Issue 01 2021. Photo by Nicholas Allott of New Year’s Day dana.
This too will pass

One of the most priceless of teachings that helps with depression, is also one of the simplest. But teachings that seem simple are easy to misunderstand. Only when we are finally free from depression can we claim to have truly understood the following story.

The new prisoner was afraid and very depressed. The stone walls of his cell soaked up any warmth; the hard iron bars sneered at all compassion; the jarring collision of steel, as many gates closed, locked hope beyond reach. His heart sank as low as his sentence stretched long. On the wall, by the head of his cot, he saw scratched in the stone the following word: THIS TOO WILL PASS.

These words pulled him through, as they must have supported the prisoner before him. No matter how hard it got, he would look at the inscription and remember, ‘This too will pass.’ On the day he was released, he knew the truth of those words. His time was completed; jail too had passed.

As he regained his life, he often thought about that message, writing it on bits of paper to leave by his bedside, in his car and at work. Even when times were bad, he never got depressed. He simply remembered ‘This too will pass’ and struggled on through. The bad times never seemed to last all that long. Then when good times came he enjoyed them, but never too carelessly. Again he remembered, ‘This too will pass’, and so carried on working at his life, taking nothing for granted. The good times always seemed to last uncommonly long.

Even when he got cancer, ‘This too will pass’ gave him hope. Hope gave him strength and positive attitude that beat the disease. One day the specialist confirmed that ‘the cancer too had passed’. At the end of his days, on his death bed, he whispered to his loved ones, ‘This too will pass’, and settled easily into death. His words were his last gift of love to his family and friends. They learned from him that ‘grief too will pass’.

Depression is a prison that many of us pass through. ‘This too will pass’ helps us pull through. It also avoids one of the great causes of depression, which is taking the happy times too much for granted.

Citation – “Opening the Door of Your Heart”, Ajahn Brahm

The Emperor’s Ring

This story recalls the tale of a young Emperor, a man inexperienced in ruling a kingdom. Whenever things were going well in the kingdom he would rejoice and throw parties to celebrate his success, yet because of these celebrations he was sacrificing many valuable resources, forgetting his duties as a ruler.

A time came where the Empire started to slowly crumble and it seemed that the days of economic instability, unrest and social disorder was becoming a vicious cycle. The Emperor would not know how to deal with this and would spend his days worrying about the problems instead of working to fix the issues. Realising this, a few of his wise Ministers pondered amongst themselves how to best advise the young leader. The decision they finally came to was that instead of telling the Emperor what to do, they went to a Goldsmith and asked him to make a ring engraved with the words “This too will pass”. They gave the ring to the Emperor and asked him to wear it on all occasions. Whenever the Emperor would look upon the ring, he was reminded that he didn’t have to worry too much since the bad times would pass naturally if he only focused on what was in his control and took one small step at a time to build towards a sustainable future of his kingdom. The ring gave the Emperor something that he would always need when the times were tough. It also gave him the wisdom to appreciate and value the times that were peaceful and prosperous. This simple gift gave both hope and wisdom.

Pañña is the Pali term for wisdom or insight; seeing the world clearly without distortion. It is the deep understanding of the human condition that emerges out of the pure and peaceful mind. Insight into the nature of things, whether small or huge and life changing, always sets you free and fills your heart with unconditional love and compassion for all beings.

Citation – Based on Ajahn Brahm’s ‘Friday Night Talks’.

All proceeds will go towards Dhammaloka and the BSWA community activities

For the promotion of rings on sale at the Dhammaloka Library. Page design and photograph by Oshi Elan. Article editing assistance by Anuki and Sahan.
by Ven Canda Bhikkhuni

On 8th November, Ajahn Brahm blessed our annual Anukampa Volunteer Meeting (via zoom) with his benevolent presence and wisdom. Our good friend Lia Lalli from Italy very kindly transcribed his enthusing address to our team, for you to read and enjoy and I offer some excerpts for you here. Please visit www.anukampaproject.org/news for the full article, which is packed with inspiring stories from Ajahn’s life and the early Buddhist suttas!

AJAHN BRAHM:

“I have been teaching meditation for almost fifty years now. One of the first meditation teachings I gave was when I was a twenty-two-year-old high school teacher in Devon where I taught children between the ages of eleven and eighteen. I was asked to do the morning assembly and I got permission from the school Principal to teach meditation there every day before class. I taught six hundred and fifty children anapanasati – how to meditate on the breath – and it was a wonderful thing to share.

