in some way. We feel hurt. We are angry with and hate what the person did and we are angry with and hate the person who did it. Sometimes we would be happy to forgive, if only they would say sorry and we can see that they mean it. Sometimes we are happy for them just to voice it. Sometimes this won't do, because we want some show of genuine contrition. We want them to offer reparation – an offering in kind, a small gift. Anything will do so long as there is a gesture. Sometimes this won't do either. The anger and hatred we feel demand compensation equal to the wrong doing, but more. We say we don't want to take revenge. We just want them to know how much they made us suffer. And it might just teach them a lesson. We often call this justice. Sometimes the suffering as punishment we impose on someone may gratify, whether it be withdrawal of support, or favour, or friendship, and in some cases of freedom or even of life. But more often it doesn't because anything done out of anger and hatred simply feeds that attitude. We don't feel they have suffered enough. 'Justice has been done.' But justice is a malleable concept. There is no universally accepted punishment for a crime. For similar crimes,

some societies hang people, maim people. Other societies call this barbaric. The leniency of some societies is seen by others as weak and ineffectual. It may not be just those people whom we are in contact with and have 'injured' us, no matter how slightly, that we need to forgive, but the big players also – politicians, corporations, bankers, 'them'. And there are those who say, 'I can't forgive'. But this is a child's 'can't'. They are really mean 'won't'. Now when it comes to actual pain or damage to the body whether slight or severe, that is one thing, but any negative, unwholesome reaction to it is the suffering. Even so we can justly claim compensation for harm done. And although there is a sorrow that comes from any pain or loss by way of any form of violence to oneself or to the other (broken limbs, acid in the face, murdered relative), grief is a measure of attachment. Sorrow is the sadness at the needless pain or loss of life that should move us towards compassion, even for the perpetrator and further afield to undermine the causes of violence. Knowing the difference is crucial to bring closure. All grief, anger and revenge are reactions by the aggrieved. Forgiving, then, begins by refusing to act out of anger and hatred. It is made easy once we realise that the hurt and grief we feel is self-generated and needs time and vipassana (insight) to dissolve. It is we who injure our own hearts. When we realise this, we don't need even an apology from the other in order to forgive. Here's the Buddha: 'He abused me, he hit me, he overpowered me, he robbed me.' Those who indulge such thoughts do not rid themselves of anger and hatred. 'He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me, he robbed me.' Those who do not indulge such thoughts rid themselves of anger and hatred. If you want to go into the Buddhist psychology of forgiveness, have a look at my effort. You will also find multiple exercises there. Towards the End of Forgiveness. Download from: Towards the End of Forgiveness or get a copy from <http://www.wisdom-books.com/ProductDetail.asp?PID=23660> Pay postage only. If you have read a book or heard a talk which you consider useful to those who may find forgiving difficult, do email me.

My Body is Mother Earth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This contemplative essay examines how modern consumerism has severed our connection with the natural world, contrasting this with the Buddha's teaching on the Four Elements (cattāri mahābhūtāni) as a path to reconnecting with nature. Bhante Bodhidhamma guides readers through a meditation practice where we experience the earth element (paṭhavī) in the hardness of bones and stones, the fire element (tejo) in bodily warmth and sunlight, the water element (āpo) in bodily fluidity and cohesion, and the air element (vāyo) in breath and movement.

The essay presents a practical method for developing ecological awareness through direct bodily experience, showing how the Four Elements meditation reveals our fundamental interdependence with the natural world. Drawing parallels with traditional kamma teachings, the author offers a contemplative verse recognizing the body as literally composed of and sustained by Mother Earth. This practice cultivates both environmental consciousness and deeper understanding of our physical nature, making it relevant for both meditation practitioners seeking to develop mindfulness of the body and those concerned with ecological wisdom in daily life.

(Sorry topreachto the converted! I just need to make the link between body and nature.)The abuse of nature did not really begin till the Industrial Revolution. These days it has been given a quantum burst with the doctrine of Consumerism with its dominant dogma that the growth of possessions, whether things or pleasure giving services, equals purpose of life – a belief held worldwide.Ever since humans have become truly self-conscious they created the other, be it the minerals of the earth, the plants and animals and have set about working with nature to make life safer and happier, alas virtually always for themselves. And the usual suspects– greed, aversion and fear – were soon manufacturing tools as weapons, grew food for warrior lords and trained animals for war.This was true for the time of the Buddha.However, where minerals were once extracted by hard labour, making them precious, giant machines now excavate in abundance and make them valueless. Where crops only grew by the sweat of the brow, giant machines now till and harvest and make food cheap and undervalued. Where once humans lived close to animals, smelled their sweat and knew their pain and valued their work, giant machines have replaced them. Now, save for working dogs, we keep them as sentimental pets (few pet owners acknowledge the huge slaughter of other animals to feed them) and, of course, we eat some with disarming in-

difference. How do we return to a relationship where we truly value minerals, plants and animals? One way to contact nature is through our very bodies. The Buddha asks us to contemplate the Four Elements. The Earth : the quality of weight, pressure; fire: the quality heat, cold and temperature; water: the quality of cohesion and fluidity; and air: the quality of movement. Sitting, standing or walking especially outside, find these qualities in the body and nature. The hardness of bones and brick or stone; the warmth in our bodies, of the sun or the coolness of the wind; the elasticity of the chest breathing or a branch swinging; the feeling of movement as the body walks or the flight of birds. This is how we actually experience the physical world, our earthiness. The wisdom that grows from the realisation that we are in and of nature, leads to a heart connection - nature as Mother Earth. We need only contemplate the minerals that make up the body, the food that keeps it alive, the air we breathe and the living beings, some that feed us, others that pollinate and those who make such glorious company – and all the microbes that live in our very bodies that manifest this symbiosis. We need to let it be deeply digested into the heart how mothering earth, moment after moment, gives birth to this body and how this body is utterly dependent on mothering earth. We are but one breath away from death! Truly this body is Mother Earth. I've tried to make myself more aware of this with a simple reminder derived from the verse about kamma: 'This body is born of Mother Earth, dependent on Mother Earth, fed by Mother Earth. However I treat Mother Earth, it will be to my own benefit or harm.' (The Kamma Verse: I am my own kamma, I am a heir to my kamma, I am born [in this life] from my kamma, I am the kinsman of my kamma, I am protected by my kamma. Whatever kamma-s I shall do, kalyāṇa-s or pāpaka-s, I shall become their heir.

Dealing with Intense Emotions and Moods in Ordinary Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This practical teaching addresses how to work skillfully with intense emotions and persistent moods that arise in daily life, drawing from both personal experience and Buddhist wisdom. Bhante Bodhidhamma shares a vivid personal story of public humiliation to illustrate how emotional pain can persist for years when we feed it with mental narratives and replay scenarios.

The essay identifies two main pitfalls in dealing with difficult emotions: becoming lost in the story (which amplifies the emotional charge) and suppression through aversion (which paradoxically gives more energy to what we're trying to avoid). Instead of these unskillful approaches, the teaching offers a middle way - the practice of 'parking' emotions with gentle acknowledgment rather than pushing them away.

The key insight is learning to communicate directly with our emotions, promising to attend to them later while turning attention to present needs. This approach respects the emotion without being overwhelmed by it, offering a practical alternative to both suppression and indulgence. The teaching emphasizes the importance of eventually returning to attend to parked emotions, maintaining integrity in our relationship with our inner experience. This guidance is particularly relevant for practitioners learning to apply mindfulness and Right Awareness in the midst of ordinary life challenges.

Let's recall how we create more misery out of misery. Often in daily life we have to deal with intense and painful emotions. They may last but a while or they can carry on for days, for years. I remember once I walked across a bus station and the station master set upon me. I was in no mood for a fight so I meekly listened to his criticisms. I remember he went on about how drivers weep when they back into people and injure them. I had thought myself in private with him, but when I turned to go, there was a quite a queue in the shelter who had overheard the whole one way conversation. The look of breathless pity an elderly woman gave me said it all. Well, that shame hung around for years!!! And so did the replays of my indignant retorts. What the French call 'esprit d'escalier' – staircase wit or repost! And there are moods too. Those longer lasting emotional states that seem to run subterranean and surface every so often like horror ghouls - the usual culprits of depressive, anxious and aversive moods. The first thing to remind ourselves is not to let the mind start off on the story ... yet again. For we can be sure

that it's cranking up the emotion all over again and adding a little more power to it. It's the path to despair, suicide or murder. If we catch ourselves lost in the same old narrative, we must come out of it at once and sink into the body and stay with the feeling. But there are occasions when there's no time to do that. Or there are times when they so persist, we need a break from it all. That's when we tend to fall into the error of suppression. We let aversion or fear push it out of our minds and we seek distraction. But the more we push it away, the more energy we unwittingly give it for now it has the energy also of our aversion. It's similar to pushing a spring down. When we let go, it springs back with more force than it had when uncoiled. But there is a way we can 'park' an emotion or mood. We can talk to it and say, 'I will attend to you later, but now I need/would like to attend to this.' Notice the word attend which can mean to pay attention to and to wait upon. And gently put it to one side and turn our attention to something else. Even should we sense it lurking in the background, we can occasionally turn a gentle smile towards it and assure it that we will attend in time. Then, of course, we have to find the time to attend.

How Much Pain, Physical or Mental Should We Suffer?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay explores the delicate balance between developing spiritual qualities through enduring pain and the wisdom of knowing when to seek relief. Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses how pain and suffering can serve as vehicles for cultivating patience, equanimity, and insight, while warning against pride-driven self-mortification that the Buddha rejected as meaningless torture. Drawing from practical meditation experience, particularly with knee pain during sitting practice, the teaching emphasizes matching endurance with quality investigation rather than mere stoic endurance.

The essay examines the subjective nature of what constitutes bearable versus unbearable suffering, touching on sensitive topics like suicide while maintaining that only the fully liberated can make such choices without karmic consequences. Central to the discussion is the Second Noble Truth—understanding that while physical and mental pain may have multiple causes, our relationship to them through aversion, fear, and despair is self-generated. This insight into how we create dukkha through taṇhā (unwholesome desire) points toward liberation through understanding rather than mere endurance. The teaching offers practical wisdom for both meditation practitioners dealing with physical discomfort and anyone facing life's inevitable sufferings.

The question as to how much pain and suffering we should bear needs to be referred back to primary aims – the one to purify and strengthen the heart, the other to bring an end to delusion by way of insight. If the pain and suffering is bearable, it becomes a vehicle to develop patience, equanimity, affectionate awareness and insight. Once we feel, if only temporarily, that we have reached that limit, then it seems wise to find a way to bring an end to the pain, or at assuage it. For instance, in sitting meditation aching knees are well documented. Unfortunately, the knees don't bend that way and relief comes only when the tendons at the top of the legs lengthen. In the meantime, we have to deal with the pain. So long as the pain is bearable we can continue to investigate, but when it becomes so painful that all the effort is to endure, then at least we are developing forbearance. But there may come a point when the pain is just too much and then it seems wise to change the posture and not grit the teeth and clench the jaw and be praised for our heroic stance against pain? Our unshakeable endurance! And find we have damaged our knees. This has happened. In fact, I began to have a loose cartilage myself at one point in early Zen practice. But when circumstances completely

undermine the process of spiritual investigation, what point is there in suffering them – save, of course, to build up that quality of endurance. Even here we have to be careful. A meditator once told me he had a very bad tooth ache. I asked why he did not take an aspirin until he could see a dentist. He said he was building up the virtues needed for greater suffering. I asked him: suppose there will be no greater suffering for you? It seems to me we should match endurance with the quality of investigation. Not to do so may indeed be an act of pride. ‘I’m bigger than pain’. Such an attitude leads us into self-mortification which the Buddha found to be meaningless torture. Rather endurance should be balanced with care of the body. For those in dreadful pain, there may arise the option of suicide. Of course, what is considered to be bearable or unbearable is subjective, always personal and individual. The topic of suicide is a delicate one. Suffice here is to say that it is generally understood that only those who are fully liberated can take their own lives without some unwholesome karmic consequences. But this has been questioned. However, it is important to remind ourselves that understanding how suffering and unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) arise, we need to know that the given, be it physical or mental pain and illnesses may have a multitude of causes, but our relationship to them of aversion, fear and despair is self-generated. To investigate how we create suffering and unsatisfactoriness is a path to liberation by way of understanding the Second Noble Truth – the Cause of Suffering is Unwholesome Desire, tanha. (I’ll have another go at euthanasia – a good death again sometime. I had a shot at it with <https://www.satipanya.org.uk/essays/Assisted%20Suicide.pdf>)

Judging or Judgemental?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores the important distinction between skillful judgment and harmful judgmental attitudes, a common source of confusion for meditation practitioners. Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the apparent contradiction between noting 'judging, judging' in vipassanā practice while still needing to make necessary decisions about what is skillful or unskillful in daily life.

The essay clarifies that what we note as 'judging' in meditation is typically criticism arising from selfishness, hatred, and fear—the mental formations that wound both ourselves and others. Being judgmental involves evaluating the person rather than their actions, rooted in conceit and the comparing mind that creates divisions of 'better than,' 'worse than,' or 'equal to.'

Practical guidance is offered for distinguishing between necessary discernment and harmful judgment, including techniques for responding to difficult situations without falling into vengeful or hateful reactions. The teaching emphasizes developing equanimity while maintaining appropriate boundaries, exemplified through the wisdom of 'hate the deed, not the doer.' For meditators, this understanding helps refine the noting practice to recognize when judgment crosses into the unskillful territory of being judgmental, reducing unnecessary suffering in both formal practice and daily interactions.

There can be a lot of confusion around judging. It gets bad press in the practice. We're supposed to note it – day and night as 'judging, judging'. But if we don't judge, how do we come to decisions? How do we know what's skilful or unskilful and so on? We note 'judging, judging' when we hear ourselves criticising. And we love to criticise: it makes us feel grander than others and better about ourselves. When daggered towards our selves, what sweet wounding it is to beat ourselves up for we know we deserve it! These sorts of injuries rise out of the usual suspects – selfishness, hatred and fear in all their varied forms. And the delusion is that it is for the victim's good. However, the fact is that the truth of the judging may be so. If we perceive someone as deceitful, we may balk at the judgement. But they may very well practise deceitfulness. For fear of 'judging', we do not guard ourselves against their deceitfulness. Surely this is folly. If I judge myself as lazy – which I do! I might dismiss that as hateful self-judgement. But I am lazy! (Sometimes.) In civic life, when it is time to vote, we have to judge which party we are going to support. If we call it judging, we will find it difficult to come to a decision – if at all. So

where does this judging go awry. Can we distinguish when we are judging and when we are really being judgmental? Surely that's where the confusion lies. And to be judgmental is to judge the person rather than the act, the politician and party rather than the policy. To come from a position of pride, aversion and so on. The judgemental is a product of conceit. Better than, worse than or equal to. It's always about me and other. Even when it's about me only, it presumes the standard of the other. The old adage: hate the deed not the doer, sounds easy. But I was deceived by that person and to separate the deceit from the person is no easy thing. One way, perhaps, is to phrase what has happened in terms of what was done or received and how we were affected by it. 'I was told to come to party at 10 Baker St. I found there was no such place. It was cruel joke at my expense. I feel hurt. I feel vengeful. I shall wait till equanimity arises. And decide what to do then. But for sure I won't be deceived again. I shall double check.' As I said, no easy thing. But try we must. In our meditation, of course, it shouldn't mean we stop noting 'judging', but rather that we clearly see it is 'judging, judging' and that's ok. When we can discern there is 'judgemental, judgmental', then we should note that and know it to be unskillful. The distinction is difficult to see, but unless we do so, we will cause unnecessary suffering for ourselves.

The Absurd and the Sublime: A Mid-summer Contemplation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This contemplative essay explores the existential crisis that drove the Buddha's spiritual quest, beginning with the recognition of life's apparent absurdity and meaninglessness. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how all human endeavours—science, art, politics, philanthropy—seem ultimately futile when faced with aging, sickness, and death. The essay traces the Buddha-to-be's encounter with the four divine messengers (devadhūta): the sick, aged, dead, and the ascetic, which precipitated his existential awakening to life's fundamental unsatisfactoriness.

The teaching reveals how the Buddha's great determination beneath the Bodhi tree arose from recognizing he had 'nothing to lose' in a seemingly meaningless existence. His realization of nibbāna—characterized by non-attachment and liberation—transformed this apparent absurdity into profound meaning. Through awakening, intuitive awareness (satipaṇṇā) recognizes that life's purpose is the journey toward Buddha-realization itself.

This transformation reframes all aspects of existence—relationships, work, art, and even pastimes—as meaningful steps on the path to sublime awakening. The essay concludes by showing how the Buddha's compassionate teaching arose naturally from seeing others' potential for this same transformative realization, giving ultimate meaning to human existence through service to others' spiritual development.

In the end there is an absurdity to it all. By absurdity, I am suggesting a meaninglessness with a twinge of the ridiculous. That life, consciousness and all we have experienced, have understood and come to love should come to end, makes for uselessness. Life as a pastime. To say, 'Well at least I enjoyed most of it. And I achieved this and that.' is to hide the absurdity beneath a pathetic self-indulgence and self-importance. To say, 'My life is dedicated to the happiness of others.' knowing their lives also lack the same meaning, is a sorry attempt to make our lives meaningful. Because of this all human endeavours: science, politics, heroism, philanthropy and so on are all useless. And art too! What point to try to express anything when everything in itself has no intrinsic meaning? A piece of art is glued to its time and place, of interest to art lovers and art historians, but in the long run is veneer. It treats with beauty and subjects personal, social and even cosmic, but rarely treats with the real problem. The sheer absurdity of creating anything about something that is inherently meaningless. Yet paradoxically this is the

game we must play. A game is a useless pastime. It need not be unwholesome in itself, but it is mere entertainment, save for the professionals, the fanatics and the financial managers who give to sport the meaning of their lives. How absurd is that! When the Buddha-to-be realised at the end of youth what he was heading for, he suffered an existential crisis. It wasn't that he wanted to leave his family and all he treasured. It was that he had no choice. Capturing the full meaning of the four Devadhuta – Messengers from the Gods (Ultimate Truth) – the sick, the ageing, the dead - he realised that this was his destiny as a human being. The fact that he believed this would continue rebirth after rebirth simply added to the horror. The fourth was an ascetic sitting under a tree. It was this gave him an inkling of hope. It is the horror of meaninglessness that drives us to seek comfort in the pleasures and joys of life and causes us to fight off and flee from anything that turns us towards these dour Messengers. By the time the Buddha sat beneath the Bodhi tree and made the Great Determination not to move until he had explored this meaninglessness or die, he had the invincible courage of someone who knows he has nothing to lose. If life was just a pastime after all, then all there was left was to enjoy it as best one can. Such was and is the position of annihilistic materialists. If it did turn out to have meaning after all, then that would be the end of the despair of absurdity. His realisation was an actual experience. He called it Nibbana. Although this word has been given various meanings, they revolve around non-attachment and liberation. Non-attachment was his new relationship to the world. Nothing mattered. Liberation was how he experienced this. 'Something' was set free. That something was intuitive awareness, Satipanya. Upon this realisation, everything mattered. For he realised that that the purpose of life was to bring this Satipanya to its own realisation. It was a rite of passage. A passage from ignorance and all the suffering towards Buddha realisation. Questions as to why this should happen in the first place are deemed irrelevant. This is the way it is and this is the way we must go. And again all that seemed absurd, now take on profound meaning. Our lives - personal relationships, work, even pastimes - take on the same meaning, journeying towards the same sublime destiny. And art takes on the task of attempting to communicate the inexpressible. It will never succeed, but try it must. Seeing the delusive state of other people and knowing their potential, the Buddha had no choice but to teach. There he found meaning in his existence as a human being. And there he found the flowering of his personal joy into the joy of helping others make their way to their own sublime destiny.

If there is no self, who bears the karma?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay addresses one of Buddhism's most challenging philosophical questions: if there is no permanent self (anattā), how can karma operate? Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies that the Buddha never said there is no self, but rather that the self has no lasting substance—it arises and passes away moment by moment through the process of I-making (ahaṅkāra). Drawing on the teaching of paṭicca samuppāda (dependent origination), he explains how each momentary person arises dependent on conditions, including past actions and habits.

The essay explores how karma functions as the consequences of our actions—wholesome and unwholesome habits that shape future momentary selves. Since only the present person exists, they bear the results of past persons' actions while creating conditions for future persons. This understanding leads to a practical ethics: if we want future momentary selves to be happy, we must cultivate wholesome actions now. Bhante emphasizes that this process requires loving both oneself and others, as happiness depends on both inner cultivation and outer circumstances. The teaching concludes that developing 'a continuous flow of happy selves' not only benefits daily life but also supports spiritual progress, making this profound philosophical insight deeply practical for meditation and ethical living.

Every moment arises dependent on past and present conditions. This is no less true for the self, the sense of being a person. Nowhere does the Buddha say – there is no self. It is patently obvious to all that there is a self. What he says is that it has no substance; it does not last more than a moment. There is only the process of I-making (ahaṅkāra). There is, therefore, a 'person', conscious and sentient arising and passing away all the time – even in sleep there is a sliver of consciousness and sentience or the alarm bell would not wake us. The self or person is but a collection of habits and the body and a consciousness of it all. There are also moments of self-consciousness where the person perceives and feels themselves to be a person. Karma has become everyday speak for consequence. The consequence within a person is the habits they have formed, both wholesome and unwholesome. Now a person can only be in the present moment. Yet past editions of persons of both today, all our yesterdays and even before that, have created acts of thought, words and deeds - all of which have continuing consequences. If this person now feels unhappy, it's to a greater or lesser extent because a past person did something and this person now is bearing the consequences. There is also this person now making acts which may make for worse consequences for a future person. Similarly should this person now experience happiness, because of right inten-

tion, this will determine happier persons in the future. On the presumption that I will continue to arise as a momentary person for some time yet and possibly after death, if I want the future person whom I shall be, although only for a moment, to be happy, I have to start doing and creating habits now that will make for future happiness. This is loving oneself. When I'm happy, I really love being me! Because a lot of this happiness is also dependent on my outer circumstances, I have also to try to steer that towards happiness. That means I engage with people and the environment in whatever way I can to enhance the happiness of myself and others. Depending on the situation, I shall want to express my empathy in joy, compassion, love, patience and so on. This is loving the other. So it is that an ethics born out of the desire to make oneself happy is developed. And you can't do it without a self, without being a person. Our task as human beings is to develop a continuous flow of happy selves. And help others do the same. An added consequence: it's so much easier to make spiritual progress when we are happy.

Overwhelmed by All the Violence in the World?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This compassionate teaching addresses the psychological and spiritual challenge of witnessing endless global violence and conflict. Bhante Bodhidhamma offers five key strategies for managing overwhelm and despair when confronted with horrific events beyond our control. The essay emphasizes cultivating humility about our actual power and influence, taking a long-term historical perspective on human conflict, and maintaining our practice of mettā (loving-kindness) and karuṇā (compassion) even when effects seem minimal.

The teaching includes practical advice about knowing when to step back from consuming distressing media, understanding our role within saṃsāra as both a realm of suffering and a training ground for liberation, and finding constructive ways to channel our concern through donations and compassionate action. A thoughtful commentary by Sally Lever adds the dimension of self-reflection, suggesting we examine how external violence might mirror internal patterns of aggression in our own behavior, particularly toward children and vulnerable beings.

This guidance integrates traditional Buddhist understanding of suffering and compassion with contemporary challenges of media overwhelm and global awareness, offering both immediate coping strategies and deeper spiritual perspective on our place within the cycle of saṃsāra.

What to do when we feel overwhelmed by the stories and videos coming from the seeming endless conflict between Israel and Palestine and the terrible images and slaughtering by Islamist fundamentalists – to mention two main areas of conflict. Here are some ways to undermine overload, unrequited compassion, despair and burn out. First it's a case of humility. Power: We need to accept what we can do and can't do. And let go of trying to do something about a situation that we know we can't do anything about. Consider this modern koan/paradox: What can we do when we've done everything we can do? Influence: We need to know what we can and cannot get other people to do. And let go of trying to have influence where we have none. Secondly, we need also to take the long term view. Look at Europe and its 1000 years of internecine wars. That's how long it took, with every bit as horrible events as in the Middle East, until we finally agreed to live peacefully together. Of course, there is also the carrot of the benefits of peaceful co-existence. Thirdly, we need to do what we can always do – send our goodwill messages of love and compassion. Even if we don't think it has any

effect beyond ourselves it makes us feel we are doing what we can. In the Buddhist Tradition, it is understood that metta/karuna blessings will have an effect no matter how slight. There are also donations that can be made to the various charities that deal with such situations. Fourthly, we also need to come to a place where we know enough and enough is enough! Stop feeding the heart and mind with horror stories. Why stop at Israel/West Bank, Islamic State? Finally we need to accept that this is samsara. This is where delusion will always play itself out, but also where it is possible for individuals to liberate themselves. This is the training ground. Do you have other suggestions? Please email and I shall add to next Newsbyte. Thanks.

Comment by Sally Lever
You asked for additional suggestions. What I'd like to offer and share is something I've noticed in myself when faced with so much atrocity, particularly the senseless killing of innocent civilians, including children. When I started my first job after finishing with Uni, I had a very inspirational and caring boss. When he noticed us criticising others, he would say something like: 'When you see yourself pointing a finger at someone else, take a moment to look at your hand and notice who the other fingers are pointing to.' So I quickly learned to check things out internally with myself first before projecting my grievance onto others. Having been practising this for another 30 odd years since then, I still manage to criticise others and to be aggressive towards them from time to time, although I think my level of awareness is improving, thank goodness! So, returning to violence in the world, in addition to all the suggestions you've made, I also reflect on how what I'm witnessing externally might be reflecting anything internally in me or externally in relation to my behaviour. For example, I found myself feeling particularly upset learning about children being killed. I asked myself what I might do with my behaviour towards children. Where am I being aggressive towards them? I remembered myself speaking harshly to both my sons, to my niece and to the neighbour's children - aagh! I remember your enthusiasm for setting a daily intention, so when I feel upset about others harming children, I set an intention to behave peacefully with them myself. Bit by bit, it does seem to help me and maybe, like metta bhavana, the effects will ripple outwards?

Legal : Moral : Ethical

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This contemplative essay examines the important distinctions between what is legally permissible, morally wholesome, and ethically sound from a Buddhist perspective. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the Buddha's understanding of sila (moral conduct) differs from secular legal frameworks, noting that many legally permitted actions may be unwholesome or harmful to ourselves and others. The teaching centers on the Five Training Rules (sikkhāpada) as the Buddha's clear guidance for avoiding harmful actions, while emphasizing the positive cultivation of wholesome qualities like friendship and compassion. The essay addresses complex ethical dilemmas such as abortion and armed intervention, demonstrating how Buddhist ethics requires careful consideration of context, situation, and intention rather than rigid black-and-white judgments. Throughout, the author emphasizes that our moral choices ultimately express either our delusion or wisdom through our relationships with others. This reflection offers practitioners a framework for navigating ethical decisions in modern life by grounding them in the Buddha's teachings on wholesome and unwholesome actions, making it particularly relevant for those seeking to integrate Buddhist principles into contemporary moral challenges.

Words are important. The Buddha was careful about his use of words. He had difficulty in expressing his new understanding in the conventional language of the time. Hence coining the word, anatta – not-self. We are often confused by what is legal as opposed to moral. It's legal to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes, but is it moral? What the Buddha means by sila/morality are those actions and speech that are skilful, wholesome, virtuous towards ourselves and others. Plainly there are many laws that make unwholesome actions legal. This is a consequence of our liberal society which takes 'religion' out of politics. It prefers to leave moral questions of a more personal nature to the individual. If government interferes with our personal behaviour, they are accused of creating a nanny state, or worse authoritarianism. Unfortunately, making immoral behaviour legal takes the sting out of our immoral actions. 'Well, it's legal. So it can't be that bad.' Ethical has a lot of 'currency' these days – it's very fashionable in business and finance to give them greater kudos. While the word 'ethics' looks to the positive side of morality, the word 'morality' still carries Victorian undertones of guilt and shame. Not that the Buddha was not clear fudged the question of which actions about those actions we should avoid – the Five Training Rules (sikkhāpada)* and he also encourages us to restrain the senses. This is balanced by the need to develop the qualities of friendship,

compassion, reciprocal joy and so on. If we accept ethics to mean both of these – the negative and the positive side of our moral lives – then what we are really accepting is that our delusion or wisdom is expressed through our actions of speech and deeds – and in our thoughts. And it is all to do with relationship. However, it's rarely a case of black and white for ethical decisions have to take into account situation and context. One of those dilemmas arises with abortion. It was once thought horrific and criminal. Making it legal, softened the moral sting. In Buddhist understanding consciousness arises at conception, no matter how dimly. The potential is there. It is always going to be a difficult ethical decision for those who see the foetus as a human being. A similar dilemma arises concerning armed intervention. (See my essay for some thoughts about this: *Is Armed Intervention Ever Justified?*) As always, a given decision is rooted in intention. Our responsibility is to make sure that our intentions, given context and situation, are for the benefit or the greater benefit of ourselves or others or both ourselves and others.

Sikkhâpada: Training Rules (often translated as Precepts.)

- To refrain from killing sentient beings
- To refrain from taking what is not freely given
- To refrain from abusing our senses (usually limited to sexuality, but the word kama is sensual desire. That is not to indulge.)
- To refrain from wrong speech – lying, slander, coarse language and useless talking.
- To refrain from taking drinks or drugs that cloud the mind.

The Consumer in Us All

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this penetrating analysis, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the pervasive culture of consumerism has infiltrated our spiritual lives, creating false expectations and undermining genuine practice. He demonstrates how the consumer mentality—seeking immediate gratification, maximum benefit with minimal effort, and constantly hunting for 'bargains'—directly contradicts the Buddha's teachings on the spiritual path.

The essay reveals how this conditioning manifests in our approach to Dhamma practice: searching for the 'perfect' technique that will deliver quick results, expecting teachers to provide instant enlightenment, or treating dāna (generosity) as a transaction for spiritual merit. Bhante contrasts this with the Buddha's final words—'appamādena sampāde-thā' (strive diligently)—emphasizing that authentic spiritual development requires long-term commitment, perseverance, and genuine renunciation of the profit-seeking mindset.

Drawing on contemporary debt statistics to illustrate greed's societal impact, the teaching offers crucial guidance for practitioners navigating modern spiritual materialism. It challenges us to examine whether we approach the Path with the same consuming attitude we bring to material acquisitions, and calls for a fundamental shift toward patience, dedication, and authentic spiritual inquiry that transcends the instant-gratification culture.

Have we really noticed how insidious the now world-wide 'religion' of consumerism has become? We all know how advertisers create false 'needs'. All adverts suggest what you are buying - a product, a service - is a bargain. Money well spent. They tell us it will make us especially happy. We will be so gratified - immediately! And we don't have to do anything - or at least it will take such little effort. In fact if all you do is tick this box, go onto this loan plan. You won't even notice the money leaving your bank account. And you can win a prize! Consequence of greed manifest: <http://themoneycharity.org.uk/money-statistics/> Total personal debt (2014) in the UK currently stands at £1.46 trillion. The average household debt in the UK is £7,975 (excluding mortgages). Based on September (2014 trends, the UK's total interest repayments on personal debt over a 12 month period would have been £59.8 billion. (Never mind the rest of the world!) This habit of greedily seeking a bargain insinuates itself into our lives so much so that the behaviour becomes automatic and is never questioned. It seems so natural. Well logical. Surely it's been with us ever since bartering began. But as a generalised attitude to life this becomes truly cancerous to the good heart. For the consumer seeks to take as much

as they can, while giving as little as possible. They are always on the lookout for that bargain. Of course, it's just another manifestation of our good friend, greed, but in these new clothes it takes on the air of ethical correctness. It's confused with self-care. 'Greed is good.' But how does it affect our spiritual lives? Some reflections: Are we looking for the pristine technique! The one that really was taught by the Buddha. The one that is going to deliver the goods and fast with least possible effort. Are we looking for that famous teacher everyone is talking about? What do we expect of the teacher? That they are actually going to get us to Nibbana? Do we expect them to be entertaining, exciting? Will they be able to give us the immediate gratification we are looking for? All those vipassana knowledges – theñāna, shouldn't they come quickly. I have read about them. They all seem pretty straight forward to me! Why haven't I attained them? It can only be the teacher, the method. And if I have to listen to that talk again, I'll go mad. It's become so boring! Same old jokes. And is my spiritual practice all about me. What about dana – generosity. It is said in giving we receive. Are we giving in order to receive? I don't know where I got this quote (If you know, please email me): The One, or Oneness, as we might say in Zen, never tries to turn a profit from anything at all. It wouldn't even make sense. We, on the other hand, are always trying to turn a profit from every human exchange. We are always trying to get something—admiration, love, recognition, praise, acknowledgment, even just staying connected. Think how we manipulate and bargain and negotiate to turn a profit from every interaction. Much of this is subtle, unconscious habit. Even when we give, or serve, or love, or pay attention, we're trying to get something. Sometimes it's just to get back some of what we give. Unfortunately the spiritual life asks almost exactly the opposite to our speedy, consuming society. It demands a long-term commitment – over lifetimes if you are open that. It demands dogged perseverance. Although there are highlights and wonders on the way, they are merely short stops on the Path. The Path is a constant 'struggle' against Mara, our unwholesome habits - the Five Hindrances, the Defilements and the subtle, unconscious Latent Tendencies that we don't know are there or we don't know how powerful they are until a situation drags them out hiding. Why were these the last two words of the Buddha – *apamadena sampadetha* – with diligence strive/work hard. 'Strive diligently for your liberation!' If you see other ways in which the speedy, consumer affects our outlook, injurious to spiritual life, do email. Still a classic: *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Barriers or Boundaries

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay examines the crucial distinction between barriers and boundaries in our relationships, expectations, and self-identity. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the ego creates rigid barriers around our preferences, political views, and social groups, leading to disappointment and reactivity when reality doesn't match our fixed expectations. Using everyday examples from dining experiences to political opinions, he illustrates how these mental barriers generate dukkha through our aversive reactions to change.

The teaching then shifts to boundaries as a healthier alternative—fluid, flexible guidelines that maintain dignity and appropriate conditions without creating the hardness that barriers impose. Through personal anecdotes about monastic protocol and living arrangements, Bhante demonstrates how boundaries can be adjusted mindfully without compromising our integrity or well-being.

This practical wisdom directly relates to vipassanā practice, where Right Awareness allows us to observe our defensive reactions and choose creative responses rather than automatic protection of our positions. The essay encourages readers to examine their own patterns of creating barriers versus establishing healthy boundaries, offering insight into how attachment and aversion operate in daily life and relationships.

What is it about the self that creates such a mess? Is it not the hard lines it draws around things, people and events? We go to a restaurant and we 'know' what apple pie and custard should taste like. When we taste the one we have bought, we are disappointed. Now it may be that the pie is not so good. I once had apple pie, years ago now, and when I put my fork into it, the crust was so hard it broke into pieces and some flung themselves off the plate. I didn't think the cook would appreciate my pretend interest by asking how much cement went into the crust. But it was difficult to enjoy. Looking back, if it had been the first apple pie and custard I had tasted, I no doubt would have thought it should be like that and thoroughly enjoyed it. What about our politics? We draw hard lines around our views. I would never vote for ... Now we may not vote for that party. But what point the hardness around it. It stops us acknowledging that there is some good in all parties. The undecided floating voter is considered weak and no political party likes them. Relationships too. Do we not draw comfort lines around our friendship group. Closed groups are cosy, but they are closed and self-serving. Such can be viewed as barriers. It suggests hardening, inability to change even

though change is all around us. How do we know when barriers are being breached? When threats arise to the status quo, fear and aversion arise. We react to protect, maintain. Unless we can be mindful of our aversive reaction, there cannot be a creative response. We defend our positions sometimes at great cost. Boundaries are more fluid. The beach is sometimes the land and sometimes the sea. It's not that boundaries allow everything. They don't have to be porous. One can create conditions, but they allow us to be flexible. How do we know when boundaries are being breached? An amorphous discomfort. A feeling of invasiveness. At worst a loss of personal dignity. When I became a monk, I kept up my friendly, easy going relationship with people. This was fine, except when someone became 'familiar'. Suddenly it was a slap on the back and 'how are you doing, Bodhi?' I felt I was at fault by trying to be a 'mate' and it was not quite in line with the dignity the Buddha would have his monastics behave. So that's when I asked people to address me as Bhante. This keeps a respectable distance between myself and the person I am talking to. It also stopped me behaving sloppily - at least in public! I was lodging with a friend and I told him I expected a phone call at a certain time. Just before the allotted, he received a call. As the allotted time came for my call, I called out to remind him. Unfortunately he heard my reminder as a command. I got an earful which reminded me that hosts have their boundaries and I needed to respect these. Barriers or Boundaries - is it just human nature? Have a look!

Isolation, Loneliness and Solitude

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this reflective teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma draws clear distinctions between three related but fundamentally different experiences: isolation, loneliness, and solitude. He begins by sharing his personal experience of isolation at Satipanya, separated from the broader monastic Saṅgha, yet clarifies how this differs from loneliness—a more painful state rooted in dependency and often connected to childhood wounds of feeling unloved or abandoned.

The essay explores how loneliness reveals our dependence on others for validation and self-worth, often triggering deep-seated beliefs about being unlovable. Bhante suggests that sitting quietly with feelings of loneliness through vipassanā practice can become a healing process, allowing buried emotions to surface and be resolved. This patient observation can lead to profound self-discovery.

The teaching culminates in distinguishing true spiritual solitude from mere temporary retreat from company. Authentic solitude represents finding one's 'home within'—a state of contentment that no longer needs others for completion. Drawing on the Latin wisdom 'never less alone than when alone,' Bhante points to the transformative possibility of discovering this 'self-embracing all-one-ness' through patient meditation with difficult emotions, ultimately transcending the pain of loneliness into the peace of genuine solitude.

Feeling isolated is quite different to loneliness. It comes from being unable to commune with those who we feel close to or affiliated to. I, myself, here at Satipanya, live isolated from the Sangha. As a monastic, I feel at home in the company of other monastics – of whatever creed. This is the same as anyone in the trades or professions. Anyone in the building trade feels at home with their mates. Anyone in the professions does so with their colleagues. In the same way we can feel isolated from our friends and families when we don't have enough or easy communion with them, but we don't necessarily feel lonely. These days this should not be such a problem especially with skype. Loneliness can be a very painful state. It can come after the death of a loved one, a loss of a friend, when we move into a new area and don't seem to know anyone and so on. And whenever we feel loneliness, it dips deep into those times we have felt lonely, perhaps unloved and even abandoned in childhood. Loneliness tells us we are dependent on someone to feel worthy, loved and wanted. Sitting quietly with our feelings of loneliness, arising for whatever reason, can allow old buried and unresolved feelings to arise. And they usually centre around a belief we have of ourselves that we

are unlovable. The heart longs to divulge her secret pain, but finds no-one to trust. And in that vulnerability, touches upon the fragile nature of her existence. To sit with loneliness is to discover many things about ourselves. It can be an eye-opener. It's a healing process. And we need to wait until all feelings of loneliness disappear. What then arises? Solitude is of a different order. It is often what we seek when we have had enough company, enough excitement. It's 'such a relief' sometimes to be on your own. But this is poor solitude. It doesn't last very long. As soon as we have rested, we get fed up with ourselves and off we go into the helter-skelter of excitement seeking. Solitude, at its true spiritual depth, is to have found one's home within. As a Latin saying goes: never less alone than when alone. This is the gift of a heart no longer in 'need' of the other. A heart that is content. I wonder if you can catch this solitude, an inner sense of a self-embracing all-one-ness, when you've sat in vipassana with a bout of loneliness and waited patiently for it to sublimate.

Envy, Jealousy and Appreciative Joy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching distinguishes between envy and jealousy, offering practical wisdom for transforming these common human emotions through Buddhist practice. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how envy can sometimes be healthy motivation ('I envy you' as appreciation), but becomes problematic when it turns into coveting - the compulsive need to keep up with others that stems from ego-comparison. Jealousy is identified as a darker state involving both wanting what others have and hating them for having it, often disguised as righteous criticism or projected onto others through denial.

The essay presents muditā (appreciative joy) as the primary antidote to these unwholesome mental states. Drawing on Vipassana meditation techniques, particularly the noting practice, Bhante shows how we can catch these attitudes as they arise and work with them skillfully. The practical approach involves acknowledging the unpleasant bodily feelings of jealousy without suppressing them, then actively cultivating joy in others' successes and achievements. This teaching offers valuable guidance for daily life interactions and demonstrates how Buddhist psychology can transform difficult emotions into opportunities for spiritual growth and genuine happiness for others.

It's ok to say, 'I envy you'. It's a way of praising someone, but also showing that we would like what they have. I know a monk who was an abbot and retired from that position. When he told me, he brought out in me a desire to lessen my teaching rota and spend more time on retreat and study. When I told him that I envied him, there was no 'coveting' for what he had, but I saw it a spur to move in the direction I wanted to. But the problem comes when we 'covet' what the other has. That's the 'keeping up with the Jones's' compulsion. And that's all to do with proving oneself equal or better than the other. It's a fool's game. The antidote is to be grateful for what we have. To discern what we need rather than what we want. This allows for a greater contentment. Not that we cannot better our situation, but it is not done in comparison to someone else. Jealousy is a darker state. Here there is not only wanting what the other has, but hating them for having it. This aversion can disguise itself as righteous criticism of the other. We can be dismissive of their achievements, their possessions. But there is a deeper comparison here, not of possessions, position and so on, but of egos. At worse the person nurtures a revenge for the shame they feel the other causes them - and yet be oblivious to their own jealousy! To accept we are jealous is to realise we are defining ourselves as inferior! That's hard on self-esteem. Indeed, we can even be in such denial that we project

our jealousy onto them and fool ourselves into thinking that they are the ones who are jealous of us! One of the blessings of the noting technique in our practice is that it can make us acknowledge this difficult attitude. The antidote to all of this is appreciative or empathetic joy, *mudita*. First, as soon as we catch ourselves indulging our jealousy, we stop the thinking and imagining and see if we can feel the emotional value of the attitude in the body. If we can, if there's time, we stay there feeling and acknowledging its unwholesome and very unpleasant feelings. If there is no time or we cannot wait till the feelings exhaust themselves, then we put them to one side. Remember this is not suppressing them, but simply not identifying with them, not indulging them. And we then rejoice in the successes of the other. When we feel envious of what another has or achieves, we can praise their work, rejoice in their luck. When jealousy is aroused, we can praise not just what they have achieved, but their abilities and characters. And then wish them greater success – even through gritted teeth!

Unwholesome Karmic Results as Fate

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the Buddha's concept of anusāya (latent tendencies) through the lens of psychological insight, showing how unconscious mental patterns manifest as seemingly external 'fate' or repeated unfortunate circumstances. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws connections between modern psychological understanding and Buddhist teachings on the kilesas (defilements), demonstrating how our unacknowledged motivations and contradictions create cycles of suffering in relationships and life situations.

Using practical examples—the controlling 'do-gooder,' the person who repeatedly faces relationship failures, or those whose sarcasm alienates friends—the essay illustrates how we unconsciously act out inner conflicts when we lack self-awareness. These patterns appear as external misfortune but actually arise from our own unexamined attitudes and intentions.

The teaching emphasizes the power of vipassanā meditation, particularly the noting technique, to develop the sharp awareness needed to catch these latent tendencies as they surface in our mental formations. By bringing conscious attention to our subliminal attitudes, we can break free from the karmic cycles that seem like fate but are actually the result of our own unconscious mental habits. This represents a practical integration of psychological insight with traditional Buddhist understanding of how mental formations create our experienced reality.

Yung :The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains divided and does not become conscious of his inner contradictions, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into two opposite halves.How true!The Buddha talks of anusāya, latent tendencies. These are lying underneath the obvious kilesa, defilements. We are not often aware of these subliminal attitudes and intentions.One tell-tale that something is being acted out by us of which we are not totally aware or not aware of at all is when we fall repeatedly into a similar unfortunate or painful situation.Consider the do-gooder who consciously wishes in her heart to do only good for you, yet is not aware that she is controlling the situation. That she actually only wants to do the good she wants to do for you because that is what makes her feel worthy and so happy. She is shocked at the ingratitude of the person she is helping who only feels constrained, not-heard and even bullied. She doesn't understand why the person gets so angry when all

she is they are trying to do is help. A man came on a retreat of mine while at Gaia. He came with a whole set of garden tools! It was difficult for the co-ordinators at the time to stop him doing what he wanted to do to the garden. Consider the person who is always falling in love and a few months down the line finds himself dumped! What's really happening is that, after the honeymoon period, he starts to criticise and be cruel, unaware that when the relationship becomes too close he finds it smothering. Yet he is madly in love. Not being fully conscious he blames the other for oppressing him. Not acknowledging that we feel insecure or angry or inferior we become sarcastic. Our sarcasm is actually funny to everyone else but the victim. Making people laugh gives us back our self-worth, but mysteriously friends begin to avoid us. If we look into our lives and see negative patterns, it may be time to have a hard look at our attitudes instead of blaming others or the situation. In meditation, using the noting technique, if we remain sharp and perceptive we may catch surfacing into our day-dreamings these very latent tendencies. In this way we can bring the fate of inner contradictions, so clearly expressed by Yung, to an end.

Ideology Leads to Strife

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay explores the Buddha's profound warnings about attachment to views and opinions, examining how ideology becomes a source of strife and division. Drawing from the Cūḷamālukya Sutta (MN 63) and Aṅguttara Nikāya teachings, Bhante Bodhidhamma analyzes the three components that make views 'rock-like': wrong view (diṭṭhi), conceit (māna), and craving attachment (taṇhā). The essay illustrates these dynamics through historical examples of secular ideologies—from eugenics and communism to neoliberalism—while noting similar patterns in religious fundamentalism.

The teaching emphasizes that while the Buddha held clear views about the Four Noble Truths, he demonstrated remarkable pragmatism in worldly matters, as seen in the gradual development of the Vinaya rules and his eventual acceptance of women into the Saṅgha. The essay concludes with practical guidance for holding views lightly, cultivating humility to counter conceit, and developing genuine openness to others' perspectives. This wisdom offers essential tools for navigating disagreement without falling into the cycle of ideological conflict that characterizes much contemporary discourse.

The Buddha had this to say of opinions: a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. MN 2.8 When Master Kaccana was asked by a Brahmin why ascetics fight ascetics, he answered: 'It is because of attachment to views, adherence to views, fixation on views, addiction to views, obsession with views, holding firmly to views that ascetics fight with ascetics.' (AN 2:iv,6- Bhikkhu Bodhi: In the Buddha's Words. A view in this sense is a tightly held belief, substantiated by personal experience and rational thinking. And it has three components which make it rock like. The first is the wrong view itself - diṭṭhi. Take the three predominant ones of the previous century. The science of eugenics which pointed to the purification of the race, a central tenet of Nazism; the revolution against capitalism and rise of the doctrine of the ownership of the means of production by proletariat giving rise to communism; the present politico-economy of neoliberalism of a free market driven by 'natural' forces, with its stress on privatization, deregulation, fiscal austerity and free trade, that has led to the recent and ongoing economic collapse. Added to this is the conceit - māna. I am right and everyone else is wrong. In fact, they are so wrong they need to be annihilated or at least ignored. When the 'I' becomes a 'we', social upheaval is in the making. And the emotional attachment to it - taṇha. Such is the devotion to a view that one is prepared to give up one's life, sacrifice one's own spouse and children for the

cause. All in all this is ideology. And you see it in all religions. The examples I gave above were all secular, but the present day worst religious example of this is Islamic fundamentalism. What is the escape from this continual strife? First, as to views and opinions, the Buddha did not say we should not have them. He had very clear view of what would help humanity, namely the Four Noble Truths. However, whatever views or opinions we hold, let them be held lightly as perspectives that can be changed and nuanced by others. We don't need to identify with them or own them. It's just one view or opinion amongst many. This demands humility which undermines conceit, for we may have misunderstood or only partially understood. Although the Buddha pointed to a single 'right view' in terms of how to overcome suffering, as regards the practical matter of living in the world, some have said that he was a true pragmatist. Whatever works. We can see this in how the Rule (Vinaya) for the Sangha was developed. He does not seem to have come from some sort of preconceived ideal, but as time passed and the behaviour of monastics seemed inappropriate, rules were established. To give but one example. Lay people complained that monastics were coming at all times of the day on alms round and sometimes more than once! The Buddha established the rule that an alms round could only be done once in the morning and that all food had to be eaten by midday. There is also the celebrated change of mind concerning women joining the order. He had refused the request from women of his own family and court. Ananda asked him if women could become liberated and if so should, should they not be given the same opportunity as men to join the order. The Buddha relented. It's an interesting exercise to list all our views and opinions around religion, society, economy, and politics. Then ask what makes me so sure I am right and the other is wrong? How do I react when someone disagrees with me? Have I really listened to the other with an open heart? And, if you find you have no strong views, to ask: Do I need to put more energy into clarifying the beliefs that are guiding me through life? How might I do this? <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/Bitter Lake>

The Sacred: Its Meaning and the Role of Free Speech

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this thoughtful reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines what constitutes 'the sacred' from a Buddhist perspective, identifying the Buddhadhamma as the teachings that provide life's profoundest meaning. He traces the evolution of Buddhist symbolism from the Dhamma wheel to the eventual creation of Buddha statues by Greek converts, distinguishing between the Sacred itself and its human expressions. The essay addresses the complex relationship between free speech and respect for religious symbols, drawing on the Buddha's guidance on Right Speech (sammā vācā) as kind, truthful, and timely communication aimed at persuasion rather than insult. Bhante discusses how commercial exploitation and disrespectful treatment of Buddhist imagery—from garden ornaments to advertising—can cause genuine offense to practitioners. He advocates for respectful dialogue when sacred symbols are misused, sharing practical examples of his own gentle interventions. The essay encourages readers to reflect on what they hold sacred and how to respond skillfully when others show disrespect, balancing non-attachment with appropriate care for what gives life meaning.

The Sacred is that which gives life its profoundest meaning. It tells us why we are living and – why we must die. For myself, this is the Buddhadhamma, the teachings and practice as taught by the Buddha. These provide my core values. It is symbolised in the Wheel – originally a cart wheel. And the founder, teacher, exemplar and archetype is Siddhartha Gotama to whom we give the title, Buddha, the Awakened One. At first he was symbolised by a tree, an empty chair or footprints. But after 500 years, the Greeks who were the first Westerners to be converted to Buddhadhamma began producing statues. The Sacred itself should not be confused with the way it is expressed through the speech and actions of human beings. For we are all deluded and our expressions are conditioned by history, culture and our personal experience. Free speech and its companion, free expression have never been absolutes. Political correctness protects minorities and any expression inciting violence is illegal. However, there are those who say that this freedom includes the right to insult. It is one thing to express our disagreement with another's views and actions with the intention to insult them. And another to follow the Buddha's own advice about Right Speech, that it should be kind, truthful and spoken/written at a suitable time. The purpose would be to persuade the other to change their minds. So rather than coming from the heart of angry arrogance raising

only angry resistance from the other, the Buddha asks us to approach with humility - first understanding the other's position, then pointing out the errors and suggesting a different view. The Prophet Mohammed is the founder, teacher, exemplar and archetype for over a billion Muslims. As in early Buddhism, his depiction in form is seen as a sacrilege - an offense against the Sacred. Whatever means cartoonists and political satirists have to lampoon, satirise and ridicule Islamists, turning the Prophet into a figure of fun does nothing but insult all Muslims. Not distinguishing the Sacred and its symbol from how it is used in this case has cost lives and it could even be argued that it is incitement to violence and therefore unlawful. Buddhadhamma disavows all recourse to violence such is the commitment to harmlessness, though one is allowed to defend oneself. Even so the figure of the Buddha is often abused. At Bamiyam, the great statues were exploded by the Taliban. At a more banal level is the use of the image for commercial reasons. The Buddha in the lying posture used to advertise BA flights to USA that now offer beds. There is also a Buddha Bar and, of course, Buddha statues as pretty garden gnomes. And Buddha statues have even been used in pornography. There was a case of this in Thailand which scandalised the whole country. Here Buddhists may feel somewhat constrained. To complain may seem an expression of attachment and to get angry a sign of weakness. But I see no problem in asking people to respect what others consider sacred. Respect after all is but a facet of love. Only the most cynical materialists will fail to respond, paradoxically wanting their own views to be respected. So this is a good moment to ask ourselves: What does 'the sacred' mean to me? Do I hold anything sacred? How should I respond to someone who shows no respect for what I hold sacred?

Personal Experience: I was in a new-agey nick-knack shop and a small statue of the Buddha was on the floor by the door. I told the assistant who I was and how offended Buddhists would be to see a Buddha statue on the floor where it could be kicked even inadvertently. I suggested he could place it up on a shelf. When I went in next time it had been moved. We bought some toilet cleaning material it had the Buddha image on it. I phoned Tesco. The assistant said she would contact the manufacturers. Even if the statue was sold and the assistant simply raised her eyebrows and put the phone down, slowly but surely the message might get across that there are some things that need to be respected. An excellent book on this which I found most useful, covering all sensitive issues is the small: *Free Speech: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)* by Nigel Warburton

Awareness, Compassion and Wisdom

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the crucial difference between merely being aware of suffering and developing true compassion that motivates skillful action. Using the example of the European refugee crisis, Bhante Bodhidhamma illustrates how awareness can transform into genuine heart-connection when we move beyond intellectual understanding to felt empathy. The essay guides practitioners through the process of recognizing their initial reactions to others' suffering—whether fear, aversion, or indifference—and working with these responses mindfully rather than judging them. It emphasizes the importance of perspective-taking and the golden rule as foundations for authentic compassion. However, the teaching also warns against the dangers of unwise compassionate action, where good intentions can lead to overextension and harm to existing relationships and responsibilities. The essay concludes with the essential insight that compassion without wisdom creates additional suffering, highlighting the need to balance our desire to help with realistic assessment of our capabilities and limitations.

