

Chapter News

In May the Chapters will be focusing on Enlightenment - in Buddhism and specifically in Pragmatic Buddhism.

Other Chapter news is below.

St Louis Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

The St. Louis Center is planning a new activity for May. We'll be doing a Meditation Hike on May 16th starting at 10am. We'll do a silent meditation hike stopping for other meditation techniques along the way. Visit our Meetup page for more information and to sign up.

Central Ohio Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

During May we have some exciting events.

On May 2nd we'll be participating in the Buddhist Network of Central Ohio's Vesak Celebration. There will be silent meditation, a sutra service and a vegetarian potluck shared with many sangha from Central Ohio.

On May 3rd we'll host our own Vesak celebration with sutra readings, bathing the baby Buddha and a Taking Refuge ceremony for those becoming new Buddhists.

West Georgia Center for Pragmatic Buddhism:

The CPB-West Georgia is moving to a new location closer to downtown Atlanta at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta. Sitting there will begin on Thursday May 8th from 6:30pm - 8pm and continue every other Thursday at 6:30.

The Sensei' Cushion - Meghan Ruddy Sensei:

When can you change the culture?

Thus far in our series based on the work of David Shaner sensei, we've discussed why people change (because they're given good reason to), where our cultures lie (within each of their members), and whose culture is it (both ours and not ours depending on our perception). But if we ever hope to change a culture, or change anything, we must begin by owning it NOW.

Once we cultivate appropriate and ennobling view, or become aware, about how we are part owners in our cultures, we can then accept this and begin to think differently about them. By fully accepting our roles, we begin to think like owners. This change in thinking then needs to lead to changes in behavior, in our actions. Awareness. Acceptance. Action.

If deep, lasting change is to occur we must practice this awareness, acceptance, and action everyday. Such everyday intentional practice, living the practice, life as practice, is sometimes referred to as shugyo. It is everyday repetition, lived self-regulation and compassion for when we fail. It is life as monastery.

So when can you change the culture, change anything? NOW. How can you change it? Shugyo. ^\

Mourning and Comfort in Buddhism

During a recent teaching on Impermanence I was asked by one of the attendees what Buddhism had to offer in terms of comfort for those in mourning - especially for the death of a loved one. He had recently attended a Christian funeral for a friend who had died unexpectedly and was impressed by the focus of the service on comforting those who had known the deceased and felt that this emphasis was lacking in Buddhist services and in Buddhist teaching in general since we don't teach of an afterlife or an eternal soul. In the teaching I responded that while we didn't teach an afterlife or eternal soul we also don't teach their non-existence - we follow the path of the Buddha who said that such concerns were not important to the core of his teaching - dukkha and its cessation. So we must continue on with the realization that we simply don't know what happens after death; but that dealing with that loss is part and parcel of dealing with dukkha.

Honestly, I felt unsatisfied with my own answer so I started meditating on the question. It so happened that during this time of meditation Eubanks sensei gave me my Dharma Name - Ge Jie, or 'he who is connected to all things' - and with that it clicked in my mind. Our comfort in times of loss is in the teaching of interconnection and dependent origination. When we begin thinking about these two teachings we realize that these very pragmatic teachings offer a beautiful hope and comfort not found in other religions. So what is this hope and comfort?

First let's look at the teaching of dependent origination. The Buddha taught that, "If this occurs, that arises. Without this occurring, that does not arise." What this means is that every compound thing - in the Mahayana tradition everything outside of the grounding Emptiness - comes into being because of a specific set of causal influences. This is a very pragmatic concept and one that stands at the core of modern science as well. Everything about us and our own situation has arisen because of specific people and events in the past - going all the way back to the beginning of time.

Neal DeGrasse Tyson has said:

"Recognize that the very molecules that make up your body, the atoms that construct the molecules, are traceable to the crucibles that were once the centers of high mass stars that exploded their chemically rich guts into the galaxy, enriching pristine gas clouds with the chemistry of life. So that we are all connected to each other biologically, to the earth chemically and to the rest of the universe atomically. That's kinda cool! That makes me smile and I actually feel quite large at the end of that. It's not that we are better than the universe, we are part of the universe. We are in the universe and the universe is in us."

This refers to the physical manifestation of dependent origination, but it also affects our mental, emotional and spiritual being as well. Not only we, but all the things around us that are important in our lives are the result of those who have gone before us....of who they were and what they did. This interconnection doesn't disappear when they die but continues to live on in us and in our lives.

Anyone who was important enough in our lives for us to mourn their passing will have had an effect on our lives and on who we are - and continue to be. Their influence on us and on others who share our lives will continue to

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be seen as long as we open our eyes and look for it. We don't have to hope for an eventual - an unknowable - reunion in an afterlife to see this person again; we can see them every time we look in the mirror. Every time we smile or laugh. Every time we offer an act of compassion...and yes, every time we cry and mourn as well. There is no greater comfort than to honor our predecessors and to see them again through every act of our lives.

It is indeed more true in Buddhism than in any other religions that those who die are here with us always; because they are truly here with us, in us and around us. Not in any corporeal - or non-corporeal - form but in their influences, the causal formations that continue to affect our lives as long as we live. In the same way we will continue on in the causal influences we have had and will have on others; and this is another reason for us to practice compassion and altruism - so that those influences are to the benefit of those we leave behind, not to their detriment.

