

Reflections



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Three disciplines for progress
on the Buddhist path are
study, reflection and meditation.

Principles of Lay Buddhism

by R. Bogoda

(This article has been condensed. The entire article can be found at the Web site "Access to Insight")

Introduction

The central problem of a lay Buddhist is how to combine personal progress in worldly matters with moral principles. He strives to achieve this by building his life on the foundation of the Fourth Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and to shape his activities in accordance with it. The first step of this Path is Right Understanding; by developing a lifestyle in accordance with it, the other factors of the Path result from it, namely: Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. The eight steps of the Path fall into the three divisions of Wisdom (the first two), Morality (the second three), and Mental Culture (the last three). The order of development is, however, Morality (sila), Mental Culture (samadhi), and Wisdom (pañña).

The Path outlines the practice of Buddhism, the Buddhist is particularly concerned with Morality. Right Understanding, however, is the prerequisite. Right Effort is the training of the will, and Right Mindfulness, the all-round helper. Progress to a lay Buddhist means the development of the whole man in society. It is, therefore, an advance on many fronts — the economic, the moral, and the spiritual, the first not as an end in itself but as a means to an end: the full flowing of the human being in the onward-carrying stream of Buddhist ideas and ideals.

A Practical Guide

Right Understanding is the beginning and the end of Buddhism, (it) provides a sound philosophy of life. Right Understanding, the first step of the Path, is seeing life as it really is. All things are nothing but incessant change (anicca), therefore unsatisfactory (dukkha) and productive of suffering. Right Understanding implies a knowledge of the working of kamma — the moral law of cause and effect. We reap what we sow. We know that actions consciously performed again and again tend to become unconscious or automatic habits. They, in turn, whether good or bad, become second nature. They more or less shape or mold the character of a person. Kamma includes both past and present action.

The past is dead, yet influences the present, but does not determine it. The past and the present, in turn, influence the future that is yet to be. The responsibility of using the present for good or bad lies with each individual.

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Vast is the sky. Breathe the sky.
Great is the ocean. Drink a drop.
Rich is the land. Be at peace.
Many are the Sangha. Be at one.
Infinite is the Dharma. Be the Dharma.
Enlightened is the Buddha. Be a Buddha.
(submitted by Jeff and Rosanne McNair)



Editor's Comments:

We live in a world and at a time when people seem to be polarized and angry. Most people seem trapped in a web of fear - fear that the other guy is a threat to their wellbeing and way of life. Whether it is global turmoil or a display of road rage one mile from our homes, people seem self absorbed, defensive and tense to the breaking point. So what's new? The answer – nada, nothing, zero. It is the same habitual cycle since humanity began to walk upright. No pessimism in admitting this. In fact there is encouragement to be found in admitting that the human race is a creation of negative habits. No matter what are daily woes are, as individuals, communities, a nation or a plant, at their core are the same problems of greed, aversion and indifference that have dogged humanity for millennia. The good news is the antidote is the same - awakening our hearts and minds by practicing the teachings of the Buddha. May reflection on those teachings as presented in these articles further our journey on that path.

– Dan Lee –

And the future, still unborn, is one's to shape. We, often unmindful of the rights of others, desire for, grasp at, cling to, the wrong sorts of things: the pleasures that money can buy, power over others, fame and name, wishing to go on living forever. We hope that pleasures will be permanent, satisfying and solid, but find them to be passing, unsatisfying, and empty. The result is frustration and disappointment.

To remedy this, we must correct our understanding and thinking]and first reduce, and finally remove all shades of craving or desire that are the causes of this restlessness and discontent. This is not easy, but when one does so by treading the noble Eightfold path, one reaches a state of perfection and calm (Nibbana) thereby bringing to an end the pain-laden cycle of birth and death.

Kamma, implies making choices or decisions between, broadly speaking, skillful (kusala) and unskillful (akusala) actions. The former are rooted in generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom leading to happiness and progress, and therefore, to be cultivated again and again in one's life. The good actions are Generosity, Morality, Meditation, Reverence, Service, Transference of merit, Rejoicing in other's good actions, Hearing the Doctrine, Expounding the Doctrine, and Straightening one's views. The unskilled actions are rooted in greed, hate and delusion, leading to pain, grief and decline, and therefore, to be avoided. There are ten such actions: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, harsh speech, gossip, covetousness, ill-will and false views.

Buddhism teaches, above all, moral responsibility. One therefore strives one's best to avoid evil and to do good for one's own welfare as well as for the benefit of others. This conduct leads to peace within and without.

