

2004-05-19 Foundations of Buddhist Spiritual Life: Cultivation (Week 4 Part 1)

Wed, 7/22 10:53AM • 49:47

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

cultivating, buddhist path, people, meditation, develop, cultivation, practice, confidence, buddhism, life, capacity, important, buddhist, concentration, generosity, clinging, meditation practice, understanding, happiness, sense

SPEAKERS

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So COVID Evening everyone. And we can start with someone who has any questions you'd like to ask. Everything from last year was less than last week was crystal clear. rays, no concerns, no controversy, no confusion. Everybody's completely understanding. So far the Buddhist path would be obvious. That's good.

Different for you work. So you're not going to different from the love from last weak and the difference between kind of helpful forms of love that are helpful in the path and those which are not too helpful or those which can lead to suffering. And the main distinction is, is whether there's clinging is part of it. And if there's playing as part of the love, then it's not considered to be so helpful. And so what we're looking for is cultivating Buddhist practice are defined within us is the capacity to love but have no clinging. So is another love of exchange doesn't really matter if someone loves you back for example, or you have loving someone because you get something in return, like, you know, security or whatever you get praise or admiration or, you know, it's the love doesn't require anything in return, because there's no clinging to it. So it's kind of like you could almost say kind of self generating love. That certainly has something to do with something to do with a person that Because the object of the law, but it's more self generating as opposed to being generated in a sense from your desires and wishes for the in relation to that person. So the main distinction is that is a clinging or not, and, and it's very hard to take these Pali words to the Sanskrit words. There's a whole series of them and and, and how they're how they're using colloquially Pāli or Sanskrit, and how they're used in, in a Buddhist texts and differentiate all these and understand how to translate them to English. There's a word like Padma, which the Buddhist vocabulary is considered to be usually usually translated as affection, English. And affection seems pretty, pretty innocent. But the Buddhists understand that it's a kind of affection that has clinging as part of it. So Pema is not usually usually not considered to be so desirable to have.

Whereas loving kindness, which is really kind of a feeling of love that really wants the best for the other person. has a tremendous amount of goodwill as part of it. But there's no expectation or anything in return. That is considered to be healthy Call of

Duty or something right and think think that life in it.

dividing the kind of sense of delight and happiness in our good qualities or good activities and actions is separate consider to be separate from love. So we can delight in having loving kindness, or we can delight in being generous. They can really go out in the heart, I suppose. That's the kind of uplifting feeling of the heart being glad and are delighted, could be understood by some people as a form of love, associated with love and the way people feel when they get uplifted. I can imagine that I think are the most different so for some people, it's a very foreign idea that there could be love without any expectation of anything in return. And, and, you know, some people say it's kind of seeped in maybe even in human, you know, why would Why would I want that? And why would I want that? And so there's two things one is, is is, is Buddhist path only fulfilling with you want in some narrow sense once? Or is it something else. And so Buddhist often make a distinction is between narrow minded goals and broad mining goals or incentives to talk about small self and large sell. If desire comes from a sort of small self, that's the kind of egotistical self that just wants to build up its status or its reputation must be liked by people or wants to just fulfill its desires or its likes and dislikes. That's a very, that's coming in a small cell for the neuro view of things. And then the large sell for the big mind or the, you know, the pure heart of different languages use for this. We might still want to have something for ourselves. But it's not. It's not for the small self is for this big self is broad. So where the self almost disappears is almost not focused on myself at all. Make sense? Yes.

