

Questions & Answers

ALBA Day of Practice 19 February 2022

'THE MIRROR OF THE DHAMMA'



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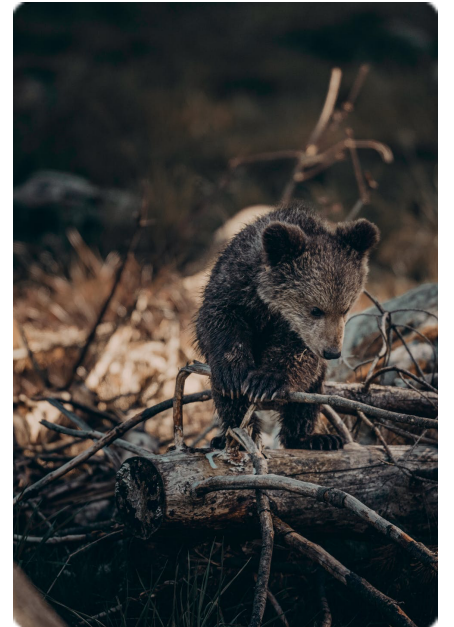
Is Awareness enough?

Is Awareness enough?

Is it? We have to hold up the mirror to the mind to find out for ourselves. It is worth putting our faith in awareness and giving it a try, and not buying into the mind that tells you, 'don't look here'.

But it is not the whole of Buddhism. Wherever you look, it is mentioned as a part of a greater whole. Like, as one of the five faculties, one of seven factors of enlightenment, one of the eightfold path. An essential and often a central part, but not the whole.

Satisampajanna is mindfulness and clear seeing – the two go hand in hand. We hold up the mirror of mindfulness and the Dhamma is reflected back. The mind sees itself and Dhamma is revealed.



Virtue

Thank you for your reflections on polishing the mirror. I heard you say that virtue is the source of “true love”. In our Buddhist practice do we use the word “love” on its own? There are so many Western implications of the word love, or from the divine, or when distorted by the mind. So is it better to just use in the context of loving kindness or true love?



I don't think I said that. I think you may have misheard when I chanted the benefits of keeping the precepts. 'Virtue is the source of true wealth.' But it is interesting to investigate what we mean when we use words like virtue and true love. We could think of virtue as the cultivation of good or beautiful qualities. As in *Kalyana mitta* - which literally means 'beautiful friend' - meaning someone with beautiful qualities of mind (rather than a beautiful appearance).

Not Self

My question relates to the whole notion of Not Self in Buddhism. Whilst the notions of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness have real immediate meaning and relevance to me in my practice, 'not self' is less obvious. I can understand an idea that we don't have a fixed self, we change; but I have picked up the fact that the idea of 'not self' in Buddhism is much more than that. The only way I seem to relate to it is on a very intellectual level and even then, only just. I'm wondering how it is relevant to practice. Essentially, I suppose I'm wondering why the Buddha thought the idea of 'not self' was such a central one to grasp on the path to liberation from suffering. Possibly a rather large topic for a Q&A slot!



This is a question that really goes to the core of the Buddha's teachings. Ajahn Sumedho's book title 'Don't take your life personally' comes to mind. Why shouldn't we take it personally? Because when we add a sense of self to our experience it leads to suffering. The sense of I, me and mine underlies desire, what I want and don't want, and desire leads to Dukkha. If we look at the ten fetters, there are two levels of seeing through the self-delusion. The first is to let go of self-views – such as that there is or isn't a self. The second, which leads to full enlightenment, is a complete penetration of self-delusion. We could see it like this. The first shakes what we thought was the solid ground of the assumption of self. We no longer buy into or attach to it as an idea, which undermines the self-centred position we think from. The second eradicates the delusion of self completely – and this leads to the complete ending of suffering. So you can see why it is such a central part of Buddhism.

Healing feelings of resentment

It is common for memories or beliefs of past unfairness to enter our thoughts and perceptions of what is happening now.

How can compassion and loving kindness help heal or reduce feelings of resentment or anger that may arise and may affect our behaviour?

