

Week 1 – Karma & Rebirth

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – symbolic Dharma

PREPARATION

Wheel of life big, for classwork
Wheel of life b&w handouts for colouring
Wheel of life colour print or thank-a – to demo, ask if people want copies
Wheel, spiral mandala handouts
Flipchart with
wheel, spiral mandala sketch
Karma table

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Gain appreciation of symbolic understandings
Gain overview of wheel/spiral/mandala as symbol of whole of life & its potential
Gain overview of wheel of life as mirror & map of our own life
Gain flavour of being trapped in cyclic existence by our own conditioning
Understand the meaning of the hub in terms of our three root poisons.
Understand the white & black segments in terms of karma

MEDITATION

Time to settle & tune in to self. Let go of worries for the moment if you like.
Towards end, if you as you are at this moment were an animal, what sort of animal would you be? Can have an action associated with the animal if you like eg. hamster running on a wheel, or cat curled up in the sun.

INTRODUCTIONS

Everyone introduce self with name & what animal do you feel like right now (may have changed from the meditation)

OVERVIEW OF MODULE

This module as v. brief overview to three important symbols that link together in to single symbol that covers the whole of the spl life:
Wheel of life – traditional early symbol (Maugalayana, disciple of Buddha, said to be originatory) – represents mundane (samsaric) existence in its heights & depths
Spiral path – symbol given by Sangharakshita to a traditional early teaching – represents unfolding of genuine spiritual progress

Mandala of Five Buddhas – traditional Mahayana symbol - represents the goal of Buddhahood, unpacking the multifaceted nature of the Enlightened mind.

For those on previous modules, will be recapitulating some of the earlier concepts, now represented symbolically.

WHY SYMBOLS?

Refer back to “animal” exercise. We can communicate very richly with a single image – multilayered.

Addresses a different part of us than just the conceptual – more emotional, direct link to deeper, wholer self.

We know we can be more moved, feel more strongly motivated, by other than the rational self. Otherwise why should we be so moved by movies? By books & stories? By music & poetry? By dreams? Why should millions of people grieve for someone they never met when Princess Diana was killed?

Buddhism employs symbols in many guises to communicate it's messages.

OVERVIEW OF WHEEL OF LIFE

Bhavacakra – wheel of becoming

Obviously a cyclic symbol – the never-ending round

[Guided tour of the different aspects of the wheel]

“escape from castle” computer game

point isn't to amass lots of points for its own sake, but to escape altogether

Image of rebirth – How beings migrate from one mode of being to another

Don't have to see it narrowly just in terms of one lifetime to another – we're constantly being reborn, moment by moment – what governs the sort of mental state that we're “born” into.

The Dharma views all – including our selves – as process

The WoL is a visual description of many dimensions of process

What's actually going on? Why do I feel how I do? Why do I act as I do?

It's a mirror, held up by Yama lord of Death – look to see ourself in there

Yama should be frightening – we should be frightened to see ourselves in the mirror – This is happening to **me** – I'm doing **this**

It's also a map describing the dynamics of the process of becoming

THE HUB

Cock – greedily pecking for food - lust or craving

Snake – image of malicious harm – hatred or aversion

Pig – eyes obscured by ears – ignorance or delusion

[don't get too hung up on biological accuracy! Just relate to the image]

These are the driving forces of the wheel – of the reactive mind

And the sources of our suffering

But its counterproductive to respond with aversion to our nature - Accept our basically animal natures & animal drives

Not at war with self, but look for ways to accommodate & go beyond limitations.

We have that possibility because of self-consciousness

& if believe Buddha, we have that potential in us

We have potential for the opposites of the poisons

Generosity / contentment, love, wisdom

Can contact the innate knowledge that these qualities are wholesome – don't need to justify it rationally because we know they are good when we experience them – could call that an aspect of our Buddha nature.

T E A B R E A K

ORGANISATIONAL DETAILS

Dana appeal – recommend £5-7 per night

Mailing list – any interest? VP will send out invitations to join the Yahoo Group. Can always unsubscribe.

Want an A4 copy of wheel of life?

