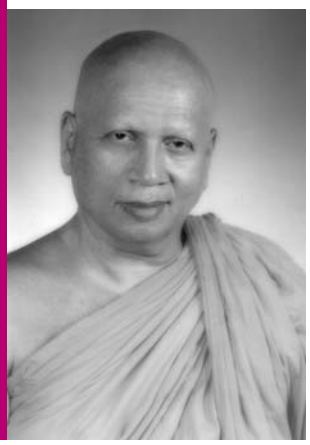
Issue 20 (Oct - Dec) 2006
MICA (P) 012/10/2006

the Path of Joy

Publisher: Buddhist Research Society, 2 & 4 Lorong 24A Geylang Singapore 398526
Printer: Citi Print & Design Pte Ltd, 10 Ubi Crescent, Ubi Techpark #03-34 Singapore 408564

the Buddhist Library



Bhante Says

GUARDING OUR WORDS, ACTIONS AND MIND

There are many guidelines about guarding our words, actions and mind in Buddhism.

Actually, from a simple point of view, the whole of Buddhism can be said to be about these 3 practices - guarding our words, bodily actions and thoughts. If we can look after these 3 aspects of our lives, we can say that we are real practitioners of Buddhism.

But to practise them is extremely difficult. It's difficult mainly because we hardly (ever) guard these 3 aspects in our daily lives. Everybody tends to talk, act and think freely. This way of life has become a habit. So our habitual way of living is such that we do not bother much about these 3 aspects.

Of course, some of us may have a certain understanding of these 3 aspects from our religious teachings or from our parents' or teachers' advice, or the cultural background in which we were brought up. We generally know what kinds of thoughts we should not think or what kinds of actions we should avoid. But we do not pay much attention to them. We do not try to cultivate these 3 aspects of our lives seriously.

The Buddha advised us to pay more attention to these 3 aspects. When he was asked what constitutes a wise person, his simple answer was - *'a person who talks rightly, uses the right words and acts rightly or in a righteous way'.* In other words, a wise person is one who abstains from wrong actions, does only right actions and has harmless, pure or good thoughts.

The Buddha also mentioned that if a person does not talk, act or think in a righteous way, he is *'bala'*. In Pali, *'bala'* is an immature person. A mature person is one who's disciplined in his words, actions and thoughts. Such a person is a wise and intelligent person *(pandita).*

(So) although we do not take them seriously, these 3 practices are (nevertheless) very important.

> ***'Actually, from a simple point of view, the whole of Buddhism can be said to be about these 3 practices - guarding our words, bodily actions and thoughts. If we can look after these 3 aspects of our lives, we can say that we are real practitioners of Buddhism.'***

Let's take talking. Talking has become an important activity in our daily lives. We talk everyday with people around us, be it on the move or sitting down. With the help of high-tech communication devices and gadgets, we can even talk to someone far away. In a way, we talk more than we work today. And so, if we do not guard our words when talking, we're wasting energy. Not only that, sometimes our words can be harmful to others and ourselves.

Unfortunately, if we're not careful, we can easily get into the habit of talking too much or unnecessarily. Out of a few hours of talking a day, maybe only 10 minutes or so are useful while the rest is not. And once you get into the habit of talking too much, it's extremely difficult to get rid of it. So habits are, in a way, very dangerous. That's why I discourage people from getting into such habits.

There are, however, some people who are afraid to talk to others, even to some of their friends. They try to talk less or stay away from others just because those people talk too much. But they still consider such people as their friends. But as much as we're scared of friends who talk too much, we also do not wish our friends to be afraid of us. So guarding our words, actions and thinking is much more important.

There are also people who guard their actions because of the fear of punishment for breaking the law. Although we can't say that this kind of behaviour is real discipline, it's still not something bad.

In Buddhist teachings, we're taught some ways to guard our words, actions and mind.

Guidelines on Guarding Speech

The Buddha's advice is to talk with mindfulness. Mindfulness is of fundamental importance in Buddhism. If we have the habit of talking a lot, mindfulness will totally disappear. On the other hand, if we talk with mindfulness, we will not make errors and mistakes. Whatever we talk will be beneficial to ourselves and others.

But the Buddha did not stop there. He gave guidelines (in the form of practical personal slogan-like reminders) on how to cultivate beneficial speech by remembering what we should do.

The Significance Of Vesak by Prof. Y Karunadasa - Page 5

Continued from Page 1

1. 'I will speak in a timely, not an untimely moment.'

Not every moment is a time to talk. I'm not saying you should be very moody or isolate yourself from people or society. To function, you have to talk and be friendly to people. Even when we want to help people, we need to speak mindfully.

But there's a time to talk and a time not to talk. If we're angry or have negative thoughts, such as greed or strong attachment, in our minds, then it's not a time to talk. If we talk at these times, it will be harmful to ourselves and others.

Then again, if we find that the listener is not in the right mood or frame of mind to listen, that's not the time to talk either. In any event, if a listener is in need of our help, we should not give up. Instead, we should patiently wait for the appropriate time to talk.

