

Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd.



Introduction to Teaching Buddha Dhamma

Transcribed and adapted from teachings given by Anita Carter in 2010

To begin we will go through the precepts. Fundamentally the path to the Buddha or the Buddha Path is to come to Nibbana, to wake up. Nibbana is difficult to describe in terms of things but people liken it to a mind or an experience. Once Nibbana is experienced you are able to then act, say, do and think in the correct manner because then you can see what the right action to do is.

Otherwise, without Nibbana we are acting on our karma. Even when we see something is the right thing to do, we know 100% that this is the right thing to do, it is a karmic result because we choose according to our experiences and our experiences are dependent on our past experiences. The decisions we make are due to our own logic systems and our own logic systems are coming from our past experiences. So it is very difficult to know in a time and space what is the right thing to do because one decision might be good for you but not beneficial for others, or vice versa. This is the dilemma of living – how do you know if you are making the right choices or decisions?

The Buddha Teaches that we go about our life making these choices but they just end up bringing us back into life, we keep going from one birth to the next to the next. But by experiencing Nibbana we can cut that cycle of birth and death. We come to what is known as the deathlessness, not having to come to birth again, becoming an enlightened or awakened being.

To get to Nibbana one of the practices required is called Right Action. Right Action is explained according to precepts, the things we shouldn't be doing and the things that we should be doing. The Buddha made very clear lists for people to follow because it is difficult for a person with an ordinary mind, an unenlightened mind, to work it out for themselves. This is because we see things from experience. For example, we see someone who is starving to death and you say 'don't steal', they will think, 'If I don't steal then I'll die'. So they can't make a decision to not steal because that is how they are going to survive. So to get beyond all of that you need to experience Nibbana so you can see clearly and you can say what the right decision to make is in the present.

The Buddha did this. He became enlightened and he saw what the right actions are. Because everything is dependent on our karma he saw what the right actions are to bring about the

best karmic results for each being. So he gave lists of Right Actions and one of the lists is the five precepts or five moralities. He said that if you do these five things it really protects you from negative karma. It's like occupational health and safety for your life. You don't have to believe in Buddha, you don't have to believe in anything, just don't do these five things:

1. Don't kill

It is the intention in the mind that is important. Sometimes we kill beings without knowing it, without any intention to kill such as for example, if we accidentally step on an insect while walking in the garden. We are not going there with the idea to kill the beings as we walk. So it's really about focussing on our intention, for having the purity of thought to say, 'I will not kill.'

2. Don't Steal

This means not taking anything that is not freely given. When you are practising for a while it becomes easier to tell whether something is not given freely. So it's really an internal practice. Nobody is out there to say that you are stealing. Buddha is not taking note of who is stealing. Buddhism is all about the individuals taking responsibility for their own actions, their own speech and their own thoughts. There is no one else taking account. It's your mind recording your karmic experience. So if you believe that you have stolen then you have. That is the seed that is going to be planted. If you think you have lied then that is the seed that is going to be planted. You have to develop that knowledge yourself.

3. Don't commit sexual misconduct

This means not using your sexuality to manipulate the world that you live in. Using flattery etc. Conduct yourself appropriately by following the laws of the culture or land you live in. This is also, of course, not committing adultery.

4. No Lying

This is because we are trying to get to the truth of how things work. All of these things come back to us karmically so if we kill or steal, commit sexual misconduct or lie then we are going to experience the result of our actions.

5. No intoxicants that cloud the mind

This mainly refers to alcohol and drugs but once you start to keep that precept you start to see how we get intoxicated with life. You can get intoxicated with work, with family, with music. You name it, we can get intoxicated with it.

So Buddha has given us this list to say don't do these things and you'll see for yourself that you will experience good results. This is Right Action, one part of the Noble Eightfold Path. It is not only what not to do, but to also do these things.

1. To preserve life and practice harmlessness

This is the opposite of killing. Harmlessness means to not hurt or harm anyone, not having ill-will, and not to become annoyed with anyone. So you need to think of the opposite. To

kill something you first have to not like it and hate it before you can kill it. You cannot kill something you love. When you preserve life you start to see all of the actions that preserve life such as offering food, looking after people, sending love, reducing hate.

