



Samatha at Home (and elsewhere)

A newsletter for the Samatha Sangha: 13

Thursday 16th July 2020

www.samatha.org

Samatha at Home 13

Dear Friends

We very much hope people are finding ways of enjoying the summer and getting out in lockdown/normal life. It seems to have been going on for a very long time, and our new 'normal' is very strange. So we hope people are managing to keep in touch with friends and family, and keeping happy.

In this week's issue there is an article on loving kindness, one of our core practices, but perhaps something we talk about less.

A main article is on the *Dhammacakkapavattana* sutta. This is a distillation of the Buddha's primary teachings known as the 'First Sermon' or the "First Discourse'. Those who have heard the samatha chanting group will recognise it from events or on courses where it has been chanted: so it is very welcome to have an exposition of it too.

There is also an article on the five faculties and the five powers, from the 37 *Bodhipakkhiyadhammas* and another video story from the *Dhammapada* commentary.

And finally, some people have been developing skills in lockdown: one of the pictures this week is of a stone found on beach near Edinburgh.

Thanks to David Hall, Peter Harvey, and Felicity White for contributions this week. Do please continue to send us any photos, poems, comments or articles to cheer us all up in these odd times! Thank you!

With warm wishes,

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This week we have another video story from the *Dhammapada* commentary. This is from the story cycle of King Udena and is about two women called Sāmāvati and Māgandiyā, who were chief consorts of King Udena. It concerns the events behind verses 21,22 & 23 of the *Dhammapada*.

You can watch the video via the link below:

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/437568944>

All previous issues of Samatha at Home can be found at: www.samatha.org/samatha-at-home

Loving kindness

These are verses on loving kindness from the *Mettā Sutta*:

Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world: above, below and across, without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.

One should sustain this mindfulness, whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long he is awake. This is said to be living in a heaven, here in this world (*Suttanipāta* 150-1).

The text suggests that if we can feel loving kindness as a mindfulness – we are already in a kind of heaven, just for a bit. We all know loving kindness as a practice we do, sometimes before or after the sitting practice, and it can pop up sometimes in the joy of the meditation too, if we are lucky. I have always felt it was something that was perhaps best not to talk about too much, as it emerges at odd moments, sideways, in interchanges with friends, when somebody does something at the right moment, or when you are just enjoying what you are doing. Loving kindness likes silence too, so it can find a chance to spread around the edges of conversations and dealings in daily life. I think we have all seen that it can creep in unobserved, and tends to slip away if scrutinised too much. But it does seem interesting to see the factors that can allow it to arise. So how do we do a loving kindness practice?

It is interesting to look at some ways we can open the windows to let it in. For one thing is that although one cannot make it come, it does seem to arrive if invited sometimes. Loving kindness seems to like space and a sense of being able to drop the immediate details of a problem which is besetting us, and just suffuses everything with a different light, or like water melting the hard bits inside.



In the Bodhisatta vow, the Buddha-to-be vows to cultivate it on his path to awakening:

‘You, making firm and taking upon yourself this ninth, be without an equal in loving kindness if you wish to attain full awakening.

Just as water suffuses with coolness good and bad people alike, and washes away dust and dirt,

So you too, cultivate lovingkindness for friend and enemy, and, going to the perfection of loving kindness, you will attain full awakening.’

One of the things very commonly said about the practice of the Buddhist path is that it is not possible to attain insight without the practice of wisdom: right view and right intention. But what is not often stressed is how important loving kindness is too. Right intention needs loving kindness. It cannot be true otherwise, and nor can wisdom. Loving kindness is just needed, all along the way. And in my experience, we need it so much to keep us going: loving kindness, for self and others, seems to me the basis of all our practice and self-development. I find that the real mark of progress in meditation is if you get a chance to feel it sometimes, experience it, and are lucky enough to meet it from time to time in others too. In practice, it feels like the best basis for watching the breath, and arises out of that naturally, as a kind of friendliness towards the meditation object, that does not grasp after it, or neglect it either. Boonman sometimes talks about the effects of meditation as being like a ‘good friend’. You need to make a welcoming space for them to visit, but you also need to let them go when they want to, and accept they cannot be there all the time. Loving kindness seems like that kind of friend.

