

## PATH GOING NOW-HERE 2

Two weeks ago we ended with a consideration of the word *samma* and you were invited to explore the implications of a totality perspective in your daily lives. If you gave this a try, you will know directly how difficult it is. Only when we begin to realize how much we think, speak and act without awareness of totality do we begin to develop as students of the path of liberation. We have to see how much our lives are dominated by partiality. This lovely word can mean two things: preference and incompleteness -- really the same, when you stop to consider.

Tonight's task is very big . . . to give an overview of The Eightfold Noble Path as the foundation for our life as practitioners. So we have to start with the first principle the Buddha taught, also the most difficult: totality view or totality understanding. We'll spend a lot of time with this principle, because all the rest flows from it. *Samma ditthi* means knowing the nature of reality as an awakened being would know it -- directly, without concepts. But for us, who dwell so incompletely in the realm of concepts, we can try to use them skillfully, as the Buddha did.

Within totality view, there are some pivotal understandings that we must study, contemplate, question and meditate upon. These are being presented in the order they popped up today, but this order is not hierarchical. Each of these is equally important in cultivating a totality view of reality, and each is a potential experience of totality.

Let's begin with the universal time scale these teachings consider: not just this one life that only matters to you, but a vision of time/space that is infinite. Our science speaks about this universe forming around 15 billion years ago, but what about before that? "Within this fathom-long body," the Buddha taught, "I show you the arising and passing away of universes." We could say that cosmology is what this study might be called in western terms, and the scientists whose speciality this is are constantly expanding, amending and turning over their concepts as the gap between what we can perceive, even with our advanced instrumentation, and what we can intuit gets wider and wider. "You will **never** realize your potential," Rinpoche once said to a friend of mine, shaming him in class, in front of everybody. Gasp! Then he leaned down near my friend's ear, so subtle no one really noticed, and whispered, "because your potential is infinite."

"From beginning-less time until now" is a phrase you will hear often. *Samsara*, or perpetual blind wandering, said the Buddha, has no beginning. It does, however, have the possibility of ending, which he called *nirvana*. This literally means "blown out" in the sense of a fire being quenched. We might as easily say "blown away." This is not nihilism, but has the sense that all those conditioned qualities that cause our views to be partial (or wrong) are burned up, consumed.

*Nirvana* is sometimes translated as "peace" -- as the Christians say, the peace that passeth understanding. The Buddha once referred to *nirvana* as "permanent (*nicca*) happiness/wholeness (*sukha*.)" Thus, *samsara* has no beginning, but has the possibility of an end. *Nirvana* has the possibility of a beginning, but has no end. The realization of *nirvana* is a developmental process of increasing insight into the nature of reality that comes about because one's mind is purified of the fetters which bind us to repetitive blindness. "Was blind, but now I see." Interesting to note that the word in Pali for "ignorance," the last of these fetters to fall, is *avijja*, literally "not-seeing."

Second, we need to consider the concept of *karma*, which literally means 'action' and *karma vipaka*, result of action. The Buddha stated this conceptually as a law: cause (*karma*) and effect (*vipaka*.) "What ye sow, so shall ye reap." Every action of body, speech and mind creates an imprint on the mind. Repetitive actions reinforce these imprints, giving rise to habitual body chemistry, which give rise to habitual ways of feeling, thinking, acting, speaking and being. These imprints, or patterns, carried by the energy body, carry on even after the physical form (and the sense of self that goes with it) is food for worms. The quality of these imprints determines what sort of rebirth will occur. It is important to keep in mind that sometimes very small causes can give rise to very large effects.

Third are what the Buddha called the Three Characteristics of Existence: impermanence, struggle and the emptiness of self -- *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*. The last, as we've discussed before, is the most difficult to comprehend intellectually. We must see these characteristics as "real" in our own lives, and in the lives of other beings; as true on a personal level as on the universal level.

Finally, there is the vast study of what is called in Pali *paticca samuppada*, Interdependent Arising. This twelve-point schema summarizes the direct insight experienced by the Buddha at the moment of his total awakening. Very briefly, these are the twelve links in the blind chain that binds beings to *samsara*. Ignorance (lack of totality view) gives rise to karmic-formations

(those imprints we were speaking about earlier.) Karmic-formations give rise to consciousness (actually 'rebirth-linking' consciousness) which leads to a new body-mind -- *nama-rupa*, or mentality-corporeality. This embodied consciousness has six senses<sup>1</sup> through which it contacts objects. This contact, or impression, gives rise to sensations, which give rise to craving or desire (*tanha*, remember?) which gives rise to clinging which is responsible for the process of becoming . . . which produces birth, old age, sickness and death . . . until through ignorance karmic formations produce consciousness . . . and so on and so on and so on.

While this is presented in traditional teachings as a wheel or circuit, spread over past, present and future, in this day-and-age, we might be capable of understanding the so-called 'links' as interactive factors that are the causes-and-conditions of our sense of who we are and what is going on here.

