

Week 5 – Dharma as Method

Buddhism Level 2 – What makes you a Buddhist?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Concepts

Three-fold path – seeing how the practices fit into an integrated system

Attitudes

Sense of potential at the practices on offer

Learning to use the practices skilfully

Bringing practice into our life – actually using them – build determination

Practices

The whole lot!

Symbols

Bhantes alternatives to the raft story

MEDITATION

Metta bhavana with sense of contacting positive feelings for self.

REVIEW

In small groups, how did home practice go?

Plenary review – emphasise how much we create our own world

This kind of reflection is what I call “being realistic”

One way to go for refuge to Dharma as doctrine – just be more realistic about what can expect of life.

How else to GFR to Dharma as doctrine?

- Rely more on Dharmic perspectives
- Acquire Dharmic perspectives by study, discussion, reflection

DHARMA AS METHOD

Brainstorm different practices people know

Pull out tool from a toolkit each time someone thinks of one – put it on table

Ethics	5 precepts incl 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 (ie gfr to Dh as doctrine – where they overlap)
Other	Friendship Pujas & other ritual Recollecting Buddha Mantra

Do people recognise it?

Do people relate more to some practices than others?

Threefold path – or three trainings – one of most useful catchalls of Bsm

The teaching that Buddha kept emphasising on his last tour before he died:

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

Emphasising progressive nature of path, how each stage supports previous one.

Pull out toolkit – show how big it is

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

Can practice in any situation, no special spiritual situation you need to wait for.

GFR to 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.

Parable of raft. Recap from last week.

Sangharakshita carries the analogy further:

But of course there's another extreme to be avoided, and that is not actually using the raft to cross the river at all. And this extreme is much more common. Some people board the raft but they don't ply the pole. They start making the raft a bit comfortable. They start building walls, maybe a little roof; then they install furniture and cooking utensils, bring on board their wives and families and friends. They turn the raft into a house, and they moor it very securely to this shore. They don't like any talk about releasing the mooring or the anchor. [maybe an island in midflow]

There are other people who just stand on the shore, stand on the bank and they just take a good steady look at that raft. They say 'It's a fine raft. It's a magnificent raft - so big, so solid, so well constructed, so impressive.' And they take out their measuring rod or their tape, they measure it. They can tell you the exact dimensions of it. They can tell you the sort of wood it's made of, and where and when that wood was felled. They can tell you all about the raft. And they produce a beautiful monograph on Buddhist rafts which sells like hot cakes, which even enters the best seller list. But it's only a book about the raft, and they've never even perhaps set foot on that raft.

And of course there are other people who think, well, that old raft's a bit plain, not very attractive, a bit rough and ready. After all, it's just a lot of logs lashed together. So they paint it and decorate it and cover it with flowers and make it look quite pretty. But they also don't ever get on board. They don't ever start using that pole and ferrying themselves across to the other shore.

So all these are extremes. But there's another lot of people - they claim that they've inherited the raft. They claim that the raft happens to be their ancestral property, it belongs to them. So they don't have to do anything about it, don't have to board it or use it. It's just there; it just belongs to them. It's enough, quite enough, that they simply possess it.

What is the Dharma – Sangharakshita

Exercise

In small groups: what do they each represent (put them on board in advance)?

Are there others I can think of?

Am I prone to any one?

Plenary collating additional ones: mine: half-building a bridge, then a raft, then a pontoon

Regular & irregular steps, more & more of less & less

We've got a pretty huge arsenal of Joko Beck

ATTITUDE TO PRACTICE

Refer back to last weeks practice – need to remember to do it to do it!

But can't force self to be aware, need to plant definite intention that can fruit at moments of awareness as they arise.

This is purposiveness – 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

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

Can be a bit baffling, the number of different practices available – which one to actually do in any one time.

Need to know ourselves well enough to know how to engage with the training. This knowledge grows as we practice, become aware of our tendencies, strengths, weaknesses, get feedback from spiritual friends.

Input from Team Member: How I put the methods into practice

Exercise

In groups, discuss if there's some intention you'd like to form for the week's practice – you decide this time. Meditate every day? Try to be kinder to someone who you find difficult? Meet up with someone you consider a spiritual friend.

Try to come up with some do-able intentions – don't set yourself up to fail

Note them down

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.

HOUSEKEEPING

Next course, Symbolic Dharma. how many considering it?