



Vipassana Prison Newsletter

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Words of the Buddha

With goodwill for the entire cosmos, cultivate a limitless heart: above, below, and all around, unobstructed, without hostility or hate.

*-Sutta Nipāta 1.150**

**A sutta is a discourse of the Buddha.*



ADMIRABLE FRIENDSHIP ON THE MEDITATOR'S PATH

Although we meditate in silence and often alone, the Buddha believed friendship could be of great value to meditators. Of course, it would have to be the best kind of friendship. Below are some of the Buddha's words about the importance of friendship.

The Buddha's cousin Ananda is said to have approached the Buddha and remarked, "This is half of the holy life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie." And the Buddha replied, "Don't say that, Ananda. Don't say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and comrades, he can be expected to develop and pursue the noble Eightfold Path." *-Upaddha Sutta 45*

"And what is meant by admirable friendship? There is the case where a layperson, in whatever town or village he may dwell, spends time with householders or householders' sons, young or old, who are advanced in virtue. He talks with them, engages them in discussions. He emulates the conviction of those who have conviction, the virtue of those who are virtuous, the generosity of those who are generous, and the discernment of those who are discerning. This is called admirable friendship." *-Anguttara Nikaya 8.54*

"These four, young householder, should be understood as foes in the guise of friends: he who appropriates a friend's possessions, he who renders lip-service, he who flatters, he who brings ruin. . . . Avoid them from afar as paths of peril. These four, young householder, should be understood as warm-hearted friends: he who is a helpmate, he who is the same in happiness and sorrow, he who gives good counsel, he who sympathizes. . . . These four friends the wise behold and cherish devotedly as does a mother her own child." *-Digha Nikaya 31*

BEWARE OF BAD COMPANY

Two friends were wandering in a forest. Suddenly they saw a bear approaching. Afraid, the boys asked each other, “What should we do now?”

One boy said, “I know how to climb trees so I will climb one and escape.” The other said, “But I don’t know how to climb trees. Please help me up the tree.” The first boy replied, “I’m sorry, I can’t help you.” And he climbed up the tree to save himself.

The second boy didn’t know what to do, so he lay on the ground and pretended to be dead. The bear came and sniffed the boy all over, including his ears. Assuming that the boy was dead, the bear went away. The first boy came down the tree and asked his friend, “What did the bear say in your ears?” The second boy replied, “He told me to beware of friends like you.”



MAKING CHOICES

After completing a meditation course, one has many choices. What am I going to do? Where am I going to go? One choice few people would consciously consider is: who will I associate with?



Unfortunately some people behave in ways that might hurt themselves – and us too. They are people who don’t lead their lives through skillful action. What is skillful action? Skillful action is developing one’s strengths and virtues by living in accordance with the Eightfold Path of the Buddha’s teaching. In this case we are talking primarily about *sīla* (morality).

Of course we can’t entirely stop associating with people who lack good moral behavior, but it will help if, at the very least, we are wary and watchful around them. We cannot abandon them, and should still have *mettā* for them, remembering that even meditators with the best intentions aren’t always able to keep perfect *sīla*.

You may have heard from someone that morality is not important. Some people had similar views during the time of the Buddha. He clearly explained that this type of thinking was harmful and should be avoided. Today it might be called the school of, “if it feels good, do it.” But this school is dangerous for someone trying to walk a long path of purity in action. Breaking *sīla* pulls you down. It preoccupies your mind with worry and concern. Will I be found out? What will happen if people learn of this action that I took? The balanced mind required for deep meditation will be less accessible to you. When you started your course you were asked to take five precepts – abstain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and taking intoxicants. It was one of the opening formalities. Now the course is over, but the practice of *sīla*, morality, is still the foundation of the practice. To progress on the path it will help to take those five precepts to heart. There will be no one asking you to do this, or watching to make sure you do it. Yet if you wish to practice a Dhamma way of life this is the first step.

What is the relevance of Dhamma to a person on the street, whose stomach is empty?

A large number of people living in poverty come to Vipassana courses and find it very helpful. Their stomachs are empty, but their minds also are so agitated. With Vipassana they learn how to be calm and equanimous. Then they can face their problems. It is noticed their lives improve. They come out of addictions to alcohol, gambling, etc. Dhamma is helpful to everyone, rich or poor.

If we keep observing ourselves, how can we live life in any natural way? We'll be so busy watching ourselves that we can't act freely or spontaneously.

That is not what people find after completing a Vipassana course. Here you learn a mental training that will give you the ability to observe yourself in daily life whenever you need to do so. Not that you will keep practicing with closed eyes all day throughout your life. But just as the strength you gain by physical exercise helps you in daily life, so this mental exercise will also strengthen you. What you call "free, spontaneous" action is really blind reaction, which is always harmful. By learning to observe yourself, you will find that whenever a difficult situation arises in life, you can keep the balance of your mind. With that balance you can choose freely how to act. You will take real action, which is always positive, always beneficial for you and for all others.

You spoke about non-attachment to things. What about persons?

Yes, persons also. You have true love for the person, compassionate love for this person, this is totally different. But when you have attachment, then you don't have love, you only love yourself, because you expect something, material, emotional or other, from this person. With whomever you have attachment, you are expecting something in return. When you start truly loving this person, then you only give: it is one-way traffic. You don't expect anything in return. Then the attachment goes. The tension goes. You are so happy.

Is the generation of mettā a natural consequence of the purity of the mind, or is it something that must be actively developed? Are there progressive stages in mettā?

According to the law of nature – the law of Dhamma – as the mind is purified, the quality of mettā develops naturally. On the other hand, you must work to develop it by practicing mettā-bhāvanā. It is only at a very high stage of mental purity that mettā is generated naturally and nothing has to be done, no training has to be given. Until one reaches that stage, one has to practice.



Also, people who don't practice vipassana can practice metta-bhavana. In such countries as Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, mettā-bhāvanā is very common in every household. However, the practice is usually confined to mentally reciting "May all beings be happy, be peaceful." This certainly gives some peace of mind to the person who is practicing it. To some extent good vibrations enter the atmosphere, but they are not strong. However, when you practice Vipassana, purification starts. With this base of purity, your practice of mettā naturally becomes stronger. Then you won't need to repeat these good wishes aloud. A stage will come when every fiber of the body keeps on feeling compassion for others, generating goodwill for others.



GROUP SITTINGS AND UPCOMING COURSES

Donaldson Course Schedule 2016

April 21 to May 2
(10-day Course)

August 25 to 29
(3-day Course for Old Students)

October 20 to 31
(10-day Course)

Donaldson Weekly Group Sitzings

Monday & Thursday
*approximately** **12:00 noon**
meet in the
ABE (Adult Basic Education) Wing

*Time may vary, check with local staff.