Social and Economic Aspects

To the philosophical concept of life as dynamic change (Buddha) added its social equivalent: the doctrine of social fluidity and equality based on nobility of conduct.

What matters then is not the societal class into which one was born but the moral quality of one's actions. As a tree is judged by its fruit, so shall a man be judged by his deeds.

In this way, the doors of the Deathless and of the unconditioned freedom beyond, and of social freedom here on earth, were thrown open to all, regardless of caste, color, or class. No caste, class, or race privileges existed among his lay followers or in the Order of the Sangha that he founded. A social doctrine based on the alleged superiority of any caste, class, or race, and advocating to keep it dominant by the use of force, must necessarily lead to the perpetuation of social tensions and conflict, and will never bring about harmony and the fraternity of men.

The Buddha's doctrine of equality does not, however, imply that all men are alike physically or mentally. It does mean that each one should be treated equally with human dignity, and given an equal chance to develop the faculties latent in each, as all are capable of moral and spiritual progress.

The character of a society depends on the beliefs and practices of its people as well as on its economy. An economic system based on Buddhist ethics and principles, therefore, seems the only alternative. The true nature of man is that he is not only a thinking and feeling creature but also a striving creature,

Our Whole Life Could be a Ritual

We could learn to stop when the sun goes down and when the sun comes up. We could learn to listen to the wind; we could learn to notice that it's raining or snowing or hailing or calm. We could reconnect with the weather that is ourselves, and we could realize that it's sad. The sadder it is, and the vaster it is, the more our heart opens. We can stop thinking that good practice is when it's smooth and calm, and bad practice is when it's rough and dark. If we can hold it all in our hearts, then we can make a proper cup of tea.

– Pema Chodron –

(quote submitted by Dave Mermelstein)



with higher aspirations and ideals. If he is aggressive and assertive, he is also cooperative and creative. He is forever making not only things, but himself. And the making of oneself by perfecting the art of living is the noblest of all creative aspirations, yielding the highest happiness and satisfaction in life.

Progress in the material side of life alone is not enough for human happiness. True happiness, contentment, and harmony come from an emancipated mind. A person's worth, for instance, ought not be measured in terms of what he has but on what he is. Buddhism stands for a society of equals, in which justice and ethical principles shall supplant privilege and chaos.

But humanity in the mass can be influenced for good by the example of a few really noble and selfless men with vision and wisdom, with ideas and ideals to live for and to die for. They provide the guiding star round which others, too timid to lead but strong enough to follow, cluster around and become willing followers.

It is then the duty of every genuine Buddhist to help to make known, far and wide, the Teaching of the Buddha in all its many aspects, and thereby make possible tomorrow the seemingly impossible of today — a new and just socio-economic order based on Buddhist ethics, principles, and practices.

Buddhism and Daily Life

A follower of the Buddha learns to view life realistically, which enables him to adjust to everything that comes his way. Buddhism ...clarifies what his attitude should be to specific matters like self, job, sex, and society. Thus it assists him in the business of living, for to lead a full life four fundamental adjustments have to be made. He must be happily adjusted to himself and the world, his occupation, his family, and his fellow beings.

(a) Himself and The World

A Buddhist tries to see things as they really are. He remembers the instability of everything and understands the inherent danger in expecting to find permanence in existence. So, a discerning lay Buddhist is not unduly elated or upset by the eight worldly conditions of gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. He does not expect too much from others, nor from life, and recognizes that it is only human to have one's share of life's ups and downs.

He looks at life's events in terms of cause and effect, however unpleasant or painful they may be. An understanding layman accepts dukkha as the results of his own kamma — probably a past unskillful (akusala) action ripening in the present.

He sees the connection between craving and suffering and therefore tries to reduce both the intensity and variety. As the Dhammapada states: "From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear, For him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief — whence fear? — Dhp 215

Therefore, he tries to eliminate the non-essential and learns to be content with the essential. Such a person soon discovers that to need less is to live better and happier. And when disappointments come, one tries to look at them with some degree of detachment, standing, as it were, apart from them. In this way, a person gains a feeling of inner security and frees himself from

What Are You Looking For?

(taken from page 101 of the book no death no fear by Thich Nhat Hanh)

The French have a song called: "Cu'est - ce qu'on. Attend Pour Etre Heurrux?" (What are you waiting for to be happy?). When I practice breathing in and I say, "I have arrived." that is an achievement. Now, I am fully present, one hundred percent alive. The present moment has become my true home.

