

## The Buddha's Criteria of Close Friendship

MICA (P) 003/10/2009

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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](mailto:joyeditor@gmail.com)  
Fax 67417689  
Telephone 67468435 BL's website: <http://buddhlib.org.sg>  
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Today, I want to discuss friendship in Buddhism. Friendship is a very common concept which I need not define or explain in detail. All I need to say is that friendship is very important in life, even in a Buddhist temple.

But we often get complaints that Buddhist temples are weak in this regard. When people visit Buddhist temples, they may not even meet anyone to talk to. But, I believe, these days things may be changing for the better.

In the Buddha's time, there was a prince called Aalavaka. He had numerous close friends. The Buddha noticed this. Some people asked the Buddha, "Why does the Prince have so many friends? Why do they follow him everywhere?"

The Buddha did not give a direct answer.

One day the Prince visited the Buddha with more than 500 friends. He talked to the Buddha for a while, then left.

Before the Prince left, the Buddha asked the Prince the same question.

The Prince said that he observed 3 principles.

Firstly, he's always careful with his words when he speaks. He will only utter pleasant and amicable words. This is because people want to hear pleasant words. It's not so important to them that the person they associate with is good or bad.

Secondly, if the Prince knows that people want certain things from him, he will, wherever possible, give them those gifts. He is always aware of the needs of the people.

Thirdly, the Prince does not behave as a member of the royal family. He treats his friends on an equal basis.

As we all know, friendship, like love, does not always run smoothly. Sometimes, even among good friends, there can be friction.

And so friendship can even be a cause of suffering or unhappiness.

This is because friendship, like other forms of relationships, involve expectations.

Just as teachers and parents expect their pupils and children to behave well and excel in studies, so too we expect our friends to behave in ways amenable to us.

So it's important to choose our friends wisely.

In a discourse found in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Buddha mentioned 4 ways to find people to associate with. But, of course, there can be many other ways.

This is an extremely important issue because we can safely say that the progress of our lives depends on the kind of people we associate with.

There are 2 kinds of progress in our lives – material and spiritual. Good friends are absolutely essential in both aspects.

The Buddha warned us to be cautious when we associate with people. But we should not misunderstand this to mean we should be too careful and not have any friends at all.

The meaning rather is that we should not be in a hurry to make decisions about people. We should take our time to see whether it's to our benefit and the other person's benefit to develop this relationship.

The Buddha also said that if we can't find the right people to associate with, it would be preferable to live alone.

Again, we should not take the message wrongly. It's not that the Buddha wanted us to be loners or live like ascetics and run away from society. The Buddha himself did not appreciate ascetic life very much.

But there's always a great danger of associating with the wrong people.

When we associate with the right people, it's like opening a path to happiness or heaven. But associating with the wrong people can be a path to hell or misery.

A tragic case reported in the Straits Times some months ago is a timely example of this.

2 teenagers leapt to their deaths from an HDB flat, believing that they would be reborn as *'slayers to kill demons and save the world'*. The Coroner who heard the inquest blamed the deaths on *'group identity and peer influence and, perhaps lack of maturity'*.

So mixing with the wrong people can have very serious consequences.

But nevertheless we should not suspect or condemn people just because we don't like their appearance or the way they behave or talk.

Out of compassion, we should try to live with all kinds of people.

By *'associating with people'*, the Buddha was referring to very close relationships, sharing thoughts and practices relating to material or spiritual progress.

We can work with people and, whenever possible, we can or should try to help them to improve their lives, without necessarily trying to convert them to Buddhism.

The Buddha suggested 4 criteria to apply to see whether people we meet should be accepted by us as good friends.

The 1st criterion is to leave aside traditional ways of thinking based on race and caste. In India, Brahmins were very particular about their companions. Their friends would only come from the Brahmin caste.

The Buddha was very much against this.

In the *Vasala Sutta* (*Vasala* means *low-caste*), the Buddha said that we cannot say anyone belongs to a low or high caste by birth. Everyone is equal at birth.

But we can indeed belong to a low or high caste by virtue of our actions. Moral behaviour is a very important criterion.

Today, people may not be very conscious of caste but they can certainly be very concerned about class.

The 2nd criterion is not to take the first encounter with, or appearance of, a person very seriously. Accept them as ordinary friends by all means but take our time to admit them as close friends.

Even if we know someone for a long time, we still can't come to a conclusion that they can be our close friends unless we have used our intelligence and power of observation.

The example given by the Buddha is something shining and beautiful like a gold plated object but which actually is made of brass.

We can use anger as a test. There are people who, on first encounter, appear friendly but after some time, we find that they get angry very easily and do nasty things, uttering harsh and vulgar words. Anger is the greatest weakness in people. Of course, we should not think that everyone who's angry is necessarily a bad person. But if the person does not do bad things even when angry, he's okay.

For instance, my father used to get angry at times. Then he used to cane us. When he came back from the office, and our mother complained about us – not doing homework but playing cricket – he punished us. But I have never heard him use even one bad word. He managed to control his anger and was a loving father.

The Buddha never got angry throughout his 45 years of teaching as an enlightened being. But sometimes, he showed displeasure at the conduct of certain people, including some of his disciples. They had so much pride and could not get the benefit of listening the Buddha's teachings. For that kind of disciple, the Buddha used the word *'tucha'* meaning *'empty'*.

In one case, a monk called Potila was well-versed in the Dharma and used to teach younger monks but never managed to attain any stage of spiritual progress. The Buddha called him *'Empty Potila'* because he never made any serious effort to make spiritual progress.

The 3rd criterion is associating with a person to try and evaluate that person's work after knowing him for some time. Is the person keen to achieve spiritual or worldly progress in a righteous way?

I can relate to you one example to illustrate this point..

One day, King Kosala was attending to the Buddha who was delivering a sermon.

At that time, a group of people passed by. They appeared to be ascetics.

The King suddenly got up, paid respect to them and came back to the Buddha.

The King then asked the Buddha, "*Venerable Sir, what do you think of those people? I myself think they have attained high spiritual progress. That's why I paid respect to them.*"

The Buddha replied, "*Your Majesty, I don't agree with you. We cannot come to a conclusion just because of people's outer appearance. They may be ascetic, walk slowly, talk softly or appear serene. But we should not come to the conclusion that they have made spiritual progress.*"

*We have to take time to evaluate them after associating with them and see whether associating with them can bring benefit or not.*"

The King then smiled and said, "*Venerable Sir, you are correct. They are my spies. I asked them to disguise themselves as ascetics to check on certain people because of certain incidents that have happened in this city.*"

And so we should not come to any conclusion about people just because we've met them once. Actually, even today, this is a very practical and relevant thing. We come across stories in the press about 'con-men' or even 'con-ladies' from time to time.