2. To practise generosity

Instead of taking, you can give as much as you can, according to your means. This also means not to steal from yourself. Don't become a martyr and take what you need and give to others. To benefit self and others, to share.

3. To protect others and to send loving kindness

Because sexuality seems to be wrapped up with love, it is practising the pure love without being involved in sexual connotations or lust. If you really love someone you wouldn't try to con them or try to get something by manipulating them. It's a very subtle thing.

4. To always be truthful

This means not only to be truthful to others but to be really truthful to yourself. To really dig down and get to know what is your own truth or what is truthful to you.

5. Practising clarity of mind

This comes back to being mindful. Intoxication erodes and is the opposite of mindfulness. Having a mind where you are drunk or intoxicated means that you will not have mindfulness. The opposite of intoxication is practising mindfulness and meditation or concentration.

These are easy ways to remember the precepts – not to do this but to do the opposite. This is Right Action, part of the Eightfold path – the path to Nibbana. This is a good way to look at the precepts because you are not just focussing on the negatives but the opposite path and it is more empowering knowing what to do. I like to think that I don't want people to be annoyed at me, I don't want people to steal from me, I don't like people to manipulate me with their sexuality, I don't like to be lied to and I think of the times when I have seen some of my friends being really intoxicated and you feel compassion for them because they don't know what they are doing. People are laughing at them and, in that way also, it can prompt a lot of compassion because you think that I don't like to be in those situations either.

The third value of practising precepts means that if you're not doing those negatives then karmically it means that other people can't do those things to you. You are stopping the karma of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and being intoxicated and other beings can't steal from you, can't lie to you, they can't kill you.

In that way you are protecting them as well, you are reducing the negativities in the world. Even though it may look like a little drop it still has a meaningful effect.

The class today is about teaching. It is about looking after yourself as a teacher and looking after your students. It all comes back to healing and healing ourselves. We have to be our own healers. Venerable Pandita said recently, 'If you know yourself 10%, you can know others 10%. If you know yourself 50%, you can know others 50% and so it goes on.' So the

more you know yourself the more you know others and when you can know others you can really help them. If you only know others 50%, you can only help them 50%. This is why the Buddhist practice is to really fix yourself up as quickly as you can so then you can really start to help others. To know thyself, to heal thyself and to take full responsibility for thyself is the practice.

Last time I talked about healing yourself and washing yourself with loving kindness. I wanted you all to experience that because you have to give that yourself, you have to be able to love yourself like that and make yourself feel safe and cared for. Then you can really help others, it can overflow from you to them. It's like you have to use your mind to show them what it is all about, how to love, because we don't really know. We see it in movies and there is all of these words about it but it is very rare to actually experience it or for someone to show you how. I am trying to love myself. I can do it intellectually, I can forgive myself but you need to experience that mind to feel love. I have experienced that mind from John Hughes my teacher, and from many monks and nuns that I have met. From them you can experience unconditional, clean, fresh love.

So why do we need to do that? Why do we need so much love? This is what I believe and what my experiences have been. What I see as a nurse is a lot of hurt, broken legs and broken body parts, people really sick etc. They go into hospital and they have to be nourished and as a nurse you have what's called a code of ethics which means that you are not meant to have any views or opinions about your patient. Your number one job is to just help them, to follow the instructions of what the doctor has prescribed and to just give that treatment. You don't say, 'If they didn't eat so much then they wouldn't be so fat', or, 'If they didn't drink so much then they wouldn't have liver cancer', or, 'If they didn't smoke so much they wouldn't have lung cancer.' You haven't got the right to do that because as soon as you have your view or opinion the way you respond or treat that person will change. How can they heal if underneath everything you have this hate towards them or have an opinion that it is their fault?