Many years later I met one of those students who told me that learning how to meditate had changed his whole life. I tell this story to emphasise how important service is. However small and insignificant we feel our service may be, it can literally change other people’s lives. Service is key to any community.

Not only do I serve Anukampa Bhikkhuni Project, but I also serve all over the world: in Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, Sri-Lanka, Hong Kong, and beyond. I am the spiritual director, advisor, and patron of many institutions and my responsibilities continue to grow.

People ask me why I do it – they say I shouldn’t take on any more responsibilities or service – but I believe that one can always do some more because beautiful giving is energizing. It makes one’s meditation glisten, it imparts power, joy and stillness. That is the reason why many of you have done lots of service already and continue to serve, in small and big ways. You are all important to this project.

Maybe you don’t realise just how few really good monasteries for women there are in this world. There are not many at all – and you are building one in England! There is a long way to go, but so much has been done so far. There will be a time when you wake up one morning and you will see, it is there! It’s happened!

What is service other than letting go of what we want and what we need, for something which is much more beautiful? By serving Anukampa Bhikkhuni Project you will be doing something remarkable for women who haven’t had much of a chance in Theravada Buddhism or in any other type of Buddhism for that matter.

The overwhelming lack of nun’s monasteries has made it near impossible for them to have a
chance to shine and have their place to teach. Venerable Canda is a wonderful teacher and to listen to a bhikkhuni give such a good talk, to hear the depth of kindness, inspiration and beauty in her teaching – to hear the Dhamma explained by someone who is actually living it to the best of her ability – is incredibly inspiring.

Maybe there can be other women who can join her and make something really inspiring in the UK. Nowadays when we look for images, for people who really inspire us in our home country, who can we look to? Who – just by their lifestyle, example, care, and their teaching – can really make us feel that this life has a lot of meaning? I doubt that the British political elite can be a source of inspiration. However, I’m going to mention someone who has been a great source of inspiration recently: the newly elected Vice President of the USA, Kamala Harris, who, being a woman, born to an Indian mother and black Jamaican father and raised in the USA, had everything stacked up against her. Despite this, she managed to become the Vice President of the United States. So, everything is possible!

Inspiring acts do not just happen through kindness; there is a word from Kamala Harris’s acceptance speech that stuck in my mind: “Audacity.” Just like Joe Biden had the audacity to nominate a black woman as vice president, I had the audacity to ordain women as bhikkhunis, the audacity to put them there in front. This word emphasises how ground-breaking and necessary some actions are at times. It needs to be done and we are going to do it, to make it happen. That is where the joy and the bliss of service come up – not just any old service, but serving a marvellous, inspiring cause which will change so many people’s lives, especially in the UK but also in the rest of the world.”

For the full article, please visit: https://anukampaproject.org/news/

If you would like to contribute towards our vision for a bhikkhuni monastery in England, any donation is greatly appreciated: www.anukampaproject.org/donate

For more about us and our events, including talks from Ajahn Brahm & Ven Canda’s online November retreat, “Bliss Upon Bliss Upon Bliss” visit: www.anukampaproject.org/events and Anukampa Bhikkhuni Project YouTube channel.

Thought of the Day

A few hundred years ago, a man sat down under an apple tree and noticed an apple falling down, so was the discovery of gravity, one of the four fundamental forces of nature. With this knowledge, creative geniuses in the world invented aeroplanes to space rockets, crossed the oceans and landed on the moon.

A few thousand years ago, a man sat down under a bodhi tree and with his eyes closed in meditation, noticed the mind always outflows in the direction of happiness. So was the discovery that the highest forms of happiness are born apart from sensory pleasures. You too have the knowledge and the creative mind, so what would be your innovation?

Thought and illustration by Oshi Elan.
The September 2020 to March 2021 BSWA Committee. Photo by Boon Tan.

From left to right: Tonny Wijaya (IT Supervisor), Dennis Sheppard (President), Kseniya Abusaif (Vice President), Linda McGuire (Secretary), Ajahn Brahmavamso (Spiritual Director), Paul Firth (Ordinary Member), Lucky Kodituwakku (Membership Secretary), Ajahn Hasapanna (Assistant Spiritual Director), Bill Prins (Events Coordinator), Jee Too Foo (Assistant Treasurer), Natalie Mar (Treasurer).

Absent: Ajahn Brahmali (2nd Assistant Spiritual Director), Gah Siong Lam (Assistant Secretary), Doria Giuffre (Ordinary Member). Cecilia Mitra (External Affairs).

Ajahn Brahm fielding questions with Ven. Mudu at the Great Southern Hermitage in Albany. Photo by Matt Gibson
Ethical Practice, the True Buddhist Way!

