

The Path of Joy

ISSUE 31

JUL-SEP 2009

the
Buddhist
Library

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



Vesak Day this year was celebrated in Singapore on Saturday, 9 May 2009.

'**Vesak**' or '**Vaisakha**' is actually the name of the 5th month of the Indian calendar.

'**Vaisakha**' is the Sanskrit term whereas '**Vesak**' is the Sinhalese word.

Sri Lankan Buddhist leaders took a special active part in the effort to declare Vesak Day a national holiday in many countries. They were also instrumental in creating the 5-coloured Buddhist flag.

It's mainly because of these things that the Sri Lankan word '**Vesak**' came to be used more extensively than '**Vaisakha**'. Besides, '**Vesak**' is easier to pronounce than '**Vaisakha**'.

As Buddhists, we all know, or should know, that on Vesak Day, we celebrate 3 important events – the birth of Prince Siddhartha at Lumbini, his enlightenment at Bodhi Gaya when he became the Buddha and his passing away at Kusinara.

But, in a way, we can also say that, by celebrating Vesak Day, we're, in essence, celebrating the greatness of the Buddha as a person and a unique teacher.

And because the Buddha taught the Dharma to us, we realise that we, ordinary human beings, also possess the potential for greatness in our own Buddha nature, and, like him, we can also become enlightened if we're able to practise what he taught.

Bhante Says

"What are the qualities of a great and wise person?"

This brings me to a question which was directly addressed to the Buddha by a prominent Brahmin.

"What are the qualities of a great and wise person?"

Vassakara was a highly respected counsellor to King Bimbisara of Magadha (present day Bihar state). Later, he also became counsellor to the King's son, King Ajatasattu.

To become a counsellor to a great king in India at that time was, of course, no small or easy matter.

This Vassakara used to visit the Buddha from time to time.

On one occasion, he came to see the Buddha at a temple built by King Bimbisara.

He greeted the Buddha in the usual fashion and said –

"Master Gotama, we, Brahmins, have certain criteria to decide whether a person is great and wise or not."

The 1st quality of a great and wise man, according to Brahmin society, is that he understands something as soon as it is uttered.

The 2nd quality is a good memory.

The 3rd quality is that he's well equipped in skills and diligent in business including household duties.

The 4th and last quality is that a great and wise person is resourceful and capable of investigating things based on available information."

Then he added –

“Do you accept these 4 qualities of a great and wise person? If you think that I am worthy of agreement, Master Gotama, you may agree with me. If you think I am worthy of criticism, then criticise me.”

MICA (P) 011/10/2008

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The Buddha refused to be lured into this challenge. He neither agreed with nor criticised Vassakara.

And, most notably, the Buddha did not try to convince or convert the Brahmin.

Instead, the Buddha simply offered his own list of 4 qualities of a great and wise person.

The first quality of a great and wise person, according to the Buddha, is that he *'practises for the welfare and happiness of many people and has established many people in the noble method, namely, the rightness of what is admirable, the rightness of what is skillful.'*

Thus, a great and wise person should be able to give up valuable things like time, property and comfort for the benefit of others, wherever necessary.

In other words, he should be an utterly selfless person.

Now, if we compare this quality with the 1st quality mentioned by Vassakara, the difference stands out very starkly.

A person can remember many things very well, even have a photographic memory, yet he or she may still be a selfish person.

From the Buddha's point of view, this is not a very great and wise person.

For ordinary people like us, I'm quite sure we cannot give up everything. But that does not mean that we should not try to develop this quality to some degree.

For example, whenever necessary, when people are suffering, say, from the tsunami or an earthquake, we should be able to offer them something that we have which they need.

The Buddha's 2nd criterion is that a great and wise person must be the master of his own thoughts. He *'thinks any thought he wants to think, and doesn't think any thought he doesn't want to think.'*

Ordinary people like us do not have the ability to see whether our thoughts are right or wrong, beneficial or harmful, let alone control their coming and going. We just go along with our thoughts like seaweeds floating in the sea.

Nevertheless, as Buddhists, we should at least try to develop this quality to some degree, even if it's not to a high level. Otherwise, we cannot call ourselves *'Buddhists'*.

The Buddha's 3rd criterion of a great and wise person is that he *'attains 4 jhanas that are heightened mental states, pleasant abidings in the here-and-now.'*

In other words, a great and wise person should be able to have a very high level of concentration. Whatever things he wants to do, whatever level of concentration is required to do those things, that person possesses them. His mind is absolutely steady, extremely calm, tranquil, firm and unshaken.

