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ARTICLE NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	PAGE
57	The seven techniques of clearing deep-seated mental states	2
58	Generosity	8
59	Metta in the moment	14
60	Metta to oneself	15
61	Metta an attitude	16

Article 57

Path to Nibbana listing of topics-edition 2 -segment 2 item 3

THE SEVEN TECHNIQUES OF CLEARING DEEP-SEATED UNSKILFUL (*AKUSALA*) MENTAL STATES

Based on Sabbasava Sutta [AN 4.24, AN 5.140]

Once we develop an understanding of the nine facets of unskilful mental states taken from the *Abhidhamma*, it is imperative that we learn thoroughly the famous seven techniques of erasing them. This is the primary purpose of Sabbasava Sutta. Note that there are two streams of stanzas in this discourse. One describes the results of applying wise-attention (*Yoniso manasikara*) and the other describes the results of not applying wise-attention or applying *Ayoniso manasikara*, the opposite. In this paper we take only the case of applying wise-attention to clean the impurities in the mind.

At the end of the section on the first technique, it is stated that, a person who has managed to apply the technique successfully, will be able to break the first three fetters, which means attaining the first stage of enlightenment.

At the end of the discourse, it is stated that, on completion of the practice, one will develop the seven factors of awakening (*bojjhanga*) and destroying conceit attain enlightenment. In this discourse, all nine facets, are taken together under the term fermentations (*asava*). We use the term taints for convenience.

The seven techniques of erasing taints (hidden impurities in the mind, *asava*) are considered here briefly. A summary of the scheme is presented separately on an excel spreadsheet. This will be explained later.

- 1 Noticing (*dassana*)
- 2 Restraint, discipline (*sanwara, sila*)
- 3 Reviewing the usage of things like food, clothing, medicine, and shelter (*patisevana, parivajjana*)
- 4 Tolerance, putting up with difficult situations (*adhivasana*)
- 5 Avoiding, dissociation from, cutting off, rejection of objects (*adhivasana*)
- 6 Destroying, totally eliminating (*vinodana*)
- 7 Development of the mind by repeated application of meditation techniques, more particularly, the development of the factors of awakening (*Bojjhanga*), and destroying conceit (together called *bhavana*)

There is a short preparation of the mind before one tries, to apply these techniques. First, you need to know what you are working on. For simplicity we can treat these as thoughts that are occurring in the mind or thoughts that are about

to occur. So, we know that a thought is there in the mind. Secondly, understand what the thought is about as best as possible.

Thirdly, think mindfully and wisely about the experience. Can you now see the thought clearly for what it is? Knowing, seeing clearly, and thinking wisely and mindfully should all happen. The terms *Janato*, *Passato*, *Yoniso Manasikara* are the connected Pali terms.

Technique 1

Having prepared the mind as described before, now you can focus on the thought to be cleared. You will see it clearly, and with wise-attention.

Now, you have applied the first technique on to that thought. Assuming that, you have learning and training in the Dhamma if it is an unwanted thought, it will go away. If it persists, try again and again using the principle of repeated application (*bahulikata*).

In the spreadsheet for technique 1, there are words in three columns. Try the above seeing technique, on a sensual thought, a becoming thought and finally a thought of ignorance, with the help of a guide. When these three experiments are done, you can deal with other sensual thoughts, becoming thoughts and ignorance thoughts, and try to vanquish them.

Unswerving repetition leads to ultimate success. Paragraph 14 of the discourse mentions the possibility of attaining the first stream in enlightenment (*sotapatti*) by successful and repeated application of technique 1.

Technique 2

This can be applied in the case of the six senses. Suppose you are seeing something you are not supposed to see. You will notice that the action is not proper. Then you take your eye away. You have restrained the eye-sense. The same applies to the other senses. When it occurs in relation to a memory, you just try to keep it out of consideration.