By Suladdha

Buddhist Ethics play an important part in the practice of the Lord Buddha's teachings. Three of the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are specifically dedicated to Ethical Behaviour. Samma Vaca (Right Speech), Samma Kammanta (Right Action) & Samma Æjiva (Right Livelihood). Even the other five factors of the Path, have direct or indirect connection to Ethical Living as an essential ingredient for the ending of suffering! So, one could see that the Lord Buddha has placed a very high importance on the ethical behaviour of his disciples. The behaviour that would neither harm oneself nor harm another is the ethical behaviour. In other words, it is the behaviour that would help one’s own practice of the noble eightfold path & also, make conditions conducive, for others’ practice. One calls oneself a Buddhist when one has dedicated oneself to the practice of the noble eightfold path.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance that we Buddhists, irrespective of our level of advancement on the path, follow Buddhist ethics & behave appropriately. Lord Buddha’s advice on ethical practice involving moral conduct & appropriate behaviour could be found throughout the Pali cannon. They include the suttas such as Mahamangala Sutta, Parâbhaa, Vasala Sutta, Dhammapada etc. Lord Buddha’s advice on morality & ethical practices are essential components of our practice. In the Sallekha Sutta – MN8 (Sutta on Self-Effacement), the Lord Buddha lists 44 aspects of appropriate behaviour that is essential for the ending of suffering.

The meditation practice alone, without combining with the appropriate ethical behaviour, would not be adequate to end the journey in this never-ending cycle of births & deaths.

During his Sutta Retreats, Ven Ajahn Brahmali drives this point home, advising the retreating the benefit of being ethical. Meditation Practice is essential! So, would be the Ethical Conduct!

In a Sutta in Samyutta Nikaya, the Lord Buddha likened the whole of His Teaching to a lake & the Ethics to its shores! Here is an extract from that Sutta. “The teaching is a lake with shores of ethics, brahmin, unclouded, praised by the fine to the good. There the knowledge-masters go to bathe, and cross to the far shore without getting wet.” Sangârava Sutta SN 7:21 (Courtesy suttacentral.net)

Without Shores no Lake: without Ethics, no Dhamma! So, for we Buddhists, no option but, to be ethical!

In the Cakkavattiraja Sutta SN 55:1 (A Wheel-Turning Monarch), the Lord Buddha discourses of four things that a Stream Enterer possess.

They are experiential confidence in:

1. the Buddha:
2. the Dhamma:
3. the Sangha:
4. ethical conduct.

(Cakkavattiraja Sutta SN55:1; Courtesy of suttacentral.net)

So, if one wishes to attain to Stream Entry, in this very life, one has to be ethical in one’s behaviour, all the time! No short cuts!

The ethical conduct includes the proper way of following precepts, practising generosity, honouring the elders, respecting the parents, respecting the ascetics etc. Generosity is part & parcel of skilful, ethical practice. Helping the struggling, rural monasteries, helping disadvantaged people, helping one’s own relatives & especially, helping strangers, caring for the sick etc. No doubt, such generous acts would bring more joy & happiness than in planning to accumulate as much as possible only for the benefit of one’s own family & children.

When we look the other way on the plight of poor, needy children, we forget that those other children could have been our own children, parents, or partners in previous lives! As part of our ethical behaviour, it is very important that we, as Buddhists, respect the Sangha in the appropriate manner. A simple & a decent dress code for visiting monasteries & places of worship such as Dhammaloka would be a good start! It is up to us to find out what is an appropriate dress when visiting a Buddhist place of worship & follow those guidelines. It is truly heartening to note that a vast majority of people do the right thing, behave appropriately & act ethically! It is a very small minority that may still be unaware of the proper, acceptable behaviour. No doubt, once aware, they would follow the right path!

The proper practice of Buddhist Etiquette will undoubtedly help us minimise the impact of conceit that binds us to this Samsara, the unending cycle of births & deaths!

When we offer requisites to good, practising Sangha, Bhikkhus & Bhikkhunis & bow down to pay our respect, it makes us feel humble; being humble, our conceit gets diluted, the ego disappears, at
At least for that moment! Ven Ajahn Brahm says that when we bow down to a Buddhist Statue, we bow down to the incomparable qualities of the Lord Buddha. Such bowing will undoubtedly help minimise our conceit & help puncture the notion of Self! That itself is a great achievement on the Buddhist path! The first Fetter, Sakkāyaditthi though not eliminated, is greatly weakened! So, why not try bring your hands together & bow down, next time? See how you would feel! Give it a go & see for yourself!!

