



Bhante Says Women in Buddhism

This year people all over the world are following the US elections closely because for the first time a woman could be elected as the president of the most powerful country in the world.

Exciting as this may be, there have, nevertheless, been female presidents and prime ministers in the world before, including my home country, Sri Lanka. Several countries like Germany, New Zealand and Liberia currently have women leaders.

Women have indeed progressed

far in their quest to be treated as the equal counterparts of men.

Yet there is still much room for improvement. One of the areas in which women are often seen as not being given equal treatment is religion.

Some people, especially in the west, for example, think that Buddhism is 'sexist'.

Yet, if we have studied and understood the Buddha's life and teachings, we know that this simply is not true.

During the Buddha's life, a famous king called King Kosala went to see the Buddha. The Buddha looked at the king and realised that he was very sad.

The Buddha asked him why he was so unhappy.

The king said, 'My beloved queen delivered a baby girl.' He, of course, expected a baby boy and blamed the queen for failing to give him an heir to the throne.

The Buddha admonished the king for harbouring this wrong attitude. He told the king that there is no difference between boys and girls as both are human

beings. A wise and virtuous lady can be even greater than a man.

The Buddha pointed out that ladies have a very special duty - as mothers - to bring up their children as good citizens. This does not mean that husbands have no role to play. They do but when it comes to character building and moral development, the mother plays a greater part. You must have heard the old saying - 'The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.'

Generally speaking, at a very young age, children are much closer to their mothers and they learn things more from the mother. In probably 99.9% of cases, this is true. We can say that the first teacher of children is the mother.

So the Buddha's attitude towards women was open and compassionate.

Today I would like to discuss a sutra which the Buddha taught to a virtuous female devotee by the name of Visakha. In this sutra, the Buddha spoke to Visakha about 8 qualities that can help ladies make progress both in this and future lives.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and in no way represent the views of the editor, Buddhist Library or the Buddhist Research Society. We accept no responsibility for any organisation, product, service or any other matter featured or advertised.

We welcome contributions which we may edit, if accepted. Write to - The Editor, The Path of Joy, Buddhist Library, Nos. 2 & 4 Lorong 24A Geylang, Singapore 398526 Email - joyeditor@gmail.com Fax 67417689 Telephone 67468435 BL's website - <http://buddhilib.org.sg> Please include name and contact details. We may publish letters of general interest, subject to editing.



The Buddha said –

“Herein, Visakha, a woman does her work well, she manages workers and servants, she respects her husband and she guards their wealth.

Herein, Visakha, a woman has confidence (saddha) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha; virtue (sila); charity (caga); and wisdom (panna).”

The first set of 4 qualities is helpful for progress in this life and the second set of 4 qualities for progress in the next and future lives.

Another way of putting it is to say that the first 4 qualities are for mundane worldly progress and the other 4 for spiritual progress.

Of course, many of these qualities are also applicable to men but the Buddha specifically mentioned women because he was addressing Visakha, a woman.

The thing I want to emphasise here is that if we view the Buddha's words in the context of Indian society more than 2,500 years ago, it's clear that the Buddha not only treated women fairly but was ahead of his time.

1. Being capable at her work

The Buddha referred to work done by women both inside and outside the home.

In the olden days, there were

no big industries. Agriculture was prevalent but there were industries too, mainly cottage industries. Actually, the products the ladies made were very fine and sophisticated. For example, silk was produced and transported by way of the silk road.

Although industries those days were small, the lady must know all aspects of her work well.

2. A woman should be able to manage servants and workers well

If a lady has servants or workers working under her, she must be familiar with the capacity of each individual subordinate. She needs to be not only intelligent but also observant to be able to do this.

She must also be able to delegate work well.

If anyone is unable to do her job well, the lady must be able to teach him or her how to improve his or her capacity.

She must also be able to take care of her workers who are sick.

3. A woman must be loving and respectful to her husband

Respect between spouses is essential for harmony in the home.

If there is no harmony in the home, it's extremely difficult to achieve progress. There would be many problems.

4. A woman must be able to guard her husband's and her wealth well

It's quite a well-known thing that men are not so capable

of guarding wealth as well as women. Men can be quite careless with money

Being able to manage wealth properly is not a matter of stinginess. It requires intelligence.

And being thrifty is quite different from being stingy.

5. A woman must have faith in the Triple Gem

Nowadays, many people including Buddhists, misunderstand the nature and place of faith and devotion and think that they are not important.

Of course, blind faith is dangerous and wrong but faith based on understanding is a very necessary quality. Trying to lead a spiritual life without faith is like attempting to build a house without a foundation.

Taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha means that we take the Buddha, his teachings and the great followers as our role models. We must have strong faith and great respect and appreciation to be able to do this. It won't happen automatically.

The act of taking refuge is the beginning of a Buddhist life and so it's very important especially in the Mahayana tradition. The motivation for taking refuge is crucial but often we do it in a ritualistic fashion.

Unless we have a proper understanding of the qualities of the Buddha, his wisdom, his compassion and how he helped people, we won't be able to have profound faith in him.