So the question is if you're aware that you love someone and You also wear this cleaning as part of that love, you then just turn your back on that and kind of just reject that and renounce that forget that. I'm not going to get involved, you know. And there are some people who take that choice. I don't know if it's always the wisest wise thing to do. There's so many different causes and conditions that come into play, but what our person might decide what to do, but you know, generally, you know, one of the things to try to do is to try to tease apart the love from the clinging. And then if there's two are confused with each other or inter intertwined with each other, then you think the only only opportunity only or that you could really do is let go of it. But if sometimes it's possible to tease them apart, and then you can learn how to let go the clinging, but not the other. Another attitude approaches some people take is that it's kind of like looking at the percentages, you know, if you know 70% of your motivation is pure and 30% of time. thing is impure. don't sacrifice the pure because of the impure. So if you know 70% of your love is really beautiful and pure and wonderful. And 30% of it involves some clinging. It's kind of tragic tragedy that the 30% you know, the clinging should destroy the 70%, which is beautiful. So you kind of look at the percentage of well, you know, I guess I'll live with a clinging for a while and you know, try to work on it and try to work with it, but I'm not going to reject something. It's so beautiful. So, enough about love. For all you wanted to hear about it. We can move on to other

things now more important things. So I've been talking about the Buddhist path as being kind of like a pyramid. And you want to get the different layers well established firm so you can go higher and higher in the pyramid. And the kind of the base of the pyramid has to do with right understanding and understanding what you're doing when you're doing the Buddhist path kind of understanding where it's all about and clarifying that the understanding level. And then the next layer is understanding your intention, your motivation. Because one thing is to understand what Buddhism is, it's another thing to learn do something about it. My father once said after after, was ordained as a Zen priest, my father said, Well, you know, Buddhism stuff, you know, it seems, you know, nice, you know, makes sense. But I don't understand why anybody would want to practice it. And you can be, you know, you can go out and do, you know, have fun, you know, instead. And so one thing is to kind understand the principles of practice and the other is to within want to apply it in your life. And some people, that's a very important step, because some people kind of would like to do it, you know, they'd like to do it, eventually, they'll get around to it, and then getting around to, it ends up they don't do it. Or it's important, but they don't really, it was very important for them, but to really translate that sense of importance into action or into actually motivation. Do you actually act on is a huge step and some people can feel this is really important for me. And they're inspired when they read Dharma books or Buddhist books. It's a very important for them to have the orientation. No, that's a possibility. But you know, they don't really take the, you know, that motivation to really do something about it. There's a great story of English because the teacher, or darmok, Buddhist teacher, I think, in the 1950s, and he had been introduced to Buddhism or discovered it as a teenager, and really take into it become a Buddhist at a time when they're very little Buddhism in England directly, no at all compared to nowadays, and kind of come in adult and become a Buddhist teacher of sorts. And we go around and give Dharma talks, give talks about Buddhism around England. And, and one day, he was giving a Dharma talk or a talk and he said, I forget what he said, but it was something like

Buddhist practice. Or Buddhist faith in Buddhism needs to be verified you have to verify the teachings for yourself. He heard himself say that and he stopped. And he said, I'm a charlatan, I haven't done it myself. And the next day he set sail for Thailand became a monk. And eventually in practice many years, they came back to be a teacher again. So there's even someone you know, who makes it such a big part of their life, there's, you know, translated to actually, you know, being having the motivation to do to act to, to engage in it. And people have a huge huge range of how much a person might get engaged during practice, right, anything from, you know, being weekend Buddhist, to, you know, going off for a lifetime being a monastic, a monk or nun going off and doing a 10 day retreat or there's a lot a lot of people you know, meditating everyday for an hour or use a whole range of what people might do is a lot to do with the value They see in it, and that how motivated they are. So that so those two things are very important that the foundation, understanding what you're doing, and then your, your level of your motivation. And the third is, layer is has to do now with the world of ethics we're having to the world of your relationship to other people. So ethics, morality, virtue, establishing a healthy relationship to other people, not by faking it, but by really paying attention to what goes on the inside. And trying to cultivate a virtuous heart, a virtuous mind, where you're inclined, out of maybe almost a habit, to act in ways which are kind to the people around you and not going to hurt them or harm