2. 'I will utter what is true and not what is untrue.'

This is very important because if we get into the habit of speaking things which are not true, it may develop into a bad habit which becomes very hard to stop.

For example, some people like others to think they're very important or special. Although they themselves may know that they're not that good, they want to appear otherwise. To do that, they lie about their importance or abilities. They talk about very big and important things that they may have done.

But when others find out the truth, they may start to dislike these braggarts and avoid them, although they may just listen to them out of courtesy.

Although telling the truth sometimes may not be profitable in a material sense or appear favourable, we'll gain the respect of right-thinking people who come to know that we're truthful. Working with them will also become much easier.

3. 'I will speak from a desire for others' good, not to hurt them.'

When we talk, we have to contemplate on this. We all know that words can be very hurtful if we use them wrongly. The old saying - *'Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me'* - is certainly not true especially in a multi-racial and multi-religious society like Singapore. We've all seen only too clearly and graphically the kind of damage that can be done when people are insensitive with respect to other peoples' religions or cultures, as has happened in the case of the cartoons first published in Denmark.

4. 'I will speak mildly, not roughly.'

People who have the habit of using rough words may not necessarily be bad people. They may actually be good people.

But when we use very rough words, we give others the impression that we come from a bad background, our upbringing is less than desirable, or our thoughts are negative.

We must also be mindful not to become hypocrites, talking nicely in front of people but doing the opposite behind them.

And so the Buddha advised us to develop the habit of pleasant and skilful speech with a sincere heart.

5. 'I will speak with love and compassion in my heart, not enmity.'

If we're mindful about generating love and compassion when talking to others, our mind becomes pure. We generate pure energies in our mind. This is the best way for us to develop great qualities such as friendliness, compassion and tolerance.

This will also encourage others to develop pure energies within themselves. It can create a very friendly atmosphere within which we live or work.

Guidelines on Guarding Actions

The Buddha, in giving us advice on how to guard actions, gave similar guidance as in the case of our speech.

1. 'I will act in time, not an untimely moment.'

If we have anger or any negative emotion, acting with that in mind can be harmful. If we have greed, attachment or jealousy, any action with that in mind cannot be a good action.

When negative thoughts arise, we should realise that it's not the time to perform an action.

When we want to do good things for others, but if they are not in the right frame of mind to receive our good actions, we should not act. We should always pay attention to the timing; whether the moment is appropriate for doing things. Only then will our actions produce good results.

2. 'I will do what is right, what is not wrong.'

We should perform only righteous actions. This is where knowing the Dhamma is very important. Our understanding of the Dhamma helps us to know what is righteous and what is not.

CORRIGENDUM

In our interview with Dhammachari Lokamitra of the Western Buddhist Order (WBO) [POJ Issue 19 (July – September 2006)], the following question and answer appeared –

'Where do you get the funds to do this work?

I'm a professional beggar. As a good Buddhist, I have to be a beggar. We get a lot of support from the Karuna Trust in the UK which was founded by Dr. Ambedkar. We get a lot of support from friends in Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea. We get support locally too. '

It has since been pointed out to us that the Karuna Trust was not founded by Dr. Ambedkar. We apologise for this error.

Continued from Page 2

3. 'I will act gently and not roughly.'

We should get into the habit of acting in a pleasant way and not a rough way. We have to be mindful of this. When we're able to do this, we can say that we have a refined character.

4. 'I will act out of desire to benefit others, not to hurt.'

My bodily actions should be for the benefit of both myself and others. One who has this quality is a great blessing or help to society. Such a person can bring happiness to whomsoever he or she may associate with.

5. 'I will act with love and compassion, not with enmity.'

Our bodily actions should also be actions of love and compassion, not of hurting others, and not with the intention of giving pain and suffering to other people.

Guidelines on Guarding the Mind

On guarding the mind, I don't have to go into details. All our bodily actions and words *(verbal actions)* have to be preceded by good thoughts.

As the widely-quoted first 2 stanzas of the Dhammapada say -

Mind is the forerunner of all actions
All deeds are led by mind, created by mind
If one speaks or acts with a corrupt mind
Suffering follows
As the wheel of an ox follows the hoof of an ox pulling a cart

Mind is the forerunner of all actions
All deeds are led by mind, created by mind
If one speaks or acts with a serene mind
Happiness follows
As surely as one's shadow

(Translation by Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya)

We have to be mindful not to let negative thoughts arise in our mind. We should make an effort not to generate anger, greed, jealousy and other negative thoughts.

We should allow pure, right and positive thoughts to arise instead. We should always contemplate thoughts of love and compassion, not thoughts of anger and cruelty.

All this is, of course, easier said than done. It may sound so difficult to practise as to be theoretical or impractical.

