

Long sentence

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Our life is punctuated by our in-breaths and out-breaths.

Like punctuations in good writing, we must have proper regard for them.

The Oxford comma

I like the Oxford comma, which helps keep a sentence sensible. Look at this sentence with an Oxford comma (before “and”):

I love my parents, the Buddha, and Lady Gaga.

Without the Oxford comma, we have:

I love my parents, the Buddha and Lady Gaga. (The sentence seems to say that my parents are ... !)

My Canadian friend, Tom Anderson, wrote to me that the literary journal at his University once ran a challenge: Write a short essay without punctuation, except for ‘.’—the object, write so clearly that no punctuation would be necessary. There were few entries! The one selected by the journal committee was, as one might expect, exceptionally clear. It was also uninteresting. We are language-oriented: when writing is not like speech, we do not easily follow. Perhaps this tells us something about the spread of the Dhamma.

Breath marker

I also use the Oxford comma as “breath markers,” to help us catch our breath at helpful breaks and important words in a long sentence, such as this one from the essay, **Language and discourse**:

“The Buddha, the saints and Dharma teachers speak on these 2 levels, namely, the worldly or layman level, using stories, images (comparisons, metaphors, etc), dealing with causes and conditions, and with conventional reality, and the Dharma or spiritual level, using technical terms (impermanence, suffering, non-self), directly dealing with the path and liberation, that is, ultimate reality.” ([SD 26.11 \(1.3\)](#))

Proper punctuations liberate

When our life is not punctuated by the Dhamma, then it becomes an endless and meaningless sentence—this is the uroboros called samsara.

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