

# Week 2 – Knowing your realm

## *Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – symbolic Dharma*

### RESOURCES REQUIRED

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You will need:

- Writing paper & pens
- Files or clipboards for people to write on
- Print outs of the Realms descriptions – one per person

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Gain felt overview of the 6 realms on the wheel

Realise their psychological & objective “existence”

Possibly intuit that these two are not completely different

Understand difference between karma & karma vipaka

### MEDITATION (10 MINS + SETTLING OUT)

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Settle in, then stabilise awareness around the breathing.

Try to have sense of the skilfulness of your mind: is there a trace of wanting? – some kind of special experience, or for the class to start, or chasing after thoughts

Or is there a trace of aversion? – to the thoughts you’re having, to pain in your body, to sitting here like this?

Or is there contentment to sit here with an open heart with your experience, patient with yourself.

Is there cloudiness of not really being able to see what’s happening, or is there a clarity about your experience?

Sit trying to track the fluctuations of the mind state – the traces of white & black.

If you were a landscape / seascape what would you be?.

### INTRODUCTION TO SESSION

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Will be looking at the next ring out from the 2 segments, the so-called six realms of conditioned existence.

You’ll be doing most of the work!

### Introductions again (10 mins)

In pairs, make sure you know each others’ names. Ask about their image in meditation, then try to find out something about your partner; something about their world that we may not know. Then introduce each other with and tell us what you learnt.

## Plenary (15 mins)

### *Previous class Review*

Together, try to come up with salient points from previous session.

- Wheel spiral mandala as a unified symbol that encompasses all life from mundane to transcendental
- The rich, multilayered nature of symbols (remember the animal exercise)
- Wheel of life as presenting symbol for dynamics of life, from moment to moment or life to life. It's a mirror.
- Hub – 3 poisons – recognise our face in it, and reconcile self to it.
- Black & white segments – we have a choice what to do with every moment – give in to animal nature, or orientate to higher dimension through exercising karma; we're evolving or devolving.

### *Home practice review*

How did home practice and/or the “dharmavijaya” aspect of the meditation go? how easy or hard did you find it to:

- Remember to be aware a few times per day
- to work out whether you were being skilful or unskilful

What about now – are you in the black or white? Is there possibility for neutral?

Introduce dharmavijaya – investigation of mental states – as a crucial aspect of awareness in Dharma practice – knowing what's going on, especially knowing its ethical status.

Will be doing more in next module – ethics.

## REALMS AS KARMA VIPAKA (10 MINS)

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Realms illustrate the different modes of being & consciousness – where we're at

Black & white segments illustrate karma in operation – the realms illustrate the results of karma – “karma vipaka”

We evolve from realm to realm (and within the realm) according to our karma.

Realms are objectification of karma vipaka

Can be seen in two ways

- As objectively existing worlds (we know the human & animal worlds) - traditional
- More psychologically as different modes of human consciousness

## THE SIX REALMS

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Gather around picture and have general orientation look at the six realms, and point out the Buddha in each one. Then...

## Exercise (30 mins)

[Point of this is to get people learning by teaching]

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Give Realm handout to each person. They are edited extracts for Sangharakshita's talk on the wheel of life (CD 103)

Each contains either a description of one realm – both as objectively existing world, and as a mental state; or else a description of what the Buddha is giving in each realm.

Take 5 mins to read the short text, then each person comes up in turn to describe that realm to the others. Try not to read from the paper! [Set time limit for the presentation, warn that you'll ring bell or whatever after a few mins]

### Points to draw out

- They're all impermanent – not fixed states
- There's no judgement or judger – it's the natural operation of karma that determines the realm a being enters – a being becomes into a realm through their actions.

Name of realm	Description	The inhabitants	Characteristic mental state	"Human paradigm"	What the Buddha offers
<b>Hell realm</b>	Flames & ice; many kinds of torment, extremely grisly.	Experiencing pain being inflicted on them; unrelenting	Pain	Strong hatred; psychosis; living in warzone.	"Amṛta" - balm to relieve suffering.
<b>Hungry ghost realm (pretaloka)</b>	Bleak, grey, lifeless, desert.	Tiny mouths & necks, big bellies; food turns to excrement in mouth	Unsatisfied desire; misplaced, neurotic craving.	Addiction; neurotically attached to someone; shopaholic	Food they can really eat – meet true needs.
<b>Titan / Angry gods (asuraloka)</b>	Ongoing battle with gods over the wishfulfilling- tree; constant warring	Powerful, aggressive, warlike beings. No trust or love.	Jealousy & fierce competition	Stockbrokers, politicians... fighting to top of hierarchy	Sword of wisdom – only true conquest is over ignorance
<b>Animal realm</b>	Animals eating, sleeping, reproducing	All kinds of animals going about their instinctual life.	Ignorance & unselfawareness	Overriding concern for comfort & bodily satisfaction.	Book of Culture – intermediate between savagery & spirituality.
<b>Human realm</b>	The world of human culture, civilisation, endeavour, striving	Self aware humans, experiencing pleasure & pain	Awareness of self & other; ability to make ethical choices	"Happy healthy human being"	The robe & staff of a spiritual aspirant
<b>Heaven realm (devaloka)</b>	Beauty, refinement, light, music	Very refined beings, dwelling in subtle bodies, needs are spontaneously met.	Pleasure & bliss; bright, clear mind	Light hearted, carefree, attractive people; happy artists(!); very spiritually-developed people	Lute of impermanence – positive fruits of karma will run out; devas will fall from grace.

