

The Path of Joy



Bhante Says

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Parents and Children in Buddhism

In this world, there are many kinds of love - romantic love, friendship, the love among siblings,

parental love and children's love for their parents, to name just a few. Among all these, Buddhist texts have, through the ages, often highlighted parental love - the love of parents for their children - as the closest example of unconditional or altruistic love, the highest form of love that's given without pre-conditions or expectation of

anything in return. No matter how good or bad, filial or ungrateful, talented or unskilful their children turn out to be, most parents can't help but do their utmost for their offspring, whenever and wherever necessary.

In the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, for example, the Buddha singled out mother's love as the epitome of love, worthy of emulation by people walking the spiritual path -

As a mother would risk her own life to protect her only child so should one, to all living beings, cultivate a boundless heart

Similarly, in Mahayana Buddhism, in the

Homage to Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom is compared to a father who does his best for his children in all his activities -

Obeisance to my guru and protector, Manjushri ... Who teaches in sixty ways with the loving compassion of a father for his only child, all creatures caught in the prison of samsara, confused in the darkness of their ignorance, overwhelmed by their suffering

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Dhamma Day

Rejoicing in the Dhamma

Dhamma Day marks the time the Buddha preached his first sermon (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*) to his first five disciples at the Deer Park (modern day Sarnath). The Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, including the path to perfect enlightenment (the Noble Eightfold Path).



24 & 25 July 2004
Buddhist Library



The highlight of the celebration at BL was the unveiling of a facsimile of the Buddha's footprint by Venerable De Yuan, Abbot of Perseverance Cottage. The Buddha's footprint, recently installed at BL's art gallery, is an intricate work of art from Sri Lanka and quite a sight to behold. Many distinguished visitors graced the occasion, among them Professor

Sumanapala, who spoke about the spread of Buddhism during and after the Buddha's time, and Venerable Santa of the Buddhayana Society, who conducted the Buddha Puja. Participants also had the opportunity to offer alms to the Sangha during lunch. We greeted this memorable event with great enthusiasm.

Joy

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There's a story - a Jataka tale called *Ummagga Jataka* - which perfectly illustrates the selfless quality of a mother's love for her child. This Jataka story actually contains many sub-stories. The story I'm going to relate is just one of these minor accounts.

The Buddha was once born as a Bodhisattva called Mahausada. He was a very wise man and became the king's counsellor. Almost everyday, he helped people by counselling them.

Once, a lady with a child passed by the area where the Bodhisattva was conducting a session. She had to cross a stream, which had swollen into an angry river as a result of the previous night's rain. A passer-by offered to help mother and child to cross the river. However, once in possession of the child, the helper - in reality, a human-flesh eater - ran away with it. The mother hysterically cried for help, giving chase. Some nearby villagers managed to catch the kidnapper. They asked her why she'd taken someone else's child. She claimed the child as hers. The mother had no way to prove her claim. In those days, of course, there were no DNA tests. She could only weep and plead for help. So the villagers brought both ladies and the child to the Bodhisattva for advice.

The Bodhisattva asked each claimant whether the child was hers. Both maintained their claim. The Bodhisattva drew a line in the sand and asked the two ladies to stand on either side. He told them to pull the child towards themselves as hard as possible. "Whoever can pull the child to her side can have the child."

The kidnapper saw her chance and pulled the baby as hard as she could. The mother, on the other hand, could not bring herself to hurt the child. The Bodhisattva advised the mother to try her best if she wanted the child and gave her a second, then a third chance. Still, the mother could not bring herself to pull the wailing child. Elated with her victory, the kidnapper was about to run away with the child when the Bodhisattva denounced her as an impostor. The genuine mother had proved her case by her conduct - she would rather give up the child than hurt it.

In China, Korea, Taiwan and Japan, the paramount position of parents is largely due to the influence of Confucianism. Filial piety is, of course, a cornerstone of Confucianism. Children are taught that they're indebted to their parents for life and it's their most important duty to do everything possible for their parents' benefit.

"... whoever encourages his unbelieving parents to believe, his immoral parents to be virtuous ... such a one by so doing does more than repay his parents."

In Buddhism, we have similar teachings although there are differences. In one sutra, the Buddha said:

There are two people you can never repay. What two? Your father and your mother. Even if you were to carry them on your back and live a hundred years, supporting and assisting them with medicines, bathing and massaging their limbs and cleaning them, even this would not repay them.

Even if you were to give them absolute rule over the whole world, this would not repay them. And why? Because parents do much for their children. They bring them up, nourish them, they introduce them to the world.

But whoever encourages his unbelieving parents to believe, his immoral parents to be virtuous, his stingy parents to be generous, his foolish parents to be wise, such a one by so doing does more than repay his parents.

This translation was done by someone not so familiar with the original Pali scriptures. There are some words in the translation which I can't quite agree with. For example, the word 'foolish'. The Pali word 'bala' actually means *young* or *immature*. The Buddha used this word for immature or young people. Parents may not be young but they can be immature. In particular, they may be spiritually immature. Their children may have attended Buddhist teachings, meditation retreats, associated with Buddhist teachers or monks and made an effort to practise the Dharma. Their parents lived in leaner times and may not have had the same opportunities. Parents may go to temples to make offerings - flowers, joss sticks or oil lamps - and pray to Buddha, believing that he's God. This is due to their ignorance. But we should not call them foolish just because of this. The Buddha, for example, never addressed people as foolish, whether they're young or old, even though they may have undertaken wrong practices. He addressed them in a very friendly manner, not only pointing out why they were wrong but also prescribing the right or skilful way for them to follow.

