

Amita Schmidt - Fires of Change



Ha'a Keaulana

Rock Runner & Hawaiian Surfing Champion

Our Training Rocks

The "Hawaiian Rock Runners" are surfers who run carrying rocks up to 50lb in weight, 20-30 feet under water. This is to build up stamina and ability to survive under water for long periods, without breathing, no matter what waves knock them and hold them under water.

Amita uses this as an analogy to show us that change and difficulty are our own "training rocks" towards building us into better human beings. These include, Covid, climate change, etc. When we commit to the "training rocks" of the "Fires of change" we begin to learn and know about the 'unchangeable' where there is awareness, love, stillness and infinity. When we know better the unchanging nature of the here and now, it leads to freedom and calm in our lives and even on our deathbed.

"Form is burning, feeling is burning, perception is burning, volitional is burning, consciousness is burning. Through this the mind is liberated." - Buddha

Fires of change are a wake up call of understanding about the Dhamma. We practice not later, but right now, with whatever is in front of us, be it an angry person, fear, etc. Every developmental change always includes frustration, fear, anxiety, which like learning to ride a bike, is initially not easy. Ego doesn't like this change of burning and growing, but the consciousness does.

"Every advance in consciousness is experienced as a defeat by the ego" - Carl Jung.

A contagious Virus

Don't catch the virus of fear, anger and disconnection. No matter what everyone is doing around you, don't catch the virus of whatever is their mind state. Take care of how you're looking at things.

"When your eyes are tired, the world is tired also." - David Whyte

As Dhamma people we know that we can bring awareness into these mind states and avoid getting lost within them. Only if we know how the mind and heart work around adversarial events, can we bring compassion and wisdom into them.

Recent research on the normal brain shows that every 6 seconds we are constantly evaluating, scanning

and adjusting the environment, for signs of safe/unsafe. - That is a lot of Cortisol. The safety we seek is not out there. We have to find this safety inside as the refuge where this 6 second rule does not matter as much. The only place the 'fear mind' exists is in our thoughts, imagination, the future and it contains a sense of self, that is causing us to fear things that at present do not and may not ever, exist. This "selfing" thing is like a scam 'ponzi scheme' where you've already invested so much that you just cannot stop. At age 60 this sense of self can be very well established. You must just walk away from it no matter what you've put into it, and drop down into the heart. Here you see that infinite quality of love and awareness and realise that you are it.

"Do not misunderstand me....Danger is very real, but fear is a choice." - Will Smith

In addition to becoming fearless you can take it to a deeper level, which even finds unity in the separation. These limited mind states that we get caught up in can also take us to the unlimited. Remember we only divide in concepts, otherwise nothing is divided. The unlimited unity state is always here when we stop creating the 'stories.'

"People out there and what they are doing, are concepts. Moreover objects out there are doing nothing, but minding their own business, but this mind is not minding its own business and is getting into all sorts of trouble." - Buddhist Monk of Amita's tradition.

When we think about concepts it is almost like we're throwing paint at the world and its landing on things, colouring and forming them and with this, we create an 'outward illusionary samadhi'* state. We get thoroughly absorbed in and glued to the concept of a 'me' separate to things out there and become entranced by this 'outward samadhi' state.

Meditation & Awareness

All meditation is really aiming at is breaking the trance of the thought and mind, bringing us into a state off unchanging awareness, love and stillness.

Within the Fires of change, we get to know that which is unchangeable. Awareness is found in and used by, meditation, because it is the one thing that has no thought. It is an important and clean refuge.

Awareness sees the mind state but is not the mind state. Let yourself be aware of the self. Meditation enables us to come down from the mind and dwell within our 'awareness refuges' inside.

1. Awareness is 'Space.'

It is the space within everything. Be aware of the spaces between everything and is between the words and emotions. Emotions, thoughts and words have wavelike qualities and are energy in motion, and as between waves in the ocean, there is a pause between the waves of thought. We can dwell in the awareness of the trough, and so doing, we notice the 'shape' of things.

