

Week 4 – Progressive conditionality

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – symbolic Dharma

RESOURCES REQUIRED

“Abandon Hope” poster up on door to study room

Torch & room that can be blacked out

“Secret flipchart pad” with the 3 lakshanas printout in the middle, with various glossy magazine rip-outs arranged around it to symbolize distractions (semi naked women, food, computers, holiday brochure images...); blue tak to hold them up.

Copies of the Spiral path exercise (enough for one between 3)

Nidana chain revision exercise

Quotations printouts

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Get a sense of the possibility of a second progressive trend of conditionality and the overall shape of its internal logic.

Gain an intuitive feeling for the “movement” of letting go & equanimity that lies at the heart of the movement onto the progressive trend – “abandoning hope” for worldly winds.

Gain an appreciation for the transition from the mundane to transcendental path and the significance of this.

MEDITATION (15 MINS)

Exercise in awareness of vedana

Sit in pairs opposite each other, eyes closed. Settle in for a few minutes.

Then, with bell, one person (decide in advance which) speaks aloud any vedanas they notice, eg. “unpleasant pain in neck, pleasant warmth in hands, neutral pressure on bum”, “unpleasant feeling of self consciousness” etc. Keep it flowing pretty constantly, can always find lots of neutral vedanas. The listener just has to listen – nothing more. They can open eyes if they want. After 2 mins swop over.

After another 2 mins stop, close eyes, and both turn inward to keep labelling vedana in experience. After a while, stop labelling, just notice. After a while just sit, then stop.

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION

Going to be looking at another mode of operation of conditionality: progressive order.

In cyclic conditionality tendency to react between extremes: pleasure pain, gain loss, up down, happy sad. The fruition of pleasure contains the seed of pain etc.

In progressive conditionality each state provides the basis for a yet more creative state.

Not really possible to dwell on all 12 links; we'll look at two links in particular.

Previous class Review (10 mins)

Exercise

Hand out cyclic nidana revision sheets in random order, one to each person. Ask them to arrange themselves around the room in the correct order. Help each other, especially anyone who wasn't there last week.

Plenary

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

- Talked of the cyclic nidanas as the “mechanism” behind the wheel – an application of conditioned co-production
- Saw the image of the candle flame as symbolising conditioned co-production, especially the conditioning effect from life to life
- Buddha's understanding of how to bring about the ceasing of old age, sickness & death
- Saw in particular the importance of the transition from karma vipaka to karma in this lifetime – around feeling/craving/grasping.

Home practice review (10 mins)

Did you manage to sit with nothing to do occasionally? How was it?

Did you notice your responses to painful & pleasant experience sometimes? For example? Did you notice if you're particularly governed by pleasant or painful experiences?

Plenary (10 mins)

THE SPIRAL PATH OF PROGRESSIVE CONDITIONALITY

Still governed by conditionality – each stage is fruition of previous & support for next.

Exercise - work out order of progressive conditionality (10 mins)

We're going to try to work out the order of links in cyclic conditionality from a story that's written to illustrate it. So listen carefully; but you'll have text to refer to.

Read out the example of progressive conditionality from exercise sheet.

Hand out the worksheets: the sheets with the story on it to label up with nidana, and sheet with the progressive nidanas listed in random order & described.

groups of 3

Write answers up on board & explore any differences.

The 12 links of progressive conditionality		
Link	Sanskrit / Pali	
Unsatisfactoriness	<i>Dukkha / Duhkha</i>	
Faith	<i>Saddha / Sraddha</i>	
Joy / Delight	<i>Pamojja / Pramodya</i>	
Rapture / ecstasy	<i>Priti / Piti</i>	“Meditation” Mundane path
Calm	<i>Prashabdhi / Passaddhi</i>	
Bliss	<i>Sukha</i>	
Concentration (Samadhi)	<i>Samadhi</i>	
Knowledge & vision of things as they really are	<i>Yathabhutajnandarshana / Yathabhutanadassana</i>	“Wisdom” Transcendental path
Disentanglement / Withdrawal	<i>Nirvega / Nibbida</i>	
Dispassion	<i>Vairagya / Viraga</i>	
Liberation / Freedom	<i>Vimukti / Vimutti</i>	
Knowledge of the destruction of the poisons	<i>Ashravaksayajana / Asavakkhayanana</i>	

The doctrine of conditioned co-production is an all-inclusive formulation of Reality, within which are included two trends, one cyclic between opposites, the other progressive between factors which mutually complement and augment each other. The second trend is not merely the negative counterpart of the first, but possesses a positive character of its own. Upon this second trend the spiritual life is based. In relation to the first trend Nirvana may be described only negatively, in terms of cessation... In relation to the second trend Nirvana may be described as the farthest discernible point of the increasingly positive and progressive series of reactions away from the samsara.

