

The Path of Joy

Issue 44 (March - June 2014)

MCI (P) 033/09/2013.



Inside:
*Shamatha Retreat
with B. Alan Wallace*

*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

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Bhante Says

How to Develop Loving Kindness or Metta



In life, to maintain physical health is extremely important. One effective way to do this is through the practice of meditation by mindfully breathing in and out. In this way, we can help our bodies to produce healthy cells and thereby maintain good health in a much more effective way than by just taking medicine.

Living in a small, busy and modern city-state like Singapore can be very competitive and stressful.

Many people suffer physical sickness as a result of stress or tension. Some people complain of shoulder or back pain. Of course, there could be physical causes for these ailments (in which case, you could go for massage or physiotherapy) but these problems are primarily caused by stress or tension. In order to release stress or tension, meditation is the best way.

Through meditation, we can also purify our mental processes. Our minds may be polluted. When our minds are polluted, we can in turn pollute the environment, our surroundings, even the whole world, often without even realising it.

The problem is that we don't see our mental pollution. We only see physical pollution like water, traffic pollution or air pollution.

But mental pollution is by far the most serious. On the other hand, we can even keep the environment free from pollution for at least a while if our minds are free from mental pollution.

The best way to keep our mind free from pollution is through meditation. For a start we can meditate for a short period, say, 10 minutes.

Our practice is simple, just breathing in and out and watching our mental process mindfully. So simple and yet the results can be so profound.

Metta bhavana or meditation on loving kindness (sometimes translated as *loving friendliness*) is one very important and effective practice in this regard. How do we do this practice?

We radiate our thoughts of love and compassion towards all sentient beings, beginning with ourselves.

We often pay lip service to compassion and loving kindness – '*May all beings be well and happy*'. But in real life, it is not so easy to develop such thoughts sincerely. Even loving kindness towards ourselves is sometimes difficult.

But there is a way to overcome this problem and to practise it in a practical way. We try to bring *metta* into our daily activities.

When we go out to meet someone, a friend or even a stranger, we can begin by developing thoughts of *metta* towards that person. '*May this person be well and happy. May his or her life be a happy one.*'

It is important to do this even before meeting this person. So when you meet the person, and even if that person utters an unkind word towards you, those thoughts may keep you from being negative towards him or her in return.

You can reflect – '*I am going to meet someone. We have some differences. I will try to keep my mind calm and steady.*'

Then when you have negotiations about certain matters, even if the other person is a very difficult individual, it will help if you have radiated some friendly thoughts towards him or her before the meeting.

And so whatever we do every day, we should do it with such thoughts of loving kindness and compassion.

Sometimes the telephone is a very serious problem in this regard. We may use harsh words on the telephone. Therefore, when the telephone rings, even before we pick up the receiver, we should say to ourselves – *'I am not going to have unpleasant thoughts.'* With this positive frame of mind, we then pick up the receiver. Being prepared in this way, we can avoid an unfriendly or unpleasant situation. As the saying goes – *'Forewarned is forearmed.'*

A trained counsellor knows that during a counselling session, the counsellor's main purpose is just to listen. The other party may say things which are nonsensical or irrelevant. We may get irritated by this, in which case we cannot counsel. So developing some kind thoughts beforehand may be beneficial, for example, by saying - *'I will listen to him or her with love and compassion.'* In this way, the counselling session has a greater chance of success.

Let me give you one simple example.

Some time ago, there was a mentally unbalanced person who used to visit the Buddhist Library quite often. Every time he came, he wanted to speak to me. He said he wanted to talk for only a few minutes but it would usually take a long time.

Furthermore, the things he would say were also often unpleasant. However, if I were to say something unpleasant to him in return, I would lose control of the situation because he would get angry and the result would be unfortunate for both of us.