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The Seed of Enlightenment

by Venerable Thubten Chodron

16 November 2004 (Tuesday)

7.30 pm to 9.15 pm

Bodhicitta (literally, the mind of enlightenment) is the seed of enlightenment present in all sentient beings, their potential to attain full liberation from suffering. In this talk, Venerable Thubten Chodron will answer questions such as - *What is the significance of bodhicitta in Buddhist practice? How does one cause it to arise? How can one sustain it? How does it affect our daily life?*

For a biography of the speaker, please refer to the website:
http://www.thubtenchodron.org/Biography/about_ven_thubten_chodron.html

BUDDHISM— What a Drag! Or is it?

"I won't practise Buddhism. I think it goes against human nature because it asks you to not chase passion. Everything is suffering... No meat, no onions, no garlic, no anger, no desire... Young people want to try everything."

This criticism appeared in the Spring 2004 issue of the *Tricycle* magazine, reportedly voiced by a tourist guide in Hong Kong. As a Buddhist, on reading this quotation, what's your response? Is Buddhism against 'human nature'? Is it too pessimistic? Is it too restrictive? Is it irrelevant in today's world, especially to the young?

The first question presupposes we know what 'human nature' is. That's a tough one - a problem which philosophers throughout the ages have been - and still are - grappling with. We'd do better by focussing on a narrower issue - what the speaker meant by that term. From the context, we can make an educated guess - that the writer meant that human beings, especially the young, like to venture, to pursue their dreams, to experience everything, to 'chase passion' - wherever that may lead them to. Is Buddhism really against these things?

The plain fact is that the Buddha never

required his followers to give up experience, feelings or fun. It's quite the opposite - Buddhism is nothing if not about experience. The Buddha has, of course, pointed out, that life is characterised by suffering. But he did not stop there. Nor did he glorify suffering. If life's nothing but suffering and happiness is unattainable, living would be pointless, wouldn't it?

And so, like a good doctor, the Buddha went on to identify the cause of suffering (ignorance) and the end of suffering (Nibbana). Then - and this is the crucial point - he prescribed the medicine - the Noble Eightfold Path.

The speaker refers to the human need to 'chase passion ... Young people want to try everything'. In truth, no genuine religion advocates giving free rein to passion. Passion is often compared to fire. And like fire, it's a good servant but a bad master. Giving full vent to passion would be destructive, both on the individual and the social levels. In the former case, it leads to addiction (drugs, sex, gambling, television, shopping, work, whatever); in the latter, it results in anarchy, a breakdown in society. So all religions - not just Buddhism - prescribe control of passion. Indeed, many religions have far severer restrictions than Buddhism. And whereas most do so by the commandment of God or some deity, the Buddha uniquely showed how we, human beings, can uncover our innate perfect

Buddha nature by our very own effort, a spiritual DIY, so to speak.

And so, as Buddhists, we're not required to be zombies or automatons, totally devoid of feeling or the desire to have fun and enjoy life. As humans, we cannot avoid having feelings and passion and there's nothing wrong with enjoying life. But addiction is quite a different matter. The Buddha taught us that enlightenment lies with understanding the true nature of emotions, desires and needs. Not giving them up but not surrendering to them either. He equipped his followers with the knowledge that that emotions are empty and impermanent. Armed with this knowledge and wisdom, they're better able to respond to life's problems in a skilful way, without greed, hatred or ignorance.

What, then, about not taking meat, onions and garlic? The Buddha never required his followers to be vegetarians. Or to abstain from taking onions and garlic. In fact, the Buddha himself ate meat - and the sangha, particularly the Theravadin and Tibetan sangha, by and large, do so today. It's true that some sections of the Buddhist sangha, particularly those from north-east Asia - China, Korea, Japan - do observe such abstinence. But this is because of the rules of their own traditions and lineages based on the particular practices they follow. Something they adopt voluntarily because they feel that that way of life is most conducive to their search for enlightenment. For the Buddha never

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Buddhist Resources for the Management of Emotions

by Professor Padmasiri de Silva
8 December 2004 (Wednesday)
7.30 pm

In recent times, the understanding and management of emotions has assumed added importance with developments in neuroscience, biology, psychology, education, philosophy and medicine. Buddhism, which stresses mindfulness and the need to open ourselves to inner experience as a pre-requisite to insight, transformation and wisdom, has an important contribution to make.

Professor Padmasiri de Silva will deal with techniques found in the Buddha's discourses for the management of negative emotions and development of positive emotions. He will outline some western theories of emotions and develop a Buddhist perspective on emotion theory and therapy.

Professor has held numerous distinguished positions - head of the Philosophy and Psychology Department, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, visiting positions in USA and Singapore and now as research Fellow in Monash University, Australia.

. . . NOT TO BE MISSED!

Window to the Buddhist World - Bhutan



Venerable Wangmo
BL Friday 30 July 2004

Personal Introduction

Why did you become a nun?

I know (the reason) better now than when I actually became a nun (laughs). In those days, when the monks and nuns went alms begging, they practised *chod*. This is a special Nyingmapa practice performed in cemeteries. When collecting alms, they would not say what they wanted, they just stood near the door and played their bells and drums. People offered them food grains. I used to be very moved. Every winter – during the harvesting season in October – they came.

What social work are you involved in?

It's very small but I'm trying my best. I'm helping the nuns in my area. I now live in India at Tsopedma, a holy place for Tibetan Buddhists associated with Padmasambhava (who brought Buddhism to Tibet). There are many nuns here who don't have places to stay. I hire rooms for them in Indian family homes. They don't have any income so I try to get them sponsors. I have managed to get a few here in Singapore.

