

Dedicated Practitioners Program
Reading and Homework, December 2003
Forgiveness and Transcendental Dependent Arising

The DPP Retreat was a certainly a powerful experience for the teachers as well as the participants. We will be following up on many of the topics over the next few months.

Readings

Loving-Kindness, The Revolutionary Art of Happiness by Sharon Salzberg, Ch 5 “Working with Anger and Aversion”, pp 62 -77.

Article on “Nibbida” by Andrew Olendzki, attached as a Word file.

Majjhima Nikaya 86: The Angulimala Sutta is a profound discourse on the possibility of people changing. It can also be found on: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/sutta/majjhima/mn086.html> . What can this discourse teach us in our forgiveness practice?

“Transcendental Dependent Arising” by Bhikkhu Bodhi, if you haven’t already read it. It can be found at: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel277.html> .

Forgiveness

The texts say that continuing to remain angry is like picking up a hot coal to throw at someone not realizing that you are the one getting burned. And yet it sometimes is still hard to open to a place of forgiveness. One key to forgiveness is understanding causes and conditions behind actions. This means letting go of our story, not adding blame and not taking things personally. Often this is easier said than done.

1. Forgiving yourself: It’s said that forgiveness is giving up all hope of a better past. What do I need to forgive in myself? What would I need to understand that would change guilt or judgment into compassion?
2. Asking forgiveness: From whom do I want forgiveness? What would they need to understand to forgive me? Is it possible to make amends? If so, what is getting in the way? As a practice, ask then for forgiveness with no expectation.
3. Extending forgiveness: Whom or what am I not ready to forgive? What gets in the way? What is the effect of not forgiving? What would I need to understand? Can I forgive myself for being just where I am?
4. When we don’t forgive it’s said that we’re not acknowledging impermanence. How is forgiveness an acknowledgement of anicca?

Transcendental Dependent Arising

Bhikkhu Bodhi says that the usual responses to dukkha are resentment or endurance. The Dharma allows us to reflect on the real source—our reaction to what is happening.

1. Think of an experience when suffering was a supportive factor for faith in your practice. What factors enabled you to have a deeper understanding of the First Noble Truth rather than close off in bitterness or endurance?

2. Sometimes we can blame ourselves for suffering that comes to us through a misunderstanding of karma. The Buddha committed unskillful acts in previous lives. How can we open up to our suffering without blaming ourselves? How can we hold our past actions in a way that inspires us to practice rather than inducing guilt? When you do feel guilt how can it be wisely understood?
3. Faith is the supportive factor for joy (*pamojja*). Gil referred to *pamojja* in his presentation as delight or gladness. The Buddha stated, “That gladness associated with wholesome states I call an equipment of mind.” What is the place of delight in your spiritual practice? Do you actively cultivate it as part of your practice? How? If not, why not?
4. Two later factors on the chain are Disenchantment (*nibbida*) and Dispassion (*viraga*). What is the difference between disenchantment and aversion? Do you consider disenchantment a positive development in your practice? Are there any areas of your life where you have felt the growth of *nibbida*? Has the growth of disenchantment led to any difficulties? What ways have you found to work skillfully with these difficulties or the growth of *nibbida*? What is the difference between dispassion and indifference?

Practices

Daily Life:

1. Ask forgiveness from someone you have acted unskillfully with. Hint: vulnerability without any expectation is effective
2. A classical way to practice forgiveness is by giving a gift to someone we feel contracted with. It can be as simple as opening a door for a co-worker we resent or giving them genuine loving attention. However an actual physical gift can be even more potent karmically. Try giving a gift to some one you feel anger towards as an experiment. Notice how that act affects your relationship.

Week	Sitting Practice
1	Forgiving self: Select a specific quality you judge about yourself. Each sitting spend some time cultivating forgiveness
2	Forgiving others: whenever you notice judging thoughts about another, become mindful of your experience. See if you can cultivate acceptance and forgiveness towards that person. What factors allow this to happen?
3	When you notice you are caught in a state of suffering, let yourself fully experience it. Notice what happens as you pay attention. What are the conditions that cause more suffering, that lead to the end of suffering or cause faith to arise?
4	Try consciously cultivating gladness for wholesome states when they arise (e.g. generosity, kindness.) Let yourself mindfully feel the wholesomeness of your actions.

Check in with your dharma buddy and mentor, discussing your practice and reflections this month.