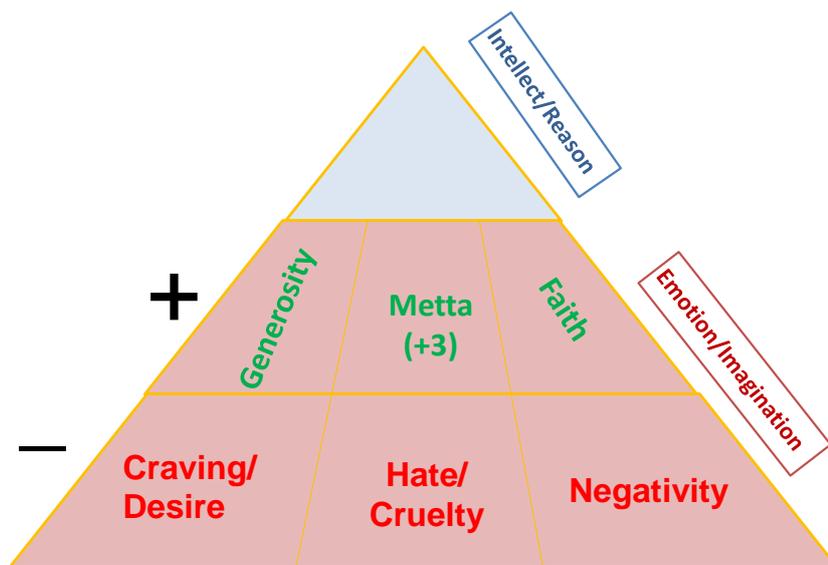


Last week we introduced the Noble Eightfold Path and considered how the Path of Vision (i.e. Perfect Vision) relates to the Path of Transformation (i.e. the other 7 'limbs'). The first step of the Path of Transformation, for very good reasons, is Perfect Emotion. The starting point in looking at this limb is to recognise that we very often fail to act in accordance with what we know to be true – this is simply because, whether we like to admit it or not, our emotions are invariably stronger than our reason. The consequence is that we have no real chance of making progress in the spiritual life if our hearts are not involved in it. The aim should therefore be not to *stifle or suppress* our unruly emotions with the force of reason and concept, but rather to *harness* our very considerable emotional energy in the service of our spiritual development. Sangharakshita says (in 'The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path') that Perfect Emotion "...represents the harmonisation of the whole emotional and volitional side of our being with Perfect Vision...". This should make it very clear why this second stage of the Eightfold Path is such a crucial one.

Perfect Emotion can be considered, according to tradition and as summarised in the text, in terms of both (a) the emotional responses we should try to eliminate, and (b) those that we need to encourage. We shall briefly describe these 'negative' and 'positive' aspects, noting that certain pairs relate to each other directly, and spending a little more time on a few of them.

The diagram below is meant to represent our whole being as a sort of 'iceberg', where the visible tip is our intellectual or rational side, and the much larger, hidden area belongs to our emotions and imagination:



First, we can think in terms of the ‘**negative**’ emotional states (represented in **red**), the energies of which we might wish to harness and ‘convert’:

1. The first of these is one of the three ‘roots’ of our suffering, **craving** (or, we might say, unhealthy forms of **desire**). This is quite probably, for most of us, the single most challenging area in which to work. Our culture is almost entirely dedicated to the systematic cultivation of desire, which is ruthlessly cultivated and exploited by the global industries of advertising and marketing. It’s probably fair to say that we could easily assume that our main reason to exist is to try to satisfy desire – at least until we choose to challenge that assumption! If we cultivate non-desire deliberately we can begin to take a radically different approach, investigating how much we can give up rather than acquire, and doing what we can to make our lives less cluttered. However, beware – this behaviour very directly challenges cultural norms, and you should understand what deep waters you might be getting into when you seriously question them!
2. **Hatred** is, as we already know, another ‘root’ of suffering. It is interesting to note that hatred is closely related to craving, in the sense of being a response that occurs when our desires – in the broadest sense of the word - are unfulfilled. In its most extreme form, hatred may manifest as cruelty - the very unskilful human tendency to revel in the suffering of another sentient being, whether human or otherwise. Any glance at history, or current affairs, will give us ample reminders of how strong this tendency can be (if any reminder is necessary).
3. We might also say that most of us, at least some of the time, are subject to a sort of ‘default’ of **negativity**. It’s as though the daily, humdrum nature of our life drags us down, like a sort of gravitational pull, away from the high aspirations or ideals that we might feel we have contacted, even though momentarily, by way of Perfect Vision that we discussed last week. This sort of negativity might often manifest as cynicism; when it becomes more intense it can take the form of bitterness, poisonous gossip or even despair. We’ve all witnessed people who appear to inhabit a world of negativity which, depressingly, can be contagious.

