

Week 5 – Orders of conditionality

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – doctrinal Dharma

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Copy of Buddha Mind to show

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understanding of 5 niyamas, and that everything that befalls us isn't necessarily functioning of karma; yet karma is the only level of conditionality we can intentionally effect
- Remembered experience of reactive & creative behaviour
- A feeling for the difference between them
- Some sense of conditions that support them, and how to access more resourceful, creative states

MEDITATION

in last few minutes...

if it makes any sense, imagine how it would be to be in a more creative, resourceful state of mind. Would you approach your experience any differently?

REVIEW OF LAST WEEK

Looked at marks of Conditioned existence – the three lakshanas – to unpack some facets of conditionality.

Talked mainly of impermanence, way all things, from galaxy to mind, to atom, are all in flux; and talked an occasion when it struck us strongly

Quick look-see at unsatisfactoriness, dukkha again – if relate to things as permanent, they'll elude our grasp – dukkha

And saw how deeper look at conditionality & impermanence shows that there's no-thing to change – everything is change, and so there's no-thing that can have any separate, abiding selfhood. That includes us

And saw how reflection on these truths is the stuff of vipassana meditation, the content of the prajna aspect of the three trainings.

Look at different "Orders" of conditionality, to see more of scope.

ORDERS OF CONDITIONALITY

What's most interesting to us is understanding how things befall us, especially pleasure & pain.

According to doctrine of conditioned co-production, they arise & pass away in dependence upon conditions. But which conditions?

May have heard of the Glenn Hoddle case – people are disabled because of kamma in a previous life. Don't think that's a useful model for our make up & it's probably not what the Buddha taught. Intro to Milinda's questions.

“Whoever says, 'It is only kamma that oppresses beings... is wrong.... The ignorant go too far when they say that everything that is experienced is produced as the fruit of kamma.’”

The Questions of King Milinda, in Exploring Karma & Rebirth

Useful post-Buddha teaching in Abhidhamma of Five Niyamas (another list!) describing the different modes, or orders of conditionality that can operate:

[Write up in advance, leaving 3rd column empty]

The Five Niyamas		
Name	Scope	Examples (<i>brainstorm</i>)
Utu-niyama	Physical	Slate falling on head, caught in tsunami
Bija-niyama	Biological	Catching chickenpox, being shortsighted
Mano-niyama	Mental, non-volitional	Post-traumatic stress, depression from childhood abuse
Kamma-niyama	Ethical, volitional	Getting angry, being generous
Dhamma-niyama	"Spiritual"	?? Mystical experience, insights

Discuss examples

However karma is probably more significant than we usually give it credit for. And it is the most important because, by definition, it is the only order of conditionality over which we have control.

Can't ever be sure what complex of conditions led to our present state, but can be sure that our karma (action) will have effect on ourselves & others in the future

TEA BREAK

Adverts

- Next course
- Parinirvana Day
- Weekend retreat

WHAT IS KARMA?

Volitional action, of body, speech or mind

Basic Buddhist belief is that karma has effects:

Most directly on modifying our mind, reinforce that trend

Liberate or oppress our spirit

But also on the world we experience

Can find self inhabiting an alienated, friendly, ugly world, if consistently act unethically. Or a connected, vibrant world where people seem to gravitate towards you.

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows even as the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the ox drawing the cart.

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs

Dhammapada, trans Sangharakshita, v1-2

Actions have consequences, nothing is lost, “universe recycles everything”

MIND REACTIVE & CREATIVE (ALLOW 1 ¼ HOURS IF POSS)

Within karmic sphere of action, useful to subdivide into two trends: reactive & creative
(Sangharakshita - not a traditional teaching, but seems clearly related to experience)

Exercise – discuss in pairs

Think of an occasion where you habitually get into a bad mood or contracted mental state. Eg. getting frustrated waiting in a supermarket queue, lose temper with kids when they x..., get alienated by watching too much tv or surfing internet. Something you regretted afterwards. Try to think of something that happens fairly frequently and that you can remember quite clearly.

And think about these questions:

- What are the conditions that lead to it?
- What did that state of mind feel like? How aware is it? How much freedom is there?
- How do you feel afterwards?

Brainstorm up responses in the “Reactive” column

Reactive	Creative
Confined, habitual	Expansive, many options
Narrow or confined awareness	Present, broad awareness
Unfortunate outcome, upsetness	Positive outcome, creative, new options found
Afterwards feel unhappy, regretful, isolated	Afterwards feel content, buoyed up, alive

Try to prompt for descriptions that evoke the:

- Extent of freedom
- Breadth or narrowness of Awareness
- Outcome
- Feeling afterwards

Exercise – discuss in pairs

Can you remember an occasion in which you responded to a what might have been a difficult situation in a way you felt was emotionally creative and resourceful? You hit a kind of creative “sweet spot” (like hitting a ball with a racket in just the right place)

Eg. expressed yourself fully but kindly in a tricky spot; or were genuinely patient in a frustrating situation without just grinning & bearing it.

Brainstorm up again

Reactivity seems mechanistic, re-act, habitual. You know other peoples' reactive patterns, when they'll always lose it or get stroppy when you raise a particular subject. And they probably know yours!

Characterised by unskilful mental states, lack of freedom and often little awareness.

Creativity can take yourself and others by surprise. It's a new response, one they're not used to.

Example of the opera singer being mugged, bursting into aria

Or John Lennon: was afraid to listen to Beethoven because it made him feel like caressing people's heads when they needed to be beaten!

Characterised by more skilful mental states, freedom of response, broader, clearer awareness of self, other & the options

Implications

Nagavira input on maintaining and developing a resourceful state? How to move into creativity when feel tempted into reactivity?

Creativity still arises on the basis on conditions. What might they be?

Brainstorm:

- Cultivating awareness
- Keeping ourselves in a good state
- Meditating regularly
- Cultivating metta
- Not placing self under too much stress
- Reflecting on our actions & motivations

It's our responsibility to be in the best possible state, both for our own sake and the sake of those around us.

Exercise

Can you identify a habitual pattern of reactivity that you're not happy with, but which feels manageable to start tackling? (eg. getting frustrated in supermarket queues, getting angry with the kids)

Can you identify some of the conditions for that reactive pattern? (eg. going shopping when you're in a hurry, kids being stroppy when trying to get them to bed).

HOME PRACTICE

Be especially aware when moving into your “danger conditions”. When you find yourself in them, try to recall your “sweet spot” experience in which you felt more creative and resourceful. See if you can access a more creative mind. (Don’t chastise yourself if you can’t – that’s just another reactive pattern!)

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Mind Reactive, Mind Creative chapter in *Buddha Mind* by Sangharakshita, or CD no 31

Karma and Dependent Origination chapter in *Exploring Karma and Rebirth* by Nagapriya, Windhorse Publications

Flag up next course