In the discourse only the senses are mentioned. However, the writer suggests the same technique could be applied in respect of speech, bodily actions, and livelihood too. Some might argue against that idea. The discourse is an enabling one and not a prescriptive one. Hence parallel concepts can be considered. Ultimately it is restraint that is practised.

Technique 3

This is the case where, by using things in the proper way, we succeed in restraining ourselves. This is clearer when applied to the *Sangha*. Even when taking food, they keep reflecting on the reason for taking food. It is not for body-building, but for quenching hunger and so on. The principle is followed regarding medicine, robes, and shelter. This reflection keeps away unwanted desires, hatred, and ignorance.

The environment and facilities also need to be used carefully. Lay persons also can apply this technique beneficially. When we eat food, use clothes, use facilities available, we can apply some rules though not formally recognised as for the *Sangha*. This way we can keep out greed, hatred, and ignorance.

Technique 4

Tolerance can also mean the ability to put up with something difficult to put up with. Examples are hot summers, cold winters, drought, and unending rain. We need to learn how to live peacefully in these circumstances, without getting too agitated. Agitation implies greed, hatred, and ignorance. When one trains oneself to adjust to these difficult situations without complaining and protesting, it amounts to reducing the unskilful mental states.

Insects and small animals need to be tolerated. Minor illnesses are another example.

Patently listening to the harsh words uttered by another is a different type of example. Unfair treatment by another belongs to this category though not mentioned in the menu for the *Sutta*.

Technique 5

It is necessary to keep away from wild animals, dangerous and hazardous places like cliffs, volcanos, and unhealthy places. A bad surrounding must be avoided.

Above all associates who are not good need to be kept away.

It helps us to keep away greed, hatred, and ignorance.

Technique 6

This technique seems to be stronger in practice. Somethings need to be eliminated from experience. The first example given is sensuality. If a person is given to the

senses, indulges in seeing things, hearing things that are worthless, there is no half-way. Such things must be eliminated.

Other examples are ill-will, cruelty and in general unwholesome thoughts. There is a high standard of cleansing required here.

Technique 7

In summary this is the growth and cultivation, development of the mind to a point at which all taints are destroyed. Successful completion would mean enlightenment.

The standard suggested in the discourse is the development of Bojjhanga cetasikas. When this effort is perfected, the result is *Samma Ditthi* (Right View) and following that the realisation of Nibbana.

The key practice is meditation giving pride of place to mindfulness. All taints are destroyed through this practice. That includes yearning for fine material form, immaterial form, craving, views, and comparison (*tanha, ditthi, mana*).

OTHER CLARIFICATIONS

For item 1, seeing (*passato*) and properly knowing (*Janato*) are both important. This can also be called wise-attention, or *Yoniso Manasikara*. If this is missing, just seeing things will not lead to their reduction.

In item 2 restraint refers to the discipline of the six senses. The five physical senses are restrained in moral conduct. The sixth sense, the intellect faculty, needs to be disciplined too. The intellect must be trained to pursue wholesome activities and not unwholesome activities.

In item 3, discipline in using the requisites is implied. Food, robes, medicine, shelter, and other facilities essential for life, must be used reflecting on the essential purposes. Nothing should be consumed for play, fun, enjoyment, and various other purposes or used extravagantly.

In item 4, tolerance is practised, when confronted with circumstances that are hard to put up with, such as cold, heat, insects, flies, worms, and reptiles which usually bother people. Intolerance in these can lead to the arousing of ignorance, hatred, and greed.

In item 5, avoidances are mentioned. Other examples are sewers, cess pits, and connected habitats for animals and small insects. Foul smelling surroundings must be avoided.

In item 6, destruction is implied. This policy must be applied to sensuality, and behavior connected to hatred.

Item 7 is very inclusive. The Pali word is *Bhaveti*. It includes the growth and cultivation of the mind through meditative practices.

