

Discovering Buddhism: Samsara & Nirvana Module

Dates: Monday's, Jan. 11, 18, 25, Feb. 1 and 8 (review/practice night)

Course leader: Don Brown (donbrown1@nc.rr.com)

Class One Homework

1. To get the most value from this course you are encouraged to do some daily meditation practice to include mindfulness of breathing (to settle down your mind/body) and then contemplative practice on the subjects presented in this course.
2. Reading for next week: Discovering Buddhism Required Reading, pp. 3-15
3. Start becoming familiar with the Wheel of Life (aka The Twelve Links of Interdependent Origination). An excellent image is in *Buddhism For Dummies* or check links below – you will notice some variations in the painting, explanation, etc.:
<http://www.buddhanet.net/wheel1.htm>
<http://www.exoticindiaart.com/article/wheeloflife/>
4. Do the following analytical meditation to examine IGNORANCE, the root cause of samsara (endless cycle of uncontrolled causation):
 - **Silently, use the word “I” in a sentence of two to see what you find.** You will see that each time you use the word you are referring to some aspect of your body, mind or both.
 - **Take a closer look at your body and mind.** Notice all the elements of what we call body and mind are in a constant state of flux/change – physical sensations, thoughts, feelings, emotions are constantly changing – often at a very rapid rate. You can't point to anything in that constant flux of change that is “solid”, me or I.
 - **Instead of coming up with an emotionally neutral statement about yourself as you did in Step 1, bring to mind a moment of great stress (when you were personally attacked) or excitement.** What pops into awareness is an almost solid, permanent, seemingly tangible, sense of self, and you feel like that is what has just been attacked: e.g. “How dare he say that about me in front of all these people.” This reified sense of self is solely the creation of ignorance – a bad habit of mind. This ignorance that holds onto a false image of you – is the root of **all** suffering, without exception.
5. In the post meditation times, begin to notice how out of control our minds and lives really are. We cannot seem to stop problems, aging, our impending death, etc. Notice (nonjudgmentally) that we are entrapped in an endless process of uncontrolled causation. Notice how we often take the past, literally throw it in front of us and do the same things over and over again. Allow yourself to be disenchanted with samsara and begin to cultivate the wish to be free.