

Introduction to Buddhism – Teachers Notes

Overview from Sagaraghosa

This course was originally devised by Ruchiraketu. I supported his classes for several years in Cambridge and made notes that formed the basis of the material here. I have taught the course about ten times since then in my own right and make small changes every time, so these notes are not fixed. I imagine that anyone using them will want to make changes to them to suit their own style. Ruchiraketu has asked me to make clear that the good ideas are his and any mistakes are mine. I don't dispute the second half of this statement, and the first half is nearly true.

The course was devised for people who may not have learnt to meditate. In Cambridge, we provide both meditation and the Buddhism course as possible first courses for newcomers. However short led meditations are included in the Buddhism course and can help to give a flavour of what it is like to meditate as well as helping the course to be grounded in experience.

The aim of this Buddhism course is to introduce people to the basic ideas of Buddhism in a way that is transformative of people's lives, rather than emphasising doctrines to be learned. In my experience, it is very easy to spend the sessions talking a lot, so there is an attempt to include several other activities such as very short led meditations or reflections, small group discussions and experiential activities. There is also some homework for each week, simply encouraging people to reflect on their experience.

Outline of the course

The outline of the structure of the course is roughly based on the three jewels as follows:

- Week 1 – What is Buddhism?
- Week 2 – History: the Buddha and later developments
- Week 3 – Basic teachings of the Buddha
- Week 4 – Buddhist ethics
- Week 5 – Sangha: the spiritual community
- Week 6 – Symbolism and ritual in Buddhism

How the material is communicated

There is a teaching philosophy underlying the form of teaching based on Concepts, Attitudes, Practices and Symbols, known as CAPS for short. The aim of this approach is to ensure that there is a balance in how the course is put across. CAPS is made explicit in week 1, but it underlies all the rest of the weeks too.

- **'Concepts'** covers the ideas and teachings. In a Buddhism course there are plenty of these and the challenge can be not to have them overwhelm everything else.

- **‘Attitudes’** involves how the teacher communicates, such as being non-judgemental in responses to people. It is the ‘how’ of the communication rather than the ‘what’. A good question to ask yourself is, “How am I doing what I am talking about?”
- **‘Practices’** include meditations, reflections, experiential exercises and rituals. There are several of them in each week and they are important to ensure that participants practice Buddhism rather than just hearing about it.
- **‘Symbols’** include images, metaphors, stories and rituals. They help to engage emotions, the heart as well as the head.

When you make changes to the course, it would be good to ensure that all these elements are still included.

Some practical points

There is likely to be too much material here for you to cover it all. I find that how much I do depends on the group: how much they want to discuss and what particular topics take their interest. In several places I give more detail than you probably need, just in case you want it for your reference. You will need to use your discretion about how much to say.

Normally there are two to three mitras or order members supporting the classes and they can provide a most helpful resource, especially when they talk about their own practice and experience. So most weeks there are suggestions of ways in which they can contribute. There are notes in italics at the start of each week, and the end of the previous week, outlining the ways in which the team can contribute so that it is easy to give supporters warning well in advance and they have a chance to prepare.

The notes assume that there is a flip chart available. Any other equipment needed is mentioned explicitly.

The handouts are an integral part of the course. The names of the files for the handouts start with a number indicating the week of the course for which they are relevant. The handouts are listed at the beginning of each week with the number required.

Introduction to Buddhism Week 1 – What is Buddhism?

Before the class, ask the team to prepare to talk for a few minutes on why they follow the Buddha's teachings.

Bring along
Pens
clip boards

Handouts

Overview of course
What is Buddhism? CAPS grid (one copy per 3 people)
What is Buddhism diagram
The Three Jewels

Introductions

- Me
- Team
- Participants – why did they choose to come on this course? What do they want to get out of it?

About the evening

- Will focus on what Buddhism is and a helpful approach to take to it.
- Will be a tea break.
- Location of fire exits and loos.

Any questions?

About the course as a whole

Not academic, but rather aiming to give a taste of Buddhism and changes it can make to your life.

Give out *Overview of course* sheets. Any questions?

Now explore the question: 'What is Buddhism?'

Can be helpful to categorise answers under concepts, attitudes, practices, symbols in order to explore broadly rather than focus on one aspect.

Maybe look at example of Christianity in order to see what these categories mean – e.g. concepts include original sin and the resurrection, attitudes include forgiveness, practices include prayer, and symbols include the cross. Or you could ask questions such as, "What are the main symbols in Christianity?"

- Put people in small groups of 3 or 4 and give each group a copy of the CAPS grid, pen and clip board. Ask them to write down as many suggestions as possible for each quadrant
- After a few minutes when they seem to have gathered plenty of ideas, ask them to come together to share and put the ideas up on flip chart. Some may go in more than one quadrant.
- Point out that there is an interrelationship between different ideas, for example, an attitude of friendliness is cultivated by practising a loving-kindness meditation with a view of the interrelatedness of humanity.

Give out the handout 'What is Buddhism?' diagram.

- Discuss our context of bringing Western thought and perhaps some people in the group have a scientific training, some may be interested in mystical aspects etc. All this colours interpretations. It will be different again for Tibetans.
- The object is given by the CAPS brainstorm.
- Discuss ourselves – how we saw the world as children different from how we see it now –Buddhist practice helps to change our view of the world.

Buddhism as practice – awareness exercise

Knowing intellectually about awareness is different from experiencing it, so first ask people to discuss what awareness is, perhaps in their small groups.

Then lead through this awareness meditation.

- First sitting comfortably in a way that is dignified and relaxed.
- Looking around the room – can choose what to attend to
- Attend in particular to colours
- Notice shapes and lines. What has happened to the colours?
- Choose to listen. What has happened to the shapes and colours? Listening to sounds far and near, may want to close eyes.
- Physical sensations – temperature, touch, contact with mat or cushion, sensations in the body, joints and muscles. Bringing gentle, kindly awareness into parts of the body in turn.
- If mind wanders, congratulating yourself for noticing and gently bringing more awareness to the sensations in the body again.
- Settling attention on sensations of breathing – perhaps having a couple of deliberate deeper breaths so that the sensations are more obvious before returning to breathing naturally – perhaps bringing awareness to the trunk inflating as breathe in and release as breathe out – doing this for a few minutes
- Broadening awareness to whole body sitting in the room
- Bring attention back to the room.

