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THE PATH OF JOY

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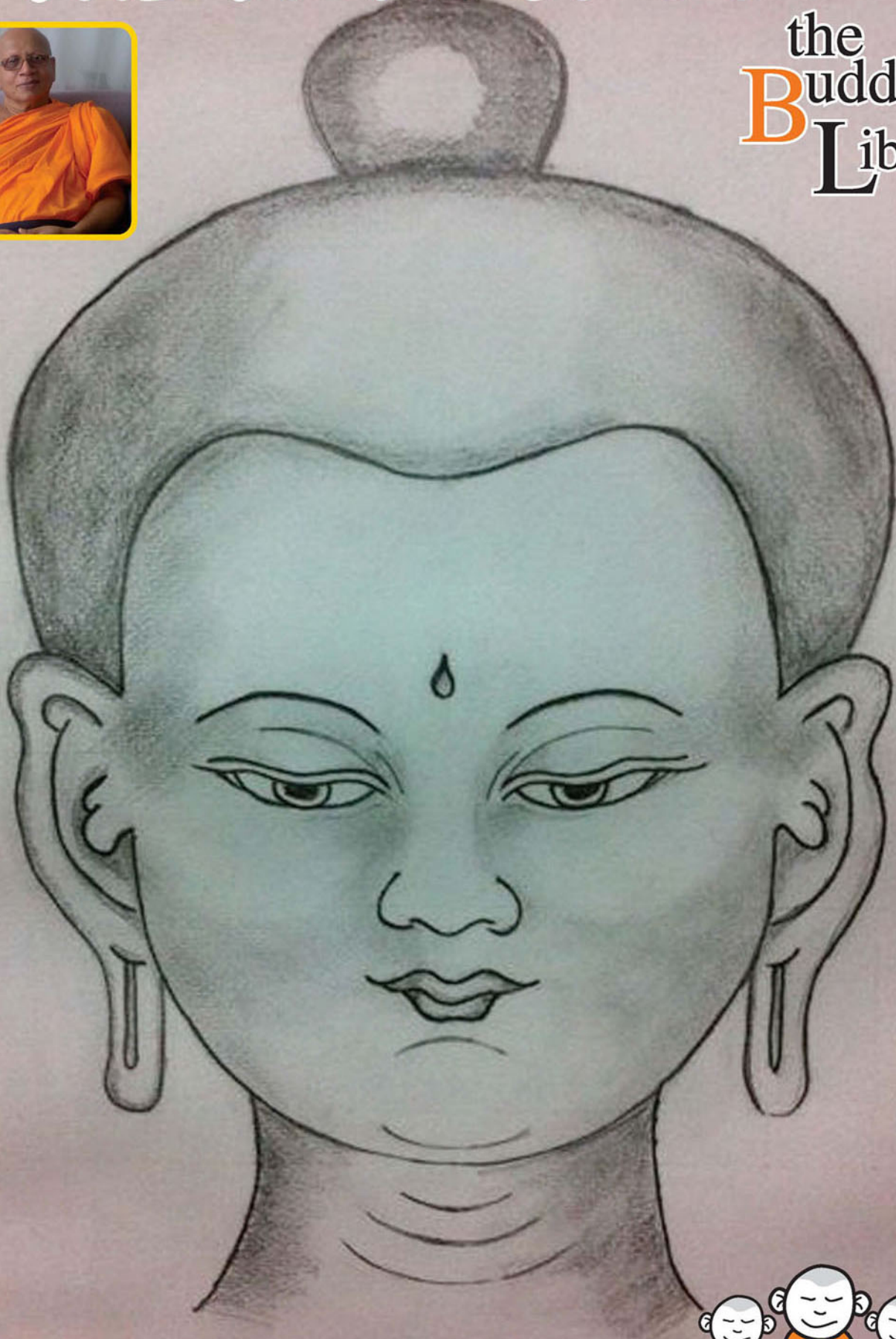

Picture of Buddha's head

drawn by Tay Hui Miang.

Editorial Board

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

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If my sickness is of benefit to living beings, let me be sick.
If my death would benefit them, may I die.
But if my recovery would help, may I be cured.
Bless me to accept whatever happens with JOY and use it as my PATH.

Gyelsay Togmay Sangpo

Bhante Says

Understanding Human Nature

Human beings have many different aspects to their nature. In that sense, we can say that human beings are generally quite difficult to understand.

As we all know, according to Buddhism, human beings have the potential to become perfect beings. This is sometimes called *Buddha nature* but, generally, we can say this is the ultimate goal of Buddhist spiritual practice, the ability to attain perfection.

We are not normally perfect but we can attain this perfect level, the peak of human spiritual endeavour that, in Buddhism, is known as enlightenment. As you all know, we attain enlightenment when we become an *arahant* or a Buddha. That is why the Buddha explained the 10 perfections (in the Theravada tradition) and the 6 perfections (in the Mahayana tradition). These perfections have to be mastered by anyone who wants to become an *arahant* or a Buddha.

In the Buddha's teachings, there are several sutras that talk about different aspects of human nature. Here I will talk about only one such sutra which helps us to understand one aspect of human nature.

In the *Sappurisa Sutta* (*The Good Person: The Bride*), the Buddha explains 4 qualities that characterise a person as *'a good person'* (sometimes translated as *'a person of integrity'* or *'a superior person'*) and 4 qualities that characterise a person as *'a bad person'* (otherwise translated as *'a person of no integrity' or 'an inferior person'*).

The criterion used by the Buddha in this sutra has to do specifically with speech, namely, people's tendency, on the one hand, to speak about the faults of other people and their unwillingness to speak about their own faults; and, on the other hand, people's tendency to speak about their own virtues and their unwillingness to speak about the virtues of others.

In this sutra, the Buddha points out that inferior people are fond of talking bad about other people, even when unasked. If asked, they will say more and more bad things without leaving out any details so much so that it becomes a bad habit.

Another characteristic of inferior people is that if we ask them about good things concerning others they will say very little or nothing at all. They often reply, *"I don't know."*

