**Week 2 – The Gap**

**Recap – 4 min**

# Welcome to week 2

# How many are new this week?

Briefly recap on structure of course: two meditations, Buddhism in early part of evening, meditation after break.

# Saw last week that Buddhism is not a faith, more of a path. So it doesn’t say, believe this and you’ll be saved. But it does offer us some ‘operational concepts’, some ideas to try out for size, to see if they work. We invite you to try these out for size, to see if they work. Looked at three very important Buddhist ideas last week:

* Happiness comes from within, not from externals
* People **can** change (in fact are changing all the time, endlessly); the idea that we are fixed by our early conditioning etc, or that we have a ‘nature’ we can’t change is simply wrong. Our family, culture, education, past experiences affect us, but don’t define us.
* Everything is interrelated, everything interpenetrates, in ways that aren’t obvious to us at the moment. Our sense of separateness is an illusion. So selfishness is self-defeating, does not lead to happiness.

Left you last week with the idea that we CAN change, and that Buddhism gives us tools to help us change in a direction that will make us happier. This week we’re going to look at ‘the technology of change’, we’re going to look at how we get stuck in unhelpful patterns, and how we can change them.

**Habits and the point of freedom – 2 mins to next timing**

Let’s unpack this a little by looking at two important concepts– the wheel, and the gap, or the point of freedom - that allows us to escape from the wheel.

**Show the wheel of life.** An ancient Buddhist visual aid. Describes the ultimate vicious circle. Describes the way that, if we don’t do anything about it, our past determines how we act in the present, and the way we act in the present creates our future. Which becomes our past. Which determines how we act in the present. Which creates our future. And so on. Like an endless wheel.

**Flip chart:**

**Past self and world-> present actions->future self and world->**

(Show as circle.)

If we allow the past to determine how we act now, our patterns and habits just get deeper and deeper, we are not the boss in our life, we are living on automatic pilot, we are being lived rather than living.

**Flip chart:**

**Actions->habits->a personality->a life-> RIP**

**[Don’t elaborate on this – its explained later. For the time being its enough to say something like:]** Cycles become habits. Habits accumulate into a personality. Personality manifests as a whole life, a whole world we live in.

This life may be boring or painful, may make us ill or unhappy, but if someone suggest we might be different our response is often to defend ourselves, to come up with reasons why we cant do this.

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So its vitally important that we take charge of our life, become the boss in our life, start deciding about the sort of person we want to be and the sort of life we want to live.

To get clearer about how we do this, we need to look at the one part of the Wheel of Life in more detail:

**The technicalities 4 mins**

The relevant bit of the wheel of life is down here, but you can’t see it:

**Flip chart:**

**Old self and world->Situation->Feeling->Craving / Aversion->usual response->same old self and world->** (Draw as circle.)

**Plus gap-> new response->new self->new world**

Take **smoking** or **comfort eating** or any other addictive cycle. Easy to see with these examples that what is going on is a vicious circle. Coffee break comes around, we feel a craving for a cigarette or a biscuit. Craving composed wanting the pleasant feeling we get from indulging our habit, and wanting to avoid the uncomfortable feeling we get from not doing so. We go for what feels comfortable and pleasant, so we have a cigarette. This means that we will want a cigarette even more strongly in the future. The more times we go round the circle the deeper is the rut that we dig, and the more difficult it is to get out of.

Easy to see for say smoking or comfort eating, but an awful lot of our behavior consists of going round in circles, reacting in much the same habitual way to the same stimuli, and digging ourselves a deeper and deeper rut. The world pushes our buttons, and we react, automatically.

And this often happens in much more complicated ways than we’ve seen with the smoking example. This is especially the case in our relationships with other people. So say for example there is someone at work or in our house that we don’t get on with. We are irritated by something they do. So we behave in a certain way when they are around. So they think we don’t like them, they are a bit unpleasant or defensive around us. So they behave in the same old familiar way. So we get irritated by them. So we behave in our usual way. So they think they don’t like us. So they behave in their usual way. Etc.