(Another angle – see earlier Tip:Pity, Sorrow and Compassion)There has been a clear example of the difference between awareness of suffering and compassion. For so long Europeans have heard and seen on screens the suffering of refugees from the war torn Middle East or coming across the Mediterranean. Nothing really happened save on the Greek and Italian Islands where these suffering people landed. It was only the photo of the lifeless body of a drowned toddler that suddenly made the connection. Awareness of suffering became compassion – a heart connection that demands action. An empathy and action – especially by Germany. And it continues in some effort to manage the crisis and not leave it up to Turkey, Jordan, Italy and Greece.It is quite simple really to acknowledge the distinction. Whenever we are aware of suffering of any kind, stay close to the heart. What do I feel? Is there fear or aversion or indifference or some other attitude? Now that may bring up feelings of guilt and shame. After all I'm supposed to be compassionate! All this, the negative reaction and the judgemental mind have to be acknowledged and felt. It's not pleasant.Then we have to put ourselves in the other's shoes. Or ask the question, if I was in that situation what would I hope people might do for me. It is the central human relationship – do unto others as you would have them do unto you.Consider the travail of refugees? They've probably been close to bombs dropping, perhaps lost family. They escape with little money – most spent on traffickers – and little food. The dangerous sea voyage. Arrive exhausted and in despair

as to the future. What would it be like to lose family, your home, your livelihood – your life as you knew it? It doesn't take long to conjure up sympathy. Sympathy is what we can feel through our imaginary efforts when we ourselves have not had such experiences. Should we have had some such experience of loss, homelessness, penury, then empathy – a closer resonance in the heart arises. Either way, they both lead to action. But then we have to be careful not to overdo it! We can get caught up in the energy aroused by compassion. The bigger the group, the greater the energy. But then we find ourselves volunteering for work that is beyond our capability – physically, mentally, financially. It can begin to put strains on long established relationships, on work. In focusing too much on the suffering of one particular person or group, we become blind to the problems we may be causing for others, usually those near to us. We can make sacrifices for ourselves, but not for others. If we can't carry people with us, we need to accept our limitations. It may come down to either not helping others in an hour of need because those close to us or our work situation won't support this, or helping others with a detrimental effect on your relationship to those close to us or our work. We need to be clear about what we are prepared to lose. Compassion without wisdom also leads to suffering.

To Become or Not to Become

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the Buddha's classification of three types of taṇhā (craving): kāma taṇhā (desire for sensual pleasures), bhāva taṇhā (desire to become), and vibhāva taṇhā (desire not to become). Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how these cravings manifest not only in daily life but also in deeper philosophical positions of eternalism and annihilationism—both of which the Buddha rejected as based on the illusion of self.

The essay distinguishes between annihilationism, materialism, and nihilism, showing how practitioners may unconsciously lean toward eternalist views (seeing Nibbāna as an eternal state that 'I' will enjoy) or annihilationist views (denying any transcendent dimension). Both perspectives miss the Buddha's middle way, which transcends the duality of existence and non-existence by investigating the very sense of self that gives rise to these positions.

The teaching concludes by pointing toward Nibbāna as uncreated and deathless—neither arising nor passing away—inviting practitioners to investigate the feeling of being 'me' and to recognize when this sense of self is absent even in ordinary daily life.

The Buddha lists three types of wrong desire - taṇhā. The first are those that cover all our day to day desires- kama taṇhā. The second is the desire to become – bhāva taṇhā. This is the self wanting to recreate itself time after time. And then there is vibhāva taṇhā – the desire not to become. The last desire is not as well publicised as the other two. We all know our day to day desires to do something, to enjoy life and get away from what upsets us. We are all aware of wanting to continue to live. Well, not all the time. Sometimes we want to get rid of ourselves. When we feel fed up, we slump into the armchair and fall asleep. Sometimes when things get really bad, we may even want to stop living altogether and sometimes wish we were never born. So, all of us experience these three desires now and again. However, the desire 'to continue or not to continue', refers also to a deeper positioning and this manifests in belief systems that presume the 'I' endures or does not. Such systems the Buddha called eternalism and annihilationism. His teaching did not sit in either category because these beliefs were based on the notion of a self. Annihilationism can often be confused with materialism or nihilism. Annihilationism seems to be a Buddhist term to oppose eternalism. It's not in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). It is the belief that when a person dies, that's it. Materialism, especially scientific materialism, believes everything is an 'emergent property' arising out of matter. So thoughts, emotions and consciousness arise primarily out of

the material of the brain and nervous system. Nihilism 'rejects all religious and moral principles, often in the belief that life is meaningless' O.E.D. Annihilationism, unlike materialism, can also include a finer energy, mind, as well as matter. But that will also annihilate upon death. Unlike nihilism it does not reject religious and moral principles. There's just no belief in an afterlife. When we sit deep within ourselves, we may touch upon our deepest intuition about life and death. It may be that we feel life is worthwhile and has a meaning beyond itself. That is 'I am worthwhile, 'I am meaningful and 'I will continue to live after death. Or we may intuit life is not worthwhile and has no meaning beyond itself. That is 'I am ultimately insignificant, 'I have no intrinsic value and 'I will not continue to live after death. Just because I believe I am eternal doesn't mean life is all roses. Just because I think life is ultimately meaningless, doesn't mean I'm not going to have good time or behave ethically. So long as there is a self, we will veer to one or the other of these opposites. And this will manifest in our understanding of the Buddhadhamma. Eternalists tend to think of Nibbana as an eternal state of Buddhahood that 'I will enjoy – 'someone' who is a Buddha. Annihilationists will deny that the Buddha ever taught there was a transcendent and if there is, it is only momentary. The answer lies in our careful investigation of that very sense of self, the feeling of being 'me', whenever such a sense or feeling arises. We can also reflect when it has not been there – even in ordinary daily life. The Buddha says Nibbana was not created nor does it die. So it must be here. He says it doesn't arise and pass away which is just another way of saying the same thing. So it must be constant. So what could 'it' be?

Appamāda: Diligent

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines appamāda, one of the Buddha's most frequently used terms, which encompasses diligence, heedfulness, and careful attention. Drawing from the Aṅguttara Nikāya (AN 1.58-59), Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how the Buddha considered heedfulness the single most important factor for preventing unwholesome qualities from arising and cultivating wholesome ones. The essay breaks down appamāda into three interconnected aspects: effort (industrious, persistent, zealous), awareness (attentive, vigilant, heedful), and care (conscientious, meticulous, thorough). It presents practical methods for cultivating this quality through daily reflection, asking ourselves whether we approach our thoughts, speech, and actions with genuine diligence. Bhante emphasizes that appamāda functions as a Right Attitude within the Noble Eightfold Path, but must be grounded in Right Understanding and wisdom to be truly beneficial. The teaching concludes with guidance on recognizing and skillfully working with the opposite tendencies of laziness and procrastination, treating them as opportunities for mindful awareness rather than occasions for self-judgment.

Appamāda is one of the Buddha's favourite words. It comes into his final exhortation: 'All compounded things arise and pass away. Strive diligently for your liberation.' Although the Buddha mentions lots of virtues needed to stop unwholesome states arising and to develop wholesome states, diligence is there among them. This is how he phrases them, here in the quality of diligence: Bhikkhu Bodhi: The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha – prefers the word heedful. AN 1.58 I do not see even a single thing that so causes unarisen unwholesome qualities to arise and arisen wholesome qualities to decline as heedlessness. For one who is heedless, unarisen unwholesome qualities arise and arisen wholesome qualities to decline. AN 1.59 I do not see even a single thing that so causes unarisen wholesome qualities to arise and arisen unwholesome qualities to decline as heedfulness. For one who is heedful, unarisen wholesome qualities arise and arisen unwholesome qualities to decline. These are synonyms for appamāda: Hard-working, industrious, assiduous, heedful, meticulous, conscientious, thorough, attentive, careful, painstaking, persistent, vigilant, zealous. I think we can separate these out into three different lists: the first to do with effort, the second with mindfulness and the third with care. Perhaps you would organise them differently. Mindfulness: attentive, vigilant, heedful. Care: careful, conscientious, meticulous, thorough, painstaking. Effort: hard-working, industrious, assiduous, persistent, zealous. Each word brings a nu-

ance to our reflection. In this way appamāda offers us a useful way to reflect on our actions. In the general how would I describe the way I think, say and do things? Taking each word and to ask: Am I in general ...? Then a daily reflection: Have I been ...? And finally even after a task: Was I ...? Appamāda is to be seen as a Right Attitude in the Eightfold Path. We express this attitude in the way we think, speak and act. In this way it becomes habitual. But, of course, this presumes that the intention and the act arise out of wisdom, Right Understanding. For these are the same qualities you need to rob a bank! Then there is antonym: lazy, sluggish, slothful, can't be bothered, do it tomorrow. That's what we have to see first of all, the underlying unwholesome tendency (anusaya) and the presenting defilement (kilesa). As per usual, we recognise it, acknowledge it, feel it and stay with it a while if there's time. If not, park it, put it one side without fear or aversion, refuse to be hijacked and raise appamāda.

Aim and Objective in Present Time

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching addresses the fundamental challenge of living authentically in the present moment while navigating the practical demands of daily life. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how our conventional understanding of linear time—past, present, and future—can become a barrier to experiencing reality as it unfolds moment by moment. The essay reveals how we often live disconnected from the present, either compelled by past decisions or driven by imagined futures, missing the immediacy of what is actually happening.

The core teaching introduces a transformative distinction between 'aim' and 'objective': while our aim might be future-oriented (such as arriving at an appointment on time), our objective can always be present-moment awareness—staying mindful of what is happening right now, including any anxiety, thoughts, or physical sensations that arise. Through practical examples like opening doors, brushing teeth, or traveling, the teaching illustrates how frequently we miss present moments by mentally projecting ourselves elsewhere.

This approach offers a middle way between the necessity of planning and scheduling in daily life and the cultivation of genuine present-moment awareness. Rather than abandoning the useful concept of time, we learn to hold it lightly while maintaining contact with immediate experience. The teaching provides a foundation for developing continuous mindfulness that supports both vipassanā meditation practice and awakened living in everyday situations.

Our concept of time is linear. We believe we are coming from a past, stop for a moment in the present and head off into the future. Historically speaking this is true. We can point to a past happening and we can predict to some extent what will happen in the future. These views can be considered as conventional. From a personal point of view, time is a way we structure events. If I said to you, I went for a walk yesterday afternoon, you would be able to position that walk in time – about so many hours ago. Not today. Not tomorrow. All this is useful for daily living, but it can be a barrier to experiencing time in a liberated way. In what way do we liberate ourselves from time? First of all it is to acknowledge that time does not actually exist. It is a concept whereby we organise past, present and future events. It's not that we want to get rid of the concept. If we did, we would be utterly disorientated. But we need to recognise the disconnection with actual present events that may come with it. This moment is sandwiched between what I think happened in the past (memories are never absolutely accurate)

and what I presume will happen in the future. So I am either being compelled to act in a certain way determined by a past decision or I am acting in a way dictated by a future I imagine or expect. In this way, I am never living in the present moment as it is right now. When I am behaving like this, I am not in contact with the way things really are. In fact I find myself often in conflict with what is actually happening or manipulating what is happening to realise a future event. I'm neither living in the future nor experiencing the present moment as it is. One way we can bring ourselves into present time is to make a distinction between aim and objective. Supposing we have to go to the dentist. (I prefer uplifting examples.) When I set off the aim is to get to the dentist on time. The objective is to stay mindful of what is happening every moment of the way. This may also include any anxiety about being late or thoughts about what may happen. This way we are always living in the present even though we may be experiencing the consequences of past action and the effects of future action. In other words, it is to live in the immediacy of the present moment. Catch yourself opening a door. Are you already in the other room? Catch yourself brushing your teeth. Are you in a hurry to get it over with, so you can launch yourself into bed? How many times have you set out on a journey and arrived at where you are going whether driving or public transport without any awareness of the journey? How many times have you 'mislaid' your keys? If we see how frequent is the number of missed present moments, we'll want to do something about it.

Money and Power

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

This essay examines how Buddhist principles might address contemporary economic inequalities and social challenges. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores a passage from the Dīgha Nikāya where the Buddha's wise counsel suggests addressing social problems through economic support rather than punishment, emphasizing the provision of resources to farmers, traders, and government workers. The teaching highlights how the Dhamma has yet to be fully adapted to post-industrial society and the challenges posed by extreme wealth disparity.

The essay introduces Distributism, a Catholic social doctrine that seeks a middle path between capitalism and socialism through the principles of subsidiarity (local control) and solidarity (mutual support). Drawing parallels with Buddhist sangha principles, particularly the Buddha's teaching that 'admirable friendship... is actually the whole of the holy life,' the discussion explores how shared ownership and local empowerment might create greater social cohesion.

Addressing potential Buddhist concerns about ownership, the essay clarifies that monastics do 'own' their robes and alms bowl, emphasizing that the problem lies not in possession itself but in how we relate to what we possess. The teaching suggests that when people have genuine stakes in their communities through ownership and decision-making power, they develop greater responsibility and self-esteem, contributing to overall social harmony and reducing the corrosive effects of extreme inequality on both individual wellbeing and societal stability.

When it comes to money and power, the Buddha, of a very different age, has only general guidelines for us today. For instance, here is a wise counsellor advising his king: You majesty, the country is beset by thieves. It is ravaged; villages and towns are being destroyed ... If your majesty were to tax this region that would be the wrong thing to do. If you majesty (were) to get rid of this plague of robbers by executions and imprisonment ... the plague would not be ended properly. Those who survive would later harm the realm. However, this plan will eliminate the plague ... to (farmers) let Your Majesty distribute grain and fodder; to those in trade, capital; those in government service, a proper living wage. D.N5 (In the Buddha's Words by Bhikkhu Bodhi) The teaching of the Buddha spread through different cultures in the east and established 'medieval' societies. With the onset of the industrial revolution, the tech. revolution and modernism,

even post-modernism, the Dhamma has yet to be fully adapted. The combination of money and power can be lethal and the discrepancy between the one-percenters and high earners (including those who head Charities!) and the lowest paid is undermining social cohesion. There are economists who say it is bad for the economy! How might we consider a change, for it is our civic duty to have a perspective on the financial, social and political landscape? Christianity has been in the thick of change and heavily challenged. It has over time had various responses and perhaps one that comes close to the Buddha's way of thinking is Distributism. This is a social doctrine developed by the Catholic Church which is often described as a middle ground between Capitalism and Socialism. But actually it has deep roots in Catholic social doctrine. It is based on the idea of equality which is expressed in the terms subsidiarity and solidarity. These words will not come as a surprise. Subsidiarity, a word we may have become familiar with when we 'were' EU members, actually originated in the Catholic Church. In politics, it is 'the principle that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level'. The word became prominent in EU after the 80's, fearful of central control – the ogre of Brussels! And solidarity defined as 'unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group', is a core principle of unions. The argument is based on seeing the fallacy of both Capitalism and Socialism as giving ownership either to the boss or to the state. Ownership is another word for control. Distributism is searching for a way to give back ownership to everyone on the understanding that the dispossessed would then have greater control and greater power both in the local community (subsidiarity) and at higher levels of governments by forming pressure groups (solidarity). There is a simple psychological reason for ownership in that the owner takes better care than one who rents or works for. I've rented and bought a house; I've worked for someone and I have worked for myself; so to me this is obvious. This may be a no-no for some Buddhists who think all possession is wrong. Or as Proudhon, the first person to declare himself an anarchist, would say, 'All property is theft!' It may come as a surprise that a monastic 'owns' their robes and bowl. In fact, every time I get a new set of robes, I have to put a 'bindu', a mark, on it to distinguish it as my own. There was a bit of 'all property is theft' going on and monks made off with other monks robes. Since they didn't 'possess' them, how could it be 'taking what is not freely given'? It's not what we possess, but how we possess which presents the problem, of course. When someone makes off with the mobile, we still go around saying someone stole my mobile. But it's hardly mine since the thief possesses it! Possession of things is a legal construct and can be an attachment. But when we realise that actually we can only use objects, we free ourselves of a lot of stress and possessiveness. So just a monastic 'owns' their robes, so an individual can 'own' his property, 'own' her business. As for solidarity, it is core sangha principle. To quote an well known saying of the Buddha:

Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. By which we can include society as a whole. And we are much more likely to build societal solidarity when all people feel they have something to cherish and something to defend – their property or business. In the political jargon – a stakeholder. Self-esteem is based upon the ability to make decisions for oneself, to take responsibility for them and so have power over one's life. This, of course, can never be complete power. But the more power we have, the greater our self-esteem and the respect of others – and our sense of responsibility. So it is that power and riches feed one another for better or for worse. You may be interested in this documentary about the Capitalist System. Four Horsemen - Feature Documentary - Official Version <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fbvquHSPJU>

Passive Aggression

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the common but destructive pattern of passive aggression - the indirect expression of anger and frustration through behaviors like ignoring others, chronic lateness, deliberate poor performance, and spiteful withdrawal. He explores how these strategies arise when we feel unable to address conflicts directly, often due to power imbalances or fear of confrontation, yet only serve to worsen situations and relationships.

The essay provides concrete examples of passive aggressive behaviors and their impact on both perpetrators and recipients. Bhante emphasizes the importance of honest self-reflection and maintaining close contact with our feelings, as taught in Buddhist mindfulness practice. He offers practical guidance for addressing passive aggression skillfully - whether in ourselves through honest communication, or when receiving it from others through patient, non-reactive dialogue that creates safety for authentic expression.

Drawing from his own experience with neighborhood conflicts, Bhante demonstrates how awareness, patience, and willingness to acknowledge our own potential mistakes can sometimes resolve tensions without ever fully understanding their origins. This teaching bridges Buddhist principles of Right Speech and emotional awareness with practical conflict resolution in daily life.

There are times when we are not getting what we want and feel angry, upset, disappointed and so on. Yet for one reason or another we won't accept the situation and work towards getting it. Because we feel such negativity, we are not able to talk calmly about the problem. We don't want to be openly angry either for fear of the other's reaction and they may be more powerful, such as the boss at work, for instance. So we find ourselves in an unhappy situation and yet unable to 'do' anything about it. So we may choose to behave in a way to undermine the other, not realising that this is making things worse. Unfortunately, it may be an habitual way of reacting and we may not even be aware of our behaviour as an expression of anger, frustration and so on. We are bewildered as to why the other got so upset with us. We may not be aware that we are indulging in a form of bullying. A common strategy is to ignore the person you are angry with. You may be justifying it ('she's impossible!'), but you actually want to avoid conflict and punish them at the same time. Consider how you feel when you are ignored. Another is to be late. You may give yourself all sorts of excuses - had to this and that, the mobile rang, just missed the bus, the train and so on. How do you feel when

someone is late a lot of the time? Here at Satipanya, how do you feel when the same person repeatedly comes in just a minute or two after time? Spiteful withdrawal of the usual things you would do - sex, cooking, gardening, taking on responsibility not strictly yours at work and then not doing it without telling anyone. How do you react when someone acts like this towards you? Doing something badly and then blaming anyone, everyone. But actually you couldn't be bothered. And anyway you didn't like the way you were asked or 'why was I asked to do this'. How do you feel when you've asked someone to do something for you and they have agreed, but obviously done it in a slapdash way and there is a feeling of irritation in the air. And all such strategies can be used at work to undermine the boss or the junior. If you know yourself to be a frequent user of passive aggressive strategies, it is good to ask yourself in what way does this help a situation? Surely it would be better to find an occasion - no matter how difficult it may be - to be honest with other. If the situation becomes intolerable, it may be worth losing a friendship or work rather than carry on feeling angry, frustrated and miserable all the time. If we are on the receiving end of passive aggression, what can we do? Often it is a case of the elephant in the room. We have to wait for a time and place to talk to the person, undermine any fear they have of us; let them be clear that we are willing to accept that we may have behaved wrongly; that we are prepared to come to an arrangement. The worst we can do is to react with anger. If they are unaware of their passive aggression, they will just deny it. Why are you sulking? : I'm not sulking. Is there something wrong? : No! : I feel you are angry with me. : Why would I be angry with you? You are late again. : Everyone is late once in a while. Why are you so angry about it? You've done the job so poorly. : Sorry! I know you would have done it better. As far as our practice is concerned, it is always better to keep close contact with our feelings. They tell us how we are reacting. To be honest with ourselves. To make sure we don't act passive aggressively - especially against someone who is being passively aggressive! That will only make the situation worse and make us feel worse. A couple of months back, I am getting very strong passive aggressive signals from the neighbouring family. Even the boy gives me dirty looks. I finally got the opportunity to talk to the wife. I told her I am getting a lot of bad feelings from you. Can you tell me why? I'm sure there's been a misunderstanding. She denied the whole thing! My hope now is to catch the husband and try another tack. Then something strange happened. I went out to the post box and they were coming down the road. I greeted them. They were both very welcoming. Then they went to gate to see their two very beautiful, Shetland ponies and their foals. I joined them and he suddenly started a friendly conversation. I never did get to the bottom of it. If all this strikes a bell, there's lots on the websites. I found this informative: <http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/passive-aggressive.html>

In what way should Buddhadhamma affect our politics?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This thoughtful essay examines the intersection of Buddhadhamma and political engagement in modern democratic societies. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws on historical examples of the Buddha's own involvement in the politics of his time, including his intervention in the water dispute between the Sākya and Koliya clans, and his indirect counsel to King Ajātasattu regarding the attack on the Vajji confederation. The essay addresses the challenge of making informed political decisions amid bias and incomplete information, questioning how we can transcend our own prejudices and partisan viewpoints.

The teaching explores fundamental moral questions about governance: whether society should embody mutual concern and collective responsibility, or stark individualism where people must fend for themselves. Bhante Bodhidhamma suggests practical approaches for Buddhist practitioners engaging with political issues, including examining our assumptions, listening openly to opposing viewpoints, and cultivating empathy while avoiding the pitfalls of rigid political correctness. The essay encourages a more nuanced understanding of complex issues like immigration, healthcare, and climate change, grounded in Buddhist ethical principles rather than mere partisan preference.

The recent vote concerning membership of the EU, (and perhaps we can include the presidential elections in USA) brought up one stark reality about democracy. The vast majority of us (I include myself) don't know enough to make a truly informed vote. And the 'information' given by parties, newspapers and other social outlets are always skewed towards their own bias. Indeed all of us vote from a biased angle – our preference. Politics is about power. So when we vote, we put someone in power over us! When a person or party has power, they can change our society, our national and local community. When an election comes round, this is the only time, we, ordinary citizens have a chance to affect the political landscape and so the society, the national and local communities we live in. The Buddha got involved in the politics of his time, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. Though a very different society, the moral problems around power were the same. When a dispute arose over the water rights of the Rohini River between the Buddha's own clan, the Sakya and the neighbouring clan, the Koliya, he went to pacify a situation that threatened to turn into a war. He asked them what is more precious the water that runs in the river or the blood that runs in our veins? The

new young king of Magadha, Ajātasattu (who starved his father to death!), sent advisors to ask the Buddha whether it was a good time to attack the Vajji Sangha, a democratic republic. The Buddha enumerates the qualities that make a sustainable Sangha, the monastic order. (see below). The king took this to mean it was 'not the right time' to attack. So he then went on by subterfuge to undermine those very qualities the Buddha had obliquely praised and so eventually conquered them. Whether the Buddha would have voted or not, is a moot point. There are party politics and there are also some real people issues out there. These days there are so many community issues on the plate – immigration, NHS, armed intervention, the financial sector, EU, climate change and so on. Is there a way we can guide ourselves so that we are not boxed in by our own views and opinions and worse by our unacknowledged biases; nor swayed by popular demand? A very old friend who is active in local politics texts: Cultural sensitivity is empathy. However, political correctness has now come to create a consensus on truth and bans criticism - and denigrates those who object to that consensus. It is instructive to make a list and write what we want to happen and why. And then to question our assumptions by seeing what those opposed to our positions are arguing. To be open to their arguments. To listen - and not be afraid that we will somehow be hoodwinked or brainwashed or converted. It may surprise us that opposing arguments also have their strengths. We may move to a more nuanced position. Post Script: Talk on TED: http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en Transcript Jonathan Haidt: The moral roots of liberals and conservatives Is this why liberals (small l) become conservative (small c) in later life? A Moral Politics Given that government, in theory at least, is our common will, representing us as a people, how do we define ourselves? Will we come to the aid of those among us struggling to get by or will we throw the needy back upon their own meager resources? Is the prevailing philosophy of governance one of mutual concern and collective help, or one of stark individualism in which everyone has to fend for themselves, or at best rely on charity? This is not so much a political question as a moral one, a question pertaining to the moral basis of our common life. Much depends on how we answer it. - Bhikkhu Bodhi, "A Moral Politics"

Practice makes perfect.*

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma draws compelling parallels between spiritual practice and athletic training, emphasizing that meaningful repetition requires clear purpose and dedication. The essay explores how the Buddha's teachings provide both technique (vipassanā meditation) and guidance for maintaining Right Awareness (sammā sati) in daily life, grounded in ethical conduct and mettā (loving-kindness).

The author explains that sitting meditation practice involves repeatedly returning attention to the present moment and the breath, allowing natural insights to arise into the three characteristics of existence: dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), anicca (impermanence), and anatā (not-self). These insights emerge not as dramatic revelations but as moments of recognition that deepen understanding gradually.

Bhante Bodhidhamma emphasizes that daily life itself becomes the practice when Right Awareness is combined with ethical behavior. Even routine activities like morning ablutions or eating can become opportunities for 'this-moment-attention' practiced with a wholesome heart. The essay concludes with the crucial point that spiritual aspiration without dedicated practice leads only to fantasy and disappointment, reminding practitioners that even the Buddha achieved awakening through committed practice, not aspiration alone.

Practice is repetition. Think of the tennis player, the piano player, the actor. Indeed even if you want to become proficient on the keyboard, you have to practice. I myself have become fairly proficient in the two finger technique! Now we can't just practice for the sake of practice. Repetition would be meaningless if the aim was simply to repeat and repeat. It would be a hell realm. Consider the punishment of Sisyphus, 'the king of Ephyra (now known as Corinth). He was punished for his self-aggrandizing craftiness and deceitfulness by being forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it come back to hit him, repeating this action for eternity' (Wikipedia). That's tough! There has to be an aim, a purpose. And it's the purpose which should give us the courage and tenacity to keep up the practice. Again bring to mind the dedication of Olympic athletes. In this sense we should endeavour to be spiritual athletes. Luckily this does not need physical prowess or intellectual brilliance – in fact we don't need any special talent at all. What we need is confidence in the vision that we are capable of perfect contentment and happiness. To achieve this, the Buddha has given us a technique, vipassana and instructions on how to maintain Right Mindfulness in ordinary daily life. It all

boils down to this Right Awareness. And when he talks of living the life guided by the Dhamma, it is always based on the virtues – the emphasis being on Metta, that universal quality of good will to all beings. In our sitting practice, the repetition starts with settling on the breath. And then to repeatedly bring ourselves back to the presenting event – what’s actually happening now. That’s the practice. Insights arise naturally into the three spiritual gateways of awakening – understanding how we create suffering, experiencing the reality of impermanence and realising the false identities and possessions we are creating. Insights are not shattering experiences, but moments or recognition, of acknowledgement, most reinforcing, deepening what we have already seen. In ordinary daily life, this mindfulness is conjoined with ethical behaviour and the very life we lead is the practice. Much of our daily life is repetitious. The morning ablutions, the eating, the job and so on. And yet, of course, each event is just that little bit different from the rest. Even so the practice is bringing ‘this-moment-attention’ to bear with a good heart. When we have an aim, all repetition becomes meaningful. But that doesn’t translate into dedication. That comes by exercising the virtues – raising enthusiasm and resolve. A real heart-felt commitment. Resolute practice underpins awakening. If all we have is the aim, some vision as to the future attainment, and no practice. Then the spiritual life enters the world of fantasy and disappointment. The Buddha did not become Buddha by aspiration alone.* Seemingly this phrase is coined from a man who is a legend in American Football coaching, Vince Lombardi. He actually said: Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect.

Right Speech

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines sammā vācā (Right Speech), one of the three moral foundations of the Noble Eightfold Path alongside Right Action and Right Livelihood. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores why Right Speech is perhaps the most challenging aspect of sīla to maintain, given our constant internal and external dialogue. The essay analyzes the four categories of wrong speech outlined in Buddhist ethics: lies (including exaggerations and their underlying motivations), slander (distinguishing harmful gossip from beneficial warnings), coarse language arising from anger or lust, and useless chatter that serves no meaningful purpose.

Drawing from the Majjhima Nikāya, the teaching presents the Buddha's positive guidelines for skillful speech: speaking at the right time, speaking truthfully while considering how words are received, using gentle language, ensuring speech is beneficial, and speaking with mettā (loving-kindness). The essay also addresses the complexity of knowing when not to speak, whether from fear, confusion, or as an expression of anger.

With practical wisdom for both formal meditation practice and daily life, this guidance emphasizes the importance of pausing before speaking to check one's mental state, coming from wisdom rather than reactive emotions when the heart is disturbed.

Of the three moral categories in the Eightfold Path - Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood, Right Speech is probably the hardest to keep. Mainly because we are always talking if not to others then to ourselves and the only respite is sleep! Right Speech is expressed negatively in the Five Training Rules: Not to use wrong speech. The wrong sort of talk we get into are lies, slander, coarse language and useless talk. Lies we probably don't tell any more. I mean real porkers. But what about exaggerations? And for what purpose are we exaggerating. To aggrandise ourselves, to defend ourselves, even to belittle ourselves? And similarly of the other. Slander means telling someone about another's faults, but it depends on the purpose. Is it to do them harm or is to warn someone? And there's :A truth that's told with bad intent Beats all the lies you can invent." William Blake Coarse language usually comes out of lust or anger. But it can also be a bad habit. We need to ask what effect it has? Is it to be 'one of the boys/girls'. A sort of bonding? Is that the sort of company we want to keep? Useless speech is simply talking for talking sake. This does not include the usual social pleasantries. In the Discourses, it often describes how when someone visits the Buddha 'some exchanged

greetings with him, and when the courteous and amiable talk was finished, sat down to one side'. M60.3 We find it very difficult to be silent with another, even when we know them well. The other can feel very uncomfortable if we don't speak. So if we feel we cannot keep silent, then at least let us guide the conversation to something mutually interesting. The Buddha also gives us pointers to use speech skilfully. Apart from the opposite of the above, the Buddha suggests: Spoken at the right time: often we have to choose when to say something especially if the other will find it difficult to hear. What is said is true: we have to remember that what we say may not be heard as we intend it to be heard. We sometimes have to check with the listener. In an interview, the teacher may repeat back to the meditator what they said to be sure they have heard properly. It is spoken gently: sometimes that might mean we have to count ten. What is said is beneficial: that is to the benefit of the other, or to ourselves or to the other and ourselves. It is spoken with the heart of loving-kindness. Then, of course, there is the whole area of not speaking when we ought to. Was it because we were afraid? Confused? Or is not talking a way we express our anger, spite, sourness and so on. But then again, silence can speak volumes. Tricky stuff! But in general, the trick to right speech is to pause before we speak; to glance inward and know our mental state. If the heart is not in a good place, then come from the seat of wisdom. Not easy!

Equanimity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores equanimity (upekkhā) as arguably the most important virtue in the Buddha's path, serving as the foundation that prevents other wholesome qualities from being corrupted by their subtle enemies. Bhante Bodhidhamma uses the analogy of an impartial judge to illustrate how equanimity operates - remaining unswayed by emotional reactions, personal biases, or external pressures while making decisions from a position of truth and dharmic principle.

The essay examines how virtues can become distorted without the stabilising influence of equanimity: love becoming attachment, generosity becoming detrimental excess, or courage becoming recklessness. It challenges readers to honestly examine their own biases and prejudices, particularly around contentious topics like politics, identity, and religion, asking whether our thoughts and feelings align with dharmic truth rather than personal preference.

The teaching emphasises equanimity's role in enabling us 'to see things as they really are' - a fundamental requirement for vipassanā practice. The practical guidance encourages approaching situations 'without prejudice, without fear, without anger and without preference,' acknowledging this as an aspirational goal that requires ongoing cultivation through mindful self-examination and alignment with Dhamma principles.

Equanimity is not the sort of word you hear very often. As for myself, I didn't really know what it meant. Something about balanced mind. In the Buddha's teaching, it is arguably the most important of all virtues. For sitting on the bed of equanimity, the other virtues are less likely to be corrupted into their direct or subtle enemies. And we are more likely 'to see things as they really are'. Every virtue has its opposite: love and hatred, generosity and greed, courage and cowardice and so on. And more subtle ones too: love and attachment, generosity and overly generous detrimental to oneself or the other or both: courage and fool heartedness. Equanimity is a quality we would expect of a judge. We don't expect them to get caught up in the clever arguments of the lawyers. The opinionated mind. We don't expect them to be persuaded by the baying the crowd. The emotional heart. They are to be impartial. We do not expect them to be angry with the criminal so clouding their sentencing. Or indeed fearful of possible reprisals from a guilty criminal on summing up and guiding the jury and eventual sentencing. They are not meant to come from a personal angle, but from the position of the law. So it is with

equanimity in ordinary daily life. Do we know our biases. Do we only read, listen and talk to those who have the same. Do we take the position of 'I'm right'. Or more subtly 'we're right'. It always feels more right-eous when others agree with us. In a quiet moment when we can talk to ourselves truthfully, what do we really think about politics, sexual identities, religion and other questions of our time? And then how we really feel. Do they match up? Are there hidden darkneses we have kept secret even from ourselves. Little prejudices that our ideal sense of self has not really allowed accepted. 'If I thought that, it wouldn't be me.' From the position of the Dhamma, often translated as the Law, the Truth, what ought we to think and feel? Do we have the humility to accept that? So when are we equanimous? When we come into any given situation without prejudice, without fear, without anger and without preference. Mmmm. Well, that's where we are aiming. 388

Shame

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the complex role of shame in Buddhist ethics and daily life, challenging the common view that all shame is inherently negative. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the Buddha regarded shame, along with its companion guilt or fear of consequences, as a guardian of society that prevents harmful actions. The essay distinguishes between appropriate shame that arises from genuine ethical lapses and excessive shame from social gaffes or over-sensitivity that can become paralyzing.

The teaching provides practical guidance for working with shame through vipassanā practice—recognizing it as an unwholesome mental state when it arises, observing it mindfully, and allowing it to pass. It emphasizes that while the feeling of shame itself is unwholesome, the desire to avoid shame can serve as a wholesome motivator for ethical conduct. The essay offers reflection exercises for examining our responses to unethical thoughts, speech, or actions, helping practitioners develop a refined moral conscience.

This exploration is particularly relevant for understanding how Right Action and Right Speech relate to our social relationships and self-respect, showing how mindful awareness can transform our relationship with uncomfortable emotions into opportunities for ethical growth and wisdom.

Shame gets a bad press. It is as though we shouldn't feel it at all. All shame is bad. It may come as a surprise then that the Buddha calls shame a guardian of society and it is coupled with guilt or fear of consequences. Shame or its lesser form embarrassment is what we feel when we have let ourselves down and especially when we have let ourselves down in other people's eyes. There is the delightful tale of Sir Walter Raleigh who, presumably as he bowed to the Queen Elizabeth, let out a great fart. He did not reappear at court for year or so. When he did arrive the Queen greeted him warmly and told him, 'We have forgot the fart.' We are often more ashamed by social gaffes than by immoral behaviour. And I dare say if we get away with it, we have none at all. Are we ashamed when we slander someone, no matter how slight? Or take the pen home from the office? Or exaggerate to the point of untruthfulness? There is a level of shame that can be too delicate. An over-sensitive conscience. If a small gaffe of calling someone by the wrong name keeps you up at night; if we find ourselves avoiding society because of the way we look; if we freeze when we stand up in public (shyness often masquerades for shame); then we may benefit from counselling. There is also the exercise of being

aware of the feeling. Recognise it as unwholesome and wait for it to pass or do what you have to do anyway. This is vipassana in action. In the Buddhaddhamma, shame is always seen as an unwholesome state for it arises when we do or think something that belittles us. And yet without it and its companion of the guilty fear of consequences what would stop any of us from committing crimes? It is the desire not to suffer shame and its companion, guilt that is wholesome. So the task is to reflect on any thought, speech or action which we see is unethical, harmful or simply insensitive and to acknowledge what shame or lack of it came up. If we feel the shame, then we can reflect on the harm done to see if it is appropriate. We can talk to the person whom we imagine no longer respects us or holds us with the same regard, and correct or soften their view of us. If we acknowledge that what we have just done is wrong, insensitive, inappropriate and there is no shame to it, then again we need to reflect as to why that is? Don't we care how people view us? What sort of self-respecting standards are we keeping if we couldn't care less if we break them? This is all to do with refining our moral conscience. It is about how we relate. The way we relate manifests our wisdom or lack of it.

Guilt

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma examines guilt through a Buddhist lens, distinguishing it from the existential guilt found in Abrahamic traditions. Rather than viewing guilt as evidence of inherent sinfulness, he presents the Buddha's teaching that wrongdoing arises from ignorance (avijjā) of 'the way things really are.' This fundamental misunderstanding leads to actions rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion that ultimately harm ourselves and others.

The essay explores both healthy and unhealthy manifestations of guilt. Appropriate guilt serves as a guardian of society, helping us recognize when we've caused harm and motivating us to make amends. However, excessive scrupulousness can create imbalance, while absence of guilt after harmful actions indicates a need for deeper reflection on consequences.

The teaching emphasizes using meditation to face guilt directly, opening to its painful tremors rather than avoiding them. Through experiencing guilt's suffering, we gain insight into the consequences of unskillful action and develop genuine remorse. When possible, making direct amends is encouraged, but when reconciliation isn't feasible, sitting with guilt while cultivating fierce determination not to repeat harmful behavior becomes the path forward. Ultimately, understanding our own suffering from guilt cultivates compassion for others who also experience this consequence of deluded action.

Like shame, the Buddha calls guilt a guardian of society. That guilty feeling means we know we are at fault. We know we have done some harm. This leads to the fear of consequences. This is not the same as existential guilt which someone may suffer from if they are brought up in one of the Abrahamic religions. For we are told we carry the sin of Adam. From an early age, we may have been told that we were essentially sinful. This is not the fundamental reason for our transgressions. The Buddha said wrong doing is secondary. The prior reason is non-culpable ignorance that causes us to fall into a delusion. We are essentially ignorant of the 'way things really are'. Because of this we commit errors based on acquisitiveness, aversion and fear. But paradoxically it is all done to make 'me' happy. Even so this leads us into actions of thought, speech and deeds that harm us and harm others. And that is when we feel guilty. If we did not feel guilty; if we did not perceive that we were a cause of another's suffering and of our own (how easy it is to blame our unhappiness on others!); if we are not worried about the consequences, what then would stop us doing harm? Guilt like all our unwholesome states must be faced. In our meditation we open up to its tremors. The fear of being caught.

The dread of consequence. Now it may be that the guilt we feel is inappropriate. To be unable to sleep because you purposely took a pen from the office, criticised your boss to someone whom you suspect might tell them or swatted a fly out of irritation may point to a guilt ridden conscience. A conscience full of scruples and qualms (the bug bear of the monastic life with all its 227 rules!) is a sign of imbalance. It is often relieving to talk to a friend whose judgement you trust to give you a wiser perspective. On the other hand when we feel no or little guilt after committing what society and ordinary people would consider wrong tells us we need to contemplate the consequences of what we have done. I knew someone who stole from a small book shop on the grounds of Marxist critique of a capitalist society, regardless of the effect on the struggling owner. However, when guilt is justifiable, we do need to turn into the feeling of guilt to really see how painful it is. Really opening up to the misery of that mental state is a departure for reflection. 'I would not be suffering this tormented heart, if I had not behaved unskilfully'. If we can put right what we did wrong, all well and good. Sometimes a simple apology. A gift. But if an occasion for reconciliation does not arise, then it may be possible to do something by way of reparation. Here is a rather extreme example. When a Hindu confessed to Gandhi he had murdered a Muslim child, Gandhi told him to find a Muslim orphan and bring him up as a Muslim. But if even that is not possible, then we have no option but to sit with the guilt and express our remorse and sorrow within ourselves. And, of course, a fierce determination not to behave in a similar manner again. When we experience within ourselves the suffering of guilt, realise it is the product of deluded unwholesome action, then we are more able to forgive others who do harm, for they will also suffer the same. Guilt, then, is also a first step towards compassion.

Gratitude, Generosity, Renunciation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the profound nature of dāna (generosity) as presented in the Buddha's traditional approach to instructing laypeople. Bhante Bodhidhamma clarifies that authentic generosity must be unconditional - given without expectation of return or reciprocation. He distinguishes between genuine dāna and transactional exchanges disguised as generosity, emphasizing that true giving should 'hurt a little' as it requires us to prioritize others' needs above our own comfort.

The essay reveals the deep connection between generosity and renunciation (nekkhamma), showing how every act of true giving involves letting go of attachment and false necessities. This process of release weakens the ego-self's grip, which manifests through clutching and fear of loss. Bhante explains how dāna becomes a spiritual practice that gradually dissolves our attachments and dependencies.

Central to cultivating generosity is gratitude (kataññutā) - recognizing the countless gifts we've received without being asked to repay them, from our parents' gift of life to our cultural inheritance including the Buddhadhamma itself. The teaching concludes with the beautiful paradox that the more we sacrifice through genuine giving, the greater our sympathetic joy (muditā) becomes, creating a virtuous cycle that propels us toward liberation. This accessible yet profound exploration shows how dāna serves as both ethical foundation and transformative spiritual practice.

The Buddha began any talk he gave to laypeople with dana, generosity. 'Even a thief can be generous!' We can be generous with our time and with our wealth. For the act to be true generosity it has to be given without conditions. If a friend needs a lift and you help her out, and there is a thought that she can be called upon when you are in need, then that is not generosity. It is a business contract. Business contracts are fine, but should not be confused with generosity. If you are out with someone and offer to buy the tea and are upset when the friend does not reciprocate, then it was not an act of generosity. That too was a business contract. An act of generosity has to hurt a little. It's hardly generous giving £5 a month to a favoured charity. What would it feel like giving £10 or £20? What if a friend is taken to hospital, how long should your visit last. If it is up to you (within reason), it is not generosity. Generosity puts the other first. In other words, generosity always – that is always! – asks for renunciation. We are giving up time and wealth for the benefit of the other – without recompense or refund. And it always hurts

a little. When we give something up, we let go of a little attachment, of a false necessity. Every time we give up a little attachment, the self shrinks a little. The self manifests as clutching 'for personal use only' and out of fear of loss. Generosity releases the cramp. This is the gift of generosity – releasing us from false needs and dependencies. But what motivates generosity in the first place. There's compassion, of course, when we see suffering. Expressions of love and joy too. But it is gratitude that can bolster our giving. Spend just a moment considering what you have received where pay-back was never asked: as a child (the Buddha reminds us that even should we carry our parents on our shoulders throughout our lives we would never be able to repay them the gift of life), support of family, education, health care, our culture – the Buddhaddhamma. The paradox is that more we give, the more the sacrifice, the more the sympathetic joy. But more, much more! This virtuous circle twirls us towards liberation.

Excitement, Boredom, Contentment

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the psychological trap of mistaking excitement for genuine happiness, a confusion that drives endless cycles of seeking and disappointment. Bhante Bodhidhamma illustrates how initial excitement—whether from worldly pursuits or even meditation experiences—inevitably gives way to boredom and restless searching for the next stimulation. He shows how consumerism exploits this pattern, feeding on our constant need for novelty and 'more.'

The essay reveals how this cycle can lead from disappointment through aversion to deeper boredom and potentially despair. Drawing on fundamental Buddhist insights about the nature of craving (taṇhā) and the unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) inherent in seeking happiness through external stimulation, the teaching offers practical remedies.

The path forward involves cultivating contentment through mindful repetition with good intention, practicing renunciation by letting go of constant planning, and developing present-moment awareness in simple activities. This approach transforms routine from a source of boredom into an opportunity for genuine satisfaction, demonstrating how contentment—rather than excitement—provides the foundation for lasting peace and wellbeing in both meditation practice and daily life.

It is when we confuse excitement with happiness that the trouble starts. You can get excited about anything – trainspotting, juggling, tiddly-winks. It does not matter what it is, so long as it excites us. We can absorb quickly into that mental state and for that time it is, well, heaven. There are those who absorb into beautiful states through their meditation and may even mistake them for Nibbana. So long as we can be lifted into that state, all is well. But when we don't get the same gratification, then disappointment sets in. After a joyous meal or party with old friends or family, there is a call for 'let's do it again!' The second time just does not live up to it. How disappointing! Suggestions for another meeting are met with rictus smiles and forced nods. Come the time, excuses abound. But what if you have to do the same thing again and again. Like work that once was so interesting. Or the breath in sitting that once was a haven. That is when the aversion sets in. A type of restless aversion that moves towards listlessness and a feeling of meaninglessness. Then a deeper boredom sets in. A sense of wasted time. Then the driving search for something - anything else. The fidgety swipes through websites. The restless flicking through channels. Scrolling through the social media. The pursuit of

biscuits. The mind in meditation starts to live in its virtual reality. And we find it! Now there is joy. And off we go again, indulging in a new passion. This time it is foraging for mushrooms, playing THE Great Big War Game, scanning up and down the body in sitting. And the whole cycle starts off again. How I save the world from ecological disaster. Consumerism depends on this sort of intoxication. And it is a religion that is onto a real winner, because once it has hooked you, it knows you are always after the NEW. New means good, means excitement. That is greed, of course. But how quickly we are bored. And at the first tweak of boredom, we are off 'seeking pleasures here and there'. Boredom is the underlying engine consumerism depends on. However great the excitement, boredom comes in equal measure. And the more excitement we indulge, the more we raise the bar, the greater the excitement has to be. Greed in all its forms is voracious. More, once an adjective, becomes a noun. We simply want More. Should there come a time when excitements lose their gloss and boredom, feelings of wasted time, of a vacuous lifestyle set in, then there arises the loss of hope of ever enjoying life again – and that beds into despair. That is endgame of course. But for most of us, we can take boredom as a warning. And the cure? Repetition with good intention. Re-establish why you are doing your job. And do it for that reason. Raise a sense of care to be excellent. Interest reappears. Acknowledging that a lot of what we do is useless entertainment and determine to spend the time more usefully. The joy of living returns. Practising renunciation. Let go of all that planning. What are we going to do this evening, this weekend, next month. Do something simple instead. Over a series of weekends, the same walk, the same simple meal. Draw the attention into the present doing, and develop contentment. This is the way it is and it is ok. Contentment is poison to boredom.

Silence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma examines our relationship with silence in a world overwhelmed by constant noise and stimulation. The essay begins by observing how modern culture drowns us in the sounds of traffic, music, and digital devices, noting how even our minds perpetually chatter, silenced only in deep sleep. While the outer senses can find rest, the ears remain alert even during sleep, and shutting out external noise often reveals the inner tumult of mental and emotional disturbance.

The teaching explores how concentration on neutral sensations like the breath can draw us into stillness and the 'delightful joy of silence.' For experienced practitioners with sufficient ability and time, deeper states of absorption offer 'sheer stillness, peace and absolute silence.' Yet even simple moments of quiet reflection with a cup of tea provide profound refreshment and nourishment.

The essay beautifully describes shared silence among friends as 'communication of being' - experiencing others in their essence before personality constructs emerge. This leads to the deepest teaching: a silence beyond conventional silence, transcending all comparative sounds, described as 'the resting place of the Buddha Within.' This progression from outer noise through inner stillness to ultimate silence reflects the meditative journey from worldly distraction to the unconditioned peace of our deepest nature.

Our world, the culture we live in, is drenched in noise. The sounds of traffic, of transport. The music, often making it difficult to speak, in cafes. Even in the Quiet Coach someone has to speak so everyone else can hear. On the streets, in the offices, in the parks, people walk with their smart phones on high alert. Forever communicating, listening, looking. Deaths on the roads are caused by the enchantment of smart phones. Every sense has its mode of rest. Smelling and tasting are the more sensitive the less they are put to work. Sight is rested easily in closed eyes. Touch softens in rest. But even in sleep, the ears are awake. How amusing it is to see a dog's ear straighten on a sound. And the mind! is for ever chattering, silenced only in deep sleep. Sounds are neutral. But some we hear as music to the ears and others as thorns. Music, whether of human or nature, is health giving. But there comes a time of too much. Noise brings tension and if constant ill-health. There comes a craving for the end of sound. The succulent pleasure of silence. But the mind won't stop so easily. In the quietest of meditation rooms, the mind blasts out. Not just the chatter, but the emotional noise too. All the

aversions, all the anxieties, all the lusts. Shutting down the outer world with its music and noise, only opens up the inner world – for most – a purgatorial video. We can draw the concentration down to the neutral sensations of the breath and listen to it. Feel it. Let it draw us into a stillness. The delightful joy of silence. For those with ability and time, there is a state of absorption of sheer stillness, peace and absolute silence. But even to sit in silence with a cup of tea, brings a deep refreshment. Whatever the depth of silence, there is always nourishment. Even more so among friends. To walk, to sit, to eat in silence, aware of the presence of the other, is a communication of being. It is the experience of the other in their essence, before their becoming somebody. It can be as shocking as death, as astonishing as birth. And there is a deeper silence still. It is a silence beyond silence, for there are no sounds to compare it with. Here is the resting place of the Buddha Within.

Courage, Fortitude and Resilience

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching addresses the universal experience of life-shattering moments—job loss, relationship collapse, illness, or death of loved ones—and how our response determines whether we descend into despair or begin the difficult journey of rehabilitation. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how such crises require courage to examine our role in events, fortitude to accept what cannot be changed, and resilience to forge new directions in life.

The essay draws a profound parallel between worldly catastrophes and spiritual crises that arise when we confront the delusions of our worldview. Just as the Buddha faced his darkest hour under the Bodhi Tree when Māra generated the Great Doubt, practitioners too must navigate periods of groundlessness and bewilderment with inner conviction and determination.

Using the Buddha's example of rooting himself to his seat and finding support in his perfected virtue of generosity, the teaching emphasizes that spiritual awakening often emerges from our deepest suffering. The essay concludes with the Buddha's fundamental insight: there is an end to all suffering and unsatisfactoriness—Nibbāna—which remains our ultimate destination and source of hope through life's inevitable trials.

It is a common experience that at least once in our lives everything seems to collapse around us. And we are left desperate. It may be failure to get the qualifications we need to do the work we have set our heart on. Or indeed the loss of work we love. It may be the collapse of a relationship we have become so dependent on. Or the death of someone close. It may be an illness that demands a radical change in our lives. Our first reaction is one of shock and disbelief. And as the reality of the situation looms through, the feeling of utter desolation. The future seems bleak. Hopeless. This is a crucial moment. We can either descend into the hell of depression and even suicide or into purgatory where we begin the process of rehabilitation. The suffering involved in purgatory is equal to hell, but for the change of attitude. We have reinstated a reason for living, a meaning for life. This takes courage. For our first task will be to ask why such a catastrophe has happened. It may be for reasons beyond our control; it may be the outer circumstances of the economy; it may be that the other has been unfaithful; it may be the nature of the body to fall ill. In such cases, there can only be acceptance and the turning into oneself to work with the emotional and mental reaction. And to explore potential. However, if it was a case of overconfidence, of being very much part of the

cause for the ending of a relationship, of carelessly putting the body into a dangerous situation, then a deep trawling of our attitudes needs to be undertaken. This takes patience, fortitude and perseverance – resilience. The situation may demand a completely new change of direction in our lives. It may call for continuing as we were, but with a very different attitude. It may mean a radical acceptance of a situation that cannot be altered. Once this decision has been made, no matter how dimly we see the potential outcome, we are on the road to rehabilitation. In many such cases, there is also a spiritual awakening. For in the misery, there also arises the question as to the purpose of life. Such occasions may also happen in our spiritual lives. In fact, I would say it has to happen to some degree or other. The world view we hold is, according to the Buddha, a delusion. When we come face to face with that delusion, it is bound to cause a disruption. And that dis-location can be as painful as any mundane one. There may be the sense of groundlessness and bewilderment, yet the inner conviction, no matter how dim, supported by the writings, experience and example of others, gives us the courage to commit and the determination to persist. In the Buddha's own darkest hour when Mara generated in him the Great Doubt – Who am I after all to seek the end of suffering? He had to ground himself. And the Earth Goddess rose to remind him that that his task was not just for his own benefit but for the benefit of all. And that he had perfected the virtue of generosity and so had the virtuous power to complete the task. Rooted to his seat beneath the Bodhi Tree, after six hours, came the insight into the end of all suffering, the direct experience of Nibbana. There is an end to suffering, to all unsatisfactoriness. It is our destination. Our only real destination.

One of the Hindrances is Sceptical Doubt

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This teaching examines the hindrance of sceptical doubt (vicikicchā) and its dual nature in spiritual practice. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws parallels between everyday situations where doubt prevents action—diving, job applications, relationships—and how similar patterns can paralyze our engagement with the Buddhadhamma. The essay distinguishes between paralyzing sceptical doubt and the healthy questioning that the Buddha encouraged.

The teaching addresses common doubts practitioners face regarding difficult concepts like anattā (not-self), kamma and rebirth, transcendence, and Nibbāna. Rather than demanding blind faith, the Buddha provided vipassanā meditation as a method for experiential investigation. This honest inquiry, rooted in wonder and curiosity rather than fear, becomes the very process of liberation by dissolving delusions.

The essay encourages practitioners to examine whether their 'certainties' are based on personal experience or merely accepted beliefs from family, culture, or tradition. It suggests cultivating comfort with 'not knowing' rather than rushing to conclusions, viewing spiritual practice as exploration rather than a series of successes and failures. This reframing transforms doubt from an obstacle into a gateway for authentic discovery of the Dhamma's truth through direct experience.

Sceptical doubt stops us doing anything. First time on a diving board and we doubt we can do it. It is fear, of course, that is rationalising. So you climb down. Applying for a job, a job for which you doubt you have the ability. The mind offers a rational argument for your fear of failure. You doubt whether the person you love, can really love you, car-buncles and all, so you delay ... and delay for fear of rejection. And they find someone else. Sometimes you have to make a leap of faith. This is easier if we abandon the notion that life is a series of successes and failures, and instead see it as an exploration - a series of trial and errors. Then we can jump. We can 'fail'. We can try again. So it is with the Buddhadhamma. We may have all sorts of doubts. Doubts in the Teaching, in the practice, in the teacher and most often in ourselves. There are also many teachings which may be difficult for us: not-self, karma and rebirth, transcendence and Nibbana, no personal, all-loving God. If we allow these doubts to overwhelm us, we will stop the practice. We will commit spiritual suicide! Yet the Buddha does ask us to have doubt - an honest doubt. It is the wonder of the philosopher. This wonder, this curiosity will over-

come any fears we have. And fears there will be as we explore our unknown inner territory. For the Buddha did not ask us to believe what he said, but question it. And he gave us a process on how to investigate - vipassana. To question not intellectually, but experientially. To discover whether his teachings are true for us. This very exploration is the process of liberation for it dissolves our delusions. This exploration demands we overcome our sceptical doubts. Such doubts often arise also when we are asked to abandon our cherished certainties. But do we know whether these certainties are true by our own experience? Or are they rather beliefs we have unquestionably accepted on the word of others, of family tradition, of culture? Can we remain in that place of 'don't know', 'not sure'. After all, why come to a conclusion anyway when in truth we don't actually know whether it is true or not by our own personal experience.

Scientism meets Buddhism (Buddhadhamma?)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay addresses the challenge faced by practitioners who appreciate both scientific methodology and Buddhist teachings, examining how strict adherence to scientism can create unnecessary conflicts with core Buddhist doctrines. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how approaching Buddhadhamma through the lens that only empirically verifiable phenomena constitute truth can lead to dismissing essential teachings like rebirth and the transcendent nature of Nibbāna as 'unprovable' delusions.

The essay contrasts the Buddha's phenomenological approach—focusing on direct personal experience of reality as it appears in consciousness—with modern scientific empiricism. Drawing on Bertrand Russell's definition of scientism, the author demonstrates how the Buddha investigated the 'All' (sabba) not as objective external phenomena but as the totality of experienced reality: the six sense doors, their objects, and resulting consciousness. This includes recognizing that profound spiritual experiences like past-life recall or transcendent states, while not scientifically verifiable, constitute genuine reality for practitioners.

Rather than forcing Buddhist teachings into a materialist framework or rejecting them outright, Bhante Bodhidhamma advocates for maintaining honest doubt and remaining open to direct experiential understanding. The essay encourages practitioners to embrace 'not knowing' as a valid spiritual position, allowing authentic investigation through meditation practice to reveal truth through personal realization rather than external validation. This balanced approach honors both intellectual integrity and the transformative potential of Buddhist practice.

There are those of us whose feet are firmly cemented in the empirical, objective truths of science, whose hearts are dedicated to the Buddha's teachings, and whose head negotiates an understanding that makes sense and gives direction to their lives. Unfortunately approaching the Buddha's teaching from a belief that the scientific method of observation, hypothesis and repeatable experimentation is the only way that truth can be determined means that some teachings must be simply discredited as 'unprovable', with added subtext that it is all deluded imagination. (see below Bertrand Russell definition of scientism) It is also possible to 'prove' something false by approaching the teachings from a particular point of view (hermeneutics). Because the Discourses are not the exact words of the Buddha (which is true), or at least, that only a minute amount might be verbatim, then there must have been a lot of additions and interpretations. This allows

us to form our own interpretation. We might, therefore, decide that some teachings like rebirth were introduced to align Buddhadhamma with prevailing ideas of reincarnation and so make the Buddhadhamma more palatable. Presuming the Buddha did not teach rebirth or any form of afterlife, puts the Buddha in the annihilationist camp. And this means that Nibbana can only be either momentary or if attainable as a constant state by an occasional person, comes to an end at death. It cannot be a transcendent state beyond space and time, mind and matter. It is one of our cultural biases that the scientific method is the only way to determine what is true. This is an extreme for it denies that for every individual an inner, personal, private, non-repeatable experience is an event as real as an eclipse of the moon. The Buddha did not conduct objective experiments to prove his teachings. For instance, there is no instance of control groups where one set is given the Four Noble Truths with the practice of vipassana, another a set of Ignoble Truths and vipassana and a third, no Truths at all with vipassana in order to see which is the quickest way to awakening. The Buddha's approach is what we would call phenomenological. It is about our personal experience of life. When he talks about the world, he sometimes calls it the All. He is referring not to the objective worlds out there which science investigates, but how we actually sense and feel and react to the inner world that appears in consciousness – the world out there as perceived by the individual, plus all the sensations, emotions and thoughts. The two can be very different. Take time for instance. Scientifically we can measure a minute. But as a personal experience a minute can flash by as we watch a film or crawl by as we wait for the kettle to boil. When someone who has an out of body experience or a past life recall, such experiences are real for them and often life changing. For them their experiences are as true as gravity. And Nibbana by definition is unprovable to the sciences. The Buddha tells us there is nothing of the material world or the mental world in that experience and yet insists it is never changing and the greatest happiness of all. If you are one of those who are not entirely convinced of Scientism, the secular belief that there is only matter and that everything is 'an emergent property' out of matter and yet can't quite get your head around rebirth and a transcendent Nibbana, surely the better position to take is one of 'don't know' or 'not sure'. We need not feel compelled to come to a conclusion, for so long as honest doubt guides our investigation, we will come to know for ourselves through our own direct experience. If you don't know, hang loose. You never know! Bertrand Russell: Religion and Science p 242: Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know. Here are two books, downloadable and donation only, that collect a lot of the sayings from the Discourses around Nibbana and the process of awakening and a book that tackles rebirth. Don't be put off by the title. It is quite readable. Mind like Fire Unbound by Thanissaro Bhikkhu The Island by Ajahn Passano and Amaro Rebirth and the Stream of Life: A Philosophical Study of Reincarnation by Mikel Burley

What is our basic disposition to life?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the fundamental attitudes and dispositions that shape our approach to life, drawing parallels between classical Western personality typologies and Buddhist character analysis. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the ancient Four Humours system (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic) and connects it to Buddhist categorizations found in later commentaries: the greedy, aversive, and deluded character types, along with their positive counterparts of faithful/confident, intelligent/discerning, and speculative characters.

The essay provides practical guidance for recognizing our dominant psychological patterns and tendencies. It explains how understanding our basic disposition can inform our Dhamma practice - whether we need to counteract harmful tendencies (like chronic guilt or over-optimism) or skillfully work with beneficial ones while avoiding their excesses. The teaching emphasizes self-awareness as a foundation for spiritual development, showing how personality understanding can support the cultivation of wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental cultivation on the Buddhist path.

Just as these days it is almost impossible to walk into a cafe without some sort of background music (and sometimes not so background), there is within our psyche a background tune/s. It is enlightening to discover this basic disposition if you have not already discovered it. There have been many ways to categorise characters and personalities according to a basic disposition. The dominant categorisation from ancient to modern times, was the notion of the Four Humours or Temperaments, connected to season, age, organ which we also used to diagnose the cause of illnesses. (See Diagram below courtesy of Wikipedia) The four fundamental personality types were: sanguine—enthusiastic, active, and social—optimistic and over-enthusiastic choleric— independent, decisive, goal oriented, but also aversive and reactive melancholic— analytical, detail oriented, deep thinker and feeler, but also sad, shy phlegmatic— relaxed, peaceful, quiet, but also lethargic and unconcerned (Wikipedia – italics additions are mine) We pass through such states multiple times during a day, but there usually one which sits as background motif – an attitude we have developed towards life. There are other typologies such as the Myers-Briggs. One that you might think worth exploring if you have not come across it is the Enneagram, which was a great discovery for me and I found it very helpful. In Buddhism, it was only in later commentaries that such personality types were developed. You will not be surprised at their categorisation. Yes, you've guessed!

The Greedy, the Aversive and the Deluded character. Their opposites might seem a little strange: Faithful, Intelligent and Speculative. The one, with Dhamma practice moves towards the other. Greed seeks to gratify itself, whereas Faith, better translated as Confidence, also desires to get, to achieve, but what is virtuous. We would normally think of Generosity as the opposite, but here we see how close Greed and Confidence are. Aversion holds objects at a distance but condemning them, whereas Discernment also sees objectively, but is judicious. Again we would normally see the opposite as Love, but here again we see how anger distorts our perception. Delusion is a state of confusion, whereas speculation thinks itself undeluded, but gets lost in all sorts of 'thinking'. It looks as though the Commentaries have given no hope to the Deluded! But obviously as delusion is undermined, wisdom arises. So since we are all, save the Arahants, deluded to some extent or another, we need to question our thinking, but we can still live in hope of illumination. We can tell which one we are if we catch the way we think about things, the way we do things. If we detect a fundamental disposition, it is good to ask – is it wise, is it beneficial. If it isn't, then we need to counteract it. For instance, if a basic attitude is an amorphous feeling of guilt (Aversive / Melancholic), then we undermine this by remembering any unethical actions we have committed. Either apologise for it or make amends. If that's not possible, then to accept whatever consequences may arise. Then don't obsess over it! Instead we bring to mind all the virtuous things we have done and congratulate ourselves. If it is beneficial, then we need to warn ourselves that there is often an over play. An optimistic joy (Greedy / Sanguine) can lead to over expectation and disappointment. Should we experience disappointment, then that becomes a warning signal to us to make reality checks. Amita Schmidt does a good introductory job on the Four Temperaments with a quiz: <https://amitaschmidt.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/personality-types.pdf> For a more detailed exposition of the Personality Types in Early Buddhism: <http://aukana.org.uk/books.html>: Buddhist Character Analysis Robert Mann & Rose Youd For those of you, who have a copy of the Visuddhimagga by Buddhaghosa, you will find the Temperaments on Page 102 para 74 Wikipedia, as usual, does a good introductory job on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enneagram_of_Personality There is even an Institute - <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humorism>

Fear!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This compelling essay examines fear as the fundamental emotion underlying all our defensive strategies and self-protective mechanisms. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the fear of death — arising from our attachment to the sense of self — becomes the 'mother of all fears' that drives us toward countless avoidance behaviors, from social media and consumption to anger and control.

Rather than escaping through these familiar strategies, the essay presents the Buddhist approach of facing fear directly as raw emotional material. Through gradual familiarization with fear's sensations — the cold agitation, suffocated breath, and racing heart — practitioners can lose their fear of fear itself. This process reveals how our 'deluded heart' creates horror scenarios and maintains the illusion of a substantial self that needs defending.

As fear dissolves through direct experience, the sense of self diminishes and defensive barriers weaken. The essay culminates in the profound realization that fearlessness naturally leads to an embracing heart capable of genuine compassion — even the willingness to suffer or die for another. This teaching offers both psychological insight and practical guidance for working with one of our most primal emotions on the path to awakening.

Have you ever allowed yourself to feel fear? I don't mean fearful. I don't mean anxious. I mean have you felt fear intimately? The raw emotion? The simple sensation of it? I don't mean sit by the fire. I mean jump into it. So long as there is a self, a 'me', someone there to defend, there will be fear. Because the self, that notion or view of me, that sense of me, that I am someone, knows it cannot exist for ever. It knows it will die. The fear of death is the mother of all fears. Yet who would want to sit still in the midst that experience - the cold agitation, the suffocated breath, the debilitating weakness, the exploding heartbeat, the nausea. Surely there is something we can do about it. Of course there is! We can turn to social media, nothing like talking to others about the weather, the tennis, Brexit, to get away from fear. Nothing like eating, or drinking. Alcohol is such a salve. Or perhaps the primal fear has morphed into other fears. Fear of loneliness or anger or love or spiders. I say morphed, but it's another way of guarding ourselves. To attach a fear to 'something' is more bearable than the fear of death, of annihilation, of total loss. And to guard ourselves well, we need to control. The more we control, the more we feel safe. To guard what we have. To fend off attacks real or imaginary. Yes! And anger too. Anger is good. It empowers us. 'Where there is fear, I shall fight.' Anger

feels good. It frightens others. It protects me from my fear. And I love to see the fear in others. And dominate! But in the worst case scenario run. Hide. Seek seclusion. And there is always shopping, jogging ... and sex. What strategies do you have? The Buddha did not say the path was easy. He said it was gradual. Against the stream. With every fear that arises we are given a chance to feel the raw emotional material. Slowly we become accustomed. The more accustomed, the more we lose the fear of those emotional sensations. Then we realise it is the deluded heart that goads the mind into horror scenarios. And as we gradually lose our fear of fear we begin to see the possibility of fearlessness. For if we lose our fear of fear, what could possibly frighten us? And since fear is the measure of our self-delusion, so the sense of self diminishes until such time as the wrong view of self, the belief that sense of self is substantial and essential, is cut asunder completely. All the while as the materials of fear dissolve, the barriers of defence weaken. The once embattled heart begins to embrace. Then we understand how we might suffer for another – die for another.

Beauty

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This contemplative essay examines the complex relationship between beauty and the spiritual path, drawing from the Buddha's own appreciation of beautiful places and objects. Bhante Bodhidhamma references the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, noting how the Buddha delighted in the shrines around Vesāli and took care that monastic robes should be aesthetically pleasing. The teaching explores how beauty can uplift the heart and create pure aesthetic mental states, while warning that beauty alone is not a reliable guide to truth or virtue. The essay addresses the philosophical question of whether beauty exists objectively or is created by our consciousness, concluding from a Buddhist perspective that it arises through the interaction of awareness with phenomena. While acknowledging that external beauty is not necessary for liberation from dukkha - one can achieve Awakening even in harsh conditions - the teaching suggests that a mind appreciating beauty that highlights truth and virtue reflects a wholesome mental state. The key insight is that beauty should support rather than replace our central aim of liberation, serving as one of many skillful means rather than becoming an end in itself.

The Buddha said of the Dhamma that it was beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end. In the Parinibbana Discourse where the last of his days are recounted, it is recounted that 'the Blessed One getting ready in the forenoon, took bowl and robe and went into Vesali for alms. After the alms round and meal, on his return, he spoke to the Venerable Ananda, saying: "Take up a mat, Ananda, and let us spend the day at the Capala shrine." Indeed, he rejoiced in the beauty of shrines: "Delightful, Ananda, is Vesali; pleasant are the shrines of Udena, Gotamaka, Sattambaka, Bahuputta, Sarandada, and Capala." In the early days, monastics would take leftover white cloth from the corpses in the charnel grounds and stitch them together. When he saw a group of them, the Buddha must have thought they looked scruffy indeed because he then asked order members to cut and sew the pieces together so the robe when stretched out looked like paddy fields – and to dye them in areca nut which gave them a brownish hue. All religions make great efforts to build beautiful places of worship. They fill them with beautiful decorative art, statues and music. But evil can also be beautiful. Mythologically, Lucifer was the most beautiful of angels. Leni Riefenstahl glorifies the Nazis in her propaganda films such as *The Triumph of the Will* (1935). The martial parades of Communist Russia were a marvel to behold. The mushroom of an atomic bomb is beautiful. Beauty then is a category of its own. Just because something is

beautiful it does not mean it is true or good. How then do we experience beauty? It has a certain emotional feel to it that uplifts the heart. There is a pure aesthetic mental state when we see something such as a beautifully wrought iron gate or a dry stone wall. But more often than not something beautiful excites conjoining emotions of love, wonder, simple joy, devotion and so on. Whether beauty is in the eye of the beholder or out there in the world, is an eternal philosophical debate. But in Buddhist understanding, it is the body-heart-mind complex that is creating the world we are actually experiencing. Nature may have all the ingredients that make beauty, but without awareness it may as well not have them. So, it is back to us. A mind full of beauty, when that beauty highlights truth and virtue, is a mental state we can presume the Buddha himself would delight in. But if beauty or the beautiful feeling is our aim, then we have lost the path. Beauty has to be one of the many objectives that gather around our central aim to liberate ourselves from dukkha. And external beauty is not necessary. We can liberate ourselves in a stinking slum, with raggedy clothes and only pap to eat. Even so ...

The Wisdom of Uncertainty

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines idappaccayatā, the Pali term for specific conditionality or 'the law of this and that,' which describes how multiple lines of past events converge unpredictably in each present moment. Bhante Bodhidhamma illustrates this principle through vivid examples, showing how our actions create causes while external circumstances we cannot control also shape outcomes. The essay reveals two profound insights: we cannot know the full consequences of our actions in the complex web of conditions, yet wholesome actions always benefit our inner moral development regardless of external results. Understanding this conditional nature of existence offers practical wisdom for daily life—by contemplating each morning that we cannot predict what will unfold, we develop resilience against shock and disappointment while remaining open to unexpected possibilities. This reflection on uncertainty, rooted in the Buddha's teaching on dependent origination, helps practitioners cultivate equanimity and adaptability, reducing anxiety about outcomes while encouraging continued virtuous action for its intrinsic value in developing wisdom and compassion.

Idappaccayatā is a long Pali word which translates as the Law of This and That or Specific Conditionality. In this very simple verse, lies the understanding as to why we live in an uncertain world: When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that. There are two lines of events that converge on the ever-present moment which is the event we experience all the time – just this moment. Are you talking about inner conditioning meeting external circumstances? All events originate in the past. A linear cause and effect process. They can be both caused by us or by anything else. If we play the lottery every week, we have just that less to spend. That's a direct cause by an action we made. But one week we win a shed load of money. That is because a computer picked the numbers we needed. That is not because we bought a ticket. To think we somehow deserved the money is superstition. And, of course, if we resist the temptation to play the lottery none of this would happen! However, in each moment, various lines of past events converge. This is true of every moment of our lives. There was an event reported in the newspapers of a man who was drunk. He stepped outside the pub to take a breath of fresh air and managed to fall down a bank which boarded a road. Just as that moment a car came to that very spot. Two lines of past actions collided and the poor man was killed. That he ended up rolling down a bank and landing in the middle of the road is his own doing, but the collision was caused because someone else decided

to drive along that road at that time. To think they are in some way connected save by happenstance or to think he deserved to be killed, is superstition. If he hadn't have got drunk, none of this would have happened! There are two contemplations that arise out of this understanding. The first is that we don't know the consequences of our actions. Just because we do something wholesome, doesn't mean that something beneficial will come out of it. Since we don't know the matrix into which we are making an input, we could very well be doing the wrong thing! Secondly, the effect inwardly, of course, is beneficial. Our inner moral life grows with every virtuous action. And again because we don't know the matrix of our own heartmind, talking a homeless person, making contact in a way we haven't before with homelessness, may lead us to join a charity or even start a charity! And secondly, we don't know what is going to happen because someone else has made decisions or because nature produces its own events. A lot of our time is fairly predictable. We live in a fairly ordered society. Events that happen contrary to what we presume will happen are rare enough to cause us to be surprised or shocked. But this would not be true in a war zone. So we tend to feel safe. But this feeling of security can easily be shattered. An obvious case is a sudden death. If every morning we spend a moment contemplating the unknowability of what will happen in the day before us, we will fortify ourselves against shock. Nor will we become over-excited by surprises. Because we are not so bound by 'what will happen', such contemplations open the day to possibilities. It undermines anxiety and makes us more flexible. We can adapt more easily to unforeseeable events. Herein lies a lesson from uncertainty?

Patience

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores the profound Buddhist virtue of khanti (patient endurance), which the Buddha called the greatest of all ascetic virtues. Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how patience encompasses forbearance, tolerance, restraint, and endurance in facing everything from minor irritations to severe physical and psychological suffering. The essay draws particularly on the Kakacūpama Sutta (MN 21), where the Buddha gives the striking instruction that even if bandits were severing one's limbs with a saw, the practitioner should maintain compassionate loving-kindness without inner hatred. The teaching offers practical guidance for developing patience through Right Awareness of arising irritation, cultivating goodwill when acknowledgment alone isn't sufficient, and practicing 'affectionate awareness' in unavoidable difficult situations. Bhante emphasizes that accepting circumstances doesn't mean resignation but rather continuing to seek solutions while learning to live skillfully with what cannot be changed. The essay concludes with the reminder to recognize the Buddha nature in others and understand that all beings, however deluded their methods, are fundamentally seeking happiness.

The word comes from the Latin, pati – to suffer. We derive other words from this root – patience, a patient, passion. But the virtue of patience takes on the meaning of bearing with the unpleasant, the unpleasing, with suffering. It harbours a lot of qualities the Buddha would have also included: forbearance, tolerance, restraint, self-restraint, resignation, stoicism, fortitude, sufferance, endurance. The Pali word – khanti is probably best translated as patient endurance, but like all virtues has a wide coverage – everything from minor irritants to major physical pain and psychological torment. What attitudes might foster patience which the Buddha calls the greatest of all ascetic virtues. When it comes to momentary situations, to have that awareness to see our irritation arising, allows us to resist indulging it. Sometimes we have to overlay it with good will for it does not pass on the acknowledging of it. If we find ourselves in conversation with someone whose views are contrary to our own, as we feel the anger arising in us, we are aware of it and positively put our attention towards the attitude of careful, respectful listening. It may be that we can do nothing about a situation and instead of getting into conflict, it would be wiser to develop patient forbearance. It may be great pain for which there is no palliative, or a neighbour with penetrating music, or a boss who bullies. Accepting a situation does not mean to be resigned to it, but to continuously seek a solution. If, however, there is no solution to be seen, then there is no option but

to learn to live with it. Here is an opportunity to practice affectionate awareness. Difficult as it may be, it is an awareness that also engages the heart into some form of kindness or caring. The Buddha offers this instruction in the Discourse of the Simile of the Saw MN21. Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching.' Instead you should 'abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate.' Majjhima Nikāya 21.21. Bhikkhu Bodhi The Middle Length Sayings of the Buddha. In order to do this, it would help to recognise in the other their Buddha nature and that they like us are also seeking happiness, no matter how deluded it may be.

Overcoming the Corruptions of Generosity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the subtle psychological corruptions that can undermine the practice of dāna (generosity), one of the fundamental pāramīs in Buddhist practice. Bhante Bodhidhamma reveals how the self manifests through conceit (māna) in our giving, creating comparisons where we see ourselves as better, worse, or equal to others in generosity. The essay identifies several specific corruptions: the 'do-gooder' mentality that gives what we think others need rather than what they actually want, the subtle sense of entitlement that can arise from feeling unappreciated, and the judgment we place on others' perceived lack of generosity. These defilements transform what should be a joyful spiritual practice into a source of suffering and ego-reinforcement. The teaching offers practical remedies: cultivating clear intention to give without expectation of return, actively listening to what others truly need, and maintaining awareness of arising defilements without engaging them. By understanding these corruptions and applying mindful awareness to our giving, practitioners can develop the pure joy of generosity that supports both spiritual development and genuine service to others.

The self manifests as conceit and conceit manifests as comparison. I am either better, or worse or equal to you. When it comes to generosity, the conceit 'I am better' confides that 'I am truly a generous person'. Whereas 'worse' is critical – you should have given more, spent more time, listened more openly. 'Equal to' masquerades as humble – I'm only doing what others do – others stand for those who are like minded, definitely not the stingy others. Before we give of time or wealth, if we stop and acknowledge the self has a lot of kudos to develop here, we can undermine that conceit by placing in the mind the clear intention to give for the benefit of other without return. We do this more easily with Charities that we support but have no contact with, such a donating to a Homeless Charity. But it gets tricky when we are part of an organisation or family or friendship group. We will know how pure the giving was when we don't get a return. It will manifest as hurt and the intention not to give again. The desire for return, whether it be praise or generous response when called for is part of the make up a do-gooder. They are the ones who do you the good they want to do you – whether you want it or not. They generally do not ask you what you want but tell you what you need and they are going to give it to you. When not appreciated and even rebuked, they are mortally offended. 'I was only trying to help!' We all fall into this trap from time to time. To undermine this tendency, the cure is to ask the person what they need or listen carefully

to what they are asking for. No problem with suggesting something else but let them make the decision. Then there is entitlement. This is a subtle corruption. Having done so much, surely they won't mind if I take a pen, bill them for a meal, take some cash. After all I don't feel I am appreciated enough. This can be the first step to fraud. There is also how upset we can be with other people's lack of generosity. That arises out of 'I am such a generous person!' Of course, a person can be stingy, a miser. But it's up to them to discover the joy in giving. It doesn't help to criticise them. How easily our joy in giving gives rise to conceit! How do we develop the joy in giving? By giving! But giving with clear intention, aware of any defilement arising, not engaging them, allowing them to fade away.

The World is in a Terrible State

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the natural despair many feel when confronted with global conflicts, inequality, climate change, and political turmoil. From a Buddhist perspective, he acknowledges that saṃsāra inherently contains suffering driven by greed, hatred, and delusion, yet recognizes that some periods are more conducive to peace than others.

The essay offers practical guidance for maintaining equanimity amid world crises. Rather than falling into proliferating thoughts of doom or attempting to control others' behavior, practitioners are encouraged to accept reality clearly and focus on their own sphere of influence. This includes examining personal prejudices, making conscious consumer choices, and engaging in meaningful protest or charitable work.

Key Buddhist practices recommended include mettā (goodwill) meditation extended even to those causing harm, limiting news consumption to prevent mental overwhelm, and remembering the countless positive efforts of humanitarian organizations. The teaching emphasizes that individual transformation through Right Action and Right Awareness remains our most powerful response to global suffering, embodying the Buddha's teaching that change begins with ourselves.

Now you might say from a Buddhist perspective the world is never in a good place. This is the world of samsara, the forever ongoing driven by acquisitiveness, aversion, fear and delusion. However, there are times when the world situation fosters peace and prosperity. Such a time at least in Europe was after the Second World War. It took a while, but the new order slowly brought renewal, a new sense of purpose, an established peace between former warring nations and prosperity. Seventy years on or so, we find the world in a precarious situation. Civil wars, the growing military might of China and its claims based on a fabricated document of no historical value, Russia seizing old territory of the USSR, a proxy war in the Yemen, Syria, Palestine and so on and so on. Here, in Europe an increasingly dissatisfaction with the inequality of wealth, with immigration, the rise of the Far Right which borders on the violent. Then there is an economic system which syphons the money up to the minute rich elite and has no social responsibility, leaving the worker poorer or unemployed and the services such as health and education impoverished. On top of that, there is the impending calamity of climate change. And we in Europe, small minute individuals, have no power to change anything and can only influence the situation at elections where we see little difference

between the parties. So, is it any wonder that many feel despair, the more so if they have children. What can we do to assuage the fear in our hearts? It won't come as a surprise that, first of all, we have to accept the situation as it is. To be as clear about it as we can. And then to receive it, no matter how painful. We mustn't allow the mind to proliferate into horror scenarios for this is exercising the very mental states we want to let go of. Then there is the clear realisation of 'what can I do'. Trying to get others to behave differently is a fool's game. You have to offer big sweeteners and have a club ready of they fall back, how else can you get donkeys to move. So, it's down to us as individuals to take stock of what we can do and to tell others what we are doing so that by our example others may follow. We can examine our own prejudices, accept them and work against them. We can examine how we spend our money, whether what we are buying is necessary and where the products are being made. We can be pro-active in joining others to protest. To further lift our spirits, we can bring to mind the huge amount of work being done by Charities, NGO's and other organisations in all the fields of concern. It may also be wise to stop the continuous input of bad news and simply keep up with main events. And finally, to practice Goodwill Meditation and bring to mind also all those who are harming whether consciously or unconsciously. Many thanks to those to those who gave ideas for this Tip. Contemplate the good going on Stop input

The Treasure of Things

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay explores how cultivating gratitude and reverence for everyday objects can deepen our mindfulness practice and bring joy to daily life. Bhante Bodhidhamma reflects on the modern tendency to carelessly discard cheap, abundant possessions, contrasting this with the careful appreciation of objects that was necessary in less affluent times. He suggests developing an attitude of 'treasuring things' - treating all possessions as precious, which naturally leads to more careful, beautiful handling of objects and greater mindfulness in our actions.

The teaching addresses both the benefits and potential pitfalls of this approach. While treasuring objects supports the Buddha's final exhortation to 'strive diligently' and enhances our attention to detail, it can also lead to attachment. The essay offers a balanced perspective by reminding us that ownership is merely a psychological construct - we can only use things, not truly possess them. Through personal anecdotes about letting go of beloved possessions and the simple act of folding blankets mindfully, Bhante demonstrates how this practice integrates Dhamma principles into the most ordinary moments of life, transforming routine activities into opportunities for gratitude, beauty, and joy.

Every year we try to give away the stuff that we have accumulated - things that we don't use now such as two pressure cookers and things that people have left such as scarves, shoes and even coats. If we can't give them away, we try to take them to a charity and if they won't have them, to scrap. It is a practice I am developing to express gratitude to the object. I don't think the object is aware of my thankfulness. But, of course, that's not the point. In our society where objects are so cheap, we discard them without a blink. It wasn't so in the poor 50s in my childhood. A broken cup would deserve a severe reprimand and a reminder that 'cups cost money'. Recognising the preciousness of our homes, our clothes, our pens, our mobiles, (without which we can no longer live!), develops an attitude of treasuring things. And that brings joy to the heart. This treasuring of things assists our mindfulness. If everything is seen as a rare Ming vase, we will pick things up carefully, handle them carefully, put them down carefully. This is honouring the Buddha's last exhortation, 'Strive diligently'. And how can we possibly forget where we put the keys! However, a problem may arise with treasuring and that, of course, is attachment. So it is also good practice to remind ourselves that we can only use things. The idea of ownership is a psychological construct. The object does not feel owned. It can be used by a thief. It is a legal fiction, necessary for the orderly run of

society. But how difficult it is to let go of something that has served you so well. I was bought a pair of boots at a cost 40\$! They were gloves to my feet. Lasted years and then water began to seep in. I tried all sorts of ways to maintain them, failing each time. Finally, I had to consign them to the wheely bin. But not without a lingering fear I would never find such a pair of boots again. Treasuring things also makes us tidy. Something I'm working on! Only in the rarest of cases, do meditators fold the blanket neatly. It's just another one of those useless, time wasting things we have to do. But bringing gratitude to mind, recognising the work that has gone into making it, acknowledging it as a gift of nature and how it keeps us warm, we would naturally fold it carefully. And when we do things carefully, we naturally do it beautifully. And when we do things beautifully, joy arises naturally. This is all part of our commitment to bring the Dhamma practice into everyday life.

Equanimity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this engaging reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma shares his recurring insight about identifying the 'single ingredient' that makes vipassanā meditation work, focusing this time on equanimity (upekkhā). He explores the etymology and meaning of equanimity as 'calmness and composure' and 'fairness of mind,' contrasting it with his definition of suffering as 'wanting things to be other than they are.' The essay examines the subtleties of different ways to understand equanimity—from contentment to allowing—while acknowledging the limits of our control over experience.

Drawing from the Vipassanā Guidelines used on retreat, Bhante explains how meditation instructions encourage us to observe experience 'without any interference whatsoever; simply watching' without controlling, manipulating, judging or questioning. This non-interfering awareness directly addresses the habitual dissatisfaction (dukkha) that arises from our needy manipulation of experience based on greed, ill-will, or delusion. The essay demonstrates how developing equanimity through mindful observation naturally reduces suffering, while playfully concluding that perhaps mindfulness itself might be the 'one key thing' after all.

I have a recurring conceit that amuses me. It is that I have identified the single ingredient that makes vipassanā “work”. It becomes the topic of my thoughts for a short period until I notice some other aspect which then becomes the one key thing. Recently it’s been equanimity. Equanimity is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “calmness and composure, especially in a difficult situation”. Apparently, it derives “from Latin *aequanimitas*, from *aequus* ‘equal’ + *animus* ‘mind’” and also has the sense of “fairness, impartiality” as we would expect of a Judge presiding over a trial. If you’ve done a retreat with me, you may remember me defining suffering as “wanting things to be other than they are”. This is the opposite of equanimity; it’s the disturbance of the mind trying to make experience fit the ideal, the rejection of the present. Another way of defining equanimity, then, might be as “contentment with things being just as they are”. But this appears to carry the invalid suggestion that we should be content with things like poverty and hunger, ecological collapse and war. So, maybe, instead of “contentment” it should be “allowing things to be just as they are”? But the problem with “allowing”—with its connotations of “permit” and “let”—is that it suggests too much control. We see from meditation that we are not in control. If we were, we would choose not to have incessant destructive thoughts and strong emotions like fear and anger arise. Equanimity is some-

thing of all of these, though. In the Vipassanā Guidelines we read on retreat, we are encouraged to examine our experience “without any interference whatsoever, ... simply watching” in a way “that does not control or manipulate ... judge or question”. What this is really pointing out is the kind of needy manipulation of experience we habitually make. Whatever our experience, we interfere because we want it to be different; we control and manipulate because we want it to go a different way; we judge and question from a place of imagined superiority or inferiority. This wanting things to be other than they are is the fundamental dissatisfaction the Buddha labelled “dukkha”. The work of meditation is finding a way where our relationship with experience isn’t one of habitually interfering like this, isn’t automatically wanting things to be other than they are. It’s clear that there is something in the relationship we have with experience that makes it dissatisfying. When this relationship is based in “greed” (wanting something to bolster our sense of self), “ill-will” (wanting something to diminish our, or somebody else’s, sense of wellbeing), or “delusion” (not caring), it results in dissatisfaction, in-dukkha. We know that when we don’t react to difficult situations, when we give ourselves time to calm down, to get perspective, we generally handle them better. It is this same mechanism that these vipassanā instructions develop. They contain all we need. We simply watch, without any interference whatsoever—without controlling, manipulating, judging or questioning—whatever arises in our experience. It is in this way that we develop equanimity, and with more equanimity there’s less dukkha. So this is why my topic of the month is equanimity. But as I write this, it occurs to me that, without awareness, without mindfulness, we would find it difficult to develop equanimity. Hmm, so maybe mindfulness is that one key thing then ...? 😊

The Years – Where Do They Go? New Year Encouragement

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This contemplative essay explores the profound spiritual significance of endings, drawing parallels between the close of a calendar year and the cessation of breath in meditation practice. Noirin Sheahan examines how we typically avoid acknowledging endings, rushing instead toward what comes next, and suggests that conscious awareness of cessation can become a doorway to deeper understanding. The teaching connects breath meditation practice – particularly the moment when breathing stops and dissolves into stillness – with the Buddha's instruction to observe the transient nature of all conditioned phenomena. The essay addresses the challenge of remaining present with 'gone-ness' without immediately filling that space with mental commentary or conceptual understanding. Drawing from the traditional Vipassana verses about the happiness found in cessation, this reflection encourages practitioners to discover peace in natural endings, whether in formal meditation or in life's seasonal rhythms. The practical application extends to finding rest and acceptance in winter's quietness rather than constantly projecting forward to future plans and activities.

The years – where do they go? December - short days, darkness, winter solstice. Pull on a woolly hat, draw the curtains. Another year is coming to its end. We tend to ignore endings. We're probably thinking more of Christmas and New Year than of 2019 drawing to a close. But we're ignoring a hidden treasure. All the effort we had to make during the year – getting through work deadlines, projects, smoothing out relationship troubles, working through the budget – all these are drawing to a close. Shouldn't we take a moment to savour that? If we make an effort to let 2019 go, then we'll be much more conscious of what to take up again in 2020. The Buddha asks us to be conscious of endings. In formal practice we endeavour to track the breath to its end, to that moment when the movement vanishes into stillness. At the most obvious level, there's nothing to this. It's just that a movement has stopped. It doesn't signify anything. But when we follow the breath closely, detect each sensation, notice them getting fainter and fainter till they disappear, it can be a different matter. That 'gone-ness' can appear highly significant, mysterious. We were looking at sensations, now what are we looking at? It's the same as looking back over the years and thinking "Where did they all go?" Nature abhors a vacuum and our tendency is to fill that mysterious emptiness with thoughts, distractions, musings. But if we can still the mind towards around the end of the breath, we find that part of us wants to rest, to explore whatever remains where sensations

stopped. The trouble is that we can't name it. Even the word 'absence' misses the mark. The name attempts to capture its essence, make it known. But in the process, destroys it. The name injects sensations, feelings, thoughts where there were none. Frustrating! The mind wants to know what it's dealing with, give it a name. But with practice we notice something within us settling, accepting non-ownership. We learn to allow experience to vanish without casting our mental net of thoughts and words and ideas around that vanishing. The last line from the Vipassana verses starts to make sense: "Truly all conditioned things are transient ... once arisen they disappear; their cessation is happiness." We can discover peace in endings at other levels in life. Like now, December, the ending of the year. Instead of filling all spare moments with Christmas plans, thinking about the New Year, looking forward to spring, we can savour the dark evenings, bare trees, notice the quietness, see nature at rest. Could we follow her lead, let ourselves rest for a moment, our work for 2019 done?

Understand and See Things as They Really Are

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay examines one of the Buddha's fundamental teachings about perceiving reality as it truly is, moving beyond superficial observation to deeper understanding. Bhante Bodhidhamma uses the metaphor of observing a rose to illustrate different levels of perception - from casual seeing to full sensory engagement, scientific analysis, and ultimately spiritual insight into impermanence and insubstantiality.

The teaching progresses from literal translation of the Buddha's words as 'really grasping and seeing how things have come to be' to understanding phenomena as processes rather than static things. This 'thinging' perspective reveals the continuous arising and passing away of all conditioned existence. When applied to our own embodied experience, this insight can initially provoke fear and aversion as we confront our own mortality and lack of permanent substance.

The essay concludes by connecting this understanding to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), showing how the establishment of Right Awareness allows us to find refuge in the midst of impermanence. Through accepting 'this is the way it is' and recognizing our shared condition with all beings, initial distress transforms into calm understanding, pointing toward the Buddha's promise of liberation through sustained awareness practice.

This is a favourite saying of the Buddha. But what does it actually mean? The translation of 'things as they really are' gives weight to experiencing in the present moment. But experiencing something can be done at all sorts of levels. Looking at a rose, I can acknowledge I see the rose and I am made happy by that feeling. But am I really seeing the rose as it is? If I want to do that I have to get back into my body, my senses and really look and smell the rose. I become aware of how red it actually is. Before it was red, but not this red. And my nose was simply not engaged. Engaging my nose gave the rose a different sense dimension. Now I am really experiencing the rose as it really is. But am I? I could go the scientific route and put it under a microscope and see all the different cells. And if we had eyes that could see the atoms and sub-atomic components, we would find out it was largely made of nothing! At any point I might say, now I see the rose as it actually is. Looking at a rose this way may be scientifically satisfying, but there is also a spiritual understanding here. That nothing has any substance. It is when we turn the gaze upon this 'body of mine' that it may strike home that as that rose is so is my body. This insightful reflection might not make us so happy! Going back to the

Buddha's phrase the literal translation is to 'really grasp and see how things have come to be'. In other words, not to see the rose as a thing, but a 'thinging' – something that is continuously changing. To see how things have come to be naturally progresses to how things are going to be. The Buddha wants us to be aware of process and how nothing is anything, not even for a split moment. To see the rose as process is to see it bud and blossom; droop and die a shrivelled memorial. And again when we turn this understanding towards this body of mine, then it may strike home at that intuitive experiential level that this body really is in a process and it will die, most likely a shrivelled representation of itself. What was the magic of nature now becomes the tragic for me. Hardly a happiness engendering realisation! Gently repeating to ourselves – this is the way it is. Over and over. Feeling the fear, the aversion, the reluctance to accept. Putting a smile on the face. This is the way it is. I am not alone. Everything is arising and passing away – all the plants, all the animals, all humans – even this mighty cosmos. Slowly the agitation gives way to calm. In that calm, we hear the Buddha's teaching – there is an end to suffering in the here and now. Where then can I stand in this tumultuous world and yet not tormented by it? When we know where that is, we have come to realise the experiential truth of Satipatthana – the establishment of awareness. This is what the Discourse on Mindfulness is all about and at the end of that Discourse the Buddha states that anyone who can maintain complete unbroken mindfulness for even a mere seven days will be fully liberated or reach the goal of Non-Returner. Reflecting on impermanence and insubstantiality, although at first not a pleasing contemplation, lead to realisation of what is permanent and reliable?

Constant Curiosity Carl

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This practical teaching addresses one of the most common questions retreat practitioners face: how to continue meaningful practice in everyday life. Rather than trying to replicate formal meditation instructions while rushing for buses or in business meetings, Bhante Bodhidhamma emphasizes understanding the heart of vipassanā practice—what Thai lay teacher Upasika Kee calls 'unentangled knowing'—the ability to observe whatever arises without controlling, judging, or interfering.

Drawing on the Buddha's First and Second Noble Truths about dukkha (suffering) and taṇhā (craving), the essay explains how our constant dissatisfaction leads us to manipulate our experience. The solution offered is developing a curious, investigative attitude toward our reactions and clinging. Using the example of anger, Bhante demonstrates how to dig progressively deeper—from surface blame to underlying fears of worthlessness and needs for acceptance.

This approach transforms daily life into continuous dharma practice. Whether reacting to advertisements, tension in meetings, or any positive or negative stimulus, practitioners learn to investigate what they're clinging to and what they want to be different. The formal sitting practice then supports this ongoing investigation, making it easier to catch reactive patterns before they manifest as unskillful speech or action. The beauty of this method is its accessibility—it can be practiced anywhere, anytime.

At the end of a retreat, it's common for people to wonder how they can continue the practice once they return to normal life. It's also common for people to observe that the instructions don't easily map to daily life, I mean, how are we supposed to go slow and note everything while running for the bus or negotiating a business deal?! For me, though, this is to mistake the form of the practice for the heart. The instructions while we're sitting are to watch whatever arises within the field of awareness in a way that does not control or manipulate, judge or question and, without any interference whatsoever, simply allow it to arise and pass away. The great Thai lay teacher, Upasika Kee, calls this "unentangled knowing". This is the heart of the practice. When we have a difficult emotion arise, we contact it in the body - feel the feelings in the feelings—and then watch it in this way of unentangled knowing. The Buddha's first two noble truths tell us that there is suffering (dukkha), and that this is caused by craving (taṇhā). We are constantly dissatisfied with our experience and feel a compulsion to fiddle and faff

about with it, trying to make it somehow better. We want things to be other than they are. The instructions, on retreat, are to simply watch this as described above, but the problem is how to do this in normal daily life. By this, I don't mean on the cushion, where the instructions are exactly the same, but when walking down the road, or immediately after a verbal collision with an ornery work colleague. The way to bring the heart of the practice into everyday life is to nurture a curious, investigative attitude that takes interest in how we are suffering, to see what we're clinging to so that we may then observe it from this place of unentangled knowing. When you find yourself struggling with a difficult emotion, ask yourself what you are clinging to; what do you want to be different, to be other than it is? Don't just accept the first answer, dig in. Imagine you find yourself angry with someone. Ask yourself, "What's causing this anger?" Your answer may be "They're an unsavory character!" Nope! Keep digging! Remember, nobody can make us feel anything; we 'choose' how we respond. "Okay, it's because their attack brought about a feeling of injustice." Better, but dig in further! "Okay, this feeling of injustice is because I feel unrecognised and disrespected." Even better, but you can go further! "Feeling unrecognised and disrespected makes me afraid that I am worthless." Excellent, but how does that make you feel? "This feeling of worthlessness, that I resent, has an underlying feeling of needing to be appreciated, liked, accepted and loved." That's brilliant! Get in touch with that feeling, feel it in the body, and then try to just accept it being there, allow its energy to dissipate without any interference whatsoever. Of course, all of this is hard. You may find yourself unable to dig all the way to the bottom. That's fine, just find the answer that feels the most real to you and sit with that. Of course, the sitting with it is hard too. This is where the sitting practice pays dividends. It's why it's called practice! The more we practice, the easier this becomes, and the mindfulness we develop helps us to catch these moments without the angry re-tort in the first place. As you develop this, keep it going at all times; be constantly curious! When you find yourself reacting strangely to an advert, investigate. When you find yourself tightening in a meeting, investigate. Positive or negative; seeing lovers kiss, babies cry, dog poo on the floor, flowers in bloom, strewn rubbish, children happily playing, whatever it is, investigate. Dig in and see if you can come to an equanimous and compassionate accommodation with whatever it is you uncover. The wonderful thing about this is that you don't need to be on the cushion to do it. You can do it at anytime, anywhere.

Kamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching explores the Buddha's profound understanding of kamma (action and its consequences) as the fundamental law of cause and effect governing our existence. Bhante Bodhidhamma begins with the familiar principle 'when this exists, that comes to be' - how our actions of body, speech, and mind generate results that return to us, illustrated through accessible analogies from Western culture. The essay then delves into the Buddha's deeper discovery: the 'kamma that ends kamma' expressed as 'when this does not exist, that does not come to be.' This points to a transformative shift from conceptual thinking to direct sensory experience. Using anger as a practical example, the teaching demonstrates how dropping below the level of thought into pure sensation dissolves the sense of 'this' and 'that', 'me' and 'you' - the very distinctions that bind us to saṃsāra. This direct, non-conceptual awareness opens the path to Nibbāna, where conventional kamma loses its grip. The essay beautifully bridges everyday understanding with profound Dhamma, showing how moving from thinking about experience to simply experiencing it transforms our relationship with reality and points toward ultimate freedom.

Kamma (karma in Sanskrit) is part of the Buddha's law on cause and effect. Every action (of body, speech or mind) generates kamma which causes a resulting effect that sooner or later comes back to us. Although there isn't an exact equivalence in Christianity, the notion of kamma is reflected in western culture with sayings like "As you sow, so shall you reap"; "What goes around, comes around". I once heard it described as "For every towel you pinch from a hotel, you lose another sock in the laundry!" This reflects the first part of the Buddha's law on cause and effect: When this exists, that comes to be. When we give a gift with good-will, happiness comes our way. When we pinch a towel from a hotel, some shade of misery comes our way. To live happily we need to think, speak and act based on good-will, generosity and compassion. But even a blameless, happy life with lots of good friends ends up in sickness, old age and death. The Buddha's spiritual quest was to make peace with that reality. He discovered a form of kamma which loosens attachment to the world, paves a way to a realm without birth or death. This he called the kamma that ends kamma: When this does not exist, that does not come to be. It doesn't mean that we stop giving gifts, stop speaking, thinking, acting. The Buddha lived an active life for 45 years after enlightenment, interacting with society at many levels. But obviously there was something not happening in all his actions. The word 'this' refers to what is immediate, present. It could be this pen I'm hold-

ing, this car I'm sitting in, this anger I'm feeling, In contrast, 'that' refers to what is objective, can be pointed at, not part of me - that pen you're holding, that car you're sitting in, that anger I might feel tomorrow. When this exists, that comes to be. This anger leads to that result - more anger, more misery. When this does not exist, that does not come to be. Could anger lose its 'this-ness'? When we think about anger, the notion 'this anger' is useful. This anger I'm feeling now makes me want to burst. When we stop thinking, just feel the sensations, the tightness, the energy, we can't also describe the experience. It's too fluid. It keeps changing. It loses its 'this-ness'. Very unsatisfactory! When it was 'this anger' at least I could blame 'that idiot who caused it'. When it's just shifting sensations, I lose the sweet notion of someone to blame. We learn, first hand, that anger is hurting me, not the person I'm angry at. To enact the kamma that ends kamma, to open ourselves to Nibbana, we drop below the level of conceptual thought. We sense the sensations, feel the feelings. We lose the notion of 'this' and 'that', 'me' and 'you'. In a strangely familiar, uncharted world we follow the path to freedom.

Progress

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay examines the profound question of progress in spiritual life, beginning with Lewis Carroll's observation that without knowing our destination, any path will suffice. Bhante Bodhidhamma contrasts technological advancement with the apparent lack of ethical progress in human relations, pointing to the Buddha's clear articulation of both path and goal as essential for meaningful development.

The teaching explores how genuine progress emerges from understanding the root cause of suffering - selfishness and the mistaken belief in an independent self. Through careful observation, we discover our fundamental interdependence with all beings and our environment. This recognition naturally leads to the cultivation of attitudes that promote harmony: moving from selfishness to generosity, hatred to loving-kindness, and cruelty to compassion - the transformative qualities outlined in Right Attitude (sammā saṅkappa), the second factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The essay emphasizes that these virtues are inherently social, requiring relationship with others to manifest. Rather than seeking some utopian ideal, the teaching points toward creating harmonious cooperation based on mutual support in spiritual development, transforming our world from one based on competition to one grounded in compassionate interdependence.

'If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there'. Lewis CarrollIn his inimitable quirky way, Lewis Carroll points to a profound truth about our lives.If we don't know where we are going, there is not only no central focus to our lives, there is also no meaning.When there is no focus, no aim, no meaning, our lives drift. But not in any old haphazard way. We are already in any given moment conditioned beings. We have our habitual ways of understanding and acting upon those understandings.And understandings can be true and they can be false.Our history is littered with 'ideologies' , secular and religious, that have taken us down dark roads.The Buddha's own avowed aim when he took up his mission to teach others to liberate themselves was to elucidate a path: a development and an aim. And most important an understanding, not based on philosophical abstraction, but based upon his own personal direct experience of his own progress and attainment.Our idea of time as a linear progression, an arrow that moves from past to present to future, lends itself to a view of progress that presumes from worse, we get better and from better we get even better (for the pess-

imist the opposite). We may consider this true when we think of science which investigates the physical and psychological world with a view to understand and then, as is our nature, to control. This has led to a technology that astonishes. Yet, it is common observation that when it comes to ethics, the way we as humans relate to each other, to other living beings and nature, there does not seem to have been a comparable progress and one might argue that it has all got worse. However, we can point to individuals both in the religious and secular life that are paragons of human goodness, but they remain a rarity and always arise as a response to general unethical behaviour, such as apartheid, regime oppression and careless destruction of our environment. And there are legions, yes legions, of people involved in putting the world aright whether climate crisis, slavery or political oppression to mention some of the worse. How then would progress manifest in a world truly devoted to Dhamma? Because our aim is to achieve liberation from suffering, we look into the causes of that suffering. We find the root cause to be selfishness. It's really all about me! When we realise this 'me' is a mistaken understanding of how we really are, we begin to change. Before we thought 'me' was independent, a self-willed integer, complete and entire unto 'myself'. On careful observation and reflection, we begin to realise this 'me' is entirely dependent on my relationship with other beings and the surrounding world. I am inextricably bound up in the total environs that envelope me. I cannot exist outside this milieu. This beckons us to develop those attitudes that will lead the whole environment towards harmony since in harmony we also find our peace and joy. In that harmony people are more than willing to support each other in their spiritual quest. How easy it is to practice when surrounded by like minded others on retreat. Or indeed, how joyful is the practice of affectionate mindfulness when doing something with others who have a similar goal. So it does help to know where we are going, no matter how nebulous the goal. The Buddha says our ultimate goal is Nibbana. But what can that be? Rather than fretting over something that is by definition beyond description, we can ground ourselves in the ethics manifested in the way an Arahant, one who has attained Nibbana, lives. Then that path becomes clear. In short, the second step of the Eightfold Noble Path, Right Attitude, shows us where we are going - moving from selfishness to generosity, hatred to love and cruelty to compassion. These are all social virtues. They cannot be practiced on 'me'. They demand the 'other'. And in that relationship, the 'other' is encouraged to reciprocate as we are encouraged when the 'other' behaves towards us with generosity, love and compassion. It would be delusive to believe that we would end up in Shangri-La for this is after all Samsara. But we may move from a disharmonious social order based on competition to one based on harmonious co-operation.

Who Decides?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay explores a compelling daily life practice: investigating who actually makes our decisions. Bhante Bodhidhamma observes that while most meditation suggestions receive knowing nods, the question 'who decides?' typically elicits blank stares, revealing how deeply we assume personal agency in our choices. The teaching examines how our sense of Self is fundamentally tied to believing we are free choosers, a conviction so strong that teenagers fight for autonomy and coming of age centers on gaining decision-making rights.

Through practical exercises—such as asking 'do I want to get up?' when the meditation bell rings—practitioners can observe that answers appear before questions are fully formed. The mind has already 'decided,' and we are simply being informed of the choice. This investigation reveals that while choosing happens, there is no chooser—a direct insight into anattā (not-self).

Drawing on the Bāhiya Sutta, Bhante Bodhidhamma connects this practice to the Buddha's teaching that in true seeing there is 'only the seen,' extending this to decision-making: 'In choosing, there is only the choosing.' While maintaining that we remain responsible for our actions through conditioned will (cetanā), this practice offers profound insight into the impersonal nature of mental processes and the illusion of an essential Self who controls our choices.

“The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer – often, indeed, to the decider himself.”—John F. Kennedy. At the end of a retreat, in my “Practise in Daily Life” talk, I give a long list of examples of things we can investigate in daily life. One of these is to investigate the process of decision making; to see if we can see what happens, and who decides. With most of the other examples I usually see slowly nodding heads or smiles of recognition and acknowledgement as I suggest something people are already familiar with. But, when it comes to the challenge “who decides?”, invariably the response is a blank stare. I haven’t asked anyone about this, but I get the feeling that people are thinking “Did he really just say ‘who decides?’ ... doesn’t he know?” But, if you’ve ever been present for a “decision”, you’ll know that this is a good challenge! One of the key premises of the Buddha’s teachings is that we are deluded, believing that we are, or have, a permanent, essential Self. We feel that we are the agents of our lives, that we are free to act, and that such actions are by choice - that we can choose. So, an essential aspect of our Self view is that we choose. We cling to this. Power-

fully. Our identity is deeply attached to our ability to choose and has been since we were children. Teenagers rebel against their parent's authority, fighting for their right to decide for themselves. Coming of age is essentially a matter of gaining the right to decide for ourselves. Given all of this, seeing how the process of choosing unfolds can be quite a surprise and because of what we see, can be quite insightful. That's why I recommend it as a practise in daily life. So, what can we do to watch how decisions are made? Obviously, the first thing we need is mindfulness. We have to be present for our minds. So, next time you're meditating, when the bell goes, just ask yourself "do I want to get up now?", and watch carefully for the "answer". Indeed, you don't even have to wait, you can do it now. Ask yourself a similar question and look for the decision. What happens? If you look closely, you'll see that before you've even finished asking yourself the question, the mind has presented the answer. You already know what you want! Okay, ask yourself the opposite question, the one you know you don't want. See that feeling? That feeling of "don't want!" Quite emphatic, isn't it. So where was the "agency" in that? Try it again. Keep trying. Every time you'll find that the answer, the "choice", is already made. The mind has already "decided", and "you" are being told. We see that "choosing" is happening, but that we are not the chooser. However, none of this should be seen as a denial of our personal responsibility. The Buddha was quite clear that this wasn't the case. We are responsible for our actions, including our decisions. He saw that the will (*cetanā*) was conditioned, but that it was also conditioned by concomitant mental factors, thus things in the mind at the time of a willed action, like the preferences of a choice, influence the action. That is, we can, and do, choose! So, this suggestion to watch "who decides?" is actually an exercise in working with not-Self (*anattā*). Just as we see through meditation that thoughts think themselves, that itches just itch, that sights are simply seen, we also see that, ultimately, decisions are decided with no input from our Self. In my favourite sutta, the *Bāhiya Sutta*, the Buddha tells *Bāhiya* to train himself so that "In reference to the seen, there will only be the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized." And then, "When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, *Bāhiya*, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of [suffering]." In choosing, there is only the choosing.