The classical method is to arouse it for oneself first, as a sitting practice, and then suffuse it to all directions, around and below. Another way is to think of someone you like, allow it to develop towards them, then to someone you feel neutral about, and then to someone you don’t like, before going on to extend it to all beings. The problem many people say they have with this is that these are usually taught with extending loving kindness to oneself first, the person many people find most difficult to like! I was talking about this with Dave Hall, another meditation teacher. He had been working on this one, and the problems involved with this, and told me that many people had found success in the practice by trying to arouse it for someone else first – and then oneself. An elderly teacher that had been kind to you as a child, for instance, or one of the great meditation teachers who seemed to radiate knowledge and loving kindness. You can feel that kindness reflected back again, just by bringing them to mind. He sent me a very interesting email about it, based on his experimentation on this theme in his group:

'These are the first couple of sentences of an article by Pema Chodron that we read at one of our meetings plus the guided practice I found (and adapted) in the same journal.

Bodhicitta: The Excellence of Awakened Heart
BY PEMA CHÖDRÖN | OCTOBER 15, 2019g

When I was about six years old I received the essential bodhicitta teaching from an old woman sitting in the sun. I was walking by her house one day feeling lonely, unloved and mad, kicking anything I could find. Laughing, she said to me, "Little girl, don't you go letting life harden your heart."

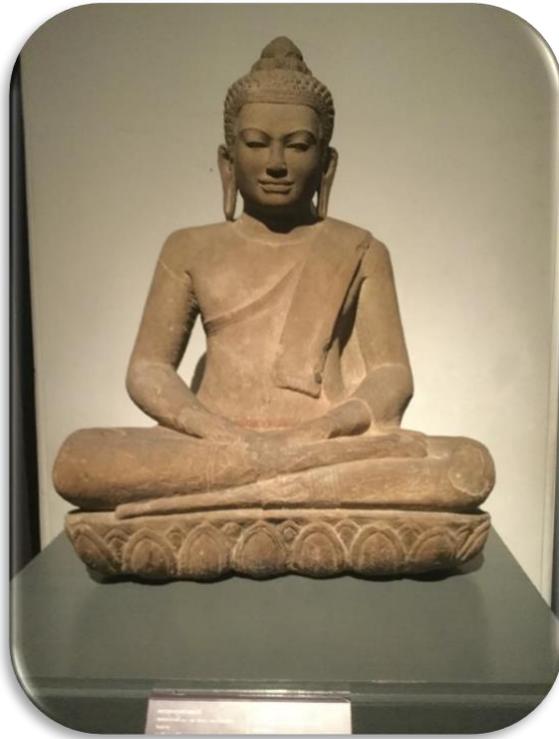
Right there, I received this pith instruction: we can let the circumstances of our lives harden us so that we become increasingly resentful and afraid, or we can let them soften us and make us kinder and more open to what scares us. We always have this choice.

Here is a practice we have worked with in the group. It is an adaptation of a guided meditation at the end of a Daniel Goleman article. I suspect it's been developed from ideas in the Tibetan tradition where their "advanced" practices require you to take refuge in the guru. So the second stage of this practice refers to a guru, a mentor, or someone similar - perhaps a parent, grandparent or a teacher. Or even someone like the old lady in Pema Chodron's article. Thus the second stage implies you allow your heart to appreciate the qualities of the guru/mentor/parent/teacher, and to also receive their well-wishing. At different times you might choose different people.

With this practice any of the divine abidings (*brahma-vihāras*), of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy or equanimity can arise - perhaps it tends to be the one you need at the time?

- Find a place with no distractions, and allow peace to arise in your heart
- Slowly bring to mind someone in your life who has been kind to you and to whom you feel gratitude. Then silently wish that person well – that he or she be safe, happy, and healthy
- Then focus on yourself and make those same wishes for your own life.
- Next, make those same wishes first for people you love, like your family members, then for people you know, your acquaintances, and then for strangers.
- And finally, spread those wishes of wellbeing toward everyone, everywhere, to all sentient beings.'