The 4th and final criterion of a great and wise person, according to the Buddha, is that he has attained *nibbana* by the complete destruction of all defilements.

Greed, attachment and ignorance are not present in such a great and wise person's mind. He's mentally, verbally and physically pure, having attained liberation from suffering.

As usual, the Buddha's teaching is systematic and logical, culminating with the most important quality of a great and wise person.

If we look at Vassakara's list, we can see that a person may have all the 4 great qualities he mentioned but mental defilements may still infect the person's mind.

How can such a person be considered great and wise?

Having heard the Buddha's explanation, the Brahmin finally declared –

'It's amazing, Master Gotama, and astounding, how well that has been said by Master Gotama. And I hold Master Gotama to be endowed with these same 4 qualities.'

What we ourselves can say from reading this sutra is that the Brahmin's criteria of a great and wise person are more secular than spiritual in nature.

In this world, there are many people – leaders of countries and big businesses – who can satisfy this test of greatness.

On the other hand, the Buddha's list describes a great spiritual personality. It is more concerned with a person whose greatness and wisdom far surpass that of a worldly or secular person.

And whose qualities of greatness are infinitely more enduring and lasting.

Sometimes, we hear people criticising Buddhism as a religion meant only for simple-minded or superstitious people, not for intelligent or educated people.

This sutra shows that their opinion is entirely baseless and only betrays their own ignorance.

In fact, the Buddha had many highly educated and capable followers.

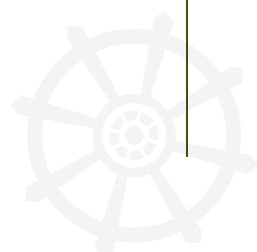
They asked him many complicated questions and he taught them the Dharma including profound principles like emptiness and dependent origination in clear, consistent, everyday language which can be understood by ordinary people like you and me.

A great man and wise man indeed.

Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Adviser
Buddhist Library

Acknowledgement – Some quotations have been extracted or adapted from the translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

“And, most notably the Buddha did not try to convince or convert the Brahmin.”



[editorial]

It's about Time – the Permanence of Now

*'Yesterday is a cancelled cheque.
Tomorrow is a promissory note.
Today is the only cash you have.
Spend it wisely.'*
Anonymous

In this special multi-coloured issue, we bring you highlights of BL's celebration of Vesak Day on 9 May 2009.

In the traditional account of the Buddha's life, we're told that Prince Siddhartha lived a life of absolute abundance in the palace.

Then, one day, in spite of all his father's precautions, the young prince witnessed suffering and death for the first time.

The experience shocked him into realising that life is fragile and finite and triggered his search for answers which led to his enlightenment.

Indeed, humans have always feared mortality and death.

Unable to find permanence on earth, we do the next best things. Live forever on earth vicariously through our heirs - hence, our preference for sons. And seek permanence in the hereafter.

And so religion was born.



We find solace in believing that although our bodies must decay and die, our souls aren't perishable and can go on in paradise forever.

Buddhism, however, offers a different solution to suffering.

On the night he became enlightened, Prince Siddhartha discovered that the fundamental cause of suffering is ignorance which manifests in the various forms of attachment, aversion and delusion.

Hankering for immortality is one form of attachment. Fear of death is an aversion. And believing in a permanent, unchanging soul that lives forever in heavenly bliss after death is a delusion.

The Argentinian novelist, Jorge Luis Borges, wrote a short story about a man who searches for immortality. Having finally found the City of the Immortals, he soon realises the limitations of permanent existence. And struggles to become mortal again.

The story is pure fiction, of course, but it illustrates a valid point.

What good is immortality if we retain attachment, aversion and delusion in our mindstreams?

Wouldn't we become somewhat like the Greek gods who plotted and fought one another endlessly? Heaven can turn to hell so easily with a monkey mind.

The Buddha, instead, taught his followers to strive for wisdom. Wisdom is the realisation of the nature of reality.

To be wise, according to Buddhism, we need to avoid duality – likes and dislikes, attachment and aversion, heaven and hell and so on. For, without the one, the other cannot exist.



As Nagarjuna says –

Nothing of samsara is different from nirvana, nothing of nirvana is different from samsara. That which is the limit of nirvana is also the limit of samsara; there is not the slightest difference between the two.'