When I breathe out I say, "I am home." If you do not feel you are home, you will continue to run. And you will continue to be afraid. But if you feel you are already home, then you do not need to run any more. This is the secret of the [meditation] practice. When we live in the present moment, it is possible to live in true happiness.



fears, anxieties, and many other heavy burdens.

How does a lay Buddhist view himself? The self or soul is then a piece of fiction invented by the human mind.

One should therefore see oneself as one truly is — a conflux of mind and matter energized by *tanha* or craving, containing immense possibilities for both good and evil, neither overestimating nor underestimating one's capacities and capabilities. One must also take care to recognize one's limitations and not pretend that they do not exist.

Seeing that no two are alike, physically or psychologically, in the light of *kamma*, a wise person should, therefore, avoid comparing himself with others.

So, instead of keeping pace with, or outdoing others, socially, financially, and in other ways, the understanding layman proceeds to do something more useful. He decides to take stock of himself, to know himself, his true nature in all aspects, as a first step to improving it: the secular (such as his physical, mental, emotional qualities), the moral, and the spiritual, through careful self-examination and observation, by past performance, and by the candid comments of sincere friends. Seeing himself as a whole, he plans for life as a whole in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. Such a plan when drawn up will include all important events of a normal layman's life including occupation, marriage, and old age...A thoughtful lay Buddhist will not simply do what others do. He can resist the pull of the crowd when necessary. He is ever mindful both of ends pursued and the means employed. He does not merely go through life aimlessly; he goes, knowing clearly where he wants to go, with a purpose and a plan based on reality.

(b) Earning a Living

Men work to satisfy the primary or basic urges of hunger, thirst, and sex, as well as a host of secondary wants and desires created by a commercial civilization such as ours.

So work is essential for happy living. Choosing a suitable career, like choosing a marriage partner, is one of the most important yet one of the most difficult tasks in life.

And one of the essential needs of a man is to feel he is wanted in the world. He should not gain a living by methods detrimental to the welfare of living beings — *anakula ca kammanta*, "a peaceful occupation," as the Discourse on Blessings (Maha-mangala Sutta) has it. So the Buddha forbade five kinds of trade to a lay Buddhist, and refraining from them constitutes Right Livelihood, the seventh step of the Path. They are: trading in arms, human beings, flesh (including the breeding of animals for slaughter), intoxicants and harmful drugs, and poisons.

Work should serve men, not enslave him. While income and wealth through righteous means will bring satisfaction and lay happiness, the mere accumulation of riches for their own sake will only lead to unbridled acquisitiveness and self-indulgence resulting later in physical and mental suffering. Conservation and improvement of one's resources and talents, acquired or inherited, with balanced living, living within one's income, ensuring freedom from debt is a sure indicator of right seeing or understanding. Lastly, a blameless moral and spiritual life should be the aim of right livelihood.

Life is one and indivisible, and the working life a part of the whole. The

Something to Consider.

by Dan Lee

Ultimately I believe that anyone attracted to the spiritual life wants to be of benefit to the world. We want to learn how to be sane, how to be more openhearted in our daily lives, and how to spread sanity and compassion in an increasingly chaotic world. The first step is encountering our mental demons through getting to know ourselves in meditation.

- Lodro Rinzler-

"Wash away my troubles, wash away my pain

With the rain in Shambala

Wash away my sorrow, wash away my shame

With the rain in Shambala

Everyone is lucky, everyone is kind

On the road to Shambala

Everyone is happy, everyone is so kind

On the road to Shambala

How does your light shine, in the halls of Shambala?"

- Song lyric by Three Dog Night-

Within the Tibet Buddhist tradition there is the legend of Shambhala - hidden city/state where everyone in the entire kingdom is enlightened and devoted to the teachings of the Buddha. This legend is worth reflecting upon. I wish I knew more about it. Its image has the power to draw out the best in us.

The more I reflect upon it the strong my aspiration for good-

man who is unhappy at work is unhappy at home, too. Unhappiness spreads. Likewise, business life is part of life. The Dhamma of the Blessed One should therefore pervade and permeate one's entire life for only wealth rooted in righteous endeavor can yield true happiness.

(c) Bringing up a Family

In the Maha Mangala Sutta the Buddha teaches us that: Mother and father well supporting, Wife and children duly cherishing, types of work unconflicting, this, the Highest Blessing. — Sn 2.4

In Buddhism, however, marriage is not a compulsory institution for all lay followers. It is optional. Steps should also be taken to foster and maintain all that is wholesome, as for instance, wise friendship, and keeping oneself usefully occupied at all times.

