

Chapter News

In April the Chapters will be focusing on The Eightfold Path. The individual session topics are listed below:

St Louis Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

Weekly meetings continue on Thursday nights. The Dharma Talks for February are:

April 2: Wisdom: Appropriate View; Appropriate Intention
April 9: Ethical Conduct: Appropriate Speech; Appropriate Action; Appropriate Livelihood
April 16: Moral Culture: Appropriate Effort; Appropriate Mindfulness; Appropriate Concentration
April 23: Living the Eightfold Path: Life is our monastery
April 30: Pragmatism and the Eightfold Path

Central Ohio Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

The schedule for April is:

Apr 5 - Appropriate View & Intention
Apr 12 - Appropriate Action & Speech
Apr 19 - Appropriate Livelihood & Effort
Apr 26 - Appropriate Concentration & Mindfulness

West Georgia Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

The CPB-West Georgia is moving to a new location closer to downtown Atlanta. More news coming later this month or check www.pragmaticbuddhism.org

The Sensei' Cushion - Meghan Ruddy Sensei:

Why do we practice if not to change? Change ourselves, change our cultures, change our worlds.

In previous essays we've discussed why people change (because they're given good reason to) and where our cultures lie (within each of their members). Now we make a very important connection. We may practice and begin to notice changes in ourselves, but how do we begin to make changes in our cultures, in the worlds of human endeavor that surround us?

An important question to ask is Shaner sensei's third inquiry as written in *The Seven Arts of Change* (2010): Whose culture is it? If we perceive that the cultures in which we find ourselves (family, friends, work, neighborhood, nationality...) are not our own, are outside of our influence, we are correct. We are parts of those cultures in so far as they shape our conditionality but we are passive, dried leaves being flung about in the winds of whim and folly comprised of the actions of others. But if we practice for purpose and meaning, if we practice intentionally to develop our potential to flourish, if we work to own the culture as it exists within us, we can authentically own ourselves and the power we exert on our cultures. ^\

Impermanence: The Hope and Joy of Buddhism

People suffer because of selfishness; yet there are no permanent possessions. This life is a state of loss and change; therefore let no one cling to anything as "mine".

Everything that one calls "mine" is left behind at death. Having realized this a follower of the way will let go of "mineness".

Atthakavagga Sutta

This is the hope of Impermanence. This is what we're called on to realize. There is nothing that is ours because nothing remains the same. Nothing remains with us when we die because we do not remain. We have nothing to renounce because there is nothing that is ours; and when we realize this - not just in our minds but in our hearts - we have let go of the selfish grasping of the second Noble Truth and the Dukkha that permeates life in the first Noble Truth can no more cling to us than the water can cling to the lotus leaf. Impermanence is also seen in our tradition as the *raison d'être* of the practice of meditation.

Dogen Zenji says:

Zazen is not "step-by-step meditation". Rather it is simply the easy and pleasant practice of a Buddha, the realization of the Buddha's Wisdom. The Truth appears, there being no more delusion. If you understand this, you are completely free, like a dragon that has obtained water or a tiger that reclines on a mountain. The supreme Law will then appear of itself, and you will be free of weariness and confusion.

In the Zen/Chan lineage it is by letting go of the twin illusions of permanence and possession that "the truth appears, there being no more delusion". This is what we practice in zazen, the letting go of illusion, the letting go of permanence.

This is also the joy of Impermanence. Being impermanent I must live fully in this present moment. Accepting - no embracing - our impermanence opens us to this way of mindful living in the present moment. We may never pass this way again so we need to experience every moment - as opposed to every thing - that life has to offer. Smell the grass - or the traffic. Stop to wonder at the beauty of the sunset, or the snow. Open your arms to the nurturing moisture of the rain. Neither they nor we will ever be in this situation again. The past is already dead - as the same sutra also says, "*Just as a person awakening does not see those things they met in dreams; so a beloved person will no longer be seen when they have died.*" And this refers not just to the final death but to the death of each moment.