On Fetters, please see the Samyojna Sutta (Fetters) at AN 10:13. Here is the link to Ven Bhante Sujato's English translation in SuttaCentral: https://suttacentral.net/an10.13/en/sujato

Here is an extract from a Sutta titled Nagarā Vindeyya Sutta, MN 150. “There are ascetics and brahmmins who are free of greed, hate, and delusion for sights known by the eye, who are peaceful inside, and who conduct themselves well by way of body, speech, and mind. They deserve honor, respect, reverence, and veneration.” (Courtesy of suttacentral.net)

How could we find such good, ascetics who deserve honor, respect, reverence, and veneration, in today’s world? In the same Sutta, the Lord Buddha gives the answer to that question, too! “It’s because those Venerables frequent remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forests. In such places there are no sights known by the eye to see and enjoy, no sounds known by the ear to hear and enjoy, no odours known by the nose to smell and enjoy, no flavours known by the tongue to taste and enjoy, and no touches known by the body to feel and enjoy.” We have to choose carefully & wisely! If you look around, you will find such good, practising Bhikkhus & Bhikkunis right here in Western Australia! Bodhinyana Monks Monastery, Dhammasara Nuns Monastery and Patacara & Kusala Hermitages are places where you could find such good, practising Sangha who deserve our respect. They are worthy of our honor, respect, reverence, and veneration.

In Cetanā karaniya Sutta (AN10:2), the Lord Buddha discoursed, “Mendicants, an ethical person, who has fulfilled ethical conduct, need not make a wish ‘May I have no regrets! It’s only natural that an ethical person has no regrets.” (Cetanā karaniya Sutta AN10:2; Courtesy of suttacentral.net).

The Lord Buddha continues in that Sutta to show us that Skilful Ethics lead to final liberation! So, when one is ethical, the rest of the practice falls into place!

About 2,600 years ago, in ancient India, some lay women who had gone to see the Lord Buddha, have started singing & dancing in the presence of the Greatest Spiritual Master that the world has ever known! The Lord Buddha, through his psychic powers, created a heavy darkness, (during broad daylight), brought the misbehaving women to their senses & gave the following teaching:

When this world is ever ablaze, why this laughter, why this jubilation?

Shrouded in darkness, will you not see the light? (Dhammapada, Verse 146; Courtesy of suttacentral.net)

Not only we need to create conducive conditions for our Sangha but, it would also be good if, we could provide support for those who are aspiring to be ordained as Bhikkhus & Bhikkunis. They are the trainees. They are known as Anagārikas (male trainees) & Anagārikās, (female trainees). When we visit monasteries, we see them doing most of the work, looking after the needs of the monastic Sangha. We need to help them with their needs, too!

So, we need to find out how we could help these men & women who are treading the path of renunciation, the path to liberation! Undoubtedly, such meritorious deeds would be of great fruit, great benefit!

What a good thing it would be if, one could have one's own family member aspiring to be a member of monastic Sangha? Wouldn’t the providing of both physical & more importantly, emotional support to your own relative, on their path to liberation, be one of the greatest generous deeds!

That is giving without clinging! A great act of renunciation, indeed! That way, we would be practicing an important part of the Lord Buddha’s teachings! The Practice of Renunciation, the 2nd factor of the Noble Eightfold Path! Then, we would be going against the worldly norms, swimming against the current & will be truly on the path to liberation!

Be ethical, be generous, behave well & meditate!

May all beings be ethical! May all beings be happy, well & peaceful!

Suladdha
(A Lay Buddhist)

Notes:   MN= Majjhima Nikāya; AN= Anguttara Nikāya; SN= Samyutta Nikāya
The prayer and meditation vigil for our climate crisis.

By Stewart Jarvis (Buddhist Council of Western Australia).

The Buddhist Society of Western Australia together with the Buddhist Council of Western Australia attended the prayer and meditation vigil for our climate crisis on 17 November 2020, at the WA Parliament House Steps.

This was organized by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change. The event was attended by various religious group leaders and supporters.

The following is the speech given by Stewart Jarvis on behalf of the Buddhist Council of Western Australia and the Buddhist community in Western Australia.

“In order to solve a problem, we must understand its root cause – in this case it is that Climate Change is real – and that the cause is attributable to Humans.

Whether it be burning fossil fuels or land clearing, we must take ownership of our behaviours.

A short reflection on this:
The Buddha explained that the 3 poisons of the mind, Craving/Anger and Misunderstanding lead to our troubles in this world. Let us reflect on how we can change and benefit beings and this world.