It is said that in his life, the Buddha

reserved only 2 hours for himself. For 45 years, he devoted 22 hours per day to helping others.

When he attained enlightenment, the Buddha could have enjoyed the bliss, calmness and mental peace of an enlightened being without doing anything else. But he did not do that. Out of great compassion, he did everything to help others.

And so it's important that we realise that we are paying respect to a teacher of the highest level or capacity.

And remember that taking refuge is not just for one day. The commitment must be firmly planted for the whole of our lives. Indeed, in the Mahayana (which includes the Tibetan tradition) devotees take refuge in the Triple Gem until they attain enlightenment which could span countless lifetimes. That is why people say that Buddhism is so difficult to practise.

But, of course, it's difficult to practise. How can you observe even the 5 precepts if you don't have faith in the Buddha? Energy can only come from faith.

6. A woman must be accomplished in virtue or discipline

Without discipline, you can't even do bad things, let alone good things. For example, even to catch a fish you need discipline and patience. Of course, I'm not asking you to go and fish.

Of course, discipline is extremely important in the army. Soldiers are punished for breach of discipline. But Buddhist discipline is not based on fear of punishment.

The 5 precepts – abstaining from killing, taking what is not given, having illicit sex, telling lies and taking intoxicating substances - are essential for the spiritual life of a lay Buddhist. One needs to have discipline in order to achieve spiritual progress.

7. She has to be accomplished in charity

Being charitable does not mean spending carelessly. One must be able to manage wealth or property and be thrifty. That does not mean that one must be greedy, selfish or stingy.

As a wife and mistress of the household, a woman's role includes greeting and welcoming guests to the house and helping them as far as she's able to.

Charity brings a lot of good results which we don't notice and we should be charitable not only in terms of giving money and things but also in words.

For instance, when people are nice or helpful to us, we should not forget to thank them.

Talking about other peoples' good qualities is also a form of charity but very often we only want other people to be very charitable with their words to us. This has to be a 2-way thing.

If we are charitable to others, they will be kind to us and help us when we need help although this should not be our motivation for helping others.

8. A woman should be accomplished in wisdom

We can achieve all the other

good qualities but that won't be enough. We need wisdom.

Without wisdom, we may perform good deeds wrongly. Giving money indiscriminately to children, whether our own or others', for example, can spoil them.

Above all, there's something that, as Buddhists we ought to, at least, have a basic understanding of. We should know that everything changes and nothing lasts or stays the same forever.

For example, we can progress very quickly in our careers but that does not mean we can make progress all the time. Sometimes we can be happy but it does not mean that throughout our lives we will be happy.

And at any one particular time we can be gainfully employed. But the very next moment, we can get retrenched.

Life is like that. It's not like a carpeted, level floor. It can be rough or smooth, pleasant or unpleasant.

The knowledge that life is impermanent is a kind of wisdom. It's a shock absorber that cushions us from the rough and bumpy road of life.

This is a very important sutra that modern day Visakhas also need to understand.

Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

Mother knows best

This year is a momentous year for Chalerm, a Thai teenager aged 20. He has reached the age when he may have to begin serving his national service.

In Thailand, males aged 20 years draw lots to see whether or not the government requires their service. If they pick red, they have to serve. If black, they're off the hook.

It's not surprising that most of them prefer to pick a black card. After all, serving in the Thai army could mean being deployed in one of the 3 southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani where casualties are common and soldiers are even issued amulets to augment the protection of their normal military weapons.

The day before, Chalerm pays respects to his parents and the guardian deity of the village.

Like most Thais, Chalerm and his parents, although Buddhists, propitiate deities and spirits to protect them from danger and ensure a good life. They even make animal sacrifices.

This morning, Chalerm sacrifices some chickens to the village deity.

He refuses to apply for a place in the university before the day of his national service lottery not because he does not want to waste time (after all, there's a 50 percent chance that he will end up in the army) but because he believes that it's bad luck to make preparations for his future just yet.

Chalerm's parents will do anything to ensure that their son escapes the draft. Yes, even pay a bribe to the authorities, if only they could afford it.

Just the day before, they'd been to see the village temple monk for blessings. But they couldn't afford to make the standard offering of 1,000 bahts that's required.

On the fateful day, Chalerm wakes up early to report at the local school for the ballot. It's a working day and his parents have to put food on the table, come rain or shine, so they don't go with him.

At around 4 pm, Chalerm's neighbour shouts for his father. It's Chalerm on the phone. With his heart pounding, the old man awaits the news.

The young man is silent for what seems to his dad like ages.

Unable to take the tension anymore, the old man blurts out, 'So did you draw red or black, son?'

"Neither," the young man finally says. 'They only required 53 servicemen and exactly 53 signed up to join the army. So the rest of us got letters to say that our service is not required.'

The old man has never felt so relieved in his entire life.

This simple story reminds me of my late illiterate mother. She had great faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha but nevertheless meticulously observed the traditional Chinese ceremony of making animal sacrifices to the deities and family ancestors every year.