When the nuns flee from Tibet – more than 1,000 of them each year – they have no idea whatsoever of where they're actually going. They don't even know how to go to Dharamsala. They only know 'Dalai Lama' and 'India'. If they manage to reach Dharamsala, the Tibetan government-in-exile sends them all over India. The young go to school but once they're over twenty, they cannot go to school. Some choose to

Meet Venerable Wangmo, a Tibetan Buddhist nun from Bhutan. Beneath Ani-la's petite, gentle exterior – she frequent laughs at her own expense – lies boundless energy and a serious sense of purpose. Her purpose includes not only her own spiritual practice in the Nyingma tradition but also a desire to better the lot of her sister nuns in India and Bhutan. Here in Singapore for a few sister days *en route* home from a conference in South Korea, she kindly consented to give this interview.

become nuns because they can't get employed, others choose to remain nuns. Remote areas of northern India are closed for six months a year because of the snow. Some of the nuns come to Tsopedma to do their practice. Usually, in summer, they go back to their own villages where they can do some farming work. The most they can get paid is S\$2 per day.

I'm thinking of building a retreat place for about thirty nuns where they can practise for certain months. When the nuns stay in Indian homes, several of them share a room. It's usually very noisy, they have no privacy. (It's not conducive) because in Tibetan Buddhist practice, you should not meet people during retreats.

As a nun, I get to realise that I don't have to go for the material things ... I am satisfied as long as I have sufficient time to do my practice.

An English-born former Buddhist monk in Thailand has been arranging scholarships for thousands of students for many years. When he was a monk, he encountered problems from his seniors who believe that monks should not get involved in worldly affairs. Do you face such problems?

Not really, although our teachers don't encourage us. They think that we're too low-level. When we cannot help ourselves, how can we help others? They would rather we do more meditation and spiritual practice. They first want us to realise the truth of the Buddha's teaching. But once we really get into (social work), they do help us. In Tibetan Buddhism, it's easier because they practise the Bodhisattva way – to place others before yourself.

How can people help these nuns?

People can help in many ways like sponsoring nuns, sending money to arrange for teachings, or, if you're going to India, by bringing clothing especially warm clothing.

I did not realise that Tibetan practitioners practise alms begging.

Oh, we do. Now in India, we ask the lamas to provide everything – teachings, food, clothes etc. But in Tibet, it was not so. The students had to support themselves. They went on alms round.

The Buddha showed us a way – how to realise impermanence by receiving alms. Living day by day. Let tomorrow come. Theravadin monks go for alms round on a daily basis, like the Buddha. (In a sense) we are more attached, we collect sufficient food to go on retreat.

But the Dalai Lama does not go on alms round.

Because as a child he was taken care of by the government. He has taken many lives before. The heads of the Tibetan traditions – the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa etc – they are realised beings. If you read about their former lives, they had also gone for alms rounds previously.

What satisfaction do you derive from your work and life as a Buddhist nun?

I get a better chance to realise impermanence. As a nun, I don't have to go for material things. The more we have, the more we want. The more we want, the more problems we get. I'm satisfied as long as I have sufficient time to do my practice.

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Why did you come to Singapore?

To see the busy world of Singapore (laughter). I went to Korea. On the way back, I dropped by to see my friends.

What were you doing in Korea?

Ten of us, Buddhist nuns from different parts of India, attended a conference in (South) Korea. They were discussing their problems, many speeches, very intellectual. Their difficulties and ours are so different (laughter). Korean nuns like Taiwanese nuns are very well educated. Their problems are very complicated, ours are simple but still...

What are your impressions of Singapore? You don't have to be diplomatic (laughter).

Materially, you're very comfortable. At the same time, it makes your life very complicated. Very ruled by money and time.

Bhutan

Tell us something about Bhutan where you come from.

By area, the size of Switzerland, it has a population of 1.2 million people, scattered all over the country. The people are mainly farmers – planting oranges, apples, red and white sticky rice. We export timber.

The eastern and western parts have different languages. In Buddhist schools, English is the second language; otherwise, English is the first language. Ninety nine per cent of the people are Buddhists. Southern Bhutanese are Hindus. There are individual Christian practitioners but there's no church.

Materially, you (Singaporeans) are very comfortable. At the same time, it makes your life very complicated. Very ruled by money and time.

How do you see Bhutan facing the pressures of the 21st century, especially western influence represented by MacDonald's and Hollywood?

Bhutan is changing very rapidly too. Although television came to Bhutan only two years ago, we're very much exposed to videos and movies. Also, our government sends many students to study abroad. Our older generation already fears this influence. It's a losing battle.

Will there be a problem for Buddhism in future?

We're already having a problem. Buddhists do not engage very much in social work, unlike Christians. Our younger generation reads Christian books in English. There are many Buddhist books (translated into English) but they're on profound subjects and our students cannot understand them. These books are not relevant to their daily lives.

Would you have a use for simple English books on Buddhism?

Yeah, actually. If you can send them to Bhutan, that would be very good.

Buddhism and Buddhist practice

What is your advice for beginners who want to practise a Buddhist way of life?

Foreigners usually look for teachers. Don't look for famous teachers like the Dalai Lama. All these Rinpoches, of course, they do have compassion. But if you have your own problems, they don't have time for you. Go for simple, ordinary monks who are good enough. As you progress, then you can get more qualified teachers.

In recent interviews, His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, spoke about his becoming a vegetarian. How important is it for Buddhists to become vegetarians?

If you don't want to harm life, you shouldn't eat it. If you don't eat the meat, then you don't harm the animal. I cannot say – *I'm eating the fish but I'm not killing it*. Because although you did not kill it, it was killed for you.

In Bhutan, we don't have seafood. Also, we don't eat horse meat, dog meat. So these lives, we don't kill. But in a place like Bhutan, to become (total) vegetarian is extremely difficult because of (the lack

of) variety of vegetables. Especially in a retreat place which is so far away from the town. Only in summer – for three months – do we get fresh vegetables. The rest of the year, we depend only on dry vegetables. Then we get sick and (develop) many kinds of complications. To save our lives, we have to see which one is more important. (To) have more time to practise, (human) life is very important so we cannot be vegetarian (in these circumstances).

If you don't want to harm life, you shouldn't eat it. If you don't eat the meat, then you don't harm the animal.