The various suggestions he gives in his email all seem helpful skill-in-means to me. If it works – it's good! So, if one does not feel able to find loving kindness for oneself, then arousing it first for someone else, and then coming back to oneself, and treating oneself to the same kindness, is really effective. I have tried variations on this since his reading



email, and find a number of them give a really fresh look to the practice, as does, for instance ‘feeling’ the loving kindness of a Buddha image, as some really exude this quality.

The loving kindness practice is an immeasurable – it takes us out of the perspective of the measure and the boundary. In difficult situations, just one moment really can change things, perhaps in an argument, a problem at work, or an unhappy state. In the end it is non-verbal too, and while you can think of ways to invite it, it is beyond words: you see it by its effects.

When I was on a work session once years ago I was getting annoyed with a job I was doing. It was something too fiddly for me, as it was trying to scrape old paper from the wall under boiler pipes. I remember having a few inept goes and throwing the scraping tools in a bucket violently and sighing. Someone said to me later ‘Have you ever thought of practising *mettā* towards physical objects?’ At the time I thought this a bizarre notion and went for a walk, which was probably not a bad idea anyway! Over the next few weeks this possibility kept on popping up. I thought it was worth a try and sure enough it does seem to work.

I started to notice people who did seem to have *mettā* towards physical objects, and some people really do; you can see the effects of loving kindness in how they do things, and what they produce. They work with objects so well, as if they are in some way working with them rather than against them. The Jewish mystical traditions have the notion of the Shekinah, the immanence of the divine in the material physical world around us. This suggests that the world is there as an active physical presence, the earth, that will try to help us, offering support and nourishment to things we do if we treat it in the right way and show it respect and love. It seems rather like the goddess of the earth coming to support the Buddha-to-be on the night of the awakening. After a while I was looking at some Abhidhamma and realised that some sense of this teaching was there too. Loving kindness does not have to have a person or people as an object – we can experience it

when washing up, cleaning, painting, gardening, walking for the bus, making a sculpture or mending the computer. In the Abhidhamma skilful consciousness always has the quiet presence of one of the divine abidings (*brahmavihāras*). So some sense of friendliness, compassion, the gladness of sympathetic joy, or the unperturbability of equanimity are there somewhere, even if it is just mildly in the background. The divine abidings are hallmark of the skilful mind, even if they might be there just minimally, as part of what you are doing. And I noticed that it was indeed possible to experience the ‘divine abidings’ in cooking. It is difficult to explain but making the right meal for someone in a sad mood can be a kind of attunement to who they are, and what they really need and nurture them: selflessness. You feel their presence, and the ingredients seem to come to help you with this. The physical world seems to support the mind with loving kindness.

So, musing on loving kindness, it felt to me like something you needed to give a chance to stay around: doing things you really enjoy, and allowing stillness in the practice.

At the end of the email David says about the practice he describes: this seems like ‘receiving and giving: Nai Boonman’s blessing practice?’ It certainly seems that way to me.

Nai Boonman introduced us to the blessings practice on his 80th birthday celebration at Greenstreete. This is to breathe in loving kindness to oneself on the inbreath, and to breathe it out on the outbreath, to all beings. It is, he says, a practice you can do during the day too, while on walks, and perhaps with a longer or the longest breath. I remember its simplicity really cheered and stabilised what was a happy day anyway – and, since then, it has been something to try when sad too, or when feeling a bit bored on a bus, or just anytime. It just changes the perspective and lets mindfulness come with the breath too. Paul Dennison has taught this with the *Yogavacāra* method of saying *Me* on the inbreath, and *Ttā* on the outbreath: this bypasses the usual thinking about things. Since then, I have always found variations on this with the breath the most helpful way of practising loving kindness. It can then sometimes come when not expected, and be genuine, as if it has just popped up from nowhere. May I be well and happy; may all be well and happy...it is surprisingly reassuring to come back to this from time to time.



**The *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta*:
The Discourse on the Setting in Motion of the Wheel (of Vision)
of the Basic Pattern of things¹ –
celebrated, along with the Buddha’s renunciation, at *Āsāḷha Pūjā***

This is the Buddha’s first sermon, focusing on what are usually called the ‘Noble Truths’ about suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path to this. These can often sound like a set of things to believe in, but they are not presented like this in the Buddha’s discourses. What in Pali are the *ariya-saccas* are not ‘noble truths’, but key dimensions of existence, basic true realities as identified and understood by the Buddha and other ‘noble’ ones: those who have been spiritually ennobled by deep, transformative insight into reality as illuminated by *Dhamma* – stream-enterers, once-returners, non-returners and arahants, and those intently practising to attain any of these states. For the rest of us, the important thing is, based on calm and clarity of mind, to tune into these realities, to contemplate and get the measure of them.



