

Parenting, children, families & Buddhism FAQ's

A student writes:

My son 8 year old son is being Baptized, at the wish of his step mother on September 11th.

Will being Baptized Presbyterian be an obstacle to him learning the Dharma? Should I go to his service? Is the date of the World Trade Tower Attacks a negative issue as well? My little guy reports to me what he learns in Bible class with a bit of a giggle. I want him to be respectful of all religions. Is it ok for me to let him feel as if church is "wrong" (god made everything, we go to heaven and the usual topics they teach children.) I am a bit surprised by his questions about the differences. Naturally some of what he learns in bible class does not concur with what he is exposed to in my home. Any advice would be appreciated greatly. Warm wishes, Joy

Responses:

Joy;

Buddhism is an all-inclusive arena. It does not say that other religions are wrong or should not be followed. There are many cases of multi-faith priests (Buddhist/Christian). So there is absolutely no conflict. Remember these naming conventions can be confusing: Buddhist, Christian, Muslum, Hindu, etc. They are all aspects of the same path. Should you go to his service? Why not? Supporting your son during his development and beyond is probably important to you, yes? Should attachment to one point of view intervene in another beings development? Besides, it sounds like your son is a bright individual who can easily navigate and balance both a Christian and Buddhist worldview. And any difficulties he may have can be worked through with your help and the help of others as long as you keep trust, honesty, respect and all those good things in mind. d/

Dear Joy,

An 8 year old is often open to discussions and can understand differences and similarities. You can explain to your son that different religions are like different paths to the top of a mountain, the goal being the same: becoming a good human being, capable of taking responsibility for other living beings and the world. There is much that is positive in Christianity and similar to Buddhism. Christianity teaches equal love for oneself and others, compassion for one's enemies and ethical behaviour; the core of Buddhism is love, compassion and shouldering the responsibility for the happiness of all living beings - boddhichitta. You may want to read HHDL's "The Good Heart", his teachings

on the Gospel to a Catholic community in England.

I do not think you should tell your son that the church is "wrong" - that could lead him to feel that he has to split his loyalties, e.g. between mother and step grandmother. You can discuss with him that there are different points of view and that the essential is to develop a good heart which includes tolerance (a difficult

subject for 8 year olds who tend to take sides). I would go to the ceremony - that would show him that you respect others' faith without having to adhere to it.

I have a practicing Jewish daughter and an atheist son. Both were initially baptized Greek Orthodox, at the request of their grandmother (at a time when I, myself, was atheist) and taught orthodox Christianity in school. My daughter's children are raised Jewish, which includes much ethical effort and self-discipline, their mother includes tolerance - even for the Arabs (she supports the "peace now" movement) and reads the Dalai Lama's books. My son raises his children to respect and follow ethical values of altruism, non-violence, non-competitiveness, respect of others and the environment, and for human rights. One of my granddaughters begins to show interest in Buddhism, quite spontaneously. So you see, life takes care. Those for whom the Dharma is the path will find and follow it. But there are other paths, equally valid.

I hope this helps you. My best wishes for you and your son - enjoy his questions and inquiries and try to keep his mind open, there is nothing more beautiful than a bright kid's developing mind!
Ulrike

Joy,
Apparently, the word education comes from the Greek word 'educare' which means to 'draw out' (I believe T.Y. blessed me with that trivia). This was more the method of teaching on subjects such as beliefs, ethics, philosophies etc in ancient Greece (perhaps other civilisations also). So it's more about helping your child to draw on the innate wisdom of their own mind, as opposed to telling them what wisdom is. Or something generally like that anyway. At this stage my daughter who is 4, couldn't care less about any of it, but she is naturally more comfortable with the concept of Buddha's in our house, and if she asks about Christianity, I just tell her some people believe in other things to help them be better people and to try to find happiness. She hasn't got to the stage of questioning which is right or wrong yet. The principle I most try to set an example for her is open-mindedness and a non-judgmental attitude toward others, at all levels like religion, race etc. Both my children were baptised, and I find no real contradiction of the vows of baptism being applied through the practise or teaching of Buddhism.

