

Buddha Heart Parenting

*– Enrich your family
with Buddhist wisdom and
compassion*

Author

Dr C L Claridge

Publisher

Vajra Publications, Kathmandu,
Nepal

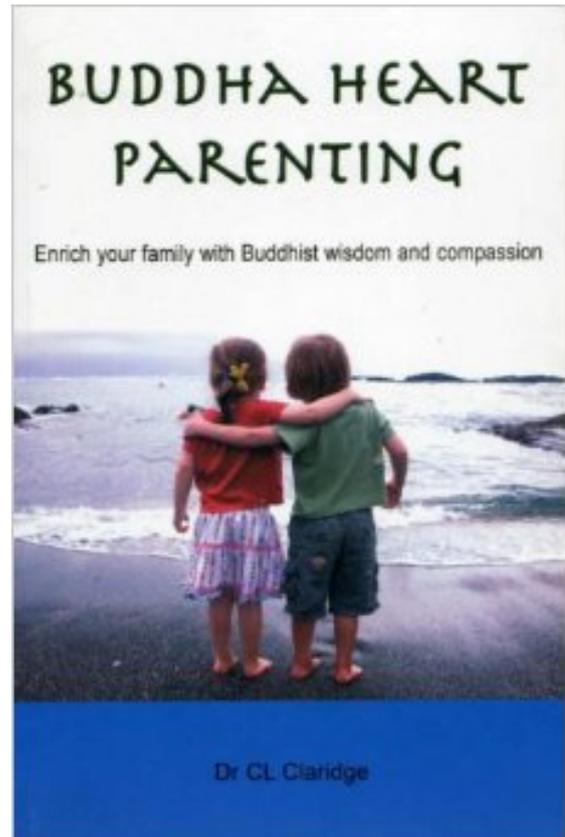
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2007

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Genre

Parenting, Vajrayana/Zen,
Buddhism



A Path for Parents

Author

Sara Burns

Publisher

Windhorse Publications Ltd,
United Kingdom

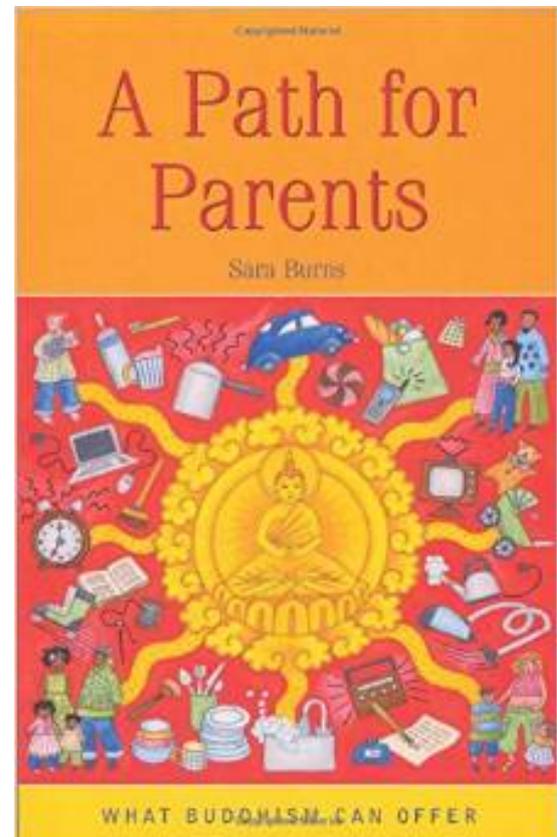
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Parenting, Western Buddhist
order, Buddhism



I decided to review the two books “Buddha Heart Parenting” and “A Path for Parents” together as they both address the same subject of parenting. They represent a sampling of recent books written by occidentals that apply the Buddha’s thoughts and teachings to coping with the challenges of daily family life in Western societies. As Buddhists, the authors of these books both seem motivated to want to ‘share their experience’ of the Buddha Dhamma with others, having been touched by the Dhamma and finding that it has helped in their own lives as parents and in their spiritual path.

The authors of these two books are both mothers and Buddhist practitioners. They draw on their personal experiences. Dr. Claridge, author of “Buddha Heart Parenting”, had “worked with thousands of parents and that helped her refine the skills and knowledge that are described in her book.” In the words of Venerable Tenzin Chonyi (Dr. Diana Taylor), a touring teacher of the Foundation for the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition, the value of “Buddha Heart Parenting” is that “it combines Buddhist practice with CL Claridge’s years of working with children, including her own”.

“Buddha Heart Parenting” is written by a parent counselor in effective parenting skills and strategies as well as a mother and practicing Buddhist about parenting based on Buddhist principles. Dr Claridge has a degree in child psychology and a Ph D in empowerment processes. She has, for more than 25 years, educated and counseled parents in effective parenting skills and strategies based on Buddhist principles and philosophy.

Sara Burns, author of “A Path for Parents”, draws from her experience to “identify the key opportunities and obstacles for growth within parenting.” Sara Burns “brought Buddhism into her life” as she found, like many of us, that after her second child was born, she “did not have time to step out of ...her... life to practice Buddhism.”