People can be very nice to others when they have hidden motives or agendas. In the past, police have even arrested 'con-monks'. Actually, these 'con-monks' are not genuine monks. Even if they have been ordained in the normal way, by trying to cheat people, they are not living the lives of monks.

As I usually tell others, monks are usually not so nice to people. When you meet monks on the roadside, they normally don't talk to you. But these con-monks approach you and are extraordinarily nice.

The Buddha's advice therefore is - *Don't come to any conclusion about anyone after the first encounter. Don't suspect. Don't condemn. Take your time.*

The 4th and last criterion is compatibility. Some people may be good and nice. Even so, we may not be able to associate with them closely if they are not compatible with us. There must be certain things in common like our ways of thinking, interests and the like.

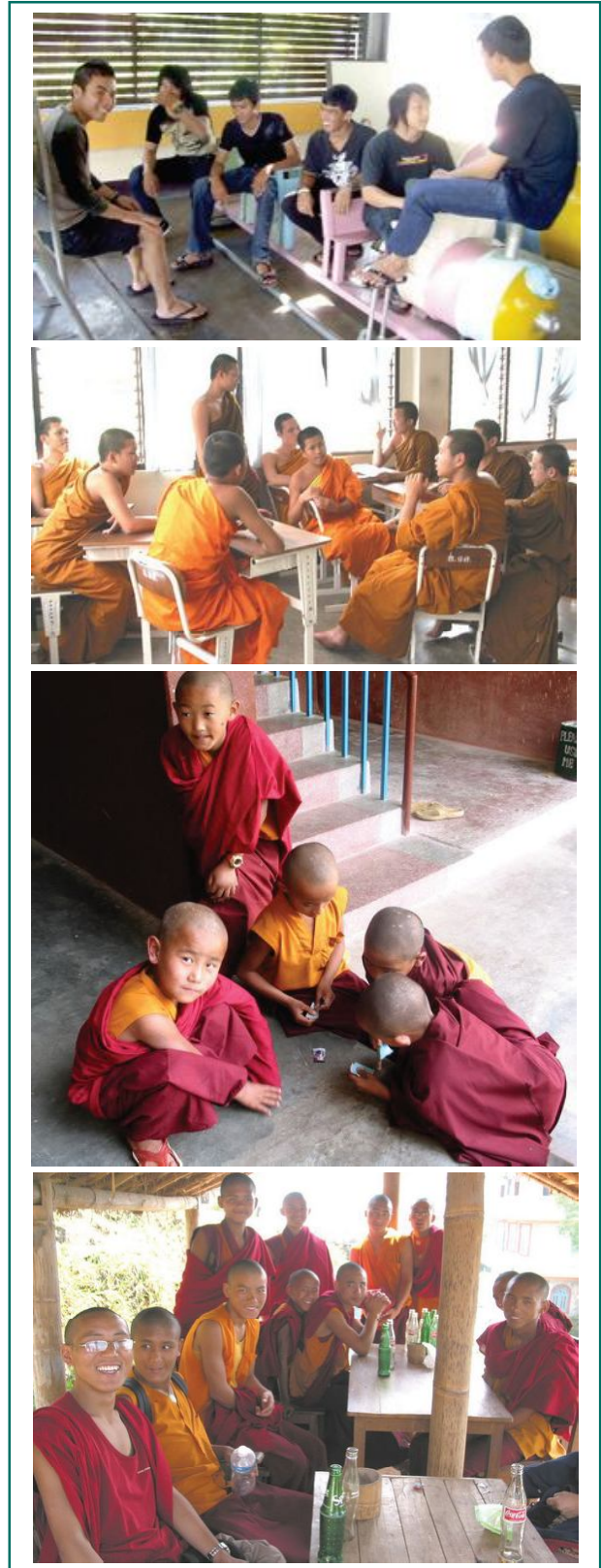
For example, you may want to listen to Dharma teachings but your companion, even though a good person, may not. As such, both of you will probably only remain casual friends and not develop a close relationship.

Thus if people have similar levels of wisdom - and by 'wisdom' I am not referring to academic achievements - it would be easier for them to be compatible as close friends. Having the same religion can make it easier to have a close relation -

ship but this, of course, does not mean that people of other religions cannot make good or close friends.

Finally, when we meet people of other religions, we have to be careful that they don't try to convert us. If they don't try to convert us, then we can consider them as good friends.

**Bhante B Dhammaratana**  
Religious Advisor  
Buddhist Library

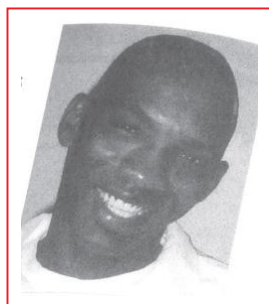
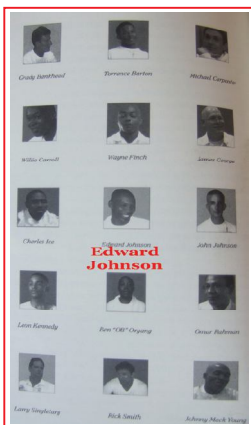


## Finding Freedom – In Prison or Out

***'Nobody asked you to convert from one religion to another organised religion. The conversion is rather the conversion of the mind from bondage to liberation, from ignorance to enlightenment, from cruelty to compassion, from misery to happiness.'***

**S N Goenka**

Edward Johnson, a tall black man in his 30s, is serving a life sentence in a maximum security prison in the USA. His crime is aiding and abetting a triple homicide.



Johnson has led a colourful life, to say the least.

As a teenager, he could not handle the responsibility, entrusted to him by his mother, of keeping the family together. He took refuge, instead, in alcohol and started selling cocaine.

Even in prison, Johnson subverted authority at every turn. He has, as a consequence, spent some 6 years in solitary confinement.

When his 6 year old daughter died in an accident, he resorted to gang fights in prison. In this way, he sought to prevent the reality of her death from sinking in, ever ready to jump in to save his mates.

Throughout all of this, Johnson lay the blame for his troubles on his father who was not around when he needed him.

Johnson was, in short, one very angry, bitter man.

Eventually, though, even Johnson realised that he needed to change.

And so he attended an anger management course. But that failed to work out.

He could not suppress his anger, as he needed to.

Then he heard about a 10 day vipassana course in the tradition of the Burmese meditation master, S N Goenka.

At the orientation, Johnson learned that *'vipassana directly addresses anger, not by suppressing it or masking it but, ironically, by allowing it to surface.'*

He hesitated. Wouldn't his pent-up anger overwhelm him during the meditation?

But the instructors assured him otherwise. He *'would be taught the skills and given the guidance he needed'*. At any rate, *'coming face to face with his anger was the precise healing work that he needed to do.'*

And so Johnson signed up.