Jason

A student writes:

Greetings All,
My name is Samantha & have recently begun module 1 (approx 6 weeks ago). Am looking for some advice if anyone can assist. I am enjoying the module but am finding it quite difficult to concentrate & absorb the teachings. I am a mother of 3 small children & the only time I seem to find is at the end of the day - by which time I'm totally exhausted. My mind wanders or I simply

begin to drift off to sleep. There is such incredible wealth in these teachings & I am committed to doing what I can to move forward. Is there anyone else in the group with small children who could possibly offer any advice on how they may have tackled this problem? Throughout the day I am focussing on my breath & trying to watch my thoughts/emotions. Is there some way of adapting the course to fit in with family life?? (It's a big ask!) Any advice will be gladly received & greatly appreciated.

Warm wishes,
Samantha

Responses:

Samantha,

I believe that several of the contributors to this list share the challenges you face with integrating regular meditation with family life. I also have two young boys (22 months and 5 yrs), a full-time job, not to mention a husband too! I have been in this program since it began, and am in the middle of Module 10. I am certain that you can work out a schedule!

You're doing great by being mindful throughout the day! Keep that up. As time goes on, and you progress further, that practice will deepen. You might want to follow up on this by reading Lama Zopa's [book](#) on Transforming Problems into Happiness, or HHDL's book on Healing Anger, or Thubten Chodron's books on Working with Anger or Taming the Mind. You can find additional resources on this, such as a variety of Thich Nhat Hahn's publications. Your children offer you a great [opportunity](#) to practice...

Here are some possibilities for formal meditation sessions...

I also have difficulty concentrating after a busy day, so the other alternative is to get up early. I know that with young children, early can be really, really early. It is worth it though. I used to try and get up, splash some [water](#) on my face and start meditating, but I would face the same difficulty with sleepiness in the morning as I do in the evening. Now, I first take the dog out for a little stroll, do some stretching, or clean-up a bit, or sit with a cup of tea before beginning, things like that. The hardest part for me is actually getting out of the bed!!

You can try meditating while the [children](#) nap. I know the temptation is to catch up on projects that can't be done with the children around, but most of those things are not that important anyway.

Keep the evening meditations directed. I tend to do the Vajrasattva purification. Reciting a mantra helps to keep me engaged. In this same vein, you could try reciting mantras while you do something. I suppose ideally one should listen in a relaxed manner to the CDs. I try when I can, but I often listen to them while cleaning dishes or doing laundry. Multi-tasking is not the beaten Buddhist path, nevertheless... You can do it!! I trust that you will find a way. These teachings are so helpful. Just keep that in mind.

Best wishes,
Andrea

Don't worry, since I began this course, I am now the Mr. mum role due to various reasons, and I understand the difficulty. The trick is in my experience to utilise the spare time you may get, rather than try to adapt regular times amidst the predictable unpredictability of our children's demands.

For any consolation, my mind still wanders, and I'm only on module 4 after far too long being involved with this course.

Just relax and do your best to achieve daily meditation no matter what, no matter what, even if it isn't necessarily your ideal perception of ideal time or situation etc, ie; when all the kids are finally asleep and you finally have some peace and quiet (despite how much of a joy they are!). 5 mins when you have the chance or whatever, will bring results. Consistency in terms of a daily practise is most important to begin with I think.

I rather meditate with the possibility of being disturbed, than the possibility of falling asleep myself. And if the children come along, well, that's a mother's lot I guess (even for us Mr. Mom's!). Basically, enjoy your practise, when you can, for as long as you can, consistently, on a daily basis. Your children will probably grow into your routine, I hope.

I don't if this helps at all, but at least I can say, I share an understanding of your difficulty. Persevere, it will be worth it.

Jason

Yes, I too have small kids. A 10 year old boy, a 2 1/2 year old girl and a 9 month old boy. I don't know how old yours are at present? Andrea had a great idea about getting up before them. If you can do that, morning is ideal. If you can't (I can't because the moment I stir, so does the little one), there are other options. My children can be counted on in the evening to give me a bit of me time and that is when I really get into any work that I need to sit and concentrate on.

In your earlier post you wrote: "Thank you once again for helping me shift the way I look at the DB teachings" and that is what I suggest.

In terms of being too tired. I can understand as my nights are 'broken'. What I have done is just try to strengthen the desire to do it, so that I look forward to being able to learn. That way I am more likely to create the energy in the evening. So, I just tried to change the way I felt about getting it done to make me more able to achieve it.

Like Andrea I listen to the cds while I am doing other things. I hope that this is not creating a difficult habit to break - it isn't ideal, but perhaps while your children are young it is better than not having time to do all the study at all. That is my thinking. I would agree with Paul so wholeheartedly. Buddhism/compassion in action is really important. It's your chance to give to others, to do for others, and to put into practice all the stuff you learn from the course.