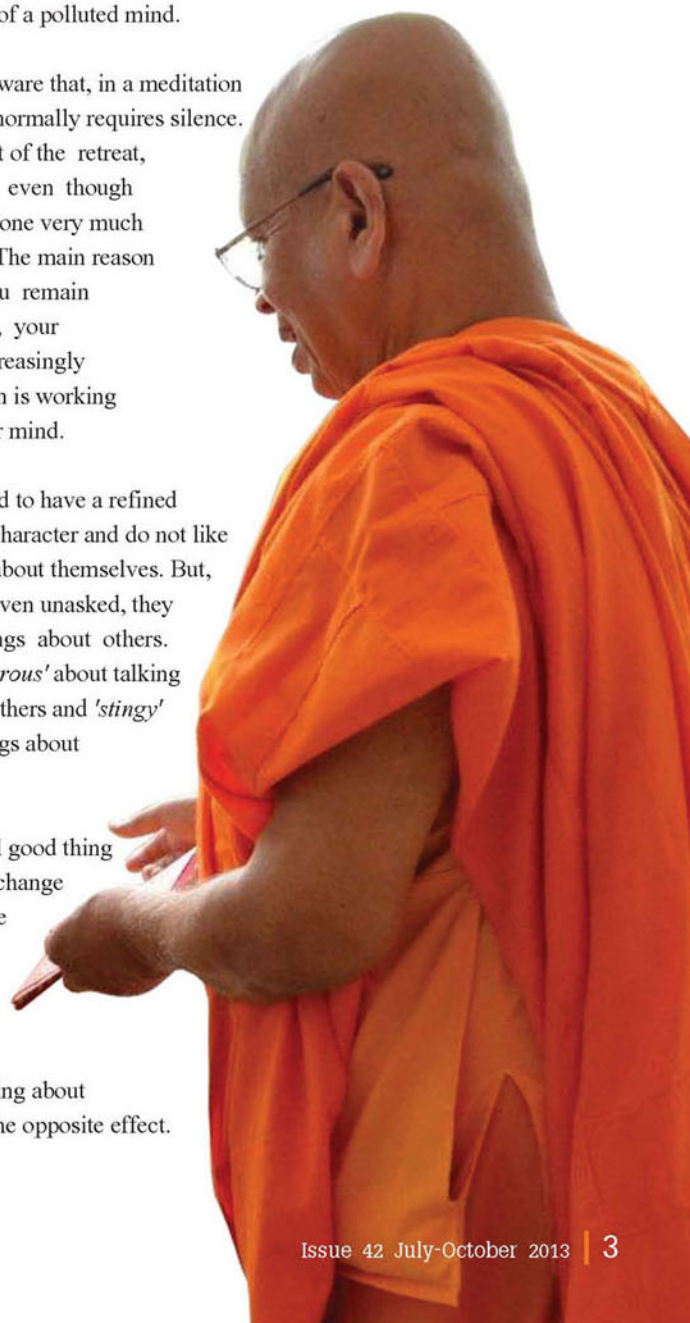
From a Buddhist point of view, this is quite a serious mistake - showing a *'stinginess'* in talking about others' good qualities and *'generosity'* in talking about others' bad points. In this way, we allow our minds to become corrupted or poisoned.

When it comes to saying good things about themselves, inferior people tend to be very *'generous'*, even if unasked. The good things they claim may not even be true but this does not prevent them from talking about their virtues endlessly. This is another example of a polluted mind.

I think you are all aware that, in a meditation retreat, the teacher normally requires silence. When you come out of the retreat, you feel very good even though you may not have done very much meditation. Why? The main reason is that as long as you remain silent and mindful, your mind becomes increasingly quiet. Mental poison is working less and less in your mind.

Superior people tend to have a refined or well-developed character and do not like to say good things about themselves. But, on the other hand, even unasked, they will talk good things about others. They are very *'generous'* about talking good things about others and *'stingy'* in talking good things about themselves.

Saying even a small good thing about a person can change that person's attitude towards his or her work or even the world. At the same time, talking even a small bad thing about a person can have the opposite effect.



Appreciating other people's good qualities and abilities is 100% consistent with Buddhist teachings. For instance, there were 80 foremost disciples of the Buddha who were given great titles according to their outstanding qualities.

For example, Ven. Ananda was given the Chief Assistant's post because of his excellent memory.

Ven. Upali was very good in *vinaya* or disciplinary rules so the Buddha made him the Chief Justice of monks.

In an interesting case illustrating Ven. Upali's ability, one lady, a disciple of the Jaina teacher, Mahavira, became a Jaina nun. Before she ordained, she was already married. After some time, people realised that she was pregnant. They started criticising her. In Jaina teachings, nuns also had to practise celibacy. So this lady was expelled and she wanted to commit suicide.

Someone directed her to the Buddha. The Buddha referred the case to Ven. Upali through Visakha, the Buddha's most senior female disciple. After some inquiries, they found that, in fact, the baby was conceived before the lady became a nun so she was not guilty of breaching the *vinaya* rules. The Buddha then made arrangements with King Kosala to help this nun. When the baby came of age, he was ordained as a novice monk.

Thus it is clear that recognising someone's ability and offering praises is appreciated in Buddhist teachings too. Indeed, Buddhists are taught that rejoicing in the good deeds and accomplishments of others is a great virtue in itself and that, by doing so, we can share in the merit resulting from those good deeds and accomplishments of others, although, I must add, this should not be our motivation. On the other hand, envy and jealousy are discouraged.

You may wonder why the Buddha distinguished between *'superior'* and *'inferior'*, *'good'* and *'bad'* people? Was he encouraging his followers to be judgmental?

Certainly not.

One reason was that the Buddha was teaching his followers that, although observing the precepts was certainly a good and necessary thing, it was not the whole of Buddhist spiritual practice.

Ordinarily, we say that a person who observes the precepts is a good person. That is true but the precepts only form a part of the Buddhist spiritual path.

We may observe the precepts and still get angry or lose our temper easily. We may also be ignorant about other peoples' needs or feelings, not knowing how to help them to live in peace and happiness.

Thus the Buddhist spiritual path requires us not only to observe the precepts but also to develop mindfulness, loving kindness or friendliness, compassion and wisdom.

Indeed, towards the end of the *Sappurisa Sutta*,the Buddha gives us a clue in his analogy of a bride.

The Buddha says that a new bride normally shows *'a keen sense of moral shame and moral dread'* towards not only seniors like her mother-in-law but also subordinates like servants. But after some years of *'living together and intimacy with them'*, she may tell them, *"Go away! What do you know?"*

Similarly, a newly ordained monk normally exhibits a keen sense of moral shame and dread towards monks, novices, nuns, even lay people. But after some time, he *'says even to his teacher and his preceptor: "Go away! What do you know?" '*

So the Buddha advises his followers to *'dwell with a mind like that of a newly arrived bride'*.

From this analogy, we can clearly see that the Buddha was not telling his followers to focus their attention on the faults of other people but on their own shortcomings. They themselves should avoid being *'inferior'* or *'bad'* persons and strive to be *'superior'* or *'good'* people so as to improve their spiritual practice.

This focus is not surprising. It is, in fact, totally consistent with the general tenor of the Buddha's teachings which will be clear to us when we read the Buddha's teachings as a whole.

In the *Dhammapada*, for example, the Buddha advises his followers to be mindful of their own shortcomings and not to concentrate on finding fault with others.

It is easy to see the flaws of others,
Hard to see our own.
Exposing the flaws of others,
As one winnows the chaff,
Yet hiding our own faults,
We are cunning gamblers, concealing the dice.

Far from removal and constantly growing
Are the blemishes of the man who clearly sees
And points out the faults of others,
But is ever resistant to corrections in himself.

And in the *Bala-pandita Sutta (Fools & Wise People) Sutta,* the Buddha describes 2 kinds of fools and wise people.

'Bhikkhus, there are these two kinds of fools. What two? One who does not see his transgression as a transgression and one who does not, in accordance with the Dhamma, accept the transgression of one who is confessing. These are the two kinds of fools.

Bhikkhus, there are these two kinds of wise people.What two? One who sees his transgression as a transgression and one who, in accordance with the Dhamma, accepts the transgression of one who is confessing. These are the two kinds of wise people.'

I would like to end by quoting the main portions of the *Sappurisa Sutta* because they are clear and succinct and well worth reading and remembering.

'Bhikkhus, one who possesses four qualities can be understood to be a bad person. What four?

