



## How do we live the *Dharma Life* in the 'world'?

Last week we reflected upon how we live the Dharma life by referring to a set of headings related to our livelihood and how it supports us practically, emotionally and in terms of connections with society, how it benefits others, is supportive of our practice and provides opportunities for simplicity.

Taking the Dharma beyond a weekly class and into our *whole life* is absolutely essential if we are to really effect the transformation needed to take us beyond those attitudes and behaviours which cause us suffering and toward a life that is increasingly more wise, fulfilled and content.

Buddhism - practising the Dharma - is not all about meditation! Yes meditation is essential but alone it will not be enough. We also need the insights gained as we act in the world. The situations we encounter and the people we engage can be our greatest teachers if we approach them with awareness and Metta.

This week we will reflect again on the conditions that support our efforts toward transformation using another set of headings. I encountered this set on my first retreat a little over ten years ago and it has stayed with me since as a useful aid to keeping my practice in balance and indeed simply living my life.

We all have different traits and tendencies so we are likely to be attracted to some of these areas more than others but it is good to see if we can go beyond our habitual patterns and cover all areas to some degree. We have covered some of these in depth recently so we'll concentrate here only on a few.

**Morality** - undertaking the Five Precepts

**Meditation** - mindfulness and Metta but also simple stillness and practices such as 'just sitting', considering impermanence and connecting imaginatively with the Buddha

**Devotion / Worship** - These words may have mixed or unhelpful connotations for us but 'worship' at its root is means to honour that which we regard as being of greatest worth. So we can consider it as maintaining connection with our highest ideals and aspirations. If we don't know where we are going we won't know in which direction to travel. Ideally worship engages our emotional depths, helps us tap into parts of us that motivate us and inspire us to practice with some degree of consistency.

This may be formal Puja but also saluting our shrine (indeed having and beautifying our own shrine) before meditation, reciting the Refuges and Precepts, Tiratna Vandana or some Dharmic formulation that we have learned by heart. It helps if we can get a sense of who the historical Buddha was through reading about his life and also reflecting upon / connecting with archetypal Buddhist figures that embody qualities such as wisdom, compassion, fearlessness and so on.

**Spiritual Friendship** - Sangha. Sharing the company and thoughts of those who share our ideals and aspirations. Putting oneself in supportive conditions. Making our own connections within the Sangha. We may have noticed that some of the things, people and places we have previously associated with now seem less than helpful in the light of the Dharma.

**Studying the Dharma.** Gaining an understanding of what the Buddha taught through our own reading, listening and reflecting but also through 'talking the Dharma' with others. Rather than feeling that we need to understand the whole breadth and depth of Buddhist teaching before we can get started it is probably best to focus upon a few key teachings, get to know them well, reflect upon them, discuss them and crucially notice how they pertain to one's own life.

**Service / Giving / Generosity.** Probably the most accessible effective way that most of us have in our daily lives of overcoming the delusion of fixed and separate selfhood, overcoming an underlying self-centred world view is to do what we can to help others.

So these are the six headings, we could also add others such as creativity and wholesome recreation, having fun in a way that nourishes us. It may be useful also to reflect how much they support each other, e.g. Sangha might help our meditation, be a place where we do Puja together, improve our Dharma understanding, provide an opportunity for giving and receiving and so on.