Delusion, Caring for Illusion

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay examines the Buddha's profound teaching on anattā (not-self) and offers a nuanced approach to working with our deeply ingrained sense of self. Bhante Bodhidhamma guides us through the traditional investigation of self-hood within the five khandhas (aggregates) - body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness - showing how none can be found to contain a permanent, satisfactory essence that could constitute 'me' or 'mine'.

Rather than advocating the suppression of our sense of self, the essay presents a middle way approach. Drawing on the Buddha's teachings about self-compassion and the importance of cherishing ourselves enough to follow the spiritual path, Bhante Bodhidhamma suggests we can work mindfully with our sense of self as a teacher. The instinct to identify and define ourselves, though ultimately illusory, can become a guide to liberation when met with Right Awareness.

The teaching offers practical wisdom for meditators who struggle with the apparent contradiction between the doctrine of not-self and the necessity of a functioning sense of self in daily life and spiritual practice. By learning to observe the pushing and pulling of identity formation without resistance, practitioners can use these very movements of self-construction as opportunities for deeper insight into the nature of experience itself.

The Buddha's teaching on anatta (not-self) asks us to investigate our sense of self. To each of us, this is precious - our sense of being unique, individual, an entity in our own right. The Buddha doesn't confirm or deny this. But he questions our automatic assumption of self-hood within our body-mind system. He asks us to see can we find any essential self- essence within this, can we locate it, define it, pinpoint it. How about my body - surely that contains me? But when I look deeper, all I find is an array of shifting sensations. And when I think about it, can something so obviously vulnerable as this body represent my essential being? What about feelings? These certainly feel like me! But they change so easily ... same for perceptions, habitual drives, even my subjective experience - all changing, at the mercy of external conditions. Can something so precious as my sense of self really be so unreliable? If so, I'm most unsatisfactory! Instead of drawing such an unhappy conclusion, the Buddha asks us to follow the investigation with a question: Since I cannot find anything in my body or mind that is reliable, permanent, satisfying, should I assume that my essential self is contained within my body

and mind? When he asks this question of his disciples they answer 'no'. He approves, confirming that nothing in our body-mind experience, can properly be thought of as 'Mine / Me / Myself'. When we make one of our habitual mistakes, thinking of our bodies, achievements, experiences as 'mine', or get caught up in plans, dreams, arguments, or mistaking this hot and bothered entity as 'me', we've fallen into delusion. But there is a danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The sense of self is central to our life in the world and also to our spiritual life. Just because we keep getting it wrong, mistaking our bodies, emotions, ideas etc. as 'me' or 'mine', this doesn't mean the sense of self is inherently useless and needs to be quelled whenever it arises. On the contrary, the Buddha asks us to spend time directing kind good wishes towards ourselves. We need this kindness to fulfil our unique potential for full liberation. If you cherish yourself, he says, then follow the spiritual path. Cherish ourselves? Cherish an illusion? A mistaken identity? Yes! Mindfully of course. When the sense of self is strong we feel for a moment the pleasure of this – perhaps we think of it as being centred, well defined or happy. But something deep inside wants more. It wants these feelings, this perception of 'me' to be permanent. Gradually the illusion breaks down. We realise it was a mistake. It didn't define an essential, unchanging 'me'. But mistakes are just mistakes. We don't have to despair. We can learn from them. Keeping attention on the experience we feel physical pushing and pulling within body and mind, pulling towards some new definition of 'me / mine' as we push away whatever appears to threaten that. Can we allow all that pushing and pulling to lead us along the path? At times it leads us to new definitions, new understandings. At times it leads us to a simpler experience of sensations and feelings without any conceptual overlay of 'me / mine / you / yours' etc. Then the desire for identity pokes out again, pushing and pulling us into some new definition of who or what we are. The instinct to identify is strong within us. It won't be quelled just because we've heard the teaching on not-self. Rather than fight with the instinct, we can let it be our teacher, our guide to liberation. Cherish the illusion – mindfully of course!

The World is Not in a Good Place

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this reflective teaching, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines our contemporary global situation through the lens of Buddhist wisdom, acknowledging that while saṃsāra—the cycle of existence driven by greed, hatred, and delusion—is inherently unsatisfactory, current world conditions present particular challenges. He addresses the rise of authoritarianism, economic inequality, climate change, and widespread social unrest, noting how these circumstances can lead to despair, especially for those with children.

The essay offers practical guidance rooted in Buddhist principles: first accepting reality as it is rather than proliferating into catastrophic thinking, then focusing on what we can personally influence. Bhante emphasizes examining our own prejudices, making conscious consumer choices, and engaging in peaceful protest. He suggests limiting exposure to constant negative news while staying informed of major events.

The teaching concludes with the recommendation to practice mettā (goodwill meditation) and to remember the countless charitable organizations working for positive change. This approach transforms feelings of helplessness into opportunities for skillful action, demonstrating how Buddhist practice provides both inner refuge and practical wisdom for engaging with worldly suffering.

Now you might say from a Buddhist perspective the world is never in a good place. This is the world of saṃsāra, the forever ongoing driven by acquisitiveness, aversion, fear and delusion. However, there are times when the world situation fosters peace and prosperity. Such a time at least in Europe was after the Second World War. It took a while, but the new order slowly brought renewal, a new sense of purpose, an established peace between former warring nations and prosperity. Seventy years on or so, we find the world in a precarious situation. Civil wars, the growing military might of China and its claims based on a fabricated document of no historical value, Russia seizing old territory of the USSR, a proxy war in the Yemen, Syria, Palestine and so on and so on. Here, in Europe an increasingly dissatisfaction with the inequality of wealth, with immigration, the rise of the Far Right which borders on the violent. Then there is an economic system which syphons the money up to the minute rich elite and has no social responsibility, leaving the worker poorer or unemployed and the services such as health and education impoverished. On top of that, there is the impending calamity of climate change. And we in Europe, small minute individuals, have no power to change

anything and can only influence the situation at elections where we see little difference between the parties. So, is it any wonder that many feel despair, the more so if they have children. What can we do to assuage the fear in our hearts? It won't come as a surprise that, first of all, we have to accept the situation as it is. To be as clear about it as we can. And then to receive it, no matter how painful. We mustn't allow the mind to proliferate into horror scenarios for this is exercising the very mental states we want to let go of. Then there is the clear realisation of 'what can I do'. Trying to get others to behave differently is a fool's game. You have to offer big sweeteners and have a club ready of they fall back, how else can you get donkeys to move. So, it's down to us as individuals to take stock of what we can do and to tell others what we are doing so that by our example others may follow. We can examine our own prejudices, accept them and work against them. We can examine how we spend our money, whether what we are buying is necessary and where the products are being made. We can be pro-active in joining others to protest. To further lift our spirits, we can bring to mind the huge amount of work being done by Charities, NGO's and other organisations in all the fields of concern. It may also be wise to stop the continuous input of bad news and simply keep up with main events. And finally, to practice Goodwill Meditation and bring to mind also all those who are harming whether consciously or unconsciously. Many thanks to those to those who gave ideas for this Tip. Contemplate the good going on Stop input

Happy New Year

Carl Fooks · 2 min read

Drawing from childhood memories of New Year's Eve disappointment, this essay explores the common pattern of unsustainable resolutions and relates it to our approach to Dhamma practice. The author examines how we often begin spiritual practice with intense enthusiasm only to burn out, likening this to 'sprinting for the marathon.' The essay introduces Right Resolve (sammā saṅkappa) as the Buddha's solution to this predicament—one of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path that provides a balanced approach to aspiration. Rather than the harsh, punitive resolutions that typically fail, Right Resolve teaches us to move gently away from greed, ill-will, and cruelty toward peaceful renunciation, loving-kindness, and compassion. The key insight is finding the 'balancing warmth' that makes transformation sustainable—approaching change with gentleness, compassion, and kindness rather than force. This teaching offers practical wisdom for both formal meditation practice and daily life, showing how sustainable spiritual development requires patience and self-compassion rather than heroic effort.

I remember the first time I was allowed to go to my parents' perennial New Year's Eve party. I don't remember how young I was, but I remember feeling excited to be present for the grand crossing over of one year to the next. I don't know what I was expecting but it was something noticeable and significant. Something like the machinery of the universe whirling and clunking over into The New Year. As the time drew near - "how long mum?", "is it near yet?" - my excitement and anticipation grew. "It won't be long now," my mum would assure me. And then ... it was here. The music went off, the radio went on, the countdown began with the chiming of Big Ben's bells: "ten, nine, eight, seven," my excited expectation reaching fever pitch. "Three, two, one." And then ... nothing! Well, except for cheering adults and a drunken rendition of Auld Lang Syne. I can't begin to tell you how disappointed I was. I had spent the preceding couple of years pretending to be asleep in bed while the adults celebrated, but would creep out to try to witness The Big Event, always to fall asleep near the time, waking up only with the cheer after it had happened. Charged up with excited anticipation about finally witnessing my first New Year, I was left wondering what on earth was wrong with my parents and their friends! Thus New Year struck me as rather pointless. Particularly when I became old enough to be pressured into making New Year's Resolutions. I couldn't work out what was wrong with my behaviour that I had to change it by resolving to do something different, especially given nobody continued with theirs beyond the first few

weeks anyway. It seemed to me to be a time of collective delusion. First of all with The Big Event that wasn't, and then with resolutions that, well, aren't. None of which is intended to say that making resolutions is pointless. On the contrary, resolving to do something can be really helpful. A common mistake with resolutions, at any time of the year, is the way we relate to them, engage with them. If we're not paying lip-service to the tradition, we typically choose something we really want to change and we put in a Herculean effort for the first few weeks that is unsustainable. Eventually, we burn out and give up. This, of course, is a simile of our relationship to the Dhamma. Burning brightly with interest and good-will, we throw ourselves in only to find ourselves unable to sustain the pace. We are sprinting for the marathon. The Buddha, of course, knew this about us and came up with a factor of the Noble Eightfold Path for exactly this: Right Resolve (*sammā-saṅkappa*), also variously translated as Right Thought, Right Intention, Right Aspiration; "a right way of thinking/aspiring, which has a balancing warmth." This is taught as the intention to move away from greed, ill-will, and cruelty, towards peaceful renunciation, lovingkindness, and compassion. I don't know about you, but when I first heard this, it sounded so far away from what was possible, it seemed unachievable. What was missing, for me, was this "balancing warmth", and it is that which makes it sustainable. So rather than choosing resolutions that will effectively punish us, we need to find ways of orientating towards them gently, with warmth, compassion, and kindness. This helps make them sustainable and easier to integrate into our lives.

Sickness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This profound teaching examines how sickness served as one of the divine messengers that awakened Prince Siddhattha Gotama to the reality of human suffering and impermanence. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how illness, while initially shocking and devastating, can become a powerful doorway to spiritual understanding when approached with Right Awareness (sammā sati).

The essay reveals how our attachment to the body creates a false sense of security and permanence. When sickness strikes, it shatters our illusions and confronts us with the fundamental Buddhist truth of impermanence (anicca). Rather than being overwhelmed by fear and despair, the teaching shows how we can use illness as an opportunity to develop the observer mind - stepping back to witness our experience without complete identification with physical discomfort.

Practical guidance includes daily reflections on the body's vulnerability: 'This body is subject to disease, this body is of a nature to fall ill, this body has not gone beyond sickness.' These contemplations, while initially uncomfortable, gradually free the heart from anxiety's grip. The teaching concludes with loving-kindness (mettā) practice directed toward the body, transforming fear into genuine care and establishing patient forbearance that supports both healing and spiritual development.

Sickness was one of the ‘messengers of the gods’, an awakening call that set Siddhattha Gotama on the path to an astounding spiritual discovery. When sickness befalls someone we know - a dangerous illness, a crippling accident - it comes as a jolt. It’s happening around us all the time, but now it’s in our face. But still we rarely ‘get it’. When such misfortune happens to us, it’s a shock. Depending on the circumstances, it may drive us to despair. A young policeman, all-body paralysed by a shot, chose to commit suicide. Even though it is happening all around us, we continue to live as if it won’t happen to us. If we reminded ourselves, every day, of how vulnerable the body is, it would take away the tinsel armour of ignoring, of self-deception. Should we have to suffer, it won’t be such a shock. But a shock it will be, because so much of who we are, the Self, is tied up in the body. Sickness is a mini-death. It tears us away from what we love – ‘the things I do; the friends I see; the job I have’ - and offers us what we don’t want – the discomfort, the pain, the disability. The mind works on this and offers a future of horror, of terror. Yet, here lies a gateway. An opportunity of escape. Escape from the de-

lusive world we have conjured up within ourselves and take for real. The escape cannot be yesterday, drowning in nostalgia. It's gone. Nor tomorrow, a world only in dreams. It hasn't arrived. The answer must be present. Right here. Right now. That was the Buddha's astounding spiritual discovery. Through developing right mindfulness, we can stand back within ourselves to discover an unassailable place. Even as the objective observer, the feeler, the experiencer, whenever it is stabilised, we've already found a haven. Indeed, when we have been patient enough to let all fear and aversion subside, this haven tells us there is physical discomfort or pain and disability to smaller or greater degree. And that's all! There is no denying that is not an easy task. Indeed depending on the severity of the illness, it can be a great struggle. So let's start with the easy ones. Next time you are ill, even a cold, try saying to yourself. 'There is this discomfort or pain and this illness prevents or hinders me from doing this. That's all.' This sort of acceptance helps to establish patient forbearance which is uncomplaining and a realistic optimism which sees possibilities. Here are some daily reflections to prevent us living in a make-believe world of continuous health: This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. Such reflections act on the heart as toothpaste on teeth. If we want to free the heart from the accumulation of plaque from fear and anxiety, each day we need to face such possibilities. We get in touch with these unpleasant mental states and in accepting them, they manifest and evaporate. Far from glooming our lives, such reflections, undermining the constraining effects of fear and anxiety and have the opposite effect of allowing our lives the more to bloom. Recognising the body's paramount importance in human existence and that this life form the Buddha tells us is the best for liberation, we need then to turn our loving-kindness, metta, towards the body. May you be free of sickness and disease. May you be well and strong. I determine to look after my body. Such blessings transform the energy of fear into care.

Yearning for a Better World

Noirin Sheahan · 2 min read

This reflective piece examines how individual spiritual practice can contribute to broader social change through the cultivation of mettā (loving-kindness). Drawing inspiration from Bhante Bodhidharma's observation that 'if enough people yearn for a better world...something will manifest,' the essay explores the potential ripple effects of goodwill practice on global society.

The teaching addresses common obstacles that arise when practicing mettā for world conditions, such as anxiety about global crises and skepticism about the possibility of positive change. It emphasizes the importance of balancing loving-kindness with upekkhā (equanimity), recognizing our limitations while maintaining genuine care. The essay suggests that acknowledging our powerlessness to single-handedly transform the world can paradoxically strengthen our capacity for sustained goodwill.

Practical guidance includes using phrases like 'Though I wish the world changes for the better, I have no power to make this happen' to cultivate equanimity. When resistance arises, vipassanā practice helps us understand the magnitude of personal transformation, fostering trust in others' potential for growth. The piece encourages practitioners to notice signs of hope in community efforts and social initiatives, allowing these observations to 'recharge our mettā-batteries' and sustain our practice of wishing well for our interconnected world.

This tip is inspired by a few lines from Bhante's Diary: "If enough people yearn for a better world ...something will manifest. After all society is conjunction of hearts and minds. Let us work in our own little ways for unification". We can join this effort, this collective yearning for a better world, through the practice of metta (goodwill) e.g. "May the global crisis bring a change for the better in society". Don't underestimate the potential for good even in a single good-wish. The flap of a butterfly wing can cause a storm. The ripple effects of metta through the world are similarly unpredictable. But there may be challenges e.g. the words 'global crisis' might bring up anxiety, while thinking about society changing for the better could bring up scepticism. We might give up after a few token wishes. But if we want to do our bit, we need to persevere. One option is to focus on equanimity, the balance of mind that adds strength to metta, giving us the necessary calm and steadiness to bring forth good-will in the face of challenges like anxiety and scepticism. Paradoxically, this strength stems from recognizing our limitations.

It's the delusion that we should somehow be able to save the world that brings on anxiety, prevents us seeing the potential for good in others. We can cultivate equanimity using a phrase such as "Though I wish the world changes for the better, I have no power to make this happen". Sometimes recognising our limitations brings relief, and we are better able to wish well for our fragile world. But sometimes not - admitting to powerlessness in the face of the deep threat to civilisation might bring up fear, hatred or other hindrances. Here we resort to our old friend - vipassana. Seeing how much work is needed to change ourselves for the better, we start to feel relieved that we're not expected to do this for anyone else never mind the whole world! We start to trust that at some deep level, the world is OK, that each person has the potential for good, and that change for the better really is possible. To encourage ourselves we need to look out for signs of hope such as the number of community groups that have been set up to help vulnerable people through the crisis. We should pause for a moment on hearing any such news, let it recharge our metta-batteries, hope that the cumulative effect of all such efforts will bring beneficial change to our social structures, our shared values. As Bhante says: "If enough people yearn for a better world ... something will manifest."

Balancing Lay and Spiritual Life

Carl Fooks · 4 min read

Drawing from personal experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, this essay addresses one of the most pressing challenges for lay practitioners: how to balance the rigorous demands of spiritual practice with the realities of work, family, and daily responsibilities. The author honestly describes feeling 'tired and frazzled' while juggling key worker duties, dharma teaching preparations, and personal obligations, yet still trying to maintain diligent practice.

The essay explores the seeming contradiction between seeking peace in Buddhism and encountering the Buddha's repeated exhortations to be 'diligent, ardent, and resolute.' Using Professor Peter Harvey's framework for skillful action, the author presents three key criteria: examining motivation (greed, hatred, delusion), assessing harm to self and others, and considering whether actions incline toward or away from liberation. Importantly, the essay suggests that even spiritual practice itself can become unskillful if approached with excessive force or aversion.

The central message emphasizes gentleness and sensitivity to one's present needs, arguing that sometimes 'sitting at the window, watching the rain fall gently on leaves' may be more skillful than formal meditation. This perspective reframes the Buddha's guidance in the Mettā Sutta as gentle encouragement rather than harsh demands, offering a compassionate approach to spiritual development that honors both dedication to the path and genuine self-care.

As I write this, I have just completed another long week of work. I am a “key worker” and the last 10 weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown have been long and hard. The work that I do is literally to help keep the country running; to help people get through this crisis. I write 40 hours on my timesheet, but I know it's more. I'm tired and a little frazzled. I have this to write, send to Bhante, Noirin, and a few close friends for feedback, and update accordingly, and so on. I'm planning for a Zoom call tomorrow which Noirin and I are holding for our upcoming retreat. Next weekend (today as you read this!) is the inaugural Satipanya Urban Southeast Saṅgha (Zoom) meet-up which I'm thinking about, and I'm also thinking about recording my talks for the retreat so that I can just play them, and not have to worry about if I'm called to work instead. On top of that, the grass and weeds keep growing. The bills still need paying. The dog needs walking. The family need tending to. Life goes on. Oh, and the very last thing that happened

at work last week was that I had my first meeting with my new boss who started off by telling me that at his last place he fired all the people in my position. Did I mention that I was tired and a little frazzled? The point of me saying all this is that lay life is hard! So we come to Buddhism to get some peace and ease, some joyful release from the rigours and hardships of life, and what do we find? Phrases like “diligent, ardent, and resolute” (MN p. 497). We go on retreat where we have to get up at 3:30 in the morning, meditate until at least 9:30 at night, and stay mindful—no, not just mindful, but “diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful” (Anālayo 2003, p. 4)—from the moment we wake up until the moment we fall asleep. Oh, and we have to find a noting word to label each and every experience as we go. To top it off, after a week of slog comes *sadhiṭṭhānadayā* ... a day of “resolute resolution” where we “strive” for a full day of moment-to-moment mindfulness. And let’s not mention the dreaded “C” word. OK, let’s! “Concentration”. I’m old enough for a teacher to have whacked me across the knuckles with a ruler for “not concentrating hard enough!” When Bhante reads us the *Mettā Sutta* every night, the Buddha says how we should behave like this and should do that. More things we should do! [Edit: Bhante’s softened it now.] I mean, to cap it all, the Buddha’s last words were literally “strive diligently for your liberation.” (DN p. 270). “Strive diligently ...”. You would be forgiven for thinking this isn’t the kind of peace and ease or rest and relaxation I had in mind when I signed up! Where’s the Spa?! So, the question is, how do we balance the demands of our lay life with the demands of the spiritual life? How do we reconcile our needs with the exhortation of the Buddha to “strive diligently for [our] liberation”? The Buddha, of course, had the answer to this: Skilfully! But, what amounts to ‘skilful’, and how do we apply it to our lives and practice? Professor Peter Harvey (Harvey 2000, p. 46) whittled the Buddha’s criteria down to: 1) Is the motivation based in greed, hatred, or delusion? 2) Is the action to my harm or that of others? And 3) does it incline away from liberation? So, if an action affirms any of these, the action is unskilful, and we should abandon it. Ultimately, all unskilful action can be said to be to our harm because it does not incline towards liberation. Now, to be controversial. This can include practice! If we’re up to our eyeballs in stress and worry and feeling particularly aversive to practice, and go and do it anyway, it can be that all we do is build up further resentment and aversion to the practice, never to practice again. Of course, it can also be that we find a wonderful place of peace and calm in the thick of it, but you get the point. We need to connect with our needs right now. Sometimes, sitting at the window, watching the rain fall gently on leaves is a more skilful thing to do than formal practice. Sometimes, getting up at 3:30am to practice diligently, ardently, and resolutely is exactly the right thing to do. Basically, it boils down to this: we should be gentle and kind to ourselves; we should be sensitive to our needs at the time and skilful in our response to them; we need to have a skilful orientation to the path that does not result in harm to ourselves or others, is not based in greed (which implies not indulging laziness!),

hatred, or delusion, and does not incline away from liberation. We need to gently nurture our practice, doing those things that are most nourishing for us at the time. Notice all the “should”s and “need”s in that last paragraph? If you feel the gentleness of these, this is how we “should” hear the Mettā Sutta that Bhante reads each night. I implore you to read it again with exactly this in mind. Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer’s day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time. (John Lubbock, *The Use of Life*.)

Wildflower Wisdom

Noirin Sheahan · 2 min read

Noirin Sheahan shares her journey of discovering dhamma teachings through wildflower identification at Satipanya Buddhist Retreat. Inspired by Joanna Macey's approach to climate anxiety through gratitude and nature appreciation, she chronicles her evolution from overwhelming aversion to curious engagement with the natural world around her.

The essay traces the familiar pattern of the three unwholesome roots (lobha, dosa, moha) as they manifest in her botanical learning journey - from initial aversion to the complexity of identifying species, through growing greed for knowledge, to finding balance through mindful appreciation. What begins as a butterfly walk becomes a metaphor for how mindfulness practice can transform our relationship with the world's complexity.

Sheahan demonstrates how everyday activities like nature walks can become vehicles for dhamma practice, showing how each mindful encounter - whether with wildflowers, political committees, or meditation cushions - offers opportunities to care for what is "vulnerable, fleeting, unreliable." The essay beautifully illustrates how environmental engagement and spiritual practice can support each other, with nature study becoming both a form of loving-kindness practice and practical activism that counters climate despair through present-moment awareness and appreciation.

Oblivious to the pandemic and all its consequences, the wildflowers have been blooming here at Satipanya and giving me a few dhamma lessons in the process. My interest was sparked by reading Joanna Macey's 'Active Hope' last year, a guide to facing the climate crisis. One danger, she says, is that we get so overwhelmed by anxiety that we do nothing. To combat this, we need to start with gratitude: to develop and express appreciation for the natural world that supports us and is now so deeply threatened. Whatever actions we take to combat the threat will then stem from good-will and be more effective and sustainable as a result. So when Eddie, one of our dhamma group in Dublin, suggested a butterfly walk, I was enthusiastic. Luckily it was a beautiful sunny day and butterflies fluttered in abundance. It was a bit of a downer therefore to find aversion showing up. It all seemed so overwhelming – so many different butterflies, so many different wildflowers, so much beauty and profusion. My brain ached! I kept reminding myself of the motivation — to develop and express appreciation for the natural world — as I adjusted myself to the news that this was going to be a long journey, that the heart was only going to open chink by chink to the biosphere. 65 years of ig-

noring the ‘weeds’ under my feet weren’t going to be pushed aside that easily! By the time those ‘weeds’ started blooming this year, aversion had given way to a tentative curiosity. Little pink flowers (from a photo Eddie identified Herb Robert) became differentiable from a companion pink (Red Champion). When I went out for my walk, these became friends greeting me on the roadside. With their encouragement little white flowers (Stitchwort) began to form a niche in consciousness, soon followed by the taller white ones (yarrow) and yellow ones As you can probably guess, greed was now triumphing over aversion, my heart aching with desire to know and name all the flowers peering at me whenever I glanced at the hedgerow. Doubt crept in — what was the point in making my daily walks stressful? Would I not be better off to cultivate tranquility, just feeling my feet on the ground as I walked? Remembering the motivation — appreciation for nature as a way of countering the paralyzing anxiety associated with climate crisis — I could see that the stress was worth bearing. On this side of enlightenment what relationship is free from greed? I could work with it mindfully and balance it out by spending more time admiring each flower, letting them draw me deeper into this new relationship, wishing them well as they coped with weather changes now and to come. Maybe thanks to Joanna Macey’s strategy, I now find myself on the biodiversity policy group of the Green Party. Although my expertise on Herb Robert might not save the planet, I will surely be able to compile an email list or in some way contribute to this work. No doubt greed and aversion will make their appearance here too. But that’s OK, they have their place in life. Greed counters laziness, my tendency to ignore what I don’t yet understand or value; aversion tells me when I’ve had enough, need to relax, let someone else compile that email list. Nature, politics, committees can all be part of our path to freedom. The truth seeps in as we follow the breath in meditation, compile an email list, discern one pink flower from another. Each mindful encounter with the world is to care for what is vulnerable, fleeting, unreliable — the perfect Dhamma teaching.

Dealing with the Stories that Make Us Suffer

Carl Fooks · 3 min read

This practical teaching addresses one of the most common sources of everyday suffering: the stories our minds create when people disappoint, betray, or upset us. Carl Fooks explores how our mental narratives about events—whether accurate or distorted—often cause more pain than the events themselves. The essay bridges formal meditation practice with daily life application, showing how the same investigative awareness we use on the cushion can be applied to emotional turmoil off the cushion.

The teaching offers two complementary approaches: first, using mindful investigation to discover what is actually disturbing us beneath the surface stories, then applying gentle noting practice to the wounded feelings that arise. Second, when pain is too intense for direct investigation, the essay suggests undermining our certainty in our interpretations by recognizing that multiple explanations could be true. This uncertainty becomes a doorway to freedom from clinging to particular views.

Rooted in the fundamental insight that attachment to views leads to dukkha while letting go brings release, this guidance helps practitioners develop the habitual wisdom of questioning all mental stories. The teaching emphasizes how this practice gradually liberates us from our inner critic and moves us toward greater freedom in both formal practice and daily relationships.

A common question I get goes something along these lines: “A friend has done something that has upset me. I feel betrayed. I thought I could trust them. I’m suffering. How can I stop?” The person varies, what happens varies, the feeling varies, but it all boils down to the same archetypical cause: something happens that we want to be different. Sue got a pay rise but I didn’t! Jim cheated on me! Billy stole from me! Mary doesn’t like me. Tara has asked me not to make a cake for the party; I’m convinced nobody likes my cakes! Etc. When things like this happen, a big part of our suffering comes from the stories we tell ourselves about these events. The stories might be accurate and justified, but often they’re distorted and hypercritical, and we believe them as if they are true. We think we’re useless, unloveable, gullible, unlikeable, talentless chumps! The instructions for practice boil down to watching whatever arises within the field of awareness in a way that does not control, manipulate, judge, question, or interfere in any way whatsoever. How does this help in daily life, though? When something like this assails us, how do we apply the practice? One thing we can do is use mindfulness to delve into

what's happening to discover what's really disturbing us. On the cushion, we investigate our experience: what is this? The same is true off the cushion. We delve into the experience: what am I actually experiencing here? What's troubling me? On the cushion, we do this non-discursively, we simply watch and wait for it to show us what it has to tell us, but off the cushion it often first needs a bit more interactive analysis. We delve deeper and deeper asking what's the matter, what's bothering me, what am I struggling with? Get an answer, test it, and ask again. Eventually we find something fundamental, possibly an unloved, unappreciated, betrayed little mini-me, sitting wounded in the corner of our minds, wailing at the terrible things "that nasty person has done to me". It is there that we apply the practice. We simply watch that wounded feeling, allowing it to be there without any interference whatsoever, noting gently: "wounded wounded". I wrote about this approach in last October's Newsbyte if you would like to read more. Sometimes though an alternative approach is needed. Perhaps the pain is too much and we have to first get ourselves into a better place before we can investigate. When something like this happens to me, I undermine the certainty I feel in what I believe has happened. If somebody's said something to me that makes me feel terrible, I think of how I "know" that it's True, and then think of alternatives that could be true instead. I come up with two or three alternatives that are genuine possibilities, and I convince myself that I can never know which one of the different possibilities are actually true. If I asked the "perpetrator", they may tell me a lie so as not to offend me. Or they may tell me the truth. Unless I could actually get inside their mind, I have no way of telling. Even lie-detector tests are fallible. So, I just can't know. Right there, in that realisation, is freedom. The moment you see that any of them could be true, the attachment to one of them simply does not make any sense, and the mind is much less inclined to cling to it. Seeing this, we should soak ourselves in the realisation that clinging to an idea, a view, leads to suffering, while letting go of it leads to release and relief. When this becomes a habitual pattern of the mind, it starts doing it with everything. Is my view of anything more right or wrong than anyone else's? No! Of course not! There are just views. Seeing this, we unpick our belief in the stories the mind tells us, slowly liberating ourselves from our inner-critic, and inching our way towards freedom.

The Wisdom and Virtues of Insecurity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay examines how Buddhist teachings on impermanence (anicca) provide a foundation for navigating life's inevitable uncertainties and disruptions. Bhante Bodhidhamma reflects on the Buddha's final teaching about compound things being subject to change, connecting this fundamental insight to our contemporary experiences of sudden global challenges like pandemics.

The essay explores key contemplative practices that prepare the mind for uncertainty, particularly the traditional contemplations of sickness, aging, and death that awakened the Bodhisatta to his spiritual quest. These 'Messengers of the Gods' serve as daily reminders of life's fragility and impermanence, helping practitioners develop genuine acceptance rather than denial.

Central to the discussion is the cultivation of upekkhā (equanimity) - the ability to remain calm and clear-minded in the face of danger or disruption. This balanced mental state, rooted in acceptance of 'what is,' allows for wise responses rather than reactive emotions. The essay also emphasizes khanti (patient forbearance), which the Buddha identified as the highest form of ascetic practice, particularly relevant when external circumstances force us to renounce familiar comforts and routines.

Ultimately, the teaching suggests that embracing insecurity can transform us, making us more flexible, inventive, and resilient. Rather than viewing uncertainty as purely negative, we can recognize how challenging times often create opportunities for growth and deeper wisdom.

Everything changes and everything is dependent on something else. We, human beings, are always changing and dependent on virtually everything! We are all made up of bits and pieces and each bit is dependent on many of the pieces. And all these bits and pieces are changing all the time. The recognition and acceptance of impermanence is one of the rocks upon which the Buddha established his teaching. It is part of his last valedictory encouragement. 'Everything that is a compound is subject to change. Strive diligently for your liberation.' None of this comes as a surprise. But that does not mean to say we are ready for changes that really do upset our regular, presumed changes of everyday life. The sudden appearance of Coronavirus, a fatal illness! We have been lucky in the West not to have to deal with MERS, SARS, Zika, Ebola. And scientists say there are more on the way! Hold onto your hats! What are the contemplations and vir-

tues that will steel our hearts to acceptance and action?The contemplations of sickness, ageing and death prepares the ground for profound acceptance. These were the awakening calls – the ‘Messengers of the Gods’ – that woke the Bodhisatta to his vow to become fully self-enlightened. Repeating the phrases once a day and really driving home their truth value that sickness and death could strike today, sensing any resistance, would be enough to keep us prepared for the worst.Equanimity, calmness in danger, comes in handy! This has to be based on acceptance. This is the way it is. This is what it is. This allows clarity to arise, untainted by emotional bias, and protects us from denial and fake hope of wacko theories – how could anyone in their right mind think that swallowing a cleaning liquid that says it kills 99% of known germs could be taken as a medicine and swallowed? Hopefully, they have recovered.Yes even the good old British stiff upper lip, courage and stoicism to face dire situations. Patient forbearance the Buddha says is the highest form of ascetic practice. In other words, letting go is most difficult when we are in a stressful situation. Lockdown, social distancing, restrictions on where we can go, who we can visit, where we can eat, all call for renouncing of enjoyable habits.So all in all, we may become grateful for this disruption in our lives. If we have responded with wisdom, it will make us more flexible, more inventive, more optimistic, more ready to face sudden changes in our lives in the future whatever the cause.The Chinese word for crisis says it – dangerous times may lead to opportunities.

As Winter Approaches

Noirin Sheahan · 2 min read

This deeply personal essay by Noirin Sheahan weaves together grief, seasonal change, and Buddhist teaching in a moving exploration of embodied awareness. Writing in November, she reflects on her mother's death and love for winter evenings, using this memory as a foundation for examining our relationship with the physical elements that constitute our bodily experience.

Sheahan explores the traditional Buddhist understanding of the four elements (mahābhūta) - earth, water, air, and fire - showing how seasonal changes, particularly the fading light and warmth of November, can become teachers rather than sources of depression. She examines our deep attachment to bodily comfort and the mental commentary that overlays simple physical sensations, drawing on the insight that most of us live 'at a little distance from our bodies.'

The essay offers practical guidance for using winter's challenges as opportunities for mindfulness practice, suggesting we learn to rest attention on immediate physical sensations like cold toes or warm hands, observing both the raw experience and our mental reactions. Through patient observation, she shows how the overlay of preference and aversion can simplify and even cease, revealing an intimate connection with present-moment reality that serves as a counterpoint to mental proliferation.

Traditionally, November is the month of the dead, the 'Holy Souls' in Christian understanding. It's a time to remember those we have lost. I am especially remembering my mum who died in January. She used to love this time of year - closing the curtains early and looking forward to long evenings by the fireside. For many people November has the opposite effect. As the days get shorter and the sunlight fades a gloomy depression mounts. It's humbling to see our dependence on physical basics like daylight and sunshine for optimism and good humour. It's also an opportunity to reflect on the teaching on the elements - earth, water, air and fire - the basis for bodily experience. Earth represents solidity; we sense this as pressure, hardness, softness, weight. We experience the water element when it spatters into our face as rain, lets eyelids skim over the delicate surface of the cornea. The air element represents movement - we sense this when we turn our head, when the legs swing while we walk. The fire element is responsible for the November blues; changes in temperature and light tell us that this element, like the others, is not to be taken for granted, not ours to have when we want it to discard

when we want something else. We're very attached to bodily experience! As a baby it was our main source of pleasure and pain. Later the mental world became more prominent – the pleasure of reading, socializing, achieving, the pain of misunderstanding, rejection, failure. Delusion allows our mental life to take over the show; like James Joyce's Mr. Duffy, most of us live "at a little distance from our bodies". The fading of heat and light at this time of year provides a wake-up-call. Warmth is the vital sign of life while light has spiritual as well as physical significance – near death experiences often report moving through a dark tunnel towards light. No wonder we are so deeply attached! To go to the root of the problem we need to rediscover the pleasure and pain of the embodied life, rest attention on cold toes or warm hands. There's the simple physicality of warmth or coolness; there's also the overlay of commentary, liking, disliking, desire & aversion. As we watch, the overlay simplifies down, and when conditions are right, stops. What a relief! An easy intimacy grows, but so delicate! It shatters with any grumbling for more heat, brighter light ... Slowly and painfully we learn to drop our preferences, be grateful for whatever sensations the body offers. These sensations provide our footing in reality, a welcome counterpoint to the unending chit-chat of the mind. With our feet planted firmly in reality, our true nature can take shape. I like to remember my mum's November evenings when she gladly turned away from the hustle and bustle of life to rest by her fireside, read her books. I can follow her lead, retreat into my body, let it become my focus for winter evenings, curl up with the book of Dhamma – the real-life one printed on direct experience. The chapter on the elements is always a good place to start. What better way to greet the cold, dark days of November than by learning to love the vibrant stimulation we term 'cold', discovering peace in darkness? Thanks for the memories, Mum.

Guidelines For a New Year's Resolution

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This teaching offers a comprehensive approach to New Year reflection and resolution-setting through the lens of Buddhist practice. Bhante Bodhidhamma presents four interconnected aspects of well-being: physical, material, social, and spiritual, each supporting the others in creating a balanced life conducive to spiritual development.

The essay provides twenty reflective questions across these four domains, encouraging honest self-assessment of the past year's progress. Physical well-being addresses health habits essential for spiritual practice, as the Buddha taught that good health supports meditation and mindfulness. Material well-being examines our relationship with wealth and resources, recognizing that sufficient material stability enables spiritual focus. Social well-being draws directly from the brahmavihāra practice, exploring our relationships and social connections as expressions of loving-kindness, compassion, and other heart qualities.

Most significantly, the spiritual well-being section addresses fundamental questions about life orientation, ethical conduct aligned with Buddhist teachings, and the cultivation of spiritual friendships (kalyāṇamittā). The practical approach transforms reflection into action, helping practitioners identify specific steps for balanced development across all four aspects, ultimately supporting a more integrated and fulfilling spiritual path.

Towards A More Fulfilling Life. The opportunity for making your New Year's Resolution will be just after the Refuges and Precepts at midnight. Now we are approaching the end of the year, and it's the perfect time to reflect how we have done in the past year. We can then take some lessons for the New Year. One good way to reflect is using four aspects of well-being: Physical well-being, Material well-being, Social well-being, Spiritual well-being. These four aspects give us a complete and balanced view of well-being. By reflecting on them, we will have a complete view of how your life as a whole progressed in the past year. To help us reflect, these are some questions we can ask ourselves for each aspect. By giving honest answers to them, we will be able to see whether or not we have progressed the way we wanted in each aspect. For the questions to which our answer is no, we can ask why. For example, take this question: Did you achieve the desired income level? If our answer is no, we can then ask: Why? The answer might be because of circumstances beyond our control. But it may be a time to question what our income level should be. Whether it is fair or whether we expect too much. Whether life wouldn't be easier if we reduced our expectations. So, here are 20 questions to help you reflect the

past year. You may consider others, of course. Physical well-being (The Buddha tells us that one of the necessary supports for spiritual practice is good health.) Have we established the habit of exercising? Have we established the habit of consuming nutritious food? Are we sleeping well? Do we feel physically fit? If you have an illness or disability, are you caring for this appropriately? What resolution comes of these reflections? Material well-being (We need a sufficient level of material well-being to support our spiritual practice.) Have you achieved your desired income level? Have you established the habit of spending less than you earn? Have you been able to eliminate debt? Have you establish the habit of saving? Have you reduced your spending on some unnecessary expenses? Has your career progressed as you wanted it to? If unemployed, are you spending time to your advantage? How much of your wealth do you offer to charity? What resolution comes of these reflections? Social well-being (This is the spiritual practice of Brahmavihara, the social virtues, in all its aspects) Have our closest relationships been fulfilling? Have our relationships with our families been as good? Have we maintained good relationships with our friends? Have we maintained good relationships with our workmates? Did you get to know people from more diverse backgrounds? Spiritual well-being Have you found your life's orientation? Do our ethical standards and behaviour match up to the teachings of our spiritual teachers? Have you built the necessary habits for spiritual growth? They could be meditating, developing virtues, reading sacred texts, for example. Are you maintaining and developing spiritual friendships? Overall during the past year What are you most proud of? What do you most regret? While the questions listed here are not comprehensive, at least they can give some idea about our progress. Besides, we will be able to see which aspect requires more attention. Since we should maintain a balance of all aspects, the aspects, least developed, are the ones that we should pay more attention to. These questions can also help you identify the specific actions you should take for each aspect. For example: If my answer to the question Have I built a habit of exercising? is no, can I determine a time every day devoted to some physical exercise or can I join a gym or local group? If my answer to the question Did I get to know people from more diverse backgrounds? is no, can I join a group or society which has a more varied membership – art clubs, walking groups, gardening societies? If my answer to the question Have I found my life's orientation? is no, then I can ask: Have I put enough effort into my practice or do I need to explore other spiritual teachings? We can then prioritise the actions based on what will make the most impact on our lives. All these will help us set your goals for the New Year. Our objective should be to have good and balanced progress in all four facets.

Coronavirus: Messenger from the Gods

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this contemplative essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the coronavirus pandemic through a Buddhist lens, viewing it as a 'Messenger from the Gods' that has exposed fundamental truths about human existence and society. He explores the spectrum of human responses to the crisis - from fear and aversion to boldness and defiance - while encouraging readers to examine their own reactions with mindful awareness.

The essay highlights how the pandemic has illuminated both suffering and positive transformation. While acknowledging the genuine hardships - economic disruption, social isolation, loss of loved ones - Bhante also identifies unexpected benefits: renewed community spirit, environmental improvements from reduced travel, appreciation for essential workers, and opportunities for simpler living. He reflects on how the crisis has forced a re-evaluation of what we truly need versus what we habitually consume.

Drawing connections to Buddhist teachings on impermanence and interdependence, the essay suggests that this global challenge offers lessons about sustainable living, social cooperation, and finding contentment with less. Bhante concludes with cautious optimism that the pandemic might serve as a turning point toward more conscious, community-oriented ways of living, despite inevitable pressures to return to previous patterns of consumption and individualism.

I much prefer to call our 'Messenger from the Gods[1]' Coronavirus rather than the bland Covid 19. It gives a certain majesty (corona/crown) to the role it is playing in our human world. There is the fear it inspires, especially to those who are vulnerable. It connects us to the fragility of human life. How ironic that this minute arrangement of chemicals has the sensitivity to pierce our cells and destroy them. The aversion towards it for upsetting our daily routines, undermining our economy, destroying our jobs, impoverishing the already poor, worsening the suffering of the mentally ill and fragile. Painful in preventing us from being with loved ones and the young from enjoying each other's company. And most painful of all when it kills the ones we love. And all this is spiced with anger at having to comply with rules and regulations. In some it has brought out a boldness, perhaps a bravado. Life must go on. We can't be covered by a disease. There have always been diseases. So what! We all have to die anyway. Life becomes meaningless when everything stops. Then there is the libertarian – no-one tells me what I am going to do! No-one not even death should undermine my personal

freedoms even if it imperils others. What has been your response? On a wider scene, Coronavirus has confused the leaders of our countries with differing responses. The authoritarian lockdown of China which learnt from the Sars outbreak. The wise response of Jacinda Ardern. The macho response of Trump and the confused efforts of our own Boris. But there have been great pluses. How quickly vaccines have been produced when co-operation is demanded. And with no testing on animals so easily sacrificed for humans! How well local communities responded in helping those who are vulnerable. There was a re-discovery of neighbourliness. Some inkling as to how we could be so much happier as a community of interdependent citizens rather than isolate entities, vying with each other for personal advantage. New communication especially with Zoom. It is not the same as a real presence, but it surprises how real the encounters are. It has been a great boon to be able to join online courses of every description. A change for many in work habits. Working from the comfort of home. The saving of time and money for travel as well as carbon footprint. Every indication is that this will be a permanent change in working habits. Finding ways to make life enjoyable in lockdown has led many to new pursuits and to re-ignite the joy of education, of involvement through social media in the problems of the day. The virtual collapse of tourism which has its negative effects on jobs, but so much better for the Climate Crisis we are in. It maybe that people seek vacations closer to home, discovering the beauty of their own countries. Greater appreciation for 'front line' workers – health care [2], shop assistants, refuse collection, bus and train drivers. Also seeing importance of NHS over private medicine. And we can add the BBC as a trusted information media. The forces to re-assert life as it was with an economy based on personal greed at the expense of social welfare and the environment will without doubt return with great force. But hopefully, it will be guided towards the sustainable. And it may just be that there is enough conscience especially in the Democracies of the world to start addressing the unsustainable balance between the rich and the poor and the neo-liberal economy that has produced it - and the growing far right politics. And the consumer also plays an important part. Many have realised that they do not 'need' all the stuff they are used to buying. A visitor told me how he envied the Travellers who work for enough money to live by, live simply and contented in their caravans. Perhaps you see further advantages and disadvantages from what is after all a plague. Some commentators talk of a turning point. There are grounds for hope.

Quench all Resentments

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay draws from Buddhaghosa's 5th-century masterwork, the Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification), to offer systematic methods for dissolving resentment and anger. Bhante Bodhidhamma presents nine progressive techniques beginning with cultivating mettā (loving-kindness) toward those who have hurt us, recognizing their good qualities, and developing compassion for those who seem to lack redeeming features.

The teaching explores deeper contemplations including reflection on kamma—understanding that all beings inherit the consequences of their actions without need for our punishment—and considering past-life connections through rebirth perspective. When gentler approaches fail, the essay introduces analytical meditation techniques that deconstruct the object of resentment through elemental analysis, revealing the insubstantial nature of what we resist.

Grounded in the Kakacūpama Sutta's radical teaching about maintaining loving-kindness even when 'bandits brutally severed limb from limb with a two-handed saw,' this practical guide acknowledges the challenging nature of forgiveness while providing concrete steps for transformation. The essay concludes with the powerful practice of generous giving to former adversaries and emphasizes applying these same techniques to self-resentment, offering a comprehensive approach to emotional purification essential for meditation practice.

Resentment burns. Old wounds smoulder in the heart. Fantasies of revenge fan to flames. And the desire for vengeful acts, retaliation, becomes more and more violent. Sometimes we shock ourselves at the fierceness of our imaginations and then quickly suppress them and with them the blazing. And this malevolence begins to manifest in more subtle ways, such as the passive aggression of sarcasm. The Path of Purification was written by Buddhaghosa in the 5th Century CE. My teacher told me I had in my hand the whole of Theravada Buddhism[i]. It is considered one of the great spiritual manuals of all religions. It is not a book you would want to read from page to page, but to dip in when needed. This is a summary of an extensive section of how to dissolve resentment at Chapter IX 14[ii]. The first remedy is to develop metta towards the person who has hurt us. This would begin perhaps by not dwelling on the person's negative characteristics. In this way we can undermine the anger and develop patience, which is the willingness to bear with the unpleasant and not to react with ill-will. 'If bandits

brutally severed limb from limb with a two handled saw, he who entertains hatred in his heart on that account, would not be one who carries out my teaching' M i 129 Tall order! If that approach fails to dampen, then bring to mind the person's good qualities. I remember my niece when she about five telling her father how she could not stand her brother. He reminded her that he makes her laugh. There was a moment of recognition and she went away happy! Everyone has a good side that can be appreciated. But writes, Buddhaghosa, failing all that, if the person has no redeeming qualities, then they are deserving of our compassion. If this approach fails, then consider the damage resentment is doing to us. Such negative mental states, when we dwell on them as feeling, are very unpleasant – hot agitation. And, of course, the chemicals produced are not doing the body any good either. Seemingly it takes 90 seconds for the chemicals caused by anger to dissolve once we are patient. Hence count ten ... slowly! Failing that, then the reflection on kamma: All beings are the owners of their actions (kamma), heirs of their actions, born from their actions, related to their actions, and have actions as their refuge. Whatever action they do, whether good or evil, they will inherit its results. In other words, we suffer the consequences of all our actions – good and bad. There is no need to punish. And, of course, this leads to a reflection on our own past unkind, perhaps callous behaviour. We would not want people to bear grudges against us. From a rebirth point of view, that person may have been a parent of ours in a past life. The Buddha says we would not repay our parents even if we carried them on our shoulders throughout our lives, such are the gifts we have received from them. According to rebirth theory, groups have been revolving around each other throughout countless lifetimes. If even now, resentful feelings are not soothed, then bring to mind the blessings of Metta, Loving Kindness, one of which is good sleep. How exhausting it is to wake up in the middle of the night, the heart burning with resentment. Still finding it difficult to let go, a more subtle contemplation is to ask what is it I actually resent? Breaking the person up into parts – is it the hair? The knees? And so on. Seeing the person through the Elements of Earth (solidity), Water (fluidity, elasticity), Fire (heat and cold) or Air (movement). In other words, by dissecting the person, one finds there is nothing solid, substantial to be angry with. When all has failed, finally, most difficult, buy the person a present! An act of generous forgiveness is a powerful way to douse the flames. All these techniques can be used where we see resentment towards ourselves. [iii] An exercise: list all resentments towards others and ourselves. Work your way through them. It takes time. May all our resentments dissolve into generous patience and caring benevolence! [i] [i] there is also Venerable Sariputta's advice: Getting rid of Resentment and the Buddha: Getting rid of Resentment. [ii] This essay complements Towards the End of Forgiveness [iii] A poem on self-forgiveness by Dilruba Ahmed: Phase One

Exiting Lockdown

Noirin Sheahan · 2 min read

In this reflective piece, Noirin Sheahan examines the spiritual opportunities inherent in transitions, particularly as coronavirus restrictions ease and retreat participants prepare to re-enter daily life. She identifies the common oscillation between over-expectation (projecting too much happiness into future events) and dread (attachment to withdrawal and fear of busyness), showing how both states reveal our attachments and delusions.

The essay demonstrates how mindfulness becomes the key tool for navigating these transitions skillfully. When caught up in pleasant expectations, we can practice muditā (appreciative joy) by savoring our anticipation while grounding ourselves in realistic awareness. When experiencing aversion to re-engagement, we can embrace this discomfort as insight into the first noble truth of dukkha - the unsatisfying nature of conditioned existence.

Sheahan emphasizes that transitions, while challenging, are 'precious' opportunities for deepening our understanding of attachment, impermanence, and the path to liberation. By cultivating the habit of pausing to acknowledge our emotional states, we can navigate life's inevitable changes with greater wisdom, reduced suffering, and authentic gratitude for both society's offerings and our own spiritual growth.

As coronavirus restrictions start easing again, many of you will be engaging with family, social and worklife more fully. Similarly for us here at Satipanya, as the winter retreat closes, we start looking outwards, forwards, planning outings, visits, work. Transitions are tricky. We so easily lose the run of ourselves, expect too much of whatever is on the horizon. You might be dreaming of booking a meal in your favorite restaurant; on retreat we're dreaming of the first breakfast when we can chat. We project too much happiness into these events and get disappointed, bewildered, angry when the initial happiness fades, leaving us as grumpy as ever! Or it can be the other way round, we suddenly realise how attached we've grown to the enforced withdrawal of lockdown, of retreat, and dread all the coming busyness. Most of us suffer from both afflictions – expecting wonders one moment, dreading change the next! The good news is that transitions are also rich opportunity for spiritual practice. It's when we see our attachments and delusion most clearly, and thereby find a precious opportunity to work with these, find wiser ways of responding. As always, mindfulness is key. Can we tune into whatever emotions are driving our thoughts, actions, speech? Say we're being fired up by expectation. Stop a moment to acknowledge and explore the experience. Ex-

pectation usually has a pleasant, happy flavour. Stopping to savor that is a form of *mudita* – appreciative joy. It is good to be able to look forward to things, to have faith that we can enjoy life. Anyone who has suffered from depression knows what a great gift this is. Stopping to enjoy our anticipation of happiness cultivates gratitude for mental well-being as well as whatever we are looking forward to. Stopping also grounds us, makes our expectations more realistic, lessens disappointment if things don't go exactly as we would have wished. Say we're being driven in the opposite direction – dreading the thought of going back into society. Can we feel the reluctance, dislike, aversion - whatever way unhappiness is manifesting? There is truth here too – going back into society requires effort and will not bring us lasting happiness. Though this insight is painful, we have the good fortune of knowing that the Buddha saw value in this pain and formulated it as the first noble truth; he told us we must fully understand *dukkha* (the unsatisfying nature of life) to become liberated. We won't learn by shying away from life. But if we can embrace the pain as a spiritual insight, this lifts our spirits. We'll reengage with society more willingly, knowing this is part of our spiritual path. The burden of dread diminishes, and we might even start looking forward to a meal in our favourite restaurant – after all the path can have enjoyable aspects as well as pain! As we see-saw between overexpectation and dread, we learn to savor here and now the happiness we were projecting into the future, and to embrace the unhappiness that teaches us the first noble truth. None of this is easy however, and we need to be patient with our many mistakes as we fly up into the sky with false expectations and get rudely dumped on the ground with disappointment. Transitions are precious. Transitions are tough. The habit of stopping to acknowledge our emotional state helps us emerge from our various lockdowns with minimal misery, maximal learning and deeper gratitude for all that society offers.