Here, bhikkhus, ***a bad person discloses the faults of others*** *even when not asked about them, how much more then when asked. But when he is asked about them, then, led on by questions, he speaks about the faults of others without gaps or omissions, fully and in detail...*

Again, ***a bad person does not disclose the virtues of others*** *even when asked about them, how much less then when not asked. But when he is asked about them, then, though led on by questions, he speaks about the virtues of others with gaps and omissions, not fully or in detail...*

Again, ***a bad person does not disclose his own faults*** *even when asked about them, how much less then when not asked. But when he is asked about them, then, though led on by questions, he speaks about his own faults with gaps and omissions, not fully or in detail...*

Again, ***a bad person discloses his own virtues*** *even when not asked about them, how much more then when asked. But when he is asked about them, then, led on by questions, he speaks about his own virtues without gaps and omissions, fully and in detail...*

Bhikkhus, one who possesses [another] four qualities can be understood to be a good person. What four?

Here, bhikkhus, ***a good person does not disclose the faults of others*** *even when asked about them, how much less then when not asked. But when he is asked about them, then, though led on by questions, he speaks about the faults of others with gaps and omissions, not fully or in detail...*

Again, ***a good person discloses the virtues of others*** *even when not asked about them, how much more then when asked. But when he is asked about them, then, led on by questions, he speaks about the virtues of others without gaps and omissions, fully and in detail...*

Again, ***a good person discloses his own faults*** *even when not asked about them, how much more then when asked. But when he is asked about them, then, led on by questions, he speaks about his own faults without gaps and omissions, fully and in detail...*

Again, ***a good person does not disclose his own virtues*** *even when asked about them, how much less then when not asked. But when he is asked about them, then, led on by questions, he speaks about his own virtues with gaps and omissions, not fully or in detail.*

One who possesses these four qualities can be understood as a good person.'

I hope we can all be mindful of these wise words of the Buddha.

Bhante Bellanwila
Dhammaratana Nayaka Thero
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library, Singapore.

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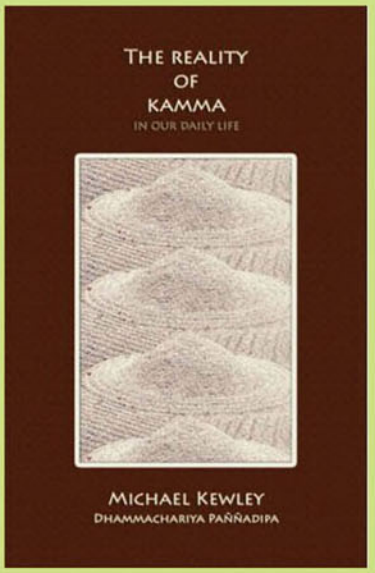
Editorial

One Word



'If you have to describe, in one word, what Buddhism is all about, what word would you choose?'

One episode of the award-winning BBC series, *The Blue Planet,* begins with a poignant scene. A mother polar bear hunts for food to feed her hungry cub. She thumps the ice to break it, hoping to catch a seal pup hiding below. If she succeeds, her cub lives and the seal pup dies. If she doesn't, the pup's life is spared but her cub starves to death.

At first glance, the scene depicts effectively why suffering pervades this world, why this world is never, even for one moment, free from suffering. For one being to live, another must die. That's just how the system works.

However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The scene does not address other causes of death such as ageing, disease, accidents, natural calamities and murder.

Then there are other unskillful actions such as stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication that also cause suffering.

But, above all, this portrayal misses the Buddha's fundamental point that the real source of suffering is not what happens to us physically but how we deal with any given situation psychologically.

Indeed, in the first 2 stanzas of the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha says -

'...the mind is the source of not only the problem of suffering, but also the solution to that problem.'

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

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

And in the *Anguttura Nikaya,* he elaborates -

'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.

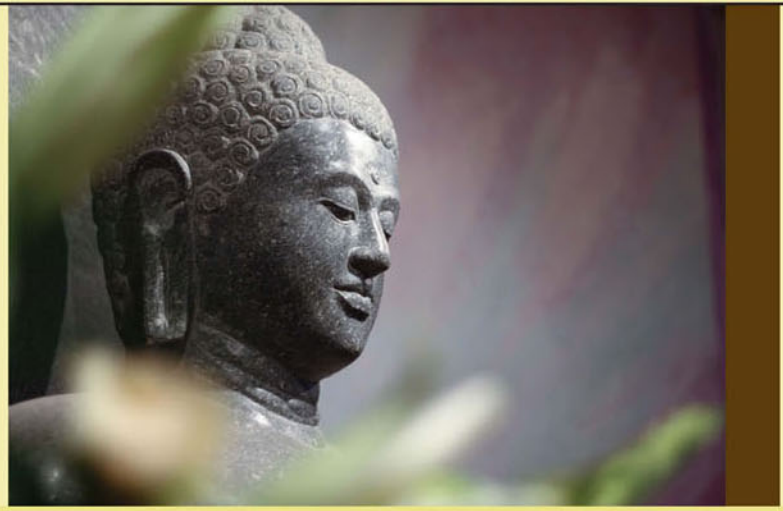
Bhikkhus, I don't know of any other single thing so conducive to such benefit as this developed, practised mind. The developed mind is indeed conducive to much benefit.'

Thus it is clear that the mind is the source of not only the problem of suffering, but also the solution to that problem. Nothing underscores this point better than the familiar story of Kisa Gotami.

When her son was killed, Kisa Gotami was so grief stricken that she went everywhere looking for someone to bring him back to life. The Buddha agreed to help but only if she could bring him some mustard seeds from a house in which no one has died.

Not surprisingly, Kisa Gotami failed in her mission. In ancient India, of course, new houses don't sprout everyday as they do in modern Singapore.

Her search, however, was by no means fruitless. In exhausting her physically and mentally, it nudged her mind towards a catharsis (as the Buddha no doubt intended). This made her realise that her misery was not unique. Death was, and still is, indeed a universal phenomenon.



So she buried her child and ordained as a nun. Eventually, she gained enlightenment.

In the *Gotami Sutta,* her resolve was tested by Mara, the personification of greed, hatred and delusion. Mara asked her why she was meditating and not looking for men. Kisa Gotami replied -

I've gotten past the killing of sons,
have made that the end
to [my search for] men.
I don't grieve. I don't weep
and I'm not afraid of you, my friend.
It's everywhere destroyed - delight.
The mass of darkness is shattered.
Having defeated the army of death,
free of fermentations, I dwell.

When we compare this confident, even triumphant, retort to Mara with Kisa Gotami's earlier desperate and pitiful cries for help when her son died, we witness the astonishing ability of the mind to cause, and eradicate, suffering.

So central to the Buddha's teaching is the mind that we may simply describe the whole of Dharma practice, whatever the Buddhist tradition, as mind training. But sometimes people overlook the role of the mind and this may consequently lead to a misinterpretation of popular Buddhist concepts such as karma.

One of the most amazing things about karma is how well-known it is, even to non-Buddhists, and how misunderstood it can be, even among Buddhists.

