

Week 6 – Wisdom & Compassion

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – doctrinal Dharma

LEARNING OUTCOMES

See in own experience the connection between understanding and metta

Intuit the connection between spiritual wisdom & compassion, as two sides of the same coin (two wings of a bird)

Intuit the possibility of the bodhicitta as an altruistic orientation, and its radical difference from pleasure/pain orientation

See the possibility of kindness as a path to insight, and the dangers of spiritual individualism

Understand the historical transition to the Mahayana as a reemphasis of the qualities and example of the Buddha

MEDITATION

Group metta

Notice especially in last stage, how you feel about opening heart to whole world, all beings.

Those I loathe will die, those I love will die; I too will die; and all will die.

Bodhicaryavatara, 2.36

REVIEW OF LAST WEEK

Looked at different “Orders” of conditionality, Niyamas & mind reactive/creative.

WISDOM & COMPASSION

Balance individual & collective

Wisdom & compassion

So far this course, have been looking at the wisdom aspect of Buddhism

- could say the cognitive aspect

This week round off with looking at the “other side of the coin” – the compassionate or loving aspect

- could say the affective or emotional aspect

Story from 7 Habits with kids on train

Exercise

Can you think of an occasion on which you were in difficult communication with someone, or felt aversion towards them; and then a greater understanding of their viewpoint or life experience brought a feeling of care, concern, empathy, or warmth for them? Discuss in pairs.

In plenary, draw out connection between understanding and metta, being able to imaginatively enter someone else's life.

Hatred is a limitation of perspective, being overly concerned for how someone else impacts on us, not being able to see beyond the unpleasant experience that we are having.

Every negative mental state is a failure of perspective - Aloka

Can see connection between understanding & love at everyday level: this keeps getting recapitulated as path progresses, so that increasing spiritual wisdom is associated with greater love and compassion.

Such that Enlightenment is seen on one hand as complete awakening – wisdom aspect; but also as compassionate & loving.

When the Buddha died, Ananda's words of sorry – “the teacher is about to pass away from me, he who was so kind”, not “he who was so wise”, or tireless, or whatever.

Why should this be?

We must not forget the metta aspect of Dharma. It's not a kindergarten exercise, as Bhante puts it – it's a practice that is an integral part of the path.

Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings

Karaniya Metta Sutta, Sutta Nipata I.8

This boundless heart that we cultivate is the same boundless heart that we cultivate through reflection & realisation of anatta, no-self.

The idea is to gently but persistently expand the boundaries of your metta and therewith the boundaries of your own self. When metta is experienced in this fully expansive mode and is universal in its scope, there is no experience of a self that is separate from anyone or anything else. To speak of 'oneself' at this stage is almost a contradiction in terms. Just as a circle that has expanded to infinity is not really a circle any more, having gone beyond any distinguishable shape, so the mind that has expanded to embrace all beings has gone beyond definition. Forgetting the self as a reference point, no longer asking what any given situation means for you alone, you can go on indefinitely and happily expanding the breadth and depth of your interest and positivity. The self is replaced by a creative orientation of being.

Living with Kindness, Sangharakshita, p136

As wisdom progresses, accompanied by metta, boundaries of the heart soften, & we're naturally more sensitive to the suffering of others.

TEA BREAK

BODHISATTVA IDEAL & BODHICITTA

But the tendency to egocentricity is so strong, seems it's possible to practice for a long time with the notion of “getting Enlightenment for myself” and therefore escaping suffering, without having to be too bothered about everyone else.

Maybe there was a somewhat individualistic streak that developed over the centuries following the Buddha's death.

One strand of the Mahayana developed in response to re-emphasise the altruistic dimension of practice – felt had to restate the compassion aspect very strongly to correct an overly egocentric form of practice that had developed.

So emerged the Bodhisattva ideal.

= “Awakening being” – someone set on Enlightenment, but without a simply personal motivation

characterised by the Bodhicitta – the heart of awakening. Full arising of Bodhicitta is mysterious thing – nature of transcendentally erupting within us.

Own will blended with the will to Enlightenment.

If you love someone very much, when they ask you to do something and you do it, is the carrying out of the task their volition or yours? You make their will your will

Sangharakshita, The Bodhisattva Ideal p. 38

Radical reorientation of volition: from pleasure/pain to easing suffering – whether it's mine or others isn't so significant. You see suffering and want to respond.

Natural result of metta bhavana, fully realised.

Mahayana emphasised the altruistic very strongly, to overcome the natural tendency towards self pre-occupation.

For example, Santideva's Bodhicaryavatara very strong evocation of the attitude of Bodhicitta:

All those who suffer in this world do so because of their desire for their own happiness. All those happy in this world are so because of their desire for the happiness of others

Santideva, Bodhicaryavatara 8.129

Discuss

NB: Altruism is not doing things for others necessarily at own expense: it's basing action around others' benefit.

Can see the Mahayana as emphasising the spirit of the Buddha's teaching – maybe too much emphasis had been previously given to the word, but so much of his communication was in what he did – taught for 45 years.

Mahayana emphasised his compassion in doing so.

Down to earth

Nagavira input on examples of experience of Bodhicitta – practising dana paramita

Bodhisattva Ideal & bodhicitta are extremely lofty ideals, but we can relate to them simply in terms of not forgetting the other-regarding aspect of practice.

It's very good that we want to get sorted out ourselves – we're a suffering living being and it's good to alleviate that suffering.

But the bodhicitta-aspect of ourselves won't be content with that as our only concern – outwards flowing aspect, intuition of interconnectedness.

Could we really be happy if we're in contact with other's suffering?

Either we'd have to harden hearts – feels bad in itself,

Or we'd feel involved in their suffering.

Exercise (if time)

What experiences do you think you've had of Bodhicitta? What examples of real figures who've exhibited Bodhisattva qualities?

HOME PRACTICE

Try to notice whenever possible your desire for the well-being of others; whether it is an urge to help, or a sense of compassion when things go badly for them, or happiness when it goes well for them. Don't worry about mixed motives, or darker emotions (jealousy, schadenfreude etc) – just notice when there is any germ of “bodhicitta” – eg. the urge to send someone a get well card, be hospitable to someone, congratulate them etc.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Living with Kindness, Sangharakshita, Conclusion

What is the Dharma? Sangharakshita, ch13

Origin & Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal, Sangharakshita chapter 1 in *The Bodhisattva Ideal* book, or CD 065.