During the retreat, he endured pain, itch, heat, irritation, urgency pangs and anger. But he soldiered on, even keeping his precepts.

At the vipassana graduation, he wept openly. And made a resolution to avoid fights. He would instead go *'in [his] cell and meditate and deal with [his] sensations'*.

Johnson knew more than anyone else what this change in behaviour entailed in a maximum security prison environment. It *'raised questions about his strength and manhood'* and left him *'open to challenge or attack.'*

But he persisted.

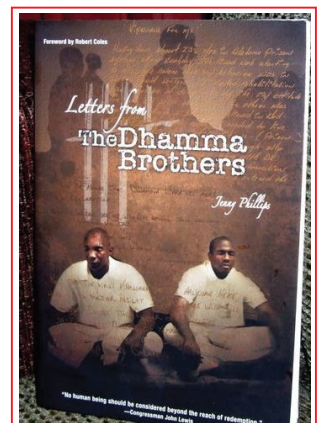
*'I refuse to let myself slip back into the past...It's a struggle. However, ...[it] will only make me stronger.'*

*'I tell people of my blessing everyday. It's hard to explain vipassana to a bunch of guys who have no clue. Nevertheless, I try. And they [are] interested because mainly of me. They ... see the change in me.'*

*'I refuse to let myself slip back into the past...It's a struggle. However, ...[it] will only make me stronger.'*

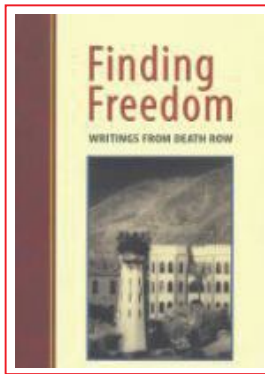
**Edward Johnson**

Johnson's incredible spiritual journey is one of 15 similar accounts related in *Letters from The Dhamma Brothers – Meditation Behind Bars*, a book written by Jenny Phillips, who initiated the meditation programme.



*Letters* is, of course, not the first book about Dharma practice and prisoners.

Some years ago, I read *Finding Freedom – Writings from Death Row* – by Jarvis Jay Masters, a prisoner in San Quentin Prison. Masters was convicted of the murder of a prison officer while in prison on a robbery conviction and sentenced to death.



In his book, Masters recounts how he got involved in Tibetan Buddhism and how the practice transformed him.

A turning point for Masters was the day Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, despite his advanced age and ill health, went to the prison to perform a Red Tara empowerment ceremony for him.

It must have been a strange sight indeed.

Melody Ermachild, a member of Masters' legal team, describes the scene –

***'I arrived ...to find the Rinpoche and his interpreter... waiting on a hard bench in the crowded hallway... The hallway was jammed with waiting visitors, smoking, talking loudly, babies crying. The Rinpoche sat quietly, telling the beads of his rosary with his brown wrinkled fingers, his bright eyes taking in everything around him. He was quite a sight, in his floor-length burgundy skirt and his grey topknot and grey frizzled beard ... Right in front of him, two young women ... cursed in vulgar street language, while the Rinpoche watched quietly.'***

After 2 hours, Jarvis was brought in.

***'... There are three ways to be: harmless, helpful, pure. Eventually you will understand your own pure nature ... It's all a function of mind. The way to practise is to see everyone as pure whether they hurt or help you - even animals, the guards...'***

**Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche**

He *'leaned towards the glass, his phone pressed to his ear; a dim light barely illuminating his face from above. His smiling and slightly worried eyes were clearly visible.'*

As is customary, Rinpoche gave a brief teaching.

***'...There are three ways to be: harmless, helpful, pure. Eventually you will understand your own pure nature ... It's all a function of mind. The way to practise is to see everyone as pure whether they hurt or help you - even animals, the guards. See their perfection. Hear every sound as perfection, as Tara talking . . . Every moment is a chance to be harmless, helpful and pure. Tara - you are her, completely perfect.'***

Here was Rinpoche telling Masters that even a convicted prisoner on Death Row has a pure nature and can be free - without leaving prison.

After the ceremony, an inmate asked Masters whether he was a Buddhist practitioner. Masters hesitated.

***'After eight years of incarceration, I felt a real fear of calling myself a Buddhist... I was especially afraid of being seen receiving an empowerment.'***

But the ceremony must have indeed empowered him somewhat. For he then replied.

***"Sure I am ...Aren't we all, in some way or another? Life ... may just put a piece of Buddha in us all."***

Unlike Johnson and Masters, we are free individuals. We have liberty to do anything and go anywhere we please. So we count ourselves infinitely more fortunate than they are.

But are we, really?

In his *Address to the Inmates* included at the end of *Letters*, S N Goenka speaks of a prison that engulfs us more pervasively and insidiously than any high wall and electric fence can.

***'(A) bigger prison is the prison of one's behaviour patterns. Deep inside everyone is a prisoner of his unwholesome behaviour patterns at the depth of his mind.'***

In a famous sutra, the Buddha declared –

***"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."***

Such indeed is the nature of the human mind.

Ultimately, therefore, there's no essential difference between Johnson's and Masters' predicaments and ours.

Johnson and Masters are imprisoned by the law, we, by our habitual tendencies.

Masters faces a death sentence imposed by the court for the crime of which he was convicted. For all of us, death is our unwelcome but certain destination, sooner or later.

Through their courage and commitment, these prisoners have succeeded in gaining a measure of freedom from the usual *'misery'* that accompanies incarceration.

Whereas we, living in a highly competitive society, also have to contend with our own quota of *'misery'*.

The fact that they are succeeding, in spite of all the obstacles they face, can inspire us to take a breather from our usual hectic schedules and re-assess our own spiritual commitments.

And hopefully, like them, inject more *'benefit'*, instead of *'misery'*, into our own lives.

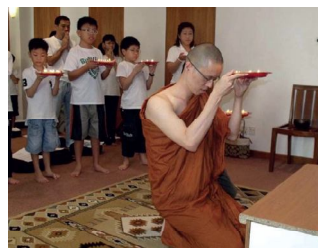
As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

**Chwee Beng**  
 Editor

## Children's Day

**BL Dharma Sunday School's Children's Day Celebration - September 27, 2009**  
 by Sandy Yong

Every Sunday, the teachers and students of BL's Sunday Dharma School assemble at the Dhamma Hall on the 1st floor before they proceed to their respective classrooms to attend their Dharma classes. These classes are attended by youngsters aged between 6 to 17 years old. While some are new, many students have been attending Sunday School since a young age and have grown up with BL, so to speak.



