the Buddhist Library

The Path of Joy

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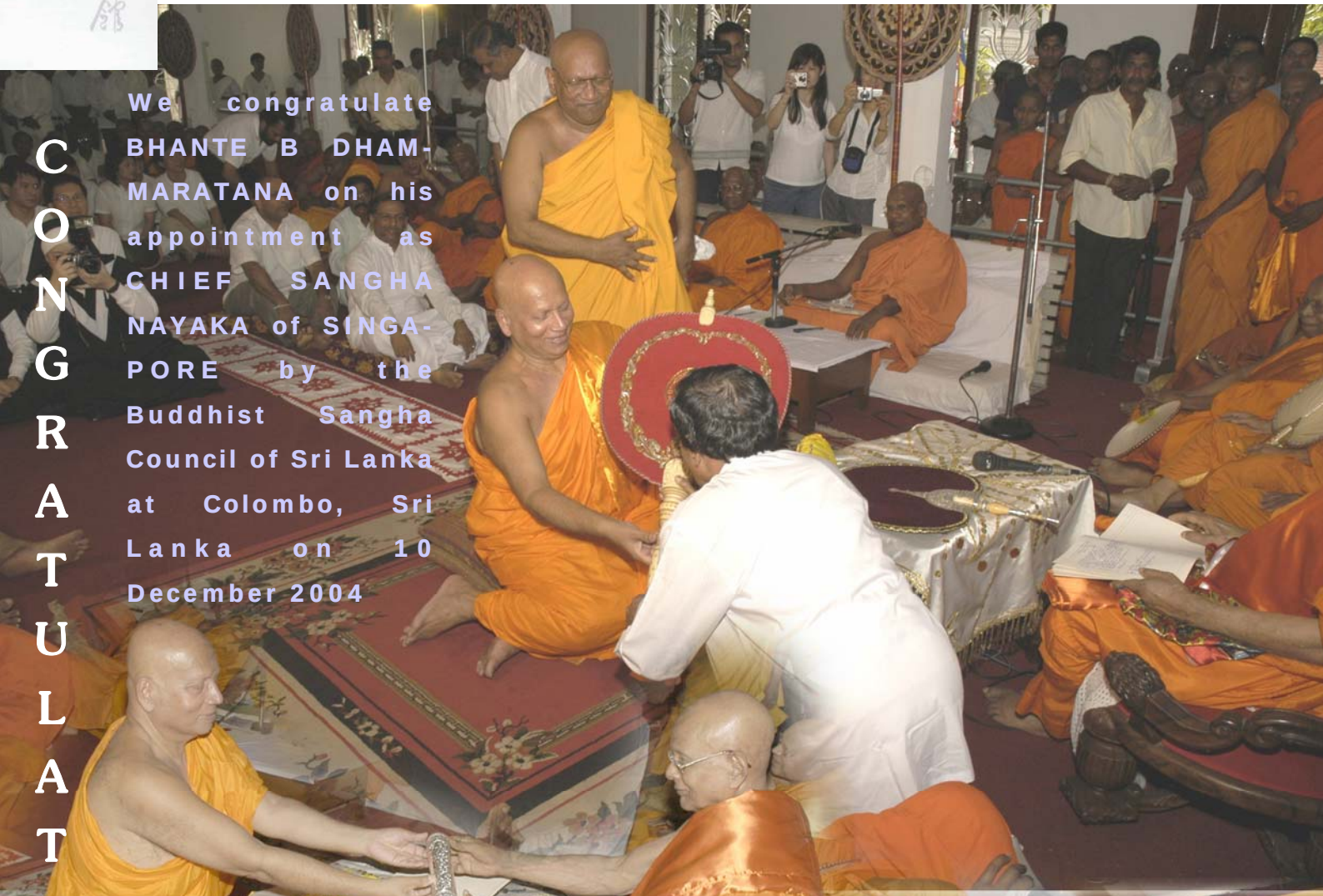
CONGRATULATIONS

We congratulate BHANTE B DHAMMARATANA on his appointment as CHIEF SANGHA NAYAKA of SINGAPORE by the Buddhist Sangha Council of Sri Lanka at Colombo, Sri Lanka on 10 December 2004



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Bhante Says

MONKS' ROBES

AND FOUR KINDS OF PEOPLE

The topic for today's discussion is the *Kumba Sutta* (the Discourse on Pots) but as today - Sunday, 31st October 2004 – is Robes Offering Day in the Buddhist Library – I would like to explain robes offering to you first.

The Significance of Monks' Robes and Robes Offering

Robes offering is a traditional ceremony conducted by monks and lay people within the Theravada tradition. It started in a very simple way during the Buddha's time.

People often me ask why monks' robes come in different colours, even within the Theravada tradition itself. Colour difference is a very important thing. In certain countries, monks who live in the forest prefer to have darker colours so as not to attract the attention of wild animals. Darker colours are not so striking to the eye. City dwellers, on the other hand, may choose a bright colour like orange. But there's no a hard-and-fast rule.

The saffron or orange colour of the robe is also a symbol of maturity. When leaves mature, they turn yellow or orange and drop to the ground. Monks have renounced the world. They're supposed to practise the Dharma and thereby attain maturity. By doing this, they free themselves from greed, hatred and delusion. Although most monks are ordinary monks, we have made a commitment to be free from these three defilements. So freedom from these three defilements is called *'maturity'.*

Another reason for choosing this colour is that yellow or orange is a symbol of impermanence, just as yellow or orange leaves die and drop from trees to the ground. The yellow or orange robe is therefore a constant reminder to monks that human life is impermanent. This is not negative or pessimistic thinking, as some people think, but realistic thinking. There's no point for us to think we can live forever, we can go on accumulating more and more material wealth in this life. That's not a solution for life's problems. Acquisition only serves to ehance attachment.

But monks also can suffer from attachment. For instance, monks may develop attachment for devotees. Some monks want more and more supporters. They go all out to have more and more devotees. This is, of course, different from the positive wish to help more and more people practise Buddhism.

Monks can also be attached to temples. They may wish to build more and grander temples and monasteries to enhance their own ego. They may even be attached to robes. That's why I always distribute extra robes to other monks, mainly in Sri Lanka, as they're more in need.

Finally, monks may become attached to offerings or *dana*. In certain traditional Buddhist countries, people make so many offerings to monks. Some monks may even live to receive offerings. Becoming a monk is not for the purpose of receiving offerings.

So a robe is a reminder to the person who's wearing it why he became a monk. It's therefore very meaningful if the monk is and remains mindful.

Colour aside, monks' robes should have the same pattern. The designer was the Buddha 2,500 years ago. The pattern is very significant. At the beginning, the Buddha's disciples did not use exactly the same pattern. They used one big piece of cloth and sewed it at the edges.

Later, when monks washed and dried their robes, some people stole them. This was brought to the Buddha's attention. The Buddha then took the monks to a nearby padi field in Magadha, modern day Bihar state in north-east India. A padi field was, and still is, customarily divided into different sections along straight lines. The Buddha asked the monks to follow the pattern of the padi field in making their robes.

What's the purpose in doing this? By dividing the robe into different sections sewn together, the monks in effect reduce the value of the material. It becomes more difficult for others to use the robes for their own purposes.

Reducing the value of robes

also seeks to have a salutary effect on monks themselves, When monks wear their robes, they're reminded that they've given up lay life to achieve spiritual development. They cannot think – *I'm wearing a valuable robe, a very nice one, it's precious, it costs a lot of money.*

A monk's robe can also be considered a kind of uniform. Like an army or police uniform. People may have respect or fear of them. For example, when an army officer is around, people's behaviour is more restrained. A robe is also a '*power uniform'* but in a different way. If a monk wears a robe mindfully and lives in accordance with the Dharma, he'll become peaceful, honest and compassionate. And he will earn the trust and respect of lay people.