But if we make a serious effort in putting into practice the Buddha's advice in our daily lives, even if we fail from time to time, gradually, our lives will take a turn for the better. As the great 7th century Indian Buddhist philosopher, Shantideva said -

'There is nothing (so difficult) which, with time, you cannot get used to'.

Then, we can honestly say that we're the followers of the Buddha. *Joy*

Bhante B. Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

Editorial

REMEMBERING A GREAT MONK

May 27, 2006. A very special day in Thailand which went largely uncelebrated. It marked the centenary of the birth of the great Thai reformist monk, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is best remembered for his back-to-basics Dharma teachings. Like his 15th century Tibetan counterpart, Lama Tsong Khapa, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu delved into the Buddha's teachings to extract and crystallise the essence of the Buddha's message as he saw it and re-interpreted key Buddhist concepts. One oft-quoted example is the 12-linked dependent origination principle. Traditionally regarded as spanning 3 lifetimes - the previous life, current life and immediate subsequent life - it was re-interpreted by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu to refer instead to the impermanence of moment-to-moment experience in daily life.

The revered monk's chief targets, which he attacked vigorously, were materialism and consumerism, so prevalent in his home country then - and even more so today. Popular Buddhism, he pointed out, had gone badly astray. He denounced its trappings, singling out for particular attention the Thai Sangha's penchant for constructing impressive temples and the laity's pre-occupation with merit-making *(tum boon)*. He once famously remarked that if the Buddha were alive then, he wouldn't have been able to recognise the religion he founded.

For his tireless efforts, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu earned the ire of not only the secular authorities of the time (who branded him a communist because he alarmed them with his constant talk of *'emptiness'*) but also his conservative Sangha brothers.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu dubbed merit making in its popular form a *'business deal'*. Giving *dana* or making donations to the Sangha has, no doubt, its proper place in the scheme of things as the Buddha envisaged it. Lay people voluntarily provide material support for monks and nuns. And the Sangha, in turn, renders the people spiritual support and guidance. A reasonable, mutually beneficial arrangement, surely.

Continued from Page 3

But what if people made merit making the centre-piece of their spiritual lives? What if they thought that it was either unnecessary or not their station in life to do any better? And what if they behaved as if all they had to do was to visit the temple occasionally, give food to the monks or a donation to the temple and they would be assured of a better rebirth or a seat in heaven? As a highly respected Privy Councillor, Dr. Kasem Wattanachai, noted recently -

'The Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu taught us to get rid of ignorance, greed, defilement and selfishness, but people today don't heed the essence of Buddhist teaching. They run around nine temples a day worshipping Buddha images but fail to learn what is at the heart of our religion.'

Buddhadasa thus saw that the Dharma made no material difference to peoples' lives. Merit having been made, they continued doing whatever it was they did, even if that included cheating, lying, stealing, selling drugs or receiving bribes. I once read a newspaper report of a young man who was arrested for drug trafficking. He told the police that he always set aside a portion of his profits for charity.

For far from guaranteeing future happiness, as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu explained, merit-making can bind us to *samsara* and promote suffering -

'In fact, what is called 'merit' and 'heaven' becomes another focus of attachment, thereby leading to more suffering. In order to transcend suffering we must eliminate the source of attachment. The mind must be freed from the hope of both heaven and hell, merit and demerit, happiness and suffering. A person who has merit suffers. It is not the case that he who has merit eliminates suffering. To want anything is to suffer simply from having the desire itself. To escape suffering, hope for merit and heaven must be totally rooted out'.

'To want anything is to suffer simply from having the desire itself' - Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

Lest anyone thinks that this is a valid excuse to refrain from, or stop, giving, it certainly is not. *Dana* or giving, the 1st of the 6 (or 10) perfections in Buddhism is vitally important in the Buddhist spiritual life. But in giving, as in all other activities, it's necessary to heed the Buddha's call to act wisely or mindfully.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu extended the frugality of his life to the simplicity of religious buildings. If you visit Suan Mokh near the southern city of Surat Thani, you will not witness the familiar ornate, sparkling and spectacular Thai temple architecture. You will find instead only ordinary, simple buildings.

One of those buildings has on its walls, as I recall, simple paintings inspired by Zen Buddhism such as the ox-herding pictures, a series of drawings depicting the road to enlightenment. For, although Buddhadasa Bhikkhu stressed the fundamentals of the Buddha's timeless message, he was no fundamentalist. Though he was a Thai monk in the Theravada tradition, he was uniquely well informed about other schools of Buddhism. He translated *The Sutra of Hui Neng* and *The Teachings of Huang Po*, 2 important Zen texts, into the Thai language. And he was well-versed also in other religions.

Indeed, in his later years, he championed inter-faith dialogue, arguing that all religions fundamentally convey the same message, despite their superficial differences. And they all faced the same enemies - materialism and consumerism.

Earlier in his life, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu had written that -

'…the teaching of anatta ('selflessness' or 'no soul') is found only in Buddhism. Unlike the sects which teach a self to be grasped at or to be attained, we teach the complete destruction of self-consciousness so as to perceive the state of anatta, the state empty of self in all things'.