In Bhutan, people usually eat yak meat, beef, pork, mutton and lamb. The traditional practice for Tibetan Buddhists is to eat the meat of larger animals so that they need to kill fewer animals to feed the same number of people. Although many monks and nuns take meat, they don't take fish, chicken and pork. Because in Bhutan, pigs are raised only to be eaten, unlike cows. (Otherwise) everyday in our mind, we keep on thinking – *we are feeding the pigs to be killed and eaten*. So everyday, we are sort of (mentally) killing the animal. Now, in India, many Tibetan temples do not serve meat because of His Holiness.

I haven't seen (how animals are kept) in Singapore but I saw it in India. I tell my friends – *even if you are eating meat, please don't eat chickens because they're put in small cages*. It's so sad to see the way they keep chicken in India.

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Self-Esteem – How do we Measure it?



BY VISU

In a materialistic society, people usually measure their self-worth by the amount of wealth they've amassed – money, houses, cars, property, luxury items, a high standard of living, and so on. They gauge their self-worth by their achievements in life. Are they university graduates? And not just any university but the most prestigious and respected one. Are they professionals? Not just a GP but a specialist or a surgeon. Are they tycoons, CEOs, powerful politicians, ministers or high ranking civil servants? Do they have a string of letters after their names? People may feel a high sense of self-esteem when they have all these. Then they've 'arrived'.

Even the spiritual scene is not spared. As a result, people become disillusioned with religion and religious structures. They find big buildings but no heart in the people inhabiting them. They find a lack of compassion and humility and an increase in greed and hubris. They find their priests, monastics, and 'holy' people amassing wealth, driving luxury cars, behaving like businessmen, and indulging in unbecoming activities. So religious people too have to do some soul-searching and ask themselves - *how are we measuring our self-worth?*

There are always good and bad apples among us. Even the good are not always good, And the bad are not always bad. The good can be bad sometimes, and the bad good. We are a mixture of goodness and badness in various proportions.

There's nothing wrong with worldly success, just as there's nothing wrong with wealth *per se*. We can do much good with wealth, skills, talent, and influence. So there's nothing wrong in building a big temple with the noble aim of serving

people and giving them facilities to listen to Dhamma talks, to be inspired to live the good life, to meditate, to make good friends, to have a wholesome place to go to, to spend their time in a profitable manner. All this is fine and laudable.

The danger, however, is when corruption sets in, when there's fraud and deceit, jealousy and disharmony, possessiveness and attachment, power games and undue control and manipulation. When the practitioner starts thinking that he's someone who seethes with self-importance, forgetting that the whole idea of the practice is to see through the five aggregates – form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, which constitute our body and mind - and realize that here, there's no substantial self, everything being ephemeral, transient and conditioned.

These days the word 'self-esteem' has become an often-used term. Someone might say, "I've a low self-esteem," "I think I am hopeless," or "I'm no good." What do they mean by that? How do they measure their self-esteem? What are the criteria?

So, ultimately, how should we measure our self-esteem? If we go by society's norms, a housewife would have low self-esteem. She's just a mother, a woman, bringing up children and earning no income. A clerk, an office boy, a gardener, servant, driver, factory or ordinary worker, an illiterate person – all of them might all have a feeling of low self-esteem.

I suggest that we should measure our self esteem by how well we've lived up to the true values in life. What are these true values? Love, kindness, compassion, generosity, patience, forbearance, tolerance, forgiveness, fortitude, perseverance, humility, gratitude, consideration for others, thoughtfulness, composure, calmness, serenity, equanimity, understanding, and contentment, concentration, wisdom and

honesty. And courage (to do what's right), determination, resoluteness (to live a noble life), mental strength, diligence, and effort in walking the noble path.

We need to analyse the true meaning of these qualities. We need to understand how to apply them in our everyday life.

For example, love is neither attachment nor selfishness. It's caring and seeking the good of another. Kindness is simply the act of opening our hearts and being genuinely good to others. Compassion is a heart that's touched when it sees the suffering of others. It wants to reach out and alleviate their suffering. Consideration is thoughtfulness and regard for others' well-being and happiness.

Generosity is being able to give and share what one has – it's the opposite of stinginess and miserliness. Forgiveness is the ability to pardon or excuse somebody who has hurt us without any grudge or resentment - the act of a magnanimous person. Patience is being able to persevere through all the trials and tribulations in life - the ability to forbear insults and injury without anger or vengeance. Perseverance is not giving up, despite difficulty - taming our mind and continuing to do all the good work that we're doing. Calmness is the ability to be composed and steady, especially in times of crisis, the opposite of agitation and restlessness. Equanimity is the ability to remain calm and balanced, not ruffled by life's ups and downs.

Gratitude is the remembrance and appreciation of the kindness one has received from others. Humility is the lack of pride and conceit – it's the opposite of haughtiness and hubris. Contentment is having few wishes, being happy with what little one has. Usually, we're not content - always craving for more. But to the extent that we can reduce our craving and be content, to that extent we'll be happy and be spared from suffering. Resoluteness is our continued

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persistence in cultivating our mind, inculcating all the values we hold dear, not giving up and rising up again every time we fall. Diligence is the effort we put in to cultivate all these wholesome states.

Understanding is the ability to see deeper than the superficial - how we're all conditioned, how we're all the same in wanting to seek happiness and avoid suffering and yet suffering because we're still not free from delusion and ignorance.

Mindfulness is the awareness of what's going on in our body and mind from moment to moment. Concentration is focusing our mind on whatever we're doing without restlessness and wandering. And wisdom is the ability to see things as they are, the true nature of this mind and body.

Many of these values often go together. For example, people with loving kindness are also patient, kind, forgiving, and generous. And they who are kind, generous, loving, humble and honest are usually also wise because these are the actions and behaviour of a wise person.

So this is how we should measure our self-worth - by how much of these qualities we've developed, how strongly they're ingrained in us.