Yesterday, I went to buy a few things for robes offering. Somebody wanted to go with me and choose practical items for the use of monks like soap, toothpaste and towel. At the last minute, however, that person had to go to a hospital. So I had to go alone. At the shop, I went to the counter to make payment. A lady rushed to the counter and called to me. She said – *Bhante, let me pay*. I told her it was not necessary because someone had already left some money with me for payment. The lady said - *Please let me do something good today. I'm not doing this all the time*. I pointed out to her that there were many things to pay for but she was insistent.

I recount this incident to you not for the purpose of encouraging you to pay for my purchases. But to illustrate the potential power of this uniform, a monk's robe. The lady was so happy to help. Why? Because this uniform represents the Sangha, the majority of whom lead skilful, compassionate, useful lives.

When attending the robes offering ceremony, it's helpful to understand and bear in mind what I've said today.

Kumba Sutta

The *Kumba Sutta* is taken from the *Angutara Nikaya* (*Gradual Sayings*). *Kumba* is clay pot. The sermon is therefore a discourse on clay pots. The Buddha used the clay pot as a simile to explain different kinds of people. He talked about the different characteristics of clay pots.

Human beings are very sophisticated. Today, we see somebody who appears very nice. Tomorrow, we may get a different picture. A person may lead a decent life for 20, 30 years but he may change after that. Some people are very good in their own country but when they go overseas, they forget themselves. Many people find it very difficult to maintain their principles when their lives change.

The Buddha mentioned four types of pots to explain the characteristics of four kinds of people. These people may be monks or laymen.

A closed and empty pot. There are some people whose outer appearance is very nice, friendly and pleasant. But their actions are driven by a selfish motivation. They're '*closed'* – meaning that they appear well-developed – but '*empty'* – meaning that they've actually not developed genuine virtues or characters. As ordinary people, we tend to judge others by their outward appearances so, in respect of this kind of people, we may mistake them as good people.

An open and filled pot. '*Open*' means that such people may appear uncouth, outspoken, even harsh outwardly, maybe in the way they talk or conduct themselves. '*Filled'* signifies that internally they've managed to develop wisdom. We may mistake these people as bad people but they're actually good.

An open and empty pot. Such a person's behaviour appears bad outwardly. Inwardly, they've also not developed wisdom. Both inside and outside, they're not good. They belong to the worst category. By associating with them we may harm ourselves.

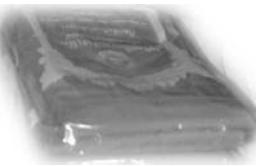
A filled and closed pot. These are people '*filled*' with pleasant behaviour - they behave well, speak compassionately, don't engage in frivolous discussions, neither gossip nor flatter, their demeanour is inspiring. Internally, they're proficient in the Dharma and, more importantly, they practise it. They know that life is impermanent, that it has to be lived meaningfully. With that understanding, they try to abstain from unskilful practices. At the same time, they're '*closed'* in that they manage to close all avenues for unpleasant thoughts and behaviour. In the Buddha's opinion, such people belong to the best category.

Living in society, we can't avoid meeting a whole range of different kinds of people. Of course, the Buddha's four categories are a generalisation used by him only as an illustration for the purpose of teaching. In the real world, people come in all shapes and sizes with all shades of character and conduct. And so another lesson we can learn from the *Kumba Sutta* is not to judge a book by its cover. We should try to be mindful and, with mindfulness, we won't have too many problems living with different kinds of people.

Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

Bhante B Dhammaratana and the Buddhist Library thank all volunteers and donors for their contribution in cash or kind to the tsunami victims in Sri Lanka.

Editorial



OF ROBES, POTS AND HUMAN NATURE

Have you ever wondered why monks (Theravadin monks, at least) wear yellow or orange robes? And what's the purpose of robes offering? Well, wonder no more. In his regular column, *Bhante Says*, Bhante B Dhammaratana gives a highly illuminating explanation of these FAQs. Our article is drawn from a talk Bhante delivered on Robes Offering Day held by BL on Sunday, October 31st 2004. Bhante also used the occasion to explain the *Kumba Sutta* (the Discourse on Pots) where the Buddha used the simile of four different kinds of pots to illustrate different types of human nature.

Talking about human nature reminds me of a lunch I recently had with a close friend. John loves to play football and chess. I suppose one game exercises his body while the other invigorates his mind. But the subject matter that amazes him above all is human nature. At the lunch, he told me about someone close to him. Jane's a devout Buddhist. She yearns to be a nun and sacrifices much of her time and effort performing Dharma work. She even serves in a hospice. Recently, Jane's mother became very sick and needed an operation. The old lady's children all agreed to contribute their shares towards the medical expenses. But not Jane, who has - '*no money*'. Despite her savings in the bank.

'*Now, don't get me wrong,*' John cautioned me. '*She's a very nice girl, I really like her. But I just can't understand her sense of priorities. Maybe she lacks maturity.*'

John's story reminded me of the well-known Buddhist tale of the meditating monk. A monk sits on his mat, in deep meditation, exuding beams of loving kindness and compassion. His tranquillity is, however, disturbed by the sound of the temple servant approaching. Opening his eyes, he notices that the poor man has spilled some tea onto his precious mat. He yells at the terrified man – who sputters and spills even more tea.

A similar thing happened to me once. Not the yelling or the tea, but the state of mind of the monk, I mean. Some years ago, I brought a good friend for a holiday in Bangkok. I was determined to show him how wonderful and exciting Bangkok was – the Grand Palace, Floating Market, Chatuchak weekend market, Mahboonkrong Shopping Centre, Saxophone Pub … the list was endless. And so I did, relentlessly. On the eve of our return to Singapore, I noticed that my friend was not as happy or grateful about the trip as I'd imagined he would be. I asked him about it. To my horror, I found out that I'd completely forgotten my friend's one simple request – all he wanted was to buy a model tuk-tuk to give to someone back home.

I suppose, as ordinary human beings, we all have a blind spot. This is true physically, of course – actually, we have two blind spots, one in each eye – but probably also true spiritually. That space in our conduct which we normally find so difficult to spot is often obscured by something called ego. And if we're not aware of this blind spot, we may keep operating in that area repeatedly without realising it. That sometimes happens, for example, when we get too involved with our own agenda, like I did in Bangkok.

I guess that's why the Dharma teaches us to constantly remind ourselves to be mindful of our actions. Even if – or, perhaps, especially when - we're performing what we think are meritorious actions, like donating money, giving *dana,* serving in Dharma centres, whatever. As Bhante says, even monks can learn a lot if they're mindful of the significance of the robes they wear.

As usual, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor

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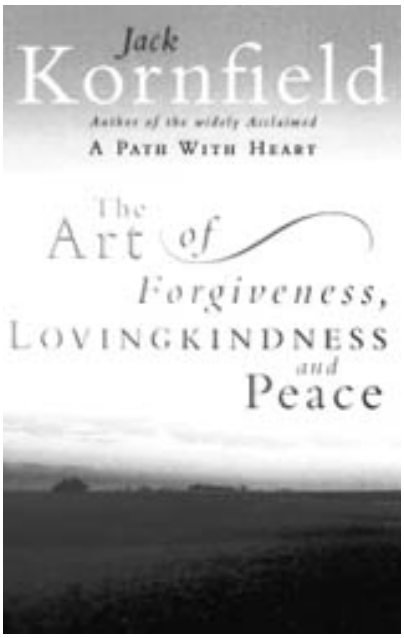
May the blessings of the Triple Gem be with you always.

Bhante B Dhammaratana and the Buddhist Library wish all members and friends a Happy & Prosperous Year of the Rooster.

Book Review

The ART of FORGIVENESS, LOVINGKINDNESS and PEACE

by Jack Kornfield
Bantam Books, 2002
Hardcover, 215 Pages
Reviewed by James Chiang



The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness and Peace is a collection of quotes and anecdotes written and collated by Jack Kornfield, a renowned author with books such as *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry* and *A Path with Heart* to his name.