I want to close with one stanza from a poem by Uchiyama Roshi:

*Life is not born because a person is born.
The life of the Universe has been ladled into the hardened idea of "I".
Life does not disappear because a person dies;
Simply the life of the Universe has been poured out of this hardened idea of "I" back into the Universe.*

Peace,
Shi Ge Jie
Glenn Gustafson deshi, OPB



Illustrations by Lawrence Akers, OPB

On the Zafu: Tips on Meditation

Location, timing and supplies

Remaining mindful of both the location and timing of your meditation is essential regular practice. You should choose a regular location that is quiet and peaceful – such as a corner of a bedroom that can be closed off from the rest of the house. In comfortable weather sitting outside is a great idea. Remember *zazen* is not about cutting yourself off from the world but about realizing your connection to it.

When just starting your practice it can be helpful to schedule your sitting at the same time each day to facilitate getting your body accustomed to a cyclical rhythm. As you progress in your practice new research is actually showing that changing the time of your sitting deeper cognitive changes.

Sitting supplies can be very simple depending on your choice of posture. For most postures you will need a base cushion and a higher cushion or bench on which to sit. Most Buddhist practitioners use a *zabuton* and *zafu* or *zabuton* and *seiza* bench.

Who are Pragmatic Buddhists? Meet Ben Butina, Formal Student

My name is Ben, and I live in Latrobe, Pennsylvania with my wife and our four kids. I am a training and development manager and a graduate student in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. Aside from psychology, I am interested in history, philosophy (especially Stoicism), art, cigars, and craft beer. I have been meditating in the Shinzen Young/Basic Mindfulness tradition for several years and I lead a small mindfulness group here in Western PA (www.middlestream.org). I've sat with Buddhist groups in the past, but it didn't sit well with me (pun intended) that I didn't share their beliefs. I came upon OPB just by searching around the Internet for sympathetic groups and it suits me just fine so far. :)

If you're interested in my ramblings on various disconnected subjects, you can read my blog at www.approximatelyforever.com

Sutra of the Month: From the Atthakavagga

IV - Octet on the Pure

1. Some say: 'I have seen pure people and I say that by their views people are made pure.' Holding this opinion the seer of purity returns to study dharmas, hoping to see purity there.
2. If a person is purified by their philosophical views or released from pain through knowledge, they have gained their purification by way of another and they are marked by that path.
3. The wise person does not acknowledge purification that comes from another; for this one does not cling to what is seen or heard or to morality or good works and neither to good nor evil. This person leaves behind what had been grasped and builds up nothing in this world.
4. Moving from teacher to teacher, from philosophy to philosophy many cling to one thing and then another. Following their disturbed passions they never let go of attachments.
5. Clinging to religious dogma and observance a person swings from joy to sorrow led by their passions; but the wise person being freed from attachments does not swing from joy to sorrow, from one thing to another.
6. The wise person is a peace with all philosophies and does not cling to what is seen or heard or felt. This person, going about with clear sight is not changed by this world.
7. They do not advance any view or utter any preferences; they don't say, "I have the only way"; having cut the knotted cord of attachments they seek for nothing in this world.
8. The wise person goes beyond all boundaries and clings to nothing seen nor heard nor felt. This person seizes on neither passion nor dispassion; places nothing in the world as first among many.

Commentary:

This discourse returns to the concept that we cannot be purified by what we learn from others or from the dogma we follow. Those who hope that a doctrine or teaching will free them are constantly frustrated and move 'from teacher to teacher ...philosophy to philosophy' without ever gaining the liberation they seek - because liberation comes through our own efforts. Yet the wise person does not disparage philosophies or doctrines but rather learns what can be learned from them and incorporates the best into their own practices. This discourse reminds me of the teaching of the Buddha that his teachings should be viewed as a raft to get us across the flood. Just as one does not keep carrying the raft once they have reached the other shore we should not cling to even his teachings.



Ask a Monk:

Q: Why is some chanting done in other languages than English

A: In Pragmatic Buddhism we usually recite and chant in English so that the meaning is apparent to everyone. That being said, there are some times when the meaning is not the primary goal of chanting but the goal may rather be producing the appropriate mindful state in practitioners. This can often be done best by removing the tendency to think about what you're hearing and focus instead on a calming sound. Because of the structure of both Sanskrit and Japanese these languages can be very amenable to producing the desired mental state when chanted. Indeed, most Sanskrit mantras don't actually have a meaning per se that can be translated but are strings of syllables specifically designed to produce a certain mental state in those who chant them or hear them being chanted. Even when meaning is applied that is not the primary goal of the mantra. The same is true of many Japanese gatha in the Zen tradition.

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 two fictional accounts of the Buddha's life to celebrate Vesak:

Buddha. Deepak Chopra. Harper Books. 2007

Siddhartha. Herman Hesse. New Directions. 1951

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*

3) Metaphysical Truth

A Metaphysical Truth is something upon which you and I happen to agree, with which someone who is bigger or smarter than us does not happen to disagree.

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

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