To study these elements of *samma ditthi*, I suggest two allies in the form of books. The first is Walpola Rahula's classic: WHAT THE BUDDHA TAUGHT.<sup>2</sup> The second is called BUDDHIST DICTIONARY.<sup>3</sup> Every teacher will address these principles; it is good to have a collection of metaphors from different sources. They each stir the investigative mind in different ways; make us feel different things, and with so vast an understanding, it is likely that each facet we receive will bring us a little be closer to *samma*.

*Samma ditthi* is the background radiance out of which arises everything else in our lives.

The next principle, *samma sankhapa*, means totality intention, motivation or aspiration. Some translate it as "right thought" but that doesn't really go far enough. One might also say "resolve." Our motivation arises directly from the view we are holding: totality view informs totality aspiration. Narcissistic view informs selfish intention. There is, taught the Buddha, intention (total, wholesome or unwholesome) behind our every action of body, speech and mind. Noticing this continuum of intention is one aspect of the work of insight. Since we mostly breeze through life with little or no awareness of what our intentions really are, and since the Buddha also taught that the quality of intention was what determined the karmic effect of

---

<sup>1</sup> The five physical senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching plus the cognitive perception we call mind.

<sup>2</sup> What the Buddha Taught: Walpola Sri Rahula; Grove Weidenfeld; New York; second edition 1974.

<sup>3</sup> Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines: Nyanatiloka; revised, enlarged edition edited by Nyanaponika; Frewin & Co.; Colombo, Sri Lanka; 1972.

an action, it is very important that we harness motivation in **everything** we do to the awakening principle.

We train in this by stating our aspiration to awaken before every practice session, before every class. When we get deeply serious about awakening, we do the same thing before cooking every meal, singing every song, signing every contract, reading every book, until we realize that *samma sankhapa* informs all our actions. And then we continue to make that conscious, again and again, just in case. We consciously imprint our aspiration to awaken for the benefit of all beings on our mindstreams, so that in the dream state, when we've had one glass of wine too many, when we feel frightened, or threatened, or are in the grip of great pain as we die, we can rely on that totality motivation to trump any lesser motivation that may arise.

Intentions are like rays of energy which flow out from the background radiance of view, powering our thoughts, emotions, speech and actions.

These two principles, *samma ditthi* and *samma sankhapa*, are grouped together as the *panna* or "wisdom" aspect of The Eightfold Noble Path.

Now let's quickly consider the other six which are grouped together: three as *sila*, the "ethics" aspect, and three as *samadha*, the "mind training" aspect.

Totality speech, totality action and totality livelihood all have to do with living in a manner that causes no harm to oneself or others. Non-harming behaviour is the bottom line of ethics in Buddhadharma, in which no moral absolutes are taught as rules. Rather, we have training precepts which we commit to as deep, life-long studies. The function of enlightened ethics is to calm the mind of agitation and dullness . . . the word *sila* literally means "cooling." So in our speech, our activities and how we support ourselves, we 'chill out' by training ourselves to behave as the enlightened ones do.

Totality effort, totality mindfulness and totality concentration are about training our unruly "monkey minds," riding along on the back of huge, unconscious, instinct-driven "elephant minds" to behave themselves and to wake up.

Effort means practicing the Four Powers: recognizing the arising of an unwholesome state and making effort to change it, understanding the causes of that unwholesome state so that we do not repeat them, recognizing the arising of a wholesome state and making effort to continue

it, understanding the causes of that wholesome state so that we can repeat them.

Mindfulness is the cultivation of continuum awareness, focussing solely on the moment we are in, in the quicksilver flow of future to past. Beginning with awareness of the body and its postures, we expand awareness to the world of sensations within our bodies and the states of mind that arise from them. Finally, as that more personal part of the process becomes automatic, we include observation of the universal *dharmas* or laws (all part of totality view) as they arise in our experience.

Concentration refers to training the mind to be one-pointed, finely-focussed like a medical laser beam. This skill is the foundation of all formal meditation practice. For unitive experience to arise, there must be stillness. What gets in the way of stillness are blocks or distortions in the flow of energy in our fine-material bodies, which eventually manifest as tensions and disease in our bodies, and agitation or dullness in our minds. When the mind is trained to focus correctly, and becomes more calm, these blocks and distortions being to release and heal.

Lots of concepts to play with tonight! We revisit the principles of The Eightfold Noble Path again and again, each time understanding a little more, getting more and more engaged as we begin to experience the effectiveness of the path. Expand the view, and motivation becomes more clear and compassionate; cause no harm and the supportive conditions for a wholesome life are there for you; train the mind and negative emotional and mental states will heal, the body will loosen and become radiant and transcendent realization will follow.

It's not a matter of belief. Buddhadharma is a life experiment that anyone can start, no matter what circumstances they are in.