

The Five Pillars of Transformation

Overview

A Fresh Look

So we come to our last talk, and just for a few minutes I'd like to gather and summarise what I've offered you over these last few days concerning the practice that is at the heart of the DharmaMind Buddhist Group, namely The Five Pillars of Transformation.

We need to develop understanding towards each one of these five pillars and be willing to put each one in place for our practice to be complete and fulfil itself. We need to understand these very important features and I've spent the last few days reviewing them one by one.

I've highlighted and brought to your attention features that could be completely new to you, or maybe you've heard of them before and thought of them as not being particularly important, or maybe saw them as just part of a landscape that goes to make up a much larger picture. But I'm very much of the conviction that if you are really interested in the type of practice we pursue in our group then these are the key features to be aware of and constantly bring to your attention and open up to. Turn them over within yourself and bring them into your mandala of awareness and daily life. Bring them into the mandala of what you would call your practice.

Don't imagine, as we can often do, that this is an opportunity to create yet another list of formulas so often found in Buddhism. I guess lists and formulas can and do have their use, but please don't imagine this list to be of that nature. These so called five pillars have been primarily created to arouse and orientate your awareness and reflective ability. The real use of these features is to bring them into our lives right now. These five pillars are not things to think about but to do, something to taste.

When we begin to bring these pillars into our practice we will see that they do not line up one after the other as you might expect, that would be theory, which is the nature of thinking. That would be the dualist world, one thing sitting alongside another. When we bring these pillars into life as our direct experience we find they merge, become one. Whichever pillar you wish to reflect on, look carefully and you'll see the other four. With direct experience concepts become one, they penetrate each other, that's the difference between theory and practice. In theory there is duality, when we practise there's a direct impact and direct living of awareness and in that moment there is no duality. So please see these pillars as pointing to our direct experience of what we regard as our reality. It is in this moment that we experience and realise the heart and spirit of our particular practice: it is so important to realise this.

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Tasting the Practice

I've often used the analogy in the past that this practice isn't like thinking and theorising what an ice cream might taste like, rather it's about direct tasting. You can spend your whole life theorising about the taste of an ice cream but there is only one way to know the taste and that is to lick it, and when you do you will know. This is not a theory, not a formula, not something dualist, this is direct experience. This direct impact experience is the heart and spirit of this practice, it is about tasting it. So again, please keep this in mind.

If we do 'taste' the practice, if we do experience the direct impact before thinking and creating duality with views and opinions, and retain that state of awareness, we will be creating something very important, indeed

profound: this area and space of awareness I like to call the dharmic environment. It is profound because it is in this space that the transformation of our samsaric attachments through the arising of wisdom can take place. It is the space where we nurture the ability to reflect upon our relationship with ourself and others and life itself, and burrow deeply with the tools of insight into our human makeup and condition. The space where we become familiar with the mirror-like quality of awareness that sees and knows, and to learn to abide in that mirror-like quality and realise that when doing so, we are in this very moment before we create the world of dreams.

The dharmic environment is characterised by direct awareness, containment, spaciousness, clarity and knowing. It is where we begin to learn how to contain our created conditioned karmic world so often driven by our wild self-possessed emotions and tame the restlessness ingrained in the body, mind and spirit that deny us the precious stillness so crucial to ever brighter awareness, clarity and knowing. All of this training is focused upon and nurtured not in the head but at the heart of awareness which is to be found in the body.

As I've been pointing out throughout these talks we learn to become familiar with that openness, that spaciousness discovered and nurtured primarily through our sitting meditation so that slowly we become aware that this state of being is actually our true state, our true being and nature or Buddha nature. We do not in any way create this state, this is such a crucial point to realise, we are not creating anything, there is no doer doing something here. Please contemplate this, really look closely and see the subtlety of this realisation. If you imagine that you are the creator of stillness and spaciousness then this would be another typical conclusion of our everyday deluded mind that is always in the mode of creating and becoming something. This notion that I am the creator is a typical grasping characteristic of the self that would wish to make this experience of stillness yet another of its possessions.

What we are awakening to here is our natural state of being which lies just beyond this turmoil of samsara, beyond the turmoil of a grasping self. Just behind this veil is the real 'me', the real self. The self of non-attachment, of openness and spaciousness that is actually with us all the time, but we've covered it over and lost it. It is through learning to put the five pillars of transformation in place that we rediscover what our true nature is, learn to become familiar with, learn to open to, learn to develop a relationship with and learn to trust. Learning to trust is so important. So open and relax into the experience of feeling vulnerable at this time when the everyday self that gives us that sense of being in control will be absent.

Playfulness

Through awareness we learn to contain our habitual outflows experienced primarily in our daily life. Create an environment through commitment and familiarity, through coming back to over and over again, through nurturing, through tasting, and always be watchful of too much thinking. Taste it, taste it, always be tasting. Learn through your commitment to bring playfulness to your growing familiarity with the dharmic environment and practice, Don't think about the particular situation too much, play with it! Don't think 'Am I doing it right, am I doing it wrong': Do it! Make mistakes! 'Fall over!'. It's so important to nurture that spirit of playfulness, spontaneity and experimentation. Our practice isn't about always getting it right, this isn't about perfecting something and not making mistakes, be prepared to get it wrong and fall over.