By now, we have a better idea of how to measure our self-worth. But we've still a long way to go before we can uproot our greed, anger and delusion, and become an Arahant - a Worthy One who's accomplished the goal, lived the holy life and ended rebirth and suffering.

It's important to constantly bear in mind that, until we attain Arahantship, all measurement of self-esteem is flawed; tainted with the notion of selfhood. Whether we think highly or lowly of ourselves, whether we think "*I am superior to you*", "*I am equal to you*", "*I am inferior to you*", we're all still caught in the "I" conceit. For only when we've become Arahants and uprooted all identification with the five aggregates as a self will we be free from all measurement and reckoning in terms of "I" or self. *Joy*

Letter from Visu

Ven B Dhammaratana
Buddhist Library
2 and 4, Lorong 24A
Geylang
Singapore

9 July 2004

Dear Bhante

Many thanks for the reply which we received when we opened our email today.

Barbara and I just got back today (Friday, July 9, at 6.30pm) after being away for four days visiting the ancient city of Anuradhapura which is in the northern central region of Sri Lanka. We visited the 2,300 year old Bodhi tree and sat around meditating for a while before it. I was a little disappointed with the visit to the Anuradhapura ruins site - there was not all that much to see with little information provided by the government - yet the authorities charge US\$15 - 1,530 Sri Lankan rupees - for entrance for foreign visitors.

Barbara and I, being poor, found this rather exorbitant. We even had to pay 10 rupees after that just to visit the toilet in the site - and the toilet itself was in poor condition! And even to visit the Tooth relic temple in Kandy, we had to pay 300 rupees.

I find all this a little hard to comprehend as I thought Buddhist temples and sites should welcome visitors and not charge any fee, not to mention exorbitant ones at that. I have never heard of any Buddhist temples charging entrance fees. Burma is a very poor country too but, as far as I know, there are no charges for visiting the Shwe Dagon and other temples. And I don't think there are any entrance charges to the Buddhist holy sites in India though I have not been there myself.

With lots of metta

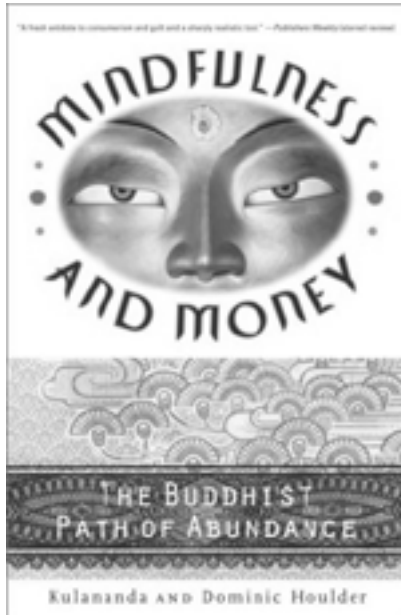
Visu

Look out for the next issue of Path of Joy for Bhante's reply to Visu's letter...

MINDFULNESS AND MONEY - THE BUDDHIST PATH OF ABUNDANCE

by Kulananda and Dominic Houlder
Published by Broadway Books (2002)
(234 pages)

Reviewed by Chwee Beng



Money affects people in very different ways. To most of us, money means security. But this natural sentiment can be carried to extremes.

A friend, who'd stopped working in the fast lane, returned to it after six months. She missed 'putting the deals together', as she put it. But more pertinently, she was worried about her future. Only lots of money, she confided in me, could suffice to give her a sense of security.

On the other extreme, a monk once said to me, 'I don't have any use for money'. He went on alms rounds in the mornings and he lived in a *kuti* within the compound of a Thai temple. Everything that he ate, wore or used was given to him by lay people anxious to 'tum boon' (make merit).

But no matter how we perceive the way money affects – or does not affect – us, one thing's certain. In this world, money's essential. Even the monk's minimalist life requires money to function because no amount of good intentions can put food in the monk's alms bowl. Indeed, as the authors point out, if not for money – or its electronic equivalent in today's cashless world – we'd all have to revert to the barter trade.

Seen in this light, it's no surprise that money is, in the authors' opinion, 'humanity's greatest invention'. The Buddha himself, wise and pragmatic as he was, refused to prohibit the use of money (or its then equivalent) by lay people or recommend a life of poverty. What he did do, though, was to show how we can earn – and use – money wisely. This book shows us just how the Buddha did that and how we can use those lessons to help us live a meaningful life.

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism begin with the recognition that life is characterised by suffering. We suffer because, in our ignorance, we fail to understand the nature of reality, the way our lives actually function. Even as modern science and technology bring greater development and material success each passing day, more and more people are discovering that their lives remain incomplete or meaningless. In the authors' words – *Nothing whatsoever will make your life complete: not possessions, not a job, not a family, not a vocation, or a loved one, not drugs, not religion, not even Buddhism. That's because of the way life is and suffering comes from our determined attempts to swim against the flow of life.*

We try to use everything that we have, including money, to fill in the void, just as financially successful parents today try to use expensive education, gifts and holidays as substitutes for the quality parental care that they're unable or unwilling to give to their offspring.

Yet, the message of Buddhism, contrary to popular misconception, is a happy one. *'...(W)e can learn to live in a way that changes the picture radically, that helps us to become less deluded and reactive and instead, much wiser and more creative in our ability to master greed and hatred. Money ... can also fuel a journey – the path of abundance – that any of us can choose to make towards an extraordinary life. It's up to us.'*

What is this 'life of abundance'? It's a complete, integrated life, one that's not split into material and spiritual compartments. Nor one in which the spiritual dimension is squashed to extinction by a pre-occupation with materialistic pursuits. In a life of abundance, we 'use our money to change

our mind, to change craving into generosity, aversion into love and delusion into clear awareness.'