A key term in the first *Sutta*, and in Buddhism in general, is ‘*dukkha*’ – but what does this really mean? ‘Suffering’ is OK as an approximation, but is too loose. The word ‘*dukkha*’ can be either a noun or an adjective. As an adjective, its basic everyday meaning is ‘painful’ as opposed to ‘pleasant’; so feeling can be pleasant/*sukha*, painful/*dukkha*, or neither (e.g. SN IV 232). In the present *Sutta*, the way *dukkha* is explained shows that it is here referring to those things which are painful – ‘the painful’, i.e. which bring pain, whether in an obvious or subtle sense. SN V 209–10 talks of five ‘faculties’ (*indriyas*): *sukha* and *dukkha*, which are

¹ *Samyutta Nikāya*, *saṃyutta* 56, *sutta* 11. To read my translation, with some explanation, of the *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta*, see: <http://sunderland.academia.edu/PeterHarvey> – a translation of the *Sutta* and a full article on ‘The Four Ariya-saccas...’ – & see my *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 2nd edn, ch. 2.

bodily pleasure and pain; *somanassa* and *domanassa*, mental happiness and unhappiness, the latter said to be ‘mental *dukkha*’; and *upekkhā*, bodily or mental neutral feeling. That is, *dukkha* in its simplest noun sense is bodily *dukkha* – physical pain – but there is also *domanassa*, mental *dukkha* – which includes such things as stress, frustration, unease. In the *Sutta*, there is reference to ‘sorrow, lamentation, *dukkha*, *domanassa* and distress’, and the *Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (at DN II 306) explains *dukkha* in this as physical pain, and *domanassa* as mental pain. This shows that the primary sense of *dukkha*, when used as a noun, is physical ‘pain’, but then its meaning is extended to include mental pain, unhappiness. The same spread of meaning is seen in the English word ‘pain’, for example in the phrase ‘the pleasures and pains of life’, with the ‘pains’ certainly including mental ones; and in the expression ‘it pains me to say...’, the word clearly means *mental* pain.

Dukkha as an adjective is applied to things which are not (in most cases) themselves forms of mental or physical pain, but which are experienced in ways which bring mental or physical pain. When it is said in the first sermon ‘birth is *dukkha* (*jāti pi dukkhā*)’ etc., the word *dukkha* agrees in number and gender with what it is applied to, so is an adjective. The most usual translation ‘is suffering’ does not convey this. Birth is not a *form* of ‘suffering’, nor is it carrying out the *action* of ‘suffering’, as in the use of the word in ‘he is suffering’. But ‘birth is painful’ makes sense; being born entails pain.

When asked what ‘*dukkha*’ is, Sāriputta says (SN IV 259): ‘There are, friend, three kinds of painfulness (*dukkha-tā*): the painfulness of pain (*dukkha-dukkhatā*); the painfulness of conditioned things (*saṅkhāra-dukkhatā*), and the painfulness of change (*vipariṇāma-dukkhatā*).’:

- the painfulness of pain is the painfulness of actual physical or mental pains.
- the painfulness of conditioned things is the subtle painfulness, unsatisfactoriness, of whatever is limited, ephemeral, conditioned, imperfect: an implicit contrast to the unconditioned, *Nibbāna*. In this sense, it is said that ‘all conditioned things are impermanent ... are *dukkha*’ (AN I 286). And this even includes the Noble Eightfold Path, ‘the foremost of all conditioned things’ (AN II 34)!
- the painfulness of change is the painfulness of something’s being pleasant while it lasts but bringing the pain of loss when it ends.

In the *sacca-samyutta* (SN.56), it is repeatedly said that one should make an effort to understand:

- ‘This is *dukkha*/painful’, i.e. some aspect of experience that is itself mentally or physically painful, or which often entails, or involves, these.
- ‘This is the origin of the painful’
- ‘This is the cessation/stopping of the painful’
- ‘This is the way going to the cessation of the painful’.