In other words, samsara and nirvana are not 2 different places or realms. Hence, there's no need to die in order to attain nirvana.

It's said that when ordinary human beings like us look at the world, we experience samsara. But when Buddhas and bodhisattvas look at the world, they see nirvana.

What this implies is that both the problem of *dukkha* or suffering and its solution lie nowhere else than in our own minds.

"Bhikkhus, I don't know of any other single thing so conducive to such misery as this undeveloped, unpractised mind. The undeveloped mind is indeed conducive to much misery.

'Bhikkhus, I don't know of any other single thing so conducive to such benefit as this developed, practised mind. The developed mind is indeed conducive to much benefit.'

(Anguttura Nikaya)



And so, to be free from suffering is not to seek permanence in heaven but to realise that permanence is the mirror image of impermanence. Right here on earth.

'Observing the impermanence, the changing nature, the fading and the ending of body, feeling, perception, mental activities and consciousness, one knows that: "Now, as well as formerly, body, feelings, perception, mental activities and consciousness are impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change".

So, seeing in this way – as it really is, by perfect realisation – one abandons grief, suffering, distress and despair.

Leaving this, one is untroubled; untroubled, one abides in well-being, abiding in well-being, one is called 'truly calmed.'

(Samyutta Nikaya)

In his latest book – *'Money Sex War Karma – Notes for a Buddhist Revolution'* David Loy puts it this way-

'Time and eternity are not incompatible. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin. The eternal life we desire we already experience right now. We just need to realise the true nature of time.'

Loy gives a simple analogy.

To measure the speed of an ocean current passing an island, we need to place an instrument in the water at that island. In other words, *'a fixed, unmoving perspective is needed.'*

Would we be able to do the same from a small dinghy moving along with and at the same speed as the current? Obviously not.

'Again it's the same with time. The fixed island is like our sense of self. The current is time, and we suffer because we fear that sooner or later our own current will stop. But the notion that there is something which doesn't move is a delusion, a mental-construction.'

In his book, Loy explores how Buddhism can contribute towards a resolution of the pressing problems facing the world today. War, terrorism, global warming and genetic engineering. And, on an individual level, how it can explain, and help us to resolve, our fixation with sex, money and fame.

Loy concludes that not only does Buddhism have a role to play, it has a unique one.

Because, unlike other religions, Buddhism teaches that ignorance (not sin) enslaves. And that wisdom (not obeisance) liberates.

As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor

'Hankering for immortality is one form of attachment. Fear of death is an aversion. And believing in a permanent, unchanging soul that lives forever in heavenly bliss after death is a delusion.'



Meditation Seminar
led by Venerable
Henepola
Gunaratana at BL
on 27 February
and 21 March 2009

Buddhist.

Library Event



Photo credit : Leon



[book review]

Finding the Still Point: A Beginner's Guide to Zen Meditation

Written by John Daido Looi
Published by Shambhala Publications Inc
(2007)

(107 pages with a CD of guided instructions)

Reviewed by Tjiep Hoe

This is a little gem of a book, only 107 half-size pages long, with large text and pictures. It is probably one of the least intimidating and easiest to read books on Zen and Zen meditation. You can read it in one or two sittings, and then refer to relevant parts when you start to practise.

John Daido Looi is an esteemed Zen teacher, the author of several other books who also conducts (or has conducted) meditation and other classes. If a basic meditation course is kindergarten or primary school level, this book is pre-school. Exactly what I need!

Many people who attend meditation classes or retreats don't have even the most basic knowledge. This book attempts to remedy this problem.

It covers topics like *Positioning the body, Centering the body, Head and Hands, Breathing* etc - all the questions that a beginning meditator wants to know but is afraid to ask, or doesn't even know to ask!

If this book is made a pre-requisite of meditation classes and retreats, it would certainly save a lot of time (and probably grief to the teacher) especially in the first few days.

The book starts by describing *zazen*, then goes on to the practical aspects of meditation and then, in part 2, gives a brief Dharma discourse, from a Zen perspective.

It also has a *Glossary* of terms used in the book and a *Suggested Reading List* for those who are interested or have progressed enough to go further. The reading list is especially useful because there is a one-paragraph description of each book in the list.

All in all, this manual feels like a textbook, structured and logical.

The one shortcoming is that it's not a "*stand alone*" text because it does not have a timetable or a set of goals and milestones in our development.

This makes it an ideal companion if one already has a teacher or is attending a meditation course.

