

A Sangha activity

Introduction

I'm proposing an activity for our next Sangha meeting. In this activity I'm hoping everyone will participate because I'd like to learn from you and I hope you will learn from each other. Please allow some time before we next meet to think about what this activity asks of you and what you'd like to share with others.

I'll point out that I am not certain of anything and I don't claim to be an expert in the subject matter which follows. I hope to always to think as a beginner.

Most likely you've heard of the 'four noble truths' which in Pali to English are along the lines of

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering (Dukkha)
2. The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (Samudaya)
3. The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (Nirodha)
4. The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (Magga)

I imagine many people are left wondering, 'what am I supposed to do with that? Where is my agency in this?'. There seems to be a clear alignment of a practice in the noble truth of Magga, but for the three before it's not so clear.

Contemporary thinkers sometimes re-frame these noble 'truths' as 'tasks' to be understood in experiential language; they do so while still mirroring the Pali Canon. For me, having something to 'do', not just something to 'understand' is a far more pragmatic way to approach the Dharma and hopefully live a life of greater ease.

The Noble 'truths' expressed as 'tasks' are often listed in a similar way. Here is Stephen Bachelor's list:

1. Embrace life (understand dukkha)
2. Let reactivity be (abandon craving)
3. See reactivity stop (realize cessation)
4. Actualize a path (cultivate the path)

Guatuma (Buddha) implied that for each of these tasks (or truths),

1. The task needs to be understood.
2. That a practice needs to be put in place to 'accomplish' it.
3. That the task is to be accomplished.

What I ask that you do.

I have 9 questions for your consideration and I'm very keen to hear your thoughts on them. If you could write a few points for each before we meet that would be ideal. Each question represents each of the 3 milestones for each of the first 3 'great tasks'.

Question 1: What is the task of understanding the nature of 'Dhukka'? (Quick reminder: Dhukka: the unavoidable vulnerability, instability, and friction inherent in being human. Not just pain, but *existential unease*)

(It's a tricky question, and it's a different question to 'what practices do you follow?')

Your answers:

Question 2: What are the practices you've implemented, or might like to implement, to accomplish the task of *embracing Dhukka*?

Your answers:

Question 3: How and when to you know that you've have accomplished the task of *embracing Dhukka*?

Your answers:

Question 4: What is the task of understanding reactivity (craving/thirst)?

(You might like to describe how you recognise it)

Your answers:

Question 5: What are the practices you've implemented, or might like to implement, to accomplish the task of *abandoning reactivity*?

Your answers:

Question 6: How and when to you know that you have accomplished the task of *abandoning reactivity*?

Your answers:

Question 7: What is the task of 'seeing' reactivity stop?

(You might like to describe how you recognise it)

Your answers:

Question 8: What are the practices you implemented, or might like to implement, to accomplish the task of 'seeing' reactivity stop?

Your answers:

Question 9: How and when to you know that you have accomplished the task of ‘seeing reactivity stop’?

Your answers: