

Proposed Dhamma Practice Discussion Group

For a long time, I have felt that we should have a forum where people who want to make the Buddha's teachings the guiding principles in their lives can discuss their practice with like-minded people. I have found in my own life that the practical application of the teachings can be a difficult area and I'm sure that many of us would benefit from listening to other peoples' experiences in a more structured manner than generally happens at our regular Wednesday meetings.

At the recent meeting to discuss re-opening after the lengthy closure due to Covid restrictions, I therefore proposed that one Wednesday per month should be used to discuss individual practice rather than general Buddhist philosophy. I know that this may seem a daunting prospect for some members but I believe that it will prove to be truly valuable.

If there is sufficient interest to make this group viable, I suggest the following guidelines for the group. These are just my initial thoughts and I would welcome discussion and any additional or alternative suggestions.

1. Anyone is welcome to attend the group, provided that they are interested in putting the Buddha's teachings into practice in their daily life and feel that they would benefit from discussing their experiences with fellow practitioners.
2. The type of experiences and the amount of detail shared will be at the discretion of the individual. Nobody will be asked or required to speak at the meetings; participation will, again, be at the individual's discretion.
3. Participants should agree to respect confidentiality and not repeat any information shared in group meetings.
4. Contributions should be confined to personal practice.
5. Some individuals may simply want to share an experience whilst others may want comments from other attendees. In order to differentiate between the two, I suggest that those wanting feedback should end their contribution with a phrase such as "I would welcome any constructive feedback."
6. Before either describing a personal experience or giving constructive feedback, participants should consider the Buddha's guidance for Right Speech 'Is it true? Is it beneficial? Is it the right time and place? Do I speak gently? Do I speak with a mind of goodwill?'

I expect that, once the group has been running for several months, people will be able to turn up and discuss whatever topic has been relevant for their practice in the preceding month; however, for the first few months, I think that it would be useful if, at each meeting, a subject is given for discussion at the following month's meeting. Participants can then make this the focus of their practice for the month. I suggest:

- Month 1 – The five precepts.
- Month 2 – The five hindrances.
- Month 3 – The first three Noble Truths.
- Months 4 to 11 – One step of the Noble Eightfold Path, in sequence.

I would be happy to produce a short handout, with suggested practice questions, for each month.

Nigel