Notice our ability to direct attention to the body or thoughts.

“What is the difference between talking about awareness and doing it?” If necessary prompt with comments such as, “Doing is simpler, more immediate, ...”

The importance of awareness (*I can't find a reference for this story, but it illustrates the point*):

According to a Buddhist story, one day a leader of a religious sect came to visit the Buddha and asked Him “If I follow your Way, what will I do day by day?” The Buddha replied, “Walk, stand, lie down, sit, eat, drink...” The religious leader the inquired “...what is so special about your Way?” And the Buddha answered, “It is indeed special. The ordinary man, though he walks, stands, lies down, sits, eats, and

drinks, does not know he is walking, standing, lying down, sitting, eating and drinking. But when we walk, we know that we are walking. When we stand, we know that we are standing....”

Any comments or questions?

The central importance of the three jewels

Give out The Three Jewels handout – explain it and how we shall be exploring themes in later weeks.

- Buddha as ideal – direction rather than goal (next week)
- Dharma as practices to help us change ourselves (weeks 3 and 4)
- Sangha as companions to support and encourage us (week 5)

Members of the team and leader talk for a few minutes each on why they follow the Buddha’s teachings and how these three jewels are important to them.

Fundamental values and how we live them – how Buddhism is different from our culture

Meaning – not fame or status, but compassion and understanding

Happiness – not from money or pleasant experiences, but from inner peace

Security – not from fighting and winning nor from indifference, but from positive relationships and knowing ways to practise with whatever comes up in experience

Living fully – not from peak experiences, but from becoming more mindful and awake, so delight can come from small things

David Brazier says:

I have heard many people say that it seems just too good to be true: a religion that does not require people to believe things they find incredible, that is not incompatible with modern science, that is not warmongering, that provides an ethic that applies right across the social spectrum, and that is still flexible and evolving to meet ever new social situations and applications in constructive ways. It is faith that urges us to protect the environment, to build harmonious communities, to avoid waste, to settle conflicts and live more simply, yet it does all this without loading people with fear and guilt; a faith with a strong internationalist vision as well as thorough personal ethics – ethics that extend to our treatment of animals and plants as well as our relations with other people. Many people nowadays are coming to have great hopes for the gentle path of the Buddha.

How to approach Buddhism

You can cover this part quite quickly.

The simile of the arrow – questions the Buddha wouldn't answer

from the Cūḷamāluṅkya Sutta (Middle length sayings, sutta 63).

A monk, Māluṅkyāputta was concerned that the Buddha had not answered certain philosophical questions:

- whether the world is eternal or not eternal;
- whether the world is finite or infinite;
- whether the life principle is the same as the body or different from it;
- and whether the Buddha exists after death, or does not exist after death, or both exists and does not exist after death, or neither exists nor does not exist after death.

The Buddha said: “It is as if there were a man struck by an arrow that was smeared thickly with poison; his friends and companions, his family and relatives would summon a doctor to see the arrow. And the man might say, ‘I will not draw out this arrow as long as I do not know the caste of the man by whom I was struck, his name and his family, whether he was tall or short or medium height.’ That man would not discover these things, but that man would die.”

Buddha's teaching is about transcending suffering and being happier.

The Buddha is pictured as a physician rather than as a philosopher.

Reflection on how live your life (c. 10 minutes)

Bringing to mind a moment which felt more than usually positive or meaningful for you – perhaps felt contented, in tune with the world, more fully alive and energetic.

- Remembering the place – looks, smells, sounds
- and how you were feeling

If you were to live on the basis of that

- How might you think? What would you say was important?
- What would be your attitude towards life and other people?
- What would seem important to do?
- Is there any symbol or image that might help you remember?

Are there any differences to the way you normally live?

The simile of the raft

The Buddha likens his teachings to a raft. He says that trying to attain enlightenment is like someone coming to a river and trying to cross. They build a raft and cross safely, but when they have reached the other side, they do not carry the raft with them. So the Dharma is taught to cross over, not to hang onto.

The elephant's footprint

The Buddha tells the story of the elephant's footprint. He says suppose that a wise elephant woodsman were to enter an elephant wood and were to see a big elephant's **footprint**. He would not conclude that this is from a big bull elephant as some small she-elephants leave big footprints. He follows the footprints and sees also some **scrapings high up**. He would still not conclude that this comes from a big bull elephant as there are some tall she-elephants with prominent teeth. He follows further and also sees **marks made by tusks**, but there are some she-elephants with tusks. So he follows further and sees broken branches and a bull elephant at the base of the tree. Now he concludes that this is a big bull elephant. So similarly, he says, it is only after practising for some time that a disciple can conclude that the Buddha is fully enlightened.

So while learning about Buddhism, encouraged to keep an open mind while exploring a path that looks promising.

Buddha said you should test his words as a goldsmith tests gold in a fire.

Homework

During the coming week reflect on what really matters to you, what you value.

*Next week a team member could tell the life story of the Buddha (in 5 to 10 minutes).
Also members of the team can read out loud the extracts on the handout.*

Introduction to Buddhism Week 2 – History

A team member could tell the life story of the Buddha.

Also members of the team can read the extracts out loud near the end of the session.

Handouts

Images of the Buddha

Historical outline

History of Buddhism extracts

Shopping with the Buddha – one copy

Pingiya's praises – one copy

Review of last week:

Looked at breadth of Buddhism through Concepts, Attitudes, Practices, Symbols

Directing attention/ awareness

What is a Buddhist? – the three jewels

Approach to Buddhism – keep critical faculties, be open to experience, explore what works for you

Homework of reflecting on values

Small groups of 3 or 4 discuss any reflections they have had during the week, any experiences and any questions.

Feedback and questions in the whole group.

This week looking at the Buddha and the history of Buddhism.