**The Gap, or the Point of Freedom 3 mins**

But there is a way out! The gap in the wheel of life, the point where we can break out of old patterns is between feeling and craving. This is what we sometimes call the gap, or the point of freedom.

**Refer to flip chart diagram.**

**The gap->new creative response->new self and world**

We find ourselves in the same old situation. The world pushes the same old button. We get the same old feeling. But we choose to do something new, something creative, something that breaks us out of the wheel.

When we stop being ruled by our momentary feelings and acting like preprogrammed machines we can break out of our vicious circle. When we do this we **start setting up creative spirals**. We start creating a new self and a new world. We break out of our ruts and habits, so we start to transform our whole personality. And as we change, the whole colour and flavour of our life changes, so that eventually it is as though we were living in a completely different world.

When the aggressive person starts responding with kindness rather than aggression, they start experiencing less aggression from others,so their world becomes a less aggressive place. When the shy person starts behaving in more confident ways, other people feel less uncomfortable around them, and become more approachable and easier to get on with, so their world becomes a less threatening place. And so on.

This is the technology of change, the way we use the fact that we can change to become happier and alive. We do this is by being in The Gap as much as possible. By expanding our point of freedom.

**But it is not always easy…** . **1min**

…to be in the gap. Often requires us to do things that feel uncomfortable – our usual responses are a way of avoiding the discomfort of going against ingrained patterns.

Also: Often it seems like everything happens in such a rush that we have responded before we are aware of what we are doing. This is one of the ways that meditation is very useful. In meditation we get a chance to slow things down and get a much clearer picture of the way our mind works.

Life is like a rapids. Most of the time we are just tumbled along, and every now and thn our head comes out and we can look around. Meditation gives us a stable rock we can climb onto, from which we can observe the current of our inner mental world much more clearly.

**Examples – 4min**

2 examples, one about working on a habit of positive vedana (eg smoking or lying in bed), one about working on negative vedana (eg someone you don’t like or procrastination).

**Groups – 15 min**

Look at simple habits you want to change: what is the situation (what pushes your button), what is the feeling, what is the response. Don’t get into giving advice. Plenary with flip chart.

**Karma – intro 1 min**

Everything we do contributes to deepening some sort of groove in our being – to creating the person we will be in the future - for better or worse. If we act in some ways we make ourselves smaller and more limited, and this is painful. If we act in kore positive creative ways we make ourselves larger and more expansive – this is inherently pleasant.

This is the basis of the much misunderstood law of karma:

How we act now creates the person we will be in the future.

And the person we create determines the sort of world we live in, our experience.

Our actions create our personality

Our personality determines the sort of world we live in

**Actions-> personality – 2min**

There are lots of strands to our personality. Something happens, gives rise to all sorts of thoughts and feelings, some positive, some negative. For example, see someone in need, feel generous impulses, and stingy impulses, backed up by all sorts of reasons why it wouldn’t be a good idea to be generous That’s okay, conditioned by the past. What we do with those strands, which ones we put our energy behind and act out is what is important. We strengthen the strands in our being that we act on and put our energy behind. We weaken those that we don’t act on, don’t put our energy behind. And in this way we create our future personality. Act on the generous impulses, strengthen these, become a more generous and kind person, experiencing more open and expansive mental states. Act on the stingy impulses, strengthen these, we become more and more focussed on ourselves and cut off from others, experienced more cramped and unpleasant mental states.

**Personality → world – 3 min**

Personality we create for ourselves really does determine the sort of world we live in, in a very real way. Don’t have to die and be reborn to experience the fruits of our karma – we do this right here and now, in this life.