[Continued on page 13]



# BL Event

Photo Credit : Yew Beng



***Buddhist Library's Family Funfair 2009 held at Aljunied MRT Station Open Space on November 22 2009.***  
Venerable B Dhammaratana and BL's Executive Committee thank all staff, members, supporters and friends for organising, assisting and participating in the Funfair.



# Interview

## Venerable Sean Price

October 15 2009 at BL

Interviewed by Tjiep Hoe and Chwee Beng



Ven Sean Price (Gelong Tenzin Jamchen) is an English-born Tibetan Buddhist monk in his forties. Before he ordained, he studied engineering and later became a teacher in Japan for 4 years. As a monk, Ven Sean has served as translator for many prominent Tibetan masters. He currently translates rare Tibetan books.

This interview covers a wide range of issues spanning the entire spectrum of Buddhist traditions with an emphasis on Dharma practice and commonly encountered questions which may not usually get asked.

***Rites and rituals are a large part of Tibetan Buddhist practice but a preoccupation with them can be a problem. How can we prevent this from happening?***

Ritual practices, found in every Buddhist tradition, are basically an external support for an internal meditation. I agree completely that a preoccupation with them can be a problem because preoccupation negates their purpose.

Because of peer pressure, we may spend a lot of time on the external aspects and the inner aspect gets lost.

How do we prevent preoccupation? The only way is to really understand the meaning of the rituals. So education is very important.

*'Offering victory to opponents in politics and business doesn't mean you are not going to compete with them.'*

***An essential ingredient of Mahayana Buddhist practice is bodhicitta, the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Yet, the world cannot function without killing. Is the wish to end the suffering of all sentient beings then merely wishful thinking?***

The Buddha himself couldn't change the entire world. What we have to essentialise is ourselves and our practice within the world.

*Bodhicitta*, or the desire to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings, is an attitude we must have if we want to gain enlightenment. It's not an easy attitude to have but it can be achieved. We have to address our own practice. Do we want to become Buddha or not? That should be our focus.

The intent of the Buddha was the cause for his enlightenment and was the very fuel for his spiritual path. As such, it was not 'wishful thinking'. His aim was to stop the causes of suffering. (According to the Mahayana tradition) in lifetime after lifetime, the Buddha is still acting in various guises to eradicate suffering for all sentient beings.

So the intention is far more profound than just the temporal aim of preventing killing.

***The practice of tonglen (exchanging one's happiness for the suffering of others) has been criticised as alright for someone in a monastery but impractical in the real world. Is this a valid criticism? How can one offer victory to one's opponents in politics and business, for example?***

That's a very Singaporean question there. (Laughs).

This is a misunderstanding of the idea.

The idea of *tonglen* is a mental disposition or mindset. It does not mean you become a doormat. It's one's attitude towards others that changes.

By training our mind, we strive to change our attitude so that others' happiness becomes more important than our own. *Tonglen* is a way of going from being self-centred to empathising with others.

Some people find it easier than others (to have this attitude) so much so that they feel the suffering of others. They really want to do something about it.

Even politicians should be able to see what they can do to benefit others, especially their constituents. Then, should they lose their seats, they can accept the loss and protect their minds from disturbing emotions which bring about *dukkha* (suffering or unsatisfactoriness).

**What is guru devotion? Is there a danger that practitioners can be so devoted to their gurus that they become impervious to the plight of ordinary beings, chanting and meditating but doing little else to relieve suffering? How can this be prevented?**

Yeah, there is (this danger).

Guru devotion is a very profound teaching, far more profound than usually given credit for. In essence, it's seeing our spiritual teacher as Buddha.

Practically speaking, (guru devotion) is to practise our teacher's teachings.

This is not a meditation that we should simply jump into. Just because there's a Vajrayana master doesn't mean that they are the Buddha or should even be seen as one. This is something very personal and can only come through really understanding the Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings.

I wouldn't say that a person who's devoted to the guru but does not practise the teachings is a devotee but a fan. If they just run around with a smiley face and not really practising the teachings, they're not relieving their own suffering, let alone others.

**Can merit be multiplied if meritorious acts are performed on auspicious occasions? If so, how does it work?**

In Buddhism, we speak about doing positive acts on certain days, new moon, full moon, Vesak...

The Buddha often said to his monks that only the Buddha understands the subtle workings of karma.

In a sutra, the Buddha has said that on certain days, virtuous actions done on those days, the merit accruing increases. It's something we have to take as a leap of faith from the Buddha, based upon him being the valid teacher, having taught the Four Noble Truths based upon his experience.

It is said that the very nature of karma, whether good, bad or neutral, is to increase, like an apple seed that has the capacity to become thousands and millions of apple seeds.

**A verse in the Dhammapada says that karma is personal to an individual. 'No one can purify another'. Yet Buddhists of various traditions perform ceremonies to transfer merit to the deceased. How come?**

Here, there's the notion of doing a wholesome action, making positive merit, wrapping it in a bag and giving it to others. I don't think that happens.

Let's look at it scientifically. In a University of California experiment, there was a test where a hospital was divided into 2 parts.

The names of patients in one part were given to people of various religious traditions with a request to pray for them. It's said that over a course of time, the individuals who were in this ward and suffering from cancer (this was a blind test) had a significantly higher rate of recovery (than the patients for whom prayers were not offered).

Perhaps we are dealing with some kind of intention or healing energy. (But) I've no idea how it works.

**Given that animals generally are not able to survive for long when released out of their natural habitat, doesn't the practice of 'animal liberation' cause more suffering than it alleviates?**



I would suggest to potential animal liberators that just the releasing of these animals doesn't constitute the saving of the animals. If you don't have the slightest interest where you're going to put these animals, what's the point? You're just removing the abattoir from Lot A to Lot B and you become directly involved.

Of course, we can't keep animals from dying. That's part of samsara. But the intention to liberate should go hand in hand with common sense.

We should truly understand the meaning of liberation and release animals in an appropriate place where they can neither be harmed or do harm.

**In Vajrayana Buddhism (in contrast to other Buddhist traditions) it is said that that Buddhahood can be attained in a single lifetime. What precisely in Vajrayana practice makes this possible and how?**

I don't know. (Laughs).

Most Vajrayana masters would tell you, "Attain enlightenment in a single lifetime? Forget it."

But is it possible? Yes, it's possible.

Like in any Buddhist activity, it requires a thorough understanding, contemplation, practical application and meditation.

***The Japanese Pure Land tradition discourages 'own power' practices like meditation as futile. Enlightenment is attainable only when we rely on the 'other power' of Amitabha Buddha. How can this be reconciled with Pure Land practice in Tibetan Buddhism which seems to co-exist with meditation and other practices?***

Essentially, the source of the Pure Land teachings in all traditions – Japanese, Chinese and Tibetan – is the same. The source is the Mahayana sutras of the Pure Land.