Committing to the Path

Noirin Sheahan · 2 min read

In this deeply personal reflection, Noirin Sheahan explores the second factor of the Noble Eightfold Path — Right Intention (sammā saṅkappa) — through the lens of her own Lay Ordination ceremony at Satipanya Buddhist Retreat. Drawing on Gregory Kramer's framework, she examines three levels of practicing Right Intention: moment-to-moment mindful attention to our actions and thoughts, episodic intentions set before specific activities, and overarching life commitments that serve as guiding principles.

The essay centers on Noirin's experience of taking formal Lay Ordination on Buddha Day, publicly committing to the Three Refuges (Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha) and the five precepts as the cornerstone of her spiritual life. She explores how public vows strengthen our commitment through healthy social accountability, while cautioning against rigid literalism that can lead to paralyzing perfectionism. Instead, she advocates for holding our aspirations gently, allowing the natural tension between our ideals and habitual tendencies to become a pathway for growth.

The teaching emphasizes how formal commitment can transform ordinary difficulties — tiredness, despondency, life's inevitable dukkha — into opportunities for spiritual development. Through her spiritual name 'Puññanandi' (Rejoicing in the Power of Goodness), Noirin illustrates how choosing a quality to cultivate can balance personal tendencies and connect us to something greater than ourselves. The essay concludes with an invitation for others to consider taking formal Refuges and Precepts as a 'safety rope' supporting their journey toward the end of suffering.

Right Intention is the second strand in the Noble Eightfold Path. In his book “A Whole Life Path”, Gregory Kramer distinguishes three levels at which we can practice Right Intention: moment to moment, bringing wise attention to each footstep, gesture, thought; episodic, where we make a good wish for a specific activity – e.g. before we go to a meeting, or open our emails; and overarching intentions, which are our guiding principles for life. Marriage vows are an example of overarching intention. So also is Lay Ordination, which I took last Sunday, on Buddha Day, confirming the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha as the cornerstone of my life and pledging harmlessness according to the five precepts. I did this to affirm that my life is dedicated to the Eightfold Path. While I've had that as a background motivation for decades and recommit every morning when we chant the Refuges and Precepts, it strengthens commitment to make the vows

in public, at a formal ceremony witnessed by friends. We don't like to let people down! The Buddha ranked guilt and shame as beneficial mind-states. They keep us within societies norms. Sadly, these same forces can be used to perpetuate prejudice, war, racial hatred. But when we chose wise friends, align ourselves with a tradition we trust, then our social instincts of guilt and shame foster traits like friendliness, compassion and generosity. One danger with making any vow is that we take the words too literally, get paralyzed with fear lest we make a mistake. It is painful to see ourselves fail to live up to our own expectations. That pain, when examined mindfully, persuades us to let go of tight definitions of right and wrong, trust that just being mindful of that tension between our aspirations and our habitual tendencies is to step along the path. Taken gently like this, the vows give a background frame to support us through life's challenges. Feeling tired and despondent this afternoon, I remembered my ordination and 'drudgery' took on the hue of nobility. Life is dukkha after all, tiredness and despondency are only to be expected. What matters is that we embrace them willingly. Remembering the broader aspiration for my life allowed me to value each plodding step. Though the sensations and feelings reflected despondency, the heart saw in these the first noble truth and embraced them with curiosity and tenderness. After a retreat at Satipanya there is the option to take the Refuges and Precepts formally, and also chose a particular quality you would like to develop, such as equanimity, wisdom or patience; this quality then becomes your spiritual name – traditionally its translated into Pali. My name is Puñyanandi which means 'Rejoicing in the Power of Goodness'. This balances my tendency toward over-effort and grasping; reflecting on 'the Power of Goodness' brings me beyond myself, helps me trust the wider world, develops gratitude for all the goodness I receive, joy that I can contribute to Satipanya and all that I perceive as beneficial. Lay Ordination is one aspect of 'The Power of Goodness'. It reminds me to practice Right Intention, direct my life toward the end of suffering, resist habits that drag me into whirlpools of misery. It's a safety rope. I hope you too will grasp that safety rope, take the Refuges and Precepts formally, make those vows in public, choose a name that calls you home, to the stillness and peace of your true nature.

Beauty

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the Buddhist perspective on physical beauty and its role in perpetuating suffering. Bhante Bodhidhamma uses the metaphor of fading flowers to illustrate the impermanent nature of physical attractiveness, connecting this to the monastic rules in the Vinaya that restrict cosmetics and ornamentation, as well as the Eight Precepts observed by lay practitioners.

The essay reveals how our attachment to beauty stems from craving admiration and the illusion of power it provides. This attachment inevitably leads to suffering as beauty fades, creating damaged self-image, dependency on others' approval, and the acid burn of jealousy when attention turns elsewhere. The teaching encourages practitioners to examine their own relationship with appearance, noting how even those who don't consider themselves beautiful often engage in beautification practices.

Drawing on traditional contemplations of bodily impermanence and the reality beneath the skin, the essay guides readers toward a healthier relationship with the body—one focused on actions rather than image. This shift from seeking admiration for appearance to being valued for character represents a movement away from superficial attachments toward genuine liberation from the suffering caused by vanity and self-obsession.

Flowers are true teachers of the foolish vanity of physical beauty. Even now in late spring, the radiant golden lilies fade, curling into a crispy, tanned rigor mortis. The obsession with physical beauty is not new by any means, though hyped to impossible heights by Hollywood, Bollywood and CGI[i]. The Vinaya, rules for the ordained Sangha, rules against any indulgence in beauty. There is a long list of cosmetics and ornaments not to be used. Even in the Eight Precepts lay people take when staying at a monastery, physical beautification is avoided. I undertake [to observe] the rule of abstinence from dancing, music, visiting shows, flowers, cosmetics, the wearing of ornaments and decorations. It does seem as though the Buddha has a grudge against physical beauty! But in fact, these undertakings are based, not surprisingly, on alleviating suffering. For what is it we are trying to achieve when we try to make ourselves look beautiful in others' eyes? It makes us feel good to be admired. But does it not also give us a sense of power, even the ability to manipulate? Both of these have their downfalls. As beauty fades, the comfort and joy of the admiration of others is a mask that falls away to reveal a self-admiration based on the admiration of others, which, as it corrupts, leaves a damaged

self-image and a realisation that admiration is, after all, not love. Worse! Beauty's power, based on admiration, is now trapped into a relationship, where it is forced to prove over and over again that it controls the admirer and not vice-versa. Should the admirer look elsewhere, the underlying dependency, which we term attachment, manifests as the acid burn of jealousy. Physical beauty has its time and place. But as far as the cause of suffering is concerned, it is the constant concern of how one looks that is the underlying cause of dissatisfaction with our bodies. So the Buddha advises us to get real. To awaken to our skewed perceptions and establish not just a healthy relationship with our bodies, but one that leads to liberation from suffering. Physical Beauty is only skin deep. So let's begin there, by peeling off the skin. No-one would find a flayed body beautiful. And if we take apart all the different parts and pour all liquids into bottles, that old saying takes on a deeper meaning. Whatever this sense of 'me' is, surely it is foolish to consider itself as a body. In the same way, imagining what happens to the body after death, is another way of undermining that part of the sense of 'me' that defines itself as beautiful. At this point, you may be saying to yourself. This essay does not concern me. I don't think of myself as particularly beautiful. But look again. You may be surprised as to how you are concerned with how you look in company. What special measures do you take when you go out? And what do you wear when alone? Do you bother with perfume and aftershave if you're not going to meet anyone? And if you do, why? And what about those romantic daydreams? One of the discoveries that some people have made in these lockdowns is how these fineries have been dropped. How baths and showers became less frequent. (Often also because of Climate Crisis). There is a distinction to be made between cleanliness and beauty. Becoming more concerned with what the body does, our actions, rather than what it looks like, our image, we can turn away from caring how people see us towards how people value us. Craving to be valued, of course, creates other sufferings. But that's for another Tip!

[ii][i]Computer-Generated Imagery [ii]See Values in mine own eyes.

Motivation for Practice

Carl Fooks · 2 min read

Carl Fooks offers a candid reflection on the evolving relationship between motivation and meditation practice. Drawing from personal experience of decades of practice with periods of both dedication and abandonment, he examines how our initial motivations—whether to alleviate suffering or unlock spiritual mysteries—can transform from helpful fuel into harmful expectations that sabotage our practice.

The essay explores the subtle but crucial difference between motivation and expectation, showing how requirements and demands placed on our meditation can create the very suffering we seek to escape. Fooks references the Mahāsāropama Sutta (MN 29), where the Buddha emphasizes that the true goal is 'unshakeable deliverance of mind'—not special attainments, mystical experiences, or even virtue itself.

This teaching offers practical wisdom for developing a sustainable relationship with practice that doesn't depend on particular outcomes or experiences. The author's conclusion—to approach practice 'gently'—points toward a mature understanding that allows meditation to unfold naturally without the burden of expectation. Essential reading for practitioners struggling with inconsistent motivation or those seeking to understand the deeper purpose of the spiritual path.

What happens when you sit down to meditate? How do you feel? Are your meditations a chore to be slogged through, or a holy hour (ten minutes?!) of heavenly angel choirs singing a harmonious “ahhhhhhhhh” in appreciation of the sanctity of your intentions? Or maybe somewhere in between? Sincerely, I don't intend any criticism in asking these questions. I can assure you that, at times, I have related to my practice in all of the above ways! The interesting question that sits behind those posed, is what kind of expectations or requirements are secretly infiltrating your practice, and how might these be affecting your ability to keep practising? Indeed, what does keep you practising, and what would happen if whatever that is wasn't present any more? A powerful motivator can prove to be an equally powerful demotivator. For me, these last several years have been a barren wasteland of on and off practice that has, frankly, until relatively recently, mainly been off. When I was first practising, the primary motivation for my practice was to alleviate my suffering. As time went on it turned to unlocking the secrets of the universe, and it has alternated between these across the decades. For some time though, I have felt that these are not skilful motivations. I now find that if

there is any requirement or expectation infiltrating my motivation for practice, at any time, or in any way, this disturbs the practice itself; practising to not suffer now brings suffering! So what keeps me practising? This is a good question, and one that doesn't really have a simple answer. While it sounds very much like "to not suffer", I find that I practice now because, simply, I'm better doing so, and that's enough. Actually, it's more than enough. I have no requirements of it anymore, no heavenly angel choir, not even a need to feel that "I'm better doing so". As I say, if anything like this creeps in, it is clearly seen as unskilful and therefore unsatisfactory. But motivation is important, and this is just my experience now. No doubt it will change again. The various relationships I've had with it over the years has brought me to practice and, generally, kept me practising. It's been appropriate at the time. Whether that's been to alleviate my suffering, being spiritually enthralled, or seeking the secrets of the universe, they've all been a tremendous source of energy that has motivated my practice. It's when these have surreptitiously turned into expectations and requirements that problems have arisen. I've had fallow years of infrequent practice because of this. We need to be careful to make sure that we're not setting ourselves up for the future abandonment of practice because of an unskilful relationship to our practice, of having expectations and requirements that can only disappoint us when not met. In the Mahāsāropama Sutta, the Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Heartwood (MN 29), the Buddha points at the serious business of practice. He says "So this holy life, bhikkhus, does not have gain, honour, and renown for its benefit, or the attainment or virtue for its benefit, or the attainment of concentration for its benefit, or knowledge and vision for its benefit. But it is this unshakeable deliverance of mind that is the goal of this holy life, its heartwood, and its end." No heavenly angel choirs celebrating our holiness, no attainments of special attributes or powers, not even virtue, just "this unshakeable deliverance of mind." How can we orientate to our practice so that it is skilful, sustainable, and isn't secretly setting us up for disappointment? Gently.

All in the Mind

Noirin Sheahan · 2 min read

This insightful essay by Noirin Sheahan examines the profound Buddhist understanding that all suffering is fundamentally mental in nature. While physical pain and life's challenges are real, the essay demonstrates how our suffering comes not from these experiences themselves, but from the mind's reactive patterns of panic, resistance, and endless questioning.

Drawing on direct meditation experience, particularly walking meditation, Sheahan illustrates how the six sense spheres (the five physical senses plus mind as the sixth sense) operate as distinct dimensions of experience. This recognition offers practical liberation: when caught in cycles of anxious thinking or emotional turmoil, we can consciously shift attention to any of the five physical sense spheres—sounds, sights, bodily sensations—as refuges from mental reactivity.

The essay includes a powerful personal account of overcoming anxiety by recognizing the voluntary nature of worried thinking and choosing to rest in the simple experience of bird-song. This demonstrates the Buddha's central teaching that we have moment-to-moment choice in how we relate to our experience. Rather than being victims of our mental habits, we can learn to 'not pick up heavy suitcases' of anxiety and distress, finding freedom through mindful sense contact rather than compulsive thought patterns.

If we suffer a physical disease, a broken bone, a bereavement, we might get sympathy and attention. But if people suspect our problems are 'all in the mind' they usually want to get away as fast as they can! And yet suffering is 'all in the mind'. The pain of a broken bone is physical. True we might writhe in agony, convinced our leg is where suffering is located. But the leg just gets on with the business of tissue repair. It's only the mind that panics, thinks 'this is unbearable', gets us moaning and contorted in an effort to soothe ourselves. When the mind is still in meditation, we can sometimes see that physical sensations are separate from mental reactions like emotions and thoughts. In fact all of the six senses (five physical senses plus the mind, which forms the sixth sense in Buddhism) occupy distinct 'spheres' within experience. I first saw this during walking meditation. I noticed that the sight of the foot swinging forward was totally separate from the sensation. It was as if they occupied separate universes, different dimensions. One contained colours and shapes, the other sensations. There was no possibility of communication between the two, and it was a third dimension, the mind, that put the

information together and decided they both described a foot moving forward. I was amazed that I could walk so easily even though my legs, eyes and mind were confined to separate dimensions! This isn't just academic. The Buddha's only purpose in teaching was to point us along the path to the end of suffering. One very practical consequence is the possibility of letting attention rest in one of the five physical sense spheres, to get a new perspective on our mental life. In meditation we notice the incessant stream of thinking that often seems to get in the way of calmer experience such as the sensations of breathing. We begin to see for ourselves that suffering 'is all in the mind'. I learned this one time when my mind was afire with anxiety, repeating questions endlessly — What was going on? Why couldn't I get on top of this anxiety? By chance, my attention was momentarily called by the sound of birdsong, interrupting the flow of questions. My mind relaxed as I listened. But as soon as I noticed this 'lapse', it hurried back to its urgent duty of fretting. As relaxation changed to anxiety I felt the voluntary nature of thought. I sensed myself choosing to fret, to indulge anxiety. It was as if I was choosing to pick up heavy suitcases. I was amazed to realise that I had a choice in the matter. But now there was no escaping that choice. Would I continue burdening myself with anxious questions? Although the answer is obvious, it felt scary beyond words to stop, to accept the reality of not knowing what was going on, or how to get on top of anxiety. It was like taking a step over a cliff. And yet, something deep within commanded that I stop fretting, accept that I did not know any answers. With my heart in my mouth, I surrendered to that truth. Next moment, anxiety disappeared without trace! Luckily, suffering is 'all in the mind'. And we have access to five other dimensions of experience which show us the way out. At each and every moment we can rest attention in sense contact, learn to recognize the possibility of not reacting, not picking up heavy suitcases of anxiety, depression, woe, and misery. We can choose sense contact rather than thought as our guide, step over our mental cliffs, fall into freedom.

Perfection, Elitism and Excellence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this insightful reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the painful pursuit of perfection and its connection to the Buddhist understanding of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness). Drawing from personal experiences in Sri Lanka, he illustrates how perfectionism creates tight expectations and inevitable failure, leading to self-criticism and misery. The essay explores the Buddha's teaching on the three conceits (māna) - feeling superior, inferior, or equal to others - and how these comparisons trap us in cycles of elitism and competition.

Bhante distinguishes between harmful perfectionism and healthy excellence, showing how true excellence is relative and personal - simply doing our best in each moment without comparison to others. Through practical examples from monastic life and everyday activities, he demonstrates how releasing perfectionist expectations brings relief and joy. The teaching offers a compassionate Buddhist approach to self-acceptance while maintaining standards of care and effort in our practice and daily activities.

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's a place for everything and everything has its place.' And when I fail, as I must, the misery. 'I'm no good. I'm useless. Everyone is better than me. I can't 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? Can't be that objective then! I was cured of a lot of my obsession for perfection in Sri Lanka. I'd 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. 'Tomorrow', 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. It's the best I can do. It doesn't mean to say I can't do better. Nor that another couldn't have done better. It's just that now, this very moment, I'm doing what I'm doing the best I can. That's good enough, isn't it? So where's the anxiety coming from? It might be real. I might not be good enough. Maybe I will lose my job. But that's ok, if I'm doing my best. I've to accept I've over-reached myself. But I still feel anxious. And jealous of others? Am I still in competition? Still competitive? I've slipped into the error of elitism. Here I am comparing! I'm better than you. I'm worse than you. And at a more subtle level I'm equal to you. The 'you' in equal, of course, simply means I've 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! That's the three conceits the Buddha talks about. That's dukkha! That's 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. Don't we tend to rate people according to their cleverness. To be clever is to be a good person. Hence, a slow reader can't 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 that's excellent!

Material World

Noirin Sheahan · 2 min read

This reflective teaching examines how our material possessions and physical form serve as teachers about the first of the five khandhas (aggregates) - material form (rūpa). Noirin Sheahan explores how we build false identities by clinging to material things, from major possessions like homes and cars to everyday items like mobile phones and car keys. She draws on personal experience of voice loss to illustrate how deeply our sense of self becomes entangled with physical capabilities and material circumstances.

The essay offers practical guidance for working with the inevitable stresses of losing or misplacing possessions, suggesting we use these moments as opportunities for spiritual practice. Rather than getting caught in the mental stories of 'I, me, mine,' the teaching encourages turning attention to body awareness as a path from delusion to reality. Through mindful observation of physical tensions, emotions, and reactions, we can begin to loosen our binding to the first khandha.

The ultimate invitation is to love and care for the material world without attachment - finding the 'perfect peace and happiness of our true nature' while still engaging responsibly with the practical needs of embodied life. This teaching bridges everyday domestic challenges with profound Buddhist insights about non-self (anattā) and the nature of identity.

We live in a material world. As a minimum we need food, clothes and medicine but most of us want a house and car too and these lead on to mortgage, insurance and don't forget the freezer, sound system, house alarm ...We can use the stresses and strains of material possessions as teachers about the first khandha – material form. Khandha is the Pali for a heap or an 'aggregate', something formed from a mixture of different elements. The Buddha lists five such khandha, the first being material form while the others are to do with the mind. We delude ourselves by clinging to the khandha, building a false identity for ourselves as we struggle hold on to these. Does my identity depend on material form – my body and material possessions? Would I be the same person if I were to lose my house? To have nowhere I could call home, relax, forget the outside world? Nowhere to invite family or friends for Christmas. Would this threaten my self-belief, the sense of who I am? What about losing my eyesight, hearing, mobility? I'm still learning first-khandha lessons from the loss of my voice several years ago, seeing how much of my confidence and sense of self was bound into being able to speak fluently and with a voice I recognise as my own. We get somewhat easier first-khandha les-

sons every day: when we lose our mobile phone, our car keys, our glasses. Before turning the house upside down, we need to pause, look within, enter the spiritual school-room. Does the situation feel irritating or threatening? Listen awhile to the stories we are telling ourselves. We're not interested in the detail but to see how they build and sense of self: I need this because I'll lose my job if I don't have ... I want ... I'm fed up ... They will never forgive me if ... This automatic self-chatter always revolves around I, me, mine and how essential the lost item is to I, me, mine. This is how we build and maintain a false identity with the great heap of material possessions we struggle to hold together. The practice is to turn attention away from the story and towards that basic material entity we attach to – the body. Body awareness sets us on the path from delusion to reality. The path might lead through knots of anxiety or tensions that underlie impatience, or the tight jaws of irritation, the tight breath of fear. Our job is to follow the path, no matter what uncomfortable, unedifying terrain it leads through. Eventually the emotions burn out, the body relaxes, we can think more clearly, continue the search more calmly. Car keys and glasses are not the end of the world after all! Mobile phone though ... More fundamentally, we have loosened our binding to the first khanda. We've trusted that there is something more essential than the stories we tell ourselves. That's what the Buddha wants from us – that we search for an essence more reliable than the stories we believe about I, me, mine. He doesn't want us to be satisfied by anything less than perfect the peace and happiness of our true nature. And yet we live in a material world, where all our possessions need care and attention. Can we care for them without building stories around them, tying ourselves into knots of false identity? Can we love the material world without attaching to it?

Inner Voices

Carl Fooks · 3 min read

This engaging essay explores the fascinating discovery that people experience thinking in dramatically different ways - some with inner voices, others in complete silence, and still others with vivid mental imagery or none at all. Through a humorous personal anecdote about the author's partner having no inner voice whatsoever, Carl Fooks illuminates how our assumptions about universal mental experiences can be completely wrong. The essay draws connections to meditation practice, particularly noting (with a brief nod to Mahāyāna concepts of emptiness) how the mind's ultimate malleability challenges our sense of fixed reality. The practical implications for Dhamma teachers become clear: instructions about 'listening to thoughts' or 'seeing mental images' may not apply to all students. This leads to a crucial insight about meditation practice - the importance of playful experimentation and adapting traditional instructions to fit one's own unique mental patterns. Rather than worrying about 'getting it wrong,' practitioners are encouraged to engage creatively with meditation guidance, recognising that there is no single way the mind must work. The essay offers both humor and wisdom about the diversity of human consciousness while emphasising the need for flexibility and personalisation in contemplative practice.

So, I have this thing where I give character to somebody's inner voice when I mimic them. Typically, this is Rene (she who must be obeyed), and usually results in us falling about in fits of laughter. (I can't even hint at what these are like as it'd give you too much of an insight into our private lives! 😊) Anyway, so there I was, talking to Rene, and mimicking her inner voice while explaining something. Thus ensued aforementioned hilarity, followed by: "I don't sound like that! I don't have an inner voice. At all."! ... 😬 Mind: Blown. 🤖 Well, I confess it did take several minutes of checking we were talking about the same thing before my mind finally settled on being blown. I mean, we've only been together for 26 years, and never has she mentioned to me that she has no inner voice. She talks about thinking this or that, and I always assumed she meant, well, thought. In the way that I think! With a voice! So to find out that she has no inner voice really did blow my mind. Now, there are many ways in which we "think", and only some of these involve a voice, but I had always assumed that everyone has one. I even Googled it, and sure enough ... some people have no voice. Anyway, with a spooky synchronicity, a few days later an article appeared in The Guardian on the variety of our inner voices, including those who have no voice whatsoever. Some of the people in the

article describe some remarkable ways of thinking, including one person who hears “a belligerent Italian couple ... like the family in the Dolmio pasta sauce adverts [who] passionately argue” in her mind! 🤖 Now, I’m not sure why this should be so surprising to me, I don’t get any images whatsoever. So, that this would manifest for the voice is entirely reasonable. Still, I was surprised! I’m 51; it’s not often you learn something so fundamental for the first time so late in life. But there you go. This all played out shortly after I had taught a weekend retreat during which somebody asked about thoughts. I had been referring to the vocal kind, considering them a universal. This new knowledge had rendered my answer void. I found myself marvelling about the infinite malleability of the inner space. That ultimate emptiness (in the Mahāyānic sense) of the mind. We tend to think of things as “real” as “universal”; that an “orange” is the same to all of us, but this reminded me that, to some, an orange is a gustatory delight, while others’ tastebuds curl up in horror. But it also got me thinking about how those of us who teach may need to adjust our teachings to accommodate the different ways people experience the mind. We can’t talk about “seeing” things, or “listening” to the tone of the inner voice with any certainty. And yet, somehow Rene and I managed to get along fine without her knowing about my aphantasia, or me her missing inner voice. What this made me realise is that, of course, everything happens within our own internally consistent versions of “reality”. I don’t “see” things in my mind, yet I do still “imagine,” Rene “thinks” without words. This also made me realise the importance of playful experimentation in our practice, and how we need to interrogate our experience to adjust and adapt to the instructions. Our inner world does not exactly match anyone else’s, we need to engage and experiment with the instructions to make them fit our own model. So, don’t worry about “getting it wrong”, or “messing up”. Play! Enjoy your practice. Relax into it in a playful way, and see how you can make the instructions work for you. Engaging in this way is the only way. There is no single reality. It does have to make you wonder, though: how does Rene not “thinking thinking” without words? 🤔 🤖

Full Catastrophe Ethics

Noirin Sheahan · 3 min read

In this thoughtful reflection, Noirin Sheahan examines how we might respond to the overwhelming reality of climate change and potential environmental collapse through the lens of ethical preparation. Drawing on a bioethics paper endorsed by renowned Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy, she presents six ethical maxims designed to help us maintain integrity in the face of catastrophic change: working to grasp the immensity of what's coming, cultivating radical hope beyond optimism, establishing personal ethical boundaries, appreciating this unique moment in history, training body and mind for resilience, and acting for future generations of all species.

The essay explores the natural human responses to climate anxiety—from denial and numbness to rage and despair—and offers a framework for moving beyond feeling 'out of depth and inadequate.' Sheahan sees these maxims not as absolute truths but as a foundation for spiritual practice, promising to examine each one more deeply in relation to the Dhamma. The piece bridges contemporary environmental ethics with Buddhist principles, suggesting that our mental and spiritual resources will become increasingly valuable as physical and social resources diminish. This represents the beginning of a series exploring how Buddhist practice can prepare us for the challenges ahead.

How do you react to news of climate change and forecasts of ice-caps melting, cities flooding or burning, widespread drought and famine, breakdown of essential services like water and electricity, hundreds of millions of refugees seeking homes in temperate regions like ours? Do you shrink into a ball of anxiety and disbelief? Weep? Pound your fists in frustration and rage? Numb out? Feel totally out of your depth and inadequate? Trust the scientists to find a way out? Any or all of these happen for me depending on circumstances. Afterwards I might be prompted to read some relevant articles, sign a petition, donate to an environmental cause, re-commit to living sustainably, toy with the possibility of learning basic survival skills. Then I'll turn back to more immediate concerns. Till the next depressing news bulletin. The 'out of my depth and inadequate' feeling I find particularly troublesome. It begs so many questions. Surely there is something I can do to help myself face what might be coming down the tracks? I was relieved and grateful therefore to come across a bioethics paper suggesting ethical maxims that we can practice to help us face the environmental and social disaster that the authors see coming as soon as 2031 – only nine years away!!! The paper[i] was publicized in a recent Zoom event featuring Joanna Macey, the renowned author, climate activist and

Buddhist scholar in conversation with the authors of the paper. She enthusiastically endorsed their suggestion to prepare ourselves so as to behave with as much integrity as possible in the face of environmental and social breakdown. Here's a brief summary of their suggested maxims:

Work Hard to Grasp the Immensity. The possibility of environmental and subsequent social collapse is inconceivable for most of us. We enter a fog where we no longer know how to think, where right and wrong become meaningless. And yet that incomprehension may be a necessary steppingstone to the next maxim.

Cultivate Radical Hope. This not based on optimism that some solution can be found to restore the social security we now enjoy. Having worked through grief and anger and a depth of despair, hope takes the form of faith that some values are worth preserving to the end - kindness, not abandoning people, behaving with integrity. Radical hope sees openings for positive action, finds gaps in the gloom.

Have a Line in the Sand. Know that there are some things you will not do, some actions you will not embrace. Be prepared to die rather than cross your red line.

Appreciate the Astonishing and Unique Opportunity. Acknowledge what an extraordinary transition is coming for humanity and the biosphere. Appreciate what is vanishing before your eyes, be glad for every blade of grass that is still green, every tree still standing. Practice gratitude for being alive now, able to breathe now.

Train Your Body and Your Mind. Develop the capacity to deal with despair. Learn skills for getting beyond the limits of ego. Climate collapse will bring widespread physical, psychological, and spiritual trauma. As our physical and social resources shrink, our mental and spiritual resources will become ever more valuable to ensure human survival and flourishing.

Act for the Future Generations of All Species. Think beyond yourself and your immediate circle. Act for the benefit of the poor, future generations, other species, forests, seas and mountains. Act, personally and politically, to limit the damage - every 0.5° C increase avoided will save millions of lives, species, resources. We are all in this together, interconnected, a multiplex unity.

The authors of the paper aren't proposing these maxims as absolutes, but as a bare beginning that will provoke discussion. Personally I feel very grateful to have this skeleton upon which I can begin to take on board the spiritual challenge that is to come. Over the coming months I hope to examine each maxim in more depth, see how it ties in with the Dhamma, see how we could put the maxim into practice in our meditation and daily life. I hope to be back with a series of tips on the subject and if any of you would like to practice alongside me on this, please get in touch.

[i]https://media2-production.mightynetworks.com/asset/39337730/Schenck_-_Ethical_Maxims.pdf

On Learning How to Be with Climate and Social Breakdown

Gwen Sanderson · 5 min read

This thoughtful essay by Gwen Sanderson examines how Buddhist practitioners can engage skillfully with climate change and potential social breakdown. Drawing on her personal experience of climate anxiety, grief, and the tendency toward denial or shutdown, she explores how the Deep Adaptation framework developed by Jem Bendell offers a Buddhist-compatible approach to facing difficult truths about our environmental crisis.

Sanderson describes attending a Deep Adaptation event where participants explored themes of resilience, relinquishment, restoration, and reconciliation in the face of climate chaos. She connects this work to fundamental Buddhist teachings about impermanence, the arising and passing of all phenomena, and the importance of sangha (spiritual community) for support. The essay emphasizes how opening to difficult emotions and connecting with others, rather than shutting down in isolation, allows compassion and wisdom to emerge.

Integrating insights from Mahasi Sayadaw's teaching to 'note our experience and be present with it,' Sanderson presents Deep Adaptation as an extension of vipassanā practice. She advocates for Buddhist communities to courageously engage with climate realities through practices like 'Deep Relating' - a form of relational meditation that cultivates awareness of arising sensations, emotions, and thoughts in community dialogue. The piece offers a compassionate framework for maintaining spiritual practice while facing unprecedented global challenges.

“May all beings be safe well and happy and live in harmony with the world” To feel unsafe in the context of the breakdown of our natural systems is a reasonable reaction I would say. To feel deep sadness about the destruction of habitats, extinction of species and indigenous cultures, the displacement of peoples also seems a healthy reaction. As are feelings of anger about gross inequality and social injustice. I own all of these reactions without shame but with distinct guilt, (futile, but it’s there) because I’m white, live in a temperate climate, and at the moment my basic needs are met yet the food and fuel that keeps things relatively stable here is because someone, somewhere else is suffering. Helplessness and hopelessness are not uncommon reactions either. George Monbiot, has described recent political and economic decisions as, “an ideological commitment to destroying life on earth”. (Monbiot 2022) I kidded myself a few years ago that I was doing a good job at acceptance. The systemic change needed, so deep and complex, I had

no chance of properly understanding the immensity of it. Climate change would be non linear and unpredictable so resource depletion although inevitable would be difficult to manage. Hoping that climate change could be averted by measures of mitigation was delusional, I thought I was at terms with all this. There were odd specific things that triggered grief. Once grief was labelled I became acquainted with what was happening in me and gradually accepted that this is how it is. As meditators we are learning, that everything arises and passes away and so it does. I told myself that my meditation practice and a smattering of Buddhist psychology were standing me in good stead. Moreover, I had been “prepping” for a decade or so. Now, I have navigated myself to live in a more peaceful, less busy way and have opportunities for both reconnecting with nature and growing food. It is easy to kid myself that I am content and at ease with the world. As meditators we are also taught to be cautious when we think we have reached a spiritual milestone or have attained a goal, because everything changes and the self is highly delusory. In fact, I realise I have, in fact been in a fog, asleep in the context of climate collapse, for some time. The “dullness and lethargy” that Carl wrote about in July’s newsletter, resonates. It is a form of denial. The immensity of what is in front of us is not something we have a frame of reference for or have had to deal with before. Breakdown of law and order because there is a depletion of basic resources and the rise of extreme right wing factions are all quite possible. The study of collapsing societies, apparently, is an academic discipline; “Collapsology”. My fears, it seems, aren’t fantasy. In response I have been passively, ever so, ever so quietly, shutting down. We know from our practice that fear is about isolation. The thinking mind gets protective of the self. Defensiveness, ill will and hatred are driven by unidentified and un-dealt with fear. I had work to do. When a friend sent me a link to a live Deep Adaptation day event in June, I signed up. Deep Adaptation was termed by Jem Bendell in 2018 in his paper, *Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy*. Pitched at sustainability professionals and academics, it shifts the focus from mitigating climate change by reducing impact and presents the scientific case that the likelihood is that we are too late, therefore how do we talk about what to do in that context? The map he described in 2018 is defined by Resilience; a need to develop ways to adjust and transform in light of the shocks ahead of us; Relinquishment, a letting go of the habits and dependencies we have that have led us to this place; Restoration, of some of ways of life; pre hydro-carbon, such as low tech entertainment and seasonal eating. Latterly, Bendell has added Reconciliation; coming to terms with our shared mortality. Recently the concept of a map is reframed; our situation being one of maplessness. This is unknown territory, (Bendell J, 2020). The counter response to this is that conversations about social collapse come from, “doomers and gloomers.” For many people this is a nihilistic, negative and depressing response that denudes hope and is dangerous to contemplate because it accelerates fear and poor mental health. Paradoxically, however, the paper is arguing that by

engaging with climate crises and social collapse as either current or imminent, we may be better able to prepare ourselves and work out how to navigate safely, the dangerous world ahead of us. Preparing ourselves spiritually is central to this, for ethical and moral choices are at stake. My experience when I attended the Deep Adaptation event was to feel better. Alongside some thirty or so other people, I engaged deeply, openly, honestly with thoughts, feelings, and experiences about climate/ social collapse. I shared and listened to information, experience, confusions, fears, frustrations, blocks, misconceptions, concerns, sadness, gratitude, wisdom, love. I even danced and sang. Despite its heavy themes, I came home lighter, happier and confident that I have and can develop the emotional and spiritual resources necessary to be in this climate chaotic world in an engaged, moral, loving and compassionate way. The Mad Max scenarios that run through my head are just responses to fear. Thoughts of locking the door, learning how to use a gun and working out where I should build a bunker, can be combated by connecting to other people to explore how to “be” in this place, but also just by developing more togetherness generally. We, at Satipanya, can draw on the concept of Sangha; from both the arahants for inspiration to keep us strong on this path, and from each other for support. In the Deep Adaptation event, Open Space technology allowed those present to offer and choose themes to explore and structure the day with the help of a facilitator. Twelve workshops or conversations were held. For example: “Working with our experience to develop our capacity for compassion and connection in the face of collapse”, “Talking about collapse between generations” “Adjusting to redundant technologies of green agendas: should I buy a solar panel?” “Local government and politics; How to be with the Deep Adaptation agenda?” “Keeping our hearts open” “Humour and collapse” Some people offered experiences; “Dances for Universal Peace” and “Matriculture for co-liberation” The mix of intellectual, spiritual, experiential, discursive opportunities and informal spaces for conversation were all of equal value. Whatever I fear is ahead of us, is a part of my now, the present moment. Shutting down, leads to introversion, isolation, separation, and being closed off. Sometimes, it takes extroversion, verbal expression, to become aware of pain, and negative mind states. Openness allows connection, the hold that fear can have dissipates, feelings of joy and love can emerge and compassion can be developed. Constant attention to the very initial teachings of the Buddha is needed... Dhamma is absolutely, a practice. Acceptance is not the same as complacency. To support myself further I have recently joined a group called “Deep Relating”. Described as “a ‘relational meditation’ (in a collapse aware community), a practice that allows us to become aware of our sensations, emotions, thoughts and intuitions as they arise in our communication with one another”, (similar to what I understand Insight Dialogue is). Adaptation is now main stream for policy makers at the level of United Nations down to local authorities and individual institutions. There is a broader acceptance that we need to be able to adjust. As we cul-

tivate compassion when we are practicing Metta, maybe as a community the time has come to ask the question how are we to open up to the challenging experiences that climate and possible future social breakdown procure? Noting our experience and being present with it, is what Sayadaw Mahasi taught. I see engaging with the Deep Adaptation agenda, as an extension of just that. “May all beings be safe well and happy and live in harmony with the world”! Bendell J. (2020) ‘A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy’ in Bendell J and Read R (ed) Deep Adaptation Navigating the Realities of Climate Chaos: Polity Monbiot G (2022) ‘Willing the end’ available at <https://www.monbiot.com/2022/07/14/willing-the-end> Sources for further exploration: <https://guidance.deepadaptation.info/method/deep-relating/> [https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/course/turning-towards-the-climate-emergency-together/](https://www.deepadaptation.info/https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/course/turning-towards-the-climate-emergency-together/) <https://postdoom.com/> <https://oneearthsangha.org>

Living in the Here and Now

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching distinguishes between simple present-moment awareness and the Right Awareness (sammā sati) that forms part of the Noble Eightfold Path. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains that true liberating awareness must be grounded in ethical wholesome relationship, not just focused attention in the present. The essay provides practical examples across daily activities—reading, conversation, household tasks, work, and relationships—to illustrate how unwholesome desires can infiltrate our awareness and how to recognize these patterns. Through careful attention to our motivations and responses in everyday situations, we can develop the skill to distinguish between self-driven, unskillful intentions and wholesome, virtuous ones. This discriminating awareness supports the cultivation of Right Intention (sammā saṅkappa), the second factor of the Eightfold Path, helping practitioners integrate ethical awareness into all aspects of daily life rather than confining spiritual practice to formal meditation periods.

It is a cliché: live in the here and now. But then a burglar in the dead of night stealing around your home is definitely living in the here and now. But the awareness that will lead to liberation has also to be ethical – ethical in the widest sense of that term of wholesome relationship. Otherwise, it is not Right Awareness. When can we tell some unwholesome desire has entered a situation? Here are some pointers.

Reading: there may be times we have to read and skim to collect facts for a piece of work, but is that what we are doing all the time – collecting facts and figures. If you speed read, is it just to collect data. Are we tense or relaxed? Are we in fact hoarding knowledge? When finished, does it feel nourishing or just gratifying? Or do we find ourselves reading slowly, carefully, stopping occasionally to re-read, savouring phrases, mulling over what has been written. Do we understand more deeply? Do we feel nourished?

In conversation: are we inwardly answering while the other is speaking? Do we always want to be ready with a reply – agreeing, disagreeing. Do we interrupt? When we have finished, do we feel we have won? Do we feel bad if the conversation didn't go our way? Are we too afraid our view might be changed or even wrong? Or do we let go of our opinions and listen. Are we ready to see the way the other sees and understands and perhaps have our views challenged, nuanced, even changed?

Doing chores: are they chores? Do we just want to get them done so we get on? Or do we see them as an opportunity to develop care and attention. Do we find repetition a bore or does the ever-busy mind rest on the activity and the heart find a gentle joy? Do we delight in washing pots? Do we find

the toilet pan a beautiful object to carefully clean? Work: If boredom comes up at work, do we bring energy, focus, refinement to what we are doing, or do we find ourselves restless, seeking distraction, day dreaming ... getting a cup of tea. We work to earn a living. Do we see it as a service or is it just 'work' so we can get things and have 'experiences'? Do we seek promotion to get more money, status and power or do we see it as a way of offering our skills for the benefit of the company or society? Relationships: are we more concerned to be liked, to be loved rather than to admire and love? Are we more concerned to be consoled than to console? To be understood than to understand? No other, whatever the relationship, is ever kind and considerate all the time. When we are hurt, do we hold onto the resentment? Or are we open about it and ready to let go? When we hurt the other, are we quick to apologise? Or do we justify our actions? Is there revenge in our hurting? When discussing what to do, do we come with a fixed idea and get upset if the other doesn't want to do it? Or do we come with an idea we are happy to put aside? Our hearts are normally combining self-driven, unskilful desires with wholesome, virtuous intentions. Our spiritual work is to empower those right intentions and not get embroiled in wrong intentions. In this way we are developing Right Attitude, the second step on the Eightfold Path.

Being Human

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

Drawing from the Upaḍḍha Sutta (SN 45:2), where the Buddha tells Ānanda that having admirable friends is not half but the whole of the holy life, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines what it means to be truly human in relationship. The essay addresses contemporary challenges that fragment human connection—from neoliberal atomization to social media divisions, climate crisis denial, and institutional breakdown—while offering Ubuntu philosophy ('I am because we are') as a complement to Buddhist understanding of interdependence.

The teaching explores how our humanity is fundamentally relational, manifesting through the dance of wholesome connection or the brawl of corrupted relationships. Bhante connects the Eightfold Path's foundation in Right Understanding and Right Attitude to practical cultivation of kinship with all beings, even those we find difficult. He offers a walking meditation practice using Ubuntu phrases to develop genuine human solidarity.

This essay bridges ancient wisdom with urgent contemporary needs, showing how personal spiritual development and social healing are inseparable aspects of the holy life, while acknowledging the sobering reality that fear often motivates change more than wisdom in saṃsāra.

Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “This is half of the holy life, lord: having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues.” “Don’t say that, Ānanda. Don’t say that. Having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues is actually the whole of the holy life. (See below [I]) We are our relationships. This is a dynamic between ‘me’ and other. It is constantly changing. When that dynamic is wholesome, it is a dance. It brings all the benefits of community. When it corrupts, the dance morphs into a brawl. Everyone suffers. There are now so many forces that militate against our togetherness as human beings. Even our togetherness within individual nations. The neoliberal ideology that atomises us into individual entrepreneurs each vying against the other for a piece of the pie; the neoliberal economies that have created a gargantuan gap between the multitude of poor and the very few rich; the disastrous effect of Social Media in exacerbating the divisions in our society and proselytising conspiracy theories; the political powerlessness to tackle Climate Crisis and callous disregard of this existential threat by Corporations in the service of shareholders and by Deniers; the loss of confidence in our institutions – the Health Services, the national broadcaster, the police, the government; the zeitgeist, world mood, that is moving us towards ‘illiberal’

democracy and dictatorships; the growing threat of war (nuclear?) between China and the US, and even Russia. Not to talk of Covid and future pandemics that manifest the selfishness of richer nations and racial disparity. I'm sure you could add to the list. In all, it adds up to a foreboding that there has to be a crash of some sort. It can leave us feeling paralysed. Apart from becoming involved in a charity or cause that moves us, there may be something we are overlooking. We must do all we can to re-establish our sense of community. There were neighbourly awakenings during the lock downs, but once the pandemic ends, I dare say it will be back to 'normal'. The word Ubuntu^[ii] comes in many forms throughout all the countries of Southern Africa. It is a part of their view of life. Ubuntu (Zulu pronunciation: [ùbùnt'ù]) is a Nguni Bantu term meaning "humanity". It is sometimes translated as "I am because we are" (also "I am because you are"), or "humanity towards others" (in Zulu, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu). In Xhosa, the latter term is used, but is often meant in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity". (Wikipedia) This is also included in Dhamma understanding of interdependence, but to say: I am a human because you are a human, is to cement it in a relationship of equality. As always, change begins within the individual. The Eightfold Path begins with Right Understanding and this manifests as Right Attitude which in turn manifests in how we speak and act. Here we have a practice. Just as in Metta we have phrases to establish good will to all beings, so we can develop that desire for kinship with all other human beings – even those whose actions and philosophy we detest. I am because you are – bring to mind all categories of people. How does each category effect you? I am because we are – My being a human depends on you being a human. I practised this while walking around Shrewsbury and there was growing sense of kinship. If you try it, do send me your experience. Please send me other phrases if you think of any. This talk is the inspiration for this Tip: What do We Want to Sustain? Thinking about Faith and The Climate. Dr Carmody Grey: Hook Lecture 2021 PS: Without doubt the best possible way through all catastrophe is through personal responsibility and a sense of common purpose, driven by a solidarity that comes from caring for one another. However, sadly, and I confess I am a little cynical; what will eventually drive most is the experience of danger. As all dictators know, fear is also a great motivator! But it comes with destruction. Such is the nature of Samsara! ^[i]Half (of the Holy Life) Upaḍḍha Sutta (SN 45:2) I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyans. Now there is a Sakyan town named Sakkara. There Ven. Ānanda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed One, "This is half of the holy life, lord: having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues." "Don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, he can be expected

to develop & pursue the noble eightfold path. “And how does a monk who has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, develop & pursue the noble eightfold path? There is the case where a monk develops right view dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. He develops right resolve... right speech... right action... right livelihood... right effort... right mindfulness... right concentration dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. This is how a monk who has admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues, develops & pursues the noble eightfold path. “And through this line of reasoning one may know how having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues is actually the whole of the holy life: It is in dependence on me as an admirable friend that beings subject to birth have gained release from birth, that beings subject to aging have gained release from aging, that beings subject to death have gained release from death, that beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair have gained release from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. It is through this line of reasoning that one may know how having admirable people as friends, companions, & colleagues is actually the whole of the holy life.”[ii]Ubuntu – you may know the word as open source software, part of Linux. There are various definitions of the word "Ubuntu". The most recent definition was provided by the African Journal of Social Work (AJSW). The journal defined ubuntu as: A collection of values and practices that people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world. Wikipedia

Sympathy, Empathy, and Compassion

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

*This essay examines the Buddha's teachings on compassion through the lens of two Pali terms: *anukampā* (the heart resonating with another's suffering) and *karuṇā* (compassion as one of the four brahmavihāras). Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the Buddha, known as *Mahākaruṇiko* (the Great Compassionate One), taught that the Dhamma naturally expresses itself through compassionate response as selfishness lessens through practice.*

The teaching distinguishes between sympathy (a lighter acknowledgment of another's situation) and empathy (deeper resonance with suffering), examining various psychological definitions of empathy and their limitations. Using practical examples, including a conversation with an injured man on a bus, the essay illustrates how different levels of response—from superficial sympathy to genuine compassionate action—can manifest in daily encounters.

The discussion emphasizes that true compassion arises from understanding suffering as a resonance in one's own heart, leading to skillful and appropriate responses. This exploration offers valuable guidance for practitioners seeking to embody the Buddha's teaching that wisdom naturally expresses itself through compassionate engagement with others' difficulties.

“Thus, monks, I have taught you the unconditioned ... the destination and the path leading to the destination. Whatever should be done, monks, by a compassionate teacher out of compassion for his disciples, desiring their welfare, that I have done for you. These are the roots of trees, monks, these are empty huts. Meditate, monks, do not be negligent, lest you regret it later. This is my instruction to you.” (Bodhi, Bhikkhu. In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon.) The Buddha uses the word *anukampa*: *anu* reinforces *kampati* - shake, tremble, the heart resonates with another's suffering. The other word which translates compassion is *karuna* and that is the word used when the Four Illimitables are mentioned – love, compassion, joy and equanimity. The Buddha is titled *Mahakaruniko* – the Great Compassionate One. The Dhamma cannot be held as a secret, it demands expression, first in the heart as sympathy or empathy and then in compassionate thought, speech or action. One obvious reason is that as we practice, selfishness lessens and generosity grows. Sympathy, from the Greek *sym/ + pathos/feeling*, gets bad press as a sort insipid response to another's misery. Yet we still send cards expressing our ‘Sympathies’ and commiseration. It is a

light contact, but need not be insincere. There is understanding and a feeling for the person's situation. It may be a situation which one has not undergone oneself and therefore we have to rely on our imagination. It may be a person we hardly know. And indeed, the circumstances may not need any more than our acknowledgement. The danger, of course, is not allow oneself to feel anything and yet feel it necessary to say something. Then the response may sound insincere and even judgemental. Empathy, from the Greek em/in + pathos/feeling, suggests a deeper contact with the other's suffering. And this will manifest in how we respond. But, as these definitions by the social psychologist C. Daniel Batson, who has researched empathy for decades, tells us; there are many types of 'empathy' (my comments in brackets): Knowing another's thoughts and feelings (a little intellectual?) Imagining another's thoughts and feelings (fabricated?) Adopting the posture of another (play acting?) Actually feeling as another does (I doubt this is really possible!) Imagining how one would feel or think in another's place (fabricated?) Feeling distress at another's suffering (a unwholesome reaction?) Feeling for another's suffering, sometimes called pity or compassion (this sounds like conceit?) Projecting oneself into another's situation (another fabrication?). None of these definitions really make it for me. I would say, understanding the Buddha's use of words, that we feel the suffering of another as a resonance, an echo in one's own heart. However, we define empathy for ourselves that will affect how it manifests in compassionate action. Too much empathy can also distort our judgement, for instance we tend not to see the big picture. The tragedy of the little boy who fell down a well in Morocco became worldwide news, but every day 10,000 children die of hunger and hunger related causes. I sat next to an old man on the bus and his face was badly scarred and bruised. I asked him what has happened. He said he was worrying about his rent and walked out into the road and got knocked down. My possible replies: Bad luck! Hope you don't feel too run down. (Ha ha!) Bad news. Well, that's what happens when you worry! At least you weren't killed! I'm sorry to hear it, but you know the Citizen's Advice Bureau can help you with money problems. That's terrible. I'm sorry to hear it, hope you heal quickly. I'm saddened to hear that. It must have pretty terrible experience. How are you feeling now? Are you getting treatment? I hope your rent troubles get sorted. Hopefully it won't be too long before you're all healed up. I'm saddened to hear that. It must have a pretty terrible experience. Are you healing OK? Are you getting help with the rent? Perhaps I can do something for you? I'm sad to hear that. Listen I'll get in touch with the Citizen's Advice bureau and see if they can help with your rent. The last is the 'do-gooder' who does the good they want to do to you, whether you want it or need it! Hope I did comfort him.

Non-Violence is not Pacifism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this thoughtful reflection prompted by the invasion of Ukraine, Bhante Bodhidhamma distinguishes between pacifism as an absolute ideological position and non-violence (ahiṃsā) as a Buddhist moral principle grounded in the first precept. Drawing from the Dhammapada verses 129-130 about our shared vulnerability to violence and death, he explains how non-violence emerges from empathy and compassion rather than rigid doctrine.

The essay examines the contextual nature of moral reasoning in Buddhism, noting how the Buddha provided principles while leaving their application to individual circumstances. Bhante references the concept of the Cakravartin (World Conquering Monarch) from the discourses, exploring whether this suggests a 'just war' theory within Buddhist thought. He emphasizes the crucial distinction between necessary force and violence driven by hatred or revenge.

The teaching addresses the challenging question of whether it's possible to use force without aversion, citing the Dalai Lama's response about accepting karmic consequences for necessary action. This essay offers valuable perspective for practitioners grappling with moral complexity in an imperfect world, showing how Buddhist ethics can inform difficult decisions while maintaining the fundamental commitment not to harm sentient beings.

Some reflections as a consequence of the invasion of Ukraine. Pacifism is an ideal. Although there are various forms, it takes the high moral ground that all war is morally indefensible, no matter what the circumstances, what the context, whether self-defence or justifiable armed intervention. It is centred on war. However, Non-Violence is not an ideology. It doesn't say how the world ought to be, but how we should behave in a world that is always going to be driven to some extent by acquisitiveness, aversion and delusion. The Buddha was born into pre-literate society. There were plenty of views and opinions, but no systematic philosophy, sociology, systems thinking that we have today. (Socrates did not leave a philosophy either. He thought writing was inferior to dialogue. He developed a method of enquiry. It was left up to Plato and Aristotle to write 'philosophies'.) Non-violence is a direct practical approach to life's problems coming from moral reasoning, either received or developed, based on a good heart – a commitment not to harm any sentient being – the first Precept. It is about relationship. How we should behave towards each other. The Axial Age, which was a great turning point in humanity, was led by the Buddha and other Indian teachers, Confucius, Lao Tse and So-

crates. The message is 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. And when the mind is not infected with anger, hatred and revenge, empathy and compassion arise naturally. All tremble at violence; All fear death. Seeing others as being like yourself, Do not kill or cause others to kill. (Dhp.129) All tremble at violence; Life is dear for all. Seeing others as being like yourself, Do not kill or cause others to kill. (Dhp.130) When it comes to moral reasoning, all moral decisions are contextual and circumstantial. What is right in one circumstance, may not be right in another. So it is that the Buddha taught moral and virtuous principles and left their interpretation up to the individual. That is why the Buddha never counsels kings to stop maintaining an army or physically punishing and executing criminals. The Discourses carry stories about the World Conquering Monarch, Cakravartin. At birth, the wise man foretold that Siddhartha would either be a Cakravartin or a fully Enlightened Being. It seems this is the Buddha's alter ego. This monarch makes his way around the world with his four fold army – infantry, cavalry, chariots and elephants - conquers everyone not in battle, but by intimidation through the size of his army and then establishes the subject kingdoms in the Five Precepts and brings peace. He is able to accomplish this because he is devoted to the Five Precepts. Does this suggest a 'Just War'? Finally, it is important to distinguish between force and violence. Force is the necessary energy needed to put right what is wrong. Violence is the same with hatred, anger, revenge – any aversive state of mind. Even dropping our mobile phone may cause us to pick it with anger towards ourselves. More so if someone else drops it. The Buddha is always bringing us back to the 'me'. It is for each of us to develop the attitude of non-violence. Yet there are occasions where we believe there is a moral obligation to defend, to protect, even to use deadly force. The problem is to kill or intend to kill without aversion. Is it possible? When the Dalai Lama was asked whether he would kill someone if he saw them about to push a nuclear button, he said he would and that he would accept the resultant kamma. There may be justification for armed intervention. The purpose may be to prevent further bloodshed. But again we come back to the individual. The soldier may be able to empathise with the enemy. Other soldiers are in a similar position. Sorrow may arise after killing. It maybe that a soldier harbours revenge or enjoys torturing and so on. On reflection, shame and guilt may arise. Research of American soldiers in WWII shows how difficult it is for us to kill another human being. Hope on the Battlefield. Non-violence was the attitude behind Kung Fu and the Samurai code. There is a story told of a samurai who had defeated his enemy and was about to slice him through when he walked away. When asked why, he said he was angry.

Neoliberalism and Buddhadhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 10 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma offers a penetrating ethical analysis of neoliberalism as an ideology fundamentally at odds with Buddhist principles. He examines how the neoliberal emphasis on individual entrepreneurship, competitive accumulation, and market-driven society contradicts the Buddha's teachings on interdependence, contentment, and compassion. The essay critiques the 'me versus everyone else' mentality that drives antagonistic competition, showing how this creates suffering through inequality, social fragmentation, and environmental destruction.