others in any other way. The next layer of the pyramid is that of generosity. Not just Buddhism, but a lot of Asian religious traditions, probably Western ones also put a tremendous value in on generosity, the virtue of generosity. Not only because it's a good thing to do socially, creates wonderful social, wonderful society when we're generous. But it also because it's a way of cultivating ourselves. It's cultivating healthy relationships with people we give to. And as we try to discover what healthy giving is, and we get to look at ourselves understand where we cling, where we hold on, understand what it's like to have an open handed open hearted kind of approach to life. And there's a lot of lot of change interchanging happens as we cultivate generosity. I don't know if I told that finger told the story last time, right. We talked about generosity, but I've known people who have had, for the presence of psychological reasons, had a very hard time actually doing meditation practice, and their Buddhist teachers instructed them to practice generosity instead. And it had a huge effect on them to their benefit, this practice of generosity. The one we talked about last week is still in this realm of kind of interesting Taking care of the interpersonal life and finding ourselves discovering ourselves in the relationship to other people and refining ourselves to developing our character and a sense in relationship to the interpersonal world. So there was love talking about the Buddhist idea of love and love that love, love, nothing, something you can leave to chance, you know, you just kind of walk into roaming see someone in, you know, chemistry works. But love is something you can cultivate and develop, you don't leave it to chance. And so there are practices for cultivating loving kindness, cultivating compassion, which is a form of love. And the other forms of love we talked about. One of the important values of doing these foundational aspects of the practice is also as Olivia said, use is to delight oneself to have happiness. And not to take these things on as moralistic things or you should or you know, it's a duty and a good Buddhist is supposed to do all these things, and I'm going to be a good Buddhist and get merit badges or whatever. It's really true Help help lighten the heart lighten for you. So you can live more likely and joyfully in life, so that you don't have to be burdened by your ethics or by in all kinds of things, but rather have a feeling of Lightness of Being. Because you go through life in a very generous, open, loving kind of way, and then to feel and then to feel happiness in doing these things. To feel happiness in your good qualities to feel happiness in your good activities, is considered to be an important part of the Buddhist path. For some Westerners is the foreign idea. It feels self centered, it feels wrong, it feels somehow and to somehow feel happiness in oneself or one's what oneself does. But this is considered very health healthy and helpful. As long as as long as it's not self centered, as long as it's not egotistical. But there's ways without being egotistical to feel greater light in one's own good qualities, and also a sense of humor for one's feelings.

And what Because of a Lightness of Being a lightness of heart to cultivate happiness and gladness, so in the classic offering of the Buddhist path, these are the kind of foundational elements, and the very, very transformative, very, very significant. In the West, we often overlook them, we often turn the pyramid upside down and teach meditation first. And some people's attitude, like my attitude when I first started practicing was that these things are kind of insignificant, not really that important to practice and I'm basically a great person and I don't have to pay attention to this stuff. And, but there's, you know, deeper and deeper refinements possible of this area, this area of interpersonal life, working on ourselves, all these layers of your bottom layers of the pyramid can be refined and deepened. The

