

Practicing with Wise Intention

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Alameda Sangha, Dec. 16, 2018

These exercises are designed to practice ways of looking at your own experiences related to each part of the Eightfold Path. This month, we explore Wise Intention. Working with each of these exercises for a week should develop skills for reducing dukkha as we go further on the Path.

Week 1 – Studying Craving & Letting Go

- 1) During meditation or in a quiet time in your day, think of a time when you wanted something so much that you'd do anything to get it. How did that intention *feel*? Did it lead you to do anything that caused you or others suffering? Have you ever wished that you could have let that craving go?
- 2) Do you currently have any cravings that you might do better without? How do those cravings make you *feel*? Can you see the intention(s) related to your desire(s)? What views or other intentions prevent you from letting go of those cravings? Keep adding your observations to your journal.
- 3) Practice generosity, and *dana* to offer the dharma to all. Watch your intentions before you give, as you give and after you've given. How do they feel?

Week 2 – Studying Ill Will

- 1) Pick 1 or more situations where you often get irritated with people, where you can observe such feelings arise, perhaps when you're driving, shopping, waiting in line, in committee meetings, etc. As soon as you can, notice your feeling grow from displeasure to ill will. What physical sensations accompany irritation and aversion? What thoughts come with them? What intentions, or thoughts of ways to express or release your irritation? Do you find yourself acting out these aversive intentions?
- 2) If all this negativity wears on you, try practices from Week 3 as antidotes.

Week 3 – Practicing Good Will

- 1) When you have studied the arising of ill will and its effects on your mind, body and actions, then intentionally turn your mind to good will:
 - a) Find at least 1 thing good about the person or situation that annoys you. It could be as trivial as the color of their shoes, or the weather. Just something you think is good.
 - b) You can also try thinking of some other person or situation you feel good toward, and let that feeling grow and soothe your heart. Notice the contrast between how goodwill and ill will *feels*.
- 2) Spend some time actively intending to feel good will and compassion toward others. You might want to start with strangers, like store clerks or customers, maybe other drivers, just sending out 1 or more words wishing them well. Animals are good objects of this practice, too. You can also try this with friends and relatives. Keep checking to see how this practice makes you feel.
- 3) Look for opportunities to act out of the intentions of kindness and compassion, being careful to consider the context and the other person's receptivity to your actions. Just considering how you might be able to do something kind and helpful for other beings can be a good exercise. See how it feels to want to act on these intentions. Practice generosity, and *dana* to offer the dharma to all.

Week 4 – Practicing with Metta and Compassion in Meditation

For 10 minutes each day, meditate with the phrases below, or others that you find work for you. Send them first to yourself, then to a benefactor (someone you have uncomplicated, good feelings toward), then a friend, a neutral person you can identify but know little about, then a slightly difficult person, and finally, to all beings. You may start with the beneficiary before wishing yourself well if that works better for you. Or, you might hear these words as if someone else was saying them to you.

Imagine opening your heart as you silently and slowly repeat these phrases, and watch to see if feelings of lovingkindness or compassion arise. If not, just keep repeating the phrases, knowing that you're inclining your mind *toward* these Wise Intentions.

Suggested Phrases:

Metta:

May you feel safe and protected from inner and outer danger and harm.
May you feel peaceful and truly happy.
May you feel strong, healthy and vital.
May you take care of yourself joyfully.
May you live with deep ease and well being.
May you love yourself completely just as you are.

May you feel safe.
May you feel peaceful.
May you feel happy.
May you feel free.

Compassion:

Think of some person or group you know is experiencing dukkha and silently address these phrases to them. Also address them to yourself, a benefactor, a neutral person, a difficult person, and all beings.

I care about your (this) suffering.
May you feel my care for you.
May this suffering be held with tenderness.
May you feel free of pain and sorrow.
May you be free from suffering, and all causes of suffering.
May you feel comforted.