But later, he changed his view and saw the differences as only terminological. In essence, all religions taught the same thing.

I must confess that I find this later view less than convincing. The theistic notion of a creator God, a being who is permanent and unchanging, is fundamentally irreconciliable with the Buddhist idea of emptiness of all phenomena.

I prefer the view of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama who once remarked that equating different religions by glossing over their essential differences is like putting the head of an ox on a yak's body. Graphic but true.

Besides, how does one practise non-attachment or equanimity with a jealous God who demands total and complete devotion - and still hope to go to heaven?

Non-attachment, equanimity, wisdom and mindfulness. All virtues central to Buddhism and highly emphasised by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. They lie at the heart of a quaint little story that I read in a Bangkok Post report published to commemorate Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's birth centenary.

2 young boys attended a summer camp for novices at Suan Mokh.

'From total strangers, they became the best of friends. One hailed from Bangkok, a head-to-toe city kid, the other a rural farm boy from Surat Thani…. When one wanted to go to the toilet at night, the other would be found reading aloud to keep his friend company on the other side of the door.'

In short, they became inseparable. Then something happened and they stopped talking to each other.

At that time, the entire country had polarised into 2 camps, pro and anti-Thaksin. The 2 youngsters found themselves trapped in this dichotomy. Fortunately, the monastery had a tradition that, before leaving the camp, everyone had to *'come out and air his feelings, appreciation, apologies'.*

And so, on the last day, the boys went up to the presiding monk and told him that they had become good friends again.

No doubt, the problems that Thai Buddhism faces are not unique to that country. (At least, they're able to produce an honest and courageous monk like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu who placed his life on the line for his convictions). Human

Continued from Page 4

nature being what it is, excesses and deviations can be found anywhere. Indeed, can we honestly say that the founder of any of the world's major religions would be able to recognise his own religion if he were alive today?

And because materialism and consumerism are so pervasive in a modern city-state like Singapore, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's message strikes at the very heart of the spiritual practice of Buddhists here.

Every once in a while, if we heed the Buddha's advice, we need to stop ourselves in our tracks and ask ourselves what we're doing. And why we're doing whatever it is that we're doing. We won't be able to influence the course of Buddhism or the country in any way but at least we can try and improve our own lives. In the revered monk's words -

'We cannot overturn the land. We can only do our work, to the best of our ability, and accept the results in due course. The only hope we have is that our devotion to the religion might inspire more people and that more will follow us. Those in power might do so, or even everybody in the world, that would then be the same as overturning the land. Even though we did not do it ourselves, the results would be the same. And we could stay humble and not have to frustrate ourselves till death.'

And so, in this issue, we're happy to bring you a reminder of the true spiritual dimension of that most important of Buddhist festivals - Vesak - something which we, as Buddhists, are so familiar with that we tend to take it for granted.

The article began life as a speech given by Professor Y Karundasa on Vesak Day this year in Hong Kong. When I first read it, I realised that it has the potential to educate beginners and refresh others, something well worth publishing even though Vesak Day this year is long gone. Its message is simply too important to hold back until next Vesak Day.

As always, I wish you pleasant reading. *Joy*

Chwee Beng
Editor

Article

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VESAK

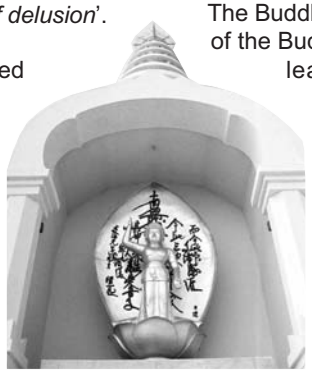
by Professor Y Karunadasa

Every Vesak Day, we commemorate and celebrate 3 events associated with the life of the Buddha - his birth, enlightenment and *parinibbana*.

As you all know, the Buddha is the founder of the religion that has come to be known today as Buddhism. The word '*Buddha*' is a title and not a personal name. The personal name of the Buddha was Siddhattha Gotama. But what exactly is the meaning of '*Buddha*'?

Both in Pali and Sanskrit, the term means '*One who is Awakened*'. We should not understand the term '*Awakened*' in a literal sense, but in an idiomatic sense. It means '*the One who is awakened from the slumber of ignorance*' or '*the One who is awakened from the slumber of delusion*'.

What this means is that the Buddha has gained an immediate vision, an immediate insight into things as they truly are. This is what is called in Pali '*Yathabhutanana*'. And this is what Buddhism calls '*liberating knowledge*', the knowledge that leads to complete emancipation from all forms of conditioned experience. If the Buddha is the '*Enlightened One*', the religion he has founded can rightly be described as '*the Religion of Enlightenment*'.



What is unique about the Buddha as a religious teacher is that, unlike other religious teachers, the Buddha did not claim divinity. According to Christianity, for instance, the Christ is an incarnation of God. According to Islam, Mohammed, the founder of Islam, is a Prophet of God. Hinduism believes in what is called '*Avatara*' or '*Divine Descent*'. From time to time, God assumes different forms and descends to earth to convey to human beings a divine message.