When someone in the family became sick or there was any other problem, usually financial, she would take a trishaw to the nearby soothsayer's house, with me tagging along, to consult him.

The soothsayer often issued a piece of paper with some magical words written on it. My mum would take the talisman home, burn it and put the ashes in a glass of water. The patient would have to drink the remedy as soon as possible.

One fine day, a Sri Lankan temple opened less than a mile from where we lived. My mum brought all her children to the temple and enrolled us in the Sunday School.

Every Sunday, she would ensure that we went to Sunday classes.

I would often run and hide, but all my efforts were in vain, in the face of a determined woman with a long cane.

Eventually, my mother's efforts paid off.

The children received a proper education in Buddhism. And we ended up passing off some of the things we studied to our mother at lunches and dinners and other family occasions.

In time, my mum ceased her non-Buddhist practices and faithfully practised the Dharma as a layperson until she passed away. She even sat quietly for long hours listening to teachings given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in languages she did not understand.

Reflecting on all this, I could not help but wonder when

Chalerm and his parents would have the good fortune to be able to undertake the proper practice of the Dharma and be able to face their future, come what may, without the crutch of superstition.

In this issue, our Bhante B Dhammaratana comments on a sutra in which the Buddha explained to a virtuous lady named Visakha the 8 practices that a woman has to undertake. Completing these practices, the woman would make great progress not only in this life but also in future lives. And not only in mundane matters but also spiritually.

Bhante points out that the Buddha was ahead of his time in his treatment of women and stresses that, in the vast majority of cases, it's the mother who plays the pivotal role in the

moral education and character development of her children.

When I read *Bhante Says*, it suddenly dawned on me that what Bhante says in this issue of POJ could not have been more true anywhere else than in my own family.

Everything that I've managed to achieve in my life, whether educationally, professionally or otherwise, I could not have done without my mother's inspiration, guidance or help, especially in my formative years as a child.

I speak for myself but my siblings, I'm sure, would say the same things about their own lives.

As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor

Readers Write

By email
21 April 2008

Dear Chwee Beng

I refer to the editorial in POJ Issue 26 wherein you wrote "... the Buddha did not require his monks to be vegetarians".

Contrary to the aforesaid, the Buddha actually prohibited his disciples from consuming meat and even spoke of the dire consequences of meat-eating in the Surangama Sutra.

Kindly return my email with contact no. to enable me to arrange for a time and place to show you what the Buddha had taught.

Warmest regards
Keith Liao

Reply by email
22 April 2008

Hi Keith

Nice to hear from you.

When I said in my editorial that the Buddha did not require his monks to be vegetarians, I was speaking in the context of the early Buddhist tradition and the Theravada sangha.

I thought that the context was clear because I spoke about alms rounds undertaken by monks.

As you are aware, vegetarianism was not part of the early Buddhist tradition and according to that tradition, the Buddha himself ate whatever was offered to him, including meat. In the Jivaka Sutta, for example, the Buddha explained the circumstances under which monks could eat whatever was offered to them.

When I wrote the editorial, I was of course aware of the different position of the Mahayana sangha with regard to vegetarianism but I did not want to deviate from the main theme of my editorial and thereby lengthen it unnecessarily.

But perhaps, on hindsight, I should have explicitly mentioned that non-vegetarianism among monks did not apply to some sections of the Mahayana clergy to avoid any misunderstanding.

Thank you very much for reading the editorial and bothering to write in.

Warmest regards
Chwee Beng
Editor

The Path of Joy Editorial Board

Religious Advisor
Ven B Dhammaratana

Editors
Chwee Beng
James Chiang
Tjiep Hoe

Chinese Editor
Yew Chung

Layout
Geelyn Lim

Secretary
Leila

**Talks by Desi Tulku on 29 February,
1, 2 & 4 March 2008**



**Talk by Ven. Thubten Chodron
on 21 March 2008**



Memorandum of Understanding Signing Ceremony

Between

University of Kelaniya • Buddhist College of Singapore • Buddhist Library Graduate School

**Joint Academic Programme
9 May 2008**



Memorandum of Understanding Signing Ceremony

Between

University of Kelaniya • Buddhist College of Singapore • Buddhist Library Graduate School

