

2014 Practice Period Introduction

Jean LaValley and Iris Dunaway, October 7th, 2014

Welcome all to this first evening of Bellingham Insight's annual practice period.

Tonight we'll give a brief overview of what a PP is in general and the focus of this particular PP. We'll review some foundational teachings & ideas that can support us during this time. There will be a chance to discuss these ideas in small groups. And we'll end by coming back together as a larger group.

Jean So...what is a PP? It is an opportunity to deepen and clarify our dharma practice, both on and off the cushion. Historically, the practice period originated in the rains retreats of the early Buddhist monks and nuns when they could not travel due to heavy rains. During that time, the sangha lived together & practiced together. So..during 9 months of the year, monks wandered and mainly practiced alone. During a PP, they practiced together. And we want to recognize that we are both practicing as individuals and practicing within this community and build in some sangha support .

A PP is a good time to “ratchet up” our practice. There are many ways to ratchet up.

You might want to start or deepen a daily practice.

And/or to start coming to one of our usual meditation periods (AM & Tuesday evenings).

The twice a month Saturday (morning) Sit-in. Ajahn Santi will be coming up in November to lead a Saturday retreat day.

The TC will be giving dharma talks on Tuesdays at 8 PM for the 6 weeks.

We'll be including chances to meet and talk with each other about dharma topics.

And to suggest resources to help you explore any topic that you are interested in.

But this is **not** to be intimidating or demanding - do whatever is right for you. Dip your toe in, step into the pool of dharma up to your knees, or

take the plunge.

The names & emails of the teaching corps are at the bottom of your handout. Meet the TC Jean, Iris, Mary S, Mary H. Geneva, Laura, John F (on retreat), Steve H (Hawaii)

The TC chose a theme for this PP - the 5 hindrances. In Buddhist doctrine, there are many obstacles which block the road to spiritual progress, but there are five in particular which are identified under the name of "hindrances." These 5 are sensual desire, ill-will, Sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse and skeptical doubt . These may be qualities that you have noticed in your own mind, *both on and off the cushion*. Understanding and working with these hindrances is often a central part of our effort, *on and off the cushion*, and it is for that reason that we will be exploring these over the next month and a half. Next week John and Mary will review what is called the gradual training, which gives a context for working with the hindrances. And in the weeks following that we will look a little more deeply at each of the 5.

The title of our PP is *Gladdening the Heart: Freeing the Mind from the Hindrances*. Not only will we be exploring the content & manifestation of each hindrance, but we will also be returning often to our attitude as we practice. In one of our meetings we were discussing what to *do* during the PP and what to call it. We were doing a decent job of brainstorming...we thought. But finally Iris said...let's think about the tone of this discussion. This all sounds so grim. Where's the happiness in this? Does it have to be grim? Who would want to come back every Tuesday for 6 weeks to get more bad news? Ah...most excellent reminder, grasshopper.

Iris -- talk about attitude

What is a PP? Theme. Attitude.

Now Iris and I want to talk briefly about basic teachings that can serve as the basis of our time during this next month and as a support for our practice always. Traditionally take refuge at the beginning

Iris talks about 3 refuges, especially sangha

*wandering monks gathering together

*Thich Naht Hanh: sangha practice may be today's root practice

*our intention is to provide an opportunity to *intentionally* practice together

Intention

Jean A practice period is an opportunity for us as participants to clarify our spiritual intentions AND to work with them. In a practice period we are

encouraged to identify an intention that will open us up to opportunities and activities beyond our current level of commitment, while keeping in mind what is doable *and* respects our family, health and work. So what is intention and what produces a good one?

The Buddha said that our intentions are the main factors shaping our lives and that they can be mastered as a skill. Ajahn Geoff starts his essay on intention this way: “there’s an old saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but that’s not really the case. The road to hell is paved with intentions that are careless, lustful, or mean.”

The dictionary defines intention as “the stretch or bending of the mind in a direction.” So the small intention might be to focus on the breath or on eating or on walking. But there is a larger piece to intention. What is your deepest wish for yourself - to become quieter? To know yourself? To be kinder to yourself? To be free from suffering? What are you “inclining” towards? Whatever your answer, you have a better chance of getting where you want to go if you purposely “intend”/bend AND point yourself in the right direction.

As the unrecognized Buddhist sage, Yogi Berra, has said: “If you don’t know where you are going, you’re liable to arrive someplace else.”

So how do we more skillfully work with intention? AG: “The most basic step in this process is to make sure that we stay off the road to hell. We do this through the practice of generosity and virtue, consciously replacing unskillful intentions with more skillful ones.” That’s why we wanted to introduce the refuges tonight and precepts next week, because they are basic supports for staying off the road to hell.

Another way of working with intention is pay attention to our actions (physical or mental) in 3 stages – before we take an action (), during the action () and then after we are done (). IF we were to do this, we would a) learn a lot and b) probably slow down, because this takes some time.

An additional support for working with intention is to meditate – to slow down and pay attention to the mind, because the mind is one of your tools OFF the cushion to figure out whether you’re on the road to heaven or hell.

So intention is about both about the direction you want to take to realize your deepest wish for yourself AND about a commitment or leaning towards specific actions that will help you realize this wish.

Let's sit for a minute and let that flow through and around you.

Iris: leads us in the refuges