Awareness meditation (for c. 10 minutes)

- First sitting comfortably in a way that is dignified and relaxed.
- Looking around the room
- Bringing awareness to sounds you can hear. May want to close eyes.
- Physical sensations – temperature, touch, contact with chair, sensations in the body, joints and muscles. Bringing gentle, kindly awareness into parts of the body in turn.
- If mind wanders, congratulating yourself for noticing and gently bringing more awareness to the sensations in the body again.
- Settling attention on sensations of breathing – perhaps having a couple of deliberate deeper breaths so that the sensations are more obvious before returning to breathing naturally – perhaps bringing awareness to the trunk inflating as breathe in and release as breathe out – doing this for a few minutes
- Broadening awareness to whole body sitting in the room
- Bring attention back to the room.

Buddha's life story, possibly from member of team (5 – 10 minutes)

Born into a life of luxury in about 500 BCE

4 sights

Sickness

Old age
Death
Holy man
Leaving home
Asceticism
Middle Way between luxurious living and asceticism
Enlightenment (Nirvana)
45 years teaching
Parinirvana (death of physical body)

Handout of images of the Buddha and how they relate to the story.

The story was about the historical Buddha and there is also an archetypal Buddha that is more of a symbol and the pictures illustrate: the Buddha as a symbol of our values. This can be brought out, for example, by having the Buddha gold, as gold is precious.

Experiential exercise to connect with the values of the Buddha (c. 5 minutes)

Do you know anyone who is wise? In what ways are they wise?

If not, what do you think a wise person would be like?

Share in small groups then large group. You may want to write the qualities on a flip chart.

One way to group qualities is as follows:

- Affective – peaceful, empathetic, understanding, gentle
- Reflective – introspective, intuitive
- Cognitive – pragmatic, observant, intelligent

What qualities did the Buddha have?

- Buddha means ‘awake’ – aware without adding stories
- free from preoccupation with self – from greed, hatred and delusion
- described by Bahiya as ‘goodly to look upon, with sense calmed, tranquil of mind, in full attainment of composure by masterly control like a tamed, alert, perfectly trained elephant.’
- described by Ananda as ‘he who was so kind’
- taught in many ways according to those he was talking to

Read Pingiya’s praises (see Appendix A) for a description from someone who knew the Buddha.

Modern imaginative description in *Shopping with the Buddha* by Srivati (see Appendix B).

Reflection: Choose a quality you already have to some extent and would like to develop further. Sitting quietly, reflect on how you have already developed your quality to some extent – at least from the time you were a baby – maybe you have demonstrated the quality in

some small way recently. ... Now wishing yourself well in developing the quality further in the future.

History of Buddhism – give out ‘Historical outline’ handout and talk briefly about the three yanas:

Soon after Buddha’s death first Buddhist Council agreed on Buddha’s sayings (suttas).

Passed down orally for several centuries then written – Pali canon

Buddhism remained a minor religion until King Ashoka converted in c. 260 BCE and spread Buddhism as far as Greece, Sri Lanka and Burma

Tradition remains today in Theravadin school in Sri Lanka and SE Asia.

Emphasis on ethics and monastic discipline and goal state of arahant.

Mahayana arose in first century BCE in response to narrow way teachings had been practised.

New scriptures were written in Sanskrit.

Mahayana characterised by:

- universalism – everyone will become a Buddha
- enlightened wisdom as main focus of realisation
- compassion
- salvation through rich cosmography including bodhisattvas

Zen is a Mahayana school focusing on meditation.

Vajrayana is an extension of the Mahayana adopting additional techniques.

Aims to speed path to enlightenment by using ritual, symbolism and visualisation.

Includes Tibetan Buddhism and Shingon Buddhism in Japan.

Modern Buddhism in the West is like a fourth yana.

Give out ‘History of Buddhism Extracts’ handout.

The extracts can be read in turn out loud, possibly by the team, and discussed. The aim is to give a flavour of the different yanas. They can people recognise different styles when they go into a book shop.

Early Buddhism

In the Dhammapada extract, you will probably have to explain the meaning of ‘pure mind’ and ‘impure mind’.

Notice the strong ethical and psychological approach.

The Bamboo Acrobat extract usually provokes a lot of discussion about looking after oneself compared to looking after others.

Mahayana

The Santideva extract has a completely different flavour, being cosmic, universal, other-regarding

In the extract from *Diamond Sutra*, brings out the metaphysical and mysterious aspect.

Zen

There wasn't enough space on the handout to include Zen examples so you may want to read these if there is time and interest.

A special transmission outside the Scriptures;
No dependence upon words and letters;
Direct pointing to the mind of man;
Seeing into one's own nature.

Studies in Zen D. T. Suzuki

A cold night - sitting alone in my empty room
Filled only with incense smoke.
Outside a bamboo grove of a hundred trees;
On the bed, several volumes of poetry.
The moon shines through the top of the window,
And the entire neighbourhood is still except for the cry of insects.
Looking at this scene, limitless emotion,
But not one word.

RYOKAN (trans. John Stevens)

Vajrayana

Notice how there is encouragement to make use of every moment in the first extract.

Notice the use of a mythical figure in the second extract.

If there is enough time, there can be discussion of the question, "Which of these extracts most appeals to you?" either in small groups and/or the big group.

Homework Read the extracts during the week and explore how you respond to them.

For next week, members of the team could each prepare a short talk (5 -10 minutes) on their experience of practising limbs of the Noble Eightfold Path (View, Emotion, Speech, Effort, Mindfulness, Meditation). The other limbs involving ethics will be covered the following week.

Pingiya's Praises of The Way to the Beyond

'I will sing you the praises of The Way to the Beyond', said Pirigiya. 'It was described to us by this man exactly as he saw it. But then, there isn't any reason why a man like him should lie — a mammoth of knowledge and completely pure, a man without desire.

‘When a voice has none of the glibness of pride and none of the ingrained stains of ignorance, then its words are full of sweetness and beauty. It is such words that I praise now.

‘They call him Buddha, Enlightened, Awake, dissolving darkness, with total vision, and knowing the world to its ends, he has gone beyond all the states of being and of becoming. He has no inner poison-drives: he is the total elimination of suffering. This man is the man I follow.