Jason really had it, also, when he suggested trying to make a habit of meditating every day. I admit I don't do it 'without fail', but I aspire to.

The only other thing I would say is to remember that everything changes. You have difficulty, then you find a way...then the kids change and so again you find a way....it's just like that. As they get older you will probably be more able to find time. Until then, work with what you've got and how you can.

Love,
Nova

..Having survived being the father of twins (so far - they are 14), I think I understand a little bit about your lack of time and energy. I would urge you to try to alter your thinking a little bit. Maybe it would help to think of the time you give to your children (and anyone else, for that matter) as your opportunity to help others, which is what being a Buddhist is really all about, I think. Serving others (Buddhism in action) is just as important, I think, as Buddhism on the cushion. You'll find, as you study, that before every teaching in the DB@H Modules, the teacher will ask everyone to "set their motivation" to one of wanting to help all sentient beings or something similar.

Every morning and throughout the day, try to think something like "I, a potential Buddha, have been entrusted with the service of the care and raising of 3 potential Buddhas. What good fortune!" (I remember thinking, on the first glimpse of my kids, as they were about 5 seconds old, 14 years ago, that my main job in raising these kids was just not to mess them up! That thought, and others like the one above, was very influential in allowing my kids to REACH the age of 14. :)

You'll read soon, in the modules, about the importance of learning patience. Well, you will definitely have (or already have) lots of experience learning patience by the time you hear that phrase in the modules.

A student writes:

Anyone,

I had a problem with my youngest son Quinn (6 yrs. old) and I would like to get some advice if possible. He was playing outside with his friend and this friend was killing ants. Quinn told him not to but started killing ants with him (peer pressure.) Quinn has and does understand the basic concepts of Buddhism and the value of all life. I was very disappointed in him that he would do such a thing. Peer pressure it tough especially at 6 yrs old. What I would like to know is what he can do to help repair I guess you'd say) his karma? Particular mantra's, prostrations, ????? Does anyone have and suggestions on what I can do to help him to understand and guide him in the future and to help him repair the karmic damage he has done?

Responses:

Hi Cathy,

I can only share with you an explanation I gave to my nephew who was about the same age as your son. He was attempting a squash a small spider at the time. I explained to him; "that spider is a mommy spider looking for food for her babies" and in a slight commical way, I asked him would he like it if a Giant stepped on his mom when she went to do the grocery shopping for him. Since then I have only seen him been helpful to spiders.

This story worked for him and has no guarentee working for another child, however, I think it is important for them to make the connection of seeing life from the ants point of view (watching the movies; "Ants" or "A bugs Life" is also another good way.

Don't be too disappointed with him, this situation is good chance for him to learn and practise compassion and respect for all creatures. This is his learning experience!

Much love
Tim K.

Cathy-

I have a six year old son as well. V used to kill bugs. We started taking him to museum exhibits - most children's museums would probably have these - about bugs, reptiles, etc.. We show him that while they look interesting and sometimes harmful, that we need to respect them. We need to learn to share the earth with them. I told him he wouldn't want to be spider and have someone afraid of him decide to kill him, would he? While I am guilty of killing insects and bugs at a younger age, I now just get my husband to get the paper or something to remove them and let them loose outside. Hopefully when V sees this he will start taking the initiative to stop others from harming bugs as well. This has seemed to help some, I think.

Peer pressure seems to be a big thing and I don't know how to address this, as V has managed to be suckered into it as well. If anyone has suggestions about peer pressure it would be gratefully appreciated!

love- jess

A student writes:

All

The conversation on Module 4 has brought up for me another question that I have been meaning to pose for quite awhile.

I have some observations about buddhism in America based primarily upon reading buddhist magazines and secondarily from attendance at Buddhist functions. From my limited experience buddhism seems to serve the following groups well: monastics, single men/women, couples without children, couples with enough money to pay for child care, women/men with very supportive spouses, people with grown children, people with some reason to be at home, people with ample vacation time who are able to leave their children in someone else's care, well-educated people. In short, in the West, Buddhism appears to be quite upscale.