**Joint Academic Programme
9 May 2008**



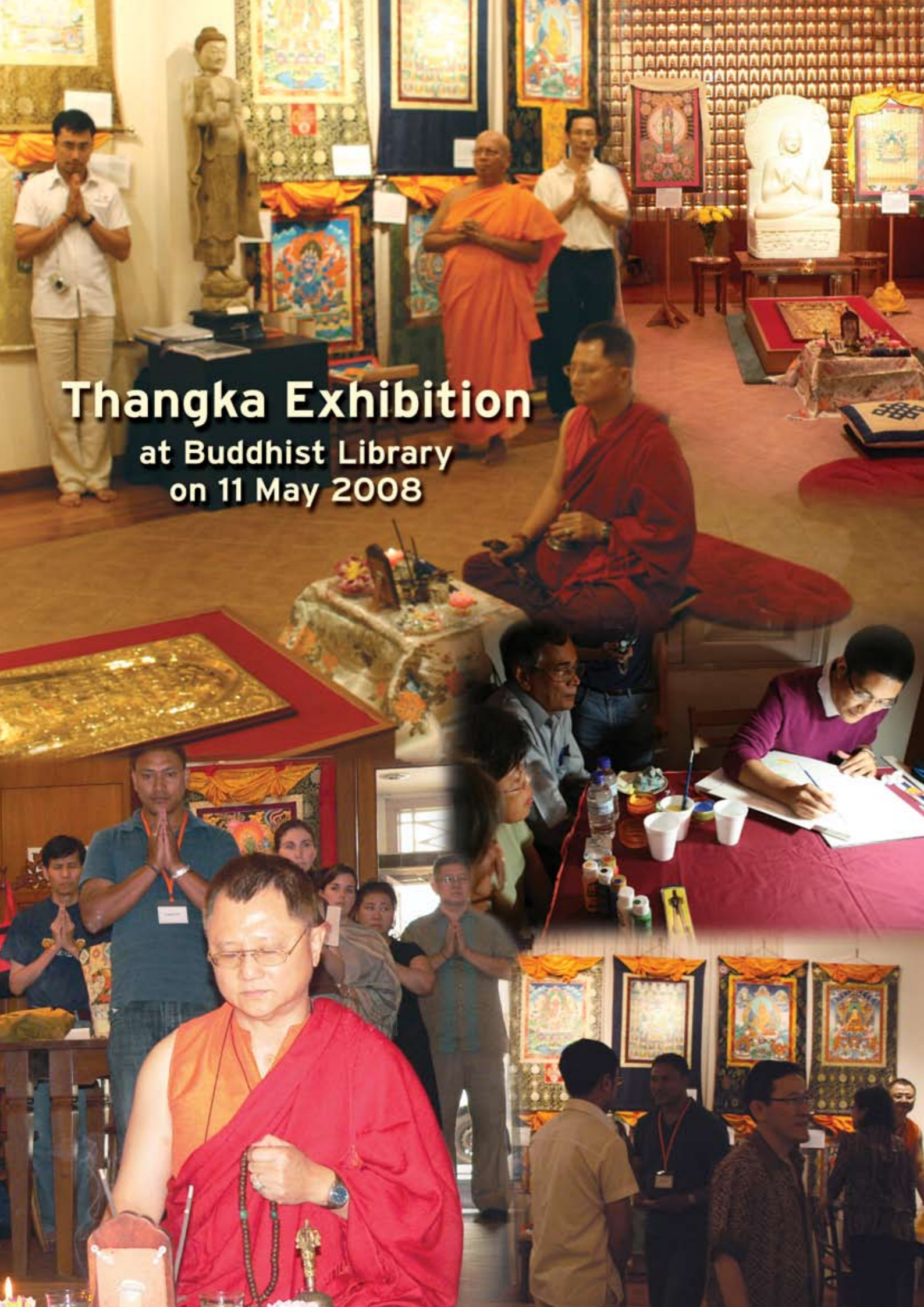
With the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between University of Kelaniya (UOK), Buddhist College of Singapore (BCS) and Buddhist Library Graduate School (BLGS) on 9 May 2008, both BCS and BLGS will start the Bachelor of Arts degree in Buddhist Studies this coming September. This three-year part time course is open to everyone with a GCE Advanced Level and details of the syllabus, fees etc will be released shortly.

Welcome to
The Buddhist Research Society
and
The Buddhist Library

Vesak Celebration

at Buddhist Library on 19 May 2008

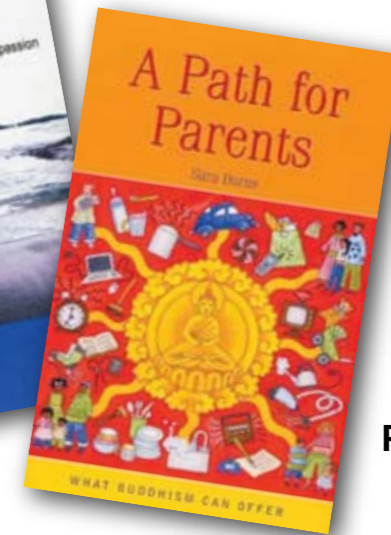




**Thangka Exhibition
at Buddhist Library
on 11 May 2008**

Book Review

Buddha Heart Parenting – Enrich Your Family with Buddhist Wisdom and Compassion
by Dr C L Claridge
Published by Vajra Publications, Kathmandu, Nepal (2007)



A Path for Parents
by Sara Burns
Published by Windhorse Publications Ltd (2007)

Reviewed by Sin Tho

I decided to review these 2 books together as they both address the same subject of parenting. They represent a sampling of recent books written by westerners that apply the Buddha's thoughts and teachings to coping with the challenges of daily family life in Western societies.

As Buddhists, the authors of these books both seem motivated to want to 'share (their) experience' of the Buddha-Dhamma with others, having been touched by the Dhamma and finding that it has helped them in their own lives as parents and in their respective spiritual paths.