### Tea break

[Need to be back with a good 45 mins before end]

## GETTING A FEEL FOR THE REALMS

### Reading

Illustration of someone's descent into a hell realm: from Anna Karenina by Tolstoy. Anna has been jilted, she's furious & desperate, getting on the train...

*A bell rang, some young men, ugly and impudent, and at the same time careful of the impression they were making, hurried by. Piotr, too, crossed the room in his livery and spatterdashes with his dull, brutish face, and came up to her to take her to the train. The noisy young men were quiet as she passed them on the platform, and one whispered something about her to another - something vile, no doubt. She stepped up on the high step, and sat down in a carriage by herself on a dirty spring seat that had once been white. Her bag lay beside her, shaken up and down by the springiness of the seat. With a foolish smile Piotr raised his hat in token of farewell; an impudent conductor slammed the door and the latch. A grotesque-looking lady wearing a bustle (Anna mentally undressed the woman, and was appalled at her hideousness), and a little girl laughing affectedly, ran down the platform.*

*'Even the child's hideous and affected,' thought Anna. To avoid seeing anyone, she got up quickly and seated herself at the opposite window of the empty carriage. A misshapen-looking peasant covered with dirt, in a cap from which his tangled hair stuck out all around, passed by that window, stooping down to the carriage wheels. The conductor opened the door and let in a man and his wife.*

*The couple seated themselves on the opposite side, and intently but surreptitiously scrutinized her clothes. Both husband and wife seemed repulsive to Anna. The husband asked if she would allow him to smoke, obviously not with a view to smoking, but to getting into conversation with her. Receiving her assent, he said to his wife in French something about caring less to smoke than to talk. They made inane and affected remarks to one another, entirely for her benefit. Anna saw clearly that they were sick of each other, and hated each other. And no one could have helped hating such miserable monstrosities.*

*A second bell sounded, and was followed by moving of luggage, noise, shouting and laughter. It was so clear to Anna that there was nothing for anyone to be glad of, that this laughter irritated her agonizingly, and she would have liked to stop up her ears not to hear it. At last the third bell rang, there was a whistle and a hiss of steam, and a clank of chains, and the man in her carriage crossed himself. 'It would be interesting to ask him what meaning he attaches to that,' thought Anna, looking angrily at him. She looked past the lady out of the window at the people who seemed whirling by, as they ran beside the train or stood on the platform.*

Her hatred is transforming her world into a hateful place, a hell on earth. (She shortly throws herself under a train, to spite her lover)

## Exercise (30 mins)

Each person chooses (or is assigned) a realm. Make sure there's at least one person per realm.

Write freely for 5 ish mins from the point of view of someone in your realm. They can be a literal inhabitant of that realm (eg. a real deva or hell being – could pick a character on the painting), or a “psychologically equivalent” human. Don't worry about the writing quality, or “getting it right”; just use imagination to engage with that realm. We will be reading them out to the group (or subgroup – depending on time & numbers, may divide into two groups)

Then read them out, realm by realm, to create a “soundscape” of the realms.

## Plenary discussion

Did people pick up a felt sense of the different realms?

## CLOSING COMMENTS

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Have talked about two ways of viewing realms: as objectively real world or as psychological state. Maybe they're not so different: consider:

*Change your mind and experience the world differently; change your mind and experience a different world. What is the difference between these two statements?*

*Sangharaksita (aphorism quoted from memory)*

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In a sense, we all dwell in our own realm; the degree of overlap is a function of the commonality of our karma. We share more karma with each other with dogs, so our world is more alike than dog-world.

By becoming familiar with the realms, we can start to recognise which realm we're inhabiting, and understand how to navigate to the more favourable realms – human & god – by orientating to the Buddha in that realm & what he's offering us.

## HOME PRACTICE

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Continue colouring in the Wheel of Life image.

Whenever you meditate, or look in a mirror, or look at your wheel of life image then try to recognise which realm you are in, feel the strongest affiliation to.

Over the week, try to gain a sense of which realms you inhabit most. Can you describe the peculiarities of your own habitual realms in terms of images? Maybe even draw them? Are they hot/cold; beautiful/ugly, pleasant / painful?

## RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

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*Wheel of Life*, Kulananda, ch 4-10

*The Six Realms* chapter in *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*, Sangharakshita

*The Symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life*, Sangharakshita, CD 103 or chapter in *Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism*

*The Six Realms* chapter in *Exploring Karma and Rebirth*, Nagapriya