

Obsessive compulsive habits

How the mind forces us to do thing

The problem of insisting that we are right

[Previously published as fb200518 Piya Tan]

After a decade of studying sociology and another decade psychology, I see myself as an amateur profiler. I'm interested in why people act in the way they do, its negative and positive aspects, how we can help this person see his own habits as such; above all, what I can learn about myself. For there is no neutral unbiased observer, unless we are awakened with the wisdom of the Buddha.

Hence, I find social engagement with people on the Internet, such as Facebook, both interesting and rewarding. This is, of course, not a given. We have to work for a wholesome kind of social media platform we want. We certainly do not want a cyber-crowd that attracts trolling, as I have often noticed and experienced over this decade-plus I have spent with Facebook and social media.

Signs of being obsessive compulsive

We don't need to have **obsessive compulsive disorder** (OCD) to troll or react negatively with Friends from far and wide whom we've never met. We can still exhibit a predictable and consistent pattern of obsessive compulsive behaviour. We are excited by the mess and attention we generate. We simply lash out abusively at Friends no matter who they are, but for simply disagreeing with us.

Now, suppose there is Z, who has a deep interest in Dhamma, even real respect for good monastics. He has the idea that only what the Buddha teaches is right. Everything else, everyone else, is wrong and should be rejected, with a **vengeance**. Surely, most of us here have a deep interest in Dhamma, and a respect for teachers, too. However, we also accept sensible and amicable sharing of faiths and views that neither belittles nor violates our faith and understanding in the 3 jewels.

Abusive conduct

Understandably, such unsocial conduct will instigate the ire of others who have a similar intolerance, and maybe more power than we have. So, we are thrown out, blocked, from that social medium. Then, we use another pseudonym, another personality: we pretend to be another name, but we are the same person, with the same obsessive compulsive tendency to be intolerant of others and be abusive towards them.

Hence, it helps for a social media platform like Facebook to be guided by **moral virtue** (*sīla*): respect for others and their opinions; no abusive language; humour, even sarcasm, but in good taste; a noble gesture of agreeing to disagree, and, above all, a willingness to learn in our own time from whatever has happened. Everything is teaching us—when we are willing to learn.

Friendship first

I try never to **abuse** someone for disagreeing with me. We should not say things to others who reject our view, like saying: “Are you taking drugs?” and so on. Instead, we should work towards some kind of middle ground, where we are willing to see those aspects that we do agree with. Or, we can simply **agree to disagree**.

Notice that when we are really **friends**, even when we have differing views, we easily give one another emotional space: we agree to disagree. In fact, we may even seem to argue, but we never **hate** our friend. We are still friends.

The teacher’s role

The openness of social media like Facebook provides us with the opportunity for being a **teacher**, whether we are ready or not. This is where anyone with something wise or worthwhile to say is, to that effect, a teacher. Here, a teacher is not a person, but a role of wisdom we assume to share what is Dhamma-based or at least helpful to others.

Further, we are also guided by certain principles. On this FB platform, for example, we see it as a comfortable little country cottage for Friends and friends (people we know and care about even before or outside of FB) to gather and celebrate wisdom and friendship based on our common love for the historical Buddha, his teaching and the community of noble saints. Basically, we are guided by the desire to learn, practise, understand and teach what we clearly understand of all this.

Moral courage

Yet, because we are not awakened, we still have something more to learn. Hence, our respect for others’ views, which we will question for the sake of learning and understanding. Of course, some of us are instinctively polite for fear of offending others, or we simply dislike discord. This may limit or distort what we can learn.

Hence, **moral courage** (*vesārajja*) is vital here. This is the willingness to see and learn the truth, even about oneself, and, in time, to be truly free of our negative emotions and past conditionings. This is the great advantage from learning. This is the remarkable, even rare, value of this Sutta FB. We challenge ourselves to change for the better. After all, our aim is to have the courage to **aspire for the path** as streamwinners in this life itself.

Noticing our inner fetters

The fact that we are still unawakened—whether we are monks and nuns, or laymen and laywomen—we are often tricked and goaded by our unconscious latent tendencies to parade to the global audience how clever we are, that we are never wrong, and woe to those who are in our way.

Then, we are narcissistic (having a strong sense of **self-identity view**). We have no faith in the goodness of others (this is persistent **doubt** in others that they can ever be better than us).

And then, there is this difficult nature of repeating our bad habits in a variety of ways (this is an aspect of **attachment to rituals and vows**): “This is what I am, I can’t change!” Nothing is more false than this, if we understand and accept the Buddha Dhamma.

Knowing oneself

Imagine how fortunate we are to be able to know oneself. The mirror does not lie but simply reflects what is before it. It is up to us to see (or not) what our true self-image in the mirror of truth is. We can let this FB page be that mirror. In doing so, we have value-added to this little Dhamma home that we share and enjoy. We will be good Dhamma-friends for **lives**, learning from one another, journeying along towards the path of awakening.

This is one beautiful explanation for the various great disciples who with their many friends, from the 5 to the 500 and more, listening to the Buddha together, and awakening together. This is the true spirit of the body (esprit de corps): we have “different bodies but one mind,” as Anuruddha and his colleagues declares in **the (Anuruddha) Upakkilesa Sutta** (M 128,48.-6-7), SD 5.18.

R748 Revisioning Buddhism 314

[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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