Drawing on the Itivuttaka and core Dhamma principles, Bhante explores how consumerism and the worship of acquisition trap us in saṃsāra's cycle of unsatisfactoriness. He warns against the co-optation of mindfulness practices by corporations seeking to manage stressed workers rather than address systemic causes of suffering. The essay concludes with practical guidance on developing contentment, practicing generosity, and shifting from 'me to we' consciousness.

This accessible yet profound teaching connects ancient wisdom to contemporary economic realities, offering both critique and hope. Bhante demonstrates how Buddhist ethics can illuminate the psychological and spiritual costs of greed-based systems while pointing toward more compassionate alternatives grounded in the brahmavihāras of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

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 dukkha[1], 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. 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 Prize. 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 of 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. 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]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. 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. [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!’[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.[5]According to theCredit 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.

Dullness and Lethargy: Our Two Very Good Friends

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this candid retreat reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the familiar experience of dullness and lethargy that often arises during meditation practice, particularly in the early days of retreat. Drawing from his personal experience at Satipanya, he examines how these mental states typically begin in the mind through paying unwise attention to mental contents, gradually spreading to physical lethargy that can feel like "the energy supply has been disconnected."

Rather than viewing dullness and lethargy as enemies to be fought, Bhante reframes them as "our two very good friends" - conditioned strategies the mind uses to deal with difficult situations, disinterest, or boredom. He shares practical approaches for working with these states, including maintaining physical alertness through keeping eyes open, standing, and walking, while cultivating the curious perspective of a child toward meditation objects like the breath.

The essay demonstrates how apparent obstacles in meditation can become fertile ground for vipassanā insight. By investigating the impermanent nature of dullness and lethargy - how one can be "lolling about in stupor one moment, and then wide awake and fully engaged the next" - practitioners can develop direct understanding of the three characteristics: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. This transforms what might seem like meditation "failures" into valuable opportunities for deepening wisdom and Right Awareness.

I'm at Satipanya as I write this, on the second day of a two week retreat and, as is usual for me during the first few days of a retreat (at least!), dullness and lethargy is the prevalent state. I'm used to this. It doesn't seem to matter what I'm doing, when I switch from one mode of being to another, dullness and lethargy arises. That can be from work to retreat or retreat to work, it doesn't matter. Holidays are the same. Any major change in behaviour results in the same thing: dullness and lethargy! Bhante calls them "our two very good friends" as they're always trying to help you be more comfortable, to rest, to take it easy, and always for good and compelling reasons: you deserve it, you've worked so hard, and so on. It's interesting to watch. For me, dullness and lethargy typically starts in the mind. Often, what happens is that I notice a warm and comfortable aspect of experience which envelopes me, and before I know it I'm nodding off! As the

dullness develops, it can migrate from mere sleepiness to a full-on (off?!) physical lethargy, like the energy supply has been disconnected! It lulls you in like that. Dreamlike thoughts/images grab at you, trying to pull you down into the depths of sleep. This is, of course, exactly how sleep starts normally. Typically, I'll close my eyes and reflect on something from the day, this quickly turns into a weird hypnagogic semi-dream and I'm gone. The feeling and character is just like dullness and lethargy, though. Stuff going on in the mind "takes over" and drags you down into sleep. So, the "problem" definitely appears to be the mind and, by that, I mean paying unwise attention to the contents of the mind. When mindfulness is present, and we're diligent with watching physical sensations in the body, it's much harder for dullness and lethargy to get a foothold. From a meditative point of view, I pretty much equate getting lost in thought with dullness and lethargy. I know that if the mind is thinking a lot, dullness and lethargy is sure to follow. While meditating, there's an apparent conflict with our "friends", though. We want to be alert, but they can make for an unpleasant and unsatisfactory experience. Dullness and lethargy is not the enemy, though. It's not a "problem". It's the mind's conditioned strategy for dealing with difficult situations, disinterest, disengagement, boredom and so on. As such, it's automatic, so I try not to fight it any more. Instead, I try to gently feed in the conditions for interest and alertness to arise. I try to stay awake, I'll keep my eyes open, stand up, walk, and so on. That is, all the usual instructions for dealing with dullness and lethargy, but I also look for something interesting, that is, I'll try to encourage my "perspective" to be that of a curious child. There's something amazing about the way the breath feels when it breathes itself. What makes it breathe in long sometimes and short others? Sometimes it's steady, sometimes it huffs. Oftentimes it feels like I'm not getting enough air, but the breath carries on like that anyway, and I don't keel over! What?! Also, the feeling of standing back and watching the body running on without "my" input is remarkable. It really shows that this body is not-Self! Also, when dullness and lethargy has grabbed me, it's fascinating to be lolling about in its stupor one moment, and then wide awake and fully engaged the next! That happens of itself, too! So, far from being a "problem", dullness and lethargy is actually fertile ground for great investigation and insight. Impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-Self, our two very good friends, dullness and lethargy, turn out to be a great vipassanā teacher!

Preparing for Climate Change - First Ethical Maxim

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay by Noirin Sheahan examines the first of six ethical maxims for preparing for climate change: "work hard to grasp the immensity." Drawing profound parallels with the Buddha's teachings on death contemplation (maranāsati), the author explores how we can apply Buddhist mindfulness practices to confront the overwhelming reality of environmental and social collapse. The essay connects this maxim to the Buddha's advice about accepting impermanence and vulnerability in all phenomena, both internal and external.

The teaching draws inspiration from mindfulness of the body practices, particularly the contemplation of death as described in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Just as the Buddha encouraged disciples to witness decomposing bodies to understand mortality, the author suggests deliberately exposing ourselves to climate change realities through mindful engagement with nature and social structures. The practice incorporates muditā (appreciative joy) as we develop deeper relationships with the natural world.

Practical guidance includes mindful walking in nature, conscious appreciation of current social infrastructure, and working with difficult emotions like grief and anger that arise when contemplating environmental collapse. The essay offers a compassionate Buddhist framework for building resilience while maintaining emotional balance in the face of unprecedented global challenges.

This follows from the August tip describing six maxims that we can practice to fortify ourselves for the environmental and social consequences of climate change. The first maxim asks us to "work hard to grasp the immensity"; I'm not going to discuss the likelihood or extent of the consequences we can expect (if interested you could read the paper that suggested the maxims) but explore some links between the first maxim and the Dhamma. The maxim fits perfectly with the Buddha's advice that we come to terms with the fact that everything inside us and outside is in flux, vulnerable, dependent on circumstance. We plan our career, family, diary, around the presumption that we will continue to have a stable food and water supply, electricity, public transport, schools, internet, the rule of law, government. All of these are put in jeopardy because of climate change. But their absence is, for most of us, unthinkable. The mind skims over the implications, we might feel blocked or frightened or we might doze off or restlessly seek distraction. Soon we're back to 'business as usual'. This parallels with the way we ignore

our own mortality. Intellectually we know we will die someday, but rarely do we think about this. To overcome this reluctance, the Buddha asked his followers to deliberately expose themselves to the reality of death - to look at dead bodies, smell them, see the flesh rotting, the maggots feeding, the residue of bones and dust, reminding themselves "one day this will happen to my body; I am not exempt from this fate." This is indeed to 'work hard to take in the immensity' of our mortality. To follow this approach regarding environmental and social collapse we could read relevant articles or watch documentaries. We could talk the matter over with friends or family or look for on-line support in coming to terms with the situation. We should also remember that the contemplation of death is the final exercise that the Buddha lists for mindfulness of the body. He starts with mindfulness of breathing and posture and everyday activities. We get to know the body very intimately in life before we contemplate its death. Similarly, we can become more mindful of the environment and social structures as they now function to fortify ourselves for their impending collapse. We can walk in nature, paying full attention to grass, trees, birds, sky, all the while being aware of our emotions which might swing between awe, joy, indifference and boredom. Acknowledging our reactions mindfully allows us to forge a deeper relationship that will eventually transcend attachment and aversion. This mirrors Joanna Macy's advice to deepen our appreciation of nature in order to strengthen ourselves for the challenge of climate change. It also ties in with the practice of *muditā* (appreciative joy), one of the cornerstones of the Buddha's teaching. After reading her book "Active Hope" I started taking more interest in nature. My daily walks slowed as wildflowers and grasses and birdsong demanded attention. After some time I began to dread winter when the verges would be muddy and drab, the birds silent. I also felt guilty, as if I were somehow to blame. I worked mindfully with this till one day I sensed an underlying intensity; focussing on this uncovered a tangle of fretful thought, insisting that I should be able to give each flower the gift of everlasting life and was failing in my task! The notion was so obviously deluded I could smile at it and start to enjoy my walks again, but now there was a deeper commune with nature. Its message of transience and vulnerability became a gentle way of learning about my own mortality. More recently my daily walks help me assimilate the possibility of environmental collapse. Walking by a tree I reflect that it might not live out its natural lifespan, that its roots might already be detecting degradation in the soil, its flowers noticing the lack of insects. Grief or anger might emerge but sometimes these resolve into a bitter-sweet 'hello, goodbye' as we meet on our journeys through life and death. I find this next part more difficult but am trying to extend the practice to include social supports such as food in the shops, water pouring when I turn a tap, electricity flowing when I press a switch. I remind myself to be grateful for whatever services now work - transport, schools, hospitals, internet and the social norms that allow me to feel safe on my daily walk. The more I value these wonders, the better I will be able to con-

template living without their immense benefits. I also appreciate the support of others in this endeavor. If you think you might similarly benefit you could join the Satipanya forum dedicated to practicing with the Six Maxims. Email Noirinfor for further information or to register. Some resources that are helping me ‘grasp the immensity’:

Hothouse Earth, Bill McGuire, Icon Books, 2022
This Changes Everything, Naomi Klein, Penguin, 2014
Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal, Noam Chomsky & Robert Pollin, Verso, 2020
Active Hope: How to face the mess we're in with unexpected resilience and creative power, Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, New World Library, 2022
What society might look like as its structures collapse: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lcem_tutbGc
<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170418-how-western-civilisation-could-collapse>
Gwen’s tip from the September newsbyte contained many additional resources and after our second Climate and Dhamma Zoom session, Gwen shared Caroline Bird’s poem “Prepper”:

Red Lines, Sīla - Third Ethical Maxim

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay examines the third of six ethical maxims for preparing for climate change consequences: establishing personal 'red lines' - absolute boundaries we vow never to cross regardless of temptation. Noirin Sheahan explores the tension between Buddhist pacifism rooted in the first precept (not harming living beings) and the complex ethical decisions we may face when basic resources become scarce due to climate change.

The essay draws on Elizabeth Harris's research into violence in early Buddhist texts and Bhante Bodhidhamma's teachings on armed intervention, distinguishing between force (energy to correct wrongs) and violence (force motivated by ill-will). Key considerations include defending vulnerable household members, the karmic consequences of harmful actions, and the crucial role of motivation in ethical decision-making.

The piece addresses practical scenarios such as defending against intruders when resources are scarce, considering the circumstances of climate refugees, and the wisdom of establishing clear ethical boundaries before crisis situations arise. The author reflects on age-appropriate red lines and emphasizes the urgent need to practice maintaining ethical boundaries now, while we have clarity of mind, as preparation for potentially difficult future circumstances when clear thinking may be compromised by illness or hunger.

The third of the six maxims suggested to fortify ourselves for the consequences of climate change asks us to draw our red lines. What is it we vow not to do, no matter how great the temptation? Buddhist ethics stands on the five precepts, the first of which asks us not to harm living beings. As climate change brings destitution and basic resources become scarce, violent conflict will become common. Defending our few remaining possessions against an intruder; what red line do we pledge never to cross? A pacifist chooses death by starvation rather than physically attack the intruder. But what if our household includes children or vulnerable adults? In her inquiry into the ethics of violence in early Buddhist texts, Elizabeth Harris writes: The person who feels violence is justified to protect the lives of others has ... to remember that he is risking grave [karmic] consequences for himself in that his action will inevitably bear fruit ... Such a person needs to evaluate motives ... yet might still judge that the risks are worth facing to prevent a greater evil. Bhante's essay on armed intervention argues against pacifism as an absolute stance. He points out that amongst the hundreds of rules that govern monastic life, there is none against self-defence. When Sharon Salzberg told her teacher Mun-

indra-ji about being attacked by a drunken man, he said “Oh Sharon, you should have hit that man over the head with all the compassion in your heart!” It is the motivation that counts. Where there is only a choice between evils, kindness demands that we prevent the greater evil. The Dalai Lama said that to prevent a mass-murder, he would shoot the attacker, not to kill but to disable, prevent them killing. Bhante’s essay distinguishes between force and violence. Force is the energy needed to put right what is wrong, violence is the same laced with some form of ill-will. Again, it is the motivation that counts and also the clarity to judge right from wrong. That clarity will be very hard to find amidst widespread poverty and starvation. Who knows how many children the intruder needs to feed? If they were a climate refugee, homeless, stateless because our affluence has made their land uninhabitable, should we not willingly give them our provisions? Because it will be so difficult to judge whether harming another is the lesser evil, I can see the wisdom of preparing red lines e.g. pledging never to use violence except to defend an immediate attack on my life or the life of someone who depends on me. The line could also be drawn at a higher level. Already close on 70, I will be very elderly if and when things deteriorate to this level; the red line could be taking any food once it becomes so scarce as to threaten lives of younger people; after all it is they, not me, who could allow civilisation, including the Buddha-Dhamma, to survive. Whatever red lines we draw, it will be a challenge to keep them in a dangerous situation when we may well be ill or famished and have little capacity for clear thought. There is an urgent need to start practicing this maxim now. To this end, I’ve set myself some red lines (simple ones but a challenge to habitual desire) as preparation for next month’s tip on practicing with this maxim.

Radical Hope, Saddhā - Second Ethical Maxim

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay examines the second of six ethical maxims for confronting climate change: cultivating radical hope through the Buddhist concept of saddhā. Unlike ordinary hope that depends on desired outcomes, saddhā represents unconditional trust in the value of present-moment awareness, regardless of external circumstances. Noirin Sheahan explains how this quality differs from optimism, instead offering confidence in the Buddha's teachings that simply being aware—even of misery—has inherent worth and nobility.

The teaching draws parallels between saddhā and the mystical tradition's radical hope, exemplified by Julian of Norwich's faith during plague and war. Meditation practice naturally cultivates this quality by training us to release attachment to outcomes and rest in present-moment experience. Each time we abandon daydreams and worries to return to breath awareness, we strengthen our capacity to find meaning beyond goal-oriented thinking.

The essay presents meditation as spiritual preparation for potential climate catastrophe, where traditional social structures may collapse. By developing resilience through working with boredom, pain, doubt, and restlessness in practice, we build the inner resources needed to maintain equanimity during genuine hardship. Saddhā enables us to discover deeper humanity when illusions of control and consumerism are stripped away, potentially revealing kindness and mutual care as essential survival tools. This radical hope empowers meaningful engagement with difficult circumstances while finding profound value in simple presence and awareness.

This continues a series of tips based on the six maxims[1] which have been suggested as a way to fortify ourselves for the environmental and social consequences of climate change. The first maxim challenges us to 'grasp the immensity' of the risk to our environment and social structures and possibly even to our civilization, posed by climate change. The second maxim asks us to cultivate radical hope. Normally we think of hope in terms of a particular outcome. We hope for good news or recovery from illness. This is 'hope for' and the six-maxim authors¹ distinguish radical hope from this; radical hope is not based on optimism that we will find a way to restore stability to the climate and nature; it's a form of hope that will survive ever deteriorating weather conditions with harsh consequences for the environment and mankind. It would inspire us to make the best of things even when our home had been burned by a wildfire. Having nowhere to live and only scraps of food to eat, it would motivate us to eat those mindfully, with

gratitude. In Buddhism this is termed 'saddha', normally translated as faith, but the better translation is trust. Saddha gives us confidence in the teachings of the Buddha. Even if our circumstances were totally miserable and the outlook equally bleak, saddha lets us trust that simply being aware of the misery is noble and worthwhile. Radical hope, saddha, has no preferred outcome. It's not driven by desire for any goal we can envisage. It trusts a goodness beyond the surface appearance of things, found in simply being present, aware of things as they are. Mystics from all religions find radical hope. Julian of Norwich lived at the time of bubonic plague and the 100 year war but could confidently believe the inner voice that told her "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well". Fortunately, saddha is naturally cultivated by meditation practice. Every time we drop our daydreams, plans, worries, and bring attention to the here and now we are letting go of outcomes. We learn that all we really know are present sensations and feelings; the future is but a thought of what might happen. Since we don't yet know what's to come, why waste energy worrying? "Its one thing to do that in meditation practice" our inner sceptic argues "where we've decided to sit down and watch the breath. Its quite another thing to be facing a future where millions are competing for scarce food and water." True, it will be a greater challenge. But its one we are training for every time we overcome some obstacle in meditation. When pain makes us irritable or we grow bored, restless, dozy, or when doubt persuades us we're wasting our time. We're tempted to give up; we don't want to endure these miseries, we want to be entertained or to be doing something, achieving something. Can we see all such challenges as spiritual muscle-building, preparing us for serious horrors which may come our way? Bringing a gentle curiosity to every experience we develop resilience to physical and mental discomfort, learn that we don't always need to be achieving goals or distracting ourselves. These traits will help enormously in the event of climate catastrophe, when there may be little we can do to avoid hardship for ourselves and for those we love. Saddha, radical hope, will bring out the best in the changed circumstances; for example we may be relieved that the delusion of human dominance over nature has been shattered along with and the 'greed is good' message of consumerism. With the loss of illusion, deeper humanity may come to the fore. During bereavement or serious illness people discover the value of family and friends. Neighbours who had hardly known one another before COVID helped each other during lockdown. Kindness and care may become our best survival-tools when climate change really bites and we can no longer rely on the social structures we now take for granted. Radical hope will let us play our part to minimise suffering in what may well be appalling circumstances. Mindfulness practice is our training ground. We can use any worries about climate change to motivate our practice. We may not be able to persuade governments to avert the disaster, but we can persuade ourselves to be ready for disaster, ready to find meaning in being present, just breathing, even if the future looks

horrifying.[1]Ethical Maxims for a Marginally Inhabitable Planet David Schenck* and
Larry R. Churchill, Perspectives in Biology and Medicine, Vol 64,4 2021[https://media2-
production.mightynetworks.com/asset/39337730/Schenck_-_Ethical_Maxims.pdf](https://media2-production.mightynetworks.com/asset/39337730/Schenck_-_Ethical_Maxims.pdf)

New Year Resolutions and the Third Maxim

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay explores how New Year resolutions can serve as training grounds for developing adhiṭṭhāna (resolve), one of the ten pāramī (perfections). Noirin Sheahan shares her experience practicing a 7pm eating boundary as preparation for the 'third maxim' - establishing ethical red lines for times of scarcity and hardship that may come with climate change. Drawing from her attempts to emulate monastic eating practices, she reveals the psychological dynamics of temptation, the emergence of inner resistance, and the cyclical nature of resolve strengthening and weakening. The essay demonstrates how seemingly small personal boundaries can become laboratories for understanding desire, aversion, and the cultivation of ethical strength. It emphasizes the practical wisdom of using accessible challenges to prepare for potentially greater future tests of character, while highlighting the importance of mindful observation of our mental states during moments of temptation and surrender.

Resolve is one of the ten 'Perfections', the virtues developed by the spiritual life. We perfect resolve by practicing it and I've learned a lot from working with the resolution not to eat after 7pm. I undertook this mainly to practice the third of the six maxims suggested to fortify ourselves for the consequences of climate change. This maxim asks us to draw our red lines. When poverty, hunger, homelessness come to our own doorstep, what will we not stoop to as we struggle to adapt and survive? Last month's tip looked at this from the point of view of Buddhist ethics. These provide the rationale for whatever red-lines we draw. New Year resolutions present the perfect opportunity to strengthen our resolve to keep within these when things get really tough. The monastic rule not to eat after mid-day has always been a challenge for me. I manage OK during retreats, but as a way of life it's been a step too far. I eat something at tea-time for health reasons, but the 7pm red line means I can't indulge the comforting delight of end-of-day snacking. The practice has been an eye-opener! The precepts are described as 'Training Rules' so I've never seen them as commandments. When I started to think of 7pm as a serious red line an inner despot emerged, locked me into a straight-jacket in anticipation of bad behaviour! In time a few chinks loosened, and I could enjoy watching the despot dismiss temptations before they had even a remote chance of success. But after a week or so resolve waned and temptation got stronger. I recognised this as the point where previous resolutions had been quietly put aside. The usual excuse popped up "You're so hungry ... you'll never be able to sleep..." tapping into a barely voiced undercurrent: "Ah go on,

give in, what does it matter?" Hard to resist this familiar, comforting laziness. I reminded myself of the wider context: climate change, competition for food, water, shelter; how violence erupts when scarcity threatens; how to avoid back-sliding into savagery; the need to be strong, heroic even, to choose good over evil. Also, that I was going to have to write up my experience in this tip, admit to my transgressions! These thoughts were enough to reinvigorate resolve. It boosted my confidence to have held fast when I would previously have given in. Joy arose and I warmed to the practice. I kept an emergency banana by my bed in case the usual excuse proved valid, but happily I slept soundly. It simplified matters to have an absolute rule to cleave to. It also removed the guilt of indulging night-time comfort-food. Such a relief. Then one evening, out of the blue, I just gave in. I had been feeling out of sorts, fractious; as soon as temptation arose, I capitulated, didn't even try to argue. Afterwards, somewhat shocked and ashamed at having crossed the red line, I reflected on the experience, remembering the savage energy desire had evoked and how instantly I had caved in. Contemplating this, a new level of resolve took shape, based on aversion to being enslaved by such a brute, unthinking, force. This has been enough to get me through subsequent temptations ... so far anyhow. Resolve is an on-going practice, and I'll welcome its on-going lessons. I'd urge you to see your New Year resolutions in the light of the 'Red Lines' maxim. Reflect on how much resolve you may one day need to resist harming another because of hunger or other basic need. Let others know of your resolution - the embarrassment of public failure increases motivation! Watch temptations mindfully so as to learn how to resist future, more serious temptations to betray your inner goodness, your true nature.

4th Maxim (i): Opportunity Knocks

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay examines the fourth of the Six Maxims for climate resilience, presenting dukkha as a gateway to spiritual development rather than mere suffering. Drawing from the Upanisa Sutta, Noirin Sheahan maps seven practical entry points into the spiral of conditions leading to liberation: faith, wise investigation, virtue, restraint, dedication/care, mindfulness, and inspiration. Each response transforms climate anxiety into skillful engagement with present reality.

The teaching shows how ordinary reactions to environmental crises—from overwhelm to restlessness—can be redirected through these traditional Buddhist pathways. Whether through ethical action, mindful presence, or seeking inspiration, practitioners learn to use dukkha as fuel for growth rather than despair. The approach complements formal meditation with everyday applications, making the spiral teachings accessible in daily life.

This practical framework helps develop resilience not only for global challenges but for personal difficulties. By recognizing our natural strengths and learning to 'play to them' during difficult times, we transform unavoidable suffering into opportunities for deepening wisdom and compassion.

I'm again looking at Dhamma links for the Six Maxims designed to fortify us for the challenge of climate change. Instead of being horrified at the thought of the inevitable hardship for humans, wildlife and environment, the fourth maxim tells us we are to look on this as a golden opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. One parallel in the Dhamma is the Upanisa Sutta which places dukkha (suffering / dissatisfaction) central to a list of conditions leading to enlightenment. The first steps show how we create dukkha by believing we can make ourselves happy in a world which is unstable, uncontrollable, inherently unsatisfying. Ironically the dukkha we feel when our plans fall apart spurs us to find a way out of the endless round of false hope, and the final links show how we can liberate ourselves from suffering. I recently attended a Tricycle online course entitled "The Spiral to Freedom". The teachers, John Peacock and Akincano Weber, stress that all the links from dukkha to liberation can be seen in ordinary daily life. This compliments the practices in previous tips which focussed on formal meditation. Let's imagine ourselves in a state of anxiety or misery because of news of another huge wildfire. The 'spiral teachings' suggest a range of responses which form entry points to the spiral of causes and conditions leading to liberation. For some, faith is the

easiest way to counter the pull into negative thinking. This could be the bright faith of the beginner, or the mature trust that grows with long practice. Every time another dark thought takes us back into the pit, we place our trust in the Dhamma to claw ourselves out. For others, news of a wildfire stimulates doubt rather than faith; we are flooded by questions like ‘What is life all about?’ where the only answer is ‘I don’t know’. If we’re willing to explore the experience of “I don’t know” this is Wise Investigation, a second entry point to the spiral. Although we don’t have the answers, we have access to teachings that can point us in the right direction. Thus, bewilderment is the catalyst that motivates us to learn about suffering and how it can be transcended. At other times, investigation may seem irrelevant, we want to do something, anything, to relieve suffering. In this case Virtue becomes the link from dukkha to the spiral. We respond with ethical action – we might donate to a charity supporting those affected, sign a petition or write to our local council. We find some positive action aiming to minimise further harm and pain. But sometimes we can’t find the energy, the goodwill needed to sign yet another petition or make that donation. Everything in us just wants to turn away from the world, forget all its horrors. This impulse contains the wisdom of Restraint, which is another entry point to the spiral. We let ourselves turn away from activity, withdraw to some quiet place, give ourselves the silence and rest we need to heal. The opposite can happen too, news of the wildfire leads to restlessness; we don’t want to turn inwards, we want something to occupy us. In this case we can use the entry point of Dedication / Care. We could wash the dishes as if this were a sacred ceremony, the most important task in the world, taking care of all the little details. Although we can’t fix the wildfire, we can take care of what is at hand, and this is a very worthy response to dukkha. At other times, the thought of caring for anyone or anything seems an impossible burden. Perhaps anxiety is overwhelming us with thoughts of who to blame. In this case, Mindfulness often provides the best entry point. We don’t have to follow the breath, but use phrases like “walking to the shops”, “making the dinner”, “driving to work” to keep us present, alert, mindful. Although news of the wildfire might still be tempting us to blame and worry, we are choosing present reality as an antidote to those dead ends, and this is a valid way to lift ourselves out of dukkha. Sometimes we can’t even muster the energy to be mindful. Everything seems hopeless, the world is doomed, we might as well give up. In this case we need to look outside ourselves, let Inspiration lift us from dukkha to the spiral. Who or what will draw attention away from misery, persuade us that life is worth living? For some it’s a weekend camping, others might sign up for a study course; it could be as simple as meeting a friend, listening to a dhamma talk. Next month I’ll look at some of the following links in the spiral. In the meantime I hope you will try out some of the entry points, get to know your strengths, learn to play to them when dukkha is getting you down. Here we’re allowed to be biased, seek out and amplify feelings and mind-states

that lift us up. But we keep mindfulness in the background, noticing what works, what doesn't, when we're pushing ourselves too hard, when we need to step back, take it easy, try again when we're ready. Thus the dukkha of climate change becomes the catalyst to develop resilience, which will help us through all manner of personal sorrows as well as to the global challenge we face at this time.

4th Maxim (ii): Spiral to Freedom

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay examines the fourth of the Six Maxims for climate resilience, which reframes hardship as opportunity for spiritual growth. Drawing primarily on the Upanisa Sutta, it traces the 'spiral path' of dependent origination that leads from dukkha (suffering, unsatisfactoriness) to liberation. The teaching reveals how our attachment to an inherently impermanent world creates disappointment, which paradoxically becomes the catalyst for awakening.

The essay provides practical guidance for recognising the sequential steps of this upward spiral in daily life: gladness arising when we find a way forward from suffering; rapture experienced as genuine interest in activities; tranquillity emerging as the 'cooling phase' when initial excitement settles into deeper peace; and happiness naturally flowing from recognised tranquillity. Each stage creates conditions for the next, ultimately leading to samādhi and insight.

Rather than avoiding or dreading difficult circumstances, practitioners learn to use any form of dukkha—whether personal struggles or climate anxiety—as entry points into this transformative spiral. The teaching emphasises paying careful attention to subtle shifts in heart and body, particularly noticing the physical relaxation that accompanies tranquillity even when the mind feels disappointed. This practical approach makes the profound Dhamma teaching of dependent origination accessible for contemporary spiritual development.

Following on last month's tip, I'm again looking at Dhamma links for the fourth of the Six Maxims designed to fortify us for the challenge of climate change. Instead of dreading what's to come, the fourth maxim asks us to see all such hardship as an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. The supporting Dhamma teaching that I've been looking at is the Upanisa Sutta, which traces the causes and conditions for liberation. The first steps show how we create dukkha (suffering, stress) by investing our hopes in a world which is inherently unsatisfying. When our hopes are dashed, disappointment, rage, despair - any shade of dukkha - becomes the catalyst for spiritual renewal, and the final links trace what has been termed 'the spiral path' from dukkha to liberation. In a recent Tricycle course, John Peacock and Akincano Weber examine the Upanissa Sutta and related teachings, stressing that all the links in the spiral path can be seen in ordinary daily life. To pull ourselves out of dukkha and into the spiral we

have a number of 'Entry Points' which I looked at in last month's tip. Here are some of the following links:

Gladness: A moment ago, we were stuck in dukkha, now we've found a way forward. This naturally gladdens the heart. But surprisingly, gladness is easily overlooked. The 'entry point' required effort e.g. to do some good deed, to restrain angry speech. We can be so intent on these that we don't notice the change of heart. We need to be on the lookout for gladness, even if its only momentary, to deepen our faith that there is a path leading from suffering to liberation.

Rapture: The background mood of gladness helps us engage, be interested in whatever is happening. This is what we mean by rapture. The word suggests an over-the-top joy, but rapture can be experienced quite simply as interest. Look out for this at the start of any activity you enjoy – as you step into the shower, take the first bite of dinner, meet a friend. Sometimes it can feel a bit giddy, we're over-excited, expecting too much, sometimes mild, like a gentle uplift or refreshment.

Tranquillity: Rapture sets up the conditions for tranquillity. This was one I struggled with until Akincano described tranquillity as that cooling phase in every activity, when the initial fizz goes out of it. True enough, once I investigated that slight deflation when some new activity lost its sparkle, I detected an inner relaxation underlying the more obvious surface layer of dullness. I needed to bring attention to the body for this, the mood of deflation still predominated in the mind, but within the tissues of the body, particularly the limbs, I sensed a quiet peace and ease. I realised that I had become more grounded, more settled within myself. So keep an eye out for any slight 'downer' when a new activity starts to feel hum-drum. Ask whether, deep down, peace has descended. I never knew disappointment could hold such treasure! But don't go straight for tranquillity and skip over the rapture stage thinking it's silly to be getting excited by things. For tranquillity to have any depth, we need to put our heart into the activity while it still strikes us as novel and interesting. The energy of enthusiasm lifts us up, and that is the same energy which transforms to tranquillity when the novelty wears off.

Happiness: Tranquillity sets up the conditions needed for happiness. Once I had detected and assured myself that tranquillity was really present, the mood of disappointment evaporated, and instead the heart softened. I realised I was content, happy. While tranquillity, for me, could be described as a bodily form of happiness, the recognition of tranquillity allowed the happiness to spread from body to mind. Unless I had looked for tranquillity within that deflationary phase when the fizz went out of an activity, the mood of disappointment would have remained. Note that nothing had changed in my circumstances to make me happy – only that I'd noticed and paid attention to the physical relaxation that happened as an activity turned from novel and exciting to hum-drum.

Happiness sets the stage for concentration, samadhi, which in turn brings forth the many fruits of the spiral path, starting with insight and leading onwards to full liberation. There isn't space to discuss these here, but I encourage you to investigate the earlier steps in the spiral, trust the fruits to ripen in their own time.

When dukkha brings you low, find your easiest entry point to the spiral. Notice the gladdening of heart that happens as you lift out of dukkha; notice the rapture (interest / uplift) that comes with any new activity and the tranquillity that settles in as the initial buzz dies away. Steadying your attention on tranquillity, notice the quiet happiness that it promotes. Trust this happiness to lead the mind towards stillness and hence to a deeper understanding of the dhamma. Thus all forms of dukkha, personal or due to climate change, can spur us into the spiral path to liberation.

Fourth Maxim (iii): Path to Transcendence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay examines Transcendent Dependent Arising (paṭilomaṇaṭṭica samuppāda), a twelve-step teaching that shows how suffering becomes the foundation for the path to awakening. Noirin Sheahan explores steps four through ten of this process, demonstrating how initial dukkha can transform through mindful investigation into faith, joy, rapture, tranquillity, happiness, concentration, insight, and disenchantment. The teaching provides a Dhamma foundation for the fourth of six ethical maxims for facing climate catastrophe - embracing our good fortune to live through this crisis.

The essay offers practical guidance for working with climate anxiety and fear through meditation practice. It shows how rapture can arise even when exploring difficult emotions, how tranquillity emerges from careful attention to pleasant sensations within unpleasant experiences, and how happiness naturally develops when we stop defending against impermanence. The author demonstrates how insight arises when the sense of a separate controlling self dissolves, revealing the First Noble Truth not as a problem but as liberating wisdom.

This contemplative approach transforms our relationship with climate grief, anger, and fear, showing how these challenging emotions can become doorways to transcendence. The essay emphasizes that resistance to life's difficulties is futile, and that welcoming our troubles - including climate concerns - opens the path toward nibbāna through progressive stages of spiritual development.

Following on last month's tip, I want to look at a few more steps in the process of Transcendent Dependent Arising, a teaching showing suffering as the starting point for the path to the end of suffering. This gives a Dhamma basis for the fourth of these six maxims - suggested as ethical preparation for climate catastrophe. This maxim challenges us to embrace our good fortune to be living through the crisis. There are twelve steps in Transcendent Dependent Arising, starting with dukkha (usually translated as suffering, but including even the irritation of a fly buzzing on the window pane) and ending with Enlightenment; each step lays down the conditions for the next. Last month I looked at the first three steps showing how dukkha, explored mindfully, leads to faith and then to joy. In meditation, joy refines to keen interest in moment-to-moment experience. We may still be aware of fear associated with our changing climate, but now we're willing to experience fear as sensations and feelings. This, believe it or not, is a form of rapture

– often exhilarating and horrible in equal measure! Rapture is a condition for tranquillity. Notice the moments where we are attracted right into the heart of the horror to discover pleasant feelings of relaxation and ease there. Confusing! We might quickly tense up again, but curiosity will sooner or later prompt another moment's relaxation, another taste of the rich concoction of feelings we label as fear. With practice, we get more confident that it is indeed possible to relax and explore the texture of embodied fear. Amid all the unpleasant sensations which we find threatening, we learn to pick out any pleasant ones. As we sink attention into these, we grow tranquil. The mind and body feel calm, at ease. When we've fully convinced ourselves that tranquillity is indeed manifesting, it becomes possible to shift focus, explore the experience of tranquillity itself. This sets up the conditions for the heart to soften as happiness arises. This is not a happy-clappy elation, but a tender glow in the heart. We're happy to be in intimate contact with ourselves despite a fear that still lurks at the periphery of consciousness. With happiness, it becomes easier to focus attention. What usually attracts my attention is the sense of self, the 'me' who watches this show. While happiness is experienced as central, the 'me who watches' hovers around in the periphery. Within the 'me' are prickles of fear as I acknowledge the fragility of the situation, how easily happiness could be quenched. Tensions grow and the breath stops in an effort to hold onto happiness, stave off the dukkha of transience. To my dismay I realise happiness has already gone, swallowed up in my efforts to protect it. With nothing left to defend, I relax and let the breath flow freely. Tensions release and to my surprise I detect happiness again. This time no watcher looks over it or tries to protect it. The sense of 'me' as a separate agent, controlling experience has dissolved. This is the step of insight on the path of transcendent arising. Pleasant feelings associated with happiness intermingle with unpleasant ones which tell of the fragility of happiness, its conditioned nature. This is no longer interpreted as a problem, but as a demonstration of the first noble truth: there is dukkha. Paradoxically, the truth is welcome. It's a relief to know I can stop trying to achieve the impossible. My original fears around climate change can now be included in this contemplation of dukkha. Sorrow, fear and anger circle around the body along with the happiness of being able to carry a share of the suffering being wrought by our changing climate. Though insight brings peace and joy, our habit of resisting what frightens or displeases us runs deep; soon we find ourselves back at stage 1 again, kicking and screaming. But now we know that dukkha, examined mindfully, leads to insight via faith, joy, rapture, tranquillity, happiness, and concentration. Each insight shows us the futility of resisting what life serves up; this provides the conditions for the next step in the path: disenchantment. Our passions cool; we get better at meeting adversity, intuitively calm at the heart of every storm. The process doesn't stop there and just three more steps bring us to nibbana – either full liberation or a glimpse that will obliterate any

doubts in the Dhamma. But that's for another day! In the meantime, let's welcome all our troubles, including our worries, anger, sorrow because of our changing climate, as doorways to transcendence.

Upekkhā: The Most Important Virtue

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 5 min read

Drawing on Ven. Nyanaponika's insight that equanimity is the most important virtue, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores upekkhā as having both intellectual and emotional dimensions. Intellectually, it means not clinging to views or opinions; emotionally, it means freedom from bias, acquisitiveness, aversion, and preference. This balanced state prevents other virtues from falling into their subtle enemies—metta from becoming attachment, compassion from becoming pity, and joy from becoming mere excitement.

The essay examines upekkhā's crucial role in the Seven Factors of Awakening (bojjhaṅga), where it enables objective investigation of the Three Characteristics of Existence—anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering/unsatisfactoriness), and anattā (not-self). In vipassanā practice, equanimity allows the investigative wisdom (paññā) to operate without distortion from greed, hatred, and delusion. Bhante also addresses contemporary challenges like climate change, showing how equanimity prevents both panic and denial while maintaining principled action.

The teaching concludes with practical guidance for developing equanimity through meditation practice, using qualities like calmness, peace-loving attitudes, openness, and composure. This systematic cultivation extends from formal meditation into daily life activities, creating a baseline of serene poise that supports wise response rather than emotional reactivity.

Ven.Nyanaponika, the German monk, who founded the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy wrote what is still a classic: *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. He also wrote *A Vision of the Dhamma* and there he says Equanimity is the most important of all the virtues. So what are the qualities of Equanimity, *upekkhā*? The word has *animus* as its basis. *Animus* is part of the trilogy that makes up a sentient being: *corpus/body*, *animus/heart* and *mind* and *spiritus/spirit* or as we would say *Nibbana* or the *Buddha Within*. We tend to think the mind with thoughts and imaginings and the heart with emotions and moods to be separate, but they work together. Perception always arises with feeling and vice versa. So, equanimity has two sides - an intellectual and an emotional side. Intellectually it means not to hold on tightly to any view or opinion, but to see whatever one believes is but a perspective. It limits the conceit of I am right and everyone else is wrong! Emotionally it means that we are not biased by acquisitiveness, aversion, fear or preference. These are the qualities you would expect of a judge – not to be

seduced by bribery or some sort of personal gain, not to be swayed by clever arguments from lawyers, not to be afraid of threats, not to be biased towards the accused by dislike or aversion and have no preference as to the verdict of the jury. It leads to composure, to an unruffled poise. This becomes obvious when we consider the Climate Crisis. What I do that affects the climate impacts on every other being and vice versa. Equanimity prevents us from becoming panicking preppers, people who are building up supplies and bunkers for future disasters. It undermines fear and anxiety of imagined future scenarios, although frankly what's happening to temperatures, fires and floods doesn't leave much to the imagination. It stops us from being angry with deniers and helps us maintain an attitude of whatever the outcome I shall remain true to my principles. This has been tackled by Noirin in her Tips for the Newsbyte around the Six Maxims. This attitude naturally develops a calmness, a tranquillity, an inner composure, a serenity. As to all the other social virtues, the balanced heart and mind, stops them falling into their subtle enemy. Metta, love or goodwill, can easily fall into attachment whereby we become dependent on the other, possessing them and presuming them to always please us; compassion can be distorted by pity, feeling sorry for someone which may mean we give them preferential attention or if in the caring services preferential treatment, and there is also the danger of falling into the do-gooder trap; joy easily slips into excitement. We've all had the experience of a party or holiday where we have said we must do this again and the second time it has lost the sparkle. Equanimous joy stops us believing we can repeat experiences. It means we can just enjoy something, appreciate it and then let it go. Equanimity stops courage falling into foolhardiness; humility from becoming humbleness, false self-effacement. Take any virtue and equanimity will stop it falling into its subtle enemy. Equanimity, however, also has its subtle enemy and passes off as cool indifference, aloofness, apathy, a lack of concern. The antidote is the applicable virtue. If we feel we lack a sense of caring, for instance, we can develop it through a compassion contemplation.

Factors of Enlightenment. The Seven Factors of Awakening or Enlightenment are headed by Sati/Awareness. One teacher said that if you were to choose one word to encapsulate the Buddha's teaching it would be Sati! This is the supremely important Factor. All other factors are there to establish Right or Correct Awareness. They are paired to balance each other.

Focus or steadiness of attention needs a steady Effort. **Interest or curiosity** needs to be prevented from becoming excited by **Calmness**. The Investigation of the Dhamma in vipassana is to clearly see The Three Characteristics of Existence – impermanence, how we create suffering for ourselves, self-inflicted dukkha, and not-self. This is made possible by Equanimity which stops us from becoming emotionally reactive or investigating with some preconceived idea or concept in the mind. Equanimity allows us to stand apart, objective to whatever we are experiencing. It allows the investigative, intuitive intelligence, pañña, to come from a place where it is not being distorted by acquisitiveness, aversion and de-

lusion! In daily life, these Seven Factors express themselves in how we speak, behave and work. It is the quality of equanimity as a base line that keeps us from over-reacting and supports wise response. Vipassana: During vipassana practice, what we are specifically investigating are those Three Characteristics of Existence – impermanence, how we cause suffering for ourselves, dukkha and not-self. We are undermining the delusion which manifests as experiencing continuity especially the sense of self always being there, seeking ways to establish happiness as best and as long as we can, and having a persisting sense that this I, that I sense to be, is really real. Equanimity, especially around these tightly held views, is needed for our effort is to see these delusive perceptions for what they are. Such equanimity rests upon certain virtues. There must be that interest that finds the investigation fascinating and the courage to look where we may experience truths that frighten us for they undermine that sense of self, 'who I am'. As insights arise, these virtues are strengthened and so the process of vipassana, to see and understand the causes of unsatisfactoriness, becomes even more alluring. From a transcendent viewpoint, all human beings are seeking the end of Dukkha, suffering and unsatisfactoriness. Since what prevents them to achieve this is a delusion, it is inevitable that at some time, the veil of misunderstanding will fall away for the Dukkha itself forces us to seek the end of Dukkha. And that is what we mean by Nibbana, unshackling the bonds that bind us to Samsara, the relentless cycles of days, months, years and lifetimes, driven by the insatiable Self. So we can see equanimity is as the base line as on a cardiogram. Whatever the strength or rapidity of the beat, the heart always falls to a resting place. How can we develop this virtue in daily life? As usual there has to be some practice that begins to develop an attitude. We are all familiar with the Metta Practice. So, in the same way we choose a set of words and begin to wish these qualities for ourselves and all the categories we go through with Metta. May I be : Calm– this refers to a physical relaxation, loosening bodily tensions and with it calming the heart. Using the outbreath to relax. Peace-loving– this refers to the attitude of always wanting to engender an underlying sense of safety and peacefulness. Open– this refers to our attitude towards others, receiving their opinions, even if supported with strong emotion and not refusing to listen, but to engage. Composed– this is our basic posture, a serene, unruffled poise (as best we can!) You may think of other qualities to add. Once you have your set of attributes, go through all the categories. Then, the hard bit, taking it out into daily life. Keep drawing ourselves down into that composed state – before eating, before meeting, before a phone call, before doing anything. It is just another habit, like any other habit we can develop if we will it.

The Danger of Nihilism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

In this contemporary reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines how our post-truth era—characterized by alternative facts, AI-generated content, and widespread misinformation—can push people toward nihilistic withdrawal from society. Drawing from his personal experience leaving Roman Catholicism and finding temporary refuge in existentialism, he distinguishes between 'active nihilism' (rejecting systems while seeking solutions) and 'passive nihilism' (apathetic disengagement). The essay connects these philosophical challenges to current crises like climate change and political dysfunction.

The teacher demonstrates how the Buddhadhamma offers a middle path between blind faith and cynical despair. Unlike systems requiring belief, Buddhist teaching encourages direct investigation of truth, fostering personal responsibility that naturally extends to social engagement. Bhante references the Buddha's own political involvement, including his prevention of King Ajātasattu's invasion of the Vajji Confederacy, showing how awakened wisdom engages constructively with worldly affairs.

The essay concludes with practical guidance for those caught in nihilistic patterns, recommending the cultivation of compassion (similar to mettā practice) as a means of re-engaging with society. By developing patient, caring attitudes toward global suffering, practitioners can move from despair to skillful action, embodying the Buddhist ethic of personal responsibility that benefits all beings.

We are now well into post-truth where it seems there are always 'alternative facts'. We simply don't know who are the interested parties giving out the news, or we do know but we don't know which one to believe. Even when we do know which one we believe, we know there is bias. So, we can never be certain we have enough true information to make an informed decision. This has now become virtually impossible with Generative AI, such as ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer), able to produce an endless stream of concocted images, videos, script and conversation, mimicking human intelligence, yet without an iota of sentiment or wisdom. This can lead to a blind acceptance of anything which fits into our own bias or a healthy scepticism.^[i] Another reaction would be to say, 'I can't verify anything so I'll believe in nothing.' This takes us towards Nihilism -A theory promoting the state of believing in nothing, or of having no allegiances and no purposes.OED. In other words, this lack of assurance can produce in us a lack of self-confidence and stultifies us into doing nothing. When a person finds

themselves in this position it can be very disorienting. The ground upon which the understanding of life, morality, politics and social relationships simply disappears. When I left Roman Catholicism, I entered into a phase of this sort of nihilism. Everything I had been taught about God and religion, the purpose of life, seemed so much fantasy. I felt lost and yet coming to terms with a loss of spiritual certainty was strangely reassuring. (I was young, 21!) It made me come face to face with death which makes the whole of life seem a joke. I found a home in Existentialism and especially the work of Albert Camus (*The Myth of Sisyphus*) who said life had no ultimate purpose and was basically meaningless, yet we should try to make the best of it. This would have been described by the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, as an 'active nihilism' where we do away with what we do not believe in, but then seek a solution. Morally we decide for ourselves what is virtue and what is vice. Politically, we decide what is needed. As active nihilists, we will be driven to change all institutions, media outlets, political and social structures that we no longer see as fit for purpose. It gets very close to Anarchism which wants to replace any formal and hierarchical structures, with individual actions and voluntary associations. These days such a political, social and economic theory is best represented by Libertarianism^[ii]. The danger, of course, is that we are presuming that our own wisdom is more insightful than any other. Just because a group of us agrees does not make it necessarily right. I/we are right, so everyone else must be wrong! It is easier to put aside one's disbelief and just run with the crowd. Or not care and become apathetic about the way things are. We might find ourselves taking such positions when it comes to the connection between Neoliberalism and Climate Crisis. Neoliberalism based on the attitudes of greed and competition, is the driving force behind the industries and investment that support climate crisis. No viable alternative seems to be in the offing. Not believing there is a solution we lose hope and do nothing. This is what Nietzsche termed 'passive nihilism'. We would then be living our lives in bad faith^[iii], betraying our ability to act according to our conscience, no matter how small the act. We may find ourselves in a similar situation in the polycrisis that threatens us. One of the qualities of the Dhamma that attracts people is that the teaching is put to us as something to investigate to find out if it is true for ourselves. There is no compulsion to believe. In fact, to believe would undermine the desire to investigate and so render impossible the liberation that comes from realising the truth for ourselves. We are responsible for our own awakening. In this way the Buddhadhamma, since we are embedded in society, becomes an expression of an ethic of personal responsibility which reaches out to others. This naturally leads to engagement in society in whatever way we can at all levels – social, economic and political. The Buddha had much to say about establishing an equitable society. He talked about the qualities of kingship and false assertions supporting the caste system. The Buddha, as our exemplar, had to deal with many political situations. He was no stranger to kings and their machinations. By his subtle advice, for in-

stance, he prevented the new King Ajatasattu of Magadha from invading the democratic Vajji Confederacy. Such a perspective demands freedom of expression and the right to make one's views known and have some weight by voting. But equally important is the right to truthful corporations, truthful reporting, truthful politicians. Otherwise, it is not possible for a democracy to function and the way is open to demagogues with easy answers. If we find we may have fallen into error of Nihilism and want to re-engage, for that is what the Dhamma asks of us, we can stimulate a more positive mind-set by developing compassion. This is similar to the practice of Mettā, using a few phrases and offering them to ourselves and to all the categories until we offer our compassion to all beings in all directions. For example: First some phrase to captivate the state we are in: The world is in a dangerous place. The misery from many causes is mounting. May I develop the forgiving, patient and caring attitude to engage and do what I can for the benefit of others. (It doesn't have to be so long-winded!) If this is all we can do, it is enough. Our mindset will affect the way we meet with others. This TEDx presentation by Nolen Gertz, a philosopher who has written widely on Nihilism^[iv], points to the subtle ways this nihilistic attitude expresses itself. Just came across this article by Naomi Klein^[i] Deep Fake! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S951cdansBI>^[ii] Libertarianism believes that people should be free to think and behave as they want and should not have limits put on them by governments.^[iii] In the philosophy of existentialism, bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) is the psychological phenomenon whereby individuals act inauthentically, by yielding to the external pressures of society to adopt false values and disown their innate freedom as sentient human beings.^[1] The same can be said when we opt out of engaging in society. (My comment.)^[iv] For further introduction, see Nolen Gertz essay *Nihilism*. He has also written a book with the same title.

Neo-Fascism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

This essay explores how the Buddha's teaching on the three conceits (māna) - feeling superior, inferior, or equal to others - manifests in contemporary political movements, particularly neo-fascism. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how the subtle third conceit, where individual ego merges with group identity ('we are right'), creates self-righteousness amplified by collective validation. He traces how modern neo-fascist movements have evolved from racial theories to cultural purity arguments, still rooted in fear and hatred of the 'other' threatening one's constructed identity.

The essay examines how these movements exploit the delusive sense of a permanent self that seeks grounding in nationality, religion, or ideology. When this constructed identity feels threatened, fear and hatred arise more powerfully than love and compassion. Bhante contrasts this authoritarian tendency with the Buddha's democratic model for the Saṅgha, which rejected hierarchical leadership in favor of collective decision-making guided by the Vinaya. The monastic community structure, based on mutual respect and reciprocal service with lay supporters, offers an alternative vision for society grounded in wisdom rather than fear-based identity.

The Buddha talked of three conceits: I am better than, worse than and equal to. The first is straight forward pride. The second is an inverse pride either through a lack of self-esteem or a masquerade for humility. The third is perhaps the most subtle because in this case we identify with the group that resonates with us and so the small 'I' becomes 'we'. We can see this happening wherever a group has formed around an ideology or a religion. I am right and everyone else is wrong. I am more right because there are lots of other people who think like me. This is self-righteousness magnified by the self-righteousness of others. One such example is the growing shift from Liberal Democracy to Illiberal Democracy which is none other than Neo-Fascism. Fascism rooted itself in the identity given by race and country, based on racial theories, long proven unscientific, on Social Darwinism and the identity that comes from the Nation. It was driven by fear of the loss of such identities and hatred towards those who were seen as threatening those identities. This was taken to its logical conclusion by Nazism which spilt humans into Aryans and non-Aryans. These days the ground has shifted away from racial theories to cultural purity: 'All races are equal, but each culture should remain pure because I am my culture. My culture is grounded on this ground, my country. Each culture should return to its own country.' Still based on race, such Neo-Fas-

cist ideology has added to the growing challenge of immigration. Unfortunately fear and hatred will always be stronger than love and compassion. The reason is because for most the meaning of life is based upon the delusive sense of a real, unchanging self. When self can define itself according to its beliefs – nationality, religion, ideology, it feels robust, real, ME! If it fails to do so, the self feels ungrounded, confused and lost. However, there is a safety and community to be found in like-minded people who suffer from the same fear and hatred. This is most clearly expressed in the Great Replacement Conspiracy where the indigenous European i.e. white population, is being replaced by non-European immigrants. Yet the irony is that the European civilisation has always been a melting pot of myriad peoples and their cultures – Romano-Greek, Celt, Germanic Scandinavian tribes, Huns, Turks, Mongols, Semitic and North African peoples. Most coalesced around Christianity during the Middle Ages and yet all the varied nations keep their different cultures. Neo-Fascism is a growing political movement. Most Western countries now have a mainstream Neo-Fascist party e.g. Hungary's Fidesz, Poland's Law and Justice Party, Italy's Fratelli d'Italia are in power. Others such as France's Front National, Germany's AfD and the right wing of the Republican Party even if not in power, pressure the traditional conservatives (and at times the Far Left e.g. on issues such as immigration) to adopt some of their policies and rhetoric. In this way, their ideas infect the whole body politic. In the UK the voting system of first past the post makes it virtually impossible for minority parties to find a seat in Parliament. Even so due to mounting pressure from the Far Right within the Conservative Government as well as the UKIP re-incarnation as Reform, the UK is showing signs of this move toward Neo-Fascism in its immigration policy, laws restricting demonstrations, attacks on the Judiciary and increasing ease with breaking international laws. Unlike Fascism which gained power through violence outside the democratic system, Neo-Fascists have learnt how to use the democratic system to win power for its racist, homophobic, and xenophobic agenda via various media. Once in power they begin to dissolve democracy. How this is done is clearly described in Ece Temelkuran's *How to Lose a Country: The Seven Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*, which describes Erdogan's rise to autocracy in Turkey. For those of us committed to democracy, no matter how imperfect it is, these are troubling times. Winston Churchill once said that: "democracy is the worst form of government – except for all the others that have been tried." The Buddha was nurtured in a tribal system where a man from the Warrior caste would be elected as leader. His role was to head a council. Monarchies were by then well established and indeed the Sakyas were vassals to the King of Kosala. But the Buddha did not choose this authoritarian way to run the order. He did not leave a successor. He left the ordained Sangha with a constitution, a rule, the Vinaya, that did not allow anyone to be the leader. And he established ways in which disputes could be settled. Theravada Buddhism is structured on the Vihara, dwelling places for monastics, and monasteries.

