SANGHARAKSHITA’S SYSTEM OF DHARMA LIFE - PLAN FOR **WEEK 3**

**Main themes:**

* This stage involves actually exercising our moral responsibility ;
* We need to be able to recognise what skillful action is;
* The precepts allow us to compare our actions with how they would ideally be;
* We shouldn’t assume that unpleasant feelings are unskillful;
* Developing skillful behaviours requires conscious effort.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **START TIME** | **TOPIC** | **LED BY** |
| 19.05 | Saluting the shrine | Ch |
| 19.10 | Body awareness, them Metta Bhavana (30 mins)   * Could read a poem | Ch |
| 19.40 | Pairs: what do you recall from last week and what has seemed relevant since? | Ch |
| 19.45 | Recap of last week:   * Taking full responsibility for our ‘karmic agency’; * finding an organising principle that absorbs all our energies; * the idea of ‘Flow’; * Attending to the context in which we live (re: dependent arising & cessation) | Ch |
| 19.55 | Any questions? | Ch |
| 20.00 | Short talk introducing skillful action:   * If the stage of integration involves recognising that we have responsibility, the stage of skillful action involves actually exercising it. (This stage was originally called ‘positive emotion’, but we need to translate ‘positive’ into ‘skillful’ and ‘emotion’ into ‘action’). * We need to be able to recognise what skillful action is. Its **effects** are beneficial for the world, and for oneself, in terms of greater openness, awareness, happiness and fulfilment. Its **characteristics** are feelings of love (metta) and generosity; the ability to open us up; and mental clarity. * The value of the precepts is to allow us to compare our actions with how they would ideally be. This might involve *apatrapya* (a sense of shame in relation to those whose ethics we admire) and *hiri* (an experience of ‘moral pain’ as a result of an unskilful action, communication or thought). | Ch |
| **START TIME** | **TOPIC** | **LED BY** |
| 20.15 | Pairs: How easy do you find it to know whether or not you’re acting in a way that’s beneficial for yourself and others? (Probably good to concentrate on fairly trivial, everyday choices.) | Ch |
| 20.20 | Feedback in full class | Ch |
| 20.25 | **TEA BREAK** |  |
| 20.50 | More thoughts about skillful action:   * It’s also very important that we clearly understand the difference between action (karma) and its result (vipaka). We shouldn’t assume that unpleasant feelings are unskilful; they may be just the opposite (as in the cases of apatrapya and hiri). * Developing skilful behaviours requires conscious effort – to identify our unskilful tendencies and to work on them systematically. The ‘Four Right Efforts’ involve eradicating and preventing unskilful mental states, and developing and maintaining skilful ones. * We will often experience a lot of pressure to conform to social norms, even when we recognise them to be unskilful. In this situation we need the support of **spiritual friends**. | Ch |
| 21.05 | Class discussion | Ch |
| 21.25 | Tasks for the next week:   * Read the ‘skillful action’ section of the handout; * Could listen to the 3rd of Dayanandi’s talks in the series “The Five Great Stages of the Spiritual Path”: Opening the Heart (1:11:21) * Try practicing the Metta Bhavana from the point of view of ‘skillful action’ rather than ‘positive emotion’. | Ch |
| 21.30 | Finish |  |