Samsara and Nirvana in A Survey Of Buddhism, Sangharaskhita

Early tea break – return with good 50 mins spare

IN DEPENDENCE UPON UNSATISFACTORINESS ARISES FAITH (30MINS)

Exercise – Quotation jigsaw

Give out one quotation to each person, and arrange into groups of 3.

How does that group's quotations shed light upon the possibility of “in dependence upon unsatisfactoriness arises faith”?

After a while (10 mins?) join up with another group with 3 different quotations, and share your thoughts & discoveries.

Plenary

Most of spl life is lived in this gap – a constant process of trying to “step onto the spiral”

Hard one to communicate – “don't react”!

About having preferences rather than demands.

Not fighting reality, not wanting people to serve the function you've marked out for them, let others be, not taking refuge in mundane refuges. Big relief -> joy

INSIGHT & THE TRANSCENDENTAL PATH (15 MINS)

Significant link concentration -> knowledge & vision of things as they really are – or Insight.

Only here that really start to move beyond the wheel – tho still on it in a way.

But everything up to concentration is essentially god-realm

Correlation between meditative states & god realms.

Can see reiteration of 3fold path in 12 nidanas

Ethics is implied in faith -> joy

Rapture -> concentration is meditation

Knowledge & vision -> corresponds to “wisdom” in true sense – prajna

So how does Insight arise with the basis of concentration / absorption?

Exercise – torch illustration of concentration

Black out room & flip over flipchart to secret page of the three lakshana printout plus various “distractions” images

Use torchlight to illustrate awareness in meditation

If try to focus on reflection, find the light is keeps flitting around to distractions, can't read what's written on the lakshana sheet

Shine torch on chest – breathing – starts settling down, eventually steady, shine on lakshana sheet – you can read it clearly.

Discussion

Difference samatha & vipassana meditation

Really ethics & meditation are buildup for wisdom.

Wisdom in sense of prajna is life altering. Undermines conventional assumptions about what's important, takes some of the urgency out of our demands on life.

Illustration of gravitation pull & point of no return

HOME PRACTICE

When you notice yourself making strong demands (internally or externally) on the world – for things to be a certain way, for someone to act a certain way, for you to get something – see if you can to whatever extent relax the demand into a more of a request. Can you “abandon some hope” of your demand giving you final fulfillment, or even of getting what you want? Is there any sense of relief in that?

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Wheel of Life, Kulananda, ch 12

The Buddhist Vision, Subhuti, ch 9 & 10

The [progressive] version of dependent arising delineates a type of development that only becomes possible when this hope [for fulfillment in cyclic conditionality] has been dispensed with. It hinges on the prior recognition that any attempt to eliminate suffering through the gratification of craving is doomed to failure, and that the only way to stop it is to cut through the vicious nexus at its base.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, Transcendental Dependent Arising, Wheel 277

*I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
for hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.*

TS Elliot, East Coker, Four quartets

The [spiritual practitioner] lives in the present because he is free from desires, and therefore free also from hope and fear; whereas the worldling lives in the present because his desires are so importunate that he neglects in satisfying them even considerations of worldly prudence, plunging headlong into the torrent of enjoyment.

Living in the Present in Crossing the Stream, Sangharakshita

Phenomenal life by definition is a promise that is never kept. If we fulfil a desire, we're happy for a brief moment, but the nature of fulfilling one desire is immediately to find another one, and another one, and another one... When we rest at peace with our pain, this repose is the "Gateless Gate". And it's the last place we want to be; it's not pleasant, and our whole strategic drive is for pleasantness... It takes years of patient practice before we become comfortable resting there, until it's just a hard and friendly rock that's moulded to us, and where we can finally find rest and be at peace.

The Icy Couch in Nothing Special, Charlotte Joko Beck

[Faith is] the ethically wholesome counterpart of craving or thirst. In dependence upon feeling the unsatisfactoriness of the world, there arises not craving but faith – faith in something above and beyond the world, a sensitivity to a higher dimension of truth and reality. Perhaps the best definition of faith is that it is the response of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe.

The Spiral Path in What is the Dharma, Sangharakshita

"Samvega" was what the young Prince Siddhartha felt on his first exposure to aging, illness, and death. It's a hard word to translate because it covers such a complex range — at least three clusters of feelings at once: the oppressive sense of shock, dismay, and alienation that come with realizing the futility and meaninglessness of life as it's normally lived; a chastening sense of our own complacency and foolishness in having let ourselves live so blindly; and an anxious sense of urgency in trying to find a way out of the meaningless cycle....The first step in the solution is symbolized ... by the prince's reaction to the fourth person he saw on his travels outside of the palace: the wandering forest contemplative. The emotion he felt at this point is termed "pasada", another complex set of feelings usually translated as "clarity and serene confidence." It's what keeps samvega from turning into despair. In the prince's case, he gained a clear sense of his predicament and of the way out of it, leading to something beyond aging, illness, and death, at the same time feeling confident that the way would work.

Affirming the Truths of the Heart, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, on Access to Insight.