We mourn when someone finally dies, yet we let ourselves be distracted from them when we're sitting together at dinner - and that dinner will never come again. It is dead. We take pictures to remember a moment - and forget to actually experience it. We spend evenings out together looking at our phones and updating Facebook rather than embracing the moment, the food, the drink, the music, the person. These are the things that impermanence calls us to correct in our lives.

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

This living in the present moment has to walk a delicate line - neither veering into hedonism on the one hand nor nihilism on the other. We must be neither trapped in the sense pleasures of the moment nor should we stop planning for the future and working to increase human flourishing just because all things pass away. Dependent Origination tells us that even though we may pass away the things we do keep producing rippling effects throughout time. Even though the flourishing we engender passes away it will itself engender further - and greater - flourishing in the future.

This though isn't an easy practice. Sometimes I think it might be easier to renounce the world and go meditate in a hermitage; but we can do it - or at least we can try to make progress. Take a first step and stop referring to anything as "mine", even in your mind. The car you drive isn't 'my car', it's 'the car I drive'. Your money isn't 'my money', but 'the money I have for now'. Your family isn't 'my wife, my husband, my children', but 'the people I love'. As you let go of "mineness" you'll find that dukkha as well will no longer cling to you. Like the lotus you'll rise from the muck of possession and give birth to the flower of compassion.

Finally, we Buddhists don't live passionless lives because of impermanence. We don't forgo happiness because it will pass away. We don't refuse to love because we'll eventually lose that person we love. Rather, we should experience our emotions more fully because we know they'll pass away - yet we strive not to cling to them and not to get trapped by them. Impermanence isn't just our hope but the seat of our joy as well. We are not to be dispassionate but simply not ruled by our passions. Feel what you feel. Love who you love. Have without greed. Let go without loss. These are the ways of the Wise; not denying what is, but experiencing it knowing that it is neither ours nor will it ever come this way again - if I can use the theme of half the proms in the country. And then you will have let go of selfish grasping and found your security in Nirvana.

Shi Ge Jie
Glenn Gustafson deshi, OPB



Illustrations by Lawrence Akers, OPB

On the Zafu: Tips on Meditation Why We Sit

The practice of sitting is essential to "train the brain"--the place where our minds emerge--to pay more attention to our everyday experiences, so that we might embrace a deep awareness without attaching unnecessary linguistic labels to our experiences. We may call this nonjudgmental awareness.

While practicing zazen, the human brain changes its physiology to induce a more relaxed and deeply calm state of awareness. Over time the brain itself changes its underlying structure to increase the actual capacity for awareness. Thus, with experience and time, the brain is able to remain aware of more aspects of our daily life than before training began. As David Kalupahana reminds us: Early Buddhism (the Buddhism of Siddhartha Gautama) emphasizes the fact that a beginner is not in a position to reach the final state of freedom all at once, but only by a gradual process of training, gradual working out, and gradual practice.

If we have an increased capacity for awareness, we are better able to navigate our world with effectiveness and happiness. Because of this insight from modern science--a valuable "tool" for understanding our world--we see that the teacher is right, and there is more to zazen than "just sitting!"

Who are Pragmatic Buddhists? Meet Dan Williams, Formal Student

I began my spiritual life after ending up in jail a few times and attending a 12 step program for drug recovery. It was suggested that I find a Higher Power, and the search was on. After 15 years of wandering through a variety of religions, I read Buddhism Plain and Simple by Steve Hagen and thought to myself 'Well, that makes sense'. Since then, I've practiced meditation and attended a number of sanghas from a variety of traditions until in 2012 created a non-lineage based group called Open Sangha. Open Sangha is a friendly rag tag group of Buddhist flavored meditators. We come from many different backgrounds and range from beginners to highly seasoned practitioners. But we're united in our earnest desire to see clearly and live compassionately. We relish the lack of structure that lineagelessness grants us, because it invites us to discover through personal experience without having to constantly fit our observations into a preexisting framework. The Dharma is our common language, but we share many tongues and peer from many perspectives.