Inviting the reader to 'engage in your own bold experiment with money', the authors examine fundamental Buddhist topics – the six realms of existence, the twelve-linked chain of dependent origination and Buddhist ethical precepts. They explain the proper basis and ambit of the positive qualities Buddhists seek to develop – mindfulness, wisdom, loving kindness, generosity, contentment, honesty, objectivity, awareness and altruism. And they show how these qualities can be employed to good effect in the work place. The book recounts, for example, how a police officer in England manages to perform his duties – which may involve violence and the carrying of firearms – in harmony with his Buddhist conviction.

The authors also remind us that these qualities are fundamentally empty and inter-dependent. Take generosity, for instance. True generosity requires us to cross the 'frontiers' of our 'comfort zone' – to give until, in Mother Teresa's words – 'it hurts'. To be generous is to give what we want, not what we don't want. It's not spring cleaning or tax avoidance. And we don't just give away money and possessions, we can also give our time, merit, education, culture, even, if the occasion demands it, our lives (as in the recent Nicoll Highway tragedy). But, above all, in the Buddhist scheme of things, we ought, if we're able to – as the Buddha did – give wisdom. In this context, generosity is extremely powerful. Undertaken sincerely and consistently, it has a 'transformational power' – 'it opens up the Path of Abundance for others as well as for ourselves'. Ultimately, '(g)enerosity is an attitude that shapes our whole being: it becomes who we are. The Buddhist ideal is to become so generous that we don't even think of those we give to as deserving recipients. We just give because that's part of being fully alive'.

The authors have themselves both set up thriving businesses. They are both committed Buddhists although Kulananda lives in a Buddhist residential community in Birmingham, England, with relatively

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little personal money whilst Dominic lives alone in an apartment in central London and is relatively wealthy. Both therefore know what they write about. This book – their first joint effort – is clearly written, practical and useful. It offers examples (either real-life or constructed) with questionnaires and checklists to help us understand the issues raised and to evaluate our own lives, work and experience.

We must bear in mind though that the book is written by westerners, about (mostly) western life and for western readers. For example, the six realms of existence are interpreted as states of mind we can experience in this very life, rather than worlds to be born into. This is all well and good. After all, much of the rest of the world is already, to varying degrees, 'westernised' and should be able to appreciate the issues raised in the book without much problem. In the context of Singapore, at least, this handy practical guide should prove relevant and useful.

The authors say that '*Buddhism has to learn to speak its ancient wisdom with a new voice, so that its old and time-honoured disciplines and practices can find fresh channels of expression*'. In

fact, Buddhism has throughout in its 2,546 year history spoken with 'new voices', even though those voices have been Asian. The cultural divide now may seem wider and deeper as Buddhism takes root in the west but, at the same time, the world is in many ways also getting smaller. There's little doubt that Buddhism will continue to adapt to new cultures and environments, including the west. Already, it has become the fastest growing religion in Australia and Italy, if reports are to be believed. The challenge for the west, on the other hand, is to accept Buddhism as it is (or, to use Sangharakshita's terminology in a different context, Buddhism qua Buddhism) and not try to inject into it a dose of Christian or New Age spiritualist ideas. Disciplines and practices are one thing, fundamental doctrines like soulessness and the lack of a creator God are quite another. Otherwise, westerners would, in the words of the Dalai Lama, be putting 'a yak's head on an oxen's body'.

I recommend this book to anyone – east, west, north or south – who feels the need to make sense of his or her life and work.

Joy

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How do you feel about the ordination of women?

Full ordination of nuns never reached Tibet.

Nuns can go to Taiwan (where the lineage of fully ordained nuns survives) to receive full ordination – there are certain requirements for full ordination like having ten teachers, one of whom must be a master, to witness full ordination – but in the Tibetan tradition we're still struggling to live as ordinary nuns (who observe only ten precepts). Unless we have a place where nuns can practise together and people can (develop a high) respect (for) them, there's not much use (in just getting fully ordained). So a nun goes to Taiwan, gets full ordination, comes back and runs around like anybody else and people don't respect you. What's the point? You really need a team of well-educated nuns who will be able to teach the Dharma. Then you can get them fully ordained.

Thank you very much, Ani-la. Joy

KIDS SPEAK

PRINCE SIDDHARTHA AS A YOUNG MAN

Here, some of our Sunday school children describe the life of Prince Siddhartha as a young man.

BEATRISA LIM



One day, Prince Siddhartha heard of a beautiful park and begged his father's permission to go out of the palace to visit it. In the middle road, he saw old age, sickness, death and renunciation and asked many questions. He felt unhappy.

VICTOR TAN



The cousins argued and they referred (the matter) to the wise man. The wise man said – *A life certainly must belong to him who tries to save it. A life cannot belong to the one who is trying to destroy it.* The prince took the bird and nursed it.

AMANDA LIM



Prince Siddhartha was kind, compassionate and thoughtful. When he was twelve years old, he and his cousin, Devadatta, were walking in the woods when suddenly they saw a swan flying in the air. His cousin quickly took out his bow and arrow and shot the swan down. Both of them ran to pick it up but the prince who was a faster runner reached the spot first and picked up the poor swan.