It is said that these are things that one should think about, reflect on, and talk about, when one does think, reflect and talk (SN 56.7–10). One should also seek to become clear about these and understand the true identity of what is *dukkha*, and its origin, etc.

The ‘true realities (*saccas*) for the noble ones (*ariya-*)’ are these four themselves – the painful, what originates it, what brings its ending, and the way to this – not teaching *about* them. The Buddha’s practice was to get people to focus on these once he was sure they

were in the right frame of mind be able to fully benefit from a teaching on them, being in a start of mind that was 'ready, open, without hindrances, inspired and confident' (MN I 379–80)

The first sermon first introduces the Noble Eight-factored Path as a middle way between the extremes of self-indulgence and forceful asceticism. It then explains the first true reality, *dukkha*, thus:



'Now this, for the noble ones, is the painful true reality (*dukkha ariya-sacca*):

- (i) birth [i.e. being born] is painful, ageing is painful, illness is painful, death is painful;
- (ii) sorrow, lamentation, [physical] pain, unhappiness and distress are painful;
- (iii) union with what is disliked is painful; separation from what is liked is painful; not to get what one wants is painful;
- (iv) in brief, the five bundles of grasping-fuel (*upādāna-kkhandhas*) are painful. [numbers added]'

Here:

- i) = aspects of life which entail physical and some mental pain;
- ii) = typical examples of actual pain, mental or physical.
- iii) = perhaps the most commonly occurring occasions for everyday pains, in their milder forms, though they can also be intense; they are the frustrating aspects of life.
- iv) = the five kinds of physical and mental processes making up a person – bodily form, feeling-tone, perception, volitional activities (volitions, moods, emotions, attitudes) and consciousness – that are focusses of identity fuelling one's vain grasping at things as 'I/me/mine': as being, or being possessed by, a permanent Self. These include all the above painful aspects of life, and grasping at them intensifies any such pains.

It is certainly acknowledged that what is ‘painful’ is not exclusively so (SN III 68–70). The pleasant aspects of life are not denied, but it is emphasized that ignoring painful aspects leads to limiting attachment, while calmly acknowledging them has a purifying, liberating effect. Thus the Buddha says in respect of each of the five aspects of body and mind: ‘The pleasure and gladness that arise in dependence on it: this is its attraction. That it is impermanent, painful, and subject to change; this is its danger. The removal and abandonment of desire and attachment for it: this is the leaving behind of it’ (AN I 258–9). In the first sermon, the second true reality, the origin of the painful, is explained as:

‘Now *this*, for the noble ones, is the originating-of-the-painful true reality. It is this craving (*taṇhā*) which leads to repeated existence (rebirths), accompanied by delight and attachment, seeking delight now here, now there; that is:

craving for sense-pleasures,
craving for being/a way-of-being (*bhava-taṇhā*),
craving for non-being (of oneself or something unpleasant).’

Here ‘craving’ translates *taṇhā*, which is not just any kind of ‘desire’, but demanding desire. *Chanda*, the ‘desire to do’, for example, can have wholesome forms which are part of the Buddhist path. Typical focuses of craving are: sense-pleasures, and things seen to bring these; attaining and preserving a certain ego-identity, a way of being, in this life and beyond; getting rid of an unwanted situation or aspect of one’s being, even craving annihilation after death. The above passage suggests that at the root of any mental pain – including the mental pain that we add to physical pain – is some kind of demanding ‘I want’, or ‘I don’t want’. The pain is sustained by some thoughts centred on I/me/mine and what ‘I’ want, or should have, or should not have to put up with. Of course, this keeps shifting its focus, ‘now here, now there ...’. So, whenever there is a painful experience of some kind, it is good to mindfully note it – perhaps doing one or more longest breaths to help one attune to doing so – and also note that which is its key internal originating source, irrespective of its external prompt. Craving also drives one on to another rebirth, with its various frustrations and other pains.

The third true reality is:

‘Now *this*, for the noble ones, is the ceasing-of-the-painful true reality. It is the remainderless fading away and cessation/stopping of that same craving, the giving up (*cāga*) and relinquishing (*paṭinissagga*) of it, freedom (*mutti*) from it, non-reliance (*anālaya*) on it.’