(d) Social Relationships

A lay Buddhist lives in society. He must adjust himself to other people to get on smoothly with them.

The lay person who practices morality (*sila*) by reason of his virtue, gives peace of mind to those around him. He controls his deeds and words by following the third, fourth, and fifth steps of the noble Eightfold Path, namely Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood or by observing the Five Precepts (*Pañca Sila*).

Such regulated behavior flows from proper understanding of the Buddhist doctrine of *kamma*, that a man is what he is because of action and the result of action. So, the Buddhist avoids killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, drugs, intoxicants, and harmful lying, tale-bearing, harsh words, and idle talk.

Positively, the Buddhist layman is kind and compassionate to all, honest and upright, pure and chaste, sober and heedful in mind. He speaks only that which is true, in accordance with facts, sweet, peaceable, and helpful. Morality is a fence that protects us from the poisons of the outer world. It is, therefore, a pre-requisite for higher spiritual aspirations and through it character shines. The development of personality on such lines results in charm, tact, and tolerance — essential qualities to adjust oneself to society, and to get on well with other people. The Four Sublime States, Loving Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and Equanimity, ... should be the four cornerstones of genuine lay Buddhist life. The Four Sublime States form the foundation of individual and social peace.

Mental Health

Life is full of stress and strain. Successful adjustment to life in the light of Buddha's teachings will, however, ensure the all-round progress of the lay Buddhist, maximizing happiness and minimizing pain.

Yet even the happiest person cannot say when and in what form misfortune may strike him. Real happiness and security are then to be sought in one's own mind, to be built up by constant effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

So the wise layman while being in this world, will try to be less and less of it. He will train his mind to look at life mindfully with detachment, and

ness, loving-kindness.

The name Shambhala means “place of peace, tranquility and happiness” In the land of Shambhala there is no such thing as war or violence or injustice. Everyone lives in harmony. Peace and tranquility permeate the land and all its people. The leaders and all the inhabitants practice meditation, are motivated by loving kindness and consistently demonstrate concern for all beings.

Buddha is said to have taught about the Kingdom of Shambhala at the request of King Suchandra. That teaching is preserved in the sutra of the Kalachakra Tantra. The Kingdom of Shambhala is also recorded in the ancient writings of the Zhang Zhung culture which predated Buddhism and existed in the West/Northwest section of modern day Tibet.

Shambhala is said to be hidden somewhere in the Himalayas surrounded by mountain peaks. It kings rule from the capitol city of Kalapa. The story goes that in a future age when the world has been fully corrupted by violence and greed the then King of Shambhala will wage war against the forces of evil and usher in an era of world peace. .

For centuries the image of this enlightened society has captured the imagination of Westerners. As far back as the 1600’s expeditions have searched through out Asia for this kingdom. Twentieth century sci-fi writers used it for inspiration. The Nazis under Adolf Hitler sent expeditions in search of Shambhala. Even the Soviet Union secret police were drawn to

soon discover that modern civilization is, by and large, a commercial one, for the benefit of a powerful minority at the expense of the unthinking majority, based on the intensification and multiplication of artificial wants, often by arousing and stimulating the undesirable and lower elements of human nature, and that the increasing satisfaction of these wants leads not to peace and stillness of mind, but only to chronic discontent, restlessness, dissatisfaction, and conflict.

He therefore decides to practice voluntary simplicity and finds a new freedom; the less he wants, the happier and freer he is.

Thinking man realizes that there are but four essential needs for the body — pure food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. Corresponding to these, there are four for the mind — right knowledge, virtue, constant guarding of the sense doors, and meditation.

Bhavana, or meditation, is the systematic training and culture of the mind with Nibbana as its goal. The emotions are controlled, the will is disciplined, and the instinctive energies are diverted from their natural ends. If there is an urgent felt need, the ideal has the power of drawing out all one’s instinctive impulses so that they are sublimated and harmonized, giving satisfaction to the individual, and therefore benefiting the community as well.

Closely connected with our instincts are the emotions. By emotion is meant a feeling which moves us strongly. We get stirred up, as it were. Examples of emotion are fear, anger, and strong sexual passion. When emotion floods the mind, reason retreats or disappears, and we often do things for which we repent later.