The accompanying CD rounds off the teachings in the book very nicely by clarifying the concepts and ideas first introduced in the book. The voice of the author is mellow and very comforting. There are even 2 practice sessions, one for 10 minutes and the other for 30 minutes. Starting and ending with a very nice bell.

I recommend this book very highly to all beginning meditators or those who always wanted to meditate but did not know how to start. Once you know the basics, there is no reason not to start right away. Start today, and do it everyday.

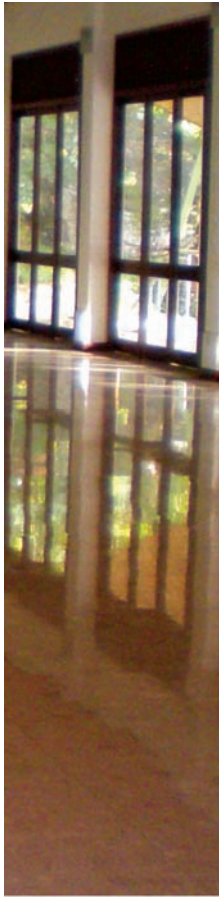
I end this review logically enough with the Concluding Verse which I find to be very meaningful. Meaningful enough, in fact, to merit reproducing below.

***'Let me respectfully remind you,
Life and death are of supreme importance.
Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost.
Each of us should strive to awaken.
Awaken! Take heed, do not squander your life.'***

(The Evening Gatha)

Film

Review



The Ageing and Death of Benjamin Button – a review of the movie 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button'

by Tiger

At Savathi, King Pasenadi of Kosala said to the Blessed One, "Venerable sir, is anyone who is born free from ageing and death?"

The Buddha replied –

"Great king, no one is born free from ageing and death.

Even those affluent khattiyas – rich, with great wealth and property, with abundant gold and silver, abundant treasures and commodities, abundant wealth and grain – because they have been born, are not free from ageing and death. Even those affluent Brahmins... affluent householders – rich... with abundant wealth and grain – because they have been born, are not free from ageing and death.

Even those monks who are arahants, whose taints are destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached their own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, and are completely liberated through final knowledge. Even for them, this body is subject to breaking up, subject to being laid down.

*'The beautiful chariots of kings wear out
This body too undergoes decay
But the Dhamma of the good does not decay
So the good proclaim along with the good.'*

[*Samyutta Nikaya, translated
by Bhikkhu Bodhi*]

True enough, no one can escape ageing or cheat death. At the most, with the advancement of the medical sciences today, you may delay, but not evade them altogether.

Ageing begins from the very moment we are born, and the more we celebrate our birthdays, the closer we are to death.

Who is Benjamin Button?

He is the main character in a very special film called 'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button', the winner of 3 academy awards.

He is born with an extremely weird disease. He comes into the world with a body of an old man in his 80's. But over the years, he becomes younger physically even as he ages mentally, the reverse of everyone else.

Struggling with his extraordinary condition, he finds it impossible to live together with his loved ones – his partner, Daisy, and their daughter, Caroline.

He 'enjoys' his youthful days towards the last few chapters of his life and eventually dies as a baby in his partner's arms.

Benjamin Button is not a hero. He is a normal person like anyone of us, gaining wisdom and insights throughout the years of various life experiences. He, like anyone of us, is unable to stop time.

According to the sutra above, 'no can ever escape ageing and death'. But what does 'aging and death' mean to Benjamin Button?

He does not experience the usual ageing process like we do. But for him, ageing nevertheless still happens 'inside' him.

In the film, Benjamin remarks to Daisy that he looks young only on the outside. Youthfulness is only a state of the mind. Given the maturity gained over the years, one would become more and more seasoned with life. Impermanence is one of the main characteristics of the world we live in, nothing in our fathom-long carcass can escape that.

It also seems that Benjamin is very much 'immune' to the process of dying and death. Well, perhaps it is because he spent most part of his 'childhood' life in a nursing home filled with a whole bunch of old folk who were at the doorstep of the end of their lives.

In the beginning, Benjamin thought that he was just one of them, but over the course of time, he felt that there's something he did not have in common with those folks. He was later convinced that he was not heading towards the destination (ageing and death).

Instead he gained more 'will' and 'energy' to live each day. The tragic death of Captain Mike in a battle with a German U-boat and the unusual appearance of a hummingbird in the middle of an ocean somehow changed his understanding of death.

