

**Dedicated Practitioners Program
Reading and Homework, September 2003
Our Relationship to Material Things**

This month we will examine what it means to let go of clinging in relationship to material things by exploring our relationship to renunciation and the joy that arises from letting go, as well as our ability to rejoice in our own and other's good fortune, or *mudita*.

Readings:

Renunciation: The Highest Happiness by Sister Siripanna. Available online at <http://www.dharma.org/ij/archives/1996b/siripanna.htm> and the DPP website.

Sutta 2—*Sabbasava Sutta/All the Taints* from Majjhima Nikaya. (Also refer to Sharda's Study Guide). (Please note: the reflections and practices this month will focus on renunciation, not on the questions about anatta raised in sections MN2.7 and 2.8).

For further reference: *Trading Candy for Gold*, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Available at www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/modern/thanissaro/candy.html or the DPP website.

Reflections:

1. How do you practice renunciation in regard to material things? How do you understand "detachment in regard to material things"?
2. Many practitioners say they can own an abundance of things because they are not attached to them. How do you determine whether clinging is actually present?
3. How do you relate to moderation and wise restraint? Do you consider this part of your practice? In what ways do you practice this? What is the underlying motivation to be moderate?
4. In Sister Siripanna's talk, she points out that sometimes we want to withdraw from the realm of sense experience in a contracted, fearful way. How do you relate to the sensory world?

Daily Life Practices:

1. How do you use things, for example, food, clothing, paper, water, and electricity? How do you determine what is the right amount to use, or “the middle way” with the usage of things?
2. What material things can you let go of? Is there any clutter that may be worth cleaning out? Consider taking the appropriate action.
3. Pay attention to the mental states of envy and jealousy that arise from comparing mind. Do these mental states arise, and if so, in relationship to who? What happens when you are around people who have more abundance than you? Less abundance?
4. To practice renunciation, Sister Siripanna refers to a teaching in the Sutta Nipata that encourages anchoring attention in the body. Experiment with the instruction in relation to material things to help understand what it is like to live with wise restraint.

Sitting Practice--Mudita:

Week One: Choose a practice that will help you develop gratitude. For example, reflect on the good things you have done or ways you have been generous with your money or time, or reflect on the blessings in your life. Let yourself feel the joy. See if you can distinguish this feeling from the feeling of pride or conceit.

Week Two: Choose a friend to direct mudita to. (Or you can choose many friends). Focus on a particular source of joy in this person’s life. Extend mudita to them with the words you most connect with, i.e.: *“May your happiness not diminish”*, or *“May your good fortune never leave you.”* See if you can feel the particular quality of mudita.

Week Three: Sharing the Merit. We share the merit of our actions to acknowledge that our spiritual endeavors cannot be for ourselves alone. By sharing the merit of our actions, we remember this truth. At the end of your meditation, or sometime before the end of the day, feel the positive energy of your actions and dedicate it. You can form your own words, or use a standard phrase: *“May the merit of my actions [or the goodness of my practice] be shared with all beings, so that all beings may be liberated.”*

Week Four: Think of someone who is in pain or suffering. Reflect on something that brings them happiness, even if it is small and rejoice over that. Extend mudita with the phrases that you are connected with.

Be sure to schedule time to connect with your Dharma buddy for a discussion of this month’s readings and practices, and for an interview with your mentor if you are receiving monthly interviews.