Nevertheless, the Buddha could not have been clearer in the *Anguttura Nikaya.*

'It is intention I call 'kamma'; having willed one produces kamma through body, speech and mind. '

Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his translation of the Anguttura Nikaya, explains -

The word 'kamma' literally means 'action' but the Buddha uses it to refer specifically to volitional or intentional action Kamma thus denotes deeds that originate from volition, which may remain purely mental, creating kamma through our thoughts, plans, and desires, or it may come to expression in bodily and verbal deeds.'

Despite this, many Buddhists tend to ascribe almost everything that occurs in life, especially unfortunate incidents, to karma.

Recently I shared with friends a list of the names of 10 airlines that, according to a report published in the newspapers, had the worst rate of accidents in 2012. I then received this comment.

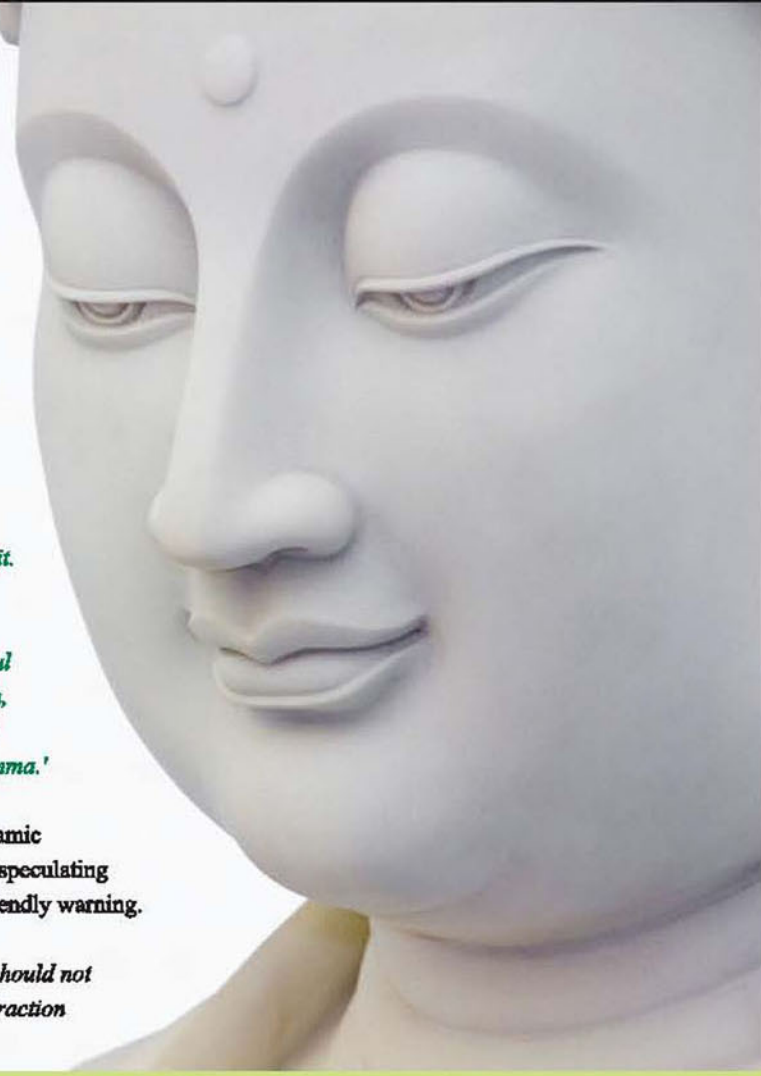
'Of course, even in air crashes, there are survivors - and some survivors literally walk off the burning wreckage - another illustration of karma.'

Just because some people survive accidents and others perish, how can we be sure this is the result of karma? The Buddha himself warned his followers against jumping to conclusions in the *Sivaka Sutta.*

'Those monks or priests who say or hold the view that whatever pleasant or unpleasant or neutral feeling a person experiences is the consequence of what was done in the past, they go too far. Therefore, I say they are wrong.

Experiences of feelings arise from bile, from phlegm, from wind, from the union of bodily humours, from seasonal changes, from stress of circumstances, and from chance external happenings, as well as from the ripening of kamma.'

In brief, the way we feel, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, may have any one or more of a number of causes which may conveniently be categorised as natural causes, accidental causes, circumstantial causes or past actions (karma). Thus it would not be wise to assume that karma is the sole cause of whatever pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling we may have at any given time.



Recently, I read a short and concisely written book - *The Reality of Karma* - in which the author, Michael Kewley, a former Buddhist monk, addresses this very point.

'What we meet in every moment of our life is the consequence of that which we have empowered in the past. However, because kamma is subtle, we very often don't understand its reality and so cultivate fantastic ideas about it. We think that if a tin of paint falls on our head as we walk under a ladder or we are infected with a terrible disease, that is our kamma. We think that if we are successful with a job application, or fall in love with a beautiful person, that is our kamma. However, whatever these things are and however we may want to speak about them, they are not kamma.'

And because karma and the consequences of karma are dynamic and complex, the Buddha did not want us to waste our time speculating about them. So in the *Anguttura Nikaya,* he gave us this friendly warning.

'The results of kamma cannot be known by thought, and so should not be speculated about. Thus thinking, one would come to distraction and distress.'

Nevertheless, it is important to understand the proper purview of karma and the role of the mind, even to the very limited extent that we, as ordinary people can comprehend. As Kewley says -

'Our spiritual journey is to understand kamma at the intuitive level and then live peacefully, maturely and in harmony with it.'

'We are the architects of our future by empowering the mind as it arises in this moment. We cannot control our past (vipaka), that which is already well-established, but we are able to respond with love, compassion and wisdom to this present moment and so create a beautiful future.'

This idea of empowering the mind is a very important one. It highlights the fact that we have the power to influence the direction our lives take. Hence it is important to bear in mind constantly, as Kewley reminds us, that *'kamma is not destiny predetermination or predestination. It is not the will of a ruling and guiding deity. It is not a system of reward or punishment. It is not fate.'*

The greatest appeal (to me, at least) that karma, as *'the moral force created by our deeds'* (Bhikkhu Bodhi), possesses is its even-handedness and inherent fairness.

Like death, it is a great leveller. Everyone, rich or poor, powerful or weak, Buddhist or not, has to play by its rules. If we see unfairness prevailing in this world, it is not because there is no moral force known as karma, or that it sometimes goes on holiday, or that it favours some people and discriminates against others. Skillful and unskillful actions do have consequences. They just need the appropriate causes and conditions and these take time.

And so when we perform unskillful actions, we can't simply propitiate karma or make offerings to it, hoping to avoid facing the music.

The only way we can avoid the unpleasant consequences of an unskillful action (which we created with an unskillful mind), even partially, is to facilitate the causes and conditions for pleasant consequences to arise. This requires us to transform the unskillful state of our mind to a skillful one. Thus we learn another thing about karma as a moral force - its rationality and consistency.

When I was teaching English in a Buddhist monastic secondary school in Chiangmai some time ago, I used to ask my students, all novice monks, the question which appears at the top of this editorial.

I asked the question to gauge the level of my students' understanding of the English language but also to see how well these young men, most of whom ordained not out of love for monastic life but simply to receive an education, have understood the Buddha's teachings.

The common responses I received included *bliss, the Dharma, enlightenment, happiness, impermanence, change and suffering.* Of course, no one can say that any particular answer is totally right or wrong. Nor would I presume to do so.