first foundation that of understanding will continue to be deepen, the further you study and practice Buddhism. So it isn't like you get it once in place once and for all. Now you have the right understanding with Buddhism isn't the path, but rather as you keep deepening In your practice, you understand more and more what that foundational element is like. So it's kind of self reinforcing. It's kind of like a loop. So, you know, to cultivate these things and be interested in exploring and developing these aspects of our life is a very important part of the Buddhist life. There's a lot of Buddhists, who as primarily what they do in their spiritual life is are cultivating these inter inter this interpersonal realm of ethics, generosity, and love. And as I said, I want to underscore if it doesn't bring you happiness to do these things, then you need to take stock and take a really careful look, why not? And what's going on with you that you're not feeling happy? Are you doing it because of some sense of obligation or burden? Or is your inner critic coming alive too much and kind of getting in the way? What is it that you have to work on and deal with, so that you can feel a sense of lightness being the light to happiness in these foundational aspect of the Buddhist path. So that's it. One of the reasons why it's fun, you know, part of the power of the foundation is that it creates this happiness and Lightness of Being. If it doesn't, part of the power of it, is it helps you to look at why that's the case. And then you can figure out what to do about that, hopefully work with it to do something. One of the things you might want to do is to go further along the path and the pyramid, even before you feel completely ready, because meditation practice then can actually help deal with some of the inner critic and some of the hindrances, some of the obstacles to having happiness and Lightness of Being. So you don't have to kind of put off that sometimes it's wise to plunge into meditation. Sometimes it's wise to go to therapy. And sometimes it's wise to do other things. My friend, John Travis was a teacher. He went to India and practice meditation with a lot of great teachers and 60s there. And at some point, he felt kind of an obstacle in pursuing his spiritual life any further He was hanging around a little bit in northern India that time with Ram Dass was there. And so he went so I spent Ram Dass and signos obstacle, you know, and he said something to do with my father. And I said, Oh, you have to go back to Tennessee to see your father, if you had to do Darshan with your father. And so he went to a local tailor, and wherever in India and made his corduroy suit, he never wore suit cutters here. There's a solder and a long haired wild hippie sadio in India, and cut his hair and got this corduroy suit and, and flew back to Tennessee. And Rhonda said don't stay long. And but he went to try to go back and kind of meet his father and his father's, you know, own context, his own level or whatever. And so he went back and visited his father and kind of clarified that part of his life. And when he felt that was clarified well enough that he went back to India and continued his practice there. So there's sometimes we have to do certain things. is to kind of take care of aspects of our life that are better done, not through meditation, but through other kinds of activities. So we don't we don't put all, you know, put to meditation is the cure for all that ails us. The patient is very, very powerful. But it's mistake to think that meditation practice is going to fix it all. Sometimes we need to do other things along the way. So the next layer of the pyramid, and in my kind of schema for this class, it's the maybe the second to last layer before the talk.

And that is, I call the level of cultivation. The word in Pali is Bhavana. And that is translated as cultivation or development. So that part of developing ourselves cultivating ourselves and the earlier

part of the path also has to do with cultivation development. But now this is really much more explicitly this is what we're doing now. It's not so much doing you know, virtue for the sake of others or helping There's all that. But now we're really, really explicitly working on our own mind, and developing and cultivating it. And I'll tell you a little preview for next week, next week, it's going to be going to be the part of of letting go. And so we have these two pieces that actually work in dynamic together, cultivating, doing something requiring certain sense of certain kind of developing our capacities. And then the next aspect is letting go and they work together. So it's not like necessarily so linear one after the other, they work together. But they're both very important. And sometimes in practice, we emphasize more one than the other. Sometimes cultivation is important aspect, sometimes letting go. Some Buddhist traditions as a traditions, emphasize more the cultivation side or the traditions emphasize more letting go side, or different teachers emphasize one or the other. It's best not to take one as being the truth at the right way, but to see them in a dynamic working together. Almost every A lot of Buddhist practice involves bringing different capacities into play into balance with each other, and have them work together. So they have a kind of simplistic idea that Buddhist practice is about cultivating concentration or mindfulness or only letting go or whatever, is actually quite dangerous. As soon as someone says it's all about one thing you should ask, you know, what else? What's being left out here that should be included as part of this. next release of a more complex, it's nice to have just one simple answer for your spirituality. Suzuki Roshi, who was a Zen master in San Francisco. He summarized Buddhism in three words. And he said, not always so. So you should remember that so as soon as someone says this is the way it is in Buddhism. Not always so might be the sort of 90% of the time but not always so. So he says there's more to the path than just so anyway, cultivation and letting go. For this week we're talking about cultivation exploring that important part of Buddhism. It's possible to develop oneself, it's possible to develop one's mental capacities, it's possible to develop as one's physical, physical capacities. And someone who is an athlete knows that because otherwise they wouldn't train. Because they feel they can develop themselves. They wouldn't train, no purpose of training. If they want to win a race or do some great accomplishment. Someone who's a musician, practicing a piano or whatever the musical instrument is, they also have this idea they can develop themselves, they can develop their concentration, they can develop their sense of music and rhythm, you know, all kinds of wonderful things. And those things can be developed. Someone who is a computer programmer and have some computer programmers develop their capacity to get coffee concentrated, because there's it requires a lot of concentration, sit there in front the screen, focus and do your thing and I know one friend of mine who has a very strong acid concentration, attributes that part to having this foundation of being a computer programmer for many years. And he cultivated develop that capacity of concentration. So it's possible to develop ourselves. And, and so this, this, this path of cultivation is just working with that realizing it's possible to change yourself to cultivate transform yourself through your activities. And so let's do it. Let's do it. In order to help further the path to go further down the path. It turns out that it's a lot easier to let go in the very profound ways of Buddhism once you've let go in the deepest places where we, we where you reach realization or enlightenment or Great Awakening, whatever. It's easiest to do that when you cultivated a lot of strength, a lot of good qualities inside of you. cultivate your mind your heart to a certain degree. It's kind of like I don't remember what so much weight will be analogy that you know, skiing, right? So all