Specific actions recommended seem to align with the seven factors of awakening in the 37 factors of enlightenment. The details are:

1	Mindfulness	<i>Sati Bojjhanga</i>
2	Analysis of qualities	<i>Dhamma Vicaya Bojjhanga</i>
3	Persistence, effort, energy	<i>Viriya Bojjhanga</i>
4	Rapture, joy	<i>Piti Bojjhanga</i>
5	Serenity, tranquility	<i>Passaddhi bojjhanga</i>
6	Concentration	<i>Samadhi bojjhanga</i>
7	Equanimity	<i>Upekkha bojjhanga</i>

At the culmination of this practice or growth, the mind acquires the ability to penetrate conceit and related mental states. It leads to the destruction of craving. At this stage, fetters are totally destroyed. Nibbana is realised.

ANOTHER APPROACH

(Source: Venerable **Kahagala Sarananda**, Director of the *Sangharama*, Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka. Sermon given on 9 July 2021 on ZOOM at the Sri Lanka Buddhist Monastery, Ellen Grove, Brisbane, Australia.)

There are three types of taints:

1	Sensuality based	<i>Kamasava</i>
2	Becoming based	<i>Bhava Asava</i>
3	Ignorance based	<i>Avijjasava</i>

For example, let us see sense based desire, like seeing an object. When contact is made, a sensation and perception arise. This is followed by thinking of the object. The process happens very quickly as other objects are within range. The thinking prompts application of the mind to the object. Continued application may occur.

Then the thoughts tend to stay in memory. After some time, these start fermenting. It is now called a taint. These can be seen during a meditation.

Constantly, we are becoming someone else. We want to be someone or something in the future. As above, after some time they might turn into fermentations.

Similarly, because of thoughts based on ignorance, mental fermentations are formed. An example could be thoughts arising from a misinterpretation of the Dhamma.

Even when we reduce asavas remaining from sense associations, certain related thoughts might still remain as fermentations. Then we need to avoid attachments and repulsions, and look at the negative aspects (*adinava*). Application of wisdom is valuable.

We also need to learn how to develop the ability to see things as they really are (*yatha bhuta gnana*). Some such applications are:

- 1 Impermanence (*anicca*)
- 2 No-self (*anatta*)
- 3 Arising and ceasing (*uppada vaya*)
- 4 Change (*viparinama*)
- 5 Cause and effect (*hetu phala*)
- 6 Suffering (*dukkha*)
- 7 Chain of dependent origination (*paticca samuppada*)

Association with noble friends, learning the Dhamma help us to see reality.

The continuation of fermentations in turn tend to create, even more ignorance and the cycle goes on.

Seven methods of reducing fermentations are dealt with in the *Sabbasava Sutta*.

FURTHER REFERENCES

There are many other good sermons relating to Sabbasava Sutta:

- 1 A series of sermons given by Venerable Ellawala Vijithananda Maha Thero, available in the Medamawatha website in Sri Lanka on Sabbasava Sutta.
- 2 A sermon given by Venerable Galigomuwe Gnanadeepa Thero. Website: www.galigamuwethero

QSA can help you in locating these sermons.

[Extracted from the script presented by Tanuja Sarath-Chandra and Jayantha Maharage at QSA Buddhist Forum 04 during November 2021]

Article 58

The Buddhist Way to Happiness

GENEROSITY

Factor (14)

GENEROSITY (*DANA*, CHARITY, GIVING)

UNIT 1

UNIT 1 (A): DESCRIPTION OF GENEROSITY

In its wider sense, generosity includes an attitude of consideration for others, a feeling that things should be shared with others. It implies loving kindness and compassion for others. It therefore helps to reduce the gap between us and them. Generosity is not restricted to giving things to others.

Even in giving things to others, the attitude of mind is important. Giving freely to charities is good and the attitude of being charitable is equally good.

Generosity expecting something in return invokes greed. It is far better to give freely and expecting nothing.

Generosity needs to come from the heart. If you give something because someone is prompting you to do so, it is not an act completely from the heart. The feeling to give could still be there but not in a clear form.

