

Awaken in this life

(A spiritual exercise)

The purpose of practising Buddhism – as the historical Buddha’s teaching – is to awaken in this life itself. This message is stated again and again in the suttas, such as the Bhadd’eka,ratta Sutta, where the Buddha declares: “**Work at the task (of awakening) this very day!** | Who knows, death will come tomorrow? | For, there is no bargaining whatsoever | with death’s great army.” (M 131)¹

Once after I have finished explaining **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1) and other related suttas on the urgent need and great ease of attaining streamwinning in this life to a group of Buddhists in a large local temple, one of the participants remarked. “I have been coming here for over 20 years. What didn’t the monks teach us such an important teaching? All we have been doing is chanting and transferring merit!”²

Here, I would like to propose a simple Dharma training for you to take up right now, so that you can awaken in this life itself, as taught in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** and the other 9 suttas of the Okkanta Samyutta (S 25.1-10). Join the growing number of Buddhists who are living their lives in a Dharma-inspired way, so that we are guaranteed to attain streamwinning in this life, if not, at the very moment of passing away (S 25.1).

WHY DO WE NEED TO ATTAIN STREAMWINNING IN THIS LIFE ITSELF? The answer is simple enough. If we only practise charity but do not keep the precepts, we are likely to be reborn amongst in the animals, but will be well treated.³ If we habitually keep the precepts but do not attain at least streamwinning, we will, after death, be reborn in the heavens. But when our merits are exhausted, we will fall straight into the animal world, the asura realm, the preta world, or the hellish states.

Only if the streamwinners, and the other saints, would remain in the heavens, or be reborn amongst humans again, to continue their practice. The arhats, after death, will not be reborn, as they have exhausted all their karma.⁴ Streamwinners, after death, will be reborn in an environment conducive to Dharma practice, whether a heavenly realm or a human birth. They will attain full awakening within 7 lives in this way.

HOW DO WE ATTAIN STREAMWINNING IN THIS LIFE ITSELF? The simple answer: We should habitually practise the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*). This is nothing new, because everything around us and inside us are all impermanent. We only need to see this reality and accept it. When we gain money, wealth or things, the gain is *impermanent*. When we lose them or someone near or dear, the pain is *impermanent*. When we become famous, a lot of people know or want to know us: this is impermanent. When we are obscure, no one seems to know

¹ M 131,3.3 ([SD 8.9](#)) = M 132 = M 133 = M 134.

² “Transferring merit,” is, of course, a wrong term for “dedication of merit,” which is really a form of cultivating lovingkindness for the deceased: see **Tiro,kudda Sutta** (Khp 7 = Pv 1.5) + [SD 2.7 \(4.2\)](#).

³ See **(Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi Sutta** (A 10.177,10-26), [SD 2.6a](#).

⁴ “Arhats” in other teachings are said to be not fully awakened, and still need to attain Buddhahood, but this is not the Buddha’s teaching: see Reflection, “[To be Bodhisattva, be arhat first](#),” R198, 2011.

us: this is *impermanent*. When others blame us: this is *impermanent*. When they praise us, this is *impermanent*. These are the 8 winds that blow like dust in a storm.

When we habitually remind ourselves that all worldly conditions are impermanent, we will neither be traumatized nor intoxicated by any such experience. Such a calm and clear mind brings about streamwinning in this life itself, if not at our very last moment of life, when we pass on with a calm and clear mind.⁵

The Sikkhā Sutta 1 (A 3.85), says that to become a streamwinner, we must “be fully accomplished in moral virtue, but gain only limited concentration, gain only limited wisdom.”⁶ We must be morally virtuous, but need only a little mindfulness and only a little wisdom. “A little mindfulness” means to be able keep the 5 precepts and understand why we do so. “Only a little wisdom” means that

- (1) we do not identify with our body or mind, knowing them to be impermanent and changing;
- (2) we are not superstitious: we do not rely on someone or something outside for happiness;
- (3) we have joyful faith in the Buddha as the ideal of awakening, the Dharma as the path to awakening, and the noble sangha as our exemplars; and our only refuge is the Dharma.⁷

HOW DO I KEEP THE PRECEPTS PROPERLY? The 5 precepts remind us of the value of life, happiness, freedom, truth, and wisdom. We should avoid killing because all life is precious. We live happily when we have our basic needs honestly gotten; hence, to steal another’s property is to take away his happiness. Freedom means that each person has the right to his own body; hence, we should not violate another’s body or freedom in any way. All this only works when we accept them to be based on truth. Finally, we need to keep our mind free from intoxicants, so that it is calm and clear. All this works as the bases for the cultivation of wisdom.⁸

These are not commandments; no one punishes us when we break any precept. If we habitually break the precepts, then there is something we do not understand about the Dharma or there’s something we are not really happy about. In that case, we need to carefully study the related suttas, and to cultivate some lovingkindness. Lovingkindness makes it easier for us to keep the precepts.

A precept is a training-rule (*sikkhāpada*): we *train* ourselves not to break the precept. If we do break any precept, we should reflect on what really happened. What were the conditions that make us break it? How do we correct these conditions so that we become stronger? With lovingkindness, we reflect on how life is precious to us, and we extend the same understanding to others. Compassion then arises in us: we do not want to hurt anyone; not to take the not-given, but be charitable; not to commit sexual misconduct, but to respect ourselves and others; not to lie, but be wise and charitable with truth; and we rejoice in being able to cultivate our own mind to find happiness through self-effort.

HOW TO MEDITATE EFFECTIVELY AND SAFELY? The best way to learn meditation is to find a kind and experienced teacher. However, if we are unable to find a teacher, we can try this simple

⁵ See (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), [SD 16.7](#).

⁶ **Sikkhā Sutta 1** (A 3.85 = A:B 3.86), [SD 3.3\(2\)](#).

⁷ See Reflection, “[Our one true refuge](#),” R397, 2015.

⁸ On the 5 values, see [SD 1.5 \(2\)](#).

spiritual exercise to keep our mind calm and clear.⁹ Do this exercise daily or regularly (that is, whenever you can). Before falling asleep, or upon waking up, or at some suitable time, reflect on something important or interesting that has happened earlier in the day. Reflect on how this event is really impermanent *despite everything*. Then, mindfully tell yourself: “**Impermanent! Impermanent! ...**” as many times as you like.

Then, notice how peaceful you are: just *silently* smile at it, and let the peace pervade your whole being (body and mind). Any time you like, gently and silently whisper, “**Buddho! Buddho! ...**” or “**Peaceful! Peaceful! ...**” Just feel the peace; enjoy it as long as you like. Sleep peacefully; wake peacefully.

At the end of this spiritual exercise, make this aspiration:

**“By this joy and peace that I have gained
through my faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha,
may I have the courage and wisdom
to aspire to streamwinning in this life itself. Sadhu!”¹⁰**

This aspiration can also be made as a group, say, after a sutta study or a puja.

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⁹ See Reflection, “[Meditate, naturally](#),” R300, 2013.

¹⁰ Further, see Reflection, “[Streamwinning in this life](#),” R414, 2015.