What, then, are the ‘**positive**’ aspects of Perfect Emotion (represented in the diagram in **green**)?

1. Firstly, **generosity**, often referred to in Buddhist circles as *dāna*, not only directly counteracts desire, but is often regarded as the ‘primary Buddhist virtue’. There are many ways in which we can give, including the wonderful practice of giving fearlessness – in other words, helping others to develop their own confidence through the example we set.
2. Next come four closely-connected emotions which are sometimes referred to collectively as the *brahma-vihārās*, or ‘sublime abodes’. The first (and, in many ways, foremost) of these is **mettā**, which we already know is difficult to translate (although ‘love’ and ‘universal friendship’ are convenient approximations). *Mettā*, of course, is the counterpart of hatred. Just as the **mettā bhāvanā** meditation involves the transformative power of love, so other *bhāvanā* (i.e. cultivating) practices exist for the other 3 qualities listed below.
 - a. The direct counterpart of cruelty is **compassion** (*karuṇā*), a response to our seeing the suffering of others that is at the same time emotional and practical. In the Buddhist tradition known as the *Mahāyāna* (the ‘Great Vehicle’), there is a huge emphasis on compassion to the extent that it is effectively seen as synonymous with wisdom. In fact, it has sometimes

been said within the *Mahāyāna* tradition that no other teaching is required to bring us to enlightenment! The beautiful myth of the enlightened being or *bodhisattva* called Avalokiteśvara is an example of how the only appropriate response to a true perception of the **three characteristics of existence** (unsatisfactoriness, impermanence and insubstantiality) is spontaneous compassion for all beings.

- b. **Sympathetic joy** (*muditā*) is a deeply positive quality, in that we can rejoice in the happiness and successes of others. This obviously works, in its own distinctive way, to counter self-obsession and the strength of ego. In considering *muditā*, Sangharakshita makes the point that the practice of Buddhism is capable of being a much more joyful affair than may be the case in other faiths – hopefully you will find this to be true within the Triratna Buddhist Community!
 - c. The fourth of the *brahma-vihāra* emotions is *upekṣā*, or **equanimity**. You may have experienced this for yourself, perhaps through meditation, or maybe spontaneously, when a deep feeling of peace and stillness, in one sense hard to describe, but in another very real, has entered your experience. Sometimes equanimity is described as having a sort of emotional and spiritual stability, in which we observe both the suffering and joy of ourselves and others, but are neither overwhelmed by negative experiences, nor intoxicated by positive ones. The winds of worldly experience may batter us, but they don't throw us off course. The image of our minds being like a perfectly round sphere, at rest on a perfectly smooth surface, has also been applied to equanimity.
3. Lastly of the 6 positive emotions, **faith** (*śrāddha*) is an emotional state which is covered very briefly in 'The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path', but which is generally felt to be hugely important, and which might be regarded as the 'antidote' to our natural negativity. It is important to realise that *śrāddha* has quite a different meaning from that encountered in Christianity – it has nothing to do with blind acceptance. Instead, it involves our having sufficient **confidence** or **trust** in somebody or something (ultimately, in the Three Jewels) to accept their message on the basis of (a) its intuitive appeal and (b) an appraisal of its objective reasonableness, until we have had a chance to relate it to (c) our direct experience. These three, successive levels of confidence or trust are traditionally known as the 'three grounds of faith'.

The cultivation of Perfect Emotion is helped by a variety of **ritual practices**. One of these is *puja*, or 'worship', particularly the **Seven-fold Puja**. This is widely practiced, in the Triratna Buddhist Community (and others), and involves recitation, ritual and imagination for the deliberate cultivation of a range of positive emotions. All 7 stages, including the recitation of Going for Refuge that we met last week, have the ability to strengthen our emotional connection with the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Shorter, simpler ritual practices are the Three-fold Puja, also used extensively in the Triratna tradition. Practising puja can be a very positive experience for some people, but doesn't work for everybody. Don't feel that something's wrong if puja isn't your 'thing' – what's more important is to know what works for you, and to use it.

Traditionally, before any class or devotional activity held in a shrine room, Sangha members recite the four phrases *Namo Buddhāya, Namō Dharmāya, Namō Saṅghāya, Namō Nama* – this translates as "Homage to the Buddha, Homage to the Dharma, Homage to the Sangha, homage indeed!". This practice is known as 'saluting the Three Jewels'.