Trying to develop loving kindness and compassion as a way to overcome resentment at being treated unfairly, may not necessarily work. It can be loaded with the idea that I ought to be able to love the person who caused this hurt.

I have recently read a book called 'The Forgiveness Project' which is a book of stories about people's journeys towards forgiveness. When I reflected on forgiveness from a Buddhist perspective what came to me was that it is only through understanding, that we can forgive completely. But what I mean by understanding is not trying to get the person who did this to you, to tell you why they did it - they probably don't know - and even if they told you, it wouldn't necessarily help you make sense of what happened. What I mean is, to understand the principle of causality. Whatever the person did, they did it because of causes. And your experience of resentment and anger and difficulty in letting go arises through causes too. We don't have to understand what these causes are in order to accept the principle of causality.

So, this is a way of letting go that doesn't depend on the person who hurt you admitting that your version of events is what happened, and it doesn't depend on needing them to say sorry - it doesn't depend on anything external. It is healing through understanding - it is something we can do for ourselves.



So, this an expression of loving kindness and compassion directed towards ourselves. When we have healed the hurt we feel inside, then we will have no problem forgiving the other person. And we will also be able to forgive ourselves.

I'm not saying that loving kindness and compassion has no role to play in forgiveness, but offering another tool for you to experiment with.

Where should I place my attention?

When I meditate being aware of the flow of breath in and out, concentrating with bare attention, I also become strongly aware of what Ajahn Sumedho calls the sound of silence. This to me is more than just a sound but also a place. Not too sure as to where to place my attention I tend to concentrate kind of on the two together. There sometimes opens up a place which seems to be a place just beyond the breath, a sort of breath behind the breath and this place is located within the sound of silence. It's a very peaceful conscious place. Does anyone have any views on this?



It is always good to bear in mind that whatever 'progress' we make in meditation comes from letting go. As you continue to practise you will discover it is possible to let go of the concept of location as well as every other 'thing' we can conceive of. As Ajahn Sumedho himself would say; not being sure feels like this, being peaceful feels like this.

Navigating the flow of experience

Life is a continual cycle of change, how to smoothly navigate the flow and not act on impulse when triggered by exterior chaos. I understand Inner stillness is the root here but it's not as easy when on the midst of society.



Mindfulness is the practice of standing back from our experience – and noticing gives us the opportunity to respond rather than react. This space – in which noticing happens – is supported by inner stillness. It isn't easy, but with practice it becomes a habit to notice, rather than to react impulsively. Sometimes, we realise noticing is enough – there is nothing we need to do, but we also have the possibility of responding skilfully – or at least more skilfully than we would have done. Right speech and right action becomes possible and we create a lot fewer problems in life.

Vedananupassana - Cittanupassana

Is Vedananupassana mindfulness of bodily sensations or the feelings? The basic confusion is that vedana is both a psychological as well as a physical phenomenon. In Vedananupassana shall we focus more on the physical sensations or the psychological stuff? When we do the body scanning meditation - is it the Kaya or the Vedana?

During Cittanupassana; the mindfulness of the entire psychological process post Phassa (sense contact) that focuses more on perception / Sanna & volition / Sankhara. How to actually practice this based on the psychological working of Perception & Volition? During meditation, my mind is full of thoughts; a) with those thoughts do I need to interrogate/contemplate immediately or after the end of the session? b) In simple words, what/how to do interrogation? Is there a simple guide you can tell us? Because if I start interrogation, I may go endlessly.

We make contact with the body (Kaya) through physical sensation - and when we notice physical sensations, that is mindfulness of body. *Vedana* means feeling - which can be pleasant, painful or neutral. Feeling can be in relation to physical sensations or the experience of the mind. So when notice pleasant, painful or neutral feeling - that is *Vedananupassana*.

We practice with the mind (*Citta*) by being aware of our mental experience - thoughts.

We can get the impression, because the Buddha's teaching is very analytical, that we should practice in an analytical way. But it is possible to just notice our experience - without trying to analyse it in great detail - trying to separate our experience into *Kaya* or *Vedana* etc.