Monastics living together as a community know each other well and by way of discussion decide who should be the spiritual guide of their community. The Abbot or Abbess has authority by way of respect not fear. They are an authority not authority, though they have natural powers that come with leadership. It is their duty to maintain harmony in the community. What is more, the institutions are entirely dependent on laypeople for support who must also feel they benefit from the Sangha, by way of talks, blessings and meditation instructions. In this way, the Buddha has given us a model on how society might be developed – one based on mutual respect and reciprocal service.

The Gift of Joy: Muditā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the often-overlooked spiritual dimension of joy, examining both its benefits and the common fears around attachment that can undermine our capacity for happiness. Drawing from his monastic experience and observations of ascetic tendencies, he addresses the balance between enjoying life's pleasures and maintaining non-attachment, showing how awareness of desire can prevent greed without sacrificing joy.

The essay particularly focuses on muditā (appreciative joy) — one of the four brahmavihāra — explaining how finding joy in others' happiness naturally undermines envy and jealousy while increasing our own wellbeing. Bhante discusses 'restorative joy' as a practical tool for lifting the heart from dullness and apathy, whether through mindful appreciation of simple pleasures like tea or engaging with beauty in nature and friendship.

Practical guidance includes daily acknowledgment of joys, weekly reflection on life's positive moments, and formal muditā practice modeled on mettā meditation. The teaching emphasizes how we tend to remember pain more vividly than joy, offering concrete methods to redress this imbalance and cultivate greater appreciation for the happiness already present in our lives.

Consider the many nouns we have for joy: pleasure, enjoyment, happiness, gladness, delight, thrill, exultation, elation, bliss, ecstasy, rapture. And it is all good! The Buddha was asked how he felt when people did not accept his teaching. He said he was OK with that. It was all to do with the person's karma. But if they did accept and followed his teaching, he was joyful. Yet in terms of practice like Mettā, no teacher of mine gave us an exercise to develop joy. But whenever I would point to something beautiful, my Burmese teacher reminded me it would corrupt and die! They were afraid of the attachment. Which is that desire to want more or more of the same. That's why the Buddha asks us to exercise restraint! However, the fear of indulgence can undermine joy. There was a Western monk who was the picture of an ascetic, thin, serious with shallow cheeks. When we were offered the delicious Buffalo curd, he waited till we had all but finished. Then he picked up the dessert bowl and tipped it down his throat, for fear of tasting its deliciousness! Of course, the seeds of greed are always there ready to be indulged. But whenever we have had a joyful time, if we become aware of the desire for more and just wait for it to expire, we will have undermined the greed that was activated there. We can use joy to lift our hearts - Restorative Joy. Wandering around a

park, meeting up with a friend, watching a good film all go to lift us out of the dumps. The monastic life can become very samey. Nothing much happens. And sometimes I found myself moving towards dullness, apathy. Only then did I realise the power of a long, mindful mug of tea. Mudita is often translated as Appreciative or Reciprocal joy - the joy in other's joy. This undermines envy and jealousy. And that in itself makes us happier. To find you can actually be more joyful for another than yourself can be a revelation. This is not so strange to parents when a daughter or son finds success. Why is it we remember mostly the painful occasions of the day? Because they hurt! But in so doing, they shadow out the joys. If you sit quietly at the end of the day and count the joys, you may be surprised to find you can't really bring any to mind. Yet there will have been lots of joys, at various levels throughout the day. We simply don't note them. How to increase our joy. A resolution to daily acknowledge the joys that come our way and purposefully develop joy. Write them up daily and see how you feel at the end of the week. Spend a week recalling all the joys of your life so far. It's not been that bad after all. Practice developing joy as you would Mettā, going through all the categories. May I/you be joyful! May I/you be ever more joyful! (optional) May I/you attain the sublime bliss of Nibbana. Highly recommended spiritual practice!

'We just follow circumstance.' — Bhante Bodhidhamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

Drawing from a profound Zen saying by Dōgen Zenji about following circumstance even when 'the world ends,' Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how Buddhist practice prepares us for the most challenging situations life can present. Using contemporary examples of global crises—thermonuclear war, climate catastrophe, and natural disasters—he examines two fundamentally different responses to overwhelming circumstances.

The essay contrasts the self-preserving reaction that tightens around ego-protection with a fearless acceptance that expands to embrace the full situation of ourselves and others. When we identify strongly with this human form, we become trapped in existential loneliness and the very fires we seek to escape—what Buddhism recognizes as the Hell Realm. However, through cultivating Right Awareness and developing an 'unshakeable heart,' we discover a deeper refuge that cannot be breached by external circumstances.

Bhante Bodhidhamma reveals how genuine vipassanā practice develops satipañña—the intuitive wisdom that allows us to remain both fully engaged with challenging circumstances and inwardly stable. This teaching shows how Buddhist training transforms our relationship to crisis, moving from self-obsessed suffering toward compassionate collaborative response, ultimately discovering the refuge of awakened awareness that remains unshaken regardless of external conditions.

I came across this saying from Dōgen Zenji, the founder of Japanese Sōtō Zen. “When the world ends, and the fires blaze unobstructed through everything, and all falls to ruin, we just follow circumstance.” (Kinder Smith) There are two possible ways in which we, all life in fact, could fall to ruin by fire at this present time – thermonuclear war and climate crisis. We have seen from massive earthquakes, most recently the devastation in Turkey and Syria, what the consequences are. Immediate death, long term physical pain and anguish and eventual death, disabled for life and lives filled with grief and despair. And the possible aftermath of political instability and social turmoil. In such a scenario, will we be able to ‘just follow circumstance’. At first this phrase may seem too cool to be true, even callous. Does it mean we have to harden our hearts, stay aloof and save ourselves. Or might that circumstance expand beyond its tight self-centred circumference to embrace the full surround of impact on others. That can only arise from a fearless total acceptance, ‘this is the circumstance now’, the total circum-

stance of myself and others in this situation, recognising that collaborative effort will produce the best results for everyone. And to mourn shared loss together most healing. In encompassing others, we lose the suffering of self-obsession. In its most exemplary expression to give up one's life for another. That is a hard ask for the self will be consumed with self-preservation. The more we identify with this human form, the more will the circumference tighten around us. But this will not release us from the fear and despair. Worse, it will magnify it. The self will stand exposed to its essential existential loneliness. Unable to bear the suffering, the self becomes the very fires it seeks to escape. This is the Hell Realm. Is there an alternative? An escape? A refuge? There is an even deeper circumference within us of a different kind, one that cannot be breached. No matter what fires burn within us or outside us once accessed we find ourselves insulated and yet able to 'follow circumstance'. Both fully aware and mindful, engaged fully in the surrounding situation, we discover the Unshakeable Heart. This is the purpose of our practice: to discover and experience over and over until we settle permanently into that intuitive awareness, Satipanya.

To Love or To Be Loved. That is the Question.

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines the subtle difference between loving others genuinely and seeking to be loved to satisfy our own psychological needs. Bhante Bodhidhamma draws on both Buddhist psychology and Western psychoanalytic insights to explore how the anusaya (latent tendencies) influence our relationships. He explains how early separation from maternal union creates a lifelong longing for connection that can distort our expressions of love into unconscious strategies for gaining approval and reassurance.

The essay reveals how insecurity about our sense of self drives us to seek validation through relationships, leading to anxiety about being liked and good enough. When we offer love primarily to receive love in return, we develop neediness and selfishness that ultimately undermines genuine connection. Paradoxically, when our intentions genuinely focus on caring for others' wellbeing without expecting gratitude, natural self-esteem and virtue arise.

Bhante offers practical guidance for cultivating pure loving: heightening awareness of our intentions, ensuring conscious wholesome choices, and daily reflection on our motivations in conversations and actions. This teaching provides valuable insight for anyone seeking to transform relationships from ego-driven transactions into expressions of genuine mettā (loving-kindness).

The Buddhadhamma teaches that we have unconscious desires, the anusaya, latent tendencies. The habits we have formed lie beneath our conscious life and rise only when some stimulus activates a given unskillful reaction. But like little devils, the anusaya are always there influencing the way we behave. Freud also was well aware of this and we have the 'Freudian slip' to tell us how embarrassed we can be by such unwelcome intervention. The whole area of love is fraught with such little devils. And we have to ask ourselves constantly: Am I thinking, saying and doing this as an expression of love for the other or as a means to get them to love me, appreciate me or both? According to psychoanalysis, as babies we are utterly identified with our mothers. As the necessary separation takes place so we can become individuals in our own right, we lose the safety and warmth of that union. So there is a longing to re-establish such a heavenly union for the rest of our lives. One reason why falling in love is so enthralling, is because it reminds us of that earlier union with our mothers. The Dhamma digs a little deeper to the sense of self and how it drives us to seek delight 'now here, now

there'. But it sits on a bed of insecurity, highlighted only when the shadow of death is glimpsed. There is no greater reassurance in that dread than the embrace of another. False refuge, yet it does serve to allay the sickled ghost. In that need, we find ourselves unconsciously offering our love in order to be loved. Yet in doing so, we are developing all the neediness and selfishness that insecurity can develop. We become anxious about whether we are liked or not, good enough or not. We must butter up our self-esteem by doing good for the other, impressing the other. We find ourselves going over the top to help and find we are even becoming nuisances. Rejection for such 'generous offering' stings and we tend to blame the other for their ingratitude. 'I have done so much for you' Paradoxically, when all our intentions bend to love, to care for the other, sensitive to their needs, we find that self-esteem arises naturally. Such is the product of virtue. There is no need for appreciation or gratitude to be expressed. What practice can we set ourselves to move towards a pure loving? First, we must heighten our sense of awareness around our intentions now that we are forewarned. Second, we must be sure the intention is a fully conscious act so that the unwholesome intentions are not reinforced and so, unexercised, simply wither. And the reflection after any conversation or act and especially at the end of the day, gently pointing to errors and being joyful at successes that lead to a greater love and care.

Saṃsāra: Doomed to Suffer Over and Over Again?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this contemplative essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the repetitive patterns of saṃsāra through the lens of human conflict and suffering. Drawing from William Blake's poetry and contemporary global tensions, he explores how the three unwholesome roots—greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha)—perpetuate cycles of violence and discord throughout history.

The essay references the Dhammapada (verse 5) teaching that 'hatred is never overcome by hatred, but by goodwill and love alone,' using the European Union's post-war reconciliation as an example of how former enemies can transcend their destructive patterns. Bhante Bodhidhamma suggests that while saṃsāra appears to doom us to repeated suffering, the very experience of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) creates the conditions for seeking liberation.

The teaching concludes with hope grounded in our Buddha-nature (here called 'Satipanya, the Buddha Within'), suggesting that wisdom's triumph over delusion represents the natural trajectory of all sentient beings. This essay offers both a sobering analysis of human conflict and an inspiring reminder of our potential for awakening beyond the cycles of saṃsāra.

This is the world of an ever onward going scenario, Samsara, where history repeats its dramas, with the same basic plot, over and over again, driven by the usual suspects – acquisitiveness, aversion (fear and hatred) and delusion. There is always a lull, a respite, after the fighting. New ideas emerge. New organisations to keep the peace are confirmed by all involved. Peace reigns. Commerce flourishes. A generalised atmosphere of safety allows happiness to arise. The people are content. And then ...

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

William Blake

There are lots of interpretations of this enigmatic poem. I take the rose to be humankind and the bed of crimson joy the potential that is destroyed by the worm of delusion. The dark secret love is the delusion manifest as a cramped individual self that surrounds itself with barriers but has within its confines a tunnel vision of love centred on the 'sovereign self' or the proletariat or the nation or race or religion. It supports itself with likeminded other tunnel visioned selves that prove 'I am right and everyone else is wrong'. It is the glory of the European Union that after centuries of killing each other,

culminating in two massive wars, that 35 odd nations have settled into a co-abiding that makes war between them difficult to imagine. It took especially the courage of the main protagonists, Germany and France, to lead to the post-war cooperation. It is based on the Élysée Treaty, which was signed by Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer on 22 January 1963 – 18 years after the end of WWII! Elsewhere other conflicts continue[i] or new ones emerge, most of all in the European mind, the invasion of Ukraine and the war in Israel-Palestine. At what point do adversaries realise that violence only feeds violence? Surely it is when they realise that there will be no end to the conflict. Wars do come to an end, but at what enormous cost! Hatred and violence are never overcome by hatred and violence. It is appeased only by goodwill and love. This is an ancient law. Dhp. 5 Each side will have its own reasons and if we stand where they are, we are able to let go of the bias of the western media. It allows us to see that each side has good reasons which makes the conflict, in their own eyes, worthy of the sacrifice. This does not justify the violence but allows us not to take sides and argue for mediation and compromise. We lack great leadership that stands above the fray, which is not cowed by the 'electorate' nor seduced by vested interests. This is my deepest despair for us all. Commentators aplenty. Politicians by the thousands. But no international figure with an over arching vision to inspire us. But then my despair may be set on a false premise. Perhaps the world has to burn whether by war or climate crisis, perhaps there has to be a universal catastrophe before desperation declares there must be a better way! This was true for Europe. As in some of our own personal dramas, when everything falls apart, there comes the choice between hopelessness or renewal. So, we should live in hope. Not expectation! But a hope based on our essential nature, Satipanya, the Buddha Within. The Dhamma will prevail! Wisdom will overcome delusion because that is the inner trajectory of every sentient being. The Buddha tells us that it is Dukkha itself (unsatisfactoriness, suffering) that makes us seek the end of Dukkha.[i] https://war-memorial.net/wars_all.asp?q=3

Compassion: To Care

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

This teaching examines the Buddhist understanding of compassion (karuṇā) through the lens of both empathy and action. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores the Pali term anukampā—the Buddha's trembling heart that resonates with others' suffering—as the foundation for compassionate response. He distinguishes between the passive mode of compassion, where we simply accompany those who suffer (particularly valuable for the dying), and the active mode of skillful intervention.

The essay addresses common pitfalls in compassionate action, particularly the 'Do-Gooder Syndrome'—the compulsive need to help driven by ego rather than genuine care. Through practical examples, it emphasizes the importance of asking what others actually need rather than imposing our own ideas of help. Key qualities for authentic compassion include patience (khanti), tolerance when facing others' anger or frustration, and commitment to sustained care.

Drawing from both Buddhist wisdom and contemporary insights, this teaching offers practical guidance for developing genuine compassion that serves others rather than our own need to feel useful. It reminds us that compassionate action naturally flows from recognizing the support we ourselves have received, leading to what the author describes as the paradox of the profoundly happy compassionate heart.

It all begins with empathy. I was going to write sympathy, but these days it has a touch of pity or insincerity about it, but I would like to use the word to say that even if we have not had a similar experience, we can imagine what it is like. The root words add up to feel-together. Whereas empathy means you have had a similar experience, the word can be used by someone who is actually imagining what the other is experiencing. I've never been a refugee. I can only imagine what it's like. The Buddha uses the word, *anukampa*. *Kampa* means to tremble or quiver and *anua* a sense of movement towards. So the Buddha says that out of this *anukampa*, the trembling of the heart resonating with someone, he has done all he can for his disciples. *Karuna* (rk karma), the word we usually translate as compassion, comes from a root Vedic word which means a holy action, a sacrament. So here we have the passive state of sympathising or empathising *anukampa* and then the action, *karuna*. If there is no action, no follow through, it is compassion unfulfilled which can leave you feeling ashamed of yourself and guilty, grieving even that you did not follow your heart's desire. Compassion then is a response

to the empathic or sympathetic connection with another's suffering. And there are two modes, a passive and active mode. In the passive mode we are able to simply be with, accompany the one who is suffering. That can be a great solace to someone, especially if they are dying. This can be difficult for us because we always want to do something, understandably. I heard a story of an elderly woman in a hospital who late in the night asked a nurse to come and stay with her while she died. So, it takes a moment of reflection to accept our powerlessness – I can't do anything for this person in their suffering, but I can accompany them. Beware the Do-Gooder Syndrome! There are situations where we can do something, and this can lead us into the error of over-doing. So, it's important to ask the person what they want of us. We can make a suggestion, of course, but be accepting if they don't want it, even when we know that it would better their situation. Otherwise, we fall into the error of the compulsive do-gooder. That's when we do the good we want to do for the other whether they want it or not! Such a compulsion comes from the need to be loved, to be wanted, to be useful, connected to self-esteem. We may visit someone who is temporarily incapacitated with offers to cook them a meal, only to find someone else has been, leaving food. How do we react if the person then says, but there is something you could do for me. 'I'd be really grateful you would clean the toilet.' The do-gooder in us also has a tendency to volunteer help without reflection. A sort of reflex compassion and then we regret it. A friend says they are ill and you volunteer to do their shopping on Saturday morning. And then you find yourself grumbling that the last thing you want to do on a Saturday morning is go shopping! All sorts of excuses leap into the mind. 'I really don't feel well.' 'My mother is sick and I'll have to go and help her.' 'I can smell gas and have to wait for the engineer.' All to be preceded by profuse apologies. I had such an occasion, but out of friendliness to help someone decorate their flat. I decided there was a lesson to be learnt here and made myself keep my promise. It stopped me being so impulsive in the future. Patience is often called for - patient forbearance, that willingness to bear. My mother was suffering the first signs of dementia caused by little capillaries bursting in her brain. One day I had reason to visit the elderly lady who lived next door and she told me my mother would come every day to talk and say the same thing! I thanked her for her kind patience. If the person turns their anger towards us because we didn't do this or that, or we did but we didn't do it properly, or we're more of a hindrance than help, then patience takes on a hue of tolerance. We are often angry with ourselves for being ill or incapacitated. Reminding ourselves of that helps us to bear with a certain amount of abuse, that is until we see the person is not just expressing their anger, but actually indulging it. And, of course, it takes commitment that demands a certain dedication to helping someone. Compassionate action arises more easily when we consider the assistance and support we have received throughout our lives. And it is a seeming paradox that the compassionate heart is a profoundly happy heart. Pope Francis puts it beauti-

fully:"Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves. Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is life is good when you are happy, but much better when others are happy because of you."

Karuṇā: A Path of Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This teaching examines compassion (karuṇā) as the second aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path - Right Attitude (sammā saṅkappa) - showing how it naturally follows from Right Understanding. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how unwholesome mental states like selfishness, hatred, and cruelty transform into their opposites: generosity, loving-kindness, and compassion. This transformation occurs as we recognise the discomfort caused by unwholesome states and cultivate the desire for purification.

The essay demonstrates how compassion connects directly with the teaching of not-self (anattā). Through everyday interactions - conversations, shared meals, relationships - we experience the constant flux of words, images, and feelings that reveal no fixed 'self' exists in isolation. Our sense of identity shifts from 'me' to 'we' as we recognise our interconnectedness with all beings.

Drawing from personal experience with sciatica, Bhante illustrates how understanding that suffering is universal - not unique or noble - naturally leads to compassion for all beings who experience similar pain. The essay concludes by referencing Tibetan Tonglen practice as a method for dismantling the barriers created by believing in independent existence, showing how true happiness emerges paradoxically when self-centredness transforms into universal compassion.

Although Right Understanding stands first on the Eightfold Path and is certainly the accent of the Buddha's teaching, the second is Right Attitude. Here we find selfishness transforming into generosity, hatred into love and cruelty into compassion, and implied all unwholesome mental states turn into their opposite. The inner discomfort and distress caused by unwholesome mental states raises the desire to be rid of them and to make constant effort to purify our hearts. In so doing, we find ourselves becoming more generous, more loving, more caring. And these virtues connect us with fellow humans and all sentient beings. Our behaviour moves towards spontaneous response, appropriate to the given circumstance – giving freely, rejoicing and caring. Our relationships change from 'me' to 'we'. Sometimes we care for the other by allowing them to care for us! This is the experience of not-self in action. Since we are in a constant state of flux where words, images, feelings and sensations resonate within us, you can never point to anything and say that is solely me or solely mine. Just become aware of talking to anyone and realising that you are receiving words that produce images in your mind,

feelings that resonate in your heart and that we are responding and causing the similar conditions to arise in them. This is true also for the pleasures and joys of life as when we share a spoonful of a served dish with the other and we delight in a spoonful of theirs. These Tips I write are distilled from articles and books. This not-self, then, is not pointing to some abstruse proposition that we have to grasp intellectually. It points to a way of being and behaving in the world that is not governed by an insular sense of who I am, cosseted by a few, but alienated from the many. Although developing compassion became almost if not more important than developing wisdom in later Buddhism, the one feeds into the other. Our insight practice leads us to understanding and directly experiencing not-self in that this organism does not constitute a whole entire, self-existent being, but is made up of parts over which we have little control, manifested primarily in that we cannot stop the process of ageing and death. And any wrong view leads to suffering at some level or another. And I'm not alone. This leads to contemplating that all beings suffer. When my prolapsed disc gave me debilitating sciatica, it's good for me to remember I'm not the only one. My suffering is not especially unique and noble! Or as Samuel Beckett puts it: Is there any suffering loftier than mine? As I offer patient forbearance to myself, I then make an offering that all beings suffering from sciatica may develop patient forbearance. It was a comfort to me when retreatant said he had suffered from severe sciatica himself and was on crutches off and on for two years and he fully recovered. It gave me the courage to keep on bearing up with the pain rather than going for an operation which my doctor and everyone else was telling me to avoid. Even the spinal consultant warned me to keep away from spinal surgeons!!! The Tibetan Tonglen Practice[i] helps us dismantle the barriers created by the belief that we are independent beings. In this way our self-centredness, transforming into generosity and compassion, expands to embrace all sentient beings. And there, paradoxically we find our true happiness.

Fifth Maxim: Develop the Body and Mind

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay examines the fifth of six ethical maxims proposed for preparing for climate catastrophe, focusing on training the body and mind to deal with despair. Noirin Sheahan draws profound connections between these contemporary recommendations and core Buddhist teachings, particularly the Ānāpānasati Sutta's breathing exercises and the doctrine of not-self (anattā).

The essay explores how the Buddha's own journey from despair to awakening mirrors our current need to develop physiological and psychological resilience. It examines how breathing practices can calm body and mind, how maintaining physical health supports spiritual development, and how understanding the illusory nature of ego can liberate us from unnecessary suffering. The teaching emphasizes that clinging to a substantial sense of self creates emotional and physical burdens that manifest as tension, illness, and distress.

Drawing from the opening verses of the Dhammapada and the Buddha's own experiences with asceticism and the middle way, the essay demonstrates how Buddhist practice prepares us not just for personal liberation, but for serving others during times of collective crisis. It suggests that those who can meet despair with Right Awareness will become increasingly vital for maintaining hope and preventing social chaos as climate impacts intensify.

This tip looks at the 5th of the six maxims which have been suggested as ethical preparation for climate catastrophe. The authors, David Schenck and Larry Churchill, believe that we are heading towards social collapse due to the unstoppable consequences of Climate Change and that the trauma of losing so much of what we take for granted – like food, water, social stability – will lead to huge levels of stress and mental illness. My purpose in writing these tips is to tease out some links between these maxims and the Dhamma. The fifth maxim advises us to train the body and mind. Here's what they say: Learn breathing exercises. Develop the physiological capacity to deal with despair. Despair isn't just psychological, it's physiological. Learn skills for getting beyond ego—not just the cognitive limits of ego, which many are at least familiar with pondering, but the emotional and physiological limits of ego. Training the mind is central to the Dhamma. The first verse of the Dhammapada tells us that all our suffering is mind-made: Speak or act with an impure mind -Suffering follows, just as the wheel of the ox-cart follows the footsteps of the ox. Speak or act with a pure mind -Happiness follows, as

surely as our shadow follows our footsteps. Although the body plays a central role in the Buddha's teaching, it is always as a means for training the mind. In a similar vein, the six maxim authors aren't advocating fitness for its own sake, but for the sake of dealing with despair. Thus their advice has many resonances with the Dhamma: Breathing exercises: The Anapanasati Sutta lists a number of breathing exercises. These start with mindfulness, knowing when we're breathing in and when we're breathing out. They include the kind of yogic breathing exercises David and Larry are indicating e.g. using the breath to calm the body and mind, to develop pleasant feeling, to gladden the mind & develop concentration. The need to deal with despair: Despair was what fuelled the Buddha's quest for enlightenment: his early life of luxury was rendered meaningless once he realised that this would end in sickness, aging and death. His whole teaching, he said, could be reduced to a simple statement: there is suffering and there is an end to suffering. Having transcended his own despair we can be confident that the Dhamma will teach us to do likewise. Develop the physiological capacity to deal with despair: The Buddha's first attempts at spiritual development started with deeply concentrated forms of meditation. Seeing these gave only a temporary respite from despair he went on to practice strenuous asceticism. On the verge of death from starvation and hardship he abandoned this approach, accepted a bowl of rice-milk and went on to discover his own path to liberation. Taking the rice-milk indicates the need for physical energy in order to make his spiritual breakthrough. While body building isn't lauded as a virtue in his teaching, he encouraged people to maintain good health e.g. to do walking meditation so as to develop energy, health and aid digestion; to eat healthy food like rice-gruel so as to enjoy health, strength and a comfortable abiding. Ego limitations manifest not only cognitively, but emotionally and physiologically: In Dhamma terminology, we suffer because we cling to the wrong view of self. This suffering manifests as emotional burdens like greed and aversion, which have physical aspects – for some it might be muscular tension, for others headaches, stomach upsets, breathing difficulties. Getting beyond the ego: This is one way of describing the teaching on 'Not-Self'. Believing there is a substantial core to the person we call 'me', we suffer when things go wrong for us – when we get blamed or mistreated, when we fall ill or become incapacitated, when we lose those we love. The Buddha does not deny the suffering, or the fact that it is happening to the person I call 'me'. Caring deeply for that person, he would respond with compassion, while knowing the suffering as unnecessary, based on mistaken identification with body and mind, with the person called 'me'. All our practice is aimed at seeing through this illusion, so as to gain the peace and joy of liberation. This penultimate maxim resonates well with the Buddha's teaching. Despair will emerge for all of us as we witness the increasing impact of climate change on nature, on vulnerable communities as our own food supplies and social structures grow ever less reliable. Can we take the coming storm to heart, prepare ourselves as advised in the 5th Maxim? If we

care for our body as the necessary basis for learning the Dhamma, train body and mind according to the Anapanasati and other suttas, we will be ready to let it become part of our path to the end of suffering. When despair becomes widespread in society, those of us who can meet it mindfully will become ever more important in preserving hope, preventing a decline into chaos.

The Buddha's Alter Ego: The World Conquering Monarch

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 6 min read

This essay examines the Buddha's fascinating parallel between spiritual awakening and righteous political leadership through the myth of the Cakkavatti (World Conquering Monarch). Born into the warrior Kshatriya class, the Buddha could have become either a Self-Awakened Buddha or a world emperor according to ancient predictions. Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the Buddha's teaching on the Cakkavatti serves as his political 'alter ego' - a ruler who conquers through the Dhammacakka (Dhamma Wheel) rather than violence.

The essay details the Seven Treasures of the Cakkavatti, paralleling the Seven Factors of Awakening, and emphasizes how this mythical emperor rules through adherence to the Five Precepts and the Dasa Rāja Dhamma (Ten Royal Virtues). These include dāna (generosity), sīla (morality), and ahimsā (non-violence). The teaching illustrates how ethical governance creates lasting peace until moral decay inevitably leads to societal collapse.

Drawing on the Buddha's real-world political involvement - including his counsel to kings like Ajātasattu and his advice to the Vajji Federation - the essay demonstrates how spiritual wisdom directly applies to governance and social responsibility. The Buddha's preference for democratic federations over monarchies reflects his understanding that sustainable leadership requires collective wisdom guided by Dhamma and Vinaya, making this teaching profoundly relevant for contemporary political engagement.

This year, 2024, will see scores of elections across the world! When the Buddha was born, eight soothsayers, eight wise men came to see him and seven of them said that he would either be a Self-Awakened Buddha or he would be a World Conquering Monarch. But one of them said, no, he's going to be a fully self-realized awakened Buddha and that's how his life panned out. He belonged to the Kshatriya class, which would be the warrior cast, the aristocracy, the ones who would have led people in war. The rulers! His close friends were all the same. He knew King Bimbisara of Magada on the Ganges and King Pasenadi towards the north in Kosala. And the others were all of his caste. So, he was very familiar with the politics of day which was moving away from a tribal system of choosing their headman to a hereditary monarchical system. As if it were his alter ego, the Buddha offers us a myth about a king who strides the world, overcoming all the other kings, the World Conquering Emperor. How is this Emperor created? One day

an eight spoked wheel, an ancient Indian symbol of conquest, here adapted to the Buddha's story, a Dhammacakka – a Dhamma Wheel, appears in front of a king's balcony. His wise Councillor informs him that this appearance means he is to be the Cakkavattin, One Who Turns the Wheel. And this is to be achieved by following the Dhammacakka wherever it goes. So off he flies into the air with his four-fold army - his infantry, his archers, his chariots, and his elephants. And whenever he comes into a kingdom, the king there does not fight him. He sees that this is a glorious being and he's happy to become his vassal. This is what happened to the Sakka tribe that the Buddha was born into. They had been their own little grouping with their lands, as you may know, in North India, presently part of Nepal. But in time another tribe became more powerful and conquered them. So, they became vassals to the King of Kosala. This had happened to many of the smaller tribes. So, there's already there an inkling of what would happen if the Buddha had decided to become a Cakkavattin. Now a Cakkavattin has Seven Treasurers much as a Self-Awakened Buddha has Seven Factors of Enlightenment. So these include: A miracle wheel, the Dhammacakka A miracle horse which flies through the air A miracle elephant The miracle Gem that casts light for miles around The princess who is a beautiful woman of course. It is said her limbs are cool in the hot season and warm in the cool season" A wise counsellor A successful commander. And so he becomes the Emperor of the whole world. After a lifetime of ruling the Dhammawheel begins to fade and the Emperor knows this is time for him to retire into a seclusive life. But his son does not necessarily become the next Cakkavattin. Yet the wheel does reappear to many of his descendants. But wherein lies the power of this Cakkavattin. He is so strong because of his morality, his ethics. He is committed to the Five Training Rules. And if you bring the first to mind - not to kill any living being, can you imagine what would happen in this world today if everyone took the First Precept only to not kill a human being! And then there's not to steal. Not to use power or wealth to take advantage of people. Not abuse our sexual energy and the huge growth in the pornography industry. And then there's Wrong Speech and all the politicians who tell lies. And then there's not taking anything that is going to disturb clear mindedness. The Monarch also is imbued with the ten virtues, Dasa Raja Dhamma, described by the Buddha for a king. These are essential qualities that contribute to wise and compassionate governance. These virtues are: Generosity (Dāna): a king is generous and giving so people are grateful and loyal. Morality (Sila): He maintains moral integrity that sets a positive example for the citizens. Sacrifice (Pariccāga): He is willing to make a personal sacrifice for the greater good. This shows his commitment to people's welfare. Straightness (Ajjava): He is honest and straightforward in his dealings and this promotes justice and trust. Gentleness (Maddava): He is a mild and gentle governor so reducing conflicts and enhancing peaceful relations. Self-control (Tapa): He practices self-restraint and self-discipline and so avoids indulgence. This allows him to focus on his duties. Non-anger

(Akkodha): He is calm and not give in to anger, critical for making wise decisions. Non-violence (Avihimsa): He promotes harmlessness and non-violence, ensuring the safety and security of all beings. Patience (Khanti): He is endowed with forbearance and tolerance, vital for dealing with adversity and dissent. Non-opposition (Avirodhana): He is a committed advocate for non-conflict and harmony, aiming to resolve disputes amicably and maintain unity. These virtues, of course, not only guide the king in his governance but also serve as principles that can enhance the moral and social fabric of any society. So it is with this ethical integrity and moral authority that the Cakkavattin rules over the whole world. And this rule of peace and justice lasts through six Emperors. Then as always corruption sets in. The seventh Cakkavattin is not committed to the Five Precepts even though his counsellors warn him problems will follow. The first thing that happens is that greed begins to take over and poverty comes to the land. Then one day a person steals. And this is unheard of! So they bring this man to the court, the emperor asks him, why did you steal? And he says I'm poor. I need money to feed my family. I would be happy not to steal. So the king gives him money. But then the rumour spreads if you steal something, the king will give you lots of money. So theft grew. And it grew to a point where the king realised he has made a big mistake. And so when the next thief comes along he has the man executed. Before long because of not sharing the wealth of the Empire all sorts of crimes are committed. And the discourse ends with no solution in sight. Once you let the demon out of the bottle, it's difficult to get it back in. But a reign of justice will begin when the next fully Self-Enlightened Buddha comes and he will be Ariya Metteya. According to canonical scriptures, Ariya Metteyya is the fifth in the lineage of Buddhas (Tathāgata) of the current aeon, and successor of the 28 Buddhas of the past. Ariya means "noble", and Metteyya is derived from the Pali word mātreyya which refers to "one's mother" and "motherloving". In real life the Buddha was involved in many political disputes such as stopping his clan going to war with the Koliya clan on the other side of a shared river. He was often asked for advice by kings and headmen, such as Ajatasattu. He was the young new king of Magadha who took the reins of the kingdom by starving his father to death. This kingdom was situated on the north side of the Ganges whose capital was present day Varanasi or Benaras as it was known in the Buddha's day. He sent a councilor, Brahmin Vassakara, to ask the Buddha if this was a good time to attack the Vajji Federation. This was a federation of clans like the Buddha's who had not been conquered. The Buddha preferred this way of ruling so much so that he did not leave a successor but said that the Sangha should be guided by the Dhamma and the Vinaya (the Rule) he had left. The Buddha answers obliquely and simply lists seven reasons that keep a federation strong. "As long as the Vajjis meet frequently and have many meetings, they can expect growth, not decline. "As long as the Vajjis meet in harmony, leave in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they can expect growth, not decline. "As long as the Vajjis don't make new decrees or abolish

existing decrees, but proceed having undertaken the ancient Vajjian traditions, their constitution, as they have been decreed, they can expect growth, not decline. "As long as the Vajjis honor, respect, esteem, and venerate Vajjian elders, and think them worth listening to, they can expect growth, not decline. "As long as the Vajjis don't forcibly abduct the women or girls of the clans and make them live with them, they can expect growth, not decline. "As long as the Vajjis honor, respect, esteem, and venerate the Vajjian shrines, whether inner or outer, not neglecting the proper spirit-offerings that were given and made in the past, they can expect growth, not decline. "As long as the Vajjis organize proper protection, shelter, and security for perfected ones, so that more perfected ones might come to the realm and those already here may live in comfort, they can expect growth, not decline." Vassakara went back to tell his king it was not a good time. However, the king set about undermining the harmony the kingdom with bribes and subterfuge, false tales, (fake news – there's nothing new!). The Federation began to break up and one day Ajatasattu simply walked in and absorbed it into his kingdom. So here and on many other occasions throughout his teaching life the Buddha was intimately involved in the politics of his day. He knew that his dispensation needed the support of the civil authorities, but more than that he cared for the whole society he lived in. And as our exemplar it behoves us to become involved in whatever way we can with our societies.

There is a Body: Exploring the Mind-Body Relationship

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay by Noirin Sheahan explores a specific meditation exercise from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) - noting 'there is a body' during formal sitting practice. What might seem like stating the obvious becomes a profound investigation into the nature of embodied experience and our relationship with the physical form. Through detailed exploration of her own meditation experience, Sheahan demonstrates how this simple noting practice can lead to profound insights about identification, ownership, and the complex interdependence between mind and body. The essay traces the journey from initial questioning through uncertainty, tension, and changing perceptions, revealing how the body can be experienced as both intimate and other; familiar yet not truly 'mine.' This practice from the Buddha's teachings offers a practical method for healing our often troubled relationship with our physical nature. Rather than taking the miracle of biological existence for granted or trying to escape into mental fantasy, the exercise cultivates objective awareness and gratitude for the body's stability and function. The essay speaks to both the challenge and necessity of our embodied existence, showing how mindful attention can transform our understanding of the mind-body relationship and point toward freedom from the suffering caused by identification with what is ultimately impermanent and not-self.

One of the exercises given in the Satipatthana Sutta (often considered the most important of the Buddha's teachings because it guides us along a 'direct path' to liberation and is suited to both lay and monastic practitioners) is to note: "There is a body" while sitting in formal meditation. This might provoke the thought "Of course there's a body, I'm sitting here, what's the point in stating the obvious?" A perfectly reasonable question. But remember we're in formal meditation, so questions are just another thing to be aware of. So we note "questioning ... questioning" and explore the experience of questioning. What flavours do we find here? The flavour of uncertainty perhaps? That's one I find quite easily in meditation – at least one thing I can usually count on! Changing the noting word to "Unsure ... unsure..." I get a new view of experience. I notice a pinch of tension in my neck. Focussing there, the tension relaxes showing me uncertainty's nebulous aspect. Clouds of doubt may seem to be puffing out of the body. Where am I in all this strangeness? Sometimes I seem to be centred in one or other of the puffing clouds. Sometimes I seem to be lured back inside the tissues of the body. The noting words might change to "heaviness ... heaviness ..." as I register the earthy nature of the body.

The closer I get, the more certain I feel. Something seems reliable at last. For a moment...For a moment I know the hardness and heaviness of the bones in the arms, the back, the legs, the skull, and then uncertainty creeps in again: Whose arms? ... There seem to be arms hanging from my shoulders as usual. And if I try, I can lift them. But the notion 'my arms' doesn't seem to fit. The phrase "There is a body" comes back to mind and now finds resonance. This no longer seems to be stating the obvious, but a lifeline, a way of making sense of a strange and unsettling situation. Knowing the body objectively as fostered by the phrase "there is a body", I sense gratitude for its stability, its powers of movement; for the life it offers, moment after moment. And yet it is, in this moment at least, quite obviously not me, not mine. Another question arises: How can something so close, so intimate, so necessary, be other than me and mine? In answer, fear and aversion displace gratitude, compete for dominance, struggle to proclaim their story. But neither can get a lasting grip on the situation; the body simply breathes through them. It takes no notice, bless it! The body-mind relationship is complex. At times we identify with the body, at other times with some aspect of the mind: feelings, perceptions, habits, consciousness. Its like being made up of a squabbling committee! And yet all our complex mental life, our hopes, fears, ambitions, dreams – all depend on their being a body breathing away quietly in the background, heart pumping, stomach digesting, feet walking. In our delusion, we take this miracle of biology totally for granted. Not a healthy way of relating to our earthly nature. The Satipatthana exercise of noting "there is a body" gives us a practical way of healing the mind-body relationship. Like all intimate relationships, the mind-body one is a challenge. Who likes being totally dependent? And yet here we are, till death do us part, tied up within an unreliable body, full of blood, sweat and tears, liable to pain at any moment, prone to illness, growing older and less able day by day. No wonder the mind tries to deny such an unedifying relationship, escape into fantasy! Luckily the body holds no grudges. And luckily, greed, hatred and delusion are no more permanent and reliable than any other state of mind. Within the gaze of mindfulness, the body is the perfect partner. It puts a limit on fantasies of hope and fear, allows delusion free reign to express displeasure at the chains of mortality. When the storm abates, its there, ready to get on with the practicalities of life. Try the exercise sometime: sit in meditation and note "There is a body". Let the reflection take you on whatever merry-go-round it likes, trusting this as the Buddha's suggestion for how we find freedom from suffering as we heal our mind-body relationship.

Self-love and Self-Acceptance

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This teaching examines the crucial foundation of mettā (loving-kindness) practice: developing authentic self-love and acceptance. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains why traditional mettā meditation begins with directing loving-kindness toward oneself, noting that those filled with self-hatred and criticism lack the emotional capacity to genuinely love others. Rather than simply overlaying positive states onto existing negativity, true mettā practice requires first confronting and healing our inner demons.

The essay provides practical guidance for transforming self-criticism and self-loathing. Key strategies include clearly identifying negative mental states without becoming identified with them, maintaining caring awareness of difficult emotions while recognizing they are 'not me, not mine, not my self' (anattā), and avoiding the 'second arrow' of additional suffering through mental proliferation. The teaching addresses common patterns like comparing ourselves unfavorably to others (inverted conceit) and holding impossible standards of perfection.

Drawing on core Buddhist insights about the nature of suffering and non-identification with mental states, this guidance offers a foundation for developing genuine self-compassion. The practical approach emphasizes completing tasks to our best ability, acknowledging accomplishments, and systematically working against habits of self-denigration through patient, diligent practice.

Self-love sounds like being selfish! This would be a big mistake. In the practice of Metta, traditionally it begins with directing love towards oneself on the understanding that you can't love others until you love yourself. If you consider someone who is full of self-hatred, self-criticism, self-recrimination, self-blame, it's hard to see how they have the heart space to love another person. We might try to practice Metta in the belief it will get rid of the self-hatred, but in fact it is an overlay for it is developing another mental state, loving kindness, on top of the self-hatred. It's like covering a mouldy cake with icing. So a good place to confront all our negativity is right there on the sitting cushion. We turn inwards towards any negative presenting feelings and opinions about ourselves. The first act of self-love is self-healing. And this can be very hard to do since we have identified with these inner demons. So that's the first step to identify clearly the mental states and emotional turbulences that come up. Once identified we have to develop a right relationship with that negativity. When we find ourselves in a state of

self-loathing, not good enough, useless and so on, we have to hold it in a caring embrace. It helps to talk to it. 'I can feel your hatred and anger'. Describe the qualities, 'so hot, so turbulent'. In this way we can distance from these states and in so doing find ourselves with them but not in them. So now we are not identifying with them. That little distance means all the world for we realise that there is not that second level of suffering that the Buddha refers to as the second arrow. Isn't the first arrow, the presenting state, enough! Do we have to add to it by hugging it as me. And when we do that, we employ the mind with its conversation and imaging to create a story around it and so add fuel to the fire! That's the insight. The self-aversion is not me, not mine and not my self! But we are so committed to old habits that we have to keep repeating the insight until it is strong enough to undermine the habit of indulging all self-denigration. The bright side is to develop the positive and there is no end of virtues the Buddha lists for us. But rather than try to develop all the virtues all at once, it is a good start to develop the opposite of the unwholesome habit we are undermining. If we suffer, for instance, from feeling not good enough, the first port of call is to ask, to whom am I comparing myself? And is this a wholesome way to go about life? What is the point of such comparison? If I were to compare myself favourably with someone whom I judge to be inferior to me, I would call that conceit. So, adversely comparing myself as 'inferior' is an inverted conceit. I am worse than them. Or it might be a hurtful parental voice. Then there may also be that I have some idea of perfection in my mind which, by definition, cannot be achieved. So, I am always going to disappoint myself. Far better to stay in touch with the situation as it is and agree that this is the best I can do. What more can I ask of myself? And what more should another ask of me? So now I have a strategy to undermine all that 'not good enough'. I conscientiously complete whatever I am doing to the best of my ability. I acknowledge it and feel satisfaction. Then we develop self-esteem by reminding ourselves of our accomplishments, whether great, small or insignificant. In this way we can take any form of self-criticism, self-blame, self-recrimination, self-doubt and slowly work against it and develop the opposite. We just need to do it ... diligently. <https://d.docs.live.net/763255e8cfc4ccf0/01%20Tips/01%20-Tips%2024/3%20TIP%20Compassion/The%20-Four%20Great%20Elements%20Moon%20and%20TIP.docx>

The Crucial Role of Desire and Intention

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

This teaching clarifies three essential Pali terms often confused in translation: taṇhā (craving), chanda (desire), and cetanā (intention). Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how taṇhā represents unwholesome thirst and craving that leads to suffering, as described in the Four Noble Truths and Paṭicca Samuppāda (Dependent Origination). In contrast, chanda can be either wholesome or unwholesome desire, while cetanā (intention) acts as the determining force that makes actions either skilful or unskilful.

The essay demonstrates how intention equals kamma and creates saṅkhāra (volitional conditioning) that shapes our character and destiny. Through practical examples—from eating a meal to washing dishes—Bhante shows how unwholesome intentions create separation between self and action, leading to reinforcement of negative mental patterns. Conversely, wholesome intentions allow us to be 'at one' with our actions, creating satisfaction and completion without causing harm to others.

This teaching emphasizes the Buddha's instruction for yoniso manisikāra (wise reflection) as essential for discerning which mental habits lead to dukkha and which lead to liberation. The essay offers profound insight into how our motivations determine whether we use others as objects for gratification or engage authentically with genuine care and presence.

There are three Pali words we need to understand that we translate variously such as desire, craving, intention, motivation in order to clarify the Buddhadhamma. They are taṇhā, chanda and cetanā. Taṇhā means drought and it is from this that we metaphorically get thirsty and then desire. Although it is translated usually as craving and does have a connotation of hunger for, fever for unsatisfied longing, it also includes even the tiniest of desires that are unwholesome, for untreated they can also become cravings. Taṇhā is the word used in Dependent Origination as that very craving is the psychological cause for suffering. In the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha enumerates three basic cravings: the craving for sensual pleasure, for becoming and for an end of becoming. Taṇhā is always unwholesome and unskilful, leading to suffering and dissatisfaction. Chanda is the word for wholesome desires, although it can refer to unwholesome ones too, so it is often prefaced by sammā and micchā, wholesome and unwholesome. So micchā-chanda is taṇhā. Cetanā comes from ceto/citta which is the word for heart-mind and so thinking as active thought, intention, purpose. For easy understanding I shall use the words desire for taṇhā/chanda and intention for cetanā. The force of desire

is neutral. It is the intention that makes it wholesome or unwholesome. Taking an example from physics, if I throw a stone, the force in my arm is transferred to the stone. As the stone flies, the force cannot be separated from the stone. I may have flicked a stone on a path here onto the car park where it belongs. I may come across a flat stone and skim it off the pond for fun. And I may throw a stone at a rabbit to scare it off. We have lots of rabbits who dig holes which is fine out in the meadows but not in the flower beds ... please! The Buddha equates intention or purpose to kamma. This word does not mean karma as it is used today to mean consequence, comeuppance. It is simply an act of body, speech or mind. However, many kamma produce a sankhara, usually translated as volitional conditioning, more easily understood as a habit. Our characters and personalities are collections of these habits and they are determining how we act and so produce our destiny. So it is of ultimate importance that we can discern those habits that lead to suffering and unsatisfactoriness, dukkha, and those leading to liberation from suffering. That is why the Buddha stresses the need for wise reflection, yoniso manisikāra. To make this distinction clear to us we can sit in front of a meal and feel the power of the desire to eat as wanting and the reason for it as the intention — do we eat to live or live to eat? The intention will either be to indulge or to nourish the body and just enjoy the taste. A difficult distinction to make. Observation— What an unwholesome negative desire does is to create a separation between the self and the doing. It never does, says or thinks for its own sake but for another purpose. If I am grumbling to myself about washing the pots, I create a separation – me grumbling, the body washing the pots. I shall express my annoyance in how I wash the pots. I am identified with a negative state of mind and not the doing. In fact I am using the action to reinforce my annoyance! This is obviously an unhealthy relationship. When we lose ourselves in an unwholesome state as when we rage or panic, that absorption is reinforcing the unwholesome conditioning and the sense of a separate self. The ‘I’ becomes absorbed in its own self-importance to the exclusion of everything and everyone else. Someone in an uncontrollable rage will kill, smash and create havoc. What an unwholesome indulgent desire does is to absorb into the object, the self and the gratification are one, but it is selective, prejudicial and exclusive. If I have a clear idea of what a pizza ‘ought’ to taste like, I approach the one just served with a bias. I’m unhappy if it does not live up to my expectation. Again I produce an unhealthy relationship. However, if it is just what I expect, I lose myself in the eating. I become one with the taste, succumbing to deliciousness. Unfortunately this absorption is reinforcing my bias. And the bias will actually stop me from experiencing all the flavours and aromas the pizza has to offer because I will concentrate on those sensations I expect and I will be simply unaware of any other more subtle ones. This is why a wine or tea taster has to clear their palate to be open to all the subtle tones and aromas. These sorts of desire are never gratified because the dissatisfaction is not coming from the doing, but from intentions that

arise from unwholesome mental conditioning. And the action is reinforcing that conditioning. You need only contemplate how such attitudes, when dealing with people (and animals), give them cause to suffer. We turn people into objects to please us, objects to gratify us. We use them and at worse abuse them. When we do, say or think something with wholesome intentions, we don't create that separate self. We are at one with what we are doing. There is some level of happiness and satisfaction. And when the job is done there is a feeling of completion. And we haven't used or abused anyone. This is being our doing!

Mindfulness meets Mettā

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

This essay by Noirin Sheahan explores how classical mettā (goodwill) practice naturally emerges within vipassanā meditation, specifically through the 'internal and external' dimensions outlined in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10). While mettā and mindfulness practices are often seen as separate, Sheahan demonstrates how the Buddha's instructions for practicing the four foundations of Right Awareness both internally and externally creates a bridge between these approaches.

The teaching focuses on practical applications, such as walking meditation where practitioners first cultivate awareness of their own bodily sensations, then extend this awareness to notice others walking nearby. This 'external' practice naturally develops empathy and connection, though it can also reveal underlying interpersonal challenges like irritation or self-consciousness. Sheahan provides clear guidance for working skillfully with both positive and negative emotions that arise during external practice.

The essay offers concrete examples for daily life situations - sitting on buses, walking in parks, feeling tired or happy - showing how external awareness can transform ordinary moments into opportunities for developing goodwill and reducing isolation. This approach grounds mettā practice in embodied mindfulness rather than visualization, making it particularly accessible for vipassanā practitioners seeking to integrate loving-kindness into their meditation.

In classical metta (goodwill) practice we bring people to mind and wish them well. Often this is placed in contrast to vipassana, or mindfulness practice. However, one of the exercises in the Satipatthana Sutta – the teaching on the “Four Foundations for Mindfulness” - can be seen as a form of metta practice which is very firmly embedded in mindfulness. In this teaching, the Buddha describes a number of exercises which bring us along the path to liberation. He starts with mindfulness of breathing and other exercises relating to the body, follows with the various feelings we experience, then the different mind-states we can notice, and ends with his core teachings, showing us how we can study these mindfully, moment after moment. After each exercise he gives a number of options for practice. The first option – to do the exercises “internally” or “externally” – can be used as a form of metta practice. The most common interpretation is that ‘internal’ means our subjective, felt experience, while ‘external’ means knowing objectively what is happening. We can feel angry (internal practice) and also know that we are

angry (external practice). Knowing experience both subjectively and objectively is the essence of mindfulness – knowing what we’re experiencing while we’re experiencing. Another interpretation has ‘internal’ referring to our own experience and ‘external’ to that of another person. Becoming aware of others as they walk is to practice walking meditation ‘externally’. This gives a very practical way of sensitising ourselves to others. Say we are walking in a park. We bring awareness to sensations - the feet lifting and falling, the knees bending and straightening, the arms swinging. After a while, we broaden the awareness to notice anyone else walking nearby. Their feet are also lifting and falling ... knees bending ... To keep ourselves focussed we note “he / she is walking ... walking”. This is to practice walking meditation ‘externally’. Sometimes it brings a sense of joy and connection to practice externally. We suddenly feel quite friendly towards whoever is walking nearby, interested in them. The link with metta is obvious here. It helps to bring attention back regularly to our own body so as to keep the meditation grounded, remind ourselves what the other person might be experiencing. This often strengthens goodwill. Sometimes the opposite happens, we don’t want to acknowledge that others are walking nearby. It might bring up irritation, we might suddenly feel hostile to a complete stranger. Or we might feel self-conscious or shy, perhaps even intrusive, as though we’re peering into their private experience. External practice shows up underlying issues we have in relating to others, and is an excellent way of learning to work skilfully with these. It’s helpful to bring awareness back inside our own body when an emotion becomes strong. This has a steadying effect. Instead of noting “he / she is walking” we note ‘irritation’ or ‘self-conscious’ or whatever word fits. As we bear with the emotion mindfully, it starts to burn out. Within a few minutes we may even feel friendly towards whoever disturbed us. This gives confidence that we can move beyond negativity triggered by interactions with others, strengthen resilience in the face of interpersonal conflict. Practicing mindfulness externally isn’t always a challenge – it can be uplifting and a bit of fun! As we’re sitting on a bus, we feel our sitting posture and then reflect that others are sitting nearby. The heightened awareness of others can stir joy. When we’re feeling happy, we remember that there are others who are also feeling this way. This grounds the happiness, prevents it spinning off into excitement and daydreams. Likewise, when we’re feeling tired and worn out, we can remember that this is being experienced by many others right now. Suddenly we don’t feel so alone. The exercises offer a very practical and embodied way to strengthen our deep connection with others. Why not give them a try? If you like, let me know how you get on.

Surely meditation shouldn't feel like this?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 6 min read

This two-part essay begins with Noirin Sheahan's personal account of transitioning from Sōtō Zen to Mahasi Vipassanā practice, where focused attention on the breath triggered unexpected panic and fear. Bhante Bodhidhamma's guidance reframes these difficulties as opportunities to encounter and work with underlying emotional patterns. The essay demonstrates how ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) naturally reveals our emotional states through the breath's pace and rhythm, providing a skillful means to observe and release fear, anger, and other emotions without suppression.

The second section explores the Buddha's instructions for 'full awareness' (sampajañña) in daily activities, drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta's guidance on clear comprehension. Through practical examples like walking to work or shopping, the essay shows how broad contextual noting—rather than detailed Mahasi-style observation—cultivates present-moment awareness in ordinary tasks. This practice reveals the dukkha inherent in transient activities and helps practitioners recognize subtle emotional patterns, such as enthusiasm giving way to disappointment.

Both sections emphasize that whatever arises in meditation or daily life is perfect material for developing self-acceptance and understanding the Four Noble Truths. The essay offers encouragement for practitioners struggling with difficult emotions, showing how mindfulness transforms challenges into opportunities for liberation.