Firstly, let us see that greed, the uncontrolled desire for profit and the need to control the Earth’s resources are causing suffering and will cause long-term hardship for those that will follow us. Let us make the deep wish that this transforms into a more Discriminating Wisdom, where the value of the Earth’s resources and people are seen as precious parts of a totality, not just for what they can be used and exploited for.

Secondly, let us remember that Anger, Hatred and Ill will do not solve problems. This is true for both sides of this argument. We will be most powerful when we remove the heated emotion from our story and instead transform this energy into a Wisdom of Clarity. Then we can express our understanding and facts in a clear, objective and powerful message that gets to the heart of the matter.

Finally, let us remember that people are not inherently evil or bad. They make mistakes because they do not understand the full outcome of their actions in this moment. Like Scrooge from Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” – until the Ghost of Climate Future visits them, they will continue to follow their mistaken path.

We must awaken them to the fact that all things on this Earth are connected intimately. The Land, Air, Water and living Beings exist in interdependence upon one another. The future of the Earth depends on this awakening in us all.

Thank you.”
No Dilemma  
—Dalai Lama

On a turbulent Tuesday, unable to calm inner fears of dying, I think: Today is the day I discover if spiritual practice truly works.

Upon my breathing in-out silently forty-five minutes, implausibly, four metres away his robed figure appears, declares: “You’re one of us…”

Decades of longing for belonging passed away today.

(“My religion is kindness.”)

(“If your compassion excludes yourself it isn’t complete.”)

(“Emotional wellness in each benefits all others.”)

By Neall Calvert

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Contribute To Our Next Issue

Please send all submissions and ideas to Nicholas the editor: editoret@bswa.org.

All types of content that are relevant to the local and international BSWA community will be considered.
Paradox & Stopping in Reality

by Dennis Sheppard

Deep meditation reveals that our aggregated consciousness of feeling, perception, and movement inside our individual worlds (AKA universe or mind) are in fact quite simple, but when grasped as a created - extended conscious reality, it all becomes paradoxical.

We come to believe that each of us live inside a homogenous universe. Deep meditation reveals that this view of reality is deluded. As we practice to understand what consciousness is, we use our meditation to develop a concentrated mindfulness, with energy that is balanced to support our gaze. Our focus becomes clear as we zoom in on the present moment, the balance point between past and future.

The middle way! It is here that we find still consciousness, consciousness that does not appear to move until we notice that it is iterating. This still consciousness loops, resounding extremely fast, beginning, and ending in the present moment, countless times in the wink of an eye. It is much faster than what is possible to measure physically.

Physicists think of this condition as quantum spacetime and describe its existence as a ‘virtual world’ inside ‘virtual time and space’. It is less than 10-43 seconds in time or a span of less than 10-32 centimetres in distance. This is the limit of physical measurement. Deep meditation reveals that this iteration of still consciousness, with its still resonance, is what creates this virtual spacetime.

In terms of meditation it is an aggregated state of mind where still consciousness holds out infinite possibilities for samsara. Infinite realms of consciousness across the entire universe where dukkha with its dualistic creation is conditioned to begin and end continuously, unless we practice to have it stop.

When asked where and when consciousness began, in terms of the physical universe, the Buddha advised that he had looked back in his mind over twenty-four kalpa’s (universal cycles) and no beginning could be seen. So, in terms of an end to consciousness and its dukkha, this answer would imply that it will continue for eternity.

The realm of Samsara is a place of continuous beginnings and endings. This is why knowing the present moment, the middle way between extremes is so important. Right here and now is where we can find still consciousness before it moves to build and aggregate our conditioned karma from the past into the future. This is the place we need to do our work.

On the face of it we live a private life in our own universe while at the same time there is ‘the other’. An uncountable number of others that includes the consciousness of the animal, mineral and vegetable, both elementary and compounded, with energy that is physical and mental.

Each individual component relates to its own universe and can aggregate symbiotically to create a new separate universe for every compounded manifestation of energetic identity, whether it be physical or mental. Every extended creation exists within its own universe, creating an infinity of individual dimensions that overlay and interact, creating a perception of paradox that could not be more complicated.

This is quantum mechanics writ large. When each of these personal universes are grasped as mine, we can easily see the paradoxes that arise in the dukkha that is born. The solution to this paradox comes when a meditator starts to see the still field of consciousness present in the moment.

Consciousness before it moves can be cultivated and amplified to be seen simultaneously with what is apparent in our world. It can become a datum for us to reflect from, to establish the right view of the world. It becomes a transcendental opening to enlightenment. A doorway to stop consciousness. The Buddha is said to have stopped. What does this mean for our practice?