But if I were asked the same question, my answer would be *mind.*

As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor

'We are the architects of our future by empowering the mind as it arises in this moment. We cannot control our past (vipaka), that which is already well-established, but we are able to respond with love, compassion and wisdom to this present moment and so create a beautiful future.'

(Michael Kewley - *The Reality of Kamma*)

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Other excerpts taken from *The Essential Teachings of the Buddha.* Edited by Kerry Brown and Joanne O'Brien.

BL EVENT

BL MEMBERS' CHINESE NEW YEAR VISIT TO TAI PEH OLD PEOPLE'S HOME

Date: February 23, 2013
Venue: Tai Peh Old People's Home
Photo Credit: Tan Yew Beng

BL EVENT

TIBETAN THANGKA ART COURSE
taught by CARMEN MENSINK

Date: February 22 - 24, 2013
Venue: Buddhist LIbrary
Photo Credit: Tan Yew Beng









Tibetan Thangka Art Course:
Drawing the Buddha!
Singapore, Feb 22-24, 2013


BL EVENT

'Can A Hidden Agenda be Virtuous?'

A Dharma talk by Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi

Date: March 12, 2013
Venue: Buddhist LIbrary
Photo Credit: Ng Yeow Foo

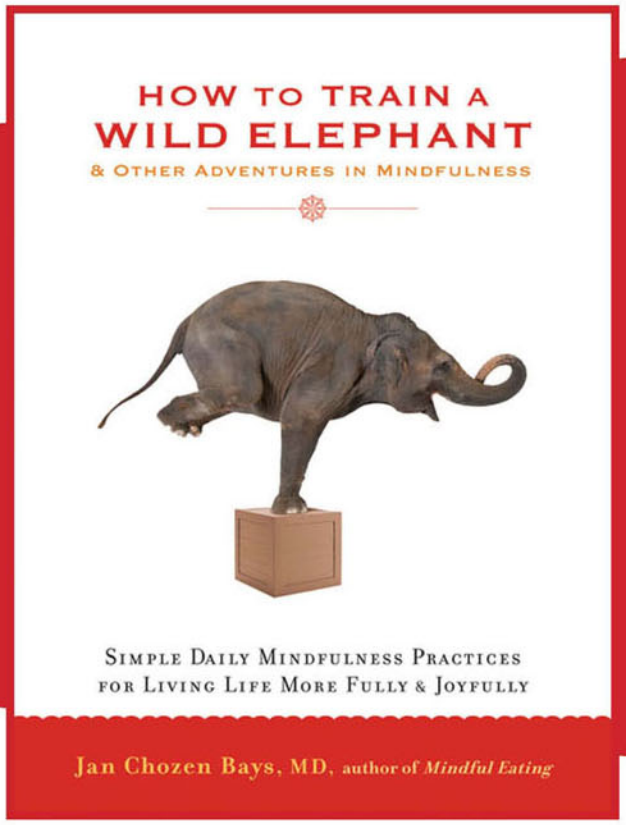
BL EVENT

Volunteers' Chinese New Year Gathering 2013

Date: Sunday February 16, 2013
Venue: Buddhist Library
Photo Credit: Tan Yew Beng

Book Review

Reviewed by Saito Shinobu (Sandy)



How to Train a Wild Elephant: And Other Adventures in Mindfulness

by Jan Chozen Bays, MD
Published by Shambala Publications, Inc. (2011)
229 pages

Shinobu is my given name. It literally means patience in English. When I was a very small kid, I was often bullied by many mischievous boys because of this name.

One day, I asked my parents why they gave me this name instead of popular names then, like Yuko, Junko, Akiko etc.

My parents smiled at me and asked me to sit down and then said, "*Patience is the most important virtue in our human life and we sincerely wish you that patience - without any feeling of anger - will be with you as long as you live so that you can lead a happy and fruitful life.*"

It is obvious that this was something very difficult for a small girl, aged 5 years old, like myself, to understand.

Whenever my mother admonished me, she would ask the same questions over and over again, *"Did you think twice before you said that/did that? And did you remind yourself to be patient?"*

In fact, small, little me did not understand why I had to be so careful in talking or doing something with patience when other kids behaved so freely.

Now, however, this book has finally revealed clearly to me the reasons and confirmed my understanding from various angles after almost 40 years of my life.

The author, Jan Chozen Bays, is not only a pediatrician and meditation teacher but also a wife, a mother, even a grandmother. Her accumulated wide experience offers us powerful insights in a very much down-to-earth style.

Jan Chozen Bays, defines mindfulness as follows:-

Mindfulness is deliberately paying full attention to what is happening around you and within you - in your body, heart, and mind. Mindfulness is awareness without criticism, or judgment.

Because of her definition, I now feel reassured of what my mother tried to teach me. She was trying to teach me the value of *mindfulness.* She did not know the English word *mindfulness* and she did not possess a sophisticated skill to explain mindfulness to me either so she certainly had a hard time teaching me how important mindfulness is and how important patience is in human life.

"Patience is the most important virtue in our human life and we sincerely wish you that patience - without any feeling of anger - will be with you as long as you live so that you can lead a happy and fruitful life."

Throughout this book, Jan Chozen Bays, teaches very practical and doable mindfulness practices. These make a lot of sense to me. I can relate numerous incidents in my life which I have been keeping in mind for a long time after some people shared certain insights that I could not digest well. In this book, there are in total 53 methods and deeper insights. The author designed it such that one method can be practised for a week. Hence we can practise and enjoy the fruits of mindfulness the whole year long.

One of the practices I have already tried is *Mindfulness of Posture*. The reason I was interested in this was that I have seen the whole chain of learning.

When I was 9 years old, our ethics teacher was a very strict lady teacher. She not only never allowed us to slouch our backs over the desk, but also never allowed us to move both hands freely on the desk. Both hands had to be on the lap whenever we did not need to write or raise our hands. She kept on saying even on a very hot summer day or a very cold winter day, *"Keep the correct posture with full attention. That will nurture your concentration and develop correct thought, so that you will speak and act ethically."* Again I believe that most of my classmates did not understand this significant teaching which was, in fact, an introduction to the Noble Eightfold Path.

Regarding posture, Jan Chozen Bays, quotes the late Thai Buddhist meditation master, Ajahn Chah -

'Wisdom comes from being mindful in all postures. Your practice should begin as you awaken in the morning. It should continue until you fall asleep. What is important is that you keep watchful, whether you are working or sitting or going to the bathroom.'

One thing I realised with this practice was that the mind and posture (or action) were indeed deeply interrelated. For instance, when one feels tired, the back automatically slouches. On the other hand, when one is enthusiastic about something, the body is erect and the mind focused.

The 1st two stanzas of the *Dhammapada* speak of contemplation -

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

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

As we all know, no one forces his or her thoughts, speech and actions. It is our mind that initiates our thoughts, speech and actions. And although our posture may seem to be automatically or naturally taken by us, it is not actually automatic. It is the mind that initiates and leads to that particular posture based on the prior thought.

Jan Chozen Bay so kindly brought me back to my childhood days as well as people around who shared the Dhamma with me in such a subtle manner all the way till today. Recollection of these warm memories and gratitude with this book gathered each piece of jigsaw puzzle into one incredibly beautiful and valuable picture in my mind. On top of it, Jan Chozen Bay shows me the path to deepen mindfulness to realise the Buddha's teachings further.

