

Week 5 – Dharma as Path & Method

Buddhism Level 2 – What makes you a Buddhist?

DHARMA AS METHOD

We have a large toolkit of practices. Here are some:

Ethics	5 precepts: kindness, generosity, contentment, truthfulness, mindfulness
Meditation	Mindfulness of breathing Walking meditation Metta bhavana Just sitting 3 other Brahmaviharas Pure awareness NB more as get more experienced
Wisdom	Study (classes, reading etc) Reflection Being realistic
Other	Friendship Pujas & other ritual Recollecting the Buddha Mantra

They are roughly collated under the headings of the Threefold path – or three trainings – one of most useful catchalls of Buddhist lists. It was what the Buddha stressed over and again on his final “tour”.

And also at Bhandagama the Blessed One often gave counsel to the bhikkhus thus: "Such and such is virtue; such and such is concentration; and such and such is wisdom. Great becomes the fruit, great is the gain of concentration when it is fully developed by virtuous conduct; great becomes the fruit, great is the gain of wisdom when it is fully developed by concentration; utterly freed from the taints of lust, becoming, and ignorance is the mind that is fully developed in wisdom."

Mahaparinibbana sutta, Digha Nikaya 16, v4.4

He emphasises the progressive nature of path, how each stage supports previous one. We can also see it as a spiral, each stage supporting other two.

What does it mean to “practice Dharma”? It is not one technique, not just meditation. You can develop a repertoire of Dharma practices for every occasion. When you start to understand the richness and variety of Dharma practice, you will see that even if you are stressed out, tired, or depressed, you can still practice. You can become a skilful chef of Dharma using its rich and varied recipes to make any situation into a source of fulfilment and happiness. When what you really want is to practice Dharma, you find more and more ability to do so in a wider variety of situations.

Buddhism with an Attitude, B. Alan Wallace, Snow Lion p15

We can practice in any situation, there’s no special spiritual situation we need to wait for. Going for Refuge to the Dharma (as practice) is actually making use of Dharmic methods consistently, becoming adept at using them like a good cook.

Note how the practices encompass body-speech-mind, head-heart, emotion-cognition-volition.

We looked at some of the ways we avoid practising Dharma.

- Settling down comfortably
- Literalism / analytic / academic approach
- Eclectic / new age supermarket attitude

- Possessiveness / identification without action

MINDFULNESS OF PURPOSE

Purposefulness is a particular kind of mindfulness that's not just focussed in the present moment, but is aware of the overall context – one's life situation. It is in touch with the thread of meaning in one's life, making sure that we don't get lost in midst of life's complexities & demands. We organise our life around our values, not just be driven by life. We can slowly but deliberately rearrange the "refuges" on the mandala we drew on week 1.

Once you are conscious of yourself unfolding within the framework of conditionality, you can make a directed effort to strengthen the process of growth and remove obstacles from its path. This is mindfulness of purpose, sampajanna. Just as when setting out on a journey you might resolve that you are not going to linger or allow yourself to be turned aside or distracted, developing mindfulness of purpose means becoming more and more conscious of the goal of growth and development. Because it is the purpose of your life, it is the implicit purpose of all your activities, and you can aim to let it gradually pervade every aspect of your life... [Sati sampajanna] has a balancing and integrating quality that permeates every area of experience, to bring about a whole way of life concentrated not so much on a future goal, as on the dynamic, cumulative nature of the path itself.

Living with Awareness, Sangharakshita, p 19 & 24

HOME PRACTICE

Do what you decided you'd like to do! Try to ensure you've got enough to give you something to "do" every day, but not so many different things that you can't easily hold them in your mind.

Use the "diary" to make a note of what you do. If you don't practice anything, make a note so it's all clear. Not to chastise self, but just so we're being up-front with ourselves.

FURTHER READING

Living with Awareness, Sangharakshita, chapter on "Goal-setting"

Buddhism with an Attitude, B Alan Wallace, Snow Lion p.15

What is the Dharma, Sangharakshita, ch 8

The Path of Regular and Irregular Steps, CD 118 or in *A Taste of Freedom* booklet, Sangharakshita