

forms. Think first of the five hindrances. When we are overcome by greed. When we are overcome by ill will. When we are feeling tired and lazy. When we are agitated. And, especially, when we have doubts about the teachings. The Buddha did not tell us to simply put up with these mental states. The Buddha wanted us to overcome them and he gave us very specific tools in the Dhamma. Once you have a collection of texts, you will be able to take this Dhamma medicine. If we cannot stir up energy on our own, we read the Buddha's words. When we read something so true and clear, our mind will wake up to reality.

By developing the habit of going to the Blessed One's instructions in times of difficulty, we develop confidence in the Dhamma. The suttas become an integral part of our lives.

Step One: Read the discourses of the Buddha

Step Two: Put the most helpful ones in your anthology

Step Three: Use these suttas when defilements arise

THE BLESSED ONE IS TALKING TO YOU: MAKING YOUR PERSONAL ANTHOLOGY

What is a personal anthology?

When we read the suttas faithfully, we are sure to come upon passages that resonate with us. We may get a feeling that the Buddha is speaking to us directly, seeing our defilements and giving the precise antidote to our disease of suffering. This is because of the sandiṭṭhiko, akāliko, ehipassiko, and opanayiko nature of the Dhamma. It is meant for us personally. Although they are beneficial to us the moment we encounter them, they will be most useful when our defilements are at their strongest. However, when our defilements are strong we may not be able to find them quickly or have the mindfulness to even try. The solution is to create a personal anthology.

A personal anthology is not simply a collection of important suttas. It is your own personal medicine cabinet for your particular disease of suffering. By collecting all of the suttas you find that address your strongest defilements and having them in one handy location, you are able to easily take Dhamma medicine when you need it the most.

For example, you may have very strong habits of anger. One day you read the following passage from The Saṃyutta Nikaya:

The killing of anger, O devatā,

With its poisoned root and honeyed tip:

This is the killing the noble ones praise.

SN 1:71*

You may immediately feel this describes your experience of anger. Anger has a certain sweetness sometimes, doesn't it? But at the root it is very poisonous. When you encounter the passage, you may be relating it to anger you have

* "The killing of anger, O devatā,..." is from *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2000.

experienced in the past. By having this passage in your personal anthology, when you are angry you can quickly go to it and have the power of the teaching when you need it most. Eventually you may be able to bring the complete passage to mind instantly, but until then a personal anthology will be able to come to the rescue.

How to create a personal anthology

Find a small blank book. It does not need to be very large. A pocket sized book is very handy for keeping close by. Do not use this book for anything other than suttas.

Only copy the text of the sutta. Do not add your own comments or reflections. You may have very powerful insights from the text. This is very good. But there is no need to record these here. If they are true insights, they do not need to be recorded. When we go to these texts in a time of trouble, we want the words of the Blessed One to come to us directly without our own interpretation or meaning. Allow the Buddha to speak directly to you each time.

It is not necessary to copy an entire sutta. You can write down the passages that give the essence of the teaching. At the same time, the teachings are not given in isolation and having some of the surrounding text may be helpful. When a repeating analysis is given for a list of items, such as the five aggregates, you may want to abbreviate in the way it is commonly done in published books. Alternatively, if you find the passage especially helpful you may want to recreate all the repetitions so you can use it directly as a contemplation meditation.

Always include the citation of the sutta, whether including the entire text or just an excerpt. This will allow you to find the original easily whenever you need to. You may even want to note the name of the translator. This is

helpful when sharing the merit of the benefit you receive from reading the text.

What kind of suttas to collect

There are several types of relationships you may have with a text. There are some passages where you will have a clear and almost uncanny sense that the Supreme Buddha is giving this teaching to you personally. One of the marvels of the Buddha is that he was able to present the teaching in different ways for different people based on their temperament and social background. Although the Buddha is not physically present with us now, we have an excellent record of these thousands of teachings. While we are reading we must keep in mind this personal nature of the suttas.

One of the main reasons these suttas feel so personal to us is that they act as an antidote to our defilements. Although the roots of our defilements are the same, they may manifest in different ways for each of us. This is why some suttas may resonate strongly with one person and not another. It is not important to figure out why. It is enough to be able to recognize what suttas really act as a medicine for our ailment of suffering. We also keep in mind that every single teaching of the Supreme Buddha contains Dhamma that will liberate us from suffering. In this way we do not have a criticizing mind when selecting suttas.

There are also suttas which we may simply find uplifting. For example, a particular simile may give you clarity into a subject and leave your mind feeling calm and cool. These are also suttas we want to collect in our anthology.

How to use your personal anthology

We use our personal anthology when we are suffering. When we see our defilements. This may come in many