You have to have that very clear perspective that my job here is just to heal. We give them all the drips and medicines, wash them and look after them and heal them. When they go off back to their lives, whether they repeat their behaviour or not we don't know, we can't predict what is going to happen to them but we do everything we can to send them on their way, healthy

That is the physical body, but what I've seen in my experience is that the same things happen in the emotional and mental body. We have many traumas, just like a disease or an accident is a trauma to the physical body. If your leg is broken you can see it and you go and heal it, you take it to the doctor and they put it in a plaster, you take pain killers and everything. No one in the world will say to you, "Get up and walk you lazy thing." Everyone knows a broken leg is a broken leg. However, when there is a broken mind or a broken emotion, not many people can see that. Same with ourselves, we tend to ignore it and just soldier on. It looks like all these people limping along.

Their physical bodies are okay but their emotional bodies are struggling, limping or emotionally bleeding. It looks as though there are big gaping wounds of emotion sitting there and that person doesn't even know it exists; they have just sort of covered it up and pretended that it is not there.

The process of healing for yourself to become strong teachers is to really heal your emotional and mental bodies. The number one medicine for emotional and mental health is loving kindness or metta. This is why it is so important to do this for yourself, to heal yourself because if you have a wound in your emotions or in your mind and you are trying to wake up and build a strong Dhamma mind you will be unable to do it. It is like trying to climb a mountain with a broken leg.

What happens is as you practice Buddha Dhamma and you become mindful, your mindfulness makes you more and more aware of your body, feelings, thoughts and actions. As mindfulness increases a lot of people experience more and more pain and wonder why they are not getting happier. A lot of people blame Buddhism for this and they tend to drop it and run away from it. What is actually happening is that you are taking off the bandages that we have stuck on there. These bandages may be listening to music or alcohol or focussing on family or work.

What Buddhism does is it makes you more and more focussed and you are watching, then suddenly you see this big wound arise or a big pain arises. This is why loving kindness for yourself is number one practice for anyone that wants to become a teacher, or in fact, anyone that wants to go to Nibbana. This is as important as going to the hospital and getting your leg fixed. It's as if every time you go to climb the mountain it doesn't matter how well you have braced your leg up, eventually it will crack because it is not fit for climbing a mountain. What we try to do in Buddhism is to mentally climb a mountain but if we have wounds and 'broken limbs' we won't succeed in our practice.

What is a trauma? We know what physical trauma is but think about emotional or mental trauma. Self doubt, relationship break-up, death of a parent, that sort of thing. Close your eyes and review your lives while I send you love and see where your biggest trauma has occurred. Pick one where someone has said, "You can't do that" or, "You stuffed up" or "You're no good and you're useless". It doesn't matter if it's external or if it's internal. It doesn't matter if your mum said it or you said it. Every time you have had that thought, it's a trauma. It's like taking a hit to your ego, a hit to "me" or my or "I". Look for two minutes and see how many times this has happened to you. Now you can see what a trauma is like. It doesn't have to be a huge group of people yelling at you. It could be from when you were a child and you thought you were so good and you were doing such a wonderful thing and you got told off.

We don't get time or direction when we are growing up to go back and heal all of these little traumas. So what do you think happens when you come to adult life – what does it look like?

Maybe a person hobbling both emotionally and mentally. You tend to compensate. For example, a person that has been walked over all of their life, quite often you see these people and they are over-strong or very bossy, they compensate for their weakness. Or someone that has been really bossy and that has got them into a lot of trouble. They could compensate and they tend to start becoming very weak.

There are all sorts of examples like this, some not even recorded in modern day psychology. Because each person is different karmically, how we react and what we experience and what we do to survive, because it's all about survival. It is unique to all of us, we are all unique individuals.

So what you need to do as a Dhamma practitioner is not go back and analyse everything and try to rectify all the mistakes we have had in our mind because you will just be there forever and it is quite draining. The quick way is to use metta meditation. To send metta to yourself now and through those years, through all those traumas that you have experienced and we are still experiencing today. You will know the traumas that you are experiencing today because they are old wounds and old hurts. They still put a twinge in your heart or a stab in your back, you still feel it. This means that it is still a wound and it hasn't healed. Your metta meditation must be to heal these wounds. You can visualise them as whatever you like and see them healing, see the negativity release. Wash them and heal them and nourish your emotional and mental bodies so you can let go of them and go on. You can only let go of something when you know how you are holding it. Otherwise, at some time or another, it will be too hard to continue with your practice.