There are 4 causes for one to immediately go to Pure Land (after death). Bringing to mind Amitabha Buddha, reciting his name, acquiring merit and meditating on the Pure Land. That was Amitabha Buddha's promise.

The 'other power' of Amitabha Buddha does not indicate that we are powerless. For the practice to work, it's like shaking hands, it requires 2 hands to work. We have to recite Amitabha Buddha's name, right?

'Prayers' has a Christian connotation of salvation. In most Tibetan prayers, a different translation is used. 'Praises' is better. It has the sense of bringing to mind, being inspired. There's no notion of salvation.

In the Tibetan tradition, the notion of familiarity, doing something again and again, comes up.

I lived in Japan for 4 years. I knew a number of priests. The laity would just simply recite Amitabha Buddha's name and that was it. They would go to the temple occasionally, light some incense. Amitabha Buddha became like a theistic figure.

***It's not just reciting Amitabha Buddha's name in a parrot-like fashion? You have to have the attitude of bodhicitta and mindfulness, right?***

I'm not going to say, you have to. But of course, if you can be mindful, that's the best. Amitabha Buddha's promise is that anyone who recites his name would be lifted up to his Pure Land. But the person has to recite it a lot. And not just like "Coca Cola, Coca Cola..." but with understanding.

From Amitabha Buddha's side, there needs to be this connection.

And from the disciple's side, it's best to have a motivation of *bodhicitta*. But for a person who does not have education, they have a better chance of going to the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha by reciting the name rather than just intellectualising it.

***Do we question too much?***

But it's useful to have a sceptical approach. The Buddha himself mentioned that monastics and wise ones analyse the teachings like a goldsmith analyses gold.

In the same way, we should analyse his teachings and if we find it useful, take it up. So the Buddha himself has given us permission to analyse his teachings.

But we should be careful not to have our own agenda or a stubborn outlook that makes it difficult to practise the Dharma.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama often mentions, we need 'faith through reason', then, it becomes stable.

***Why do lay people prostrate to Buddhist monks? We know it is out of respect but what is the basis for this respect?***

The basis is that the person we prostrate to holds more precepts than a lay person.

'Sangha' signifies someone who has some experience of the cessation of *dukkha*, the latter 2 of the 4 Noble Truths. Lay people can also constitute the Sangha.

If we have 4 fully ordained monastics, male or female, together, the merit of that group is said to be equal to an individual who has the experience of the truth of the cessation of suffering. Bearing this in mind, in Tibet, they would ask 4 monastics to recite prayers in their house.

So, in answer to the question why people prostrate to monks, they do so (i) out of respect for the Sangha (ii) for the amount of vows they hold (iii) for their devotion and practical application of the spiritual path (because) the monastics are supposed to embody the entirety of the spiritual path.

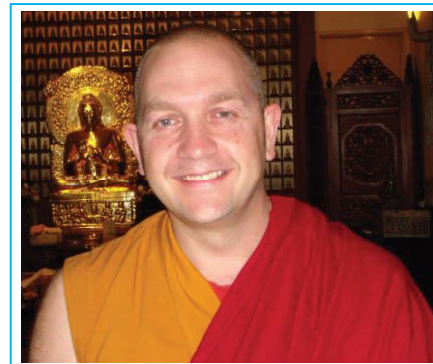
***When explaining prostration and other Buddhist practices to children, is punishment (or even the threat of punishment) ever an appropriate method?***

There's a lot of debate now in the UK about punishing children.

Nowadays, in the UK and the USA, children are out of control. (There's) no discipline at all in the schools.

But when I see my nephews and nieces and how my sister spoils them, (yet) they are the nicest children I've met. And they've never been smacked.

My personal opinion is that a child never needs to be beaten.





# BL Event

Photo Credit : Yew Beng

**Humanitarian Aid for War Victims in Northern Sri Lanka  
Sponsored by Lee Foundation and BL members and supporters**  
Venerable B Dhammaratana and his Team bring Food and  
Hospital Equipment on November 30 2009.



## MOVIE REVIEW

**SPRING, SUMMER, FALL, WINTER...  
AND SPRING (2003)**

Starring Min Choi, Yeo-jin Ha  
Directed by Kim Ki-duk

*Reviewed by Yeow Foo (Tiger)*



This is a movie of a cycle, a cycle of the human predicament. We can regard it as a samsaric cycle, springing from ignorance/innocence, transiting via worldly temptation and love-hatred agony, to maturation (which possibly leads to awakening) and finally the becoming (*bhava*) and rebirth phase of those who are still trapped in the samsaric cycle. All these are skilfully represented using 4 different seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter.

*Spring*

This season symbolises the start of a new life depicted by the innocence of the novice monk, who has just started to get to know the world. Starting with a child-like innocence, the little monk makes use of the animals that he can find in his surroundings as his toys.

His innocence turns into ignorance well depicted by the 3 animals (snake, frog and fish), used in his childish game which resemble the 3 animals shown in the centre of a Tibetan Wheel of Life painting - Snake, Rooster and Pig symbolising the 3 poisons of greed, hatred and delusion.

The old master skilfully punishes the little monk by making him experience the suffering he inflicts on the animals.

*Summer*

It's a season full of burning desire and endless lust. It ignites the burning tendency of challenging all the old traditions and customs.

There is a scene where the young monk crawls over to the girl who is sleeping at the other side without passing through the 'wallless' door standing between them.

Until this part of the movie, both the old and young monks have been using the door to get out of the bed even though they can simply walk out without having to open and close the door. This symbolises the breakaway from the old way of doing things, our familiar way of thinking.

Sometimes we do things for the sake of doing them according to what is already prescribed and established earlier.

Some people prefer to stay in this safety zone for fear of facing failure when trying to do something unfamiliar. There are many ways to achieve certain things in our life, just like there are many paths to Nirvana.

*Autumn*

Autumn is a season of grievances, of depressing mood.

The young man came back to his master after committing a crime in the city. He came back with hatred, grief and with much suffering.

As shown in the movie, it is common to see many young people nowadays ending up looking for short cuts to escape grief (of love, of despair, of betrayal) by taking their own lives. That is the stupidest thing we could ever do.

Nevertheless, the old master brilliantly calligraphed the whole Heart Sutra for the young man to carve on the wooden floor of the little monastery, as a way of pacifying his grief and suffering.

At the end of this season, we see the old master shutting himself off from the rest of the world to the peak of awakening.

I tend to analyse this season as a metaphor for the possibility of attaining bliss even in the midst of hellish suffering. It's just like a lotus blossoming out of the mud without being tainted by the mud.