Alan Turing (1912 – 1954) was, in my view, a genius and a hero. By cracking the German Enigma code during the second world war, he in effect made it possible for the war to be won against a very nasty extreme of fascism. This deluded form of narcissism was conditioned into a percentage of the German mindset by way of populist politics led by Hitler and others. It brought unmitigated suffering and misery to much of the world along with what we know now as the ‘holocaust’.

It must be said that what happened in the second world war is a very normal movement between the extremes in Samsara. Atrocities and suffering like this have happened many times in the past and will continue to happen into the future.

We can easily find ways to morally justify bad behaviour towards other people, animals and living things. Greed can easily allow us to trash our world. It is all simply a play between the extremes of duality that defines Buddha’s meaning of dukkha. Alan Turing built a machine that cracked the Enigma code early in the war.

To make his work effective he worked out a way to use only enough of what he learned from
The Buddha had seen the loop being always conscious. The Buddha sees the universe as itself off. Unlike the mainstream, if a machine could become evolved to be just conscious, whether the machine had necessarily trying to decide or stop, and the stopping that has brought about enlightenment to the Buddha can be thought about for any conscious phenomena. We can start to see that this universe is itself conscious because it is created in our conscious mind.

So, what does self-awareness mean in terms of consciousness and what happens to the other when the reality of the present moment is realised? One must remember that we are each working inside our own universe. It is our task to enlighten our own universe, and when this happens, we do, in effect, enlighten all universes because we are part of them.

The field of still consciousness in our universe connects to all other universes which makes the other a subjective consciousness in our universe. Our knowing will transcend all consciousness in our universe with enlightenment.

The place and time of the stop is right on the balance point in the heart of the present moment. Here, when seen, all consciousness finishes to leave just knowing. There is no extension to knowing, it is pure peace, so when the Buddha was asked about what enlightenment is, he is said to have maintained a noble silence.

Alan Turing committed suicide in 1954, following a painful period for him when he was charged with homo-sexual offences by the State, just after the war. No doubt he was shamed, and he had tried to chemically castrate himself following instruction from the court.

He was one of Britain’s finest men; a man who arguably did more for his country than anyone. His life is a heart-rending study in the duality of dukkha. A study that most of us will experience to a greater or lesser extent. The Queen just recently pardoned him.

The Buddha has said “the house of self is on fire, strive to get out as soon as you can”. It is well said!
Death, Dying & Living; Living the Right Way

by Upasako

Death is a word that most of us do not want to hear or associate with, quite apart from facing the reality of it! When we are born, we come to this world with an already signed Death Certificate! So, why fear? As Buddhists, the very first thing that we would learn is that the Death is inevitable.

It is the knowledge of Death that contributed to the decision of Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha-to-be, to leave the luxury life in a royal palace, in the middle land of India, in search of an answer to that suffering. The suffering of old age, sickness & death! (Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, Noble Search) MN 26.

In a story titled Letting Them Go into Death on page 92 of His best-selling book Good? Bad? Who Knows?, Ven Ajahn Brahm gives a nice analogy for the death equating it to someone going overseas on a ship. “They have just gone over a line, death, that separates us from what is beyond. We will see each other again.”

No doubt there would be the physical suffering of death but, it is the mental suffering, mental anguish, anxiety of the unknown that frightens most of us of death.

Here is an excerpt from the Sutta titled “Nakulapitu Sutta” from the Linked Discourses:

“Buddha advised him, “For this body is ailing, trapped in its shell. If anyone dragging around this body claimed to be healthy even for a minute, what is that but foolishness? So, you should train like this “Though my body is ailing, my mind will be healthy. That’s how you should train.” (Nakulapitu Sutta SN 22:1 – Courtesy of SuttaCentral)

An important aspect as explained in the above sutta is the Non-self which is fundamental to Buddhist teachings.

Our delusion makes us believe that we have the control over our faculties what the Lord Buddha Taught as Pañcupādānakkhandhā or the Five Grasping Aggregates. At least, we need to have the theoretical understanding that our body & mind are ever changing personality components over which we do not have any control.

When we do not try to hold on to our body or the mind as my body & my mind then, the dying would become easier. We could let go of them. Why? Because they are not ours! We have no control over them!

So, what is the best way to prepare for dying by keeping a healthy mind? The best way is to live a virtuous life & practise meditation! The preparation has to be for living, not for dying! If one lives well then, the death will not be a problem, it will simply be a natural process.

How do you live well? One word is to be virtuous! What is meant by to be virtuous? Is it keeping the 5 precepts or 8 or 10 precepts?