Surrounded by death at every corner of his life, he was not very saddened by the demise of his long-lost biological father, and his foster-mother, Queenie. But I guess we don't really need a 'shower of death' for us to understand life and the inescapability of death. Certainly the contemplation of death meditation as taught by the Buddha does serve as a good tool to achieve that.

The unusual circumstance of Benjamin ageing backwards leaves a significant impact on the people around him.

...continued on page 12 >>>

Buddhist

Library Event

Vesak Day



9 May 2009



Photo credit : Yew Beng

Article

**Meditation Retreat at Paramita International
Meditation Center,
Kadugannawa, Sri Lanka
20 February 2009 – 28 February 2009**

by Shamla

After an initial shock that Colombo's Bandaranaike Airport was closed, we arrived safely there, met by the smiling face of Venerable Pamaratana.

Our drive to the centre took about 2 hours.

The Paramita International Meditation Center is truly a 5 star retreat centre set in a former tea plantation.

Squirrels, multi-coloured birds, lotus ponds, hibiscus, jasmine, chempaka and a host of other trees, some laden with bananas, jackfruit and rambutans, made the retreat garden look like a paradise.

All the yogis took the 8 precepts and whilst most did not take the evening meal, silence was unfortunately impossible to uphold.

The meditation master, *Ajahn Varadho*, of Scottish descent, was ordained in 1988 under Ajahn Sumedho.

He described the 2 types of meditation teachers. Hens that gather their chicks under their wings and lead them gently along. And ducks who tell their ducklings to go in a certain direction, leaving it up to them to follow. Or not.

Most of the time, Ajahn left us to flounder along and gave Dharma talks and meditative directions only in the evenings.

Here are some interesting snippets from the 5 day retreat.

Meditation Objects -

Breathing meditation. Look to the end of the breath. It serves as a reminder that we and all phenomena have an end.

Finger meditation. Feel the contact of a single finger. It's great for keeping one grounded in the here and now.

Mantra meditation. Using 'Buddho' as a prayer, a refuge and remembrance of a great man.

Ajahn Varadho's advice -

Simplicity is the key.

Impermanence.

All phenomena lack substance. Insight into the truth of impermanence is reinforced and leads to dispassion.

Non-self

This observation leads to the insight of non-self. We are not in control.

*'In the seeing there is just the seen,
In the hearing there is just the heard.'*

During the meditation, we may meet certain hindrances.

Boredom.

Boredom is normal when on retreat. It means one is building up energy which is usually depleted in the mundane world by distractions like the media.

But boredom may be also good in meditation. Just give it full concentration and make it an object of meditation.



Fear

We normally tend to look outside of ourselves in our mundane daily activities.

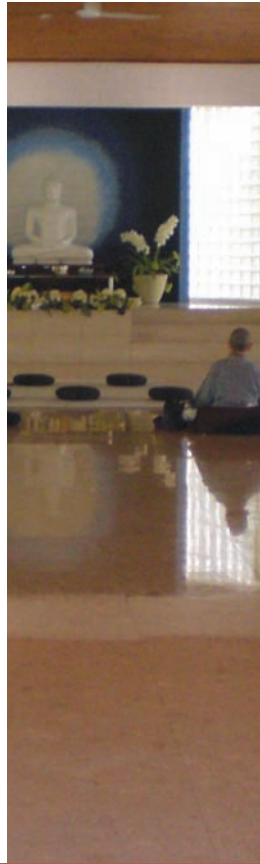
Meditation makes us see within. We may be shocked by what we see - defilements like anger, jealousy and greed.

Antidote

The antidote for fear and boredom and any phenomena that may arise in the mind while meditating is meditation on loving kindness.

It reminded me of what Ajahn Brahmavamso said -

'The door to my heart is open to whatever.'



Wandering Mind

Ajahn Varadho and Bhante Dhammaratana quoted from the *Bhaddekaratta Sutta* -

*'Let not a person revive the past
Or on the future build his hopes...
Instead with insight, let him see
Each presently arisen state'*

The food at the retreat was great. For those anxious that their stomachs would be unable to handle a week of Sri Lankan fare, the kitchen team cooked *bee hoon* and stir fried vegetables every day.



Venerable Vannaratanna chanted the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* every morning, which set a lovely tone for the day.

Despite the fact that we ate and slept less, we all felt much more energetic at the end.

