

Apparent in This Very Life

The Dhamma is not one book. That's because the Dhamma that the Buddha pointed to isn't just one thing. It isn't a teaching that comes from a god and it isn't a teaching that can be summed up in just one way. The Dhamma is something that we each need to wake up to for ourselves. And so after the Buddha woke up to the Dhamma after the Buddha attained enlightenment, the Dhamma was different based on the people he was teaching.

So he adjusted the way he was teaching based on the person he was teaching Dhamma to. And we're very lucky for that.

Christian teachings show that Jesus came back to Palestine and he began teaching but he was only able to teach for two years or so before he died, before he was killed. But the Buddha had forty five years after his enlightenment to teach to his disciples.

And he created a large community of bhikkhus and a large community of bhikkhunis and a large community of men and women lay disciples. When he passed away they were enlightened or had stages of enlightenment and were able to transmit his teachings to future generations. So we have a large treasure chest full of teachings that have been passed down.

And people who learned from the Buddha had so much gratitude for what he taught them, that they continued to pass down his words, which we consider to be some of the best and the most precise teachings on Dhamma.

What the Dhamma “is”, though, is not necessarily what's in the books. Because again, these teachings were given to different people at different times. But all the stuff in the books point to the Dhamma.

When we “take refuge in the Dhamma” we have different ways. Epithets of the Dhamma that we recite. We say that the Dhamma is “*sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko opaneyyiko paccattamveditabbo viññūhi...*” and this means that the Dhamma is visible here and now; that it is timeless, it isn't limited to just one time in history; that it encourages us to come and see. And that it is progressive. It leads us onward, it gets deeper. Finally, the Dhamma is for each person to understand for themselves. And when we recite these qualities of the Dhamma, we're remembering that what's in the books points us to the Dhamma.

It points us to an awakening of what's right here and right now in front of us.

And the Dhamma develops qualities in our hearts. It makes us better people, it makes us better able to understand the world around us. This is what waking up to the Dhamma does. And this is not something that happens just at once.

There are stories of people in the Buddha's time who were already practicing meditation and who already had really good Sila (virtue). So when the Buddha gave them a teaching, wow, they woke up really quick and they understood very quickly.

But now for most of us in the current day, it will take some time to develop these qualities. And so that's why we say *opaneyyiko*, that's why we say “it leads onwards” is because we start out and we don't know anything about the Buddhist teachings. And maybe we have a lot of qualities that we wish we could do better about.

We wish we could not get angry all the time or not be so greedy. But when we start to hear the Dhamma, then we start to understand what is good and what is bad, and what we should try to let go of and what we should try to develop. So the Dhamma points us in the right direction, and then we know what to practice, what to get better at. And as we do practice that Dhamma, we begin to understand it for ourselves.

So when we first hear a Dhamma teaching, the best we can do is to try to repeat the teaching as clearly and as accurately as we can. Because wise people will be able to understand that teaching no matter who recites it. And this is one of the reasons why we chant. We are reciting the Dhamma. We are recollecting it.

We are going over it again and again and again in a way that people in the future will be able to understand and hear the same words of the Buddha that we received from previous generations. But after a time when we've been practicing the Dhamma for some time, it begins to work itself into us. We wake up to pieces of the Dhamma, we begin to understand and see how the world works. And at that time, the Dhamma is not just what's in the books at that time.

The Dhamma is inside of us. And when we speak, we're, we're starting to speak on the Dhamma. And so like giving this talk, when I first came to the monastery, I didn't know anything about Buddhism except you should try to be kind and you should try to be generous. And that was a good start.

And if you do just that, you will begin to develop. But as I listened to Dhamma teachings and as I read the suttas and as I practiced meditation, I began to understand for myself. And then one day I found that people were asking me questions, and then later they were asking me to give talks like this. And that is the progression of the Dhamma. And this is why it's so special. So in Buddhism, it's not just the Buddha who woke up, it's all of us that can wake up.

And when we wake up, it's something that we can give to others. The Dhamma is the foremost of gifts that we can give. We can help people after us understand the world better and wake up to the truth of the way things are.

The Dhamma is sometimes compared to a candle flame in the same way that you might light a candle and then touch the flame of that candle to an unlit candle and that that candle will light. Now you have two candles that are lit. And when you, when you do this, the first candle flame doesn't become less. It still burns in the exact same way. And this is like the transmission of the Dhamma through the ages. It's like the passing, the lighting of candles on and on and on.

The original understanding that we get doesn't change when we give the Dhamma to others. It is inexhaustible. So once we understand the Dhamma, everything that we do and say and think will be affected.

And that way we can teach the Dhamma simply by existing. And this is part of what we take refuge in. We take refuge in the fact that we can wake up ourselves and become better people and that is one of the best things that we can do for the world around us. So this is a little reflection. I hope it's been informative. I hope you get a sense of when you can put the books down and just study your own experience for a while and try to understand what it is you've been reading or what you've been hearing Dhamma talks about.

I wish you well.