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A Buddhist View of Drugs and Alcohol

Rev. Henry Adams, Oxnard Buddhist Temple

Countless People are Supporting You and Wishing for Your Well-being

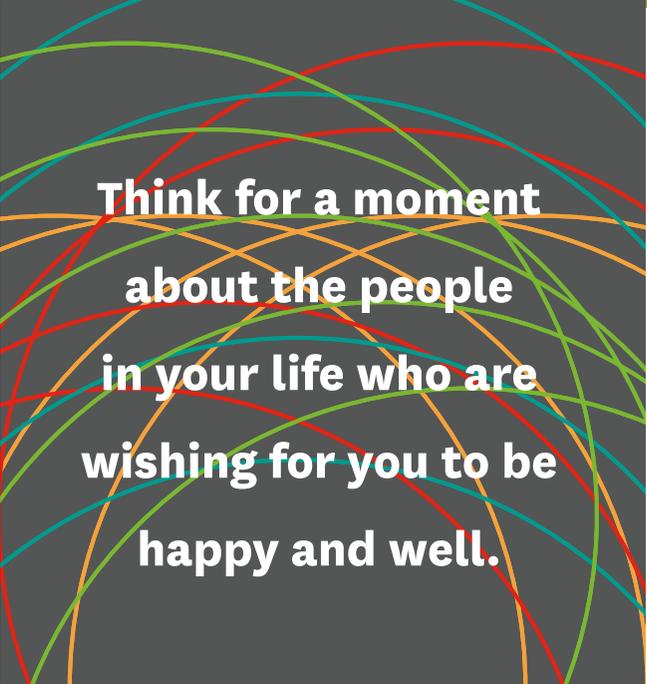
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Fleeting Pleasure versus Lasting Liberation from Suffering

Alcohol and Drugs contain chemicals that give pleasure and relief from pain for a short time. However, these temporary pleasures will not bring lasting satisfaction. Lasting satisfaction and freedom from pain can come from letting go of the ideas of “me” and “mine” and learning to live with the light of the Buddha’s wisdom as one’s guide. In the words of Sakyamuni Buddha: “As to relying on wisdom, wisdom is able to distinguish and measure good and evil. The working of mind always seeks pleasure, and does not reach the essential. Hence it is said, ‘Do not rely on mind.’” (Quoted in the Collected Works of Shinran, p. 241)

Our minds seek pleasure and relief from pain in many ways. Alcohol, illicit drugs and tobacco often come to mind as substances that are abused. Prescription painkillers, relaxants, and sleep aids that are useful in medical treatment can also lead to harmful addictions if taken improperly without regard for the instructions of a qualified doctor.



**Think for a moment
about the people
in your life who are
wishing for you to be
happy and well.**

Recognizing My Own Potential to Cause Harm

It is the nature of the human mind to seek its own pleasure. Thus, the circumstance of a harmful addiction or harmful words and actions arising in a moment of intoxicated reverie can occur in anyone’s life. In the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist tradition, we are called to look within and recognize our own potential for harmful behavior before we pass judgment others.

Everyone Has the Potential to Turn Their Life Around

The great teachers of the Pure Land Buddhist tradition assure us that the mistakes a person has made in life have no power to impede the working of the Buddha’s great compassion. No matter how far I may have strayed from the path of wise and compassionate living, I still have the

potential to turn my life around and realize great fulfillment through sharing kindness with others. In fact, the Shinran teaches that it is precisely because we human beings have such a strong tendency toward self-destructive behavior that the Buddha provided his compassionate teaching for those of us who are deeply mired in the vicious cycle of self-centered living.

“Do not take a liking to poison just because there is an antidote”

However, this should not be misunderstood to mean that we should give up our efforts to avoid harmful activities like drug and alcohol abuse. As Shinran taught his dear companions, “Do not take a liking to poison just because there is an antidote.” (Collected Works of Shinran, p. 671)

The Courage to Practice Right Action and Right Speech

When we recognize our own harmful acts, or see a person causing harm to themselves or others, we must not deny that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. It takes great courage to recognize an uncomfortable truth and to intervene in a harmful situation of addiction to show the compassion of the Buddha working in our world.