The retreat ended with a moving Bodhi Tree *puja* at the Colombo temple

Bhante B Dhammaratana led the *puja*. He then shared with us the history of the tree, dating back over 2,000 years. Its origin can be traced back to the original tree at Bodh Gaya, India.

The next retreat will be held on Friday, 18 September 2009. If you are interested, please look out for notices by the Buddhist Library or check out the Paramaita International Meditation Center's website at www.paramitaibc.org



Dharma Event

Wheelchairs, crutches and the like donated to Sri Lankan sick and disabled people by BL and distributed on 15 February 2009 at Bellanwila Mahavihara, in the presence of Mrs Anuma Fonseka, wife of the Sri Lankan Army's Commander-in-Chief. Thanks to Tan Yew Beng, Hon. Sec. of BRS for organising the drive.



Photo credit : Yew Beng

...continued from page 7

As a phrase in the movie trailer says – *'Life can only be understood backward, it must be lived forward.'*

This surely mirrors the fact that every single experience in our life becomes our real teacher.

Daisy did earnestly hope to lead a normal life with Benjamin till the end, but eventually realised that she was too old for Benjamin who came back to meet her with a much younger appearance.

Similarly in our daily lives, we should learn how to let bygones be bygones. If Daisy had chosen to cling on to her *'good-old-days'* with Benjamin, both would have suffered.

Grasping at the past does not help us to grow. It only retards us from gaining wisdom in understanding life. We tend to grasp at a lot of things in our lives from the food we eat to various social achievements in society.

Once, Captain Mike told Benjamin, *"You can be as mad as a mad dog at the way things went. You could swear, curse the fates, but when it comes to the end, you have to let go."*

In the *Mahadukkhakkhandha Sutta*, the Buddha rightly showed how attachment to sensual pleasures, form and feelings could lead to the downfall of many, and hence the removal or abandonment of desire and lust towards them would lead to the escape of it.

Likewise, a person, whose beauty we once admired the most, being consumed by age and time, would then appear crooked, wrinkled, and at the end remain just a foul corpse lying lifeless.

But even though in the case of Benjamin whose ageing process works in reverse, the conditionality of the whole thing works the same. He could not stop himself from growing younger. No one is able to live a normal life with him till the end. Reaching the stage of a pre-teen just hitting puberty, Benjamin could not even escape dementia which robbed him of his memory.

In the movie, Benjamin remarked to Daisy, *'I was thinking how nothing lasts, and what a shame that is.'*

To which she replied, *"Some things last."*

As the Buddha explained in the opening sutra, nothing in this world, as long as they are conditioned, can escape change and decay.

But something does last, something which can stand the course of time. It is the everlasting Buddha-Dhamma that resonates with the timeless message –

'All conditioned things are subject to decay...'



Buddhist.

Library Event

Dharma talk by Venerable Thubten Chodron at BL on 4 April 2009
"Transforming Adversity into Joy and Courage"



【编辑说】

是时候了——当下最重要

“昨日是已付支票。明日是一张本票。今日是你唯一拥有的现金。善用它吧！”——匿名

这一期的色彩丰富，我们将为您报道有关2009年5月8日的卫塞节节庆消息。

在佛陀的本生故事记载，悉达多太子自幼在宫中过着无忧无虑的日子。

尽管国王无微不至的照顾，年轻的太子还是首次看到了苦痛和死亡。

他感到惊恐，深深感悟生命的脆弱及有限，这促使他去寻找真理，直至最后觉悟人生。

的确，人生自古谁不为生命的有限及死亡而感到不安。

无法在这世上常住不灭，只好将期望放在下一代，生儿子成了延续自我的香火，以达长存世间的意义。

于是，宗教应运而生。

我们清楚身体必将毁坏与灭亡，为了安慰自己，我们相信灵魂永恒不灭，并且可以安住天堂。

然而，佛教提供不一样的解决方法。

悉达多太子觉悟的那一晚，他发现痛苦的根源来自无知，这个无知可以导致不同形式的执著、憎恨和错觉的显现。

渴望永生是一种执著。害怕死亡是憎恨。相信有永恒不灭的灵魂可以长存天界，是一种错觉。

阿根廷小说家豪·路·博尔赫斯（Jorge Luis Borges）在其短篇小说里写道，有一个男子四处寻觅永恒的生命，终于找到了不死之城，但他却惊觉永生的不美满之处，致使他后来决定回归终须一死的凡人身份。