‘It is like a bird that leaves the bushes of the scrubland and flies to the fruit trees of the forest. I too have left the bleary half-light of opinions; like a swan I have reached a great lake.

‘Up till now, before I heard Gotama's teaching, people had always told me this: "This is how it has always been, and this is how it will always be"; only the constant refrain of tradition, a breeding ground for speculation.

‘This prince, this beam of light, Gotama, was the only one who dissolved the darkness. This man Gotama is a universe of wisdom and a world of understanding,

‘a teacher whose Dhamma is the Way Things Are, instant, immediate and visible all around, eroding desire without harmful side-effects, with nothing else quite like it anywhere in the world.’

Shopping with the Buddha

He seemed to enjoy the drive.
Not so much the view,
although I noticed him noticing the man
stood in the allotment
as we turned left towards Asda.
No, it was the breeze.
He leant his head out of the window
like a dog, closing his eyes sometimes
to inhale the world.

As I pulled into the parking space
and turned off the engine
he was already opening the door
and making for the trolleys.
A few people turned to stare,
but not many.
This is East London after all.
My surprise was that he didn't know
that he needed a pound coin.
I assume omniscience;
He assumed freedom and trust.

I let him push the trolley.
How could I have stopped him?
He had already refolded his robe across his shoulder
and was off into the vast cavern.
Knowing we needed vegetables,
another assumption:
that we would focus on our needs,
move mindfully, no energy (or money) wasted,
and be done in half an hour.

But no. The Buddha wanted to see everything.
We walked up and down every aisle
so that he could marvel

at the choice of breakfast cereals,
taste the free samples of cheese at the deli counter
and stand quietly by the banks of chilled flesh,
his bare shoulder goose-bumping
before he moved on.

For a while I lost him.
Then hearing a distant, deep laughter,
saw a flash of flying saffron
as he go-karted the trolley down the middle aisle
towards the shelves of eggs.
He stopped like a professional,
delighted to discover the button for bored children:
one press and a chicken crows like morning.
He pressed it three times.

I love the Buddha,
even when we reached the checkout
and discovered the expensive chocolate cake
he'd put in the trolley,
and knew that he had no money.

As we put the shopping bags into the boot of the car
I realised that we hadn't spoken once.
'Did you enjoy that?' I said.
'I enjoy everything', he replied.

Srivati

(taken from *The Heart as Origami*)

Introduction to Buddhism Week 3 – Basic Teachings

Each member of the team can give a short talk on their experience of practising one of the limbs of the Noble Eightfold Path (View, Emotion, Speech, Effort, Mindfulness, Meditation). The other limbs involving ethics will be covered in the next session.

Handouts

The Teaching of the Buddha
The Noble Eightfold Path

Review of last week:

Life story of the Buddha

History of Buddhism and the various schools

Extracts from various phases to read and reflect on for homework

In groups of 3 or 4 discuss and responses to the texts and any other reflections or comments on the week.

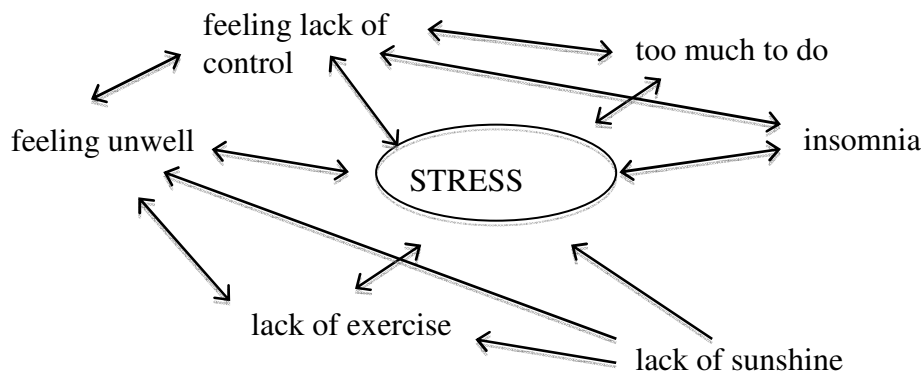
Feedback and questions in the whole group.

Conditioned co-production

Will now be exploring the conceptual aspect of the Buddha's awakening with an activity.

Write 'stress' in the middle of a flipchart and ask people for any factors that, in their experience, lead to feeling stressed, for example, insomnia. Write these words on the flipchart with arrows pointing to 'stress'. There can be interesting discussions about how certain factors are stressful because of the way that we think about them, for example, having too much to do is a state of mind. Even whether we see the sun shine depends on how stressed we feel. Then explore which arrows also point the other way. For example, insomnia contributes to stress and stress contributes to insomnia. Lastly ask for any other arrows that there are between factors, and stop when people realise how interconnected everything is. You don't need to put in all possible arrows.

You should end up with a diagram that looks something like this:



Points to draw out of the exercise

- There are many factors contributing to stress.
- They mutually reinforce each other, for example, insomnia leads to stress and stress reinforces insomnia
- The contributing factors interact
- So this means that if you can alleviate any one factor that will benefit all the others.

Give out the handout 'The Teaching of the Buddha'. The following discussion is based on it.

Conditioned co-production as the central teaching

- Conditioned co-production shows how suffering arises and how the experience of suffering can be transformed. Its realisation is presented as transforming consciousness.
- It is the intellectual and expressible content of the enlightenment experience.
- It is 'deep, delicate and subtle' and so central that the Buddha equated it to the Dharma.

The Venerable Ananda approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "It's amazing, lord, it's astounding, how deep this dependent co-arising is, and how deep its appearance, and yet to me it seems as clear as clear can be."

[The Buddha:] "Don't say that, Ananda. Don't say that. Deep is this dependent co-arising, and deep its appearance. It's because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this generation is like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, and bad destinations.

Maha-nidana Sutta, Digha Nikāya

- An understanding entails overhauling of one's most ingrained assumptions and cannot be won without existential commitment and meditative introspection.
- All conceptual treatments of dependent co-arising are by their nature limited and inadequate. Experience is different from ideas

Buddha's statement 'this being, that becomes,...' is like a general formula and it is possible to put in different words for 'this' and 'that'. For example, 'lack of exercise arises; stress becomes...'