SARA ANG

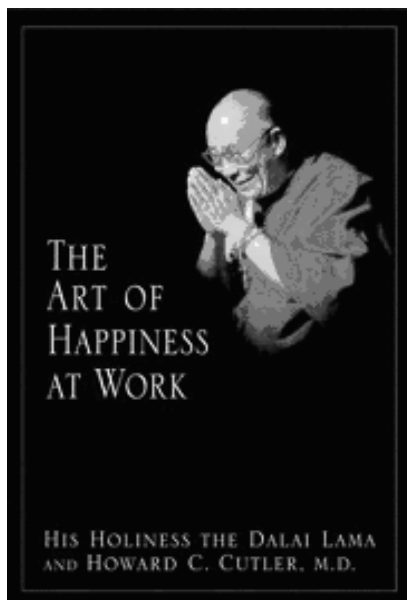


As a young boy, Prince Siddhartha was given very good education (to) prepare him to be a strong and smart king, one who could rule the country wisely. The most well-known teachers were appointed (to teach him) grammar, art and crafts, medicine, logic, religion. He was (also) trained to be a warrior. *Joy*

The Art of Happiness at Work

by His Holiness The Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, M. D.
Riverhead Books, 2003
Hardcover, 212 Pages

Reviewed by James Chiang



Howard Cutler, an American psychiatrist, first met His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1982 when he was in India on a research assignment. Their conversations over the next few years resulted in the publication of *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. The focus of their first book was on inner development – how we can achieve happiness “through the systematic training of our hearts and minds”. It became an instant hit and sold more than a million copies worldwide.

However, many of his readers pointed out that while the book provided much inspiration and guidance on a personal level, it was a little detached from society. They wanted to find out how these principles can be applied and integrated into our daily lives. As some of them put it, “... an individual does not live in a vacuum ... the society we live in can clearly have an impact on the individual”. Many were also interested to hear the Dalai Lama’s take on these

issues.

In *The Art of Happiness at Work*, Howard Cutler engages the Dalai Lama once again in a series of conversations, this time from the perspective of work. Work is an important activity that governs a huge part of our lives. We work to survive, feed ourselves and pay for our rent. As we spend so many hours at work, we inevitably encounter difficult situations – a difficult colleague, an unreasonable boss, pay cuts or company restructuring. Sometimes, we may even cause our own dissatisfaction! How often are we envious, if not jealous, of others’ accomplishments?

“ ... in the work environment, if there’s a lot of injustice and exploitation, then to passively tolerate it is the wrong response ... ”

In the first chapter, *Transforming Dissatisfaction at Work*, the Dalai Lama speaks of workplace unhappiness, such as work overload and poor working environment. “ ... in the work environment, if there’s a lot of injustice and exploitation, then to passively tolerate it is the wrong response ... We need to fight against injustice outwardly, but at the same time we have to find ways to cope inwardly, ways to train our minds to remain calm and not to develop frustration, hatred, or despair”.

One other topic I find rather interesting is how we can inject meaning into work and even turn it into a calling. There are some of us who are blessed with jobs that constantly bring excitement and challenges. At the same time, there are jobs that are very routine in nature, to the point of being boring. I once worked part-time in a factory during my school holidays for some extra cash. My menial task was to check an assortment of computer parts (that came in little plastic

bags) against the accompanying item lists. The job was so boring I found myself fighting the Z-monster by the third hour. At the end of the week, I asked myself if it was worth risking my sanity for a little extra pocket money.

Is it possible then, under such circumstances (even more so for full-timers), to turn work into a calling? The Dalai Lama offers hope - “*There is always a way to find a higher purpose to one’s work*”. For those who are supporting their families, they can “*deliberately reflect on providing for the happiness and comfort of their family, visualize each family member and how this work is providing food and shelter for that individual*”. What about those without families to support? “*They should recognise that by actively participating in this workforce, in some way, they are acting out their role as a good citizen in their society ... What is the other alternative? ... there is the danger of drifting into some unhealthy habits, such as resorting to drugs ... or acting as a destructive member of society ...*”

His Holiness’ wisdom resonates throughout the book. As you read on, you’ll find that these principles can be readily applied to the different facets of life, as much as they can be applied to the workplace. The panacea to many of life’s problems does not lie in a one-size-fits-all solution, but depends on our willingness to turn inwards to reshape our attitudes and outlook. Finally, the Dalai Lama reminds us that “*a happy life should have variety, be more whole and complete. One should not just concentrate on job or money*”.

This book is very well written and inspiring. I highly recommended it to those who would like to turn work into a more meaningful experience. Happy reading! *Joy*

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And so the Buddha taught a way for children to skilfully repay their indebtedness to parents. If parents are spiritually immature, we can help them to improve slowly. We do it indirectly because it's difficult for senior people to change. In this way, if we can gradually persuade our parents to adhere to correct Buddhist spiritual practice, then slowly – but surely – we can repay our debt to them. For example, if parents find it difficult to donate money for charity, we can persuade them that it's good to help the poor. Just as they were poor before, they should also understand the plight of others who are poor now. But we should not label our parents as 'stingy' because they've acquired a thrifty habit owing to the difficult times they had to endure, struggling to give us a decent future.

If parents are doing wrong practices, it's also good to urge them to go to places where correct Buddhist spiritual practices are carried out. It's particularly useful if there are other senior - or more senior - people around for these parents to emulate.

The words in the passage - *But whoever encourages his unbelieving parents to believe his immoral parents to be virtuous* - means to teach parents the right view regarding the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. That the Buddha is not God but a man who became the Enlightened One showing us that it's possible for us

to do the same. That the Dharma is a skilful teaching bringing us true happiness in this very life if we're able to practise it sincerely. And that the Sangha is a group of people practising the Dharma, who've gone through the same problems that we face. They can thus show us how to practise the Dharma in a skilful way ourselves.

Sometimes we tend to see our parents as a hindrance to our freedom. We want to be free to do anything we want, good or bad. But total or unfettered freedom in this sense is an illusion. The Buddha did not speak of this kind of freedom. True freedom is the ability to choose to live our lives in a skilful way that brings happiness, both to ourselves and others.

For example, for the sake of our own freedom, we should not impinge on others' freedom. We should not kill other living beings just because their death will give us some benefit. And a robber cannot say that, because he has certain needs, he has the freedom to rob others to satisfy his needs.

Parents may not always be right. They may look at things from a different perspective from us because, with the benefit of greater prosperity and wider exposure, we know a great deal more about the modern world than they do. We should thus be patient enough to understand things from our parents' perspective, instead of rushing to condemn them. We should understand

that, because parents love us dearly, our mere disagreement with them, especially if we disagree strongly, may give them much pain. And parents may be in pain, even if they don't show it.

