

An introduction to the text discussions

At the start of 2021, and as a consequence of the coronavirus lockdown, Bowerchalke Buddhist Meditation Group combined on Zoom with East Dorset Buddhist Group to hold discussions about significant Buddhist texts.

Events of this sort do not occur very often, for practice tends to be prioritised over doctrine, certainly in both the Insight Meditation and the Zen traditions, on the grounds that intellectual activity (thinking) gets in the way of the rest of (meditative) experience.

The text discussions have not been particularly popular, but some of us have found them useful, or at least interesting, and so we continue.

Notes are made after each discussion, then circulated before being revised to include any further ideas or research.

Most of the texts are from the early Buddhist Pali Canon. They represent the memorisation and recall of words spoken by the Buddha and his immediate followers over two and a half thousand years ago, then transferred between generations, before being committed to writing on palm-leaf manuscripts, at least four hundred years after the event. And then those manuscripts were frequently copied against the depredations of tropical humidity, until and beyond the texts that have physically survived from the eighteenth century. It is up to you to decide whether they are accurate records of the actual words of such a historical personage, or whether there has been some creative editing in the first centuries of such a long period of transmission.

In the interest of variety, we are beginning to examine later texts from the Mahāyāna tradition, and are not averse to contemporary Buddhist writing.

We are grateful to all of the text translators, without whom we would have no access to the Dharma. They are referenced. Mostly, their work is available under Creative Commons Copyright. Our use of the texts is solely for research, education and edification, but of course, we will remove any text if any translator requests that via the website contact facility.