That is: giving up the thirst for the ‘next thing’, and giving oneself fully to what is here, now (*cāga*); abandoning attachments (*paṭinissagga*); freedom that comes from contentment (*mutti*); not letting the mind settle down in anything in a clinging way, relying on it, sticking to it, roosting there (*anālaya*). If there is sufficient mindfulness of something painful and particularly its origin, the mind will naturally incline to letting go of this origin, and so experiencing the peace that this brings. This should also be noted and understood, when it happens.

The fourth true reality is:

‘Now *this*, for the noble ones, is the true reality which is the way leading to the cessation of the painful. It is this Noble Eight-factored Path, that is to say,

right view, right resolve,
right speech, right action, right livelihood,
right effort, right mindfulness, right mental unification.’

That is, it is the various aspects of *Dhamma*-practice, associated with meditation etc. Again, one needs to note how application of some aspect of this is what undermines and allays particular pains. The path-factors are, respectively:

- right view: seeing that intentional actions bring unpleasant or pleasant karmic fruits – that what one does *matters*; understanding the influence of greed, hatred and delusion, and their opposites, on action; understanding and insight into the four true realities, including the Noble Eight-factored Path itself.
- right resolve: for letting go, loving-kindness and compassion.
- right speech: truthful, fostering harmony, kind, and well chosen.
- right action: non-violent, ungreedy, avoiding sexual misconduct.
- right livelihood: which does not physically harm other beings, or cheat them.
- right effort: that avoids and undermines unwholesome states and cultivates, and sustains and nurtures wholesome ones.
- right mindfulness – the four applications of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhānas*): of the body, including breathing; of feeling-tones, including meditative joy; of wholesome and unwholesome states of mind; of basic reality-patterns – the five hindrances, seven factors of awakening, the five bundles/aggregates (*khandhas*), the senses and their objects, and how attachment and aversion to objects causes problems, *and* the four true realities for the noble ones.
- right concentration; the four *jhānas*.

Once one has got the four realities in one’s sights, as the key basic aspects of experience to watch out for and be calmly mindful of, then one can further see, as the *Dhamma-cakkappavattana Sutta* says, that: the painful aspects of life need to be more *fully understood*; the origin of this painfulness needs to be *abandoned*; the stopping of this painfulness needs to be *personally experienced*, and the path to this needs to be *cultivated, developed, practised*.

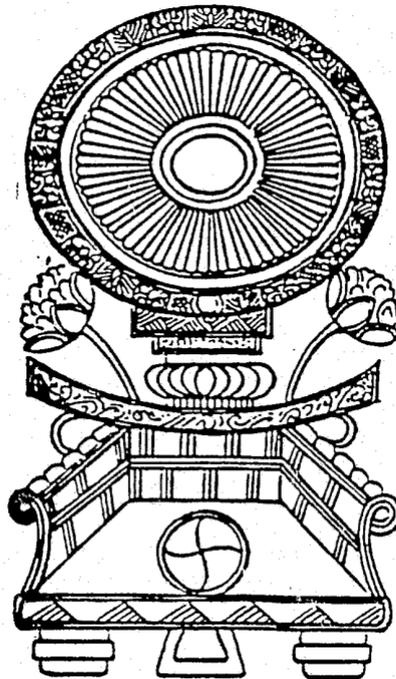
Near the end of the first sermon, it is said:

‘This is what the Blessed One said. Elated, the bhikkhus of the group of five delighted in the Blessed One’s statement. And while this explanation was being spoken, there arose in the venerable Koṇḍañña the dust-free, stainless vision of *Dhamma*: (*dhamma-cakkhu*) “whatever is patterned with an origination, all that is patterned with a cessation.” ’

That is, a degree of the Buddha’s insight is gained by Koṇḍañña, who directly sees the *Dhamma*, the Basic Pattern of things: that whatever has the nature of having an

origination, such as what is painful, *dukkha*, this also has the nature to be something that can cease, stop.