Essentially both authors “try not to separate the ‘spiritual’ aspects” of their lives or activities from “the day-to-day realities of raising children.” For those who want to bring Buddhism into their lives at a practical level, these two books serve as “practical guides.” Both books make for easy reading.

“Buddha Heart Parenting” with only 227 pages contains appropriate quotations from Buddhist Suttas and also from various eminent Zen teachers. Dr Claridge’s Vajrayana inclination is evident from her use of the ‘two wings’ of Buddhism metaphor, comprising wisdom and compassion. She “creates a powerful synergy” between parenting and Buddhism as an aid and a guide to a reader to become an effective and compassionate parent and an “engaged Buddhist,” a term coined by

Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizing “action based on awareness.”

“Practicing Buddhism whilst parenting children is, in principle, no different from practicing Buddhism without parenting children, we are still working with our mind... They allow us a precious opportunity to practice and live the Dharma.”

Dr Claridge coined and developed the concept of “Buddha Heart Parenting” to “provide parents, grand parents and caregivers with an ethical approach to parenting and child-raising that is based on the Buddhist principles of compassion and wisdom.” This approach “results in connected relationships and self-empowered children.” Buddha Heart in Buddhist idiom is ‘*Buddha Nature*’. “When we understand that all sentient beings have the same innate nature that wants happiness and doesn’t want to suffer, we are more easily able to maintain compassion and loving-kindness.”

“We all have a tendency to focus on ourselves. We tend to think that other people and our children ‘make’ us feel angry, hurt, etc through their behaviour. “Buddha Heart Parenting” gives us skills to look at the underlying causes of our children’s behaviour, and realize their behaviour is driven by how they feel.”

To understand why people behave the way they do, Dr Claridge advice that we shift the focus from “oneself and put on others.” From looking firstly at the causes of our children’s behaviour and the behaviour of members of our immediate family, we can then look at our wider family. What we see is that behind all unskillful or inappropriate action lie suffering – these people also suffer and want happiness... We can then feel heart-warming love for our wider family... From this heart-warming love comes compassion, that is, a desire for others to be free of suffering and its causes.”

Dr Claridge sight useful and easy to use Buddhist techniques that are “valuable in helping us develop compassion for our child, and stay calm in the midst of turmoil of parenthood.” One is the realization that during the aeons of lifetimes we have experienced, our child would have been our mother at some time. Knowing that they have suffered for us helps us to maintain our equilibrium in the face of provocation. Another practice is to realize that our child could be a Buddha who has chosen a rebirth that will help us to reach enlightenment. Lastly, we can focus on the Buddha potential that resides within our child.”

The aim of this book for Dr Claridge was to “enable us to be Buddhas, to awaken the Buddha within us and let that guide all that we do in our parenting role.” Here are some quotes from the book that serve to give

one a sense of the strong influence Buddhist thought had on Dr Claridge's approach to parenting:

"The focus of this book is on the 'how'."

"Compassion without wisdom can do more harm than good to our children and to our relationship with them."

"Peace is not eternal, it is internal and mindfulness together with equanimity helps create inner peace."

"Mindfulness brings inner peace and by being mindful we will spread peace in every moment."

"Peace is available to us if we can quiet our distracted mind and be in the moment."

"As we develop the qualities of compassion and Bodhichitta or altruism within ourselves we are able to create an atmosphere of peace and harmony, firstly in our family, then our community and ultimately the world."

"Bodhichitta is defined as the wish to achieve total enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. Bodhichitta holds two thoughts, (1) wanting to be a Buddha in order to (2) fulfill the desire to help all sentient beings."

Sara Burns' "A Path for Parents" is "not about how to be a good parent, how to raise happy children, or how to provide children with a spiritual context." The book is written in the belief that "our spiritual growth can only have a positive effect on our children." It tries to answer questions such as "How do we lead rich and meaningful spiritual lives in the context of parenting? ... How can we understand our everyday experience in the context of our spiritual aspirations?"

Sara Burns was born in 1962 and spent her early childhood in Barnes, London. She was raised a Catholic and became a regular member of the local church congregation. Sara has two children. She first came across Buddhism in Nepal in 1990, and then became involved in the establishment of the Northern London Buddhist Centre in the early 1990s. She was ordained within the Western Buddhist Order in 2005 and given the name Karunagita, which means 'song of compassion'. Since 1998, Sara has raised her children largely on her own and has worked as a consultant for a range of charities and voluntary organizations, joining forces with two other women in 2003 to set up a partnership. She currently lives in North London with her two children.

Sara Burns covers in seven chapters over 158 pages, the salient

teachings of the Buddha and how these teachings can be internalized and manifested in the way we behave and conduct ourselves in daily lives and how we relate to our children. In particular, Sara Burns explains in lay-person terms the Buddha's use of loving-kindness, generosity, mindfulness, cultivation of wisdom in acknowledging the impermanence of all phenomena and an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, and the ethical values, cultivation of the mind and the importance of patience, and being firmly committed to and having confidence in the path.

I would recommend both these books to those who will soon become parents or are already parents.