Today, I am certainly able to explain why the late Konosuke Matsushita who, in 1918, founded the giant electronics company, Panasonic, once said, *"We don't need to look for a great teacher. We can learn from anything around us, even a small stone on the road, if we are really mindful."*

Yes, the Buddha and the Dhamma are everywhere, here and now.

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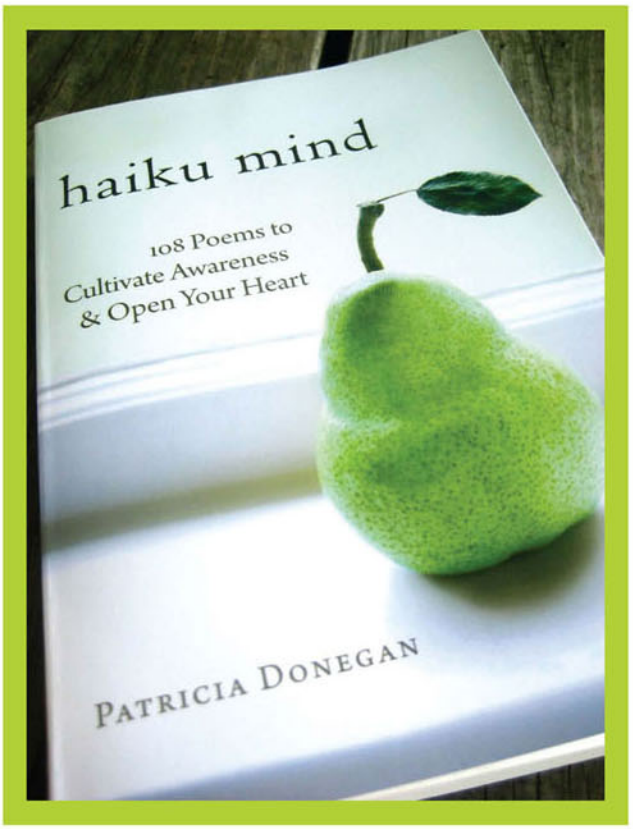
What the Buddha taught by Venerable Rahula Walpola

Dhammapada, the sayings of the Buddha.
Translated by The Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya

Book Review

Reviewed by Kim Li



Haiku Mind:

108 Poems to Cultivate Awareness & Open Your Heart

by Patricia Donegan

Published by Shambhala (2008)

231 pages

Haiku. The word brings to mind something Japanese, something Zen-like. Well, it is Japanese in origin, not exactly Zen, though, but it has the same concept as Zen in its simplicity.

According to Wikipedia (a very helpful guide), haiku is a very short form of Japanese poetry typically characterised by 3 qualities :-

- the essence of haiku is *'cutting'* (*kiru*).

- traditional haiku consists of 17 *on* (also known as *morae*), in 3 phrases of 5, 7 and 5 respectively.

- a *kigo* (seasonal reference), usually drawn from a *saijiki*, an extensive but defined list of such words.

The title of this book definitely captured my attention. After taking up the book and flipping a few pages (to decide if I should borrow it), I was definitely hooked.

I like the structure used where each haiku has a subject that it is based on, the haiku itself and an explanation of the haiku based on the author's experience and feelings at that point in time. There is also a short introduction to the original poet.

Since I'm a total newbie to haikus, I like having the explanations as a guide to the haikus. I was worried I might not get it otherwise.

After reading through a fair number of haikus and their explanations, I started feeling at home with them and would pause to reflect on the haiku I'd just read. I found this a very calming exercise.

Sometimes I found myself having a view of the haiku that is different from the author's. This is absolutely fine with me. It's also the view of the author that we might all view the haikus differently.

I especially love the ones about seasons (mostly because Singapore has no season). but I am also intrigued by haikus that reflect the culture and environment of old Japan.

I personally feel composing a haiku requires the author to be focused, to be very much in touch with the present moment, to be very aware of the present moment to see the extraordinary, the very nature of the environment. In this case, I think it's like meditation and opening up your senses to the moment now.

I'm probably explaining this badly but it's a very intriguing experience that I will leave to you to experience on your own.

I would like to end with my favorite haikus as an introduction, to let the haikus speak to each of us:

Humor
the warbler poops
on the slender
plum branch

(Onitsura Uejima)

Epiphany
winter morning
without leaf or flower
the shape of the tree

(Laura Agnes Davidson)

“当然，即使是高空意外也会有生还者，还有一些生还者甚至可从燃烧的残骸中走出来，说明了业果的显现。”

就因为有些人能从意外中逃生而另一些则丧命，我们要如何确定这就是业果的显现？佛陀在《增支部Sivaka Sutta》曾告诫过他的弟子不要轻易下结论。

“若有比丘、沙门持有见于乐受、苦受、不苦不乐受是来自于过去的造作，他们偏执了。所以我说他们错了。

诸所受者，或热所等起、或痰所等起、或风所等起、或[此等之三]和合者、或季节之转变、或由险难袭来而生、或急激侵入、或由业异熟而生者。”

简短的说，我们所受，乐，苦或不苦不乐，或许来自一个或更多的因素。这些因素也可归类于自然性质、意外性质、外在情况或过去的造作（业）。所以，就乐受，苦受或不苦不乐受的导因归于业果是不明智的。

我最近阅读了由曾出过家当僧人的麦克凯夫利（Michael Kewley）所著作的一本简要的书《关于业果的事实》。书中就针对了这一点。

“我们生活里所面临的每一刻皆是来自我们昔日所授权的。但因为业力很微妙，我们很多时候不明白它的实相所以编制了许多奇妙的想法。我们认为如果在梯子底下走过时，有罐漆掉在我们头上，或我们感染了疾病，这都是我们的业报。我们也认为如果应征成功，或与具美貌的人谈恋爱，都是我们的业报。但，实际上无论是何事它们都不是业。”

由于业与业果是不断变化且复杂的，佛陀并不愿我们浪费时间去推测。所以佛陀在《增支部》里提醒了我们。

“业果非思维所能解，所以不该去推测。继续推测将导致精神错乱、愁苦。”

尽管如此，以我们凡夫有限的程度来理解业力与心性是重要的。 正如凯夫利所说：

“直觉性地去了解业力，然后与它安然、成熟及和谐地活着，这是我们的精神之旅。”

“当我们授权念头升起的当下，其实是自己未来的建筑师。我们无法控制已建立好的过去，但我们当下能以爱、慈悲与智慧作为回应，以制造美丽的未来。”

授权于我们的心念是很重要的概念。它强调我们有能力影响生命的方向。所以应该要牢记，如凯夫利所提醒我们道：“业报不是预定的或宿命。也非由神明所主宰。它也不是奖励或惩罚的系统之一。它不是命运。”

业力是“因行为所造成的道德力”，它不偏不倚且具有公平性，这对我而言是它最吸引人之处。
犹如死亡，它是一个矫平机。任何人不论富或贫，强或弱，佛教徒否，都得依据它的规则。若我们看见世间的不平，并非因为具有道德力的业力不存在，或它放假去了，又或者它偏袒某人而排斥他人。善或恶行都自有其果。它们只是需要因缘的聚集才会展现，而这需要时间。