If you have a lot of merit and you see the emptiness of your emotions and your thoughts and your body, it helps you to release them much better. They stop becoming powerful wounds and that can help the healing process. But you have to do both. You have to have metta because we are not skilled in emptiness; we are just beginning to understand emptiness. Any trauma that you have had is like someone has hit you. When someone yells at you it is like being hit or pushed back. It is like a mind hitting a mind. It's just energy, either physical energy or mental energy, it's still there, you still feel it.

The Buddha says that we are made up of five heaps where one heap is not bigger than the other. We have the material body, we have the emotions, we have the perceptions, we have the thoughts and belief systems or mental foundations, and we have the mind. So in a way we have only one physical heap and the other four heaps are actually our mind, they are not physical entities. We place so much importance on our body, we wash and we feed it. When do we wash and nourish the other four? The best way is to see the emptiness of them and to use metta. You can cope with the logic, the Abhidhamma logic of emptiness but you need the metta for the healing, to help you see without fear.

How do you heal and nourish the other four heaps? – mindfulness, not beating up on yourself, meditation and seeing things as karma (cause and effect).

So now you all know what trauma is and some of you have some ways of handling it or

fixing it. I will give you some tools that I know have helped me or some analogies that have helped and then I'll talk about the Buddha's recommendations of how to build the mind of metta. Because once you build that mind, things come easily. You no longer have to try as hard because everything comes from that mind.

If you have a mind of greed it will run everything, your speech and your action, everything will be done with greed. If you have a mind with generosity everything you do will be generous. That's how the mind operates, it controls everything we think, say and do. So if you have a mind with metta everything you think, say or do is going to be full of metta. This is the most normal, natural way. It's using the process of the mind/body relationship to do it rather than having, say, a mind with hate sending metta. It just won't happen. It's about knowing about what qualities that mind of metta has and then building it for yourself. The Buddhist technology of building minds is by saying, thinking and doing the actions that come from the mind of metta. It's like working backwards.

We know the Buddha has the perfect mind of metta and from that metta mind he is saying, "This is what you do, this is what you think, this is what you say to build the metta mind." It is making the causes to build the mind. This is the Buddhist technology of working backwards and this is all the way through the Buddhist teachings. When the Buddha says to keep five precepts he saying that doing this will build wholesome minds, wisdom minds. You can't do this the opposite way. You can't just have a mind of wisdom, you haven't made the causes. So doing the actions, keeping precepts, being generous, all of these things are actually working backwards. They're the causes that will result in the minds that will take you to Nibbana. The minds that take you to wisdom. This is actually very easy, you don't have to force yourself to get a mind because you can't. You focus on the correct actions and then you get the result.

For metta you focus on the correct actions in the present and one of the things you do is to go through the chanting. You chant the Metta Sutta. That is really, what very powerfully builds the mind of metta. You do it in English so that you understand it and when you have the right understanding of it you can then do it in Pali to put some power into it. The Pali words have got power because the monks and many minds have chanted them before us. It has come from the Buddha; he chanted it in those words.

Mental and emotional trauma is like when someone has banged into your car and there is a big metal dent. It doesn't matter how much you wish, you can't get rid of that dent. Does understanding how it happened get rid of the dent? It doesn't. So what is needed to get rid of that dent? A panel beater? What does a panel beater use? They use tools, skills, effort, intention, time, the right conditions. And what would they have to put into that dent? They push it, they use pressure. They use a lot of energy and this is what I am trying to get you to see. It takes a lot of energy and it takes a lot effort. Using the right skills, using the right tools, using what is needed. They look at it, they prescribe a treatment and they put it to work to fix it.

You need a lot of the right energy to heal it. That energy and effort is metta. It's only metta

that will really heal that wound. You do need understanding because he needs to look and see where the damage is and how it affects the car. So you do need to look and understand how it happened and what that result means. How does that damage relate to you? How is it affecting you? How is it making you not perform? How is it affecting your functioning? And how are you not functioning 100% because of that damage? You do need to look at it and then you can do the healing. But you need the energy to heal it. Understanding alone doesn't actually complete the healing process. It doesn't remove that hurt or the damage or the pain that is there. It needs powerful energy.

