A PERFECTLY HERE TEACHING GUIDE

Buddhist Teachings for Everyday Life

Four lessons with Dr. Manijeh Motaghy on intentions, karma, the Four Noble Truths, and wiser everyday choices.

Dr. Manijeh Motaghy

Author of It's Not Easy to Be Human

Explore the book and purchase: drmanijehmotaghy.com/book/

All 4 lessons are included in this guide. You can work through one lesson each day, at your own pace.

DAY 1 OF 4

Learn powerful skills and reap their benefits

Dear Friends,

With so many religions and faith-based traditions in the world, some of us wonder: Which one can really help us with our pains and difficulties? Is belief enough? Don't our actions and thoughts matter?

During my undergraduate psychology studies, a professor introduced an idea that surprised me: the Buddha's teachings could help a person practice their own religion better.

No one needed to convert. We could learn the essential skills of avoiding creating our own suffering, and examine whether those lessons were useful in our lives.

That is the invitation for these four days. You can have a faith, or no religious affiliation. We will explore practical teachings about intentions, actions, happiness and dissatisfaction, and improving our life experiences.

Contrary to common sayings that we cannot control what happens, with better thoughts, choices, and skills we can control a lot of things in our lives.

For today: Think of one ordinary difficulty in your life. What part comes from the situation itself? What part might be influenced by your expectations, interpretation, or habitual response? Let's begin investigating this and learn more.

Tomorrow, we will explore karma, its effects, and how we can use it to reduce the difficulties that come from past unskilled actions.

With Love Always,
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DAY 2 OF 4

Your intentions are the grounds you walk on

Dear Friends,

The Buddha's teaching on karma is concerned with intentional action. It is not simply about deserving what happens to us, or being stuck with good luck or bad luck.

Our intentions and actions influence what happens next.

Let's look at a simple example.

Someone criticizes you. You feel hurt, become defensive, and respond harshly. The conversation escalates, perhaps with words that seem difficult to take back.

But then you find a moment of reflection. Going inward, you realize that hurting the other person, or being hurt, was not the true intention of the conversation.

You become willing to step back and see what is happening in your mind, and consider what may be happening for the other person. Even in the middle of the conflict, you can check your intention for the conflict. Is it really to hurt the other person, or is it to get them to hear you and respect you? With this realization, you can resort to kindness and change direction to avoid further negativity and harm.

As you become more aware of your intentions, thoughts, and actions, you can create the conditions to do better and be more effective.

Reflect today: Notice a habitual reaction that may contribute to a result you wish to avoid. What is your intention? Does your next action support that intention?

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DAY 3 OF 4

Understand how dissatisfaction comes to be

Dear Friends,

The Four Noble Truths are the core teaching of the Buddha. They offer a framework for investigating our human experience and the possibility of becoming free of relentless dissatisfaction.

They teach us four truths:

There is suffering and dissatisfaction in human life.
There are causes and conditions that give rise to suffering.
There is a possibility of ending those causes and becoming free of inner pains.
There is a path of practice that leads toward that freedom: the Noble Eightfold Path.

As you can see, we do not have to fight every difficulty or simply accept that we must suffer. We can investigate our own inner world and learn how to make it a better place to live.

The example about conflict is one place to begin. There was hurt. A defensive response inflamed the conflict. Recognizing the intention and changing the response opened another possibility.

For today, choose a small, manageable example of dissatisfaction. What is happening? What seems to feed it? When you don't feed it, does the hurt change too?

This is a brief starting point for inquiry. The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are a fuller path of practice; these four lessons do not cover it in its entirety. But if you are curious, reach out. We can help you figure them out.

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DAY 4 OF 4

Question any lesson and verify in your own experience

Dear Friends,

Learning a spiritual lesson includes questioning and verifying for ourselves whether it is effective. We can look at what it helps us understand and how it affects the way we live and experience life.

A Buddhist lesson to investigate for oneself is that all phenomena are impermanent. But this is hard to understand when we give things names and meanings. Over time, those meanings can seem solid, non-changing or forever. We stop noticing the distinction between our understanding of something and its reality as a passing, shifting, and changing possibility.

For example, a glass can break, as hard materials do. When we cling to the idea that it should not break, we experience disappointment and hardship. This applies to more than the things we own. It can include losing our jobs, the people we love, and our identities.

For today: Notice an ordinary disappointment with the loss of something. What did you want to keep as it was, or have remain as you wished it to be? What if you knew that change is inevitable and allowed for it?

Take a moment to breathe and look again. You are examining your relationship to change as a natural law. You can still care about what matters to you and act with more flexibility.

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