

Week 2 – Perfect Vision and Right View

Buddhism Level 2 – Traditional Buddhism

GLIMPSES OF PERFECT VISION

We've probably all had some kind of experience similar to Siddhartha's "Four Sights"; glimpses of a vision of some greater sense of value. Maybe something that led to you pursuing an interest in Buddhism? Could be death of a loved one, coming close to death yourself, experience of great peace, contentment or beauty....

Our glimpses of Perfect Vision, like Siddhartha's, aren't fully formed, but are essential for motivating us to keep pursuing the vision. Like catching a glimpse of distant mountain peak, and then starting in that direction. The Buddha's quest and Enlightenment developed in him a full vision, a full understanding: Perfect Vision in its fullness as the sight from that mountain peak.

Then he tried to describe that vision – his Perfect Vision – in terms of concepts, what we're calling Right View.

VIEWS

We all have a model of the world in our heads that we use to make sense of the world and guide our actions. Views are maps of reality that we use to find our way around. They're highly simplified, because reality is far too complex for us to hold in our heads.

Other words for views are beliefs, suppositions, assumptions. The views we hold aren't passive ideas: they affect our experience

Other images of views:

- Like a pair of spectacles that you wear to see better. Sometimes wear reading specs, sometimes driving specs. Similarly some views are more appropriate in some situations while others are better in others. All of them are approximations.
- Like the finger pointing at the moon. The finger bears no relationship to the moon, but it does direct us in the right directions.

Views have emotional counterparts

Views aren't just intellectual things, they have deep emotional roots. They are like the cognitive equivalent of an emotional attachment. Views condition emotions and vice versa

CONVERTING RIGHT VIEW TO PERFECT VISION

Right view

Having right view means understanding or having beliefs or convictions about life that conduce to our long-term well-being. Right view is an accurate map, good enough to get us where we want to go. Examples of right views:

- What we are now is a product of previous actions
- What we will become is a product of our present actions
- We are fundamentally involved with other people and all other living beings in an interconnected universe

- The only certainty is that we will die, but we don't know when
- We have the potential for full Enlightenment

'Right View' is not taking on set of beliefs in blind faith; it's being willing to try some of these new ways of thinking out – adopting them for as working hypotheses – like trying on a pair of spectacles.

Throughout the course, when hearing a new Buddhist "view", try to imagine how it would feel to really "inhabit" that view, believe it in your "bones", or "heart of hearts".

Perfect vision

This is a non-conceptual apprehension of reality without any distortion caused by emotional or cognitive biases. We now embody the territory that the map previously tried to describe.

Intellectual clarity is not everything, but it counts for a great deal, especially when one remembers that Right View constitutes a basis for the development of Perfect Vision.

Sangharakshita – aphorism

Our map bears a similar relationship to reality that a road map of France – say - bears to the actual country. If it is accurate, it is useful for finding our way around, but it leaves out almost all of the richness, beauty, complexity, mystery and wonder of the reality. If it is inaccurate, it is worse than useless, and will lead us into a succession of dead-ends, wild goose chases, and unpleasant experiences. So although our map is only ever a poor approximation to reality, it is still vitally important. Our beliefs and ideas about the nature of reality have a major effect on the way we feel, and on the way we live our life. Our beliefs can liberate us, or they can keep us stuck, and even trap us in downward spirals of negativity.

ATTITUDE TO VIEWS

An aspect of right view is having the right attitude to views: having an open, exploratory attitude. An overly rigid adherence to a view renders it inaccurate: like driving through the countryside with eyes glued to the map; or being unable to handle the fact the road layout has changed.

HOME PRACTICE

Throughout the week, notice occasions when you're disagreeing with someone or reacting uncomfortably to a situation.

Can you see a view about the way the world should be which underlies your response? Is there a more liberative view that you can bring to the situation?

RECOMMENDED READING

"Ways of thinking", Mitra Foundation Course, Background reading posted to group website

Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?* Introduction

Sangharakshita, *A Vision of Human Existence*, CD 132 or in *Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow*

Sangharakshita *Vision and Transformation*, chapter on 'Perfect Vision', or CD 47 'Right Understanding'