Consequence that our experience is impermanent and interconnected. For example, taking more exercise will help you to sleep better and feel less stressed, and so feel more in control, so more time to take exercise,

Reflection on conditionality

- Bringing kind awareness to parts of the body in turn
- Appreciating the whole body and whole self in the present
- Focusing on a part of the body that feels particularly good and letting that feeling spread to other parts of the body – may like to imagine light
- Thinking of a time in the past when you were learning something you make use of now, perhaps how to drive a car or use a computer. Feeling grateful to yourself then for making the effort.
- Thinking back to a time when you were struggling and telling the you then how it will pass.
- Imagining yourself further developed in the future and let that person wish your present self well and thank you for the effort you are making now.
- To finish, sitting in the present with an appreciation of your whole body and whole self again.

The Four Noble Truths

They are an example of the application of conditionality.

Before we start to explore these truths in detail, let's look at an overview of them. They can be paraphrased very simply as follows:

- **THE OLD (BAD) NEWS:** We encounter one kind of unhappiness after another in our lives.
- **THE NEW NEWS:** But it doesn't come from the outer circumstances we usually blame it on. We create it ourselves by craving.
- **THE INCREDIBLY GOOD NEWS:** Therefore we can end it by letting go.
- **THE FINE PRINT:** In the long run, that requires taking a mature view of things, behaving responsibly, and meditating.

Dean Sluyter, *Cinema Nirvana*

1. The truth of suffering

- 'Suffering' is translation of word 'dukkha' that can also be translated as unsatisfactory or stress. Evokes a badly fitting axle wheel. Should be understood as entire range of negative human reactions, including the discomfort of inhabiting a body.
- Not saying that all of life is suffering, but that life is unsatisfactory because we can't get what we want all the time.
- Buddha said, "Suffering is to be known." Involves being with experience rather than resisting. Showing up to life. Life is like this.

2. There is a cause for suffering, namely craving

- Desire is not the problem, but believing that your happiness depends on getting what you want is. Problems come from clinging to particular outcomes we think we want. Example of desire not being the problem illustrated by story of Dalai Lama visiting a monastery where they made cheese and fruitcake. The Dalai Lama later described the

tour and said that he kept being offered cheese and what he really wanted was fruitcake, and he laughed and laughed.

- Not so much throwing water on fire of desire as allowing tea to cool.

3. There can be cessation or transcendence of suffering

- It is possible for craving to end and to enter a blissful state of Awakening or Enlightenment.
- This is how the Buddha described his own cessation:

House builder you have now been seen;
you shall not build this house again.
Your rafters have been broken down;
Your ridge pole is shattered.
My mind has attained the peace of nirvana
And reached the end of every craving.

4. The way leading to the cessation of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path

- Can also be regarded as a twofold path of
 - Vision – understanding what is truly helpful
 - Transformation – making changes in ourselves
- Or as a threefold path
 - Ethics – involves speech, action and livelihood. More on this next week.
 - Meditation – involves effort, mindfulness and meditation
 - Wisdom – involves vision and emotion

The Noble Eightfold Path

Give out the handout, 'The Noble Eightfold Path'. Say that we are going to explore part of this in detail next week when we explore ethics.

The limbs all contribute to easing suffering or stress, c.f. our earlier diagram of conditions leading to stress.

As with the previous diagram, the limbs are interdependent. The arrows are not all shown.

The path is symbolised by an eight-spoked wheel.

The word 'perfect' translates the Pali word *sammā* that means something like 'whole', 'complete', 'integral'. Often translated as 'right'.

Some of the following can be discussed by a member of the team describing their own experience.

- **Perfect vision** involves understanding experience from the viewpoint of the Four Noble Truths. Also that what we do, say and think makes a difference.
- **Perfect emotion** is also sometimes translated as 'right intention'. It involves living life according to values, so cultivating positive emotions such as loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity, confidence in one's own potential and the potential of others, integrity, etc.

- **Perfect speech** – speech so important it is given a complete limb to itself. Several aspects: truthfulness, kindness, helpfulness (promoting spiritual growth), promoting concord. Does not mean that we should speak the truth regardless, as kindness and helpfulness also important. Internal speech can easily be unkind as well as speech to others.
- **Perfect action** – primary importance of intention. Helping us to act more like an enlightened being. More about this next week.
- **Perfect livelihood** involves avoiding work that does harm such as dealing in weapons of war, or selling drugs or drink. Work takes much of our time and energy so it is important what we do. More positively we can make work more of a practice and in line with our values.
- **Perfect effort** involves developing and maintaining skilful mental states, that is, generosity, love and wisdom; and preventing or eradicating unskilful mental states, that is, craving, hatred and delusion. Good place to start is maintaining the positive mental states we have already and cultivating them, for example, by noticing what we can appreciate.
- **Perfect mindfulness (memory or recollection)** – can be helpful to start by becoming more aware of sensations in the body, feelings and thoughts. Can bring in more mindfulness at odd moments during the day, especially small spaces, such as waiting for a computer or in a supermarket queue.
- **Perfect meditation** involves becoming more concentrated and focused in meditation and so in the rest of our lives.

Homework Choose one of the limbs of the Noble Eightfold Path and try practising it a bit more. or draw a diagram like the stress one, either for what causes you stress or around some other aspect of your life.

For next week, members of the team could prepare a short talk of 5 to 10 minutes about their practice of one of the precepts.

- Precepts are principles rather than rules so need to think about how to put them into practice – so more like a direction than a destination.
- Can be regarded as rules of training.
- Correspond to body, speech and mind.

