

Wk 1 – Faith within a Buddhist Context

Buddhism level 2 – What makes you a Buddhist?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Demystify sraddha & defuse some anxieties around the term
- Understand traditional meaning of sraddha
- Understand gradual, analogue nature of sraddha
- Recognise the place that sraddha plays in the spiritual path
- Recognise some experience of sraddha in own experience

INTRODUCTION TO MODULE

Catchline: What is a Buddhist, or “What does it mean to GFR to 3 J?”
Today looking at “Faith in a Buddhist Context”

MEDITATION

10 min sit, lead, shake off dust & settle into body.
Reflect on why you’re here. On what basis did you decide to spend your precious time & maybe money on coming to this course.

INTRODUCTIONS

Names, why committed to module? Draw out any elements of experience, reason, intuition, hearsay etc. Write up names
Cushion name game

Each week we’ll be looking at different facets of “What does it mean to be a Buddhist?”, or more technically, “what does it mean to GFR to 3 J?”
First 2 weeks about guts of being a Buddhist, the inner experience of it, what drives us.
This week, faith. Next week GFR – really two aspects of same experience
Everyone clear about 3J?

SRADDHA

Usu trans as faith.
Problematic term for many. Diving straight in.

Brainstorm: connotations of faith

How do you feel about the term & what do you think it means?
Elements of more cognitive & emotional?
Cognitive aspect can call belief
In absence of a God who’s telling us what’s what, how can we understand faith?
Get clear about any concerns – hold them for now.
First what is content or object of faith?

TRADITIONAL DEFINITIONS

From root “place heart upon”

Immediately tells us its more to do with heart than head.

Buddha usually talked in terms of developing faith in him – observe him, see if he displays any signs of greed, hatred, delusion. No? He must be fully Enlightened. (We don't have that luxury)

In Buddha's time extended to 3 J. Not just faith in Buddha, but by extension, faith in his teachings & his community of Enlightened & semi-Entlt disciples.

This is how used now: faith in the 3 J

How can we understand faith in 3J – go thru one by one.

Many of us are allergic to faith – immediate association with blind faith

Must believe something because told it's true; overreliance on Belief, eradication of reason; heart taking control of the intellect

Not the case in Bsm

Story of Kalamas

"It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them.

But there is still room for guidance by the wise!

Need to recognise that cynical scepticism – refusal to believe anything that's not provable or rational explicable – is just as much an emotional position as credulity – absolute unquestioning belief

Both are looking for certainty

Faith / Sradhdha is more of an existential attitude to living in an uncertain world, recognising the limits of our limits & experience without being imprisoned by them

Interesting consequence that we need courage to hold faith – come back to this

Faith is a confidence in something that's currently outside of our experience.

Eg. That China exists, because we've heard about it, or been there in the past.

So it acts as a bridge to that experience.

If cynical about everything outside your experience, have few surprises in life.

How do we acquire faith? Not just a matter of blindly believing something we're told.

GROUND OF FAITH

Sangharakshita talked of 3 grounds:

Experience – I believe in st cos I've experienced it in the past – eg. Possibility of one-pointed concentration in meditation even tho not experiencing it in

medn currently; or in possy of change for better, cos have seen it for myself in the past

Reason – makes rational sense; for me, Enlt makes sense as the open-ended nature of change for the better – don't see why should hit some glass ceiling.

Intuition - makes a kind of emotional or gut-level sense. So behaving ethically to me seems intuitively right, more than the reasonable arguments about karma vipaka.

Consequence: Levels of faith

Don't get all grounds together & final at once

Faith isn't digital - it's analogue, develops

Grows as acquire greater knowledge & exp

Could talk of different levels from provisional, experimental interest that get's you out of house to the Buddhist Centre, gets you meditating even when doesn't really seem to be doing much....

Thru to a completely rooted and urgent confidence in the path & practice. As much confidence in it as you have confidence in the existence of Paris and your ability to get there if you want to.

ASPECTS OF FAITH

Quotation Exercise

Groups of 3, look at quotes, see if any particularly appeal, bemuse, inflame.

Discuss. May be able to follow up some of following topics:

Faith & Doubt

Not incompatible – until Real faith, there'll always be uncertainty.

Need to distinguish between doubt that drives a process of enquiry & leads to a lightness of touch in how beliefs are held, and doubt that cripples, hobbles, holds us back.

Canki sutta – know what you know, what you believe & basis on which believe it.

Faith & Inspiration

Although talked of faith as emotional, my experience is it's often subterranean, maybe see it more clearly through what you do, how you behave. When keep going thru lean times, all seems to be broken.

Maybe when faith becomes very manifest, strong, then it's closer to inspiration. But for most people, inspiration waxes & wanes.

EXPERIENCE OF FAITH

Talked of that aspect of keeping on keeping on

Confidence – in ourself as good enough to practice, have all we need, not a problem but the path

Sense of relaxation of anxiety on that basis

Confidence in 3 J, they can take our weight

Present in all positive mental states, so can't be an exclusively Buddhist quality -> Bhante quote in exercise

State of being existentially concerned – Tillich - what does this mean?

Short talks: how do I experience sraddha?

Exercise: groups of 3

How do I relate to this understanding of faith?

What experience of it do I have (in narrow or broad sense)?

Eg. the initial exercise: on what basis did you come here – act of faith
confidence in your abilities in a situation

Acting with boldness in face of uncertainty but a certain faith in the possibility of the outcome

IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

Brainstorm: Why do we need faith?

Gradual nature of path – need to let the practices take effect. Long path

Develops receptivity, esp to unappetising aspects of Dharma – would be surprising if our kneejerk responses of like / dislike to the Dharma were always correct, or we'd be Buddha's already!

Image – faith as seed. Or doorway to Dharma

Home practice

Be on alert for the experience of sraddha

Can use strong experiences as triggers. Ask self in midst of positive or negative mental states (however you understand them) – is there an element of sraddha here?

We'll discuss them next week, so make a note.