you have to do when you're talking to the slope is just like go up and down you go, you know, you'll get down. And when I took my son skiing last year, I tried to teach him some skiing, and it was in the work, he said, I know how to ski and how to ski. And finally, I just gave up, okay, and so he went straight down and ran into the fence. There's a plastic fence there, assuming it hurt himself. And so that was the end of the scheme that year.

And he knew how to let go. But he hadn't cultivated other things, you know, certain kind of strength and skill and all these things. So it turns out, it's easier it's more it's more realistic and actually more possible to do some of the deeper letting go when a person has cultivated themselves to a certain degree. So cultivation good golfing oneself, there's a whole slew of things that Buddhists will can cultivate. One of the nice things is that even if you do something like try to concentrate on your breath, you're actually doing cultivating a lot of different capacities while you're trying to stay focused on your breath. So you don't have to kind of think a lot about these different things that you can develop. But all you have to do is start practicing and a lot of things will come with a practice. But what I want to do is go through a list of five different things that constantly are developed and strengthened as part of the Buddhist path, a very important thing to develop and strengthen. And I'd like to do this to introduce you to them while we're meditating. So, important area of cultivation is cultivating our body developing our body. Some people need to exercise more than they need to manage I think with the body needs to be, in tune, tone properly, if it's in order to really let meditation go for some people associate meditation only with relaxation. So I think the best way to meditate and is you know, on a couch or your bed with a lot of pillows laying down. But meditation is much more than relaxation. And, and, and, and you need is actually to have, you know, relatively good sense of energy in your body by telling your body to really take meditation as far as it can possibly take. So, paying attention to your body and doing something to cultivate a good sense of vitality in your body is a really important part of Buddhism. The Buddha didn't teach us to teach that, I think because he spent so much of his life walking across India and around India walking, and so someone who's a lot of walking. That's enough, you know, if you work three or four hours a day, that's enough so take a cough, comfortable, alert posture and gently close your eyes

and then set yourself at ease. So that yourself at ease in your body at ease with how it is

sit yourself at ease with your heart, with your feelings wherever they might be.

Sit yourself at ease. With your mind, whatever's going on

and then feel your posture if you're sitting in

especially how your torso is your spine and you might see if you can bring a little bit more vitality to your spine. There's nothing much little a by sitting up straighter than your attention. travel up the vertebrae from the base to the top.

You feel your spine. Adjust your posture so your spine is nothing pulled forward or sideways or backwards.

You may take a few long slow deep breaths connecting to your body from the inside as your torso expands and stretches with the breath. And as you exhale relax, let go.

Your breath returned to normal

and then for a few minutes ride on the waves of your breathing and the expanding and attracting sensations of your body. Whatever sensations of breathing you have in your body, ride them, float on the surface breathing in, breathing out

The first in a list of five capacities that we develop in Buddhist practice is our capacity for confidence.

So as you're sitting here, reflect a little bit about the level of confidence you tend to have might vary with what you're doing but you carry with you a sense of confidence and your self confidence, your ability to enjoy gaygent things is your is your default mode one lacking confidence

is you know, a scale of one to 10 you tend to have a lot of confidence, you tend to have very little confidence

In times of your life when you felt the most confidence What does it feel like to be confident? Feel like in your body? What's the felt sense of confidence?