Karma

- Buddha says that the intention which motivates an action is what is most important about it.
- Any overt physical or verbal behaviour is secondary, but not insignificant. So if you give a gift it makes a difference if it is given because it will bring the other person benefit or if it is given to influence the other person to like you.
- An intention is a deliberately willed action carried out by a being capable of moral judgement.
- Intentions are classified into two kinds:
 - skilful born from generosity, compassion and understanding and lead to desirable consequences
 - unskilful rooted in craving, aversion and spiritual ignorance and lead to undesirable consequences
- Learning to discriminate between skilful and unskilful is the basis of Buddhist ethics. In practice motives are often mixed.
- Notice understanding in skilful, so meaning well doesn't absolve you from lack of forethought or awareness.
- Thoughts and speech are included as well as overt actions, so cultivating loving-kindness is significant, but acting on thought of giving a present important – just a thought is considerably weaker.
- As practise, likely to have more choices, or to become more aware of choices. Choices we make are not always obvious. Lack of awareness is a habit.
- Not all choices are equal. Weighty karma comes from decisions that critically directs or redirects our lives. Everyday we are more likely to be affected by habitual karma – our habits.
- The results of our actions is subtle and not linear, so someone may behave unskilfully, yet everything seems to go well for them.

Karma rests on two assumptions:

- Human character is malleable
- Volitional actions modify character

Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Moral virtues come from habits. They are not in us neither by nature, nor in despite of nature, but we are furnished by nature with a capacity for receiving them, and we develop them through habit. These virtues we acquire first by exercising them, as in the case of other arts. Whatever we learn to do, we learn by actually doing it: men come to be builders, for instance, by building, and harp players by playing the harp. In the same way by doing just acts we come to be just; by doing self-controlled acts, we come to be self-controlled; and by doing brave acts, we come to be brave.

Aristotle

*By action (karma) one becomes a farmer, by action one becomes a craftsman;
By action one becomes a trader; by action one becomes a servant.
By action one also becomes a thief; by action one becomes a soldier;
By action one becomes a priest; by action one becomes a King.
Thus the wise who see dependent arising, familiar
With the ripening of karma, see this action as it really is.
The world rolls on because of action; because of action society turns;
Beings are fastened by action like a moving chariot-wheel by a lynchpin.*

Vasettha Sutta, Sutta Nipata

Karma is not something outside that happens to us, but is the moulding of our selves.

What difference does this view have on how you act? Why practise ethics?

- Has effect on us: we change as a result of our actions.
- Has effect on others.
- Tends to break down tendency to see ourselves as separate.
- Helps us to see that our actions matter and we are interconnected.
- Can regard it as trying to act like Buddha.

Limit to how far we can go if treat ethics as end in itself

Reflection – How does it feel to be more ethical?

Recollect some time when acted meanly or unkindly. How did that feel?

Then recollect time when was generous or kind. How did that feel?

Share how these felt different: the first may well feel tighter with the second more open and spacious.

Any questions about karma?

The 5 precepts

Different members of the team can talk about their own experience of practising a precept.

Non-violence or being kind

Violence is assertion of own self over others. Involves a lack of empathy. Inability to identify imaginatively with another person.

Are there ways in which we might do less harm to other people and other living beings?

- in what we consume
- in speech
- in the environment

All the other precepts come out of this one.

Wanting to close the gap between self and other.

Generosity

Appropriation based on strong sense of mine.

It is the opposite of grasping, and counteracts our tendency to be self-referential, benefits others

In what ways can we be generous?

- Giving material things
- Giving of time, energy and thought
- Giving of knowledge, art, science and culture
- Giving of fearlessness – can reassure people by your presence – can also give any other positive quality
- Giving of life and limb
- Giving of merits – results of good actions – overcomes individualism
- Giving of the gift of the Dharma

How much to give

Story of man who went to Buddhist monk and complained that his wife was very mean and never gave anything to the monks. The monk went to the wife and held his fist tightly closed, and asked what she would say about anyone whose hand was like that all the time. She said that it would be deformed. He then held his hand open and asked what she would say about

someone whose hand was like that all the time. Again she said that it would be deformed. He said that it was the same with giving.

Developing contentment

The third precept is about avoiding sexual misconduct, but the root of the Pali word actually means to desire or to enjoy. So it can be interpreted more broadly as avoiding misconduct by craving stimulation, intensity and excitement.

We may desire things because we can feel that somehow we are incomplete. There is a hole that we try to fill with sensory experience. Joseph Goldstein talks about 'catalogue mind' where we look through a catalogue wanting to find something to desire so that we can have the satisfaction of having a desire satisfied.

What do we crave? What makes us discontented when we don't get it?

- promotion
- more money
- a better car/ house/ other status symbols
- new computer
- food
- more appreciation

There isn't so much a problem with desire per se as with a craving for particular outcomes. So fine to find something attractive, but it becomes a problem when we try to hold onto having them behave in a certain way.

An activity to develop contentment

Pause between each question to give time to reflect.

How contented are you now on a scale of 1 to 10?

Why aren't you lower on the scale?

Where are you on the scale now?

Being truthful

Without truthfulness no commerce or justice so fundamental to society.

What are the advantages of being truthful?

- we can see ourselves more clearly
- people know that they can trust us, so encourages good communication
- leads us away from self-concern

What does truthfulness mean?

- not exaggerating or minimising
- being precise

Are there any ways in which it is difficult to be entirely truthful?

How authentic are you able to be in your life? Are there things you could change to allow you to be more authentic?

If you know anything that is hurtful and untrue, don't say it.

If you know anything that is helpful and untrue, don't say it.

If you know anything that is hurtful and true, don't say it.

If you know anything that is helpful and true, find the right time.

The Buddha (simplified from Abhaya Sutta, MN 58)

Becoming more aware

Traditionally the fifth precept is understood to mean abstinence from drinking and taking drugs. But we can be intoxicated in other ways too. It is when we find our current mind state unsatisfactory and try to change it – which is fine in itself – but we aim for a diminished one, and involves a loss of awareness.

Mindfulness involves being highly concentrated, focused on what you are doing and collected, poised and calm. It comes from being aware of yourself, of the world around you and of your purpose.

We experience it naturally when we are very absorbed.

How can we develop mindfulness?

do one thing at a time and do it with complete attention

before making a telephone call or logging onto your computer, become aware of your breathing for three breaths (9 seconds)

listen mindfully and closely to what the other person is saying.

notice your bodily posture at certain times. Is it alert and relaxed?

keep a mood diary – in a small notebook write time and date and mood as many times as possible for a week

In what small ways could you be more ethical during the coming week?

