

Dedicated Practitioners Program Homework for June 2002

Theme: Wise Effort

Wise Effort is the sixth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. In using Wise Effort, we

- Guard against or avoid the unwholesome or unskillful qualities or states that have not yet arisen
- Overcome or abandon the unwholesome that has arisen
- Develop or cultivate the wholesome that has not yet arisen
- Maintain or enhance the wholesome that has arisen

This is a central part of the Buddha's teaching and of our meditation practice, and the theme for this month's practices and reflections.

Readings: Majjhima Nikaya 7 and 40 (suttas that Jack Kornfield referred to in his last presentation at the Dedicated Practitioners Program retreat). You could also read the comments on Simile of the Cloth in "The Simile of the Cloth and The Discourse on Effacement, Two Discourses of the Buddha, from the Majjhima Nikaya," edited with Introduction and Notes by Nyanaponika Thera, found at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel061.html>, and Thanissaro Bikkhu's collections of suttas referring to Wise Effort in *the Wings to Awakening*, found at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/modern/thanissaro/wings/2c.html>.

Reflections - Please reflect on the following questions for discussion with your dharma buddy and possible discussion in a Dedicated Practitioners Program group:

1. These two suttas are largely about the abandoning of unwholesome tendencies of mind and the cultivation of wholesome ones. Which unwholesome mind states do you have most difficulty with? In the moment of their arising, are you sometimes able to "abandon" them? If not, how do you work with them – in formal practice and in daily life?
2. Another analogy used in the suttas is that of "starving the hindrances," as opposed to abandoning unwholesome mind states. How do you starve a hindrance? Which model works better for you? The suttas also speak of "feeding the factors of enlightenment."
3. In MN 7.5, the Buddha talks about his followers having "supreme confidence" in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Is there anything that you have "supreme confidence" in? Do you have supreme confidence in any/all of the Triple Gem?
4. The brahmin Sundarika Bharadvaja believes that bathing in certain waters will purify him. Do you have any beliefs in external behaviors or rituals that will have this effect, e.g. turning prayer wheels, chants, prostrations? Does sitting still fall in this category?
5. What does it mean in MN 7.20 to "make yourself a refuge for all beings." Is this a goal for you? How would you develop this?
6. Cultivating and maintaining wholesome qualities is an important part of Wise Effort. Give some examples of how you actively do this in your life and practice.
7. How would you define "unwholesome"? Can you find a word that describes this term in more contemporary language?

8. How do you relate to the 'unwholesome' without judgment or aversion?
9. **Metta practice:** the basis of metta is reflecting on the good in people. To cultivate metta for yourself, please write a list of five qualities you appreciate about yourself, or kind things that you have done. Try to choose things that you can reflect on in the future as well.

Daily practice: Make a commitment with your dharma buddy for some form of daily practice. Keep track of the times you sit. Check in at the end of the month to talk about the challenges and benefits of a daily practice.

The following are suggestions for daily practice for weeks 1 through 4.

Week	Focus	Suggestions
1	Metta	Do some formal metta practice for yourself each day, reflecting on the five things that you appreciate about yourself.
2	Working with unwholesome qualities	When an unwholesome state is present, approach it with the mnemonic RAIN: Recognition, Acceptance, Interest, and Non-identification. That is, first name the emotion. Next, make sure you are approaching it with a spirit of openness and non-resistance. Then look at it with interest and curiosity: how is it expressing itself in the body, in emotional tone, in thoughts? Can the emotion be seen just as energy, without a preconception or judgment? Finally, don't identify with it. Notice the tendency to form thoughts of "I" or "mine" around the emotion, and try to reword the thoughts without this personalization.
3	Cultivating the wholesome	Pay particular attention to times when wholesome mind states are present. Note thoughts, feeling tone, body sensations, etc. What happens to them as you pay attention to them?
4	Wise Effort	Use all aspects of Wise Effort in your meditation practice (guarding, abandoning, cultivating, maintaining.) Is this a helpful way of working with your experience?