These are stages of renunciation, letting go but, to be Virtuous is much more than simply keeping the precepts. It is also to undertake wholesome acts by body, speech & mind.

Such behaviour of keeping precepts & being virtuous would fulfill 3rd, 4th & 5th factors of the Noble Eightfold Path & partially fulfill the 2nd factor. By being virtuous, we not only fulfil more than three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path but, also pave the way for the arising of the 8th factor, Right Stillness! Where is the beginning of these wholesome practices?

Invariably, it is the practice of compassionate acts, helping other beings in need! It is called Cāga, in Pali & it is the “Giving without Clinging”!

We could start helping those in need, help a bee that is drowning in a birdbath, sponsor a poor, gifted student from a 3rd world country, help the charitable organisations that help the poor, help the monasteries of virtuous Sangha, wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing so that others will not share your unwanted goodies!

Today, the economies of 3rd world countries, especially those of traditional Buddhist countries, are utterly burdened with enormous amounts that they have had to spend on eradicating Covid-19. They are almost helpless! So, give generously!

No point in keeping all our money tied in a bank account for a rainy day! The rainy-day has come: people are drowning! We need to help them!!

If you think, “their problem is not my problem” then, think again! You don’t want to think… then, read the story on page 33 of Ven Ajahn Brahm’s best-selling book Good? Bad? Who Knows? What?, you don’t have that book? My goodness, then, think again! Read the story on page 33 of Ven Ajahn Brahm’s best-selling book Good? Bad? Who Knows? What?, you don’t have that book? My goodness, then, read it! You would not regret!

During his retreats, Ven Ajahn Brahmali always says, when one is virtuous, the meditation starts to happen!

In the Mettā Sutta (The Benefits of Loving Kindness –AN 11:15), the Lord Buddha has discoursed 11 benefits of Metta meditation. Two of those benefits relate to dying peacefully. Here are those...
two benefits:
• You don’t feel lost when you die.
• If you don’t penetrate any higher, you’ll be reborn in a Brahmā realm. (Courtesy -SuttaCentral)

If one is a practitioner of any type of meditation, one would know that meditation would not work unless one practises Karuna, the Compassion.

A virtuous life leads to good meditation whether one practises, Metta, Breath, Death or whatever the type of meditation. Meditation helps one to stay in the present moment without running back to the past or to the future.

When one learns to be in the present moment then, at the time of death, most likely, one would stay in the present moment & let go of anxieties, worries & all the burdens. Then the breath would be peaceful & so would be the death!

The Lord Buddha has discoursed many times that the Reflection on Death is one way to end the suffering.

Very often, Ven Ajahn Brahmal, teaches us to practise Death Contemplation. It is another way to be ready for the death! His guided meditation Session on 2 May 2020 too, was based on Death Contemplation.

That was a great session of Guided Meditation, indeed! Practice makes perfect! It is like a rehearsal! Practising death contemplation would make one ready for a peaceful death!

Here is the link: https://bswa.org/teaching/guided-meditation-2-may-2020/ We find it difficult to come to terms with death because of our attachments to various things.

Our family, friends, pet animals, houses, cars, bank balances, etc! It is OK to own wealth to an extent that would help one lead a comfortable life & also, to help others. We don’t have to make our wealth a gateway to a bad rebirth!

As the great lay disciple Anāthapindika was dying, the Great Arahant Venerable Sāriputta Maha Thero gave him a powerful teaching on non-attachment. Please refer to Anāthapindikovāda Sutta (Advice to Anāthapindika MN 143).

When we do not have the control of our own body or the mind, how could we have any control over our wealth? Here is a quote from the Dhammapada:

“‘Sons are mine, riches are mine’, so the fool suffers vexation, when even self is not his own, how then sons, how then riches?”

(Verse 62 –Dhammapada - Courtesy SuttaCentral)

It is the qualities of the mind that one may inherit in the next life, not the level of your intelligence or the amount of wealth that you have in this life. An intelligent person in this life could be reborn as a stupid person in the next life. Yet, the mental traits from this life may be present, at least to some extent, in the next life. Similarly, a rich person in this life could be reborn as a beggar in the next life or vice versa!

For more details, please refer the three Suttas, MN 57, MN135 & MN 136.

In Sankhārupapatti Sutta, (Rebirth by Intention), MN 120, the Lord Buddha gives 5 factors that one needs to practise to be reborn in a place according to one’s intention.