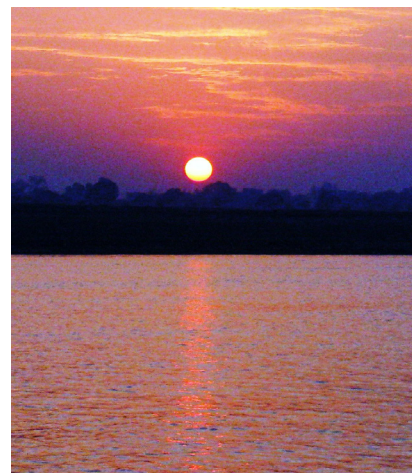
Fear is a common emotion that darkens our lives. One tries to live in two periods of time at once — the present and the future. It results from wrong seeing, not understanding things as they really are. Uncertainty and change are the keynotes of life. To each one of us there is only one thing that is truly “ours,” is “us”: our character, as shown by our actions. As for the rest, nothing belongs to us.

This attitude of detachment to life’s storms is the only sound philosophy that can bring one a true security and a true serenity.

There is no such thing as justifiable anger in Buddhism, for if one is in the right, one should not be angry, and if one is in the wrong, one cannot afford to be angry. Therefore, under any circumstances one should not become angry.

A good way to secure emotional control is to practice noticing mindfully and promptly an incipient hindrance (or any other mental state of mind); then, of its own, it tends to fade away. The five hindrances are undue attachment to sensual desire; ill-will; laziness and inertia; agitation and worry; and doubt. The last here refers to indecision or un-steadiness in the particular thing that is being done.

Daily practice is the way to progress. Even a little practice every day, brings a person a little nearer to his object, day by day.



this perfect kingdom and tried to tap into its powers.

What makes the image of an enlightened kingdom so powerful that it captivates hearts and minds of Non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike? Why do I return time and time again to reflecting of this wondrous land? An answer to that question can be found in our true nature. The aspiration for a society whose earmarks are peace and happiness where kindness and equality prevail is at one with our fundamental nature - Buddha Nature, Mind, Basic Goodness. The desire to create such a world and be the type of person who is found in that world is at the heart of who we are.

The present Dali Lama has said of Shambhala:

“... it is not a physical place that we can actually find. We can only say that it is a pure land, a pure land in the human realm. And unless one has the merit and the actual karmic association, one cannot actually arrive there.”

We can “go there” as it were by practicing the teachings given by the Buddha for they open our hearts making us vulnerable loving and compassionate as well as clear thinking awake to life, discerning and wise. We are all enlightened beings. That light is caked over or coated with ignorance, aversion and indifference (techniques we use to protect ourselves against hurt and perceived loss). As we meditate and open ourselves, we see that we are the Kingdom of Shambhala. We carry Shambhala everywhere we go.

When we arrive at work, or the

A Personal Perspective on Meditation



by J. R. Hild

Our bylaws state our mission— “To Present, Teach and Practice Buddhism: To Provide Meditation Instruction and Community Service in a Manner Consistent with the Teaching of the Buddha.” Since I became a member of the Buddhist Sangha of Bucks County (BSBC) in the year 2001, our Sangha has been purposely non-traditional, exploring many of the Buddhist valuable and wonderful traditions over the years. To a large degree we have followed our mission. We have over the years presented and taught many subjects, including meditation. It has become clear to me just how important meditation is to Buddhism and me over the last few years. I thought I might share a personal perspective on this subject.



Having personally explored the major Buddhist traditions, I am currently caught between two traditions – Zen and Tibetan. I have found significant value in both of these traditions as well as other traditions Theravadan, Won and others. I have found all of these traditions, numerous schools, and individual approaches exist for the “practice of meditation”, that is to say, meditation is not only common to all, but significant in its meaning and importance. However, in my somewhat limited experience, while I have found remarkable agreement among them as to what is the meaning and value of the meditative process, I have found differences in how to do it or what is involved in the process.

I have learned that a distinctive Buddhist orientation towards meditation can be summed up concisely. It consists of two aspects or components. The first, called shamatha in Sanskrit, is the step by step development of mental and physical calmness. The Zen tradition for example emphasizes this approach. My teacher, Jeff Shore (Rinzai Zen master and professor of Zen in the Modern World at Hanazono University in Kyoto) consistently tells me to meditate by “calming the senses”. The second, vipashyana, Sanskrit, (vipassanā, Pali) is the step by step heightening of awareness, sensitivity and observation. The latter is currently being elegantly addressed by Jeanne Reis in her “The Four Foundations series”. Thank you Jeanne! I have found that these two components can complement each other and can be practiced separately or simultaneously - one technique develops calming, while the other develops clarity. I have learned (but not mastered) to employ both equally.