On the other hand, the Buddha did not attribute his knowledge to a divine source or some kind of transcendental reality. What the Buddha discovered through supreme human effort, he did not want to attribute to a divine source. What does this mean?

This means that the Buddha took full responsibility for what he taught.

The Buddha never claimed to be a saviour either. The role of the Buddha as a religious teacher is not to save, but to lead. To lead us from darkness to light, from ignorance to wisdom, from bondage to freedom.

The Buddha himself defines his position in this way: -

'Tumhehi kiccam atappam/Akkhataro Tathagata'. 'You yourselves ought to do what ought to be done. You yourselves should work out your salvation, your emancipation. The Tathagatas show the way'.

Continued from Page 5

What this really means is that the Buddha is a guide, a teacher, one who shows us the way. It's up to us to work out our own emancipation. This is precisely why in the early Buddhist discourses the Buddha was often referred to as '*Sattha*'. The Pali word '*Sattha*' means '*Teacher*'. The use of this word brings into focus the Buddha's role, not as a saviour but spiritual guide.

There's another important aspect of the Buddha as a religious teacher. He did not endorse the use of miracles to propagate his teachings.

One day, when the Buddha visited the city of Nalanda, the people came to him and said -

'Venerable Sir, this city of Nalanda is very affluent and prosperous. It's teeming with people. It would be a good thing if the Buddha could perform some miracles, so that the Buddha would be able to convert many people to his religion'.

To which the Buddha replied -

'There are 3 kinds of miracles.

The 1st is the miracle called 'iddhipatihariya'. This means the ability to perform such supernatural acts as levitating, that is, going in the air like a bird, or walking on water like a fish, or going through walls and parapets, or appearing in 2 different places at one and the same time.

The 2nd kind of miracle is called 'adesana patihariya'. It's some kind of hypnotism or mesmerism. It's the ability to hypnotize or mesmerize someone and reveal the kind of thoughts that the person is having'.

The Buddha did not recommend or endorse these 2 kinds of miracles. Rather, he was ashamed of them. He *'detested'* them and rejected them categorically.

But there's another kind of miracle which the Buddha called '*anusasani patihariya*'. '*Anusasani patihariya*' means the miracle of instruction. It has nothing to do with exhibiting supernatural acts to win over others or to convert them. It's nothing but teaching the Dhamma through rational persuasion. Thus we see that the Buddha elevated teaching through rational persuasion to the level of a miracle. The Buddha said that this was the only miracle that he recommended or endorsed.

Religious Advisor	: Ven B Dhammaratana
Editors	: Chwee Beng, James Chiang
Chinese Editors	: Yew Chung, Sunanda
Layout	: Kok Keong
Vetting	: Alexius, Jeanie
Secretary	: Leila

If the Buddha endorsed only the miracle of instruction, this has many implications.

One is that the Buddha did not support unethical conversion by resorting to cheap and vulgar exhibitions of supernatural power. If people resort to unethical conversion, this shows the bankruptcy of the message that they try to propagate. This has great relevance to modern times when we see all around us some fundamentalist religions resorting to unethical conversion.

If the Buddha is called *'the Buddha'*, it's also because he has attained the highest level of moral perfection and wisdom. Therefore, the Buddha is considered and venerated as the highest among all living beings, whether human or divine.

Although Buddhism does not believe in a creator God, according to Buddhist cosmology, there are gods or divine beings. Most of these divine beings are pre-Buddhistic gods. They were adopted and assimilated by Buddhism, under certain conditions, in such a way that their recognition in no way contradicts the fundamental teachings of Buddhism.

According to pre-Buddhist Hindu/Brahmanical teachings, these gods are eternal, all-powerful and some are omniscient. By performing petitional prayers, people could get favours from them. But according to Buddhism, they're not eternal; all-powerful or omniscient. They no longer remain as objects of petitional prayers. Instead, like us, human beings, they're all wayfarers in *samsara*. What's more, all these gods are inferior to the Buddha. Why? Because they're not free from *raga* (passion), *dosa* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion).

If people resort to unethical conversion, this shows the bankruptcy of the message that they try to propagate.

Buddhism even recognises the creator God of Hinduism called *'Mahabrahma'*. However, according to Buddhism, he's not the creator of the world, nor is he omniscient.

There is an interesting story in one of the early Buddhist discourses to show that the Buddha is superior to Mahabrahma. According to this account, during the time of the Buddha, there was a monk who was very much prone to metaphysical speculations.

One day, he was disturbed by a serious metaphysical problem - *Where do the 4 primary elements of matter come to cessation without any residue?* In modern language - *Where does matter come to an end?*

As you all know, this is a question to which religion, philosophy, and science cannot give a satisfactory answer. So this monk, thinking that no human could solve this problem, referred it to the gods.