Giving for a good purpose is better than giving for a bad purpose. Just giving without thinking about the purpose would suggest lack of care and wisdom.

Charity must be supported by wisdom. In fact, all good actions need to be supported by wisdom.

Generosity is not necessarily proportional to the quantity given. The intensity of the mental state in giving is far more important. The appearance, weight, or volume of what is given may have some relevance, but the intensity of the mental state is the vital factor.

The beneficiary of charity needs to be deserving by virtue of what the beneficiary is doing. For example, a monk who is apparently practising well is a better choice than some stray individual.

What you give needs to be reasonably pure in its generation. If one resorts to stealing for giving to charity, such an act has little value. Generosity using wealth generated by improper means is questionable, because the mental states involved might not be clean.

A businessman engaged in dealing with liquor, poison, slaves, drugs, meat, weapons, and the like needs to think honestly if interested in generosity. The writer feels that even such individuals need to be generous.

There are many discourses of the Buddha that deal with various aspects of generosity, that tend to define the values associated with this mental state.

The following are examples:

1 Discourse on Giving (*Dana*):

The donor needs to be glad before, during and after the giving. The recipient either needs to be free from desire, hatred, and ignorance or must be striving to attain these qualities.

2 Discourse AN 5.34

Some of the rewards for the donor are as follows:

The donor becomes dear to people

The donor's reputation is enhanced

In any assembly the donor becomes confident

At the end of this life a good rebirth is assured

3 Discourse AN 3.57

Some features of a worthy recipient are:

Not having sensual desires

Not having ill-will

Devoid of Sloth and drowsiness

Devoid of Restlessness and anxiety

Devoid of uncertainty

This description implies one who has suppressed the hindrances (*nivarana*).

4 Discourse AN 5.148

A donor who is a person of integrity (*Sappurisa*) has the following mental states:

Conviction

Attentivity

Conscious of the season

Empathy

Not affected by adversity (to self or others)

These mental states give rise to the following results in the future:

Convincing personality

Others work for the donor with understanding

Donor's goals are fulfilled in season

Donor enjoys the fruits of his good deeds

The donor is properly protected

UNIT 1 (B): SUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES AND OCCASIONS TO PRACTICE GENEROSITY

Whenever you can spare a possession for the benefit of another it is an opportunity for the practice of generosity.

If one becomes aware of or observes a need to give something to another, then it is an opportunity to practise generosity.

If the giver's attention is drawn to the future benefits of an act of generosity, the power of the generosity could be reduced but the act itself is good. Attention needs to focus on the need and the deed.

One case to guard against is donating to those committing crimes or wrongful actions. If you knowingly donate towards crime or wrongdoing, it obviously is not a wholesome act.

When you donate to a well-known charity, it can be presumed that their activities are wholesome. You are not expected to engage a spy service to check this.

The common belief is that something material should be given in practising generosity. All practices begin in the mind. Generosity too begins in the mind. The very thought of giving is a wholesome act. Words arising from that thought can be part of the generous act. In fact, if one observes or participates in some way when another person engages in a generous act, that thought is an act of generosity. However, the fruits of such generosity might not be the same as the fruits of real donations.

Companies in the private sector and public corporations often have an allocation for gifts to charities. One who is managing or has influence over such funds can practise generosity by donating to the most deserving entities although the funds are owned by the corporate entity and not by the individual. A drawback is the expressed expectation of inordinate publicity.

UNIT 1 (C): REALISTIC LIMITATIONS IN THE PRACTICE OF GENEROSITY

There seem to be no limits to the practice of generosity by a *Maha Bodhisatta* (a confirmed aspirant to Buddhahood). One example is described in the *Vessantara Jataka* (a previous life of Siddhartha *Bodhisatta*). At one stage he was a king and

he gave away everything, every person he had and finally became a lonely ascetic in a jungle.

This type of ultimate sacrifice might not be possible for lesser beings. In this context a few matters become relevant.