So how do you get that good, clean energy? Merit, pureness and metta, or loving kindness are the things that will heal those wounds of emotional and mental trauma.

I want you to read with me the Metta Sutta. All teachers of Buddha Dhamma must practice the Metta Sutta otherwise it is very difficult to be a Dhamma teacher. Have I sold you enough? This is called making the effort. We are going to read it in English so you understand what it is. But by chanting this because you are saying these words, remembering that the minds are built by what you say, what you do, what you think, if you focus on what you are saying then you are getting the right thoughts to build the metta mind.

By the power of this Sutta, the Yakshas do not show fearful vision. (They are like little beings like naughty spirits or sprites). And a person who makes effort regarding this Sutta, day and night, by reciting and practicing, sleep comfortably and when he is asleep he does not have bad dreams. Oh, good people, let us recite this protective Sutta which is endowed with these qualities and others as well. He who wants to dwell, penetrating the state of calm, Nibbana, and do skilled in his good, should practice the three kinds of training. He should be able, upright, very upright, obedient, gentle and not conceited. He should be contented, easy to take care of, have few activities, have light living, have few possessions and be controlled in his senses. He should be wise and not impudent and not be greedily attached to the families and devotees. He should not commit any slight wrong by doing which he might be censured by wise men.

May all beings be happy and safe. May their hearts be happy. Whatsoever living beings there be, feeble or strong, long or big, or medium or short, small or fat or round, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who have been born and those who are yet to be born. May all beings without exception be happy. Let none deceive another or despise any person in any place. Let him not wish any harm to another with insult or ill-will, just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life.

Even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings. Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world above below and across making them unrestricted, free of hate and free of enmity. Whether he is standing, walking, sitting or lying down, as long as he is awake he should develop this mindfulness and loving kindness.

This is a noble living here in the dispensation of the Buddha they say. Not approaching taking wrong views, being virtuous and endowed with vision, the first path knowledge and

discarding attachment to sensual objects he definitely does not come again to lying in a mother's womb. (1)

When you are saying this you are mindful. So you are thinking it as well. That is the effort that builds a mind. That is how you build karma. You put intention into things. With intention you make the most powerful karma. By saying and reading something out loud it builds very powerful intention. If you chant or say this regularly and make your mind focus on the words you will make a lot of good karma, good causes to build that metta mind. It will make it easier and easier to heal.

This only takes a few minutes to read. Meditation doesn't have to take an hour or two, you just start by doing what you can. By reading this it is a meditation. Doing the chanting is a meditation and you are making a lot of good causes when you are reading things like this. You are keeping the precepts, you are putting dhamma into the world in the form of sound. There are hundreds of benefits that come from reading one sutta. And in the meantime you are also making the mind of metta. The more you chant it or say it the more you are making seeds of the metta mind that will fruit one day. You will start to find that it is easier and easier for you to send metta, it becomes automatic. Not just for others, for yourself. It has to be for you to heal as well. Otherwise this will make teaching very difficult. You want to be a powerful teacher and have a lot of metta for your students but you must heal yourself first and practice metta regularly.

Everything we are experiencing is coming from past causes. The mind that we are using now is a vipaka, is a result of past actions. So if I don't put intention into what I'm saying and what I'm doing I won't get this mind again, to be able to teach this again. I have to have a lot of intention in what I'm teaching and what I'm saying. You have got a mind that has the ability to read the metta sutta and when you go on to just robotic mode it is just like the vipaka is flowing out and it will wear out. The karma to read the Metta Sutta will run out unless you have intention and do it mindfully in the present.

You apply effort by being mindful and that means you focus on every word. You don't have to build a visual thing about what you are reading. You just read one word and then the next word and then the next. You don't try and get a meaning behind it as well. If you practice mindfulness just reading one word, one word, one word, you will start get the meaning of it, you will start to see the meaning behind the word. You don't have to bring all of your scripts up about what it means. Just by being present you will start to gain a much deeper meaning of the words.

