

Small change

To live as a Buddhist is to keep to the three trainings, those of body, mind and spirit. The training begins with our body and speech, how well we communicate with others: this is the basis of moral conduct. We may not be able to change others, but we begin by accepting them as they are: this is the spirit of the five precepts.

On a more difficult level, we need to tame our mind. As we think so we are: if we think we can, we can; if we think we can't, we can't. When we know our mind, we can change ourselves in a wholesome way.

The third training is that of the spirit, meaning the "essence" of things. With properly developed body (physical actions) and speech, and a disciplined mind, we are able to see true reality, things as they really are, which is liberating in the highest sense.

May I be at peace with what I cannot change

Two things we cannot change are the past and others. We cannot change the past because it is gone. Our past may have shaped us, or even still control us. However, our past is gone, so how can it really control us? What is influencing or controlling us is not really the past, but *how* we think of our past.

Let's say something happened in the past, and we remembered it. How we remembered it (put it together) is deeply influenced by circumstances then, for example, we were much younger or knew much less then.

We are different *now*. The past is gone: it is *now*. We need to accept the present so that we really live a full life. We might not be able to change the past, but we can be at peace with it. To be at peace here means that we no more think negatively about ourselves because of some past memory.

We may not be able to change others, but we can be at peace with our *ideas* of them. Everyone is in some ways shaped by their circumstances. There are really no "persons," only circumstances. We need to give them the benefit of the doubt because we are not them. When we meet or think of such people, we should train ourselves by *feeling*: "I accept you just as you are."

This will help remove negative images and imprints from our mind, and keep it positive. Remember that no one can hurt us as badly as we ourselves can. No one can hurt us, if we do not allow it.

May I have courage to change what I can

We are limited by our beliefs. A belief is what we *think*, put together into *words* in our mind. To believe something is to give supremacy to the "word," whether we really *know* it or not. Our thoughts (*what* we think) and behaviour (acting out *how*

we think) depend on our sense-experiences: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. In other words, this is how we “make sense” of our world.

Our senses *are* our world. The quality of our “world” is *how* we sense things. More often than not we have a “reactive” experience of our world. We tend to be drawn to what reminds us of a past joy; we tend to push away what reminds us (often unconsciously) of a past pain; and we tend to ignore what is not part of our past.

Our life then is an endless loop of causes and effects, a snake painfully eating its own tail. Ours is a predictably limited existence, living in the past, dead to the present. But we can change things, become truly happy, by rising above our ideas of liking and disliking. We begin by unconditionally accepting ourselves: “I accept myself just as I am. I forgive myself.”

Nothing happens to us from a single cause (whether a person, a thing, or an idea). Things happen as a result of numerous causes and conditions. No one is to be blamed. This is the beginning of *wisdom*, facing true reality.

May I wisely know the difference

We are liberated by *knowing true reality*, that is, knowing our mind, taming it, and freeing it. Our mind is fed through our physical senses, but it also thinks for itself by creating new and highly imaginative ideas of its own. To tame the mind is to understand and refine how this idea-making process works.

One simple way of freeing the mind is to understand that our mind is *changing* all the time. An idea is a fixed view of something that is changing. So we need to accept that even our ideas and beliefs are changing. We only need to see how our ideas and beliefs have changed, often dramatically, over the years.

If we accept that our ideas and beliefs must change, then they become steps of mental development. This is truly learning. We can see how science has progressed over the centuries by changing theory after theory. We truly grow if we honestly examine *how* we think, *why* we think that way, and *what* we think about or believe.

Real growth is that of the heart. The heart grows by letting go of the mind: never mind the word. We are limited by the words in our heads, the voice of the past: it is dead and gone. Let it go.

We may not change the world outside, but we can and need to change the world within. We need to understand and accept this difference.

May I
be at peace with what I cannot change,
bravely change what I can, and
wisely know the difference.

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