With his powers of levitation, he first went to the lowest heaven and put this question to the gods living there. They

Continued from Page 6

said that they themselves did not know the answer and that he should go to the next heaven.

In the next heaven too, he got the same answer. In this way, he went from heaven to heaven until he came to the topmost heaven where the Mahabrahma lived. But Mahabrahma referred the monk to the Buddha.

You may or may not believe this hilarious story. But what matters is the profound message that is sought to be conveyed by it. That exalted humanity is very much higher than divinity. A human being who's free from passion, aversion, and delusion is superior to Mahabrahma whom the followers of Brahmanism consider as the creator God.

Nowadays, I hear some people say that since the Buddha's not living anymore, how can he help us? What is the purpose in taking refuge in the Buddha if the Buddha is not living now?

Our answer to this question is this. It's true that the Buddha is not living now, but the Dhamma he taught is still very much with us. We can make use of the Dhamma. To give an example:

Some of the scientists who discovered many kinds of potent medicine are not living now. However, this does not mean that we cannot make use of their discoveries to cure people.

When we use the term *'Buddha'*, we sometimes use it in the plural to mean many Buddhas. According to Buddhism, besides the historical Buddha - Siddhattha Gotama - there were innumerable Buddhas in the remote past, and there will be innumerable Buddhas in the distant future. This idea of a number of Buddhas has many important implications.

One is that truth is not the monopoly of one individual being or one particular Buddha. Buddhahood or enlightenment is accessible to all. This idea of a plurality of Buddhas assures us that there's an unbroken continuity in the discovery of truth. It also offers the rational explanation that living beings in the remote past as well living beings in the distant future have the opportunity to realise emancipation.

This idea of a number of Buddhas contrasts sharply with some other religions which speak of a one single incarnation or one single prophet for all eternity. But when we consider the vastness of space, the immensity of time and the almost infinite universe with its millions of world systems, to speak of one saviour or one prophet for all time appears rather parochial. The Buddhist idea of a number of Buddhas provides a cosmic dimension to the idea of the Buddha.

When we reflect on the spiritual qualities of the Buddha, it's also important to reflect on the nature of the Dhamma.

The Dhamma, as we all know, is the body of teachings taught by the Buddha. This is what we call Buddhism today. Although Buddhism is called a religion, in many ways it's different from other religions. In fact, most of the ingredients that go to make the definition of religion are conspicuously missing in Buddhism.

All other religions believe in a higher reality or God. In the case of theistic religions this higher metaphysical reality is God. In the case of Hinduism, it's the cosmic soul or Brahman. This idea is completely foreign to early Buddhism, so is the belief in a soul and the immortality of the soul as final salvation.

The soul is supposed to be the thing that connects man with higher reality. When Buddhism denies the existence of the soul, it also denies the existence of a higher reality. This fact has many implications for Buddhism as a religion. That is why we have in Buddhism anthropology instead of theology, psychology instead of metaphysics.

Buddhist morality is therefore not based on a theory of reward and punishment.

Let us take the Buddhist teachings relating to ethics, what is called the theory and practice of moral life. Buddhism does not recognise a moral authority in the form of a God who imposes moral injunctions on us. However, Buddhism does recognise a moral order which operates according to the principles of causality. This is what is called '*kammaniyama*'.

Buddhist morality is therefore not based on a theory of reward and punishment. If we do good things we will not be rewarded. If we do bad things we will not be punished. What Buddhism says is that unwholesome acts bring about evil consequences. Wholesome acts bring about good consequences. Therefore it's up to us to do what ought to be done, and refrain from doing what ought not to be done.

As Buddhism is the religion of enlightenment, it's through wisdom and insight and not through blind faith and devotion that this final goal can be realised. In Buddhism, the accent is on self-understanding, self-verification, and self-realisation. This explains why Buddhism gives its followers full freedom to inquire, investigate or examine.

The Dhamma itself is described as '*ehi-passika*'. This means '*come and investigate*', '*come and examine*'. This attitude of free inquiry is very well brought into focus in the well known *Kalama Sutta*. It's a discourse addressed to people who were confused when they were exposed to a number of contradictory views.

In this discourse, the Buddha said that one must

Continued from Page 7

not accept anything just because it's laid down in religious texts, handed down from generation to generation, based on logic and reasoning, or conforms to our likings and inclinations. Nor should we accept anything simply out of respect for our teacher.

The Buddha said that it's only when we're convinced that certain things are wholesome and others are unwholesome, that we must decide to accept what is wholesome and reject what is unwholesome.