There are several ways this happens, eg:

* Our personality is reflected back to us by the world, and we end up having to live in that world. Aggressive people invite aggression, friendly people invite friendliness, etc
* We tend to be attracted to situations that reflect our habitual mental states. Habitually positive people want to be in the peak district or Buddhist Centre. If you are in a dark state of mind, want to be watching tv all day in a dark room.
* We tend to attract people to us who reflect our mental states. If we are kind, happy and positive we attract kind, happy positive people into our life. If we are angry or negative we tend to attract and get together with angry and negative people.
* Most importantly, we experience the world through the filter of our mental states. We see the world through the lenses of our emotions and states of mind. We all have some experience of this: when we are happy, the grass is green, people are friendly, the world looks beautiful. When we are unhappy, we see only what is negative, the world looks grey and ugly, we se only the negative side of people, places and situations. Because different people experience very different states of mind, they live in completely different worlds, even thought they share the same physical space.

**Vadanya’s greyling story 10mins**

Amoghavamsa and Vadanya are by River Rivelin, see people apparently electrocuting the fish!!

Man apparently directing from bank. V and A ask: What are you doing?

Say, are from environment agency, studying the health of the river. Are catching trout, weighing, and measuring scales, From this can tell growth rate, related to health of river. Release the fish when they’ve recovered. River cleaner than at any time since industrial revolution, studying it to see how fast its recovering.

Biologist says: “What we would really like to do is find a greyling. Greyling are very sensitive to pollution, and haven’t been any in the Rivelin for 150 years. If we find a greyling it will tell us this river is as healthy as it was before the industrial revolution.

At that moment, one of the men in the river shouts: GOT ONE!

**They’ve found a greyling! General rejoicing!!**

The river is healthier than anyone thought, as healthy as it was before the industrial revolution!

Then four people come on the scene, looking very unhealthy and overtired (dark rings under eyes etc) and in obvious neg mental states. One comes over and asks the same question – what are you doing? - and is given the same answer – we’re catching fish to measure the health of the ecosystem.

Newcomer says: You won’t catch any fish in there! Look at it, its filthy!

Biologist says “its not, that’s just the brown colour from the moors, its healthier than it has been for ages”

The newcomer says, “No, it didn’t used to be that colour when i was a child, its filthy, look, you can see turds floating in it, its and open sewer!

He refuses to believe the biologist, convinced the river is full of sewage, which he can see.

So four people are standing by the same river. Four are standing by a beautiful, healthy trout stream. One is standing by an ugly open sewer. And the difference is their mental states, not the river itself.

Illustrates nthat our mental states really do determine the way we see the world, in a very real way. We live in our mental states, almost more than we live in the actual world around us.

So summarising: Our actions really do create the person we will be in the future, and the sort of person we are determines the sort of world we live in. This is the real meaning of the law of karma. Has nothing to do with fate, or punishment for wrongdoing. Its just the way things are.

**Homework 5 min**

Do something different. Even a small change, could be something tiny. Any change gives us the power to change more. Often our life consists of sets of interlocking cycles and habits, and it feels like we have very little choice. When we make even a small change , breaks into this, opens up some space, gives us the freedom to begin changing more and more.

So choose something. Might be the pattern you talked about in your group. Might be another pattern. Might be something else even something apparently insignificant, like the way you walk to work. But choose something definite, and decide in a definite way how you are going to change it. .

A few hints and pointers.

Firstly, be realistic. Dont choose something too difficult just yet – wait til you’ve built up more or of a head of steam!

Secondly, if you forget all about it and find yourself doing the usual thing, dont get discouraged and give up. Just put it down to experience, and start again.

Thirdly, it can be useful to do the opposite of what you normally do. So if you usually feels annoyed and stressed and drive too fast on the way to work, slow right down, go to the opposite extreme, let people in in front of you, drive at thirty, keep to the inside lane.

So decide what you will change, and how. Decide now....

And we’ll talk about how you got on next week.

# Book Plug and practicalities -2 mins

Plug Introducing Bsm, The Breath, Sitting, Meditation CD.

Parking and signing in for newcomers.

Help with posture in break for newcomers and anyone who wants more advice.

**(60 mins total)**

**Tea Break**

**Mindfulness of Breathing**

Need to recap on posture and the meditation.

Invite to tea after class.