As the title suggests, the book contains three main topics - forgiveness, lovingkindness and peace. The author very aptly starts with forgiveness – a key that opens the door to peace. He invites us "*(to) remember the transforming power of forgiveness and lovingkindness. To remember that no matter where you are and what you face, within your heart, peace is possible*".

Life is often beset with trials and tribulation, ups and downs. When caught in conflicts or difficult situations, negative feelings such as anger or jealousy can arise. These emotions may leave deep imprints in our minds, long after the unhappy episodes are over. They may even drive us to react negatively in the future, thus perpetuating our suffering needlessly.

"His method of presentation is effective and refreshing, making it a delightful reading experience."

It is only through introspection, combined with a willingness to let go of these '*grudges*' that we can truly be at peace, both with ourselves and others. In fact, if we don't learn to forgive, we will only bring ourselves more unhappiness! Silly, isn't it? The author relates the following conversation between two former prisoners of war:

"*Have you forgiven your captors yet*"
"*No, never!*"
"*Well, then, they still have you in prison, don't they*?"

At the end of each chapter, the author provides a series of useful meditation practices, such as meditation on forgiveness and lovingkindness, presented clearly, and simply, using day-to-day language. His method of presentation is effective and refreshing, making it a delightful reading experience.

This book is highly recommended, for it inspires us to develop the qualities of forgiveness, lovingkindness and peace to their fullest potential. Below are some passages from the book that I particularly enjoyed. I hope the book will inspire you as much as it touched me. Happy reading!

On Forgiveness

We may still be suffering terribly from the past while those who betrayed us are on vacation. It is painful to hate. Without forgiveness we continue to perpetuate the illusion that hate can heal our pain and the pain of others. In forgiveness we let go and find relief in our heart.

On Lovingkindness

'I never look at the masses as my responsibility. I look at the individual. I can only love one person at a time. I can only feed one person at a time. Just one, just one … So you begin – I begin.

I picked up on person – maybe if I didn't pick up that one person, I wouldn't have picked up forty-two thousand.

The whole work is only a drop in the ocean. But if I didn't put that drop in, the ocean would be one drop less. Same thing for you, same thing in your family, same thing in the community where you live. Just begin … one, one, one' (Mother Teresa)

On Peace

Acceptance does not mean inaction
We may need to respond
strongly at times
From a peaceful center
we can respond instead of react
Unconscious reactions create problems
Considered responses bring peace
With a peaceful heart
whatever happens can be met
with wisdom

Peace is not weak;
it is unshakable.

K S
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K

How I celebrate Chinese New Year as a Buddhist

One month before Chinese New Year's day, my family normally spring cleans the whole house. Next, we buy new things like shoes, clothes and wallets.

When the big day arrives, my parents give us red packets to place under our pillows. Then, we go to the temple to pray and make offerings of flowers and fruits to the Buddha and Sangha. Later, we visit some relatives and offer pairs of oranges to the elderly. In return, we receive *hong baos* (red packets).

When we finish our visits to relatives, sometimes we invite them to our house for dinner.

by Belinda Ang

Interview

PROF ASANGA TILAKARATNE

Sunday 15 August 2004 Buddhist Library

by Venerable Nigrodha and Chwee Beng

Professor Asanga is one Buddhist scholar who's also well versed in western philosophy and Christianity, having obtained his master's degree in western philosophy and his PhD in comparative philosophy (Christianity, western and Buddhist philosophy). Here, Professor discusses his interest in counselling and inter-faith dialogue and shares his views on the Buddhist response to current controversial issues like cloning and the use of condoms.

Buddhist Philosophy

What is your specialty?

My PhD thesis was on *Problems related to the Philosophy of Language and Religion.* I examined the problem of religious ineffability - whether the idea of nirvana is ineffable. My conclusion was that - no, it was not. I tried to show that nirvana can be described by language. I looked at nirvana as a non-mystical religious event or experience.

But can language describe experience fully?

It cannot. But personally, I don't see that as a problem of language. Because experience and language are two different things. Experience is always personal, language is generalised. Language has to be shared with others. That's the nature of language. If two people don't understand each other, there's no language there. But between two people, there can be language when you agree on certain conventions.

Then, of course, if you want to talk of any particular experience, you just name it - A, B or C. Two people know what they're talking about. So, you're right. Language cannot describe experience but I don't see that as a problem of language because that's the nature of language, anyway. But, on the other hand, language is intimately connected to experience. Because language is something cultural, you get from your birth and your upbringing. So in a way, language shapes and determines the way you understand.

Christians say that there's a limit to man's knowledge and it would be arrogant to claim to be able to know all things. Would you say that in Buddhism there is no limit to man's ability to know?

If I say - there's no limit to man's knowledge - it's wrong. There are limits. Because an individual human being has certain limits. To know limits also makes us humble, which is a good thing.

The problem however, with the theistic religious claim is that whatever you understand is put to God and you are barred from making any more inquiries. But the message of the Buddha is – maybe we cannot know all secrets of the universe, maybe our lifetime is too short. However, about our own life, everything we can know. When the Buddha said that – *Within this fathom long body lies the world, arising of the world, cessation of the world and the path leading to the cessation of the world* – this universe, you can know, although the external universe you might not know.

Here, the Buddha made an interesting compromise between practicality and ideality. Ideally, there are so many things we want to know. But if our basic problem is human suffering - our own problem - what the Buddha said was that we can know everything related to that. Buddhism does say that there are certain limits but those limits are practical limits. In Buddhism, knowledge is always geared towards a practical need, a purpose. We, Buddhists, always ask – *Knowledge for what?* In Buddhism, knowledge is for liberation.

Counselling

A survey conducted in Taiwan after an earthquake a few years ago showed that, in a crisis, people found that a Buddhist organisation was the best for providing material and financial support but a Christian one for counselling. Why do Buddhists lag behind Christians in counselling?

(Laughter). Yes, that's pretty much true, even today. For example, in Sri Lanka, when I wanted to learn counselling several years ago, there was not a single place teaching counselling except for some Christian places. Thanks to them, I went to one of those places and I learned counselling. But ever since I became a Buddhist philosophy teacher, I've seen quite a few important things affiliated to counselling, psychological and human well-being and health of people. I was thinking - Why can't we make use of these insights and material, enhance the existing counselling techniques and develop a Buddhist group that could help others?

What are these Buddhist inputs?

A counsellor may make use of loving kindness and compassion. Look at the Buddha's example. Say, someone comes to you with a very

big problem, thinking there's no escape, If you look (at it) from the Buddhist point of view, the concept of impermanence indicates that your present situation can be changed. The counsellor (also need) not (be) just a passive listener but should be actively helping others motivated by compassion.

Sometimes, we also question some fundamental assumptions. Get the person to question his own self. In popular psychology, we are taught – *let me be myself.* What does this really mean? Maybe your self can be changed. We live in such a self-centred mentality where the individual self is so important. Buddhist philosophy teaches us to be a little more detached. Putting ourselves in the context of others, for instance.

Current Social Issues

You are also interested in modern issues like cloning.

Actually, that has been with me for a long time. In 1979, I published a book called *Human Problems from a Buddhist Perspective* (in Sinhala). I discussed some problems like pollution, birth control, abortion. But, of course, after two decades, bioethical problems have become much more complicated today.

We, Buddhists, have not really studied this subject in depth. We need to study and see what the implications are. (The available) books are usually based on Christianity. From the Christian or general religious perspective, they've discussed issues like whether cloning is permissible, whether it will serve humanity well or not. On using genetics to get perfect children, Christians suggest that this interferes with God's creation. When certain people have certain defects, it's explained on the basis that God is punishing them for their bad behaviour. Who's the scientist who can correct God's position?

From the Buddhist point of view, if science can correct (defects), we don't have a problem because we don't believe in God or God's creation. But someone can argue – *what about karma?* Is it okay for you to correct the result of someone's bad karma? This is a very important point. But, according to Buddhism, there are many factors that can affect karma. If you're born at a time (when) science is well-developed, that's perfectly okay, everyone can benefit from it.