We can see something of a pun when it is said that then Koṇḍañña had the *cakkhu*, the ‘eye’ to see this, then the *cakka* or ‘wheel’ of the *Dhamma* was set in motion: the Buddha’s insight into *Dhamma* was transmitted to another person, and its influence in the world began. Note that an early aniconic image of the Buddha giving the first sermon (from Nāgārjunakonda, Andhra Pradesh, third century BCE) has the Buddha – said to have ‘become *Dhamma*’ (DN III 84) and been the ‘eye of the world’ (DN II 158) – symbolically shown by an eye-like *Dhamma*-wheel:



The *Sutta* then ends by saying that the good news on this rippled up through the heavens:

‘Thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the cry spread as far as the brahmā world, and this ten thousandfold world system shook, quaked, and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world, surpassing the divine majesty of the devas.’

Elsewhere, the Buddha said that the *Dhamma*, the Basic Pattern, he had awakened to was ‘profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful, sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise’. He then explained it a both specific conditionality, Conditioned Arising, and ‘the stilling of all volitional constructions, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, non-attachment, stopping, *Nibbāna*’. (MN I 167). That is, as:

- Conditioned Arising: how spiritual ignorance, craving and grasping drive the ongoing flow of life and lives, and the mental and physical pains involved in these.
- *Nibbāna*: the transcending of this flow by the stilling and stopping of what drives it. *Nibbāna* is that which is unborn, deathless, timelessly beyond arising and passing away, beyond *dukkha*.

One way of using the above teaching is to reflect on its core from a state of the gathered, calm mindfulness. This can be either at the end of a mindfulness of breathing sit – or in the middle of it. Perhaps after being in the shortest of Settling for a while, then one can move the attention from the *nimitta* to contemplate each of the true realities. An aid to doing this is to learn by heart the four inset passages above, starting “Now this for the noble ones is..”, to slowly mentally recite them and contemplate what they point to – or, more simply contemplate ‘*dukkha*’, ‘origin of *dukkha*’ etc.. After doing this for a while, return to normal shortest Settling, and go back by the route you came in by.

Lance Cousins taught me a short revolving chant based on ***dukkha, samudaya, nirodha, magga*** (*dukkha*, origination, cessation, path):

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du   sa   ni   ma
      sa   ni   ma   du
            ni   ma   du   sa
                  ma   du   sa   ni
du   sa   ni   ma ... [repeat at will]

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One way of doing this is to think of the four fingers from the little finger to the index finger as respectively representing *du*, *sa*, *ni*, and *ma*, and touching the appropriate finger with the thumb when chanting the related syllable.



The Five Faculties and the Five Powers

The 37 *Bodhipakkhiya-dhammas*, usually translated as “factors leading to enlightenment”, is a summary of the Buddha’s teaching and consists of seven groups:

1. *Satipaṭṭhāna* - The four foundations of mindfulness
2. *Sammappadhāna* - The four right efforts
3. *Iddhipāda* - The four bases of success
4. *Indriya* - The five controlling faculties
5. *Bala* - The five mental powers
6. *Bojjhaṅga* - The seven factors of awakening
7. *Maggaṅga* - The eight factors of the noble path

There are five faculties and five powers that are in the list, and comprise the same mental qualities. They are as follows:

1. Faith
2. Energy
3. Mindfulness
4. Concentration
5. Wisdom

The faculties are often introduced to samatha meditators at some point, as they are essential elements in the development of calm. *Indriya* literally means overlordship and refers to the tendency of each of the faculties to dominate the others in the development of meditation. It is therefore important to balance them.

Firstly, it is useful to consider how each faculty helps with the development of calm, and then how they are balanced to lead to absorption. The faculty of faith is opposed to and overcomes the hindrance of ill-will; the faculty of energy overcomes the hindrance of sloth and torpor (laziness); the faculty of mindfulness overcomes the hindrance of sense desire; the faculty of concentration overcomes the hindrance of restlessness; and the faculty of wisdom overcomes doubt.