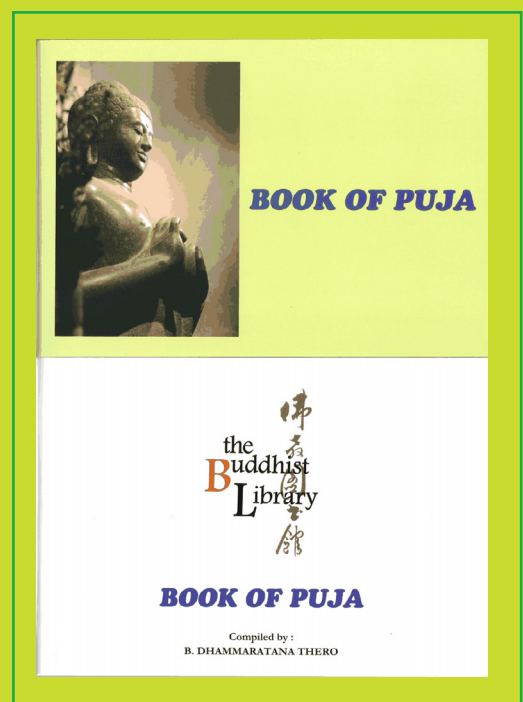
Nevertheless, I had to be firm so I decided to give him 20 minutes only. After listening to him for that time, I would tell him that he could come back another day and we could talk again. But he might say that I was angry with him. *"Why won't you talk to me?"* he might complain. Nevertheless, I had to be firm with him.

Sometimes, he would call me very late, even at midnight. When I said that I was sleeping, he would say that I did not like him. This is the time when thoughts of *metta* or compassion on my part were most needed.

This is therefore the way we can use *metta* in a practical or meaningful way to benefit ourselves and people we come into contact with on a daily basis.

As most of you know, the Buddha gave his teachings on metta in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, the discourse on loving kindness.

But what many people may not realise or remember is the background against which the discourse was given. The background to this sutra is not only very interesting but also very important to bear in mind.



500 monks received instructions from the Buddha on meditation. The Buddha taught each one of them a method of meditation appropriate for him personally.

Then the monks went to the foothills of the Himalayas to perform their practice. They found an ideal location – a quiet place surrounded by forest with a pool of water nearby and a village from which people could come and support the monks in their practice.

Delighted with their find, the monks performed their practice, day in and day out.

Unfortunately, the trees under which the monks meditated were inhabited by spirits who soon resented the presence of the monks. They decided to frighten the monks away and make it impossible for them to concentrate on their meditation.

The monks then went to seek the advice of the Buddha.

In response, what did the Buddha do? Equally importantly, what didn't he do?

The Buddha did not harm the spirits, frighten them or chase them away. Instead, he taught the monks to radiate thoughts of loving kindness towards the spirits by chanting and reflecting on the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*.

Showered with thoughts of loving kindness and compassion, the spirits finally relented. Instead of obstructing the monks, they supported them in their meditation. In the end, all the monks attained arahantship and the spirits in turn accumulated great merit. A win-win situation, as we would say nowadays.

This incident illustrates for us clearly that the Buddha practised loving kindness and compassion on an inclusive and unconditional basis even when something as important as the meditation practice of the monks is threatened by unfriendly spirits.

Let me end by quoting some sections of the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, which are indeed worth

memorising and incorporating into your own meditation practice -

*Let there be happiness and security
May all beings be happy-minded*

Whatever beings there are

*Timid, strong and all others
Long or huge
Average, short or large*

*Seen or unseen
Living near or far
Born or coming to birth
May all beings be happy-minded*

*Let no one deceive another
Nor despise anyone anywhere
Neither in anger or ill-will
Should one wish another harm*

*As a mother would risk her own life
To protect her only child
So should one, for all living beings,
Cultivate a boundless heart*

*Let one's love pervade the whole
World, without any obstructions
Above, below and across
Free of obstruction, enmity, hostility*

*Standing, walking, sitting
Or lying down, whenever awake
One should develop mindfulness
As this is the highest abode*

*Not falling into error, virtuous
And endowed with insight
Giving up attachment to sense-desires
One is not again subject to birth.*

Bhante B. Dhammaratana

Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

Reference :

Karaniya Metta Sutta (SN 1.8) - the *Book of Puja*,
(the Buddhist Library's chanting book).

