

## Chapter News

All of our Chapters will be focusing on the same topic each month for Dharma Talks. In January we'll be looking at Causality. The individual session topics are listed below:

### St Louis Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

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

Jan 8: Causality  
Jan 15: Dependent Origination  
Jan 22: Ethics and Causality  
Jan 29: Consciousness/Bodymind

### Kawatha Lakes Centre for Pragmatic Buddhism:

Here is The Kawatha Lakes chapter schedule for November:

Jan 7: Dependent Origination  
Jan 14: Consciousness/ Mind  
Jan 21: Ethics and Causality  
Jan 28: 12 Link Chain of Causation

### Central Ohio Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

The topics for November are:

Jan 4 - Causality  
Jan 11 - Dependent Origination  
Jan 18 - Causality and Karma  
Jan 25 - Consciousness/Bodymind

### Atlanta, GA

We are adding a Center in the Atlanta area. Check the website - <http://www.pragmaticbuddhism.org> for more information.

### The Sensei' Cushion:

Last month we mentioned that in his book the Seven Arts of Change, Shaner sensei provides six organizational development questions. The first question we focused on was the last one he asks: "why do people change?," the answer being, "They change because they are given a clear reason to." Let's briefly explore the first primary question: "Where is the [an] organization's culture?" For our purposes, think of an organization as "a collection of human energies ... being applied in an organized environment" (Shaner 17). An organization could be a sangha, a family, a multinational corporation, a governing body, etcetera. What is an organization's culture? Shaner sensei writes that it is "the sum total of the emotions, experiences, beliefs, and expectations" of each human being therein. It is the organization's "collective mind" or "spirit" (Shaner 17-18). So where is that mind, that spirit? It resides within each and every member of that organization. If you belong to an organization (probably several), the culture of that organization is partly within you. This can be a disconcerting realization when we are part of organizations that we find problematic because it means that WE are part of the problem. Realizing that culture resides in the people who are shaped by it is a call to be differently. Perhaps it is even, upon mindful reflection, a clear reason to change. \/\

### The Buddhist Concept of Self (Might Not be What You Think)

After observing that the world is not static, but is instead changing, evolving, transitioning and flowing into and out of itself according to the process of dependent origination (causality), the Buddha investigated the human "self" (atman) with this in mind. After examining his own thoughts, speech and behaviors, and the thoughts, speech and behaviors of those around him, he realized that the self, too, is changing, evolving, transitioning and flowing into and out of itself according to the process of dependent origination. In short, when the Buddha looked deeply into "the mirror" of rigorous self-honesty, he observed that there was a very different kind of self staring back at him than the one most people assumed. I'm talking of course (as was the Buddha) about the common idea that the self is somehow unaffected by change, that it is permanent and isolated from the change that occurs all around us. Today we know through the aid of scientific investigation that the self and all of its constituents (aggregates; skandhas) are continuously changing through causal influences--just like everything in our Universe. It turns out the self is not exempt! The Buddha did not have access to the tools of modernity that we do today, but he did not need them either. Using the basic human skill of awareness, he allowed himself to take an honest look at himself, and he realized that indeed the "self of today" is unique when compared to the "self of yesterday" and will be unique to the "self of tomorrow." The reason is that the human self, like all things in this Universe, is animated by the process of dependent origination--and this means that it is continuously changing according to its innumerable influences.

### But Isn't the Self Something?

It is precisely because the entire Universe as we know it is animated by dependent origination that all things are also perpetually interconnected and interdependent with all other things. In other words, a kind of continuity among things indeed exists because they are changing, evolving, transitioning and flowing into and out of the relationships of which they are part and parcel. Think of dependent origination as an ongoing process that is itself the mechanism for relationship-building among things. The "self of today" emerges from the "self of yesterday" and will become the "self of tomorrow"--the "self" as we know it at any given moment is connected to what it was and what it will become by the process of dependent origination. Now we come to the next point: the self is an expression of its influences, or as we state in Pragmatic Buddhism, it is an "expression of the Universe." This means that our genetics, social life, society, likes and dislikes, habits and predispositions all converge to create the kind of self we are at any given moment. Once we recognize this, and are willing to take a look into the mirror of rigorous self-honesty, we become empowered in the way the Buddha wanted us to be. We realize that we can fundamentally change the direction of our lives, and the lives of those we interact with simply by increasing the level of awareness and intentionality in our lives. When we add these essential ingredients, we can begin changing the kind of "expressed self" we are, and this is possible because of dependent origination and the impermanent nature of the Universe.

