

Week 3 – The Buddha & Enlightenment

Buddhism level 2 – What makes you a Buddhist?

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

How do we Go for Refuge to the Buddha? Buddha is personification of Enlightenment, and represents our potential for becoming Enlightened (or at least more Enlightened)

Translation of Bodhi – awakening, or Nibbana / Nirvana – extinction or unbinding

The problem of language

Language – any verbal description of the Dharma – is instrumental and incomplete. It is like a finger pointing at moon: descriptions of enlightenment are as different from it as the finger is from the moon. Or trying someone describing eating a fruit we've never had.

It is a state of being that isn't captured by the dualism of language – our own experience is so unconceptualizable, how much more so is Enlightenment.

Epithets & metaphors from Pali Canon

These provide a more poetic, felt, perspective

The harbour of refuge, the cool cave, the island amidst the floods, the place of bliss, emancipation, liberation, safety, the supreme, the tranquil, the home of ease, the calm, the end of suffering, the medicine for all evil, the unshaken, the ambrosia, the immaterial, the imperishable, the abiding, the further shore, the bliss of effort, the supreme joy, the holy city.

Or there were the descriptions of the five hindrances as being like:

Paying off an old debt, recovering from a long sickness, being freed after a long jail term, becoming a freeman after being a slave, or reaching a safe town after a long journey through dangerous country. Or like laying down a heavy burden. The sickness is suffering; the burden, debt or imprisonment is being shackled to craving, egocentricity.

Analysis of Enlightenment

Analysis of different components of being into 5 skandhas:

Outer appearance – “form” (rupa)	Hedonic tone – “feeling” (vedana)	Perception & knowledge (samjna)	Emotional states (samskara)	Will & volition (samskara)	Consciousness (vijana)
Impressive, self contained, mindful movements, like a well-trained elephant!	Bliss, peace “Nirvana is the supreme bliss” Dhp 203	Awakening, insight, wisdom, seeing truth of Reality Awareness of non-difference of self / other	Love, compassion, equanimity	Freedom (from mental bondage), energy, vigour	Pure, undefiled, luminous consciousness (jnana)

Enlightenment is often referred to as state of union of wisdom and compassion

Psychology of goal-setting

	Having goals	Not having goals
Advantages	Have a sense of direction, orientation in	Ease, openness to experience, “going

	life, ideals to live by, sense of urgency, motive force	with the flow"
Disadvantages	Additional dissatisfaction, frustration, give self hard time, over-judgemental, too "willful"	Woolly, little vigour, relativist world, no "up"

Spiritual life is lived in the gap between the real (how we are) and our ideals.

Grasped wrongly it can be frustrating or dispiriting, so we need metta & patience for ourselves. We're not a problem – we're the way

Another, less egoically focussed way of looking, is to align ourself – our will - with the broader reality; like putting out a sail into the wind. As if we go along with a higher will, a higher self. Do you have experience of this?

Home practice

Last week, we noticed the way we go for refuge to various sources of security. This week, we'll do the same, but also try to GFR to the Buddha, in sense of moving towards a more Buddha-like state of mind – a "higher" state of mind.

Periodically whenever you remember, but at least once per day, do the following:

Centre yourself with a few breaths

Gain a flavour of your state of mind/being/body.

Chose one quality of being that you think is relevant to your current state (although any would do): eg. Relaxation, concentration, kindness, clarity, presence, awareness, buoyancy, creativity.

Imagine how it would be to be feeling just slightly more of this quality (you don't actually have to bring it into being, just imagine).

RECOMMENDED READING

"Enlightenment as experience and non-experience" in "The Taste of Freedom" by Sangharakshita, or Talk no. 119

"The Ideal of Human Enlightenment" in "Human Enlightenment" by Sangharakshita, or Talk no. 120

"The Three Jewels", Sangharakshita, ch 14

<http://accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca3/nibbana.html>