Karma is not something unchanging. Also, karma should not be understood always as something that comes from your past birth. Karma is all the behaviour we're performing from moment to moment. Whether I will be a diabetic or heart patient in ten years depends on what I'm eating now. My present karma decides my future life in ten years.

We need to reflect on this new development based on Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism will also oppose certain things but not on the same grounds as Christians do. For example, if we want to manipulate things, what will happen if scientists go crazy? Can Buddhism agree with that? Certainly not.

You mentioned birth control. Buddhism is against abortion because it's against killing. What about the use of condoms? The Catholic Church has taken a very strong stand against this.

The opposition to the use of condoms is based on the belief that it encourages promiscuity. That has a certain (validity). But you have to go by the practical circumstances. Take, for example, a couple who does not want children but still, as ordinary human beings, they want to have sex. What's the way to do that? They use condoms. So Buddhism is not against the use of condoms as such. It depends. But, on the other hand, we must not promote promiscuous behaviour in society.

Unfortunately, no Buddhist organisation seems to be taking a (collective) stand based on the ground factors. At least, the Catholics have a central organisation to do that. I'm not saying we need to have a central organisation *per se* but we need to have a group of Buddhist scholars and monks who are looking into these things and enlightening other Buddhist groups. I don'[t see it happening at the moment.

What about inter-faith dialogue?

People think that for religious people to be able to work together, there must be some kind of agreement at the top level. (For example, saying that God and nirvana are the same because they are both indescribable). I've been consistently rejecting that. On the other hand, I've always advocated that religious people can work together for the betterment of humanity.

Very often, people say that the Buddha never denied the concept of God. Of course, he did. The very fact of the Four Noble Truths is a denial of the concept of God. If there's a God who can take care of your salvation, you don't need the Four Noble Truths. You just (need to) be faithful to God.

The three theistic religions – Islam, Christianity and Judaism – philosophically, they're one and the same. (However) (i)f you take theistic and non-theistic religions, you can't find common ground like that.

But, as human beings, we share certain commonalities – we all get hungry, we suffer – so why don't we get together? The Buddha gave the example – he went and spoke to all the people, whether they accepted what he said or not.

How important is inter-faith dialogue?

It's very important. We need to understand each other so that we can empathise. We need to encourage (mutual understanding). My own child studied in a Christian school when we were in Oxford three years ago. He started drawing Jesus Christ. (That's) fine for me. It's good for him to get that exposure. On the other hand, I sent him to (a Dharma school) to get his Buddhist knowledge. We must let our children know about other religions. In that way, if they also know their own religion, my own belief is that they'll always come back more strongly in their own tradition.

(continued on page 11)

A WINDOW TO THE BUDDHIST WORLD

MUSTANG THE LAST MAGICAL KING

Pema Ts'al Sakya Monastic Ins

17 October 2004
Pokhara, Nepal
by Chwee Beng

Have you heard of Mustang? I don't mean the horse, the warplane or the car, but the country. If you've not, well, you're not alone. I'd never heard of the place myself. Until one evening in October 2000 when I met five smiling, shy novice monks during a meditation retreat in Kathmandu, Nepal. The retreat was held in a monastery located at the peak of a steep hill towering over the surrounding valley. At the base of that hill lay a simple cement structure - Pema Ts'al Sakya Monastic Institute.

That Sunday evening, the boys had gone uphill for a '*picnic*', to enjoy the view and cool mountain air. The boys introduced themselves and, at my request, wrote down their names in English. I'd never seen such beautiful handwriting. They told me they all came from Mustang and were studying at Pema Ts'al. *Mustang? Tibet, you mean? No, Mustang, Mustang. Here in Nepal!*

After the retreat, like any good Singaporean, I went shopping with my friends. In a small Kathmandu bookshop, I came across *Mustang, A Lost Tibetan Kingdom* written by the French explorer-writer, Michel Peissel. Peissel describes Mustang as '*the lost kingdom I had dreamed about, remote and impossible … over 60 miles behind the 26,102 foot Annapurna range and behind Mount Dhaulagiri … beyond the world's highest mountains … its territory stuck out into communist-held Tibet like a thumb five hundred miles square … it was the highest kingdom in the world with a mean altitude of fifteen thousand feet.*' Peissel's adventures were exciting but his accounts of Mustangi customs and culture were more interesting. Like polyandry, the practice of a woman marrying two or more brothers. Peissel explains – '*when a man's son gets married it is practically impossible for him to go away and live on his own, for there is not enough arable land to create new fields … many young men live with their elder brothers. These share not only his house and land, but even his wife.*' Once I started, I simply could not put the book down. Nor forget those smiling kids and their school.

In October 2004, a friend and I visited Pema Ts'al. They've since moved to a quiet and scenic hill outside Pokhara, the springboard for trekkers bound for the Annapurna mountain range. We stayed for ten days, enjoying the school's meagre food and warm hospitality, and witnessing, with our own eyes, the daily lives of the novices.

Nowadays, Mustang is touted as '*The Last Magical Kingdom*'. It's, of course, much more accessible than before. You can even fly from Pokhara to Jomson in Lower Mustang. From there, you can venture into Upper Mustang, where the capital, Lo Manthang, is situated. But for that privilege, you'll have to pay a US$700 tax.

As you would expect, many of Pema Ts'al's novices came from austere, impoverished backgrounds. Some have even been physically abused or neglected at home. But all would have remained practically - or totally - illiterate, destined to become nomads and farmers like countless generations before them – if not for the efforts of their Principal, Lama Kunga Dhondhup and his associates.

Lama, a chubby and cheery monk speaks pidgin English but there's nothing lacking in his love and dedication for the kids and their future. If he's not down on the lawn with his familiar hat under the bright sun directing the finishing touches to the cement flower beds, he's up on the flat Tibetan-style roof supervising the construction of the school's extension works. Or he's standing in a classroom disciplining the students. Though young – he's only thirty-nine years old – he plans for the time when he's no longer around. Lama travels to the west frequently in search of financial support and told me that he will bring some students abroad in a year or two to perform pujas and sand mandala rituals.

DOM

titute

Pema Ts'al's objective is '*to provide free education and complete care … through traditional monastic training combined with a modern education.*' And so the novices learn, on the one hand, to recite prayers for ten hours unaided and, on the other, to speak, read and write English and use modern technology like email.

As Mustang emerges out of its isolation, the challenge it faces is how to benefit from science and technology without sacrificing its rich Tibetan Buddhist culture and religion. Lama Kunga and his associates are taking the bull by the horns. Pema Ts'al is one enterprise that, in my view, deserves to succeed. Its success in producing well trained, disciplined, English speaking monks with a modern outlook will, in turn, benefit Buddhism and the world at large.

The last time I saw him, I asked Lekshey Choedhar, the novice I sponsor, what his future plans were when it came time to leave Pema Ts'al. *To study further,* he promptly replied. *In Sakya College, Dehra Dun (India)?* I persisted. He gave me the broadest smile, his teeth gleaming – and nodded vigorously.

Here, 3 novices speak about their lives, studies and hopes for the future.

NGAWANG PALBAR
Age – 15 years

I have six family members. We all lived together in Lo Manthang.

My mother passed away when I was very young. On her deathbed, she made my father promise not to give my younger sister away. My father kept his promise. But he did not look after my sister very well. She often went to bed on an empty stomach.

In 1999, I heard that Lama Kunga was going to start a free educational project for the poor people of Lo Manthang. Many children from Mustang took the tests. I took my test with six other children. After the test, my father sent me to work for another family, tending chickens. I was eight years old.

I worked for one year. The chicken farm was very far - four days' walk - away from my home. In the morning, I let the chickens out, and, in the evening, I gathered them into the coop. I worked from 7 am till 6 pm. It snowed frequently and was very, very cold. I was very sad.

