

Week 2 – Love as the golden rule

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Ethics

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Writing exercise stuff: lots of scrap paper & biros (find them in Centre office)

NOTE TO LEADERS

The debate on vegetarianism especially could easily rankle people. Need to refer back to individual choice, be careful about finger wagging

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Experience an ethical debate within a Buddhist framework
- Start people thinking about vegetarianism
- Understand the difference between love & power mode and see where they could move more into a loving mode.

MEDITATION (10 MINS)

Metta bhavana – self, group, all beings

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION

Love is the so-called golden rule of all ethical systems; looking at the first precept out of which the rest naturally follow.

Previous class Review

Looked at basis of our ethical choices – complex picture.

Saw that Buddhist ethics is based on the intention or motivation behind the action – presence of greed, hatred, ignorance, or their opposites.

PRECEPTS IN GENERAL- REVIEW

THE FIRST PRECEPT

*I undertake the training principle to abstain from killing living beings
With deeds of loving kindness, I purify my body*

Reinforce “I undertake the training principle”; not “Thou shalt not”
“Violence indeed consists in our doing to another person, by whatever means, what he does not want us to do to him.” Sangharakshita

Killing is the most extreme form of violence, taking from another what they value most. It is the most extreme negation of one self by another, and thus one cuts oneself off in a very damaging way from others by killing.

Non-violence springs from a state of mind: *metta, loving kindness, love*

Seeing the interconnectedness of all things one feels metta – just as one cares for one's bruised fingers.

Need healthy self love:

*I visited all quarters with my mind
Nor found I any dearer than myself;
Self is likewise to every other dear;
Who loves himself will never harm another.*

Udana: Raja Sutta [V.1, 47]

Imaginative identification with others leads to metta for them – that's why metta bhavana starts with ourself.

"The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own."

PB Shelly

MORAL MAZE: VEGETARIANISM

This house believes that "Observance of the First Precept will naturally result in one's being a vegetarian"
- Sangharakshita

Handout paper & pens for people to make notes for questions. Take notes yourself to address any issues that want drawing out.

Take poll at beginning and end to see who agrees

Format

1. Witness 1 (DS?) 5-10 mins arguing for vegetarianism
2. Witness 2 (Mon – RG, Tue - ?NV?) arguing a Buddhist case "against"
3. Questioning of witnesses by everyone else
4. Final discussion about how they found the process, and where everyone stands. (In groups initially?)

Notes

Trying to model Buddhist ethical thinking. Hopefully you can correct many "miccha ditthis" about Buddhist ethics from the ensuing discussion.

Eg. Argument for: from a Dharmic point of view; ie try to balance introspection (wanting to be kind to fluffy animals) and consideration of consequences (a manifestation of wanting to be kind – want to limit damage & loss of life caused by sustaining my life)

Argument against (bit harder maybe): Buddha wasn't! Scale of consciousness – some people may need some animal products to sustain their health – is this ethical? Probably arguing against a literalistic interpretation. To grow vegetables, many animals are killed (worms etc) – how do we decide where to draw the line – there's no neat line.

TEA BREAK

Love mode vs Power mode

Love mode = cherishing of others

Power mode = attempt capacity to force others to do one's will, against their will.

Gross & subtle forms of power mode. This is the standard of society; without a police force society would break down rather quickly. It is not always possible to act totally in the love mode, in this case one must only use the power mode in subordination to the love mode. Examples

To operate according to the power mode means to relate to other living beings in such a way as to negate rather than affirm their being. To operate in accordance with the love mode is the opposite of this.

Sangharakshita, The Ten Pillars of Buddhism .

Brainstorm these – try to get to fairly subtle forms such as forms of psychological manipulation, (using guilt to motivate, withdrawing approval and love when people don't do the right thing for you...)

See if you can discuss the love mode equivalent of the interesting ones

Practising the first precept is about moving from power to love mode in as many ways as we can. It's not just about not killing beings.

Discussion

Writing Exercise

1. Loosen up: Write for 3 mins starting with "What I really want is..." Keep the pen moving, don't stop to think, fine to write rubbish, don't censor – you won't be asked to read it out.
2. Now start writing for 5 mins on "I tend to use power mode when..." You can afford to be a little more considered, but if you feel stuck, just write freely.
3. And now "What stops me from being more loving is..." as above.

Either (if not much time)

4. Read your writing in 2. and underline one or two areas in which you could envisage starting to move from power to love mode.

Or

Discussion In 3s

In which one or two specific areas of your life could you try to start moving from power to love mode? Try to get specific, but not too ambitious, either in scope (choosing too many areas) or difficulty. This will become your home practice for the week, so keep it do-able.

HOME PRACTICE

Start trying to notice when you're acting in power mode in the area or areas you discussed. Feel the quality or flavour of it. Remember to keep the love for yourself – be kind & patient with yourself when you don't act as lovingly as you'd like to. From this basis, can you try to act with a little more love in this situation?