During 2014 I realized that Open Sanghas' freedom was also its limitation, and wandered into the Columbus chapter of the Order of Pragmatic Buddhism. I believe I have found the next step in my journey. It appears the saying that "When the student is ready, the teacher appears" continues to hold true.

Sutra of the Month: From the Atthakavagga

III - Octet on the Corrupt

1. Some corrupt minded people engage in arguments; but then again some just people engage in arguments also; only the wise refuse to be drawn into arguments that arise; for this reason there are no discontented among the wise.
2. How can one see the error of their views when they are led on by their preferences and clinging to their own inclinations? A person argues from their own understanding.
3. The person who, unasked, speaks of their own morality and good works; the wise call ignoble.
4. But a practitioner at peace in mindfulness who does not boast of their own morality; this person, with no attachments, the wise call noble.
5. Those whose philosophies are arbitrarily contrived and formulated to give themselves a good feeling about how they live; these people exist in a peace that is conditioned by instability.
6. It is hard to get past the dogmas of philosophies; thus a person seeking to choose amongst these dogmas may pick and discard many philosophies.
7. For one who has shaken off attachment there is nowhere in the world a prejudiced view of different philosophies; having abandoned all illusion and conceit, this person has no need to be called by any dogma. This one is unattached.
8. A person being attached to a dogma has need to argue its value; but one being unattached to any dogma has no reason to be drawn into argument. For this person indeed there is nothing either grasped or rejected. All dogmatic views have been shaken off.

Commentary:

With the third discourse we begin the theme that is most prevalent in this collection - that of having no need to argue about the Way you follow if you don't judge it in comparison with others. This discourse also introduces the concept that is called 'intoku' in Zen - the good done in secret. We are enjoined not to boast of our morality or works and to not choose a philosophy because it conforms to how we already are. Yet we are not told to reject all philosophies, but rather to reject clinging to them. The wise person is one who neither grasps nor rejects any philosophy.



Ask a Monk:

Q: What is meant by "Taking the Precepts"?

A: To use a Christian analogy if we consider Taking the Refuges as somewhat like Baptism (the point at which one formally 'becomes' a Buddhist) then Taking the Precepts might be thought of as akin to Confirmation. Taking the Precepts is when a person makes the further commitment to make an effort to follow the five lay precepts. In Pragmatic Buddhism these are meant to move us toward actively bringing good into the world (increasing good karma). We phrase them as:

1. I undertake the training of loving-kindness.
2. I undertake the training of generosity.
3. I undertake the training of moderation and contentment.
4. I undertake the training of positive speech.
5. I undertake the training of life-affirming action.

Book Suggestions:

In this section I'm hoping to give some suggestions based on books that members of the OPB are reading. They will probably include quite a range of topics. This month we have:

Buddhism without Beliefs. Stephen Batchelor. Riverhead Books. 1998

Bringing the Sacred to Life. John Daido Looi. Shambala. 2008

The Centers for Pragmatic Buddhism offer services such as: Weddings, Blessings, Purifications of home and business, Memorial Services, Educational services, Speakers for events and Chaplain services. Please contact the Center near you for more information at the email addresses below.

OPB Rule of the Month: *Each month we'll present one of the guiding Rules of the Order of Pragmatic Buddhists*

2) The Rule of Opposites

There are two kinds of people in the world. Those who think there are two kinds of people, and those who don't.

Contacting Us: Visit our website at www.pragmaticbuddhism.org or one of our Centers:

The contact for our St. Louis Center for Pragmatic Buddhism is Danielle McCartney at danielle.mccartney@pragmaticbuddhism.org

The contact for our Central Ohio Center for Pragmatic Buddhism is Glenn Gustafson at glenn.gustafson@pragmaticbuddhism.org Or www.cocpb.com

The contact for our West Georgia Center for Pragmatic Buddhism is Lawrence Akers at lawrence.akers@pragmaticbuddhism.org

Property of the Order of Pragmatic Buddhists. No parts may be reprinted or retransmitted without permission of the OPB. Contents may include materials from previous CPB/OPB publications.