(The boy broke down and the interview was suspended).

I'd never been to school and did not know how to read or write. The family did not ill-treat me but I did not receive any payment, only food and lodging.

In the test, Lama Kunga asked me where the Dalai Lama lived. I said – *Dharamsala.* He asked me for the name of the King of Mustang but I did not know the answer. Lama then asked me what I wanted to do in my life and whether I myself wanted to be a monk or my father forced me to take the test. I said I wanted to be a monk myself. I thought that a life in the monastery was good because I could study and practise the Dharma. Later I learned that I'd passed the test and Lama brought me from Mustang to this Institute.

My father was a good man but he was an alcoholic. When he got drunk, he often grew violent. Sometimes, he would kick us out of the house into the freezing night. He used to beat me if I did not do what he wanted. He died last year.

I'm very happy here. But sometimes, when I can't understand the lessons, or when I think of the problems at home, I wonder whether all this struggle is worth it.

I want to study hard and be an abbot one day, to help poor people still suffering in Lo Manthang who do not have an opportunity to study.

NGAWANG LHUNDUP
Age – 13 years

I come from Upper Mustang. I came here at the age of eight.

I have one mother and two fathers. (The other) father is my father's younger brother. I call him '*Oo'* (uncle). I have three elder brothers, three younger brothers and one elder sister.

Both my fathers are farmers. In Mustang, I only attended school three days a week. On non-school days, we worked in the field, cutting grass and looking after cows. My father used to shout at us to make us work harder. My school in Mustang was not very good. It taught only one subject, Nepali language.

One day, Lama Kunga came to our village. I was alone in the house. My father was working in the field. Many children from my village went to see Lama. At first I did not know why Lama came to my village. All my friends went to see him and so I went too. Lama gave me a test. That day, when I got home, my parents scolded me for taking the test as they didn't want me to be a monk. My two elder brothers were already monks.

I wanted to be a monk because a monk's life is better than a lay person's life. Monks are well respected. They can practise the Dharma.

In the test, Lama asked me – *Which animal has horns, goats or cows?* I said – *Both.* He asked me – *What is between the sky and the earth?* I replied – *Clouds.* He also asked me some questions about myself - *Where does your mother work? How old are you? Do you go to school? Why do you want to be a monk?*

Later, my father brought me here. It took us one week to walk here. Along the way, there was a lot of ice because it was winter time. I was a little afraid.

Now, I study English, Nepali, Tibetan, maths and prayers. I like Tibetan best. In the last exams, I was second in class. I'm happy here. I have many friends, a good education, good food and games to play. I play football on Sundays. My favourite football player is Zinedine Zidane (of France). I don't like to watch television very much. I only watch Tibetan and English movies. I like to read English books like Harry Potter.

When I grow up, I want to help others, like Lama Kunga does. I want other poor children to be able to get a good education like me.

I've been here for five years. During this time, I've learned what a monk's life is like. A monk does not think of family. He only thinks of helping others, being kind to others.

In the future, I want to study prayers and computer science. I'm confident that I can fulfil my ambition. If I can't get any supporters, I will go to foreign countries and use the money that I earn by offering *pujas* to further my education.

My education at Pema Ts'al is supported by a sponsor from Germany.

TENZIN PHUNTSOK
Age - 17 years

Before I came here, I lived in a Tibetan refugee camp in Kathmandu. My father came from Kham in eastern Tibet (a province famous for its brave fighters). He was a soldier. He fled to Mustang when the Chinese occupied Tibet and stayed there for thirteen years. He developed good relations with Mustang's Abbot and King. He became a sworn brother of the Abbot. Then, the Government of Nepal ordered former Tibetan fighters to leave Mustang and my dad came to Kathmandu.

My mother came from the border region between Tibet and Nepal. My father met her on his way to Nepal. I have an elder half-sister, the daughter of my father's first wife. My father and mother have six children of their own. I'm the sixth child, the youngest son.

My father was a religious man. In Kathmandu, he worked as a manager of a monastery. It was a difficult time financially because of our large family. My parents started a small carpet business. My sisters all studied up to secondary level but did not attend college. My brothers are still studying.

I am self-confident by nature. I guess I was born that way. I always think that I can win in any situation, no matter what I do, whether in play or study. One day, the teacher told us that seventeen out of twenty students had failed the maths examination. All the students were very worried but I told the teacher – *I don't know about the others but I'm very sure that I passed.* The teacher asked me – *How do you know that?* I said – *I wrote the answers myself and so I know I passed. That, I'm sure*. The teacher jokingly invited me to bet fifty rupees (1.1 cents). I accepted. Later, she related this to the principal. When the results were announced, I scored the highest marks. The principal told me that he liked my self-confidence. My classmates voted me as the most confident student.

My father taught me how to pray and make offerings to the gods. As a small child, whenever I saw monks, I felt a strong connection to them. It gave me great pleasure to associate with them, even for a few minutes. As I grew older, I started to feel uncomfortable at home. I wanted to leave and go far away.

I used to hear many stories about monks, especially the Dalai Lama. When I was about seven or eight, the Mustang Abbot used to give me little things like sweets and I thought that monks were nice people. I just had this natural urge to be a monk but I did not know how. At school, they told me that it was very hard to be a monk. But I felt that it would not be hard for me.

When I was in Class 5, I refused to answer the examination questions because I thought that passing the examination was not important for a monk. Of course, I failed. My teacher called my parents and told them that I talked nonsense about becoming a monk, refused to study and complete the examination paper. My parents scolded me. I felt sad. Later, my favourite teacher advised me – *Education is important even for a monk. This certificate given by the Government will help you wherever you go.*

One day, I came home late. I was afraid that my father would scold me. Instead, he asked me – *Do you still want to be a monk?* I thought that if I said '*Yes*', he would scold me even more, so I said - *No.* He said that he would let me become a monk if I really wanted to. I did not believe him. He told me that he was speaking the truth - *You can ask the Abbot if you don't believe me.*

The next day, I asked the Abbot about it and he described a monk's life to me. The Abbot recommended me to Lama Kunga. I heard that fifty students would take a test and only five would be selected. Lama Kunga asked me where the Dalai Lama lived and about my ambition. He showed me some triangles and asked me to count them. He also asked me - *What's the benefit of being born a lamb*? I just told him whatever I know, about making offerings to gods and working for the benefit of the poor and the animals who die so that they can get a better rebirth. Later I learned that I was selected. I was very happy. I wanted to go the monastery immediately.

Now, after five years, I still feel that I've made the right choice. I want to do something for the people. I'm not sure if I can get supporters or helpers in the future but I have full confidence that I can achieve my aim. I want to study in a university, preferably in the USA or UK.

I don't have to be a monk to help others. Our teachers constantly tell us – *Never think about yourself*. If I stay in a monastery and be a great abbot, okay, I can teach Dharma to others. But since I'm born in this life to help others, it doesn't matter whether I remain a monk or not. It's my religion, the teaching of the Buddha. Whatever is the best or easiest way to help others, I will do it. I want to start on my own. I do not like to depend on others.

If you wish to find out more about Pema Ts'al Sakya Monastic Institute and its work, you may contact the secretary, Lobsang Tsering, at pematsal@fewamail.com.np

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(continued from page 7)

How useful was your knowledge of Christianity and western philosophy to your work as a Buddhist scholar and teacher?

Actually, the more I know other religions, the more I appreciate my own religion. On the other hand, I understand why people do certain things. I have very close Jewish friends. They invite me for their Passover dinners. We spend the entire night talking about Jewish history. It's a tremendous experience.

*Brian Daizen Victoria has written two books (*Zen at War *and* Zen War Stories*) on the part played by Zen monks in the Japanese war effort during the Second World War. How can Buddhist monks get involved in war like that?*

Brian is a good friend of mine. I've not seen (these particular books). But I've seen some papers he wrote on this. You see, the Zen tradition in Japan and Korea historically had to participate in and condone the war to prove that they were true Japanese and Koreans. It's a problem of nationalism, as I understand it. Historically, Korean kings accepted Buddhism when the Korean monks went to war. Apart from that, the monastic orders practically had armies. I remember that one Japanese emperor said – *There are three things I can't control. The whales in the sea, the north wind and the Buddhist monks in Nara!* (laughter).