*"There is a trough in waves, a low spot where horizon disappears
and only sky and water are our company.*

And there we lose our way unless we rest, knowing the wave will bring us to its crest again.

*There we may drown if we let fear hold us in its grip and shake us side to side,
and leave us flailing, torn, disoriented.*

But if we rest there in the trough, in silence, being in the low part of the wave, keeping our energy and noticing the shape of things, the flow, then time alone will bring us to another place where we can see the horizon, see land again, regain our sense of where we are, and where we need to swim." - The Trough by Judy Brown

2. Awareness is the Centre of Everything.

Another way is to notice that this awareness is at the centre of everything. In the centre of a hurricane or tornado, is the eye of the storm which is calm and still.

What the Buddha really meant by the "middle way" was not regarding some average or mean, but a going into the middle and just watching the storm happening around you. In that 'middle' you can be calm and also have a calming effect on others around you.

Everything has this stillness in it. The chair you're in is silent, the trees outside... When we really look around us, we're in a hollow of inherent still silence. In our imagination we're being bombarded by noise and activity, but its all actually still.

3. Awareness surrounds everything.

Anytime you want to 'step back,' you can see all is always calm and bigger than the storm.

Your Awareness is holding your mind and emotions like a snow globe, whether it is shaken up or not, awareness is watching and holding all within.

When you're rushing, note rushing...be aware of what knows you're rushing. Remember how infinity sees us, sees this pandemic. We are not separate from infinity. Questioning this we can move into that non-separate universe.

“Bring the idea of a movie screen that plays out all thought and emotions. "Your body thoughts and emotions are just like the moving picture in a movie screen. You are pure awareness. The pure awareness which lights up the contents of your mind is similar to this screen. It doesn't have any attributes, cannot be pointed out and not be observed by any means. There is a fire on the screen but the screen doesn't burn. There is water on the screen but the screen does not get wet. There are movements on the screen but the screen never moves.” Ramana Maharshi

The first step in the spiritual path is to understand in how to abide as the witness or pure awareness and not be identified with each thought or emotion that arises and passes away. The practice of meditation will lead to complete cessation of the sense of a separate and consistent self, which finally leads to a 'oneness' in which the observer and the observed merge together with no distinction."

4. Awareness is Love

Before potentially disastrous events, tsunamis etc there is often this waiting period and in that waiting period, there is always the deep refuge of 'metta.' (Loving kindness) In these times of pandemic, aversive emotions have been on the rise, which include anger, fear, disappointment, worry, discouragement. The antidote to these in Buddhism is 'loving kindness which is perfect for these times.

A beautiful thing is, each one of the Bramavaharas * is all about love. You can Practice metta when you practice these. They include; Compassion and Karuna: Love when you're suffering and in pain.

Joy in other people's Joy: Where love is about Joy. Equanimity: Finding love that is calm in the storm. These are different flavours of love, each one of which can be your training rock.

"Love is misunderstood as an emotion. Love is actually a state of awareness." - David Hawkins

How do we do that Love? We take the elevator down to the silent 'heart space,' away from the 'head space' with all its loudness, noise, sounds and concepts. The beautiful thing about the Heart is that it is direct and no thoughts are needed.

“...Awareness can hold all this, its true. No need to push anything away. One of my greatest gritudes is the loving awareness which I've practised for years. It watched my brain go 'offline' and helped it heal and it gives me the capacity to tolerate this...” - Frank Ostaseski following his stroke.

Some traditions talk of the “upward facing heart,” but say that Westerners have a “downward facing heart.” If that's true, try to 'flip your heart' and feel how different it feels. It is a lot warmer and open.

*“Can you practice this 24/7, not as an emotion, but as a way of ease and awareness?
Love all the way through.”* - Amita Schmidt

Summary by Shawn Comrie for the Eclectic Buddhist Group – November 2021

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With Gratitude and Acknowledgement to Amita Schmidt. Image: Courtesy. Indiatimes.com

* *Samadhi*. A state of intense concentration achieved through meditation.

* *Brahmavihārās*: A series of four Buddhist virtues and the meditation practices made to cultivate them.