For me, this is clear proof that Buddhism is not a pessimistic religion. To be able to maintain pure and unshattered mind in the sea of evils is really a noble task.

*Winter*

Everything seems to come to a stop in this season, allowing the mind to settle down. After many ups and downs in the previous seasons, we are now in the state of maturity.

The movie divert attention to a woman with her face covered throughout and her baby in that little monastery in the middle of winter.

In my opinion, the woman depicts avoidance. Avoidance of what? Well, avoidance of the reality of the world.

Many people turn their faces away on purpose from the real world.

Oftentimes, they are unable to see the world as it really is, and frequently get themselves trapped when trouble arises. See how the 'blinded' woman in the movie fell into a hole amidst the frozen lake when trying to escape from the monastery (with her child) in the dark.

Similarly, there are many traps all around us, and definitely we are able to avoid them if well equipped with the '*Dharma torch*' and the willingness to face the real world in front of us.

What I'm trying to do here is to relate the essence of the teachings of this sutra to some important scenes shown in this movie.

What is the essence of the teaching of the Heart Sutra then?

In my opinion, the entire teaching of the Heart Sutra can be summed up in these opening verses:

*Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, when practising deeply the Prajna Paramita  
Perceives that all five skandhas are empty, and is saved from all suffering*

So in short, what the Heart Sutra is telling us is that all the 5 aggregates (skandhas) are empty, and the attachment to these 5 aggregates is the source of all suffering. The Bodhisattva understands this and thus eliminates all suffering.

The following stanza explains the gist of the above message.

*Shariputra, form is not different from emptiness,  
emptiness is also not different from form  
Form is therefore emptiness, Emptiness is therefore form*

What is important here in relation to the movie can be found in these stanzas found in the middle of the Sutra:

In meditation, we clear our mind from the self-made perceptory intervention, hence here we are really facing the real world, seeing things as they really are.

The last scene witnesses how the middle-aged monk imitates the same predicaments he had inflicted on the 3 animals in his early days. The same game, the same suffering, but yielding different intention and results.

The motivation is different; it is for liberation, not mortification. Without going through the pain, how can we learn to be strong?

In this last scene of winter, the stone tied to his body depicts defilements that always pull us down from spiritual cultivation. The pensive Maitreya statue he carries along symbolises effort which drives us to strive harder. His half naked body in the middle of winter depicts determination, and the hilly route symbolises obstacles along the path towards liberation.

*The Role of the Heart Sutra in pacifying Human Grievances as portrayed in the Movie*

The Heart Sutra is very popular among Mahayana Buddhists both for its brevity and depth of meaning. It is a member of the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajnaparamita) class of Mahayana Buddhist literature which also includes the Diamond Sutra.

According to Buddhist scholars, the essence of Heart Sutra is much shorter than the other Prajnaparamita Sutras but it contains explicitly or implicitly the entire meaning of the longer Sutras. The Heart Sutra is well known in Chinese and Sanskrit, but can also be found in other languages like Tibetan, Korean, Japanese and English.

The young man thought that that kind of feeling (which is merely one of the 5 skandhas) of love for the girl belongs only to him and when it is taken away, life becomes unbearable, resulting in endless self-acquired suffering. If he understands the wisdom behind these stanzas, he will see the whole mechanism happening in his mind. With that, the fear of losing someone or something would not arise.

*The Bodhisattva, abides by means of Prajna Paramita  
Without any obscuration of mind, since there is no  
obscuration of mind, there is no fear  
He transcends falsity, and dwells in Nirvana*

With the wisdom gained in the Prajna Paramita, the grasping on the big 'I' or 'Me' dissolves. Hence, there's nothing really belonging to us, including the affective feeling of love & hatred.

The young man in the movie returns to his master in an extremely agonised state. When asked by his master what causes him to suffer, he says –

*"My only sin is to love, I want nothing except her ... she said she'd love only me... I can't bear it anymore!"*

*And the master replies, "Sometimes we have to let go of things we like, what you like, others will also like."*

## Invitation

We invite you to participate in sharing the Dharma. You can join our Editorial Team, write articles or reviews, or donate money to defray the cost of printing POJ.

Please call 67468435 (Leila) or email joyeditor@gmail.com.

***The Gift of Truth excels all other Gifts - The Buddha.***

***People probably don't realise it, but I was raised a Buddhist, and I actively practised my faith from childhood until I drifted away from it in recent years ... It teaches me to stop following every impulse and to learn restraint. Obviously I lost track of what I was taught. - Tiger Woods***

Sharing the Dharma is extremely important in Buddhism.

## Children's Day

(Continued from page 6)

On Sunday, September 27 2009, our Dharma students celebrated Children's Day.

For the 1st time Ven Chuan Guan, new to BL at that time, conducted the blessings.

The representatives of the 4 classes - Metta, Karuna, Mudita and Upekkha - stood in a row passing on candle, flower and water offerings.

After the Puja, Principal Han Chong opened the celebration and Ven Chuan Guan did a reflection.

The celebration was filled with games, food, quizzes, cake-cutting and photo-taking throughout the 2 hours.

Every child walked home with at least a prize and a goodie bag provided by parents and teachers.

It was indeed a special day.

## 在监狱内外寻找自由

“没有人要求你从一个宗教改信另一个有组织性的宗教。改变的其实是从束缚的心意到解放，从无知到明了，从残忍到慈悲，从悲伤到快乐。” - 葛印卡

爱德华·约翰逊是个30多岁的高大黑人，他目前正在美国一所保安森严的监狱服刑。他是因为犯下协助和教唆怂恿他人干下一起三尸命案，而被判终身监禁。

约翰逊曾经有过多姿多彩的生活。

在年少时，他由于无法承受母亲对他的期望所施加的压力，而开始通过酒精和贩卖可卡因而来逃避现实。

即使是在监狱里，约翰逊会利用每一次可能同执法者对抗的机会，他因此曾经被单独禁闭了6年。

当他得知6岁的女儿死于一场意外后，他以监狱殴斗来发泄情绪，这样就能避免面对女儿逝世的悲痛。

约翰逊把生命中发生的所有不幸，归咎于年少时不在自己身边给予指导的父亲。他因此变成一个愤世嫉俗的人。

但他最终意识到自己必须改变，而报名参加一个情绪管理课程。然而，由于他无法抑制自己心中的怒火，因此课程也不了了之。

他后来得知一个由缅甸静坐大师葛印卡主持的10天内观静坐班的消息。在介绍课程的活动上，约翰逊了解到内观静坐不是以抑制或掩饰的方式处理愤怒，而是正视面对它，让怒火浮上台面。