In the Zen tradition, they tried to justify this by saying that when you're enlightened, you're beyond the duality of right and wrong. So you can even kill.

That's rubbish. Being enlightened is going beyond right and wrong in the conventional sense. But, of course, the Buddha is the symbol of purity and goodness. Actually, according to the Buddha's early discourses, an enlightened person is *incapable* of doing that kind of thing.

Mahayana teachings sometimes say that the Theravada teaches the selflessness of persons whilst the Mahayana teaches the selflessness of all phenomena.

That's not completely true. These are two different stages of the same process. Popularly, it's believed that this is how the Mahayana began. Actually, the early discourses already have this idea – *Sabbe dhamma* in the *Dhammapada - All the dhammas (*phenomena*) are anatta (*selfless*).*

Thank you very much, Professor.

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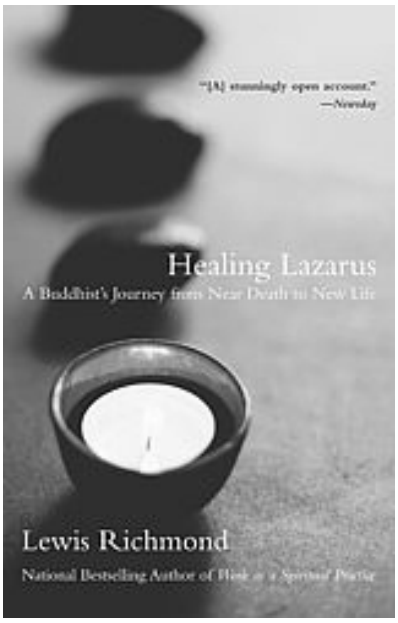
Book Review

HEALING LAZARUS – a Buddhist's Journey from Near Death to New Life

by LEWIS RICHMOND
Atria Books (2002)
265 pages



What is your idea of hell? Burning in everlasting fire? Or being deep frozen in ice in perennial winter? What about having a perfectly good and active mind trapped in an immobile, senseless body? In this book, Lewis Richmond records his harrowing, narrow escape from just such a hell – a *'saga of a man who was nearly given up for dead, but who emerged from deep coma to embark on more than a year of difficult healing and eventual recovery.'*

It all started on the eve of American Independence Day, July 4 1999, with a fever that developed a week later into a sharp pain between the eyes, three days of confinement in bed, difficulty in breathing and a roaring sound in his ears. Then, dizziness, vomiting, loss of consciousness and a deep coma for two weeks. Richmond later found out that he'd been '*struck down by an acute and life-threatening case of viral encephalitis, a rare disease with various causes.'* How did someone in a San Francisco suburb develop a sickness more commonly associated with the tropics? They never did find out.

In his Introduction, Richmond remarked that '(*t)he first of the Buddhism's Four Noble Truths - that suffering is an inevitable part of human life – is not so hard to understand intellectually, but when the suffering is yours, and goes on, week after week and month after month, it is not mere understanding, it becomes an authentic truth.* Indeed, when he got sick from the tropical disease, Richmond was no stranger to suffering. Fifteen years previously, he'd suffered from cancer and survived.

Nor was he a stranger to Buddhism either. He was a former Buddhist priest – an ordained disciple of the famous Zen master, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. He'd led meditation retreats and given Dharma lectures. He was also a successful computer programmer, an accomplished musician -composer and the author of the best-selling book – *Work as a Spiritual Practice: A Practical Buddhist Approach to Inner Growth and Satisfaction on the Job*.

But viral encephalitis was a totally different matter. It was to test him to his limits. Richmond even found it difficult to rely on his Buddhist training. '*Buddhism is based on having a clear, attentive mind, and the viral encephalitis … damaged my mind's clarity for several months. To heal I had to reach beyond everything I thought I knew and let the disease lead me and teach me.'* And so it was no surprise to find that Richmond who'd been '*cheerful and upbeat'* during his bout with cancer became a '*frightened, nearly helpless brain-damaged husk of (his) former self'* this time round.

The disease manifested some weird and frightening symptoms. The '*sensory fog'* when *'everything is too bright, sounds are too loud, it doesn't feel real.* Loss of his sense of time - *My brain's all messed up … A minute seems to last forever… my attention span is minimal … my brain could only function for five, at most ten, minutes before grinding to a halt',* And hyper-vigilance, a condition of being overly concerned with his own internal and external well-being. To name just a few.

To make things worse, just as he thought he was making progress, he suffered the side-effects of a drug. All the symptoms he'd fought so hard to overcome or reduce seemed to come back and haunt him once more. And he suffered new ones too. Like the sudden impulse to pace continually. And so, for the first time, he started to despair. Thoughts of suicide crept into his mind. Because of the seriousness and urgency, he was warded in a psychiatric ward, much to his dismay. For despite his long years of Dharma practice, he was afraid of letting his friends know that he was confined in a mental institution. Fortunately, another drug brought him back to the path of recovery.

So why should a healthy, happy, busy, normal, if somewhat stressed, Singaporean read a book like this?

For one thing, there's no reason to suppose that what happened to Richmond could not possibly happen to anyone of us. If the unthinkable should happen and a life-threatening sickness strikes, knowing what to do in such a medical emergency would be, to say the least, useful.

> '*…I quickly realised that in spite of all my years helping the mentally ill in my role as a Buddhist priest, I was ashamed to let anyone know that I was in a psychiatric unit. I thought I had a more enlightened attitude about mental illness than most, but apparently not when it came to my own situation.*'

For another, there are many lessons that a Buddhist can usefully learn from reading a book like this. An appreciation of the Dharma can help in two main ways.

Firstly, as Richmond's case proved, an understanding of the basic tenets of Buddhism can help us to understand the nature of life and better equip us to face the facts squarely. The starting point is to understand and accept that suffering and death are an inherent and unavoidable part of life. When a life-threatening sickness strikes, denial is usually the first reaction. *Why me?* But to ask this question is to open the floodgates to self-pity and self-destruction. Remembering the First Noble Truth hopefully helps to pre-

vent this. Instead, ask the question - *Why not me? What's so special about me that differentiates me from the millions of others who fall gravely ill?* In Richmond's words. - '*if such a thing could happen to me – cheery and upbeat by nature – it could happen to anyone.'*

Indeed, even an experienced and highly intelligent Dharma practitioner like Richmond found himself wanting in facing his suffering. *'My biggest mistake on this day of dread was forgetting that the Buddha's lesson on impermanence applies to misfortune too. My conviction that my sorry state would last forever was an understandable but costly error. I should have remembered that everything changes. Everything, even hell on earth.'*

Secondly, there are many Buddhist techniques that can assist a patient to recover from his illness. More and more, western medical practice is discovering the wisdom and efficacy of alternative medicine including Buddhist techniques. And learning how to embrace them, even if medical science is yet unable to discover exactly how and why they work. Thus, it's pleasant but not really a surprise to read that when Richmond was warded in the psychiatric unit, he found that '*part of the daily schedule included a period of Buddhist mindfulness meditation, led by a staff member who had studied with one of my Buddhist colleagues.'*

Besides meditation – which, as in Richmond's case initially at least, may not be applicable in all cases - other Buddhist practices may also help. Like chanting. At one time, Richmond found himself chanting - *'Amida Buddha, please protect me, Amida Buddha, please protect me.'* This calmed his mind in times of crisis.