The most important consideration is wisdom. At every turn there are choices and wisdom is necessary in every choice. Wisdom is the fourth perfection in the line-up of perfections. When a donor thinks of a donation, the donor needs to summon the factor of wisdom and test whether the action is going to be one of generosity or an act of stupidity. There is the case of a man in Sri Lanka who won a sweep ticket and spent all the money in conducting a lavish religious festival for about three months. He was left with nothing.

The author knows of a case where a husband decided to give all his property to his wife thinking of how good it is to be generous. It did not take much time for the wife to trust other friends and at one stage he was thrown out of the house. What followed was a sad story. Where was his wisdom? Was he really practising generosity or was he a common fool?

There is another perfection called equanimity. It is an ability to stay undisturbed despite changes in the surrounding. Was the man in the case cited above think that he was capable of being perfectly equanimous whatever other people do? If he had been a *maha bodhisatta* he could have put up with the sad consequences. but was he?

We need to understand who we are and use our wisdom to choose wise actions within our capabilities.

Practising generosity to be one better than another defeats the purpose, as the mental state is not clear or unpolluted.

Unit 1 (D): LIFE SKILLS ACQUIRED AND APPLIED THROUGH GENEROSITY

The most important aspect of generosity is the state of the mind in parting with what you have. Hence it is a mental state, an attitude of mind. For this, one needs to have training. Once that training is acquired, the attitude developed can also be applied in many real situations in life, even in commerce.

Looked at in this manner generosity is a skill. Some examples of its application are discussed here.

- (1) Negotiating a contract (for example a construction contract), we keep imposing conditions on the other party and we expect to win at every point. The other party gets worried and is getting closer to withdraw from the negotiation. Suppose you indicate that a point raised by the opponent is reasonable, at once the tension starts to reduce. We can do that if we are trained in generosity. Although I give in on a few conditions overall, I could be the winner. This is not an exception; it is really the rule regarding negotiations.
- (2) Negotiations and discussions always attract this principle that every individual needs to be prepared to give way to others if success is to be achieved in life. Hundreds of such cases in the management of an enterprise can be given.
- (3) Discussions at major and minor management meetings are an excellent example of long-term success of those who have a background in generosity.
- (4) When a spouse does something important it is essential that the other spouse genuinely shows appreciation. If one is incapable of doing that it is due to a shortfall in generosity. It is obvious that if that generosity is totally absent, the marriage will have problems. These things may look minor, but they ultimately determine the big picture.
- (5) In the office or your factory, it is necessary to notice the contribution made by sub-ordinates and acknowledge these suitably. That helps to develop job satisfaction and productivity. You can do this only if you have a generous heart. It will go a long way in your becoming a successful manager.
- (6) If you are running a business, the devotion of customers, needs to be continually acknowledged. Then only the customers will keep supporting the business. There was a small business in the U.S. which displayed the photographs of customers and naturally that went a long way in helping the business to be successful. What was given to the customers was very insignificant, but it was obvious generosity.
- (7) In the kindergarten, small things are given to little children all the time. That is generosity. Everyone knows how this practice brings children and parents to the school.
- (8) To some extent it might be useful to be strict with children and to have a level of discipline. However, it cannot be one-way traffic as children tend to revolt and form poor habits as a response to the powerful imposition of rules. If a parent has the wisdom to work out a few things that children really want such a thing can be given in keeping with the practice of generosity. A child is likely to notice it and agree to follow the rules set.

(9) Some people have eternal problems with neighbors. One of the reasons is that each party or one party attempts to have everything in a particular way. If you see what is aggravating him or her and then try to give a little of what he or she is looking for as part of generosity, the party is likely to respond. This may lead to a reduction of tensions.

(10) In today's world of communications it just takes one leader to take a tough stand on some matter and find that no progress can be made. If a little ground is given that could form the basis of a permanent solution to the problem. It is generosity working among powerful beings. Sometimes the word compromise is used in these situations, but it may imply the reservation of a grouse. If whatever is done is done with generosity, the chances of success would be more.

