

Week 4 – Confession & rejoicing

Buddhism Level 2 – Ritual & Devotion

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Paper, pens & clipboards (could have nice paper for merits)
7 fold puja texts
metal bowl for burning confessions

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Understand relationship between Going for Refuge, confession & rejoicing in merits
Have experience of considering confessions, and rejoicing in merits
Incorporate these elements in puja

MEDITATION (10 MINS)

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION

Importance of positive emotions, and role of puja in developing them.
Integration & positive emotion together form basis of insight.

Previous class Review – in 3s

How did you get on with the puja last week?
Did you reflect on your refuges & faith?

CONFESSION OF FAULTS

Read through

When we come to Going for Refuge, we start actively progressing in the direction of the spiritual goal. But once we have started making that effort we soon find that there are all sorts of things holding us back – all sorts of bad habits that we have formed and all kinds of unskillful actions that we have committed. So the next stage is to acknowledge that, to confess it – not only in the depths of our own hearts but also in front of the spiritual community. We thus begin to shed some of the baggage that is hindering us from climbing towards the mountain peak of Enlightenment.

Problems with “evil”

Offputting for many.

evil adj 1 morally bad or offensive. 2 harmful.

“Confession is not just a cool, objective recognition, ticking off our actions against the precepts, but something really heartfelt. It should be an emotional experience.”

Using strong language to connect with sense of regret – but not in a guilt-ridden, unworthy sense.

Why confess?

Recognising our “mixedness”; there’s a lot of ourselves below the waterline that doesn’t fit in with our idea of ourselves, or how we’d like to be. Could call it our “shadow”.

Don’t have to feel bad about ourselves for this, just simply acknowledge it – being open about it ironically takes away some of the sting. Somehow feels more objective, manageable if you can talk about it.

Makes it easier to address in our ethical practice.

Self-disclosure of aspects of ourselves we’re not proud of is a way to dissolve the persona, the face we like to wear.

How would it be if we apologised promptly every time we act towards someone in a way we regret?

How would it be to have someone you can “confess” to, to whom you could tell absolutely anything, however apparently trivial or shameful

Exercise on own

Reflect on any “faults”

These could be:

- habits that you’d like to change, and feel you can change over time;
- or specific things you regret that come to the forefront of your mind.

They are actions of body speech or mind that aren’t in line with your ideals.

Write down one or two of these on a piece of paper – you won’t need to show it to anyone, and we’ll burn it in the puja.

REJOICING IN MERIT

Read through section

Rejoicing that there’s goodness in the world, wisdom, compassion. Isn’t it great?

Recall the lives of great sages – where would we be without the Buddha & other spiritual teachers.

As get to know more & more historical Buddhist teachers, can develop more sense of appreciation for the huge force for the good that flows through history, and that we’re benefitting from.

But not just great teachers – recognising the value of ordinary peoples’ aspirations and positive qualities. What sort of world would it be without? Recognising the innate desire for self-transcendence.

Rejoicing in merits represents the converse of the Confession of Faults. You have freed yourself from faults, so you feel happy and delighted; and being happy and delighted with yourself, you can feel happy and delighted with others. This is an important psychological fact: you cannot be happy with others unless you are first of all happy with yourself.

Input from team member – why rejoice in merits?

Brainstorm: What holds us back from “rejoicing” / appreciating others more?

jealousy, envy, pride, egotism, habitual focus on the negative in others, feeling of inferiority if we do acknowledge others’ positive qualities.

It's as if there's only so much positivity to go around, so anyone else's must be at my expense – poverty mentality

Practice of rejoicing in merits works against this tendency, cultivates joyful, appreciative states of mind. Can have sense of the impersonality of positive qualities – it's just great that they exist, doesn't matter if they're mine or someone else's'

[Eg. my dhanakosa experience]

If giving, balances any tendency to see with criticism – refocus onto what others do well, their "invisible" qualities that we can take so much for granted. Counteracts jealousy, envy, pride, egotism etc

If receiving, balances any tendency to self-criticism – get to know our virtues through eyes or other, feel appreciated & seen

Exercise [for well bonded group]– divide into groups of 4-5 (to not take too long)

1. Hand out one sheet of paper to each person.
2. Write your name on the top, pass it to the left
3. Think for a while, then write down any virtues, qualities you enjoy or respect in the person who's paper you have. Be specific or general. Helpful to just see what's the first word that comes to you about them. Or imagine what a pastiche of them would be.
4. Now pass paper to left & repeat.

Finally you'll get "your" rejoicings back, read them.

Exercise [for group who don't know each other so well] – in pairs

1. think of a good friend, & recall their "merits" to your partner
2. what do you think the good friend might say about your merits? Or what would you like them to say! Write them down on a piece of paper

TEA BREAK

PUJA

We'll recite full sevenfold puja; have the heart sutra as a reading

In offerings section people can offer up their list of merits as well as incense, and burn their confessions.

Can retrieve rejoicings afterwards

HOME PRACTICE

See if you can bring confession & rejoicing more consciously into your everyday life.

- Apologise promptly for any actions or communications you regret, even if slightly.
- Consciously dwell on peoples' positive qualities. Look out for occasions to appreciate people; and do it!
- At the end of each day, note these in your practice diary. Also reflect on any actions, words, or mental states that you regret on ethical grounds; and any actions or qualities about yourself that you appreciate.