Can you feel or imagine that confidence is a strength almost like a physical strength almost like a strength.

Now imagine what it'd be like if you sat down to meditate. And you sat down you had a lot of confidence. Yes, this is something I can Absolutely a kind of stability steadiness just from having this confidence.

Confidence is something that can grow and develop over time.

What are the values of having confidence is that it gives us inspiration or energy to make effort to engage in things, we have confidence we're more likely to do something. We lack confidence we're more likely to hesitate. So comfort, confidence support for making efforts Buying, engaging. And the next faculty list of five is that of energy, of effort. energy of applying yourselves energy of engaging in some practice having energy for meditation practice for example. And energy means so many different things. They can mean just having the vitality have a good presence of mind available. energized and

no systems energized if you're not falling asleep. It could also mean a kind of persistence in making effort to kind of like wholeheartedness and engaging with more coins doing

And being constant being continuous, keeping it up.

How are you with effort? In your endeavors? You tend to have really good effort or is your effort kind of really strong in the beginning and then fades away quickly or start slow and then after a while it kicks in. To tend to do things wholehearted with wholehearted effort or do you tend to do things half heartedly

Imagine you'd sit down to meditate. And there was really good, strong healthy sense of vitality, energy, good energy in your body. Not restless energy. stable, strong. You had confidence. You really were the you had the, you're gonna be persistent. You're gonna put yourself wholeheartedly in the activity of meditating. You have the energy for it. retain a constant effort. Come back again. Come back again.

The next Capacity that's cultivating develop is that of mindfulness. The capacity to really know what's happening in the present moment as it's happening. To be here, not to be lost in thought or lost in the past in the future. For two cents to be awake or alert to notice what's happening in the presence within you inside of you.

Have you can think of two different events in your life situation. Where your alertness vary quite a bit, one situation where you really nice good way you really were alert and present, really track and see what was going on and notice what's going on in the present moment. Another situation where have you hardly noticed anything at all he kind of after was that what was that? Where was I

capacity to pay attention can be developed as you might be like to sit down with confidence, good energy, good commitment and keep going to the practice and to have a strong ability to be in the present to be alert, awake here.

The fourth capacity which is developed, cultivated is that of concentration or stability of mind steadiness of mind.

Sometimes in situations the mind is quite scattered, fragmented. Mind jumps around a lot. In some situations the mind can be quite steady and strong and doesn't jump anywhere just stays with wherever the focus is. Reading a really good book get absorbed in mind is really concentrated right there.

Trying to read the IRS tax code. Most people are not going to have the same level of concentration as a good novel. Mine is going to wander, wander away, be scattered.

The capacity to develop to be concentrated can be developed and strengthened like a muscle. So imagine you sit down would be like to sit here, confident, confidence in your body, your mind really confident in what you're doing. The energy for it, you're alert and the presence and the mind is really steady. There's a steadiness of being inside of you. A rootedness perhaps a groundedness.

Totally awareness can be Focus.

And then in the last capacity that gets developed is the capacity to be discerning. capacity to see not only see what's happening in the present, but to be wise about what's happening, to be able to evaluate it in a useful way to know what is helpful to know what is not helpful.

To see clearly what's happening and know what needs what needs to happen. To be discerning to have street smarts, for example,

Meditation discernment can mean knowing what needs to be done in meditation or to keep your mind focused, concentrated. And mindful means knowing what to eat what to pay attention to, in the present moment, so that the meditation can be useful to know that when concentration is weak it's discernment. Which discerns that Oh, I think I need to develop my concentration. Let's do some concentration practice right now. Or a faith or confidence is really low. discernment is what says all I think I need to cultivate greater confidence in myself. discernment knows what needs to happen.

Using our intelligence to help the spiritual path.

So I'll list very slowly these five faculties that we have and as I say each word, let it sink into you and somehow resonate with something inside of you If you already know in relationship to these and see if they're already part of who you are in some way,

confidence

effort

mindfulness

concentration

And discernment