India and Pakistan are constantly at loggerheads over the ownership of Kashmir. A gift of disaster relief by one country when the other experiences serious trouble might alleviate suffering in the minds of people.

(11) Managing several people in an enterprise is often our responsibility. We can learn various techniques that help us to manage effectively. It is beneficial if sub-ordinates work with proper understanding. This usually results if in the past a manager had been attentive in the act of giving.

CONCLUDING NOTE:

There three types of giving mentioned in the scriptures.

- 1 Material gifts (*amisa dana*)
- 2 Gift of freedom from fear (*abhaya dana*)
- 3 Gift of the Dhamma (*Dhamma dana*)

The third one is obviously very important.

[Taken from the book titled *The Buddhist Way to Happiness* by Rahubadde and Tanuja Sarath-Chandra based on the Great Discourse on Blessings (Maha Mangala Sutta)]

Article 59

Ajahn Brahm's Quote:

[Gratefully extracted from the newsletter of the Buddhist Society of Victoria, 26 October 2021]

“Metta to the Present

Metta can be applied to all unpleasant experiences in life.

What people really need is kindness and compassion because it will not only give you friends but also solve problems in your daily life. Whenever you meet someone and give them compassion, it’s always so powerful.

You should also cultivate compassion for yourself. You can give loving kindness to your own body when there’s sickness or pain.

If you feed negativity to your depression, you’ll usually get depressed about being depressed. And then you get more depressed about being depressed.

Metta towards the moment is so powerful it can heal so many things. I’m not talking about saving you from bullets or patting a snake’s head; I’m talking about other problems in your life.

If you can’t solve them, be kind to them, and you’ll find that metta will work so powerfully well.”

Source: Opening up to Kindfulness by Ajahn Brahm

Article 60

Ajahn Brahm's Quote:

[Gratefully extracted from the newsletter of the Buddhist Society of Victoria, 2 November 2021]

“Metta to the Present

Metta has got to go to oneself as well as others.

It’s not just sacrificing yourself for other people, nor is it sacrificing other

people and being selfish. The important part about loving kindness in the moment is to include yourself as well.

Sometimes people think there are two types of Buddhism: Mahayana and Hinayana (a pejorative term for the Theravada tradition). Hinayana is to forget about other people and be concerned about your own enlightenment or your own happiness. Mahayana is to forget about yourself and think only about others.

Both are wrong!

If you just think about yourself and have no compassion for others, it does not work. If you think about others and have no compassion for yourself, you get burnt out and sick. You think neither about the other nor about yourself—it's about **Us**. Kindness and compassion should be directed into the correct place - **us**.

When we do our metta practice, we say, **“The door of our heart is open to all beings. May all beings be happy and well.”**

Have you ever noticed that when you say ‘May all beings be well,’ you forget about one being: you?

So the metta has to go towards you, as well. Sometimes I need time out and rest to look after myself. Why? So that I can be of greater use to other people.”

Source: Opening up to Kindfulness by Ajahn Brahm

Article 61

Ajahn Brahm's Quote:

[Gratefully extracted from the newsletter of the Buddhist Society of Victoria, 17 November 2021]

“Metta to the Present

Life is what is happening now.

We can't change the world, but we can change our attitude towards it.

What should we do with this moment called 'now'? You can care for it. Have loving kindness to this moment.

The door of my heart is open to whatever life is teaching me now. I endure everything: painful, not so painful, what I like, what I don't like. It doesn't matter.

We can't change the world. We can't change what we have to experience. But what we can change is our attitude to life. That is in our power. You can't change the people that you meet but you can certainly change your attitude to them. So we change our attitude and make it one of loving kindness.

Whatever comes into my life, whatever I have to do, whatever experience arises, I will give that kindness.

Life, the door of my heart is open to you, whatever you are, or however you feel...That is the key to happiness."

Source: Opening up to Kindfulness by Ajahn Brahm

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