And acknowledgement. Interestingly, when Richmond found it difficult to handle his over-anxiety, the doctor recommended a practice called *'compartmentalisation'*. '*Pick some time in the future – later in the day, or the week, and tell yourself, 'Until I finish taking my shower, or until dinner. or until Thursday. I won't think about my problems.' And then when the time comes, keep your promise – we call it 'promise to pay' – and spend some time, but not too much, dealing with what's worrying you.'* This, of course, is essentially the same as the basic technique of acknowledgement taught in Buddhist meditation. When a thought strikes the meditator's mind, he acknowledges it and puts it aside, resolving, where necessary, to attend to it at the appropriate time. He then returns to his object of meditation. Indeed, as Richmond discovered, this practice is useful in more ways than one. '*(W)hen the time came to make good on my promise and return to my worries, I was often embarrassed to discover how petty and insignificant they then seemed'.*

And then there's visualisation. At one stage, when all else seemed to have failed, Richmond visualised himself in a well state. This also helped. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, of course, there are numerous visualisation practices that may also be applied usefully to assist patients recover from their ailments. If nothing else, they help to keep the patients in a positive frame of mind.

The severity and length of his illness forced Richmond to face a whole range of human emotions including grief, surrender and despair. He learned the value of virtues prescribed in Buddhism like equanimity, non-attachment, compassion, gratitude and patience. They all had a part to play in his recovery.

But if there's one thing that seems out of place, it's Richmond's obsession with the story of Lazarus, the man Jesus Christ brought back to life, as told in the Bible. It's one thing to use it in the title of the book or as an analogy in the Introduction. But he proceeds to open every chapter with a (thankfully) short and imaginary account of what he thinks Lazarus' life could have been like after he emerged from the tomb.

But, it must have been extremely difficult, if not painful, for Richmond to re-live his ordeal and make it public. A lesser man would have omitted accounts which showed his shortcomings like ego, self-centredness, despair, lack of patience and attachment to his work. Sometimes, he even manages to inject some humour into his account as in the story about his obsession with his laptop computer and how it almost spoiled his holiday. So I shall not nitpick. Lewis Richmond offers us a candid, well-written, inspiring account of his ordeal. A reader can do no better than try to learn something useful from it.

Reply to Visu's letter
(see POJ issue no. 12)

5 October 2004

Dear Visu

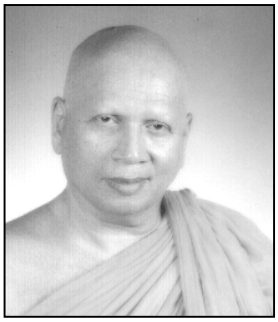
Thank you very much for your kind letter. I would like to say something about what you pointed out in your letter i.e. the practice of charging a fee in certain Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka. Honestly speaking, I am one of the strong critics about this practice. This practice was started quite recently. Unfortunately, the authorities do not listen to criticisms of foreigners or the local people.

Many foreigners who visit these places are Buddhist or sympathetic towards Buddhism. They appreciate Buddhist culture so they like to visit ancient Buddhist *viharas* in Sri Lanka. But charges for visiting such places give them a bad impression of the country and Buddhism also. To my knowledge, if you don't charge but provide proper facilities for foreigners who visit these Buddhist sites and welcome them to these places, they will be happy to donate voluntarily. But under the present situation, what I can see is that the authorities of these sites are discouraging foreigners from visiting these places and I hope that one day, they will realize this and be more friendly towards visiting foreigners.

With metta

Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

法师说



袈裟与四种人

今天所要讨论的话题是：KumbaSutta（论述瓮），但因为今天也是佛教图书馆的供养袈裟的日子，所以将首先解释供养袈裟的意义。

供养袈裟本来是南传佛教的传统。在佛陀时代，人们已开始供养了，不过仪式是比较简单。

有人问我，南传佛教出家人的袈裟为什么也有不同的颜色呢？其实不同的颜色是有它不同的重要意义的。在某些国家，住在森林里的出家人选择比较深的颜色以避免引起动物的注意，而且较深的颜色也没那么枪眼。

住在城市里的出家人可能会选择比较鲜艳的颜色，如橙色等等。不过这些都没有严格规定。

袈裟的颜色，如橘黄色或者橙色，都是成熟的象征。当叶子变黄或橙色时就会飘落在地上。出家人是出离世间的，他们应该依佛法修行以便证果。如此的修行，使他们远离贪嗔痴。虽然一般的出家人都是普通的出家人，但我们许下诺言要脱离这三种烦恼。而能脱离这三种烦恼，就称为「成熟」。

选择这种颜色的颜色的第一理由是，黄色或橙色代表「无常」，就如黄叶或橙色的叶子，枯萎了脱离树枝而凋落在地上一样。因此黄色或橙色是提醒出家人，人生是无常。这并不是一般人所认为是负面和消极的想法，而是「实在」的想法。

想象我们能永远活下去是没有意义的，我们也可以在这一生中去累积更多的财富，但并不能解决人生的问题，贪得无厌只会为我们带来更多的烦恼。

出家人也会因执著而烦恼。例如：有的出家人很在乎他们的信徒，他们要有很多很多的信徒。他们甚至于想尽办法去争取更多的信徒。这当然有别于正面的去协助更多的人来学佛的做法。

还有很多的出家人，也很执著他们的寺院。他们希望建更堂皇的寺院或修行道场，使他们的「我执」更强化。他们也可能执著他们的袈裟。这就是为什么我常常把多余的袈裟寄到斯里兰卡给那些更需要袈裟的出家人。最后，有的出家人也会执著人们对他们的供养。有些传统的佛教国家，人们作出很多的供养。有的出家人甚至活着只为接受人们的供养。出家的目的不是因为要接受人们的供养。所以袈裟是提醒那个穿袈裟的人，出家的原因。因此出家人能紧记时常专心一致，就很有意义了。

除了颜色以外，出家人的袈裟也应该有着同样的缝制法。袈裟的缝制法是有它的意义的。起初，佛陀的弟子所穿的袈裟是没有完全同样的缝制法，他们只是用一块布，而把布边缝起来就完成了。后来，有人把出家人洗好了晾起来的袈裟给偷了。佛陀知道这件事以后，就带着那些出家人到Magadha(现在的比哈省，印度的东北部）附近的一个田里去。以前的田地和现在一样都是习惯地沿着直线分隔出不同的部份。佛陀就吩咐出家人照着田的模式来缝制袈裟。

这样的缝制法是为了什么呢？因为分割的布料再缝制起来，就不值钱了。这样就不会被其他的人拿来当别的用途。

降低袈裟的价格也有它的好处。当出家人穿上了袈裟就会提醒自己，自己已经是出家了，就应该放弃一切世俗的生活，而该精进修行。他们不该想—我穿的是一件又名贵，又顶好的袈裟，很珍贵，价格也很昂贵。出家人的袈裟也可以被当着为制服。如军队或者是警察的制服，使人尊敬或感到畏惧。比如说，要是有一位军官在场的话，人们的行为就会比较克制。袈裟也是权势的制服，但意义不同。假如一个穿着袈裟的出家人牢记袈裟的意义和依佛法生活，他将会变的安祥，诚实和慈悲，因此他就会受到人们的信任和尊敬。

昨天我去买一些供养袈裟所需要的物品。本来有人想和我一起去买出家人所需要的日用品，如肥皂，牙膏和毛巾。不过临时他却要到医院去，所以我只好一个人去了。在店里，当我到柜台去付钱的时候，有一位女仕冲过来叫住我。她说：“师父，让我付钱好了。”我跟她说，不用了，已经有人留下一些钱给我买东西了。那位女仕说：“请让我今天做一件好事吧！我不是时常可以这样做的。”我告诉她，我还要买很多东西，但是她却坚持要付钱。

我讲述这件事，不是要鼓励你们替我付钱，而是要说明这制服，出家人的袈裟，是多么的威严。那位女仕很乐意地帮忙，为什么呢？因为这制服代表了僧团，而大多数的出家人都过着有智慧，慈悲为怀和有意义的生活。