This is what the monks do. They do a lot of chanting of the suttas. They chant it all together and it sounds very boring because they are doing it in monotone but the practice is to be present and to be completely chanting one word at a time like you have never chanted it before. They are putting their full intention into each word.

I want you to get rid of the idea that metta is this fluffy thing. Like fairy floss or something. We have all got that idea. It is not like that. It is powerful mental and emotional energy that nourishes and heals. It's like a food or nectar for us, for beings. Not just human beings but for

all beings. Animals, heavenly beings, all beings need metta, they need loving kindness.

The Buddha says that you let metta pervade your whole world. It's like you are giving oodles of food with a big pipe to all beings when you are giving out metta because it is nourishing them, not on the physical level, but on the mental and emotional level. Every being in the Universe needs metta. All beings need love. All beings need some form of nutrient. For many of the beings in the heaven realms their main nutrient is metta. They live on metta.

We in the Human world also need metta. We do a lot on food. Just look at television with the program Masterchef and so on, but there is no Masterchef of metta instructing us how to build metta, or to tell us how to make the best 'metta meal'. A smorgasbord of metta. So you must see that it is not just some nice thing to do, it's an essential ingredient of life. You must have it. This is your home work, to do the metta everyday. Just read it, it only takes a few minutes, but read it with intention to get the most benefit, to make the most causes, to build that metta mind powerfully. You can sit quietly and send those thoughts towards all beings including yourself.

We will just send metta now for a few minutes.

First to yourself. Whatever is in the present moment. Scan your body from your toes to your head and note any trauma. Any pain, any discomfort on your physical body or your emotional body or on your mental body. Send metta (love) towards it. You can see it as a liquid light nourishing the cells and thoughts and feelings. Dissolving the negative thoughts of fear, jealousy, hate, sadness and victimisation. Just see the metta energy dissolve it like a liquid light. It's powerful enough to melt that trauma.

Let your whole body fill up with that. Liquid metta light.

Sometimes we can feel the trauma behind our eyes or shoulder or our back. Sometimes we hold it in our legs or our knees, in our abdomen or sometimes in our throat. Sometimes in our speech. So whatever trauma you have experienced is just the karma of beings cause and effect. This metta is to heal and nourish your mental and emotional bodies. Heal them, dissolve any trauma, make them whole and stable. Dissolve the negatives. I request the Buddha and all the Dhamma protectors and guides to send their metta to us as we send our metta to them. This is like our metta mixes with their metta so it becomes very big and it can help dissolve any trauma. The metta is too big for any trauma. It is metta from the Buddha. Then we send that metta out through the whole Universe as a gift to all beings, as nourishment. May all beings have a happy heart, may all beings be well and happy.

The thing is, the whole world is coming from your mind if you like, if you think of emptiness. If you fill your mind with metta then you are filling the whole world with metta. May all be well and happy. And of course send metta to our present members and students. And then back to yourself. Then we take rest.

Just to end - this is your main tool for building yourself up and preparing your mind to be a Dhamma teacher and also for future students. You have to send metta to any students that you will be teaching in the future. The Power of Two Truths is something I use. It is about preparing the environment to teach the Buddha-Dhamma. (said three times)

There are beings in suffering, there are beings who know the way out of suffering (like the Buddha), by the power of these two truths I request the great Buddha-Dhamma protectors to come and help to create a safe place where the Buddha-Dhamma can be taught, practiced, realised and preserved.

This is one of the methods that we use to create a space that Buddha-Dhamma can be taught. It is really clearing a good energy space. There are negative energies in the world. By acknowledging that and saying that we want the space to be clean and clear and healthy and nourishing for everyone here the right conditions are created so students can really learn Buddha-Dhamma. It is about paying attention to detail. Just like we clean the physical environment it is about cleaning the mental environment as well. To make it very easy for people to listen to the Dhamma, sit comfortably and feel loved.

Thank you.

Reference:

(1) Paritta Pali & Protective Verses, 1999, A Collection of Eleven Protective Suttas, An Inward Journey Book, Published by Inward Path Publishers, Penang, Malaysia For free distribution, Translated by Sayadaw U Silananda.