那故事当然是虚构的，但却表达了一个重要的观点。

若心存贪嗔痴，永生有何益？

我们是否会变成如希腊神明一般勾心斗角，无止尽地斗争？如此不安稳的心，易把天堂化为地狱。

佛陀教导信徒培养智慧。智慧是对现实本质的认知。

佛教所指的智慧是避免落入二元对立——喜欢和不喜欢、执著和憎恨、天堂和地狱等。因为，此生故彼生，此灭故彼灭。

正如龙树尊者所言：

“无娑婆所之与涅槃有异，无涅槃所之与娑婆有异。涅槃之限也即娑婆之限；两者毫无分别。”

换句话说，娑婆和涅槃并非两个不同的地方或途径，因此无需等待灭亡才能进入涅槃。



可以这么说，我们凡夫看世间，感受到的是娑婆世界，但诸佛菩萨看世间，看到的却是涅槃的境界。

这意味着痛苦的问题及解决方法都在我们的自心当中显现。

“比丘，我不知有何比此未修炼之心更能助长苦的因。未修持之心真即众苦的因。”

“比丘，我不知有何比此已修炼之心更能助长利益的因。已修持之心真即众利的因。”

增支部

因此，想要当下脱离痛苦，并非通过追求天堂的永生，而是了悟到永恒是无常的镜中影像。

‘观察无常，变化的本质，与色受想行识的退去与终止，您将有所领悟：“如现在与过去，色受想行识即无常、苦，与善变。”

因如是观 - 如真实是，因圆满领悟 - 您将舍离悲伤、痛苦、苦恼与绝望。

舍离此，您将无有烦恼；无有烦恼，您将安住于安康，安住安康者，能称“真正平静者”。

相应部

在David Loy的新书《Money Sex War Karma - Notes for a Buddhist Revolution》里，他如此写道：

“时间和永恒并非不相容。其实，它们是殊途同归。我们只需了解时间的本来面目，则现在已经在体验所渴望的永生了。”

Loy提供一个简单的比喻。

若要测量海流擦身岛屿的速度，我们必须将测量器放置在该地的海内。换言之，我们需要一个“固定、不动摇的视角。”

如果坐在一个小船上随流移动能办到吗？很显然的，没办法。

“时间也一样。固定不动的岛屿就像我们的自我。海流是时间，我们害怕自己的海流总有一天会静止，因此感到痛苦。其实，认为有东西可以不变是一种错觉，它是一种心理的建设而已。”

书中探讨，在今日这个面对诸多棘手问题的世界里，佛教可以帮助解决战争、恐怖主义、全球气候变暖及基因工程等问题。在个人层面，佛教提供解释，并帮助我们解决对性、金钱和名誉的执著。

Loy总结说，佛教在此，背负着独特的责任。

因为，和别的宗教不同的是，佛教说无知（而非罪过）让我们变成奴隶。智慧（而非臣服）可以让我们获得解脱。

和往常一样，祝您阅读愉快。

Chwee Beng

编辑



极乐之程

ISSUE 31
JUL-SEP 2009

the
Buddhist
Library

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



法师的话

“伟大智者具备什么素质？”

今年新加坡在5月9日欢庆卫塞节。

“Vesak”或“Vaisakha”在印度年历指的是5月份。

“Vesak”是梵语，而“Vaisakha”是僧伽罗语。

卫塞节能成为许多国家的公共假日，积极的斯里兰卡佛教领袖是幕后的功臣。他们也是五色佛旗的推动者。

因此，斯里兰卡字“Vesak”反而比“Vaisakha”更广泛被采用。当然，“Vesak”比“Vaisakha”的拼音更简易，这也是原因之一。

身为佛教徒。我们知道卫塞节是为了庆祝3个重要的事件——悉达多太子在蓝毗尼园的诞生、他在菩提伽耶觉悟成佛，以及他在拘尸那罗入灭。

然而，我们也可以这么说吧，通过庆祝卫塞节，本质上就是在庆祝佛陀本人及他作为我们的根本老师的伟大。

因为佛陀向我们传授佛法，让我们认识到所有人皆具佛性，如果依法修行，也可以和他一样觉悟成佛。

这让我想起婆罗门向佛陀所提出的问题。

“伟大智者具备什么素质？”