Observe a young child at play, see how spontaneous it is when it begins to engage with things. Observe when it falls over or bangs its head on the table leg, there is no self-consciousness about making a mistake and running away to hide, the child just picks itself up and carries on, it doesn't worry about making a fool of itself. That's how a child begins to learn at the beginning of its life, before it becomes enveloped by emerging self-consciousness. This is the spirit we need to return to and bring to our practice, learning to nurture the spontaneity of a child. Learn to bring that sense of openness and playfulness into our practice, rather than take ourselves as seriously as most of us do.

Acceptance

When we create and become familiar with the stability of the dharmic environment, we can then in that familiarity and stillness allow our world and its attachments, and aspects of our personality that are so precious and dear, ingrained and often powerful, to rise up and come to us. Things that we identify with, that reinforce

the sense of self over and over, things positive as well as those things negative and even those dark aspects we can hardly bear to look at: now we are in a position to begin to accept them all and say 'yes' to what in reality is all of me.

Allow experience to, as it were, sit in front of you, but not be caught in the old familiar way and be carried away. Now through commitment we are containing our emotions, now we are not being carried away as has been the habit of the past. Now because we've become familiar with the dharmic environment we willingly allow anything to come onto that work space of spaciousness, an area within our experience where you can allow any part of your self to come alive in, whatever that may be. Now we are now longer in a mode of running after a desire or pushing away an experience we find difficult to be with or even suppressing. This is not what we now do.

Maybe for the first time we are being prepared to open and accept ourselves for what we are. The good bits about ourselves we can accept: we usually don't have a problem with those features but there are bits that are within all of us that we all know we can find difficult. Our fears, our aversions, the more unwholesome and ugly aspects of our makeup that many of us would rather not know, would rather pretend were not there, we now are opening up to. Now we can say to our experience 'Let me see you as you are, let me be intimate with you, but I'm not going to be carried away by you, I'm not going to be fuelled by you, I'm not going to be caught by you nor am I going to reinforce nor be negative towards you. Rather, I'm going to be like a mirror that sees all that comes into its experience but doesn't have an opinion or get involved. I'm going to be open and allow you to be, and I'm going to open and accept and say "yes" to what you are'. In that openness and in that acceptance there comes the beginning of the sense of healing and integration. Because you are not being reactive you are no longer creating a space between yourself and the experience but a willingness to come together intimately with what is really a part of what you are. We are learning to become friends with ourselves in the true dharmic spirit.

No longer do we blame our dukkha on our mother or father because of having done something to us in the past. Nor do I any longer blame my boss or wife for my dukkha, but to see that this whole experience is actually just a part of what I am and what I create. All the pictures, all the solid and concrete convictions that I've had up till now that most of my woes have been given to me by others begin to fall away. Now you're saying 'Yes, I am the creator of my dukkha', now you're beginning to own the whole of what you are.

All of this has become possible because you have created the dharmic environment of openness and spaciousness, where transformation of our whole makeup and understanding of life can take place because wisdom of the knowledge of how things really are begins to arise. That space where you're no longer being carried away by your habits and the world that you create. Here you're no longer caught and carried away by that world, now you have the ability through the commitment of training and through familiarity to begin to taste and rest in what is your true nature, your true nature that it is not attached to your world at all. It isn't affected nor pulled around, but something that is always free.

Now you are beginning to discover and recognise that which is your true nature. Invite into your life this discovery of spaciousness that has a mirror like quality of seeing and of being non-attached that you've been calling the dharmic environment, and awaken to seeing it as being not apart from your true nature, and the one that knows. The one that is free, and the one that never gets caught by the world.

Forgiveness

Feel drawn to developing a relationship with your true nature, with the Buddha within. Begin to develop a relationship with that which is beyond 'me' and at times of difficulty ask with humility for forgiveness, help and support. Now begin to turn away and let go of that which always wants to be in control and instead take refuge and learn to trust that which is beyond 'me'. Open and allow the qualities of the Buddha which has as its nature love and wisdom to begin to express itself through our human condition. These innate qualities that we've all got, that characterise our humanness are qualities of openness and acceptance, tolerance and forgiveness.

I believe the quality of forgiveness to be the quality that transforms us most because it undercuts the grip of self and its neurotic desire to always be in control. In my experience it is certainly the greatest quality on the

path of liberation. To learn to forgive could be said to be the only quality that we need for transformation and liberation as all other qualities naturally follow. Not just forgive others for what they may have done to us but also to forgive ourselves through acceptance for what we are. For most of us this will be the greatest of challenges, and not for nothing is this the case because it is the nurturing of forgiveness that opens up the human heart and guides us to equanimity and the middle way, and true liberation from the wheel of becoming.

To learn to forgive ourselves and others is to make friends with ourselves, and from there friendship matures into authentic selfless love. Awakening to love is to awaken to our true nature, not just love for ourselves but love for others and for all that is. In that healing within ourselves is the reintegration of mind and body. With reintegration comes equanimity and stillness and within this condition and through skilful guidance insight begins to arise. With insight and seeing things how they really are, comes the fulfilment of the five pillars of transformation and liberation from samsara.