There is a general belief among some people that a critical attitude and a spirit of inquiry are not consistent with the spiritual life. What's necessary is faith and devotion. But the Buddhist position is otherwise. From the Buddhist perspective, a critical attitude and a spirit of inquiry, rather than being detrimental, is very much salutary to the practice of a spiritual life. *Joy*

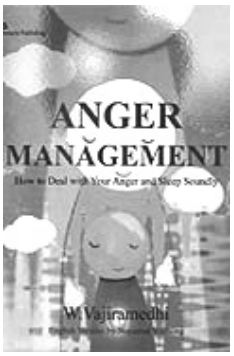
Book Review

ANGER MANAGEMENT

by W. Vajiramedhi
Translated by Nopamat Veohong

Publisher - Amarin Publishing (2005)
Reviewed by Kok Keong

'*Never judge a book by its cover*'. This commonly heard expression best explains my feeling after reading *Anger Management*, a small book that sports 2 cartoon figures of rough finishing on its cover.



At first glance, we may easily mistake this book for a children's book. But the author's mature and logical style of explaining all about anger would definitely correct whatever misimpression we may form from the book's deceptive looking cover page.

According to Buddhism, anger, apart from lust and delusion, is also responsible for binding us to the endless cycle of samsara. It is thus the spiritual goal of every devout Buddhist to eradicate anger, or, if not, to control it at least.

The author started with a simple story of a conflict between a CEO and his competent subordinate over a late delivery of an assignment. It did not take long for both to be consumed by anger when the subordinate finally blurted out his resignation and walked off. This CEO, after consulting with the author, deeply regretted his actions and made the initiative to apologise by admitting his fault to the subordinate. Almost instantly, everything got cleared up.

From this story, the author explained that the 'culprit' behind its unhappy episode was the *'I'* complex inside the 2 parties. Each tried to cling on to his own *'I'* and protect it dearly from guilt and blame.

It's this same *'I'* that causes all the anger, hatred, spite and destruction that we see around us today.

The author gave his advice for living happily with others -

1. *Do not insult anybody else's 'I'.*
2. *Do not put your 'I' above somebody else's as it will lead to a conflict of 'I's'.*
3. *Do not steal somebody else's 'I' for your own.*
4. *Do not have your 'I' in every breath you take.*

While the first 3 points sound doable, the last one seems abstract. What the author meant was that getting rid of the *'I'* is as good as removing the key condition for anger to arise.

The author recommended certain practical measures as first aid treatment to prevent us from committing senseless actions. For example,

'Get yourself away from a scene in which your anger has arisen by walking away from the person who has offended you….'

In the midst of a heated argument, the fury that clouds the mind often robs us of our ability to think logically and decide soundly. Nothing can be more precise in describing the rationale behind this strategy than the following analogy by the author -

'As when your house is on fire, the first thing you should do is to rush to put it out instead of wondering about the culprit. Should you worry about looking for the arsonist and neglecting to extinguish the fire in time, before you know it, all that will be left of your house will be a mound of ashes'

Next, the author gave a concise explanation of the process of anger with a simple 3 step diagram.

Impact ➡ Excite ➡ Act

While most of us have no control over our anger, this 3 step process helps us understand the transition of the mental states of someone who's overwhelmed by his own anger.

'Impact' happens when the mind starts to feel upset or agitated. As a result, anger starts to settle in the mind which, when provoked or disturbed, leads to *'Act'*. *'Act'* is the physical expression manifested from a mind that loses control (mindfulness).

Although anger can be arrested temporarily by applying the first aid measure as mentioned in the earlier paragraph, it may lie dormant in the mind for a period of time. Sometimes it remains rooted in the mind for the rest our lives, while at

Continued from Page 8

other times, it stays for a short duration until it gets erased through sorting out intellectually. The best and the happiest people would be those who are mindful of their anger, aware of it and who let it go.

The author has provided many different perspectives of looking at anger and the various methods to extinguish it. Thus the reader has a wide range of methods to choose from according to his or her level of understanding and level of acceptance.

One particular method is *'Dismantling the Source of Anger to Find 'Nothingness' '*. In the Pali texts, this anger-quelling approach is also called *'dismantling'* (*dhatuvinibhoga*). This approach has 4 methods of contemplating the corporeal composition of the subject with whom we're angry.

Breaking down the body into the 4 elements is only the first of the 4 *'dismantling'* methods. The subject whom we're angry with is nothing more than his or her name and the material form (body).

If it is not the subject's name that we're angry with, then it must be the subject's body. However, if we were to further break down the subject's body into the 4 elements, namely earth (hair, body hair, flesh, skin, etc), water (bile, blood, pus, sweat, etc), fire (body heat, digestive heat, etc) and wind (intestinal air, stomach air, breath, etc), we should realise that our anger can no longer make sense anymore. The original target of anger turns out to be 4 elements and is as good as non-existent. Who in the right frame of mind would want to get angry with any of the 4 elements?

For those who have a good mind or memory for more such analytical stuff, the last of these 4 involves the breaking down of the body into 32 components!

In the author's opinion, anger will only surface to anyone who is not continually mindful (mindfulness). Compared to all the other methods, mindfulness seems to be the ultimate solution. Since there is never a chance for anger to appear in the first place, what anger is there for us to fix!