所以当我们造了恶业，我们不能期望与它和解，为它做供养希望能免受恶报。

唯一能令我们避免由不善业导致的恶果（由不善念而来）的方法，即使只是部分而已，是促进善果因缘的升起。这需要我们改造不善的念为善。由此，我们又学习到具道德力的业是合理与如一的。

几年前，我在清迈的一所佛教中学教授英语时，就常问学生（刚出家的僧人），出现在这文章的首要问题。

我发问问题的主要目的是测试学生们对英语的理解程度，同时也想知道这些不是因为失恋而是纯粹为了受教育而出家的年轻人对佛法的了解。

我所得到最普遍的答案包括法喜、佛法、觉悟、快乐、无常、变化及苦恼。当然，没有人可以说哪个答案是对是错，我也不打算评论谁对错。

但如果有人问我同样问题，我的答案将会是“心”。

一如往常，我祝您阅读愉快。

编辑

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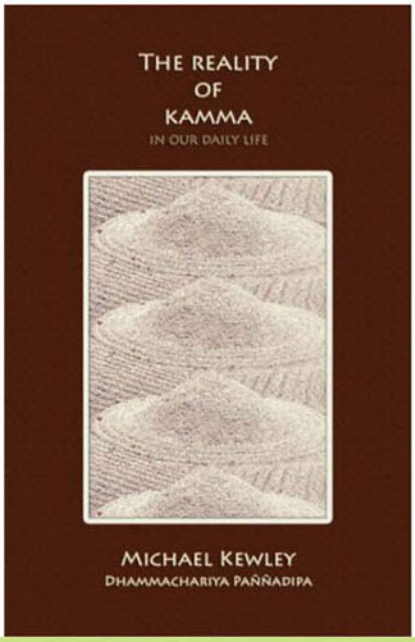
编辑语录
一个字

‘若以一个字来描述佛教，你会用哪个字呢？’



英国广播公司BBC得奖记录片系列《蓝色星球》的其中一辑就以凄美的一幕开始。一只雌性北极熊正为它的北极熊宝宝猎食。它捶打着冰地，企图打破冰层希望能猎得一只小海豹来喂它的宝宝。若它成功，北极熊宝宝便能生存但小海豹就会死。若它不成功，小海豹就能保住生命但北极熊宝宝就要活活饿死。

乍看之下，这一幕就非常成功地描述了为何这世间是痛苦的，以及为何这世间的苦是无间断的。一个众生若要活着，另一个众生必须牺牲。整个系统就是如此。

然而，这只是冰山的一角而已。那一幕并没讲述其他导致死亡的因素，如：老、病、意外、天灾及谋杀。

当然还有其他导致痛苦的行为如偷窃、不正当的性行为、撒谎以及使用让人神志不清的物品。

但，这一切并没触及到佛陀教导的基本要点。那就是：导致痛苦的真正原因不是所发生在我们肉体上的事，而是在心理上我们如何应对这些困境。

在《法句经》里的首二偈，佛陀教到：

“心是诸法的前导者，心是主，诸法唯心造。若人以邪恶之心言行，痛苦将跟随着他，有如车轮跟随拉车之牛的足蹄

心是诸法的前导者，心是主，诸法唯心造。若人以清净之心言行，快乐将跟随着他，如影随形。”

在《增支部》，佛陀又阐述到：

“诸比丘!我不见其他有一无修无多所作时，能成引苦之法，
诸比丘!此即是心。
诸比丘!无修无多所作之心者，能成引苦者。
诸比丘!我不见其他有一已修已多所作时，能成引乐之法，
诸比丘!此即是心。
诸比丘!已修已多所作之心者，能成引乐者是。”

可见，心不但是痛苦的根源，它也能解决痛苦。关于迦沙乔达弥的著名故事就强调了这一点。

当她儿子不幸病死时，迦沙乔达弥伤心欲绝地到处寻找能让她儿子复活的人。佛陀答应了她的请求，但她首先要从一户没死过人的家中取些芥菜籽。

显然的，迦沙乔达弥无法达成这任务。毕竟在古印度，不像现代的新加坡天天都在盖新楼房。

她怎么寻找都没有成果。正如佛陀所意，精疲力尽的身躯，让她对痛苦问题有了宣泻而使她的心获得净化。终于，她了悟并非只有她一人才有痛苦。从古至今，死亡是个普遍现象。

于是，她将孩子的尸骸埋了之后，毅然出家。最终，获得证悟。

在《相应部》中，有一段她与魔罗的对话。魔罗是贪、嗔、痴的化身，他考验了迦沙乔达弥的决心。魔罗问她为何在禅修而不去找人。

我已走出丧子痛，
因此不再寻找人。
吾既不忧亦不悲，
我也不怕你，朋友。
一切喜怒皆已断，
无边黑暗已破除。
征服死亡之大军，
吾住漏尽无余中。

从迦沙乔达弥之前孩子病死时的绝望哭啼，到她面对磨罗所展现的自信，甚至是必胜的回应，证明了心拥有能制造也能止息痛苦的惊人能力。

心，是佛法的核心。无论是哪个教派，都可将心的训练作为整个佛法修持的内容。但人们往往忘了心所扮演的重要角色，而导致对佛法概念产生误解，例如对因果的误解。

最让人惊讶的是纵然许多人包括非佛教徒都知晓因果，它却常被误解。就连佛教徒也同样地误解它。

在《增支部》中，佛陀解释得很清楚。

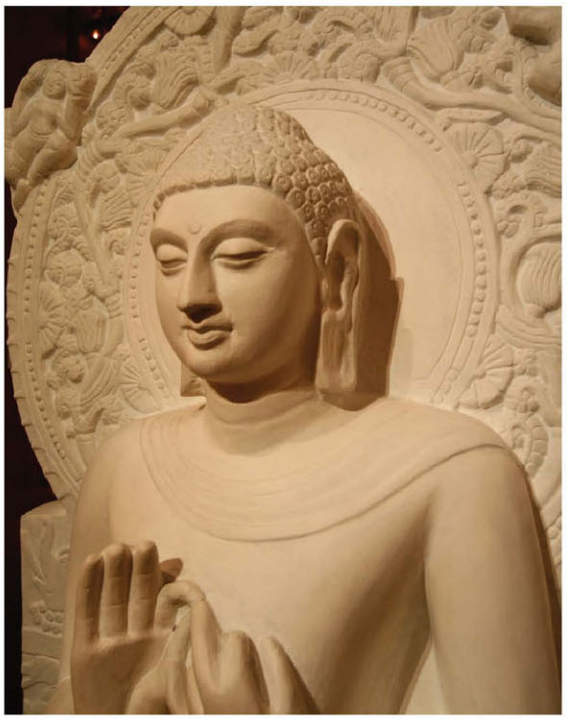
“我把思称之为业。因为必先作意，才能引发身、口、意的行为。”

菩提比丘于《增支部》的翻译中，解释道：

“字面上，‘业’就是‘作为’但佛陀将其用来指有意的作为…所以，业就是由我们的意志而产生的作为，它可以只是精神上的通过念、计划或欲望而造业，它也可以是表现于我们的肢体或语言上的。”