The authors are both mothers themselves. They draw on their personal experiences.

Dr. Claridge, author of *Buddha Heart Parenting*, has 'worked

with thousands of parents' and that helped her refine the skills and knowledge that are described in her book.

In the words of Venerable Tenzin Chonyi (Dr. Diana Taylor), a touring teacher of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, the value of *Buddha Heart Parenting* is that 'it combines Buddhist practice with CL Claridge's years of working with children, including her own'.

Dr Claridge has a degree in child psychology and a PhD in empowerment processes. She has, for more than 25 years, educated and counselled parents in effective parenting skills and strategies based on Buddhist principles and philosophy.

Sara Burns, author of 'A Path for Parents', draws from her experience to 'identify the key

opportunities and obstacles for growth within parenting.'

Sara Burns 'brought Buddhism into her life' as she found, like many of us, that after her second child was born, she 'did not have time to step out of ...her... life to practice Buddhism.'

Essentially both authors try not to separate the spiritual aspects of their lives or activities from the 'day-to-day realities of raising children.' For those who want to bring Buddhism into their lives at a practical level, these 2 books serve as 'practical guides.' Both books make for easy reading.

'*Buddha Heart Parenting*' with only 227 pages contains appropriate quotations from Buddhist suttas and also from various eminent Zen teachers. Dr Claridge's Vajrayana inclination is evident from her use

of the 'two wings' of Buddhism metaphor, comprising wisdom and compassion. She creates a powerful synergy between parenting and Buddhism as an aid and a guide to a reader to become an effective and compassionate parent and an 'engaged Buddhist', a term coined by Thich Nhat Hanh emphasising 'action based on awareness.'

Dr Claridge coined and developed the concept of 'Buddha Heart Parenting' to 'provide parents, grand parents and caregivers with an ethical approach to parenting and child-raising that is based on the Buddhist principles of compassion and wisdom.' This approach 'results in connected relationships and self-empowered children.'

Buddha Heart in Buddhist terminology is 'Buddha Nature'. 'When we understand that all sentient beings have the same innate nature that wants happiness and doesn't want to suffer, we are more easily able to maintain compassion and loving-kindness.'

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

To understand why people behave the way they do, Dr Claridge advises that we shift the focus

from ourselves to others. From looking firstly at the causes of our children's behaviour and the behaviour of members of our immediate family, we can then look at our wider family. What we see is that behind all unskillful or inappropriate action lies suffering – these people also suffer and want happiness. We can then feel heart-warming love for our wider family. From this heart-warming love comes compassion, that is, a desire for others to be free of suffering and its causes.

The aim of this book for Dr Claridge was to 'enable us to be Buddhas, to awaken the Buddha within us and let that guide all that we do in our parenting role.'

Sara Burns' 'A Path for Parents' is 'not about how to be a good parent, how to raise happy children, or how to provide children with a spiritual context.'

The book is written in the belief that 'our spiritual growth can only have a positive effect on our children.' It tries to answer questions such as "How do we lead rich and meaningful spiritual lives in the context of parenting? ... How can we understand our everyday experience in the context of our spiritual aspirations?"

Sara Burns was born in 1962 and spent her early childhood in Barnes, London. She was raised a Catholic and became a regular member of the local church congregation.

Sara has two children. She first came across Buddhism in Nepal in 1990, and then became

involved in the establishment of the Northern London Buddhist Centre in the early 1990s. She was ordained within the Western Buddhist Order in 2005 and given the name Karunagita, which means 'song of compassion'.

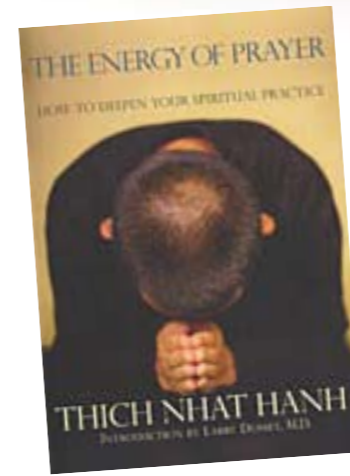
Since 1998, Sara has raised her children largely on her own and has worked as a consultant for a range of charities and voluntary organizations, joining forces with 2 other women in 2003 to set up a partnership. She currently lives in North London with her 2 children.

Sara Burns covers in 7 chapters over 158 pages the salient teachings of the Buddha and how these teachings can be internalised and manifested in the way we behave and conduct ourselves in daily lives and how we relate to our children.

In particular, Sara Burns explains in lay-person terms the Buddha's use of loving-kindness, generosity, mindfulness, cultivation of wisdom in acknowledging the impermanence of all phenomena and an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, and ethical values, cultivation of the mind and the importance of patience, and being firmly committed to and having confidence in the path.

I would recommend both these books to those who will soon become parents or want to become better parents.

Book Review



The Energy of Prayer by Thich Nhat Hanh Published by Parallax Press

Reviewed by Kim Li

What first drew my attention to the little book is not its title, nor its cover.