I have been told that shamatha, if taken to an extreme, leads to special trance states; these may be of value, but they are not the ultimate intention

grocery store, when we sit in our living rooms with family, greet a stranger, smile at a sales clerk, wherever we are and whatever we are doing - we have brought the Kingdom of Shambhala to that place. If we allow ourselves to be free from self protective ego centric habits, our presence creates a loving and kind space for all we come in contact with. We are awake to the realities of life and on some level improve the quality of that moment for ourselves and those around us. This may sound "pie in the sky" idealistic. In fact it is! The ideal is the accurate description of who we are. The ideal is not an illusion or dream. The dream or illusion is the concept that we have to be less than the ideal - guarded, self protecting distant and careless toward others rather than openhearted and charitable. So to paraphrase a quote found at the beginning of this article - How does your light - and my light - shine in the halls of Shambhala?

Whatever we are looking for, it is always right here. We are usually elsewhere. That's the problem.

Pg. 70 of Awakening the Buddha Within by Lama Surya Das

Gems of Wisdom

of Buddhism. Jeff emphasizes "letting go" and just observing what happens. To me this is when awareness or a "one-pointedness" or concentration comes into play. I attempt to establish direct contact with deep processes. One approach is to be given a question which can be readily answered by the deep spontaneous mind but is utterly intractable for the discursive surface. This approach was developed within certain schools of the Chan-Zen tradition, that important East Asian expression of Buddhism. Nowadays, it is particularly associated with Rinzai-shu, one of the two major schools of Japanese Zen. Such a conundrum is called a koan in Japanese; "What is the sound of one hand?" and "Mu" are two famous ones. The koan question is mercilessly pressed to deeper and deeper levels, and, in the process, great samadhi power is developed. When an answer wells up, it carries with it a valuable insight. In this way, by answering many such koans, the wisdom faculty is gradually exercised. However, if the question is pressed deeply enough, the insight accompanying its solution will be sufficient to crack moha and bring kensho (initial enlightenment). It is important to remember, however, that there are many kinds of koans for specific purposes and that individual teachers use koans in different ways.

The practice of vipashyana or clear observation, on the other hand, if developed with sufficient intensity and consistency leads to a moment of insight into the nature of the self identification process. At that moment, awareness penetrates into the normally unconscious chain of mental events which gives us the rock-solid conviction "I am separate and limited." This insight brings with it a radical and permanent change in perspective . . . a refreshing sense of freedom which is not dependent upon circumstances. The attainment of this perspective and the full manifestation of its implications in daily life are the intention of Buddhist meditation.

I guess what it comes down to is to be open and clear in one's intentions during meditation. There are many paths for entering the reality of Nirvana, but in essence they are all most likely contained with two practices: stopping and seeing. It has been said "Stopping is the primary gate for overcoming the bonds of compulsiveness. Seeing is the essential requisite for ending confusion." May we all benefit from our meditation.

Discovering Basic Goodness

The following is a condensed version of chapter two of Shambhala - the Sacred Path of the Warrior by the Ven. Chogyam Trungpa

A great deal of chaos in the world occurs because people don't appreciate themselves. Having never developed sympathy or gentleness towards themselves, they cannot experience harmony or peace within themselves, and therefore, what they project to others is also inharmonious and confused. Instead of appreciating our lives we often take our existence for granted or we find it depressing and burdensome. Certainly we should take our lives seriously, but that does not mean driving ourselves to the brink of disaster by complaining about our problems or holding a grudge against the world. We have to accept personal responsibility for uplifting our lives.

continued on next page

From the 7th Dalai Lama

(The following are excerpts from the book by this name authored by Glenn H. Mullin. In that book the pith sayings of the Seventh Dalai Lama with commentary by Glenn Mullin.)

In 1720 Gyalawa Kalzang Gyatso was installed as the seventh Dalai Lama. He was twelve years old at the time. After occupying Tibet for almost fifteen years Mongol forces had recently been forced out of the land. During his adult life he was a prolific writer. His writings featured and explained in this book were a series of short verses. Each verse focused on a spiritual principle. The name of the Seventh Dalai Lama's book was "A Well-Arranged Collection of Songs and Verses of Spiritual Advice Connected with the Lojong Tradition." It addressed the key themes of the Lojong Tradition. In his opening verse the Seventh Dalai Lama reveres to his series of verses as "this rosary of precious gems". They are gems of wisdom for those who reflect upon them. The following are two verses with commentary picked at random from the "rosary".