But in the development of meditation, the tendency of each of the faculties to dominate needs to be addressed. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the classic commentary and meditation manual, the balance of the faculties is one of the ten kinds of skill in absorption (*appana-kosalla*), and it is one of the seven things that lead to the arising of the enlightenment factor "investigation of (material and mental) phenomena" (*dhammavicaya-sambojjhanga*)

There are several approaches recommended in the *Visuddhimagga*, but the one that is particularly recommended is as follows:

Faith should be balanced by wisdom, because if faith is strong and wisdom weak, it can lead to the person placing their confidence in an unworthy object. However, if wisdom is strong and faith is weak, this can lead the person into cunning and manipulative ways and “is as hard to cure as a sickness caused by medicine.”

Concentration can lead to excessive indolence, even sleep, if it is too strong and not balanced by energy. On the other hand, energy that is not balanced by concentration can lead to agitation and extreme restlessness. The *Visuddhimagga* states: “So these two should be balanced; for absorption comes with the balancing of the two.”

As for mindfulness, the commentary says: “Strong mindfulness... is needed in all instances; for mindfulness protects the mind from lapsing into agitation through faith, energy and wisdom, which tend to agitation, and from lapsing into indolence through concentration, which tends to indolence.” Mindfulness is like the seasoning that is suitable for all dishes.

Once balanced the faculties are then developed as part of the continuing work of calm and insight meditation. The renowned Burmese meditation master and scholar, Ledi Sayadaw wrote in his *Bodhipakkhiya Dipani*, “The Faculties of Faith, Energy and Mindfulness, which precede those of Concentration and Wisdom, are like those who raise a king to kingship. They raise the latter two faculties until the topmost excellence is attained.” (Published by the Buddhist Publication Society in the Wheel pamphlets as: “The Requisites of Enlightenment”)

So what are the five powers? Why are the same mental qualities listed and included in the 37 *Bodhipakkhiya-dhammas*?

It is said that the five powers are the five faculties developed to their highest point, where they have completely overcome their unskillful opposites. I have noticed in a week of strict practice, the start of the week is focused on the development and balancing of the five faculties, but towards the end of the week (or towards the end of whatever extended period of practice it is!) then these mental qualities seem to become powers. They are already balanced and each one has the strength to overcome the unskillful states that are opposed to it.

The five unskillful opposing forces are: Craving (*tanhā*) opposed to faith; laziness (*kosajja*) opposed to energy; absent-mindedness (*muṭṭhasacca*) opposed to mindfulness; distraction (*vikkhepa*) opposed to concentration; and delusion (*sammoha*) opposed to wisdom.

The following examples of the power of Faith overcoming craving are given in the Anguttara-Nikaya, Catukka Nipata (The Fours) Ariyavamsa-Sutta (cited by Ledi Sayadaw):

1. Being easily satisfied with food.
2. Being easily satisfied with clothing.
3. Being easily satisfied with any dwelling place.
4. Finding pleasure and enjoyment in the work of meditation.

I first read this list after I had been on a number of strict practice weeks. I found them quite appealing, especially the fourth one, taking pleasure in the work of meditation. It suggests to me the kind of practice that is contented and settled and not driven by the desire “to get somewhere” but rather to just get on with it and do the work. In other words, the power of faith, content and confident to commit to the course of action necessary to follow the path. There is a sense of humility about this approach too. These are qualities that seem to be strongly present in the last half of a week of strict practice. It is an indication that the balancing of the faculties has been completed and the establishment of the powers has taken place.

In the *Dhammasaṅgāṇī*, the first book of the canonical *Abhidhamma*, the five faculties and the five powers appear in all skilful consciousnesses. In my understanding, the degree and strength of each depends on the maturity of the type of consciousness itself. So, in the early stages of developing meditation practice, it seems reasonable to assume the faculties are growing in strength as the practice continues day by day, and the powers are there like seeds waiting to be fully established with the right conditions. Later, the same type of consciousness might arise with the faculties developed to a much higher degree and balanced, with the powers emerging and becoming established on such occasions as periods of intense meditation practice.



Yantra on a stone



Yantras are way of showing meditation understanding through visual form. This one is on a stone that was found on the beach. It looks as if the yantra is painted in gold - but it is careful scratching of the surface of the stone that has produced the effect, as the stone is golden colour underneath the black. The five loops represent the five syllables:

NA MO BU DDHA YA

This represents the changes in the mind and body through meditation, as the five factors of meditation come into balance, and replace the hindrances. There is something about a stone that makes this feel very real!