It's the name on the book. The author's name – *Thich Nhat Hanh*.

He's one of my favourite authors because he writes simple yet powerful books, explaining difficult concepts in language that's easy to understand and follow. His energy and compassion can be felt from his words in the book.

What is prayer? Usually, the first thing that comes to mind when I hear the word 'prayer' is people asking for wishes to be granted to them. Alternatively, I think of Christians because the term is used more commonly in association with Christianity.

What then is prayer in Buddhist terminology? It is our spiritual practice.

Whom do we pray to? We usually visualise the Buddha or we have a statue of the Buddha in front of us.

This establishes a connection between the Buddha and us. To

aid the visualisation, a short *gatha* (a verse or hymn) is mentioned in the book:

'The one who bows and the one who is bowed to are both, by nature, empty.'

From the book, I realise that reciting a sutra (discourse by the Buddha) is also a form of prayer.

The mindfulness that is put into the chanting brings us back to the present moment, and instills the imprint of the teachings in our mental consciousness. This is something that I've often thought about, yet am always unable to explain satisfactorily when asked why Buddhists chant.

Chanting can also bring us back to why we are Buddhists. From chanting, we re-affirm our desire to be out of samsara (the cycle of births and rebirths) and our aspirations to be able to help others do the same. It also brings us in touch with our compassion.

Along the path of practice, I've come to realise as I chant (especially if it is an unfamiliar sutra) that my mind is usually in full concentration on the words. Perhaps chanting is then also a means, a tool we use to help us to build up the energy of concentration.

It is noted in the book that there are 2 elements of effective prayer. 1 is the communication between ourselves and the one we are praying to. The 2nd element is the energy.

Mindfulness of the present moment will bring our concentration back into focus.

Thay (which means Teacher in Vietnamese) as Thich Nhat Hanh is usually called, also touches on meditation as a form of prayer. Meditation brings forth mindfulness, concentration and insight. These energies help to create an atmosphere of peace and serenity

which benefits not ourselves alone but also people around us.

In a light-hearted manner, Thay brings our attention to our tendency to bargain when we say our prayers.

For instance, we pray for Ven so-and-so to live a longer life so that more people can benefit from their teachings. According to the book, while there is nothing wrong with such deep-rooted wishes, we should look deeply as we pray to understand what is happening in our consciousness. With a clearer understanding of the basis of our prayers, we will be able to generate more love and compassion, to cut down on our desires and to increase our insight.

With each prayer, we will also dedicate the merits. This sending of spiritual energy, as Thay mentions in the book, is not superstition. The collective energy of mindfulness especially in a spiritual community is able to produce clarity and understanding, bringing about love and compassion which in turn will improve the collective consciousness as a community.

There are many meditation techniques mentioned in the book but I would like to close with an excerpt from one that is most beautiful to me.

Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in.

Breathing out, I know I'm breathing out.

Breathing in, I calm my whole body. Breathing out, I love my body.

Breathing in, I smile to my whole body.

Breathing out, I release the tension in my body.

Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment.

Breathing out, it is a wonderful moment.

母亲最清楚

对于查叻，一位二十岁的泰籍青年，今年是一个重大的一年。他已达到国民服役的法定年龄。

在泰国，二十岁的男性都必须抽签，以决定是否必须服役。如果他们抽到红色，就必须服役。如果抽到黑色，就不必。

不足为奇的，他们大多数都宁愿抽到黑卡。毕竟，在泰国军队服役可能意味着被部署到也拉府，陶公府和北大年府的三个南部省份。那里的伤亡是常见的，军人甚至会被分发护身符，以加强保护他们的军事武器的能力。

前一天，查叻向他的父母和村里的神灵致敬。

象很多泰国人，查叻和他的父母，虽然都是佛教徒，都会讨好神灵以保护他们免遭危害，并确保一个良好的生活。为此，他们甚至会杀畜生为祭品。

今天早上，查叻为供奉村神，杀了些鸡只。

他拒绝在国民服役抽签之前申请入大学。不是因为他不希望浪费时间（毕竟，他有百分之五十的机会会被抽中入伍），而是因为他认为，要为将来作准备会给他带来坏运。

查叻的父母会做任何事情，以确保他们的儿子不必入伍。是的，为此如果他们负担得起，他们甚至会向有关当局贿赂。

一天前，他们去见村庙的僧侣求祝福。但他们无法负担所需的一千泰铢的供奉。

当天，查叻为了必须为抽签到当地一所学校报到而早起床。这天是工作日而他的父母都必须为生活工作，所以他们不能跟他一起去。

在下午四点左右，查叻的邻居向他的父亲高喊。查叻在电话上。他父亲心跳急速地等待消息。

青年的沉默对他的父亲来说好像是一辈子一样。

老先生再也无法忍受紧张气氛，冲口地说：“儿子，你抽到红色还是黑色呢？”

“都不是”青年终于开口。“他们只需要五十三位服役人员而刚好有五十三位加入军队。因此，其他的我们都收到一封信，说不需要我们的服务。”