The five factors are Saddha (Faith or Confidence), Seela (Virtue), Suta (Learning), Cāga (Generosity) & Pañña (Wisdom). If we are wise & compassionate, we could plan our next birth! So, why not start practising those five factors to gain a favourable re-birth? Then, we could stop worrying about death!

If we could Lead a simple, virtuous & a compassionate life; practice meditation & learn to stay in the present moment then, the death could be a peaceful process! So, why worry, be happy! be compassionate!

Notes: AN= Anguttara Nikaya; SN=Samyutta Nikaya; MN= Majjhima Nikaya

Photo by Karolina Grabowska.
Changes

By Kerry Sisarich

Five years ago I was a good buddhist, I upheld the five precepts, I lived the eightfold path, I had a job, a husband, children and adopted dogs and being so at peace with my life as it was I didn't feel the necessity, nor did I feel I had the time for the third gem to be applicable to me. Then life changed. Everything that could go wrong went wrong and the harder I tried to make things better the worse they became. I sit here now five years later with a face that has aged 20 with knowledge I was ignorant of, the importance of the Buddhist community, the third gem, the Sangha.

Since life fell apart I have so often wanted to go to the Buddhist centre but I seldom went as I had to work through some social anxiety and lacked the confidence to go by myself but whenever I did attend a Friday night meditation and Dhamma talk I felt safe, a feeling that of recent years has eluded me. Though I don't know anyone at the centre I feel at home when I'm there. I can close my eyes and live in a moment of serenity. Which is the most beautiful feeling after being in positions and environments where it becomes natural to be hypervigilant and to never be sure of another's intentions and when almost everyone I've met over the last five years has in one way or another been toxic (though I am aware I may be overly guarded and I try to give the benefit of the doubt).

I ashamedly could never grasp the importance of the Sangha and the buddhist community and thought my actions and intentions were good and I read buddhist books and listened to podcasts and I lived every aspect of my life according to the eightfold path, the trauma and subsequent downfall I had enlightened me to why the Sangha and Buddhist community is as important as the Buddha and the Dhamma. It truly is a gem, and a gem that if I would have of nurtured as I did the Buddha and Dhamma my fall would not have been so long and hard.

I say in honesty after spending time correcting my flaws, strengthening my frailties, rejecting my weaknesses I recognise that I not only want but I need the Buddhist community to be a constant in my life. It wasn't easy at first but I have begun going to the centre on Fridays. When I first arrived I had the usual clammy forehead and shaky hands that I've grown so used to living with, but within minutes my nervous sweat has evaporated and I felt like the strong person I was before, and with support and a sense of belonging, I am fast becomming that person again, but an updated version.

I am much like a baby that has just learnt to walk, which is in itself a blessing because the potential is exponential. I've learnt to protect myself in the same way I protect my children and the top of my priority is to engage fully with the buddhist community. With peace, safety and kindness that I feel from the buddhist community, I feel I have a buffer against future troubles, I'm currently trying to re-enter the workforce - difficult after a prolonged absense, gradually fixing up my home which is a constant struggle but it keeps me busy and leaves me with a sense of accomplishment.

The recent years had an effect whereby I became socially isolated so I hope to develop friendships with good people, and for the first time in as long as I can remember I'm no longer fearful of love. In the recent years of reflection and rebuilding I realised that I had so much love for everyone else I didn't give myself any love so when I lost that love, I lost everything. If I had have been more mindful of the Sangha and the community I would have been more able to acknowledge the noble truths and see a light in the darkness.

With my deeper understanding of the third Gem I feel a renewed positivity, though I know I'm lacking, I also know I have many qualities which can be beneficial to others and hopefully make the world a nicer, kinder place, if only one person at a time. While the road ahead is unknown I sit here with the two best people in the world on the bed beside me, my 11 year old wolfhound cross, and my 15 year old Maltese. I've heard it said the only bad thing about dogs is that they don't live as long as we do. I couldn't agree more and I'm realistic that my boys are in their golden years which is a driving force for me to engage and become active in the community. I hope to attend as many talks and meditations and to engage 100% with the community and centre.

I hope my story hasn't been too focused on myself, I worry that being isolated with minimal human conversation has made me somewhat self-centered which is not my intention at all. Ultimately my intention is that I hope this story may help everyone, especially those who like myself are complacent to the essential benefit of the buddhist comminuty. While the following is true and innate in every human being regardless of race, religion, culture, as Buddhists this is something we recognise and hold dear and we are blessed to have the opportunity of being part of each other’s lives, to care for each other, to be involved with eachother, to give without expectations and to be know that within this beautiful world there is a place we all belong, where we are all wanted and accepted and where we can be safe.