### The Mirror of Rigorous Self-Honesty

The most difficult part about Buddhism is looking in the mirror--an aphorism for rigorous self-honesty. The problem is no one can do it for us, and if we don't look with honesty, we can't know what to fix about ourselves. But even if we are brave enough to look deeply at our own insufficiencies and inconsistencies (the "awareness"

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part), we still have to accept the reality we find. And this is where most of us run away. Many people “know” cognitively what their issues are, but they don’t accept them. Instead they build up defense mechanisms, and the most popular one today besides denial and projection (painting our problems on others, think of sarcasm and criticism, which are often used unskillfully and habitually) is rationalization, where we come up with theories and ideas about why we behave certain ways that—deep down—mostly serve to protect us from having to look in the mirror. No matter how intelligent we are, we cannot escape the basic reality that if we have issues, the only way to fix them is to address them through skillful action; no amount of explanation makes our problems go away, only reforming action can. So for those brave persons willing to look in the mirror, there is a great reward: EMPOWERMENT. If we are aware of what we would like to fix, and truly accept it, we are at the third step of the Threefold Ethic of Pragmatic Buddhism: action. Only after acceptance can we take action where there are no “inhibitions” that will push us off the necessary course towards self-cultivation and personal betterment. When we are aware and accepting of who we are, we have the information and attitude necessary to take action that will allow us to make the kinds of changes in ourselves we seek. Developing a regular practice is the most direct way to learn the art and skill of awareness, acceptance and action. It starts with looking in the mirror, and ends with the positive, life-affirming changes you are seeking. Time to get started...

Jim Eubanks Sensei, OPB



Illustrations by Lawrence Akers, OPB

## On the Zafu: Tips on Meditation

### Is Zazen just the time you spend on your cushion?

There was an excellent article in the Winter 2014 edition of “Tricycle” stating that zazen itself should be viewed as a koan - “an expression of opposites that we are challenged to dissolve”. Notice, not resolve but dissolve. The article’s author, Barry Magid, states that the real meaning of zazen - or “just sitting” should be understood as:

*‘Sitting’ means sitting, walking, working, eating, speaking and being silent {and I would add playing with our children, mowing the lawn and even (gasp) having sex}. ‘Just’ means that there is nothing in the world that is not sitting...We are describing a way of being in the world in which everything we encounter is fully and completely itself. Nothing is merely a means to an end, nothing is merely a step on a path to somewhere else.*

Thus, zazen is not just the discipline of sitting on our zafu but is the entire of our lives; and it is also not a means to achieve realization but rather an expression of the realization that already exists in our being. One Zen teacher said that “Zazen is useless” and - especially in a Western sense - it is. It is useless for getting us to realization because when we practice zazen we are expressing realization. It is useless for calming us down because when we are realized we are calm.

## Who are Pragmatic Buddhists? Meet Jim Kears, OPB

I'm Jim Kears. I am 54 years old and live in Lindsay, Ontario, Canada. I was born into a military family and spent my formative years travelling across the country, living a few years here, a few years there – I have lived from the east coast to the west coast – so I grew up with a living example of impermanence! I first began my study of Buddhism in the early 1990's and have been a member of different sanghas from different lineages, but found that they did not really represent my understanding of what Buddhism meant in a modern, Western context. One day while searching the net, I came across the web site for the Center for Pragmatic Buddhism. This site seemed to describe my way of thinking and so I joined this sangha. The Order for Pragmatic Buddhism has expanded my understanding of Buddhism and exposed me to a deeper, more meaningful practice.

## Jim Kears, Deshi, OPB

*Jim is the Chapter Leader of the Centre for Pragmatic Buddhism in Lindsay, Ontario*

## Sutra of the Month: From the Atthakavagga

### I - Discourse on Sense Desires

1. If a person attains the sense pleasures they desire they will be happy, having attained what they desire.
2. If those sense pleasures slip away, however; they will feel pain as if pierced by an arrow.
3. The person who avoids seeking after sense pleasures as they would avoid treading on a snake; that person, being mindful, transcends worldly attachments.
4. Whatever person greedily pursues possessions and sense pleasures, people and things;
5. That person will be burdened with troubles and unease will overwhelm them like water entering a broken boat.
6. That person, always mindful, avoiding sense pleasures and greed; having avoided them will cross over the flood like one who has bailed out their boat and reaches the further shore.

### Commentary:

Some translations use 'sensuality' or even 'sexuality' here but I chose to use sense pleasures because I believe it's important to remember that we can get just as caught up in the pleasures of beautiful art or music or companionship - or solitude - as we can in sexual pleasure. It's also important to note that this discourse calls out people who 'greedily pursue' pleasures and things. We'll see in later discourses that the greedy pursuit is what causes problems, not the having. Possessions, or even sense pleasures, are not being condemned here but the greedy pursuit of them. This is a fitting beginning to this collection of discourses as it sets the tone right away of a middle way between hedonism and asceticism.



## Ask a Monk:

**Q:** If we practice mindfulness, living in the moment, how do we ever plan for the future – doesn't that mean our minds must be elsewhere??

**A:** Practicing mindfulness is about practicing with intentionality. When we practice being in the moment, our intention is to be fully present in the moment. So if we want to plan for something in the future, our intention is to consider possibilities of future times. As long as we pay attention to the details of what we are doing, then we are still practicing mindfulness.

## 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:

[Living Yogacara: An Introduction to Consciousness-Only Buddhism.](#) Tagawa Shun'ei. Wisdom Publications. 2009

[Life's Meandering Path: A Secular Approach to Gautama Buddha's Guide to Living.](#) Karma Yeshe Rabgye. 2014

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

### 27) Rule of Illusionary Value

Most people will sacrifice more and fight harder to protect a valuable illusion than they will to defend an unglamorous truth.

**Contacting Us:** Visit our website at [www.pragmaticbuddhism.org](http://www.pragmaticbuddhism.org) or one of our Centers:

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