迦舍是摩竭陀国（现今印度的比哈尔邦）频婆娑罗王受人尊重的大臣，他后来也成为阿阇世王的大臣。

在当时的印度，能成为伟大国王的大臣，的确不是件易事。

迦舍时常拜访佛陀。

有一次，他到频婆娑罗王为佛陀而建设的寺院参见佛陀。

他一如往常向佛陀问讯后便发问：

“世尊乔达摩，我们婆罗门会以一些条件判断一个人是否称得上是伟大及有智慧。

根据婆罗门社会，伟人的第一个素质，是当对方一开口，他便能马上明白所言何物。

第二个素质是良好的记忆。

第三个素质是通晓各种技能，而且办事勤奋，包括家务事。

第四个素质是必须资源丰富，并有能力基于现有的资料进行调查。”

然后，他又补充：

“您接受这四个素质是伟人的看法吗？世尊乔达摩，如果您赞同，敬请告知。如果不赞同，也敬请给予批评。”

佛陀不想回应，因为他既不赞同也不想批评迦舍。

最明显的是，佛陀没有尝试说服或改变婆罗门。

佛陀改而以自己所知的4个素质解释。

根据佛陀的说法，伟人的第一个素质是必须为了他人的利益与幸福而努力不懈，引导他人过着高尚的生活方式，即追求正确的东西，以及进行正确的行为。

因此，一个伟大的人，只要有需要，随时可以为利益他人而牺牲自己宝贵的时间和财产。

换句话说，它应该是一个绝对无私的人。

现在，如果我们将这第一个素质与之前迦舍所提及的相比，会发现是截然不同的。

一个人可以拥有超强的记忆，但他也可能同时是个自私的人。

从佛陀的视角，那称不上是伟大的人。

我相信像我们这些平凡人，是无法割舍所有东西。但这并不代表我们无法尽力培养这样的素质。

例如，有人因受海啸或地震之难，需要帮忙的时候，我们可以将自己拥有的东西，配合他们的需求拿出来帮他们。

佛陀所提出的第二个条件是，一个伟人应该是能掌控自己念头的人。他可以做到“想自己要的东西，可以不想自己不要的东西。”

我们平凡人没有能力分别自己的念头是否正确或好坏，更别想能够控制它的来去。我们只是随着念头浮动，好像海藻随流飘动。

不过，我们身为佛教徒，至少应该尽力培养这个素质，即使程度不高也聊胜于无。否则，我们就没资格说自己是佛教徒。

佛陀提出的第三个素质是伟人必须证得四禅天，从而提升精神状态，安住于当下的喜乐。

换句话说，一个伟人必须拥有极高的专注力。不论他想做什么，不论需要什么程度的专注力，这个人都具备。他的心智绝对是稳定，非常冷静、平静、坚定及泰然自若。

佛陀透露，伟人的第四个素质是灭除一切烦恼，证得涅槃。此人心智当中已远离贪婪、执着与愚痴。他的身口意清净无染，解脱烦恼。

一如往常，佛陀的教法既有系统，也合逻辑，将伟人最重要的素质道出。

如果我们看迦舍所提出的四个素质，即使有人具备了他所提的所有素质，那人还是可能受到不净烦恼影响到心智。

此人如何称得上是伟大和有智慧的人？

听已世尊的解说，婆罗门最终表态：

“太好了，世尊乔达摩，太惊人了，世尊乔达摩所言甚是。我相信世尊乔达摩具备了相同的四个素质。”

读完此经，我们只能说，婆罗门对伟人的看法基本上属于比较世俗化，而非心灵方面的本质。

在这个世上，有许多国家的领袖及大企业家，都可以符合这些伟大的素质。

另一方面，佛陀所开出的条件指向伟大的心灵个性，比较在意这个人的伟大素质，必须超越世俗人，同时经得起时间的考验，更能持久。

有时，我们会听到有人批评佛教适合头脑简单或迷信的人，不适合有智慧或有学问的人。

本经让他们看到自己的批评毫无根据，同时让他们看起来自觉无知。

其实，佛陀的弟子当中，许多是有学问的能人。他们问佛陀很多复杂的问题，佛陀传授他们佛法，包括深奥的空性和缘起的法则，佛陀一贯地以深入浅出，平常易懂的语言解说，即使像我们这些平凡人也能听得懂。

他的确是个伟大的智者。

达摩拉达那法师
宗教顾问
佛教图书馆

[鸣谢：部分引文取自或源自坦尼沙罗比丘(Thanissaro Bhikkhu)的英译本]

MICA (P) 011/10/2008

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