This question could be explored in small groups with ideas shared in the big group if there is time.

Give out the handout, 'Ideas for more ethical behaviour during this coming week'. This handout was constructed from ideas from a group doing the course.

Homework There are two possibilities:

Try out one of the ideas for becoming more ethical during the coming week.

With a lot of kindness and gentleness, notice when you deviate from truthful speech in the coming week and why. This can show that it is not a simple matter to tell the truth and the variety of our motivations.

For next week, members of the team could prepare a short presentation on their experience of spiritual friendship, or any experience they have of team-based right livelihood, or the arts as a Buddhist practice.

Introduction to Buddhism – 5 Sangha

There is the opportunity for team members to talk about their experience of spiritual friendship and also to talk about their experience of team based right livelihood or using the arts as a spiritual practice.

in the whole group.

Handout

Bring along copy of *The Triratna Story*.

The Triratna Buddhist Community

The Triratna Buddhist Community –

Review of last week. How have people practised ethics over the last week? What happened? Discuss in groups of 3 or 4 and then

This week will be exploring sangha or spiritual community and say a little about the Triratna Buddhist Community. The sangha is not about a particular group, but about a way of relating.

Metta bhavana – wishing well to yourself and the rest of the group (to create a positive atmosphere).

Story of Ananda and spiritual friendship.

The Venerable Ananda approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side and said:

“Venerable sir, this is half of the spiritual life, that is, good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.”

“Not so, Ananda! Not so, Ananda! This is the entire spiritual life, Ananda, that is good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship. When a disciple has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path.”

Discussion/ exploration

How has it been better coming here for a course rather than simply reading a book about Buddhism? Small groups then put up answers on flip chart.

What is spiritual friendship?

Pali words *kalyana mitrata* where *kalyana* means beautiful, charming, auspicious, helpful, morally good. Friends can be guides or they can be companions or both.

Story of Meghiya

Meghiya was acting as an attendant to the Buddha and they were living alone together in a secluded rural spot.

Meghiya returning from an alms round sees a beautiful mango grove on the banks of a river. Meghiya asks the Buddha if he can go and meditate there.

Buddha says that would leave him alone. Meghiya says Buddha has nothing more to achieve and he does. Buddha asks him to wait until another monk arrives, but Meghiya asks a third time, so Buddha agrees.

Meghiya finds himself overwhelmed by unwholesome mental states.

Tells the Buddha who says that 5 things are necessary for the liberation of the heart. The first is kalyana mitrata. The others are helped by km:

- morality or virtue
- talk that conduces to the spiritual life, such as about living a simple life, ethics and meditation
- energy in pursuit of the good – needs to be caught rather than taught
- wisdom, an intuitive awareness of reality, so understanding that things can't be possessed, that people change

Notice the relationship between this list and the Noble Eightfold Path.

A crystal takes on the colour of the cloth upon which it is placed, whether white, yellow, red, or black. Likewise, if the company that you keep is good or bad, it will make a huge difference to the direction your life and practice take.

Spending your time with true spiritual friends will fill you with love for all beings and help you to see how negative attachment and hatred are. Being with such friends, and following their example, will naturally imbue you with their good qualities, just as all the birds flying around a golden mountain are bathed in its golden radiance.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

Personal experiences of spiritual friendship

Team and yourself

Questions and comments?

The Triratna Buddhist Community

Give out handouts on the Triratna Buddhist Community – History and Distinctive Characteristics and The Triratna Buddhist Community.

- Was founded by Sangharakshita in 1967
- The Western Buddhist Order was founded in 1968.
- Is not just confined to the west – hence name change
- *The Triratna Story* as a way to find out more about the movement.

- Everyone who comes along is regarded as a ‘friend’
- Mitras – ‘friends’ in Sanskrit
 - think of themselves as Buddhist
 - trying to follow the five precepts
 - want to practice in context of the Triratna Buddhist Community, at least at the present
- Order members are known as Dharmacaris or Dharmacarinis and are ordained on an equal basis, and take the same 10 precepts at ordination. There are no higher ordinations. And although many order members take vows of celibacy, this is not accorded a higher status.
 - Choice of lifestyle is less important than one's commitment to Buddhist practice.
 - The duties of an order member:
 - keeping one’s personal practice in good repair and deepening it
 - staying in harmony with other OMs
 - being a bridge to help others join if they want
 - Ordination confers no special status, nor any specific responsibilities.
- Name changed in 2010 to The Triratna Buddhist Community and Triratna Buddhist Order.

You may like to talk about the Avalokitesvara picture as a symbol of the Order.

Questions?

The six characteristics of the Triratna Buddhist Community

Members of the team can talk about various ones.

- **The movement is ecumenical.** The Triratna Buddhist Community is not identified with any particular strand of Buddhism or Buddhist school, but draws inspiration from whatever seems appropriate to here and now.
- **The movement is unified.** Men and women are ordained on an equal footing - unlike most traditional Buddhist schools. The movement does regard single-sex activities as vital to spiritual growth, but men and women are, in principle, considered equally able to practise and develop spiritually.
 - mitra study and retreats tend to be single sex
 - women and men work together to run Centres etc.
 - both single sex and combined retreats and conventions
- **The act of Going for Refuge is central.** Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels (i.e., the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha), is what makes someone a Buddhist. As such everyone in the Triratna Buddhist Community is encouraged to place the Three Jewels at the centre of their lives. This means:

- regarding Buddha as the spiritual ideal
 - meditating regularly
 - developing ethical sensitivity
 - practising together
 - discussing the Dharma with each other
 - more important than specific lifestyles
- **Spiritual friendship.** Spiritual friendship is friendship based on our highest values - especially the *Three Jewels*. Spending as much time as possible with friends who share our highest ideals supports ethical living.
 - **Team based right-livelihood.** Working together in teams, in the spirit of generosity, and with a focus on ethics, is a transformative practice. The Triratna Buddhist Community has been a pioneer in the area of right-livelihood, operating a number of successful businesses.
If a member of the team has experience of this, they can talk about it.
 - **Art.** The arts help us to broaden our sympathies and to extend our experience; they enlarge our imaginations, they refine and direct our emotions. At their best and greatest they may be bearers of spiritual values, values which in principle are identical with those of the Dharma, values which can help us to transform our lives.
If a member of the team is particularly interested in this area, they can talk about it.