他犹豫不决，自己会否在静坐时，被怒火击垮？

指导员鼓励和告诉他，他将获得所需的技巧和指导。无论如何，正视愤怒正是约翰逊所需的治疗。

约翰逊因此决定报名参加静坐班。

在闭关期间，他经历了疼痛、瘙痒、酷热、烦躁，便急和愤怒。但他坚持下去，甚至是遵从所有的戒律。

在结业典礼上，他哭了。他发愿从此将避免陷入殴斗的状况中，并在发生这种情况时，选择回到牢房静坐，以处理自己的感受。

约翰逊比任何人更了解，在他所处的监狱中，他要改变行为，将使他的能力和硬汉形象受到质疑，同时使他更容易被挑战和袭击。

但他坚持不懈。

“我拒绝让自己陷入过往的行为中，这是个挣扎。不过，这将使我变得更坚强。我每天让大家知道自己是多么幸运。尽管要让一群男人了解什么是内观是非常困难的事情，但我还是尽量尝试。由于看到了我的转变，他们开始对此感兴趣。”

约翰逊不可思议的转变被记录在倡导主办静坐班的珍妮·菲利浦(Jenny Phillips)，所作的书籍《参佛的囚犯-牢房内的静坐》中，包括在内还有其他14名囚犯类似故事。

这并不是第一本有关囚犯学佛的书籍。

一些年前，我阅读了由囚犯贾瓦斯·杰·麦司特思写的《寻找解脱》。麦司特思被囚禁在美国加利福尼亚州的圣昆丁州立监狱，他因为抢劫被判坐牢，但却在监狱内打死一名监狱官而被判死刑。

麦司特思在书中阐述了自己如何接触藏传佛教，以及它如何改变自己。

同恰度仁波切见面的那天，是麦司特思生命的转折点。尽管已高龄和身体不适，恰度仁波切还是到监狱，为麦司特思进行了红度母灌顶仪式。

当时的情景相信相当怪异。

麦司特思律师团队的其中一名成员叙述了当时的情景：“我抵达现场时，发现仁波切和他的翻译员，坐在人潮汹涌的走廊上的一张硬板凳等待。走廊上到处是等待见囚犯的囚犯家属，他们抽烟，现场人声嘈杂。仁波切静静坐着，布满皱纹的手数着佛珠，闪烁着智慧的光的双眼看着眼前的一切。他同现场的情景格格不入，长长的枣红色僧袍，系着白发的顶髻，以及一脸的白须。在他的面前的两名年轻女子，正以粗俗的街头语言咒骂着，而仁波切只是静静注视着。”

两小时后，麦司特思被带上了。

他倾身向前贴近玻璃屏，耳朵紧紧贴着电话听筒，头上暗淡的照明隐约照亮他的面庞。他微笑和略微忧虑的双眼清晰可见。

仁波切依照惯例，先给予简短的开示。

“有3种修行方式：无害、协助他人和纯净。你最终会了解自己纯净的一面，因为这都只是思绪功能在作怪。修行的方式是以纯净的眼光来看待每个人，不论他们曾经伤害或是协助过你，这包括动物和监狱管理员。看他们的完美。把一切的声响都听为完美，就如度母的谈话一样。视每一个时刻为无害、协助他人和纯净的机会。度母，你和她没有不同，一样是完美无暇。”

仁波切告诉麦司特思，即使是等待问刑的死囚，也拥有纯净的本性，并能在不离开监狱的情况下获得自由。

仪式过后，一名囚犯问麦司特思，他是否是佛教徒，麦司特思迟疑了。

“在被囚禁8年后，我对是否称自己为佛教徒感到恐惧。我尤其害怕被视为接受了灌顶。”

灌顶显然给予麦司特思勇气，他说：“我肯定是一名佛教徒。从不同的角度来说，我们大家都是佛教徒。生命，可能让我们看到佛性。”

同约翰逊和麦司特思不同的是，我们都是自由身。我们可以从心所欲，行动不受限制。因此我们可说是比他们更幸运。

事实真的是如此吗？

葛印卡在书中告诉参与静坐班的囚犯，一个无处不在，比高墙和电篱笆更为坚固的监狱，正不知不觉禁锢着大家。

人们的行为是一个更大型的监狱。在每个人的内心深处，是一个被不良行为禁锢的犯人。

佛陀在一部著名的佛经上说：“比丘们，没有一样事物，比没被开发和训练的心智更容易被烦恼的情绪影响。没被开发的心智确实是容易被烦恼迷惑”

“比丘们，没有一样事物，比被开发和经过训练的心智更容易受益。被开发的心智确实是容易受益。”  
人类心智的本性就是如此。

我们最终的结局同约翰逊和麦司特思基本上没有什么不同。

麦司特思必须对所犯下的罪行，面对死刑。而对我们来说，我们迟早都必须面对死亡的到来。

通过他们的勇气和付出，这些囚犯成功获得了牢房以外的一些自由。

至于我们，生活在高度竞争的社会，也必须面对自己所能忍耐的‘悲惨’生活。

尽管困难重重，这些囚犯却能成功，启发我们能从日常繁忙的生活中，重新检视自己的精神生活。而我希望这能为我们的生活注入更多‘利益’，减少‘悲惨’元素。

如同以往，我祝愿你阅读愉快。

编辑  
Chwee Beng

一天，拘萨罗（Kosala）国王正在听闻佛陀的开示。这时，一群人走来。他们好像是苦行者。这个国王马上起来，向他们问讯，再回到佛陀面前。

国王问佛陀：“世尊，您对这些有什么看法？我认为他们已经达到高深的精神生活，所以我向他们问讯。”

佛陀回答：“殿下，我不以为然。我们不能单凭外貌，妄下定义。他们可能是苦行者，走路缓慢，轻声细语或外表平和。但我们不可以断定他们达到高深的精神生活。”

“我们需要时间来接触和观察他们，然后才接受他们为良友与否。”

国王接着微笑，又说：“世尊，您说得对。他们是我的探子。我叫他们假扮苦行者来探视一些人，因为城里发生了一些事情。”

因此，我们不能只因一面之缘，妄下定论。其实，即使现今社会，这也是一个非常实用的道理。我们经常读到关于‘骗子行骗’的报道。

一个人对另外一个人友善时，可能暗藏邪恶企图。过去，警方追捕过‘假和尚’。其实，这些‘假和尚’不是真的僧侣。即使他们依正统方式剃度了，如果还想欺骗别人，他们也不符合出家人的生活方式。