尽管如此，许多佛教徒还是会把周遭的事物特别是不好的事项归因于业果。

近来，我与朋友们分享了一则新闻是有关于2012年意外率最高的十家航空公司名单。随后就收到这个评论。



我们无须感到意外，因为这与佛教的教义完全相一致。若我们把佛陀的教诲视为一个整体，它就会变得更加清晰明了。

例如，在《法句经》里，佛陀劝导信徒们要留意自己的短处，不要专找他人的过失。

易见他人过，己过欲见难，
扬疵如扬糠，己过则匿藏，
狡猾赌徒子，作弊藏骰子。

若见他人过，心忿不平者，
徒增其烦恼，断惑路遥远。

在《愚人智者经》中，佛陀还描述了两种愚人和智者。

“诸比丘，有两种愚人。哪两种呢？对错误不认为错误者，以及知道错误但却不肯如法接受者。诸比丘，有这两种愚人。

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在本文结束前，让我引述《善士经》的主要经译文，因为它条理分明，清晰易懂。

“诸比丘，若持有此四种特质，即可视为非善士。哪四种呢？

诸比丘，即使没人问起，非善士亦会揭人隐私短处，而倘若有人问起，他岂不会说得更多？当他被问起时，在一道道问题的引导下，他将会巨细无遗地讲述他人的短处和过失……

复次，即使有人问起，非善士亦不会宣扬他人的优点和长处，而倘若没人问起，他岂不会说得更少？当他被问起时，即使在一道道问题的引导下，他亦不会巨细无遗地讲述他人的优点和长处……

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若持有此四种特质，即可视为善士。”

但愿大家能从佛陀的智慧之语得到更多启发。

达摩拉达那法师
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新加坡佛教图书馆

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法师开示

了解人性

人的本性有许多不同层面，所以我们常说人是挺难理解的。
众所周知，在佛教看来，每个人都有成佛的潜力，或曰佛性。这也是佛教徒修行的终极目标，以达致完美的境界。

尽管我们并不完美，但我们仍可达致这个完美境界，也就是人类精神世界的顶峰，或按照佛教的说法——觉悟。当我们修成阿罗汉或成佛时，即已觉悟，也就是佛陀所说的“十波罗蜜”（南传佛教）或“六波罗蜜”（北传佛教）。任何人若想修成阿罗汉或成佛，都必须掌握这些修行的法门。

在佛教经典中，有不少经文提到人性的不同层面。在此，我仅谈一部能帮助我们了解人性的经典。

在《善士经》（善士：新娘）中，佛陀解释了“善士”所具备的四种特质（有时也译为“有德行的人”或“圣人”）及“非善士”（有时也译为“无德之人”或低劣者”）所持有的四种特质。

在这部经典里，佛陀特以言语用以衡量善与非善的标准，也就是说，人们一方面只爱说别人的缺点而不愿意谈论自己的缺点，但另一方面却爱宣扬自己的优点而不愿提及别人的优点。

佛陀还指出，即使当没人问起，低劣者也爱说人家的坏话。尤有甚者，当有人问起时，他们还会巨细无遗地说更多坏话，由此养成了坏习惯。

低劣者的另一个特点是，如果我们问起别人的优点，他们只会略微提一下，或干脆什么都不说。他们常回答：“我不知道。”

从佛教的角度来说，“高谈”他人的缺点而“啬于”赞美别人的优点，是非常严重的过失。这样一来，只会让我们的心智受到荼毒与危害。

倘若问及低劣者的优点时，他们往往会“侃侃而谈”。即使他们所说的未必属实，但这并不能阻止他们畅谈自己的长处。这是心智受荼毒的另一明证。

众所周知，在闭关修行时，导师通常会要求大家保持静默。即使你静坐冥想的时间并不长，但当你闭关出来后，还是会感到精神奕奕。为什么？最主要的原因是，只要你保持静默，谨言慎行，你的心就会愈加宁静，精神上的荼毒亦会随之递减。

圣者往往品格高尚，不会自我夸耀。即使没人问起，他们也会宣扬别人的优点和长处。他们会“高谈”别人的优点而“啬于”称赞自己。

即使你只提起别人曾经做过的一件好事，这也可能改变对方的工作态度，甚至改变他的世界观。相反的，如果你议论他人的过失，即使事态再小，也可能导致相反的后果。

须知，懂得欣赏他人的优点和能力，是与佛教教义相符合的。比方说，佛陀根据80名最杰出弟子的卓越品格，赋予他们神圣的称号。

例如，由于阿难尊者记忆力非凡，因此被选为佛陀的常随侍者；阿那律尊者因严持戒律，所以佛陀让他掌管众僧的戒律事宜。

让我们以一则故事来阐述阿那律尊者的能力。话说耆那教的导师尊者大雄有位女弟子，她在剃度前已结过婚。过了一段时间，有人发现她怀孕了，便严厉抨击她。这是因为按照耆那教的教义，比丘尼必须遵守戒律，单独生活。她因此遭受驱赶，并打算了结性命。

所幸的是，有人指引她向佛陀求助。佛陀透过维沙卡比丘尼，让阿那律尊者处理这件事。经调查后，这才发现她在剃度前已怀有身孕，没有犯戒。佛陀遂嘱咐波斯匿王帮助她。当她的婴孩长大后，也剃度成了沙弥。

由此可见，认可他人的能力并给予虔诚的赞美，其实是与佛理相一致的。事实上，身为佛教徒，我们应该为别人所做的好事及取得的成就感到高兴，因为我们也能从中分享到善因。话虽如此，但我必须声明，这决不是我们的出发点。另一方面，我们应该避免羡慕或嫉妒他人的成就。

你可能感到不解，为什么佛陀要区分“善士”与“低劣者”、“好人”与“坏人”？难不成佛陀希望信徒们变得武断？

当然不是。

其中一个原因是，佛陀要教导众信徒，遵守戒律固然是一件好事，也有其必要性，但它绝非佛教修行的全部内容。

一般而言，一个严守戒律的人是个好人。这虽没错，但戒律仅是佛教修行的其中一部分。

我们遵守戒律，但还是会容易生气或发脾气。我们也可能对他人的需要及感受漠然置之，不晓得如何帮助他们得到快乐与安宁。

因此，佛陀的修行之道要求我们不仅要严持戒律，同时也要培养正念、友善、具慈悲心及智慧。

在《善士经》的结尾处，佛陀还提供了一个有关新娘的譬喻。

佛陀表示，刚嫁过来的新娘通常对长辈（如婆婆）及下人（如仆人）皆有“道德上的羞耻心与畏惧感”。但过了数年之后，由于大家“生活在一起，变得愈加熟络”，她或许会吆喝他们：“走开！你懂什么？”

同理，一个刚剃度的僧人通常对其他僧侣、沙弥、尼姑，甚至是普通老百姓，都会有道德上的羞耻心与畏惧感。但过了一段时间之后，他或许也会对他的师父及导师说：“走开！你懂什么？”

所以，佛陀劝导众信徒应该像“初嫁之新娘般谨言慎行”。

从这个譬喻不难发现，佛陀并不是要信徒们专找他人的缺点，而是要他们了解本身的短处。他们应避免成为“低劣者”或“坏人”，而应该致力成为“圣者”或“好人”，以便他们的修行能更上一层楼。