In the Triratna Buddhist Community we do not have teacher-disciple relationships in the same way as in traditional Buddhism. We have guidance from those more experienced, but also help each other more as equals.

Since at the beginning of career it is impossible to be in touch with the Buddhas or with Bodhisattvas living on a high level of spirituality, we have to meet with ordinary human beings as spiritual friends. ...

Should you ask, who among all these is our greatest benefactor, the reply is that in the beginning of our career when we are still living imprisoned by our deeds and emotions, we will not even see so much as the face of a superior spiritual friend. Instead we will have to seek an ordinary human being who can illumine the path we have to follow with the light of his counsel, where after we shall meet superior ones. Therefore the greatest benefactor is a spiritual friend in the form of an ordinary human being.

From *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* by Gampopa translated by Herbert Guenther (pp 32-33)

Image of Indra's net for the Sangha.

How can you develop friendships or relationships in the sangha?

- meeting up
- working together
- going on retreat and practising together

Homework Reflect on what you have learned during the course from other people, as well as the notes, and any questions you may have.

For the next session, members of the team could prepare short talks on the symbolism of the shrine, or vajra or lotus.

Room set up

It is good to set up a shrine in the room if there isn't one already. Also bring along a vajra, and a picture of a lotus (if you have them) or whatever

Handouts

The Spiral Path – image

The Spiral Path – concepts

Introduction to Buddhism – 6 Symbolism and Ritual

Members of the team can talk on the symbolism of the shrine, or the symbolism of the vajra, or lotus.

Review last week: spiritual friendship and the Triratna spiritual community. The homework was to reflect on what you have learned so far and any questions. Discuss outcomes and the week in groups of 3 or 4 and then in the whole group.

This week looking at symbols and ritual and reviewing course.

Understanding via symbols vs. understanding via concepts.

- Example of poetry

The rain has stopped, the clouds have drifted away,
and the weather is clear again.

If your heart is pure, then all things in your world are pure.
Abandon this fleeting world, abandon yourself,
Then the moon and flowers will guide you along the Way.

RYOKAN

- Examples from everyday life e.g. giving someone flowers – other examples?
- Link of symbolism to emotions

Discuss in small groups or large group any symbols or rituals that have had meaning for people.

The symbolism of a shrine

Talk about symbolism of shrine (*could be done by team member*):

- rupa and mudras
- flowers – impermanence and beauty

- candles – light of understanding
- incense – power of the ethical life going against the wind
- use of colour: gold for Buddha, blue for Dharma and red for sangha
- offering bowls with gifts for honoured guest – water for drinking, water for washing the feet, flowers, incense, lamps, perfume and food

Discussion

Individually reflect and then discuss in small groups, ‘How might you arrange a corner of where you live to remind you of the values of this course?’

Symbols we have met in the course already:

- 3 jewels for Buddha, dharma and sangha in week 1
- Text extracts we looked at in week 2 contained many metaphors, such as life being like a star at dawn, a bubble in a stream, etc. Also we discussed the archetypal Buddha as well as the historical one.
- Week 3 had the noble eightfold path looking like a wheel
- On the handout for week 4, there was the metaphor of skilful acts being like drops of water filling a water pot.
- Last week there was the image of a crystal taking on the colour of the cloth on which it is placed, and Indra’s net and the image of Avalokiteśvara for the Order.

There are other common symbols in Buddhism, such as a vajra, and a lotus. Members of the team can talk about them. Pass them round for people to look at.

Vajra:

- diamond thunderbolt – nothing can make an impression on it, and an irresistible force, can smash anything that crosses its path
- transcendental reality has these irresistible, immutable properties, so symbol of reality and the wisdom that realises it
- at centre is egg shape symbolising primordial unity before falling into dualism
- animal heads, makaras, like a crocodile – meeting of conscious heights and unconscious depths
- one end stands for the negative qualities which chain us to samsara and the other to the positive qualities which free us, with an axis joining the two – even unskilful states can be used as fuel towards enlightenment

Lotus:

- symbolises
 - gentleness and openness,
 - spiritual receptivity, being prepared to learn

- growth and development
- grows out of the mud of confusion and unawareness, rises up through the clear water of higher states of consciousness, and emerges into the sunlight of wisdom

You could discuss the different ways of approaching practice that these two represent.

Discuss responses to shrine and these images, possibly in small groups.

The path from ordinary life to enlightenment is given by an image of the wheel of life, spiral path and mandala of five Buddhas. *There is a lot of detail that can be discussed here and the danger of just talking about symbols. It can be good to encourage people to talk about their own responses instead.*

Give out the handouts of The Spiral Path – image and The Spiral Path – concepts. Give brief description of the image:

- wheel of life is held by the demon of impermanence or change (not all bad). It is like a mirror to our lives with greed, hatred and delusion in centre powering our lives. More details about the image in later course.
- spiral path starts from faith, that is confidence in ourselves and the potential of the teachings.
 - We have met other paths as well as this 12-link one:
 - ethics, meditation and wisdom
 - noble eightfold path
 - They are all the same path, just as different way of talking about it.
 - More detail about this 12-link path in a later course.
- 5 buddhas represent different aspects of enlightenment. Each has its own colour, objects, time of day, etc. More detail in later course.

Can also use images in meditation. Lead through a short awareness meditation with body as mountain, mind as water, thoughts as clouds in the sky if there is time.

We now need to say goodbye and good to celebrate what you have done and the positive impact it is having on the world.

So do a ritual. Ritual is a combination of symbols and practice. Example of giving gifts at Christmas.

Give out copies of Transference of merits and talk about it. Say that people can join in with call and response or not as they wish. Go through it in call and response.

Further courses, events etc.