THE BLACK & WHITE SEGMENTS

Beings evolving according to their karma

Skilful actions tending towards pleasant, happy outcomes; unskilful tending towards unpleasant, painful outcomes

Stark – all the time only have two choices – skilful or unskilful

Not to say there's only two different things we can do, but have the choice between those trends of conditionality.

Of course, not always that black & white

Sobering – do we tend to think that most of what we do is somehow “neutral”, won't really make a difference somehow?

KARMA

Everything we do affects us, modifies our being in some way

Karma is a model that explains how:

Actions (of body speech or mind) motivated by the poisons (greed, hatred, delusion) tend to lead to unhappy states of being & consciousness. Termed “skilful”

Actions (of body speech or mind) motivated by generosity, love, wisdom tend to lead to happy states of being and consciousness. Termed “unskilful”

Flipchart:

Underlying motivation	Karmic quality	Outcome
Greed, hatred, delusion	Unskilful	Unhappy – lower state of being
Generosity, love, wisdom	Skilful	Happier – higher state of being

Those on last module will remember that karma is one aspect of conditionality. Not everything that happens to us is caused by our karma, but everything we do say or think will have an effect, certainly on us and probably on the world around us.

There's no Supreme Being administering justice: karma is a model that describes the natural workings of the psychical universe. So we talk of *skilful* and *unskilful* rather than *good* & *bad*: there's no one "up there" judging us, to whom we're responsible.

Confidence in karma is one of chief objects of faith for a Buddhist – to extent that really at gut level believe that actions have consequences, will be that much more motivated & energised to practice.

Most reluctance or lack of energy in practice / meditation is really just doubt – lack of conviction that it will make a difference, or that one's current disengaged mental state is at best a missed opportunity.

Karma is our one true possession:

Beings are owners of their karma, heirs of their karma, karma is the womb from which they are born. Their karma is their friend and their refuge. Whatever karma they perform, good or bad, of that they will be heirs

Majjhima Nikaya 135

Defines us and our future happiness more strongly than our possessions, our likes & dislikes, our looks, our family, wealth etc

REBIRTH

Want to keep it practical, so no point getting too speculative about rebirth, but...

If see ourselves as a process of continual change, one moment of being conditioning the next, then not such a big deal to see the end of one life conditioning the beginning of the next.

No fixed "I" that moves from one to the next, but tendencies conditioning tendencies

Exercise

Think of a skilful habit and an unskilful habit that you have sometimes.

Good: eg. meditating each day, making cups of tea for colleagues, being patient with your kid, being appreciative of your friends/family...

Bad: eg getting angry while driving, getting wound up by a particular family member, nursing resentful thoughts about someone, overindulging in cake....

How do you know it is a good or bad habit? How do you feel afterwards? Think about qualities such as: content or edgy; expansive or constricted; connected or isolated; happy or unhappy.

HOME PRACTICE

Trying to gain a sense of how we're "reborn" each moment depending on our karma:

Try to notice a couple of times per day moments of karma (we're doing it all the time!), and work out whether you're in the black or white segment.

If you're "in the white", ie being aware, skilful & creative, then you'll probably notice it as you're doing it. If you're in the black, ie being unskilful & reactive, then you may not realise until afterwards, maybe by how you feel.

Is there any connection between how you feel later and the quality of the karma?

And, if you like, start colouring in your wheel of life!

RESOURCES FOR THE COURSE

On the web

Interactive wheel of life (needs Explorer) <http://www.angelfire.com/yt/fairtibet/whexpl.html>

More detailed wheel of life exposition with good images

<http://www.kheper.net/topics/Buddhism/wheeloflife.html>

Sutta and essay on how the wheel & spiral path are connected:

<http://accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel277.html>

Recommended books

The Wheel of Life, Kulananda (short & pithy) ch 1-3

The Buddhist Vision, Subhuti (more in-depth, covers whole module) ch 4 & 5

Karma & Rebirth, Nagapriya (contemporary, critical account)

Other

What is the Dharma, Sangharakshita, ch 2

Karma & Rebirth, Sangharakshita, CD 032