Number 18

What sharp weapons slice hearts

When people meet with each other?

The sayings of harsh and cruel things,

And the criticizing of other's faults.

Here the Seventh Dalai Lama introduces the second and third

When you don't punish or condemn yourself, when you relax more and appreciate your body and mind, you begin to contact the fundamental notion of basic goodness in yourself. So it is extremely important to be willing to open yourself to yourself. Developing tenderness toward yourself allows you to see both your problems and your potential accurately. You don't feel that you have to ignore your problems or exaggerate your potential. It provides the ground for helping yourself and others.

Existence is wonderful and precious. We don't know how long we will live, so while we have our life, why not make use of it? Before we even make use of it, why not appreciate it?

How do we discover this kind of appreciation? The discipline for developing both gentleness toward ourselves and appreciation for the world is the sitting practice of meditation.

By meditation here we mean something very basic and simple that is not tied to any one culture. We are talking about a very basic act.: sitting on the ground, assuming a good posture, and developing a sense of our spot, our place on this earth. This is the means of rediscovering ourselves and basic goodness, the means to tune ourselves in to genuine reality, without any expectations or preconceptions.



Here we are talking about unconditional meditation, without any object or idea in mind meditation is simply training our state of being so that our mind and body can be synchronized. Through the practice of meditation we can learn to be without deception, to be fully genuine and alive.

Our life is an endless journey: it is like a broad highway that extends infinitely into the distance. The practice of meditation provides a vehicle to travel on that road. The practice of meditation allows us to experience all the textures of the roadway. Through meditation we begin to find that within ourselves there is no fundamental complaint about anything or anyone at all.

You begin to feel that your life can become workable even wonderful. In the practice of meditation and upright posture is very important when you sit erect, you are proclaiming to yourself and to the rest of the world you are going to be a [spiritual] warrior, a fully human being.

You sit [in meditation] simply, as a [spiritual] warrior and out of that, a sense of individual dignity arises. You are sitting on the earth and you realize that this earth deserves you and you deserve this earth.

In some sense we should regard ourselves as being burdened: we have the burden of helping this world. But if we take our burden as a delight, we can liberate this world. The way to begin is with ourselves. From being open and honest with ourselves, we can also learn to be open with others. So we can work with the rest of the world on the basis of the goodness we discover in ourselves.

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negative karmas created by means of speech: harsh words and slander.

He calls these “sharp weapons that slice hearts” for our words are instruments that cut others deeply when we use them harmfully. They are most commonly used on , and also most hurtful to, those we love and with whom we are most close. In many ways abusive speech is a more profound form of harming others than is physical violence, for its impact goes deeper.

Both of these negative karmas of speech have as their underlying force the thought to harm. Unfortunately in this age of darkness both are also considered normal and acceptable . Those following the enlightenment tradition, however , always try to speak gently and with the desire to be helpful and meaningful.

Slander does not only refer to speaking untruthfully in such a way as will create division between others . It also includes the expression of irrelevant facts or truths while holding an inner intent to create divisions between others.

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What is the target of countless arrows of misery?

The temper of the mind unable to bear even small ordeals.

The enlightenment path advocates practicing spiritual strength and humor in the face of ordeals and challenges that life throws upon us. One is taught to see all difficulties, ordeals and chal-

How can We Deal with Anger?

(Excerpts from answers by the Ven. Thubten Chodron)

Buddhism teaches us not to become angry. But isn't anger a natural part of being human and therefore acceptable if it were to arise occasionally?

From the point of view of a being in samsara, who caught in the cycle of existence and influenced by afflictions and karma, anger is natural. But the real question should be whether anger is beneficial. Just because it is natural, does not mean it is beneficial. When we examine anger more closely, we see firstly that anger is based on exaggerating the negative quality of someone or projecting negative qualities that are not there on a person or object. Secondly, anger is not beneficial because it creates many problems for us in this life and creates negative karma which will bring about suffering for us in our future lives. Anger also obscures the mind and prevents us from generating Dharma realizations and thus from attaining liberation and enlightenment.

Why is it that certain people get angry easily while others do not? Is this due to their past karma and thus nothing can be done about it?