当供养袈裟时，要记住今天我为你们所讲的话。

瓮

有关瓮的经典是摘自增—阿含。Kumba是瓮的意思。这部经也就是在论述瓮。佛陀用瓮来比喻四种不同性格的人，也讲述了瓮的不同特性。

人类很奇妙！今天，我们看到某个人表现得很好，可是隔天，我们却可能看到另一个面目。一个人可能在二，三十年之间都是一个好人，不过他们也可能会改变。有的人在自己的国家里表现得很好，但一旦到了国外就变形了。有很多人当生活起变化时，就觉得很难坚持自己的原则。

佛陀用四种瓮来解释四种人的特性。这些人可能是出家人或者是在家人。

（第15页续）

达摩拉达那法师和佛教图书馆恭祝大家新年进步

编辑说

袈裟、贪、人性

在这期的“法师说”，法师为我们说明了佛教僧侣的袈裟的意义和供养的目的。法师在二零零四年十月卅一日，佛教图书馆的供养袈裟日时，说了有关以上的话题，法师也利用这个盛会讲解“贪”经。经里，佛陀用四个瓮来比喻四种不同的人性。

谈到人的本性，使我想起了和一位好友—约翰，在一次的午餐时间告诉我的一件事。约翰是一位很喜欢踢足球和下国际象棋的人。我想一项运动是在锻炼他的身体，而另一项游戏是激发他的脑筋，还有他对人的本性也感到有兴趣。在那次的用餐，他告诉我一件有关他的一位很要好的朋友—贞的事。贞是一个很虔诚的佛教徒。她很想出家，而且把时间和精力都花在帮忙佛教做事情。甚至参加了照顾晚期病人组织。最近，贞的母亲生病了，而且需要动手术。老太太的每个孩子都同意出钱还医药费，不过只有贞不愿意，因为她说她没有钱；其实她是有存款在银行里。“不要误会我，”约翰说：“她其实是一个很好的人。我真的很喜欢她，不过我怀疑她辨别事情轻重的能力，可能她缺乏智慧吧！”

约翰的故事使我想起了一个很有名有关一位禅师的佛教故事。一位和尚坐在席垫上静坐，从心中发出仁慈和慈悲的光芒；然而他的平静却被寺院里的一位侍者所扰乱了。他张开眼睛，看到了那可怜的侍者把茶倒在他心爱的席垫上，便向着那个正吓得发抖的侍者怒吼。

在几年前，同样的事情也发生在我的身上。那个时候，我带了一位朋友到曼谷游玩。我计划让他看到曼谷的精彩和刺激的生活。我想带他游皇宫，水上市场，chatuchak周末市场，马文功购物中心，saxaphone酒廊…还有数不尽的计划。因此我就自以为是地带他到处去玩。在回程的前一天我却发觉他并没有想象中的会感到很高兴或感激我为他所做的一切。我问他为什么不高兴。他的答案令我无法自容。我竟忘记了他的唯一一个很简单的要求—买一个tuktuk车的模型送给他的新加坡朋友。

我想做为一个凡夫我们都有我们的盲点。当然在肉体上的盲点我们是看得到，然而我们其实有两个盲点，一只眼睛各一个。也许精神上也是如此吧！我们一般上都很难看到自己的行为，我们被我们的「我执」所遮掩，没有意识到我们的盲点。我们也在不知不觉中反复地一直地做下去，就有时会发生如我在曼谷的事情。我在曼谷所做的一切其实都是因为我太执著我自己的想法。

我猜想那就是为什么佛法教导我们一直要提醒自己注意我们自己的行为。特别是当我们想我们是在做一些有意义的事情，比如捐钱，供养或在佛教中心护法。如法师所说的，出家人如果常记住穿在身上的袈裟的意义，也可以从中学到很多道理。

祝愿大家阅读愉快。

（Chongi中译）

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密封和空的瓮。有些人表面看起来很好，又友善，又是可亲的人；不过他们所做的一切却是在企图利益自己而已。他们是密封—意思就是他们表面看起来很有修养，但却是空的—意思就是他们并没有真正地去培养自己的品德和性格。做为凡夫的我们，很容易去「以貌取人」，所以常常把这种人误为好人。

开着和装满的瓮。“开着”的意思是指这些人表面看来很粗鲁，直言直语，甚至于表面上显得很无情，但这只是在语言的表达上和行为上而已。“装满”是指他们的内在是有智慧的人。我们可能把他们当成坏人，可是他们却是好人。

“开着”和“空”的瓮—这种人在外表上看来行为不好，而且内在也没有智慧。内在和外在都不好。他们是属于最差的类型和他们交往可能会伤害到我们自己。

“装满”和“密封”的瓮—这些人都“装满”好的行为，他们有规矩，说话慈悲，不参与任何轻浮的谈话，不说人家的闲语，也不会奉承别人，他们的举止令人赞叹。他们精进佛法，而且最重要的是，他们心体力行。他们知道生命是无常，所以他们过着有意义的生活。他们明白这个道理，所以尽量避免去做不明智的事情。同时他们也「密封」，意思是指他们能够关闭所有会使他们感到不愉快和坏习惯的途径。在佛陀的看法，他们是属于上等的类型。

我们生活在这社会里，是不能避免遇到这些不同类型的人。

当然佛陀概述瓮的用意是以它为例子来说明他的教导。在现实的世界里，我们遇到形形色色的人，而从瓮的经里，我们吸收到另一个教训，那就是不能“以貌取人”。我们应该时时刻刻都注意我们自己的行为，这样我们和人共处时就不会有太多的问题了。

我祝您们供僧日快乐。

达摩拉达那法师
佛教图书馆宗教顾问
（Chongi中译）

谢谢

所有为救济斯里兰卡海啸灾民出钱出力的会员和其他善心人士，达摩拉达那法师和佛教图书馆在此感谢大家。

Where, in Singapore - on a single day and in one place - could you have met Romanians, Americans, Sri Lankans, Tibetans, the old and the young, the able-bodied and the wheelchair- bound, purchased lots of goodies and eaten a large variety of food, all at rock bottom prices?

BL's Fun Fair

21 Nov 2004 outside Aljunied MRT Station

Let's take a peek!

Jody, 11

I help to sell souvenirs. They're selling well. I'm happy. I've helped BL's funfair about 2 or 3 years already.

Maria

I come from Romania. I found out about the fun fair from my friend who's come here for three years with his children. His children like to see a lot of things.

Sam

I'm a management consultant. I set up a restaurant for a client from India who's very happy with my service. He wanted to do something for me in return. When BL organised this fun fair, I told him about it. Without a second thought, his wife took the form and completed it. My client sells both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food in two restaurants. For this fun fair, he decided to sponsor a Punjabi vegetarian food stall, something unique. I'm just the driver (laughs). I picked up the food.

Olivia

I'm from Khoon Chee Vihara. We run eight stalls to raise funds for BL selling vegetarian food, coconut drinks – one and only stall (chuckles) – stuffed toys, souvenirs. It's a little tiring and hot. Preparation is rather tough but we enjoy seeing so many people participating and buying our things. We took one day to prepare. We have 20 helpers under the guidance of Ven Mun Cheng.

Mark

I'm American. I've been here since 1987. My wife, Diane's Singaporean. We're members of BL. My wife bought a CD and, being a Singaporean, she bought a lot of food. I'm enjoying myself. The volunteers are great.

Ven Mun Cheng

We've been participating in the fun fair almost every year. Some friends like to sell things so we asked them to set up the stalls. Food stalls are selling better.

Kumari

I'm a Sri Lankan, I help to sell coffee, tea and cold drinks. I go to BL on weekends to help clean BL and iron the monks' robes. Sometimes, I attend puja. '*Business*' is good today.

Nigel, 7

I help to sell bags. We came at 7 am. I've been attending Sunday School for the last three years.

Matthew, 10

I came to buy things and play games. I came with my mum. I played a lot of games. I won a doctor set, a music box and a wallet. I shall come again next year. We spent $56. It's worth it.