我一向和他人说，和尚不一定都非常友善。当你在街上遇到和尚，他们一向不和你说话。但，这些‘假和尚’亲近你，而且超友善。

佛陀的启示：不要根据一面之缘而妄下定论。不要猜疑。不要毁谤。莫心急，慢慢来。

第四、志同道合。有些人可能和蔼可亲。如此，我们不必非得亲近他们，因为未必和我们的志向不同。一定要有些东西志同道合，例如在想法、兴趣及喜好上，才能成事。

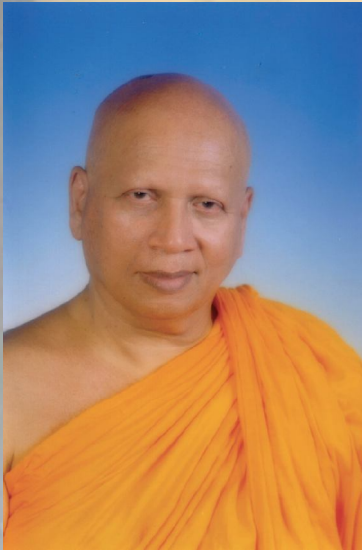
例如：你想听闻佛法，但你的伙伴人虽好，但却没兴趣听法。因此，两人顶多是普通朋友，而不太可能发展成为密友。

因此，要是两个人的智慧相近（智慧不代表学术成绩），两个人成为密友会比较容易。有共同的宗教信仰能促进感情，当然，这不代表其他宗教的人不能成为好友或密友。

最后，当我们遇到其他宗教信仰的人，我们必须警惕，当心他们是否为了转换我们的信仰而来。如果他们没有此意，还是可以做好朋友。

达摩拉达那法师  
宗教顾问  
佛教图书馆

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



### 佛陀说成为密切朋友的条件

因此，友谊可能成为痛苦或不满意的原因。因为朋友，如同其他情谊，会有某些期望。就如老师和家长要求学生或孩子要品学兼优，同时我们也要求朋友对我们坦率。因此，谨慎选择朋友是非常重要的。

在《阿含经》的一则寓言，佛陀谈到四种方法来选择值得亲近的朋友。当然，或许也有很多不同的方法。

这是非常重要的课题，因为我们人生的展望与所接触的朋友息息相关。这里，有两种提高生活素质的元素：物质和精神。好朋友，在这两方面，绝对扮演重要的角色。

佛陀警惕我们与大众交流要谨慎小心。但是，这不代表我们过分小心，而不结交朋友。这意味我们不要对大众马上妄下定论。我们应该慢慢觉察这段友谊的发展，是否利益双方。

佛陀也说，如果找不到适当的朋友，单独生活会更理想。

同样，我们不可以歪曲这个道理。佛陀并非让我们变成孤立或避世的人。佛陀本人不安于避世的生活。但是，结交错误的朋友肯定是件非常危险的事。

我们与良友接触，便好像打开了幸福道路的天窗。但是和损友接触，可能是地狱和痛苦的开始。

有一则惨剧（海峡时报报道）正好切实反映了这点。两个少年从政府组屋坠下，确信自己是“斩妖除魔的救世者”。法官裁定这是‘群体压力，损友影响的不成熟行为’。

因此，和损友同流合污将会带来非常严重的后果。但是，我们不能猜疑或鄙视他人，只因不喜欢他们的外貌或是他们的行为或言语。出于慈悲，我们必须和不同品行的人共存。

结交成为朋友，佛陀所指的是一种密切的关系，能够在思想上与行为上分享物质或精神上的成长。我们可以和他人一起共事，并帮助他们改善生活，却不一定非要劝他们成为佛教徒。

佛陀提出四种原则，帮我们断定哪些朋友适合交往。

第一、不该有尊卑的思想。在印度，婆罗门特别重视他们的朋友选择，只和婆罗门地位相应的人交朋友。佛陀极力反对这种做法。

在 Vasala Sutta (Vasala 代表贱民)，佛陀说我们一出生，并不属于贱民或贵族。人人皆平等。

但是，我们的确根据行为而划分出尊卑。品性是重要的划分条件。今天，人们或许没有尊卑之分，但非常讲究品格的划分。

第二、不要以貌取人（根据初次接触）。先接受他们为普通朋友，再慢慢发展成为密友。

即使我们和一个人认识很久，我们也未必能认定他们为密友，除非我们使用智慧和观察能力。佛陀给予的例子是：会发光且美丽如镀金，其实质为铜质物品。

我们可以以生气做考察。有些人，在初次见面，表现友善，但过些时日，他们容易发火且做出不良的事、粗言又粗语。嗔恚是人类的最大弱点。当然，一个生气的人不一定是坏人。如果他在生气时，不做坏事，这还可以让人接受。

例如：我父亲经常发怒。他平时会打骂我们。当他工作回家，妈妈投诉我们不做功课，只顾玩蟋蟀，他会处罚我们。但我从来没有听见他用粗暴的语言。他能控制怒火，是一位慈爱的父亲。

佛陀身为觉者，在45年的弘法中，从来没有发过脾气。但有时，他会对一些人的行为表示不满，包括自己的弟子。他们的傲慢心过重，即便是听了佛法，也无法获得佛法的真谛。这类弟子，佛陀用‘tucha’，表示‘空洞’来形容。

有一个例子，一名叫Potila的法师，对佛法的认识很高，且经常教年轻的弟子，自己却未达到任何修行的成果。佛陀称他为‘空洞Potila’，因为他从来没有认真修习佛法。

第三、经过接触，做出判断。这个人是否愿意净化或以正确的方式改变人生？我可以以一个例子来说明这一点。

MICA (P) 003/10/2009

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#### 《极乐之程》编辑部

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达摩拉达那法师

编辑  
Chwee Beng  
Tjiej Hoe

中文翻译  
汇莹  
佳薇  
丹增洛桑

协调  
Leila

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今天，我想对佛教理论下的友谊进行谈论。友谊是一个非常普遍的词语，因而无需解释或具体分析。我只能说友谊对生活，甚至在佛寺里是非常重要的。

但是，我们经常收到反馈，佛寺在这方面显得薄弱。当投诉者来到寺庙时，他们找不到倾谈的对象，但我相信这些已经在改变当中。

在佛陀时代，有一位王子名阿拉瓦加。他有无数的好友。佛陀觉察到了。有人问佛陀，“为什么王子有那么多朋友？为什么大家都处处跟随他？”

佛陀没有直接回应。

一天，王子和他的五百名朋友拜访佛陀。他和佛陀说了一会儿的话，便离开了。

当王子离开时，佛陀问王子一样的问题。

王子说他遵守三个原则。

首先，他一向说话小心谨慎。他只用悦耳亲切的语言。因为人们想听好听的话。他们不太重视所接触的人是好或坏。

其次，王子一向把他们想要的东西（即王子所能给予的），尽可能都给他们。他一向了解大众的需求。

最后，王子从没摆出王子的架势，他对朋友一视同仁。

我们知道友谊如爱，并不能屹立不倒。有时，甚至好朋友也会有摩擦。