One of the results of karma is that people have the tendency to do the same action again. However, the fact of anger arising in the mind to begin with is due to the seed of anger existing in the mindstream. The Buddha taught methods for counteracting anger and for purifying negative karma created by anger. So there is absolutely no excuse to say that you are born like that and there is nothing that can be done about it. Don't think, “I'm just an angry person. There's nothing that can be done, so everyone just has to live with me and love me anyway.” That's nonsense!

Some psychologists say that it is better to release negative emotions such as anger rather than keeping them within us as it will affect our health. What does Buddhism have to say about this?

I think psychologists assume that there are only two things that can be done about anger. One is to express it and the other, to suppress it. From a Buddhist perspective, both are unhealthy. If you suppress anger, it is still there and that is not good for your health. If you express it, it is not good as well because you might harm others and you will create negative karma in the process.

So Buddhism teaches us how to look at the situation from a different perspective and how to interpret events in a different way. If we do that, we will find that there is no reason to get angry to start with. Then there is no anger to express or to suppress.

For example, when someone tells us that we did something wrong, we



faces as teachers sent to help us learn more about ourselves and to grow in inner stability and courage. Passing blame on to the other people for whatever difficulties we encounter is seen as a weak and ineffective approach to accomplishing personal happiness and results in frustration and unhappiness rather than personal growth and fulfillment.

The Indian master Shantideva said, “ One person harms someone out of ignorance ; someone else becomes angry out of ignorance. What makes the one blameless and the other an object of blame?” In other words , harming someone is caused by a lack of wisdom , and becoming angry at someone who harms is equally caused by a lack of wisdom. Why should we allow ourselves to embrace either mode, when both reflect ignorance?

Shantideva offers the following words of hope. “There is nothing whatsoever that is not made easy through familiarity. Practice patience with small difficulties and this gradually become patient with greater challenges.”

When we allow the mind to flare up when it is confronted by ordeals and challenges , not only do we fail to meet the problem successfully. In addition we lay the foundation of a mind that is predisposed to fail in the future.

usually think that person is trying to harm us. But look at it from a different perspective and consider that he may be giving us some useful information. He may be trying to help us. ...If we interpret it in a different way, the anger will not arise.

What are the antidotes to prevent anger from arising? As lay people, how do we apply them in our everyday life?

Whether you are lay or monastic, applying antidotes to destructive emotions is important. We must practice the antidotes that the Buddha taught again and again. ...There are a few slogans which I remember when anger begins to arise. One is “Sentient beings do what sentient beings do.” That is, sentient beings are under the influence of ignorance, afflictions, and karma and. Any being that is under the influence of those obscurations is going to do harmful actions. It is clear that living beings are imperfect. So my expectation that they be perfect is totally unrealistic. When I accept this, I understand why they act like that and am more compassionate regarding what they do. They are caught in this dreadful prison of cyclic existence. I don't want them to suffer, and I certainly don't want to inflict more suffering on them by getting angry. Holding this big picture of sentient beings trapped in cyclic existence enables us to feel compassion instead of anger when they act in mistaken ways.

How can we learn to accept criticism without being angry?

If someone criticizes you, don't pay attention to the tone, vocabulary, or volume of their voice. Just focus on the content of their criticism. If it is true, there's no reason to get angry. For example, if someone says, “There is a nose on your face” you are not angry because it is true. There is no use pretending we don't have a nose—or didn't make a mistake—because everyone, including us, knows we did. As Buddhists we must always improve ourselves and so, we should put our hands together and say, “Thank you.” On the other hand, if someone says, “There is a horn on your face” there is no reason get angry because that person is mistaken. We can tell this to the person later when they are receptive to listening.

Patience is the opposite of anger and is highly praised in Buddhism. But sometimes others take advantage when we cultivate patience. What do we do in such a situation?

Some people fear that if they are kind or patient, others will take advantage of them. I think they misunderstand what patience and compassion mean. Being patient and compassionate does not mean you let people take advantage of you. It does not mean that you allow other people to harm and beat you up. That is stupidity, not compassion! Being patient means being calm when confronted with suffering or harm. It does not mean being like a doormat. You can be kind and at the same time, be firm and have a clear sense of your own human dignity and self-worth. You know what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in that situation. If you are clear in this way, others will know that they cannot take advantage of you. If you try very hard to please people and do what they want so that they will like you, other people will take advantage because your own mind is unclear and attached to approval.

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Letters to the Editor and suggestions

Poetry (any style)

Notes about your spiritual journey and reflections

Buddhist thoughts on a contemporary movie or novel or other books

Short suggestions about or Buddhist Literature (books, magazines, etc.)

Information on Buddhist resources and area events

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