Meditation, according to Buddhist teachings, is the most effective way to achieve wisdom and mindfulness. This may be why the author reserved the best and most fruitful method - *'Meditation'* - for the last chapter.

A person who's mindful at every breath no longer has enough space left in his mind to let anger slip in. It's also the mindfulness of Arahants that enables them to get rid of the *'I'*.

To paint a clearer picture about mindfulness and its effectiveness against anger, the author wrote a stanza -

Anger is like a mouse.
Your mindfulness is like a cat.
When the cat is awake, what mouse will dare roam
About listlessly in its presence?

Despite its childish exterior, this book packs within its pages much invaluable and wise advice on managing anger, all explained in a succinct and logical style. It has to be said, though, that the use of logical arguments to combat anger may not be effective for everyone because logic, together with reason, is the very first thing that often flies out of the window when an emotion like anger walks through the door.

Still, this weakness can be reduced if we read, re-read and contemplate these wise teachings in our ordinary frame of mind, at a leisurely pace and in our free moments. This will hopefully leave an imprint in our mind that can withstand the first onslaught of anger just sufficient for us to hesitate and allow mindfulness a split second to surface.

As they say, if at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again. For, after all, we have a lifetime to fail and try again - until mindfulness becomes a habit.

All said and done, I would highly recommend this book for everyone. Who, after all, doesn't suffer from anger? *Joy*

New books at the library

Author	Title	Publisher	Year	Country
David Richo	The Five Things We Cannot Change	Shambhala Publications	2006	Massachusetts, USA
Thubten Chodron	Cultivating A Compassionate Heart	Snow Lion Publications	2005	New York, USA
Steven Heine	White Collar Zen	Oxford University Press	2005	New York, USA
Jack Kornfield	Meditation For Beginners	Sounds True	2005	Colorado, USA
Madonna Gauding	Six Keys To Buddhist Living	Octopus Publishing	2005	London, U.K.
Maura D. Shaw	Thich Nhat Hanh	Skylight Paths	2003	Vermont, USA
Thich Nhat Hanh	Creating True Peace	Free Press	2003	New York, USA
Ajahn Chah	Food For The Heart	Wisdom Publications	2002	Massachusetts, USA

Mother's Day 2006
At Grand Court Vegetarian Restaurant

7 May, 2006

THE FAMILY BODHI BIG WALK OF HARMONY

2006 18 JUNE

Venue: The Esplanade Park

by Leila

This year's Bodhiwalk, jointly organized with the Buddhist societies of Nanyang Polytechnic, Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore, Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Singapore Polytechnic, began from the Lim Bo Seng Memorial at the Esplanade.

About 200 student volunteers and their leaders, including a young teacher, Ms Juliana Lim, gathered as early as 6.30 am to prepare for BL's yearly walkathon. Dark clouds loomed ahead and it soon began to drizzle. But the rain clouds dispersed just in time for the flag off.

This year's Guest of Honour, Minister of State for Health, Mr. Heng Chee How did the honours at 8.15 am. Almost 600 people walked down the scenic path. I spotted two dogs, a fluffy white poodle and a majestic looking *Welsh Corgi*, aptly named *'Prince'*. His Royal Highness was not pleased to meet his canine counterpart when their paths crossed.

Minister of State for Health, Mr. Heng Chee How

As we walked along the riverside, I overhead a few people talking to each other in a foreign language. I turned around. A pretty electrical engineering student, Thin Thazin Mg, told me that at least 100 Myanmar students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Nanyang Polytechnic had volunteered for the walkathon.

As many as 35 senior citizens from the Thong Kheng Seniors Activity Centre, some in wheelchairs, showed up, accompanied by their group organiser, Mr. William Sng.

At the other end of the scale, the young had a field day. They packed a booth reserved specially for the making of animal balloons. Juliana Lim and her young team of volunteers put their pumps and colourful balloons to good use and kept the children and their parents happy.

Afterwards, Voicegraffiti, Bodhicitta and Sunny Rain entertained the crowd with songs from the 70's and more modern hits like hip hop and rap.

It was certainly an enjoyable morning for everyone. Some even managed to go home with attractive prizes. Among these were 5-star hotel and foot spa vouchers and an MP3 player.

I found the 5 km walk enjoyable. Strolling along at a leisurely pace, I soaked in the morning sun and the eclectic architecture along the Singapore River.

BL thanks Minister of State for Health, Mr. Heng Chee How, Aerospec, the event's main sponsor, Voicegraffiti, Bodhicitta and Sunny Rain and everyone involved for making the Family Bodhi Big Walk a success. *Joy*

THE FAMILY BODHI BIG WALK OF HARMONY '06

The Family Bodhi Big Walk of Harmony 2006 家庭菩提义走2006

18 June 2006 • Esplanade Park

WALK FOR LIFE! WALK FOR HARMONY!

Guest-Of-Honour :
Mr. Heng Chee How
(Minister of State for Health)

FUN , FUN & MORE FUN

Joy