The last duty which we can perform for our parents is to conduct religious services for them when they die. But these services must be conducted in accordance with *our parents'* beliefs, not our own. Some people create fear in their parents' minds by pressing their parents to accept their religion, or die without any religious rites being performed for them. Faced with this dilemma, these parents often have no option but to accept their children's religion. They may also accept their children's religion just to keep them happy or to maintain harmony in the family. This practice is absolutely wrong, certainly no way to repay our parents' kindness and love for us. No one should change another's religion without that person's genuine consent, freely given.

If we sincerely put into practice these simple principles, we'll be able to enhance the quality of the limited time available to us to spend with our parents and children.

May you all enjoy many precious moments of love and happiness with your loved ones.

*Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library*

BL's Third Charity Golf



BL held its third Charity Golf Tournament at the Raffles Country Club on 5th August 2004. The event kicked off to a shotgun start at 1pm and some 100 participants set off in their buggies, armed with sunscreen and drinking water under a bright blue sky. After a full day of swinging and putting, the participants settled down to an evening of wining and dining at the clubhouse restaurant. Surely one event that many golfers would look forward to next year! *Joy*



editorial... continued from page 3

issued commandments, cast in stone, to be obeyed by all and sundry under pain of eternal damnation for breach, no matter what the circumstances.

So is Buddhism irrelevant to modern life? Some days after reading *Tricycle*, I listened to a BBC radio programme on road rage – that peculiar and dangerous phenomenon that some people succumb to once they're behind the wheels of a car, often triggered by the slightest of perceived driving transgressions. I say 'perceived' because, of course, in many cases, the road rager's victim may in fact have done nothing wrong at all.

The programme discussed what road rage is, what causes it and how to better respond to it. In the United States, one state's response is to offer offenders an option – either to serve their normal sentence – a fine or imprisonment – or undergo a fifty-two week driver education programme. It was the contents of this programme that particularly impressed me. For example, the role of conditioning (parental influence, especially if they're drivers themselves, and the power of the media, particularly television) in causing road rage. And the many techniques used in the programme to treat the condition. Such as being mindful, using deep breathing exercises (to dissipate the flow of adrenaline in the body), employing the power of reasoning (to avoid conflict situations), making appropriate choices, knowing how to respond rather than react, distinguishing between fact and misconception, realising the dangers of egotism (the false belief in self-image), how to be compassionate and empathetic to the needs of other road users and how to develop an altruistic motivation by placing others before self (even apologising despite your having done nothing wrong, just to diffuse a volatile situation).

Amazing, isn't it? How closely these techniques resemble the contents of a course in Buddhism. Breathing meditation, inter-dependence, self-help

and responsibility, skilful response as against gut reaction, compassion, altruism, mind training (especially the Tibetan Buddhist techniques of *lojong* (mind training) and *tonglen* (taking the suffering of others and offering them our happiness). Of course, they're known by different names and the Buddhist techniques are far more profound and comprehensive in scope but, undeniably, the driver education programme shares the same basic ideas, more or less, as any standard teaching on Buddhism.

This was not really surprising to me. Because Buddhism is, above all else, a great psychology. 21st century psychiatrists realise this when they adapt the essence of Buddhist meditation techniques to treat post-traumatic cases resulting from wars and genocide in various parts of the world. Can we still honestly say that Buddhism is irrelevant to the needs of the modern world?

It should be apparent by now that the problem lies, not with Buddhism, but with us. It's called ignorance. And, when coupled with limited knowledge – remember the old adage 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing' – ignorance can even masquerade as wisdom.

And so, at the beginning of Buddhist teachings, we're often reminded not to behave like three kinds of pots. One is an upside down pot. No matter what you try to pour into it, nothing goes in. The mind is just too closed. Another is a pot with a hole in it. Through forgetfulness or a scattered mind, we are simply unable to retain any teaching. The final simile is that of a dirty or polluted pot. Whatever we are taught immediately becomes tainted with prejudice and misconception. If we cannot understand the teaching, it must be too academic, irrelevant or the teacher is simply no good. What we want is a teaching that's tailor-made to suit our mindset, prejudice and all, and makes us feel good as we exit the hall. But how does this 'teaching' help us, except to massage our ego and increase our suffering?

In this issue, our Bhante B Dhammaratana, in his regular column, *Bhante Says*, talks about one of the most important duties of a Buddhist – that of repaying our debt to our parents, setting it in the proper Buddhist context. We also have an article by Visu, formerly Venerable Visudhacara of Penang, Malaysia, on self-esteem. This article is a timely reminder of how we ought to live our lives as Buddhists. After disrobing, Visu continues to serve the Dharma by delivering Dharma talks and leading meditation retreats, most recently in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and Sri Lanka.

In our usual book review segment, James Chiang reviews *The Art of Happiness at Work* by Howard Cutler based on discussions with His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama. How can we survive and keep healthy – physically, mentally and spiritually – in this shrinking world of increasing tension and stress in the workplace? Keeping up with the contemporary theme, I review a handy, little book called *Money and Mindfulness*, where the authors, Kulananda and Dominic Houlder, both committed Buddhists, with impressive proven track records in business, delve into the fundamental tenets of Buddhism – the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path and dependent origination – to argue their case, not only for the skilful use of money, but also that there's a possibility for us to live a 'whole life' that does not 'split (our) lives between the material and spiritual worlds'.

Finally, we introduce a new segment – *A Window to the Buddhist World* – in which we feature items pertaining to events elsewhere in the Buddhist world. Our debut item is an interview with Venerable Wangmo, a Tibetan Buddhist nun from Bhutan, who's engaged in welfare work for Buddhist nuns in India. We also have a letter from Visu about the pricing policy in certain Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka.

As usual, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor

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