Also, there seems to be little attempt at integrating children into "practice". I frequently search the web for buddhist sites and have come across the homepages of many centers. While there are interesting seminars, retreats etc...very few centers offer programs that parents and children can attend at the same time and place, in the same room. After all, this program would have to be tolerant of a youngsters inability to remain quiet for long periods, a drag when cultivating meditative quiescence. Certainly, as a mother I can encourage certain behaviors. For example, nonviolence, compassion. However, there doesn't seem to be the equivalent of "taking the children to church" as a family.

Of course, enlightenment is an individual quest and experience. This is what buddhism is about. However, if families are not being actively engaged as a group, then buddhism has little hope of

growing beyond "fringe" status, and as such, its effects, which are unbelievably empowering and positive, will be necessarily limited, which seems to fly in the face of the logic of the Mahayana tradition.

First, what experiences/observations do others have of this?

The bottom line is that I have two sons, 3.5 yrs and 3 mos old. I want them to grow up recognizing that there is something beyond daily appearances. At the current moment, my children could end up quite confused, if I raise them Lutheran, for the social aspects and group support, but practice buddhism.

Any thoughts?

Sincerely, Andrea

Responses:

.. I have a son who is almost three years old, so I think it's about time to start a similar bedtime routine for him. I like the idea of thinking of three happy things before bedtime, too.

Some time ago I found an article online by a parent (aimed at slightly older children) recommending a similar kind of "metta meditation" at night: May Mommy be happy, may Daddy be happy, may Spot be happy, May Aunt Jane be happy, etc.

If you've never encountered it before, there is a [book](#) called "Dharma Family Treasures: Sharing the Dharma with Children" by Sandy Eastoak. It has numerous articles and essays on sharing the dharma with children, the difficulties of dealing with [children](#) in the context of a dharma center, etc.

Also, some of the bigger, brighter picture [books](#) aimed at children hold my son's interest at this point. We have a book called "The Brave Little Parrot " (Rafe Marti) based on one of the Jataka Tales (stories of the Buddha's previous lives as a Bodhisattva). These are great tales for kids! I can't wait until my son is old enough to understand the stories.

In lovingkindess,

Sharon

I've noticed that some centers are starting to offer more family-oriented events - Thich Nhat Hanh's sanghas at times, IMS in Massachusetts, etc.

I'm a little out of it when it comes to Buddhism in the West, but it sounds like this is just something that Buddhism there is going to have to grow into. Over here kids are [free](#) to go to temples and shrines, but as someone said, they're really not expected to be anything but kids, so they just run around and play together while the adults do their thing. The monks usually just take their behavior in stride or laugh at them, and leave it to the Moms to decide when enough is enough. Of course, there are times when [people](#)

are expected to be quiet, and if a child can't handle that, their mother or an older brother/sister usually takes them outside, but that's the kind of duty that can be shared, too, if there are other families, or just somebody who likes playing with kids.

Meanwhile the children don't seem to need much teaching, and just absorb things through osmosis. By the time they're 3 they know the form for praying at the altar and can do prostrations (though they sometimes look more like headstands). I think everybody enjoys having them around. So I figure over there it's just a matter of time and somebody making the suggestion.

Tim

A student writes:

Hi All,
I've been wondering for some time, is it O.K. to strive for financial independence by developing wealth apart from the obvious traps of attachment and such? I remember references to having a fortunate rebirth as a wealthy being so one may have more liberty to practise etc. So I guess the main thing is to be able to achieve such a goal with pure motivation and follow ethical and moral practises in the economic world.

Responses:

Jason,
I know of no precept or advice in the Buddha's teachings or later commentaries that discourages or condemns striving for financial wealth. True, there are numerous biographies of saints and scholars who gave up "worldly" pursuits in search of knowledge, and these set a standard and inspired following generations of practitioners. Nevertheless, even yogis ensure their needs (food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and education) are met. The main difference between the lifestyle of yogis and others is that they succeed in reducing their wants and responsibilities. As every householder with a family knows, life is much simpler for the single person, but having become a householder with a family it is important to do it well. If one does not do it well, then one's conscience would probably be too heavy to meditate without the pangs of remorse. Further, not everyone is able to use their time effectively as a full time yogi. Family life is a fertile ground for Dharma in action, and the most natural, simple and profound lifestyle for those who are unable to keep celibacy. But as we know, financial assets are important factors to sustain the family and provide opportunities for its members. I wish us all good fortune that we may succeed on this path!

Pende

And don't forget we need to create the causes for wealth which is the practice of generosity, the first of the Six Paramitas.

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