When I started meditating it was with the Sōtō Zen tradition which has no particular focus for meditation — it is described as ‘just sitting’. I enjoyed its very open form, found it easy to relax, let the world go by as I sat still. When our group switched to Theravada and Mahasi practice my troubles started. As I brought attention to the breath, noting ‘rising, rising’ during the in-breath, ‘falling, falling’ during the out-breath, I would feel little twinges of panic. What was the matter? Surely meditation shouldn’t feel like this? I could think of myself as reasonably capable during daily life, but during Mahasi meditation I became a bag of nerves. When I eventually got around to telling Bhante Bodhidhamma of my problem, his answer changed everything: ‘Instead of thinking of this as a problem, your job is to turn around your attitude and think of it as an opportunity to get to know whatever underlying fears are manifesting on the breath.’ What a relief! By then I was in the throes of a mid-life crisis, knowing my life was undermined by fear, but with no inkling of how to approach the emotional turmoil. It was wonderful to real-

ise that by paying attention to the breath, I had access to my underlying fears and could start to befriend myself through them. The panic persisted, but now it was welcome in all its forms. In time, mindfulness of breath became a refuge, a source of strength. The Buddha's instructions for mindfulness of breathing includes noticing whether the breath is long (slow, deep) or short (rapid, shallow). In daily life the breath's pace varies with physical activity, but while we're sitting in meditation it tracks our emotional state. We breathe slowly when relaxed; quickly when any emotion is expressing its energy through the body. We can identify so strongly with our emotions that we are not aware of them. Angry thoughts drive more angry thoughts. Our full attention is on who said what and why they shouldn't have... But if we remember this exercise, we may notice that the breath is faster than normal. Then we see the cascade of angry thoughts objectively, realise that we're experiencing a bout of anger. Just knowing this has a powerful impact. We might still feel angry, but we will also have the benefit of some objectivity on the matter. If we are panting with fear, we might be tempted to calm ourselves by taking a few slow, deep breaths. But this is to suppress, to persuade ourselves there is nothing to fear. Which is true, but it's a truth we need to re-learn from scratch each time fear emerges in meditation. That's how we work our way through fears that are an inevitable part and parcel of delusion. Not interfering, letting the jerky, panicky breath continue till it slows and calms of its own accord - this allows fear to be felt, expressed and released. Each time this happens we grow less afraid of fear, more willing to step outside of our emotional comfort zone. The non-interfering approach is similarly therapeutic for all emotions – lust, anger, guilt, shame, confusion. Thus the practice of mindful breathing gives us a means of coping with emotional outbursts that can otherwise ruin relationships, undermine our self-esteem, lead to cynicism or isolation. All the while we're assimilating the first noble truth - that this world cannot satisfy our needs and wishes. As that sinks in, we grow ever more curious about and sensitive to whatever keeps us going, motivates us to continue searching for the wisdom, joy and peace we can never fully pin down. Surely meditation shouldn't feel like this??? On the contrary, however it feels right now is perfect for teaching us how to develop self acceptance and unconditional love, learn the Dhamma of liberation. Full Awareness

Noirin Sheahan

The Buddha asks us to act in 'full awareness' when we go about the ordinary tasks of daily life. The first exercise he prescribes is full awareness while going forth and returning. Say we are walking to our workplace. As we note the sensations of walking in the legs and feet, attention is drawn into the present moment. For full awareness the context must also be born in mind: we are going to work. Full awareness requires a broad understanding of our actions alongside the stream of sensations that accompanies them. Instead of the detailed note we use for Mahasi practice, broad-brush phrases work better here. On our way to work we can note: 'Going to work... going to work.' Sounds obvious but how easy it is to forget the bigger picture. We go to work on autopi-

lot, so familiar with every step of the journey that we can devote our time to worrying or daydreaming. The note 'going to work' lifts us out of the doldrums, lets us feel more purposeful, helps us appreciate our surroundings. Reminding ourselves of the broader context can expose hidden emotions. We might feel a deep reluctance to note 'going to work', for example, but feel happy later in the days as we retrace our steps, noting 'going home'. This highlights a negative attitude to work. If we do not make the note, that negativity might sneak out as carelessness, not bothering to finish tasks properly, alienating colleagues and making the situation worse. However, if we note 'going to work' the weariness or anxiety or depression we associate with work comes to the fore. Although it might feel worse than heading for the job on autopilot, bearing with the feelings means the negativity can be acknowledged. Acknowledging suffering is a form of self-care and has a very beneficial impact psychologically. We are much less likely to act from negativity once we're aware of it. We might even start noting satisfaction in completing a task, finding pleasure in cooperating with colleagues. Imperceptibly, perhaps, the situation starts to improve. Even for less emotionally charged activities, the experience of going forward can differ from returning. Say I have to nip down to the shop for groceries. I may be bright and purposeful at the outset. My step is light and I look with interest at the neighbour's gardens. Coming home my steps might be more plodding, my eyes downcast. What I am seeing here is the dukkha of transience. Each new activity offers a glimmer of hope that this world can make us happy. But when the choice between carrots and broccoli, biscuits and cake have been made and all the money spent, it becomes clear that my shopping spree has not delivered the goods I was secretly hoping for. Of course the pattern can vary. For instance, the prospect of meeting friends may find us brighter on the way home than heading out. Worthwhile noting as it helps us appreciate our friends when we see how they lift our mood. The second task the Buddha prescribes is to be fully aware when looking ahead and looking away. Say we are returning from the shops on autopilot, rehashing our problems, eyes vaguely scanning the pavement. Now and again, we look up and ahead in a semi-automatic check of the broader environment. If we have primed ourselves to see 'looking ahead' as worth registering, that automatic check might awaken mindfulness. Looking ahead also reminds us of our destination, so we can return to full awareness instead of being lost in negativity. While looking ahead is often stimulating, looking away often carries subtle dukkha. A friend practising mindfulness of speech found that when reacting against what another person was saying, her eyes turned slightly aside. Once she had detected the pattern, she was able to use this as a 'wake-up' call to notice aversion. Her communication could then be much more honest and straightforward. Full awareness does not mean self-awareness. Say we are preparing dinner. We may be cutting carrots, totally absorbed in the task. Then suddenly we become aware of 'me' who is cutting carrots and worry that we weren't being mindful because we hadn't been self-aware.

That's a mistake. If we hadn't been lost in thought while cutting carrots, then we were being mindful. The sense of self comes and goes and can disappear altogether when we are fully absorbed in an activity. Following the Buddha's exercises for Full Awareness supports mindfulness throughout all aspects of daily life. Instead of taking ourselves and our situation for granted we wake up to the extraordinary treasure we call awareness.

The Fire Sermon

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 1 min read

This teaching examines one of the Buddha's most powerful discourses, the Ādittapariyāya Sutta (SN 35.28), commonly known as the Fire Sermon. Bhante Bodhidhamma explains how the Buddha taught that all our sensory experiences—through eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—are 'burning' with the fires of lobha (greed), dosa (hatred), and moha (delusion). These fires fuel the cycle of birth, aging, death, and all forms of dukkha.

The essay emphasizes the Buddha's solution: developing non-reactivity towards sensory experiences and the feelings they generate. Through cultivating disenchantment (nibbidā) and dispassion (virāga), practitioners can achieve liberation from the mental taints (āsava). Bhante Bodhidhamma highlights how this ancient teaching offers practical guidance for modern meditators, showing how we can act in the world with a 'pure heart' rather than being driven by reactive patterns.

This reflection demonstrates the profound psychological insight of early Buddhist teaching, revealing how our ordinary perception becomes the very source of our suffering, while also pointing toward the path of freedom through wise awareness and non-attachment.

Bhante Bodhidhamma The Buddha explains the cause of conflict and suffering. He tells us how to free ourselves from it. In a word: non-reactivity. We can then act in the world with a pure heart as he did. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Gaya, at Gaya's Head, together with a thousand bhikkhus. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus, all is burning. And what, bhikkhus, is the all that is burning? The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, aging, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, I say. "The ear is burning ... The mind is burning ... and whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, aging, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, I say. "Seeing thus, bhikkhus, the instructed noble disciple experiences disenchantment towards the eye, towards forms, towards eye-consciousness, towards eye-contact, towards whatever feeling arises with eye-con-

tact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant; experiences revulsion towards the ear ... towards the mind ... towards whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition.... Experiencing disenchantment, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion his mind is liberated. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'It's liberated.' He understands: 'Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of becoming.'" This is what the Blessed One said. Elated, those bhikkhus delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of the thousand bhikkhus were liberated from the taints by nonclinging. *Bhikkhu Bodhi* Italics are mine. disenchantment for revulsion and becoming for being.

Why spend a week or more on retreat?

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this encouraging essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma addresses the vital role of intensive retreat practice in supporting year-round spiritual development. Drawing from his experience running Practice in Ordinary Daily Life (PODL) courses, he explains how retreats provide the necessary 'lift' in enthusiasm and energy to sustain moment-to-moment awareness in daily life. The essay explores how retreat practice serves multiple purposes: creating space to calm down and let go of life's stresses, developing 'effortless effort' in observation, and allowing the intuitive intelligence (paññā) to gain insights into our habitual patterns.

Bhante emphasizes how sustained practice reveals the Three Characteristics of Existence—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self—showing how our illusion of self creates fear and secondary sufferings. He uses the metaphor of physical preparation for pilgrimage to illustrate how retreat practice builds spiritual fitness. Without this intensive effort, he warns, laziness sets in and old unwholesome habits regain strength. The essay concludes with the Buddha's encouraging words to Ānanda from the Indriyabhāvanā Sutta (MN 152), emphasizing that while the spiritual path goes against the stream of ordinary life, it leads to fulfillment and the highest joy. This practical teaching offers both inspiration and clear reasoning for dedicating extended periods to intensive meditation practice.

Bhante Bodhidhamma Each year I run a Practice in Ordinary Daily Life Course: PODL. Every month over the winter, January to March, there is a day retreat at the beginning of the month and a meeting at the end where everyone shares their experience. As you would expect, the aim of moment to moment mindfulness is enhanced and there is a general feeling of good work done. And with that encouragement comes the desire to continue to bring the practice into every sphere of our lives. But note, it begins with a day devoted to sitting and walking meditation. In other words, a special effort to lift that energy for spiritual purposes. And that ultimate purpose is Nibbāna which unfortunately sounds as nebulous as Shangri-La. But grounding Nibbāna in everyday experience simply means there is less and less suffering from habitual reactivity driven by our demons – acquisitiveness, aversion, fear, guilt, shame and so on and so on. In other words, it is all about Dukkha, undermining our tendency to create suffering and unsatisfactoriness for ourselves. And this takes effort! And that is the role of at least a week of meditation practice every year. And the more the better. So the first reason to come on a retreat, is to lift the enthusiasm needed to continue our practice in daily life. But, of course, that energy is supporting other crucial aims during the week. The first is to stop!

Calm down. Let go of the stress and excitements of life. Bring ourselves into a state of the 'effortless effort'. The ability to observe, feel and investigate our body, hearts and minds without some idea of achieving anything. For when we have an idea of what we want to achieve that becomes the goal and distorts the ability 'to see and understand how things come to be right now'. That is why our awareness, Sati, is choiceless and it is in this state that the intuitive intelligence, Panya, which is but the active part of Sati, can have insights no matter how small into our habits and behaviour, some that cause us harm and others that enhance our lives. As the effort to just watch and feel settles, there grows that one-pointedness of attention and we begin to see more clearly the Three Characteristics of Existence: how mistaken desire is a direct cause of our feeling of never being fully satisfied; how we do not allow ourselves to experience impermanence by always living into the next moment and dodging the collapse of the last moment; and how this illusion a self, of me and of what I own as mine, is creating fear and anxiety and a host of secondary sufferings. For it is this very self that needs to shore itself up with acquiring wealth, friends, power and so on. Then it has to protect its possessions from others either by angry, hateful tactics or hiding and avoiding. Such insights feed into our attitudes and the unwholesome ones are undermined and the positive ones enhanced. All the guides for a Camino or pilgrimage tell you to prepare physically by doing lots of walking before you even start. You need to have some physical fitness. A pilgrimage is a metaphor for the spiritual life. The pilgrim has to gather their energy and be prepared to undergo discomfort to reach the goal which for them signifies some spiritual realisation. For the practitioner, the practice and the goal are one and the same thing. Every moment of every day is practice and every moment of every day is a piece of the goal. The goal is here and now! Nibbana is staring us in the face, but we cannot see it save in little aha moments. But that constant gentle effort brings its own rewards – less greed, less anger, less anxiety. If we do not put that extra effort into our practice, laziness sets in and the practice wanes. Old habits we have worked to undermine regain their strength. And it all begins to feel hopeless. That is when the alarm bell rings. And there is no better way to regain the enthusiasm than to devote a specific length of time to the meditation. The Buddha never said it was easy! Spiritual practice goes against the stream. But talked about the end of the journey being fulfilment, contentment and the highest joy. The Buddha's own caring encouragement to Ananda, his companion for 20 years: Whatever a teacher should do who cares for the welfare of his disciples, I have done for you, Ananda. There are the roots of trees and empty huts. Do not delay, Ananda. Meditate now lest you regret it later. This is my encouragement to you. (MN152.18) Let's take that to heart! Let's do a little extra this year!

Nibbāna is Close at Hand!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

This essay by Noirin Sheahan examines the profound humanity of the Buddha through key moments in his life, particularly his initial reluctance to teach after his awakening. Drawing on the insight of teacher Rob Burbea, she highlights the irony that the Buddha's first enlightened thought was to avoid frustration—revealing that awakening doesn't eliminate human concerns but transforms our relationship to them.

The teaching explores how the Buddha's transcendence manifested through the brahmavihāras (divine abodes)—mettā, karuṇā, muditā, and upekkhā—rather than through detached indifference. His equanimity (upekkhā) enabled him to continue teaching despite rejection, while his appreciative joy (muditā) sustained him when witnessing others' potential for liberation. Even in old age, describing his body as 'wracked in pain from morning to night,' the Buddha demonstrated that awakening doesn't deliver us to a blissful realm beyond physical reality.

This reflection challenges common misconceptions about nibbāna as escape from ordinary life. Instead, it presents awakening as a knowing that brings us into more intimate contact with humanity—accompanying us through daily decisions about livelihood, relationships, and even death. The essay concludes with the powerful recognition that nibbāna is 'close at hand'—not separate from but fully present within ordinary life, known for what it is.

Noirin Sheahan As you may know, when the Buddha became enlightened he first thought that there was no point in trying to teach others how to follow in his footsteps. He felt that the enlightened understanding he had achieved was so subtle, so hard to see, that nobody would be able to understand him and teaching would only be frustrating. It was the Dhamma teacher Rob Burbea (now sadly deceased) who pointed out the irony – the Buddha's first thought as an enlightened being was to avoid getting frustrated! This irony challenges simplistic notions of transcendence. The Buddha's wisdom protects him from suffering because he knows better than to identify with his body or mind. But this does not make him careless of what happens to his body, indifferent to the contents of his mind. Carelessness and indifference don't appear to be options for an enlightened being. Transcendence only manifests in some form of goodwill – friendliness, compassion, appreciative joy or equanimity. The latter quality, equanimity, comes to our rescue when life disappoints or frustrates us. The Buddha only undertook the hard work of teaching after being persuaded that there were some who would under-

stand and follow in his footsteps. Disappointment at those who rejected his teaching could then be offset by knowing the immense value of his work overall. And so the Buddha could remain equanimous when people disputed, dismissed or scorned his teaching. The joy of seeing that some people were able to accept, work with, and at times even to understand his teaching would also have been an enormous support to the Buddha's mission. This is a form of *mudita*: appreciating the potential for liberation as he sees it manifesting, taking shape, affecting change, in another being. Going back to his earlier reluctance to tire himself out by attempting the seemingly hopeless task of teaching: The incident reminds us of the humanity of the Buddha. He never claimed to be anything other than a normal human being and as we see here, took care to minimize distress for himself even after enlightenment. As an old man, close to death, the Buddha describes his body as wracked in pain from morning to night. He says this in response to Ananda's request that he prolong his life for the sake of all those he could help. This story too shows us that the Buddha was not superhuman and was deeply cognizant of his aging body and physical limitations. He was not operating from a lofty blissful plane outside of his feeble and painful body. These incidents from the life of the Buddha remind us not expect that liberation will deliver us to a state of bliss where we're oblivious to the problems of the world. Instead we grow ever more sensitive, feel our connection with others more keenly. It also reminds us not to imagine Nibanna as separate to ordinary daily life. Nibanna is close at hand! Perhaps we could imagine it as a knowing which is in intimate contact with humanity, accompanying us through decisions on how to live and what livelihood to follow and when to relinquish our hold on life. Ordinary life, in other words. Known for what it is.

AI 'Art'

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 3 min read

In this thoughtful reflection, Bhante Bodhidhamma examines the fundamental difference between authentic art and AI-generated creations. Drawing from personal experiences at Gaia House and contemplating Van Gogh's 'The Olive Trees,' he explores how genuine art serves as what T.S. Eliot called an 'objective correlative' — a means of sharing deep human experience and understanding between artist and viewer.

The essay argues that while AI can produce technically impressive works, it lacks the essential quality that makes art meaningful: authentic human experience and intention. True art creates communion (communis) between human beings, allowing us to connect heart-to-heart through shared feeling and understanding. When we engage with machine-generated art, we lose this fundamental human connection and risk increased alienation and loneliness.

Bhante connects this technological challenge to Buddhist understanding, identifying our attachment to body and mind as the root cause of dukkha — our frustrating inability to find lasting happiness in the sensual world. He warns that relying too heavily on AI art and entertainment may deepen our separation from authentic human experience and our true inner nature, potentially making us more robot-like ourselves as we seek distractions from life's fundamental realities of aging, sickness, and death.

Bhante Bodhidhamma Art, in all its forms is a creative act. So are many areas of creativity such as science, technology, artifacts and so on. But Art is what TS Eliot called 'objective correlative'. When the artist wants to share an experience, they find a common metaphor or way to relate to the viewer or listener. It is about communicating experience or understanding in a way that the other not only understands but feels. I was teaching at Gaia House in May. It was bursting with spring. I stood beneath the oak in the front lawn with friends and we marvelled at its size, its strength and vitality. Its huge presence dwarfs us. Suppose the oak tree were made of plastic by an artist expressing his feelings about how people don't connect with nature? Or the same manufactured by a 3D printing machine at the command of an AI 'artist'. Machines don't do meaning. A few days later, I came across a painting by Vincent Van Gogh, called 'The Olive Trees'. If you google it, you will see it has little to do with olive trees as such. There is a swirling, undulating movement throughout the painting and the sombre blue mountains and churning clouds gives me the feeling of apprehension. It brought up the

feelings of foreboding I have about the Polycrisis. Van Gogh has shared with me the mental state he was in when he painted the picture. And I am grateful he has evoked these feelings in me. They motivate me to do the little I can to limit the Crisis. Suppose someone asked AI to produce a picture in the style of van Gogh of a football crowd. I have no doubt that it would be interesting, but it will lack experiential meaning. The 'artist' has done nothing and intends nothing but inane play. It may indeed evoke similar feelings, but I will be communicating with a machine. I will have lost that essential reason for art – communication – communis – as if one, in common. I won't be able to make a heart connection with another human being. It will just be lonely, little me, hugging my feelings. Of course, I might share the experience of a poem, a song, a picture with a friend, but there would still be that feeling that it is a machine, without care or ethics, that has induced these sentiments in me. All art forms with their various concerns such as erotic, social, political, personal and healing and religious, are communications between human beings. Imagine if all you had around you were robots who behaved exactly as human beings, but you knew they were devoid of inner purpose of life. How would you feel if in distress you were hugged by a cyborg? You may feel comforted, by what? It must be by way of a projection of a human onto a 'humanoid'. Surely, at some point, there must arise a feeling of separation from humans, an alienation, a deep loneliness. But why is this possible in the first place? Because we identify with the body and mind – the root cause of our dukkha, the frustrating inability to find lasting happiness in the sensual world. So we seek distraction. This has, of course, always been so, but now made more acute by relying on technology that further separates us from each other and from our true inner being. The real danger is that we become like robots – drowning out any feelings of meaninglessness, of sickness, ageing, sorrow and death with entertaining 'art' empty of human experience. Having said all this, no doubt artists will arise who can use AI to produce real art. Please send me your thoughts. This article inspired the Tip and is worth reading for the social and political consequence: The Trouble with AI art isn't just lack of originality. It's something far bigger. Eric Reinhart 'Deep Bach' is an algorithmic program that uses machine-learning to analyse Johann Sebastian Bach's compositions and then produces its own variations. The results are convincing enough that many people can't distinguish between Deep-Bach and the real thing. Futures Centre The Threat of Computed Creativity Creativity here refers to Art. Letter by Nick Cage read by Stephen Fry

A Field of Barley

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this deeply personal reflection, Noirin Sheahan shares her experience of encountering a beautiful field of barley and the complex emotional responses it evoked. The essay demonstrates how the final three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path—sammā vāyāma (Right Effort), sammā sati (Right Awareness), and sammā samādhi—can serve as practical guides when confronting the challenging realities of attachment and impermanence.

The narrative traces the journey from initial delight and grasping desire through aversion and the impulse to look away, to a deeper acceptance facilitated by muditā (appreciative joy), one of the four brahmavihāras or divine abodes. Through careful attention to physical sensations and emotional responses, the author discovers underlying grief about transience—the painful truth that everything we love will pass away.

This teaching illustrates how mindfulness practice can transform our relationship with beauty, loss, and even death itself. Rather than turning away from difficult truths, the cultivation of Right Awareness allows us to remain present with both joy and sorrow, finding a deeper peace that encompasses life's full spectrum. The essay offers practical wisdom for anyone seeking to understand how Buddhist training can be applied to everyday moments of beauty and the inevitable encounters with impermanence that define human existence.

Noirin Sheahan On a sunny afternoon last weekend, I walked by a field of barley, mesmerised by its beauty. The stems were unusually tall, almost shoulder height, and a light breeze rippled the leaves into exquisite shades of green and gold. It was as though I had entered a van Gogh painting! Something hungry inside wanted to devour the scene, master it, keep it for a rainy day. And that something felt frustrated and angry at the impossibility of this. The final section of the eightfold path - training the mind using the factors of Right Effort, Mindfulness and Samadhi[1]- turned up as guides. Mindfulness registered delight at the scene, desire to swallow it up, anger at my inability to do this. It registered the physicality of this emotional cocktail: desire opening the chest, pushing the head upwards, anger tightening the face and throat, furrowing the brow and eyes. The clash of opposing forces felt painful. Craving for beauty morphed into disgust. Desire switched course in an instant, told me to forget this nonsense, look away, think of other things. Again there was a strong physical component: desire was now trying to turn the neck, head and eyes away from the barley field, find a new draw for the imagination. This felt like the easy option, and the force of mind com-

manding “Move on” was almost irresistible. At this point Right Effort stepped up to prevent me taking the habitual easy option. I reminded myself of Mudita, appreciative joy, which the Buddha described as a ‘divine abode’ for the mind. Despite its transience, we are to take in the beauty of life, let it halt the river of thought that persuades us to do something more useful than stare at a field of waving barley. Armed with the motivation to practice mudita, I found the willingness not to turn the head and eyes away from the scene. Mindfulness registered aversion and disgust but also moments of ease when the mind rested in silent wonder at the sight of green-gold barley. Gradually those moments grew longer, and drew thoughts to a close. This is Samadhi, the mind’s natural preference to rest, let go of its protests and useless babble. After a while I could relax enough to let attention sink into the unpleasant tightness in the chest, neck and face. The close-up physical perspective let me glimpse shades of grief which I hadn’t previously registered. The field of barley was showing me the heartbreaking truth of transience: what we love is forever slipping through our fingers. Once I could feel and acknowledge grief, the experience became easier. Physical tensions relaxed and I could appreciate the beauty without grasping it painfully. Appreciative joy mingled with sombre thoughts of death and dying. I was surprised at how calm the mind remained as it acknowledged that my personal story along with my experience of life would come to an end. Despite twinges of grief, the thought seemed more acceptable than usual, even somehow beautiful, as if it too were dancing in waves of green-gold barley. Thank goodness for Mindfulness and how it can be shored up by Right Effort at times of need; how it enables the stillness of Samadhi, where we can ponder unwelcome truths without adding to our fear of death, our hunger for life. I trust the trio to work hard at my death-bed, persuading me not to turn away in disgust, perhaps reminding me of death’s dance in a field of waving barley.[1] Usually translated as Concentration which unfortunately suggests straining, while Samadhi denotes an unforced gathering of mind or peaceful abiding.

War!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 2 min read

In this thoughtful reflection prompted by contemporary conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how Buddhist practitioners can navigate the complex moral terrain of war and conflict. Drawing upon St. Thomas Aquinas's just war theory, he outlines the traditional conditions for legitimate warfare (jus ad bellum) and ethical conduct during conflict (jus in bello), including principles of just cause, legitimate authority, proportionality, and discrimination between military and civilian targets.

The essay addresses the challenging question of whether ends justify means, while emphasizing the Buddhist principle of maintaining equanimity even when taking ethical positions. Bhante warns against the danger of wisdom being clouded by anger and grief, distinguishing between being partial and judgmental versus impartial and judicious. He stresses that taking a considered moral stance doesn't require becoming 'stonehearted' but rather allows the heart to express itself fully without moral regret.

Particularly relevant for contemporary practitioners, the teaching explores how to engage with divisive political issues while maintaining Right Speech and avoiding the 'personal wars' that arise from self-righteous anger and moral outrage. The essay offers practical guidance on expressing understanding assertively rather than aggressively, and accepting the need to 'agree to disagree' while avoiding the polarization that social media often amplifies.

Bhante Bodhidhamma Not the summeriest of subjects! But the whole appalling situation in Gaza and the pitiless game that Presidents Trump and Putin are playing in Ukraine plus the polarisation social media is expert at developing, has prompted me to revisit this whole area of conflict. St. Thomas Aquinas, the Medieval philosopher, developed the rules for a just war and what the limits were within the war. These form the basis for such international laws as the Geneva Conventions. With so many conflicts, each with their own reasons, it might be good to have some guidance that allows us to take a considered position. For there is always the danger of wisdom being over clouded by anger and grief, which may be understandable but biasing our judgement. Here we must distinguish between being partial and judgemental from being impartial and judicious. This does not mean we become stonehearted! Quite the opposite for it gives the heart freedom to express itself fully without moral regret. Thanks to AI: 1. Jus ad Bellum (Conditions for going to war): Just Cause: The war must be a response to a wrong

suffered, such as defending against aggression or restoring a violated right. Legitimate Authority: The decision to go to war must be made by a recognized authority, like a government, not by private individuals. Right Intention: The purpose of the war must be to achieve good, such as restoring peace or justice, and not for personal gain or aggression. Last Resort: All peaceful options, like negotiation and diplomacy, must be exhausted before resorting to war. Probability of Success: There must be a reasonable chance of achieving the intended just outcome through war.

2. Jus in Bello (Conduct during war): Proportionality: The force used in war should be proportionate to the wrong being addressed and should not cause more harm than necessary. Discrimination: Attacks should be directed at legitimate military targets, minimizing harm to civilians, emphasizing the need for careful consideration, restraint, and a commitment to peace even amidst conflict. These guidelines seem pretty straightforward, yet when we take the reasons given by both sides into consideration, it can be very hard to make a fair judgement. And in the midst of all this there is the knotty problem of whether the ends justify the means. What position do we take? Anything is allowable to achieve a just end. Or are there moral boundaries that must not be crossed? We don't have to come to a conclusion. We can keep our minds open. But once we are clear, we should do whatever little we can to express our understanding. This, of course, can bring us into conflict with friends and family so it is also important to come from a position of equanimity, careful to realise when we are being aggressive rather than assertive. We need to actively listen to the other and accept that we might have to agree to disagree. It is when polarisation is fuelled by self-righteous anger – moral outrage! that we give cause for personal wars!

The Enlightenment and its Demise

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 6 min read

In this wide-ranging cultural and historical analysis, Bhante Bodhidhamma traces the intellectual trajectory from the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment through to our current political moment. He examines how the rational ideals of philosophers like John Locke and Immanuel Kant, coupled with capitalism and the Industrial Revolution, promised human happiness through reason and progress. The essay explores the various responses and counter-movements that arose: Romanticism's return to nature and emotion, Modernism's break from traditional structures, and Post-Modernism's rejection of objective truth.

Bhante Bodhidhamma analyzes how these intellectual developments led to contemporary neoliberalism and its consequences: growing wealth inequality, the rise of narcissistic leadership exemplified by figures like Donald Trump, and the erosion of democratic institutions. He argues that the entire Enlightenment project has become exhausted, leaving Western civilization 'bewildered, anxious and rudderless.' While acknowledging liberalism's genuine achievements—democracy, human rights, rule of law—he suggests these foundations are crumbling under the weight of their own contradictions.

The essay concludes by pointing toward the ancient wisdom of Buddhism as a potential source of guidance for navigating this civilizational crisis, setting up his next exploration of what the 2500-year-old Buddhadhamma might offer to our contemporary predicament.

Bhante Bodhidhamma Bewildered. Anxious. Rudderless. 'Cometh the hour, cometh the man' We live in an age of multiple crises: climate crisis, wars, immigration, authoritarianism to name a few. Each impinges on the other. Everything is intertwined. Here I am taking one strand of a chaotic situation. The idealism of Liberalism and how this ideal is now profoundly undermined and indeed it may be terminal. While I am not in any sense of the word an academic, it's important to get to grips with the history of ideas that has produced this chaos in which the West now finds itself. President Donald Trump is the man of the hour, the embodiment of this decline with its moral sleaze, self-serving corruption and disregard for the law. He has thrown all the cards into the air and no one knows where they will land. How could such a person with such an obvious narcissistic personality end up in charge of the richest and most powerful nation on earth? Just as the Medieval Ages were in thrall to Christianity and Grecian science, so we have been in thrall to the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century onwards. The period of the Scientific Revolution spawned Isaac Newton and

Charles Darwin that placed God out of his creation – a *deus ex machina*. Philosophers John Locke and Immanuel Kant made reason the saviour of mankind: the Rational Self. It also gave us capitalism, an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit. According to Kate Raworth, author of *Doughnut Economics* (2017) the ideal person is 'Homo Economicus ... solitary, calculating, competing, insatiable'. And the Industrial Revolution manifested man's brilliance in harnessing nature and would eventually produce everything for everybody. Coupled with capitalism and liberal ideology, man's happiness was assured. The intellectual dryness evoked the Romantics who sought to put the heart back into the mix. Jean Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Schleiermacher encouraged a return to nature as beauty and as a place to return the intuitive emotional soul suffocated by the intellect. The French Revolution, a rational project infused with romantic idealism, expressed this longing with its slogan: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, only to be severely undermined when Napoleon became emperor. The disillusion did not crystallise till after the first World War. Then Modernism arose with an effort to break away from old structures and understanding that had brought such suffering and destruction, expressed most obviously in the work of Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dali where art moved towards personal experience and subjectivity. Again a rejection of the purely rational. The Wall Street Crash 1929 dragged the whole capitalist financial edifice down into the Great Depression. And then, of course, came the second World War. This only aggravated the sense of disillusionment and alienation that expressed itself in the Existential philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus and in literature with Samuel Beckett. By the late 1950s even this dried up and Post-Modernism began to evolve. An essential tenet of Post-Modernism was the absence of objective truth, a consequence of individualist, rational thought. Society, culture and religion were constructed by individuals and each individual was creating their own reality. Margaret Thatcher expressed the view that there was no such thing as society, only individuals and families. It meant everything was relative. Hence post-truth. Each person had their own 'take on reality'. You may remember in President Trump's first term the expression 'alternative truths'. And how easy it is to tell lies as truths. Boris Johnson was a past master! Running alongside all this were the political ideologies, the secular religions. Communism was based on the criticism of Karl Marx who saw clearly the destructiveness of the market, the capitalist system that exploited workers to the benefit of the middle classes and rich. Paradoxically, the system was realised fully only in pre-industrial Russia and China, but power corrupts and as George Orwell pointed out in *Animal Farm* some became 'more equal than others'. Even so, socialist ideas did take root in the West. A similar idea of equality rose out of the competition of nations against each other. For instance, National Socialism put the nation first and when mixed with the toxic pseudo-science of racism it produced Nazism. After the second World War, there was

perhaps the only flowering of liberalism: welfare liberalism, where for 30 some years an effort was made to raise ordinary workers' standards and rights as Europe emerged from the ruination and impoverishment of the Depression and war. Most Western countries instituted some form of national health system, free education including tertiary education and welfare programmes for the disadvantaged. Trade unions became powerful in their demands for worker rights. The sixties and seventies, with the arrival of pop music and hippies, were expressions of what heaven on earth might look like. It was short lived and by the eighties, US President Ronald Reagan and UK's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher ushered in neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, a super-charged capitalism, was a conscious ideology brought about by right wing think tanks to take back the wealth, using the economics of Friedrich Hayek and the Chicago School led by Milton Friedman. It took us right back to the origins of capitalism. The market was to rule everything. And the 'invisible hand' would, in theory, ensure it would work to everyone's benefit. This metaphor, used by Adam Smith, described 'how individual self-interest, within a competitive market, can lead to beneficial societal outcomes, even without centralised planning or government intervention'. Under Reagan and Thatcher this process was rebranded as trickle-down economics – the rich had to get richer first before the wealth could trickle down to everyone else. So anything that hindered the free market was to be undermined and if possible, got rid of. This meant unions, social welfare programmes, charities and even governments were to be subjugated to the market and commodified. This had all been tried before with laissez-faire capitalism in the 19th century in Britain. It created such poverty, so well described by Charles Dickens, that eventually the government had to intervene with the Poor Laws to give financial support and care to the impoverished. The neoliberal free trade of globalisation was to generate a new Shangri la. But as we now witness it has only created huge disparities in wealth and given power to the super rich: instead of trickling down over the last 50 years wealth has been siphoned up. Donald Trump has 13 billionaires in his administration. So the Liberal man depending on reason has ended up being alienated from others and self-seeking at the expense of others. It is believed that people are fundamentally greedy and excel in competition. And the one type of personality that might be completely at home in this culture is the narcissist. The not-for-profit Mayo Clinic, one of the world's top hospitals, describes the narcissistic personality disorder as: '... a mental health condition in which people have an unreasonably high sense of their own importance. They need and seek too much attention and want people to admire them. People with this disorder may lack the ability to understand or care about the feelings of others.' The prognosis is not good. This present ideology, neoliberalism, fell apart in the 2008 financial crisis and we suffered the Great Recession. The world is still limping along because no other ideology or economic system has risen to replace it. This is because the Enlightenment project is exhausted. The hope that reason might lead to well-

being and happiness has failed. Various efforts to reevaluate and reform by way of Modernism and Post-Modernism and the three idealisms centring on community, nation and the individual self, have all failed. Such is the Enlightenment's sorry end. Unfortunately the hardship of the growing cost of living and a global rise in people on the move to escape the outcomes of poverty, climate change and oppressive regimes plays into the hands of the far right which threatens the end of democracy and the institution of fascist regimes. We are, in fact, beginning to see this clearly in the US where Trump is completely discarding the law. Another hallmark of authoritarianism is corruption. Corruption is the use of public office to enrich oneself and so 'consolidate power, maintain support and suppress dissent' (<https://protectdemocracy.org>). Trump is in the process of making the rich even richer with his latest financial bill while also creating a huge personal wealth fund for his family and cronies. The same play book as Russia's Vladimir Putin, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Hungary's Viktor Orbán. Nigel Farage is coming up right behind them. All this should not blind us to the many benefits of Liberalism such as democracy and universal suffrage, internationalism, the rule of law, civil rights, property rights, free speech and The United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights which went onto spawn many international treaties. It is the crumbling of this order, both national and international that causes us to be bewildered, anxious and rudderless. Can the 2500-year-old Buddhadhamma offer some guidance? Hopefully, I'll have some pointers next Newsbyte. As always, comments, corrections, criticisms are welcome. Many thanks to Denis, Martin, Jim and Therese for their comments and a special thanks to Therese who also edited the essay.

The Awakening and Possible Salvation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 6 min read

In this thought-provoking essay, Bhante Bodhidhamma explores how the Buddha's teachings offer practical solutions to the spiritual and social crises created by Western Liberalism's emphasis on individualism, materialism, and loss of existential meaning. He identifies three core problems with the Enlightenment legacy: excessive individualism that disconnects people from their social nature, the loss of transcendent purpose through scientific materialism, and the false myth of inevitable progress that underlies Western ideologies.

Drawing on Buddhadhamma as a pragmatic guide, Bhante Bodhidhamma proposes that the Buddha's understanding of dukkha (suffering) caused by delusive self-grasping offers a foundation for creating caring, wise societies. He contrasts Buddhist cyclical cosmology with linear Christian progress myths, emphasizing how the Buddha's practical approach to establishing the Saṅgha through the Vinaya demonstrates wisdom grounded in present conditions rather than idealistic futures.

The essay presents two pathways for transcending destructive individualism: cultivating genuine relationships based on mettā (loving-kindness) and recognizing our interconnected nature, and developing vipassanā insight to uproot the illusion of separate selfhood. Bhante Bodhidhamma concludes by suggesting that Buddhist principles of caring and pragmatism, exemplified through John Rawls' 'Veil of Ignorance' thought experiment, could guide the transformation of Western institutions toward genuine well-being for all beings.

Bhante Bodhidhamma Bewildered. Anxious. Rudderless. 'Cometh the hour, cometh the man' Following on from last month's Tip, we can take it that Liberalism is a political and moral system that focuses on individual rights – particularly individual liberty and the right to own property, along with limited government. This presents us with three problems. The first, understandably after the authoritarianism of the medieval ages with kings and Roman Catholic hegemony, is the accent on the individual. This lacked the importance of society, man as a social being. After all we are our relationships, but this is so hard to see once we define ourselves as separate individuals. In fact it was only from 1610 onwards that the word individual, coming from the Latin in-dividuum – not dividable, began to refer to a person as such and by 1815 had become another 'ism' – individualism as opposed to communism and socialism! These latter two were attempts as reintroducing the idea of a person in and of society. And there are those who call for the Enlightenment to be reshaped by other philosophies such as Confucianism, Ubuntu

and First Nation philosophies which centre the person back into society and nature. The second is the loss of existential meaning. Christianity was undermined by the growing dominance of science. If it can't be measured, it doesn't exist! Many people have no deep reason for living, a meaning that goes beyond self-preservation and self-indulgence. This is supported by a consumer mentality and an economic system based on acquisitiveness. It has replaced a self-transcending purpose with individual material gain. This can lead to a nihilistic lifestyle of just keeping oneself entertained or to a crisis of meaning that can lead to depression and even suicide. The third is that Liberalism is a rehash of the Christian myth of progress. That the world began with God. It was corrupted. Jesus came and saved it. It will end with the Rapture or when all bodies rise from the graves anew and the Kingdom will arrive on earth. This is the underlying myth of all Western idealisms. So it is that idealisms are future driven. They always presume they will end up in a wonderful and perpetuating society. They are based on a false premise and set an impossible goal. There is an apocryphal story that at a Moscow conference the question of achieving a perfect Communist society was discussed. When someone asked: 'What about accidents?' a long silence followed, until a voice was heard to say: 'In a Communist Society there will be no accidents.' Consider the more realistic Indian myth, perhaps, of eternal beginnings and endings, an endless rotation where sentient beings display their delusions. This is the world of Samsara, ever onward going, never arriving at a static heavenly place. Human life will always be a struggle, sometimes less so than others. It was from this world the Buddha found an escape: it was to be in the world but not of it and eventually out of it completely. So, what do we do and where do we go from here? Many undeveloped ideas are fermenting. If we are to take Buddhadhamma as a guide, even though it developed in a very different period, its baseline attitudes can become a guide to future thinking. In the Buddha's time, there were no ideologies or system thinking. This was before reading and writing allowed us to think about thinking. Yet there are objective truths about human beings as there are objective truths in science. Just as science talks about system theories, how everything impinges on something else, so in the mental sphere humans impinge upon each other, more so now with social media. And the basis of the Buddha's teaching is that there is a level of suffering and the suffering we cause to others that is caused by a delusive sense of self. This manifests as acquisitiveness, aversion and fear. So here we have a way of knowing when we are acting from an unwholesome basis. When these are replaced with non-greed, non-hatred and non-fear, it follows that wisdom and compassion arise naturally. It is the good heart that will develop a good mind and a good mind that will develop good systems and a caring society. So instead of reason with all its -isms being our guide, reason should be at the service of our benevolent intention. Instead of ideologies, practical wisdom, one that arises out of connection with others and caring for others. The operative attitude is caring, caring for humans, for animals, for plants and

for the mineral world. Such practical wisdom grounds us in the present, working with present conditions to better them. And let the future take care of itself! As an example of the Buddha's own pragmatic approach in creating an institution, he once saw some monks carrying large amounts of cloth for making robes. He decided to find out for himself how many were really needed. In the cold season, he lay down to sleep with his lower and upper robe and soon found he needed another robe (a 'robe' is basically a large sheet!) and, as the night grew longer, yet another. So he was able to formulate a rule that monks were allowed only a lower and an upper robe and to carry another two upper robes that were sewn together. It was in this way that the Vinaya, the rules and regulations, were formulated. The Buddha did not have some idealistic idea in his mind. He wanted to establish an institution that would allow its members to devote their lives to the study and practice of the Dhamma, that would sustain through time and that would support the spiritual needs of lay members. This he achieved through a compassionate and practical response to circumstance. Even though many rules of the Vinaya are not applicable, they remain as pointers. The Sangha, the community of monks and nuns, is over 2,500 years old. The Buddhadhamma also offers a solution to the lack of meaning without any belief either in a transcendent state, Nibbana or in a God. There are two ways we can transcend the self-seeking individual that leads to isolation, alienation and loneliness. The first is to connect with others and begin to see oneself in relationship. A conversation is exactly that. It is not me talking to you and you to me, but us talking to each other. We are not simply communicating – email, texting, chatting - we are co-relating. (I have in the past talked of Ubuntu, the South African philosophy that is encapsulated in the phrase: I am because we are.) Of course, open to rebirth and transcendence, life takes a deeper meaning. The opposite to the vices of selfishness such as generosity, patience, kindness, compassion and rejoicing necessarily evolve. We are our relationships. This is why the Buddha tells us good companionship is the whole of the spiritual life. And the operative motivation is to develop metta, a universal, unbiased kindness. To achieve that we must acknowledge the human being as an expression of the Dhamma, the Buddha Within. Eventually we see we are all undeveloped Buddhas trying to get on with each other. The second is to uproot the notion of an individual self through the inner investigation of insight meditation, vipassana. The two, of course, go hand in hand. Finally, if caring and pragmatism are to be the basic guides, capitalism can also be made to serve the common good and so can social media. Indeed, the whole of society can be changed for the benefit of all. And there is a way in which we can approach this. John Rawls, the most influential political philosopher of the modern area, has given us a Theory of the Veil of Ignorance. Put simply, if we were conscious before we were born and we did not know what circumstances we were going to be born into, in what sort of society would we want to find ourselves. How such an approach pans out into economics, social organisation and

politics will depend on the culture we are in. Hopefully, the West will develop an approach out of the good heart that will help us to rise out of the present chaos towards social well-being and harmony. Many thanks to Denis, Martin, Jim and Therese for their comments and a special thanks to Therese who also edited the essay.

Sixth Maxim: Act for the Future Generations of All Species

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

This essay examines the sixth and final ethical maxim proposed for addressing climate catastrophe: "Act for the future generations of all species." Drawing deeply from the Metta Sutta's universal loving-kindness teachings, Noirin Sheahan explores how the Buddha's words "Whatever living beings there may be, whether they be weak or strong, omitting none" directly relate to our climate responsibilities toward both current climate refugees and future generations.

The teaching addresses a fundamental challenge in climate activism: how to open the heart to planetary suffering without falling into either pity (positioning oneself as superior) or overwhelm (compassion fatigue and despair). Using the Buddha's teaching that "the whole world can be found within this fathom-long body," the essay provides practical guidance for working with the physical sensations that arise when contemplating global suffering.

Through detailed meditation instructions, the author demonstrates how tracking aversion and tension in the body can lead to a balanced middle ground where compassion flows naturally without exhaustion. This process reveals the interconnection between wisdom and compassion, dissolving the delusion of separation between "self" and "world." The essay concludes with practical suggestions for translating this inner work into concrete action for climate and environmental justice, making it both a profound meditation teaching and a guide for engaged Buddhist practice.

Noirin Sheahan This tip looks at the last of these six maxims which have been suggested as ethical preparation for climate catastrophe. This advises us to “act for future generations of all species”. Here’s how the authors elaborate: Speak for those without voice: the poor, the future generations, other species. Speak for the forests, the seas, the mountains. Act, personally and politically, to limit the damage being done to the biosphere. Every 0.5° C increase avoided is a major victory and achievement. We are to concern ourselves with the welfare of those far beyond our circle of friendship or kinship. The Buddha’s teaching on compassion asks the same, and these lines from the Metta Sutta link closely with the maxim: Whatever living beings there may be, Whether they be weak or strong, omitting none, The great or the mighty, medium, short or tall, The seen and unseen, Those living near or far away, born or to-be-born, may all beings be at ease! The words are easy to say, but challenging to put into action. Weak or strong omitting

none. Considering climate change, the weak could be considered as those currently suffering, for example peoples in East Africa who have suffered decades of drought with resultant famine, homelessness and political instability, war and mass migration. The strong could be considered as those in relatively stable environments like Europe and the US, long beneficiaries of the resource-hungry technologies causing climate change. It's helpful to bring both weak and strong together as the tendency to blame can find no suitable resting place – neither the climate refugees nor the far-right activists opposing them, nor the climate deniers exacerbating the crisis. Weak and strong, omitting none. Neither can we console ourselves by ignoring the forecasts of what our grandchildren may have to face: Those born and to be born; May all beings be at ease. To “act for future generations of all species” is to consider the whole world, to let the mind linger on wildfires, floods, drought and the devastation these bring for people and wildlife as well as nature itself, the essential basis for new generations. When considering the world in this way, I've found it helpful to remember the Buddha's teaching that the whole world can be found within this fathom long body. 'The world' here means the totality of our experience. In meditation we are normally focussed on our inner world of sensations and feelings. While working with this maxim, the totality of our experience includes our thoughts and imaginings of the outer world, planet earth with all its inhabitants. Imagining drought and starvation brings tension: the jaws clench, the eyes wince. We usually ignore these seemingly trivial reactions but they are a key to the conundrum of compassion: how do I open the heart to the suffering of the world without causing myself to suffer? Here is an example of working with this conundrum from my own experience. Remembering that 'the world can be found within this fathom long body' draws awareness towards the physical tension in my jaws, eyes and elsewhere. This gives me the objectivity needed to register aversion, the attempt to get rid of suffering. Tracking the pushing sensations of aversion I realise that I am attempting to push away the imagined suffering so that 'I' can be above it all, directing good wishes towards those who suffer. At times I sense this image of myself as superior, powerful, full of resources, while 'the world' is weak and needy. This is pity, easily confused with compassion. As I acknowledge pity, I notice how exhausting it is to imagine myself above the suffering of the world, how much effort I have to put into my good wishes. In time I run out of steam and sense myself as drowning in the imagined suffering of the world. Anger, blame and despair compete for attention as I scramble to get back on top of things. This is overwhelm, compassion fatigue, burn-out. Mindfully tracking experience as it bobs between these extremes, I find myself drawn towards a middle ground where the distinction between 'me' and 'the suffering of the world' is not so pronounced. This is a kind of no-mans-land and the lack of direction can be disconcerting, but since pity and overwhelm are dead ends I have no choice but to explore this territory. I sense my boundaries loosening as mental images and thoughts are pulled down-

wards into the body, making everything feel unstable, uncertain. It's nerve-wracking and the breath becomes jerky, but if I can stick with it long enough, a joyful fascination makes itself felt. Unpleasant sensations grow more pronounced, but habitual aversion towards them is held in check. I am now sensing these sensations as my best attempt to become conscious of the suffering of the world, while holding them in awareness is recognized as my best attempt at compassion. Although the sensations are unpleasant, the holding feels pleasant and thus a tentative equilibrium forms. Within this equilibrium, I see that the unpleasant sensations are caused by anger, which is being directed at the felt sense of myself as responsible for fixing this problem. With that, the expectation that I should be able to fix the problem fades. Instead of there being a bubble of 'me' holding all the responsibility to save the world, the resources now seem to be shared equally. I sense a growing confidence that an essential goodness will continue no matter what devastation may be forthcoming. The endeavor to expand my circle of goodwill has dissolved a layer of delusion, demonstrating the link between wisdom and compassion. With this more balanced perspective, it becomes easier to think about practical ways I could help – which charities I could support, which actions I could take as a personal or political level. The sixth maxim challenges us to expand our circle of concern towards all the inhabitants of the earth, including nature itself. The Buddha's teaching that 'the whole world can be found within this fathom-long body' provides a practical way to open the heart to meet this challenge.

Cultivating Mettā for Future Generations

Bhante Bodhidhamma · 4 min read

This essay explores how to cultivate mettā (goodwill) for future generations in the context of climate crisis, drawing on the Metta Sutta's call to extend care to 'those born and to be born.' Noirin Sheahan addresses the challenge of directing loving-kindness toward beings we cannot clearly imagine, using a teaching from the Samyutta Nikāya where the Buddha suggests that sometimes it's better to identify with the body rather than get lost in mental formations. When visualization of future generations proved overwhelming, she employed this embodied approach as a refuge, allowing natural gratitude for physical existence to arise. This led to connecting with past generations through memory of grandparents, which then enabled mettā to flow forward to future beings. The practice demonstrates how grounding awareness in bodily experience can serve as a stable foundation when meditation becomes difficult, offering a practical method for sustaining compassionate action toward environmental challenges without burning out. The approach honors both the temporary nature of identification with form while using it skillfully as a stepping stone toward broader loving-kindness practice.

Noirin Sheahan Following from last month's tip, I want to explore additional Dhamma supports for last of these six maximssuggested as ethical preparation for climate catastrophe. The final maxim challenges to think beyond our close circle and act for the future generation of all species. There are many ways we could do this - caring for the soil, for ecosystems, for political structures promoting long-term social well-being over short term gain. But unless we can do this with good will, we risk burning out, overwhelmed by the immensity of the task, demoralised by the cultural habits that fuel climate change and blind us to the coming catastrophe. To sustain our efforts we need to develop a metta (goodwill) practice which can encompass future generations. Last month I described how the teaching: "The whole world can be found in this fathom long body" allowed me to use news and documentary images of climate related suffering to become an embodied aspect of 'my world' – the world of present experience – for the purpose of opening the heart to those beyond my immediate circle. But when I tried applying this to developing metta for future generations, it didn't work as I couldn't imagine who or what I was directing metta towards. Because the Metta Sutta asks us to extend goodwill and care to 'those born and to be born', I guessed the Buddha would have provided some help with this aspect of metta practice and started looking for anything relevant. The teaching I found particularly helpful is from the Samyutta Nikaya: "It

would be better, bhikkhus, for the uninstructed worldling to take this body composed of the four great elements as self rather than the mind. For what reason? Because this body may last for ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years... But that which is called mind, intellect, or consciousness arises as one thing and ceases as another, both by day and by night."In other teachings the Buddha clarifies that he does not want us to identify with the body, because it cannot provide a reliable basis for happiness. At any moment the body may get injured or fall ill; if we live long enough it will grow frail and eventually will die. Beautiful sights and sounds, thrilling or tender touches – all these give temporary pleasure and we can use such pleasure to lift the heart: relaxing in a bath, having a massage, gazing at the sunset, sipping tea. But if we keep chasing one sense pleasure after another we'll exhaust ourselves. None of them can ever satisfy our natural desire for lasting happiness. In this teaching however, the Buddha tells us it would be better to identify with the body rather than the mind, because the body is a more trustworthy source of stability. He says this applies to 'an uninstructed worldling', someone who doesn't know the Dhamma. This is true of all of us at times – when we're on autopilot or caught in an emotional storm or getting fixated on an idea or somehow stuck in meditation. Our Dhamma knowledge has temporarily deserted us, we need to relearn it in this presenting moment. What I really like about this teaching is that it gives us permission to make a mistake. For those of us who tend towards perfectionism, this is gold dust. We know it's a mistake to identify with the body, but we do it anyway, assured that it's the lesser mistake than following our current line of thought. Relaxing into the body, enjoying the temporary illusion of identity, some wiser thoughts start to appear in the mind. I used this approach to develop metta for future generations. I pictured a cousin's grandchild, tried to imagine him getting older, with his own children and grandchildren and the kind of world they might be living in. But trying to hold this in imagination along with goodwill was a step too far. The images kept collapsing and I began to feel resentful at being asked too much. I took the Buddha's advice and let myself sink into identity with the body. It was a great relief to let go of the imaginative effort and lots of joy arose at simply being able to sit and breathe, to think of this as 'my body, my breath'. Recognizing the relative stability of the body brought forth gratitude for the enduring nature of physical form in general, the house I was in, the earth itself, nature, the bodies of others. Gratitude that my own body had already lasted several decades triggered memories of my grandparents. It occurred to me that although I wasn't able to imagine future generations, I could remember past ones, which seemed like a good way to ease back into the metta exercise. I recruited my grandparents in the flow of goodwill, imagining them wishing me and all their grandchildren well. It then became easy and natural for this metta to flow onwards to future generations. At intervals thoughts and images suggesting future climate catastrophe brought the metta stream to a stop. Grippled by horror I again accepted the Buddha's invitation to relax, let mental

images fade, identify with the physical body, take the comfort it offered from being at this moment, safe, comfortable, well. This reminded me of the physicality of future generations – the bodies of people and animals that would be living then, the ground around them, the buildings or shelters they would inhabit. I sensed in all these the potential for strength and care and the basic blessing of survival. Metta flowed again, strengthened in fact, for having worked through the challenge. The practice of identifying with the body whenever I feel stuck in meditation or lost in daily life has since proved a refuge on many occasions. I hope it will also prove a refuge for future generations facing challenges we are spared and that the intricate web of physical life on earth can continue to link beings with the Dhamma and hence with liberation.

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