老先生毕生从来没有感到那么欣慰。

这个简单的故事，令我想起我已故的母亲。她是个文盲。她对佛陀、佛法以及僧伽虔诚，但也遵循每年以畜牲拜祭神灵和祖先的华人传统。

当家里有人生病或有任何其他问题，通常是有关钱财的，她会带着我乘搭三轮车到附近的乱童屋找他。

那乱童常常会在一张纸上画一些神奇的字。我妈妈过后会把神符带回家，烧了它，把灰烬放在一杯水里。病人必须尽快把神符喝下去。

有一天，一所斯里兰卡的庙宇在我们家不到一英里的地方奠基。我妈妈带了她所有的孩子到寺庙及登记我们上星期日的佛学班。

每个星期日，她会确保我们上佛学班。

我会经常尝试溜走和躲起来，但面对一位拿着藤条的坚定女士，都没用。

最终，我母亲的努力见效了。

孩子们都接受适当的佛教教育。我们也在午餐，晚餐和其他家庭聚集的场合把我们学到的与我们的母亲分享。

过了些时候，我妈妈停止做非佛教的东西并虔诚地以一个在家人实践佛法，直至她过世。她甚至会静静的坐在那儿几个小时听达赖喇嘛以一种她听不懂的语言说法。

回想起这一切，我不禁会想，到底查叻以及他的父母几时会有福分以正确的方式实践佛法，并不需要依靠迷信来面对无论怎么样的未来。

在这一期，我们的达摩拉达那法师谈到佛陀向一位贞妇毗舍佉解说妇女须拥有的八种特质。能够实践它们，妇女便在此世和来世，日常生活和精神上都会有进展。

法师指出，佛陀当时对待妇女已经是超越了他的年代，并强调在绝大多数情况下，母亲对孩子的道德教育和个性发展，发挥关键的作用。

当我读到法师说时，我恍然大悟。法师在这期刊物说的，对我自己家人的情况实在贴切。

我一生的成就，无论是学术上、专业上或其他方面，没我母亲的启示，指导或帮助，特别是在我幼年时，我是达不到的。

虽然我我说的是我自己的经历，但我的兄弟姐妹，我敢肯定，对自己的一生都会持同样的看法。

跟往常一样，我祝你们阅读愉快。

(接自第16页续)

如果有任何人不做好工作，女士必须能够教导他如何改善他的能力。

她还必须能够照顾她生病的员工。

3. 敬爱丈夫

家中的和谐，配偶之间的尊重是不可少的。

如果在家里没有和谐，要有进展是很困难的。也会有很多问题。

4. 守护他的财产

众所周知，守财富，男人比不上女人。对于钱财，男人会比较粗心。

能妥善管理财富，并不意味着要吝啬。它需要智慧。

而且节俭跟吝啬，是颇为不同的。

5. 正信

当今，很多人，包括佛教徒，误解信念和虔诚的性质和地位，并认为他们并不重要。

当然，迷信是危险和错误的，但基于理解的信念是一个非常必要的特质。没有信念的修行就像要盖一间没有基础的房子。

皈依佛、法、僧意味着我们以佛陀，他的教诲和他的得力信徒，作为我们的榜样。要能够做到这一点，我们必须有坚定信念和崇高的敬意和谢意。它是不会自动发生的。

皈依是佛教生活的一个开始，所以这是非常重要的，特别是在大乘佛教的传统。皈依的动力是至关重要的，但我们常常只以仪式的方式带过。

除非我们对佛陀，他的智慧，他的慈悲，以及他如何帮助人们的特质有一个正确的认识，我们将无法对他有深刻的信念。

据说，佛陀的一生，每天只留两个小时给自己。四十五年来，他每天

投入二十二个小时帮助别人。

当他证悟后，佛陀大可不做任何事情而享有证悟者的喜悦、平静和心理安宁。但他没有这样做。出于伟大的慈悲，他做了一切来帮助别人。

所以我们要知道我们是在对一位崇高的导师表示尊重。

要记得，皈依不是一天了事。这个决心必须是在我们的生活中根深蒂固。的确，大乘佛教（其中包括西藏传统）的信徒对三宝皈依，直到证悟，可跨度无数世。这就是为什么人们说佛教是如此艰难实践的。

当然，这是艰难的。如果你对佛陀没有信念，你又怎么守五戒呢？能力来自信念。

6. 持戒或纪律

没有纪律，别说好事，你连坏事都做不到。举例来说，即使捉鱼，你也需要有纪律和耐心。当然，我不是叫你去捉鱼。

当然，纪律在军中是非常重要的。士兵违反纪律会受到惩罚。但佛教的戒律，并不是基于惩罚的恐惧。

对一位在家佛教徒的修行，五戒：不杀生、不偷盗、不邪淫、不妄语、不酗酒，是不可少的。一个人要在修行上有进展，持戒是必要的。

7. 布施

慷慨并不意味着要漫不经心的花钱。一个人还是要能够管理财富或财产并且节俭。这并不代表一个人必须贪婪，自私或吝啬。

作为妻子和住户的主人，一名女子的角色包括迎接并欢迎来探访的客人，而且尽能力帮助他们。

布施会带来了很多我们不知的很好的后果，所以我们的布施应该不仅在金钱上，也要在言语上实行。

举例来说，当人们对我们友好或者

帮助我们，我们不应该忘记向他们致谢。

谈到其他人的良好素质，也是一种布施的形式，但很多时候，我们只希望他人慷慨的对我们说好话。这必须是个双边互益的。

如果我们对他人布施，他们将会善待我们，在我们需要帮忙时帮忙我们，虽然这不应该是我们帮助别人的动机。

8. 智慧

我们可以实现所有其他的良好特质，但这将是不够的。我们还需要智慧。

没有智慧，我们可能会把好事做坏。举例来说，随便给孩子钱，无论是我们自己或他人的孩子，都会宠坏他们。

最重要的是，作为佛教徒，我们应该至少有一个基本的了解。我们应该知道，世事无常，没有东西是持久不变的或永远保持原状的。

例如，我们的事业可以非常迅速的进展，但这并不表示我们能够时常取得进展。有时候，我们可以很开心，但并不意味着我们的一生，都会很开心。

还有，在任何一个时候，我们可以有职业。但另一刻，我们可以被裁退。

生活就是这样。它不是个盖着地毯的平坦地板。它可以是艰难或顺利的，愉快或不愉快的。

知道生命不是永恒的，是一种智慧。在我们生命中经历的艰难和忐忑，它能帮我们减缓那些冲击。

这是一个现代的毗舍佉需要了解的重要经文。

达摩拉达那法师
宗教顾问
佛教图书馆



法师说

佛教中的妇女

今年世界各地的人都密切注意美国总统选举，因为这世界最强大的国家，有可能首次选出第一位女总统。

虽然这会令人兴奋，然而，之前世界上已经有女总统和女总理的存在，包括我的母国斯里兰卡在内。有几个国家，如德国、纽西兰和利比里亚目前都有女领袖。

在追求与男士受平等对待的道路上，妇女们确有可观的进展。

然而，仍有很多须改进的地方。其中就是妇女在宗教中，往往被视为没有得到平等的待遇。

比如有些人，尤其是在西方，会认为佛教是‘歧视性别’的。

然而，如果我们有研究并了解佛陀的生活和教诲，我们会知道，这根本是不正确的。

在佛陀的一生，一位著名的国王叫拘萨罗国国王前去看佛陀。佛陀看到国王，得知他非常难过。

佛陀问他为什么他那么不开心。

国王回答：“我心爱的皇后生了个女婴。”他，当然，期望一名男婴，并指责皇后未能给他一个王位的继承人。

佛陀责备国王怀有如此错误的态度。他告诉国王说，男孩和女孩都没有分别，因为他们都是人。一位明智的和有良性的女子，可以比一名男子有成就。

佛陀指出，女士们，有一个很特别的责任：作为母亲把他们的子女带大成为好公民。这并不意味着丈夫没有角色可扮演。他们有，但如果说到性格的发展和道德的建设，母亲扮演一个更大的角色。你肯定听过这句话：“那双轻推着摇篮的手，主宰着整个世界。”

一般来说，在非常年幼时，儿童会比较接近他们的母亲并多数从母亲那儿学习东西。在大概有百分之九十九点九的情况下，这是事实。我们可以说儿童的母亲是他们的第一位老师。

因此，佛陀对待妇女的态度是开放和慈悲的。

今天我想讨论一个经文，这是讲佛陀教导一位叫毗舍佉的贞妇信徒。在这经里，佛陀向毗舍佉说道能帮助女士在此世和来世有进展的八特质。

佛陀说：

“藉由勤勉、照顾仆人、敬爱丈夫与守护他的财产”

“藉由正信(saddha)、持戒(sila)、布施(caga)与智慧(panna)”

第一组的四特质，有利于此世生活的进展而第二组的四特质，有利于来世生活的进展。

另一种说法，就是首四特质，是为世俗人间的进展，而另四特质，是为修行的进展。

当然，很多的这些特质，亦适用于男士，但佛陀特别提到妇女，因为当时他是向一名女子毗舍佉说法教。

我要在这里强调的是，如果我们用印度社会超过两千五百年前的眼光看佛陀的话，明显的，佛陀不仅是公平对待妇女，而且是超越了他的年代。

1. 勤勉

佛陀所提到的是妇女在家中和外头所做的工作。

在昔日，并没有什么大工业。农业比较普遍，但也有工业，主要是家庭手工业。其实，女士做的产品都非常细腻和精密。举例来说，丝绸生产后以丝绸之路运输出去。

虽然当时工业规模都很小，女士必须对她工作的各个领域有很好的了解。

2. 照顾仆人

如果一位女士有仆人或员工为她工作，她必须熟悉每个下属的能力。她必须不仅有智慧，也要有观察能力。

她还必须能够把工作适当交给员工去做。

(第15页续)