Editorial

The Key of Balance

All the havoc wrought in the world is wrought by men who have not learned the way of mental calm, balance, and poise.

Piyadassi Thera

A few years ago, I attended a *shamatha* meditation retreat in Phuket led by B. Alan Wallace, the renowned meditation master, translator, author and pioneer in Buddhism-mind science research.

During a personal interview, I sought Alan's advice on a problem that had been bothering me.

I told him that, during my meditation, I felt that my body was not straight. I adjusted my posture repeatedly but it simply got worse. Sometimes, I sensed my breath dancing round and round.

Alan assured me that this sort of thing was not unusual, nothing serious to worry about, adding, *"Just practise the middle way. Don't over-do it."*

Balance is, of course, crucial in life generally as well.

It promotes biodiversity in nature, for example, and is essential for the ecological health of our globe.

When we invest in business, we want a balanced portfolio in order to avoid over-exposure to volatility that any particular form of assets may be prone to more than others.

A balanced diet, together with exercise, is the best way to maintain good health.

And if we want to achieve long term health and happiness, we also ought to live a balanced life - materially, intellectually and spiritually.

The Dharma, perfectly fulfilling its function as a mirror of reality (*'the finger pointing to the moon'*), not surprisingly, also emphasises this need for balance.

That the Dharma is a *'Middle Way'* between the extremes of sensual pleasure and self-mortification is a fundamental truth every beginner learns in any basic course on Buddhism.

'There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathagata — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.'

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

As he or she progresses, the student will, in due course, learn that the *'Middle Way'* also connotes the Buddha's unique teachings of emptiness and dependent origination which reject the extremes of nihilism and eternalism.

'By and large, Kaccayana, this world is supported by (takes as its object) a polarity, that of existence & non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'non-existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one

'Everything exists.' That is one extreme. 'Everything doesn't exist.' That is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dhamma via the middle way ... (of conditional causality).'

*Kaccayanagotta Sutta: To Kaccayana Gotta
(on Right View).*



Balance also figures prominently in the Buddhist world view comprising the 6 realms of existence (*devas, asuras*, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings) into which sentient beings are said to be born and reborn until, and unless, they attain enlightenment. Of these 6 realms, ranging from the most pleasurable heavens to the most agonising hells, the most fortunate one to be born into is said to be the human realm. Why? Because it is the only one that is, or has the potential to be, balanced. Humans undergo enough suffering to incentivise them to practise the Dharma but not so much as to make them give up that practice in despair.

But even within the human realm itself, the possibility for imbalance – and the need for balance - is all too evident.

On the one hand, the wealthy and privileged may feel that they are already in paradise and hence there is no need for spiritual practice. If any change is necessary, more of the same will do just fine.

On the other hand, people who are trapped in an unending cycle of poverty, disease and starvation cannot muster the time, energy or ability to undertake spiritual practice for obvious reasons, even if they want to.

This reminds me of a conversation I had with one of my students, Boonmee, once when I was teaching English to Buddhist novice monks in a monastery in Chiangmai.

We were sitting in the grounds of the monastery one evening. Witnessing a pack of stray dogs barking at each other, we began to talk about the prevalence of stray dogs in Thai temples.

"You know, Ajahn," Boonmee said with a smile, his finger pointing to the lean, mangy dogs, "we are no different from these dogs. One day, our parents bring us to the temple. And they don't bring us home."

Boonmee's remark left me totally dumbfounded.



On reflection, I should have told Boonmee that, as unfortunate as his circumstances were, he was fortunate at least that his parents left him in the care of a responsible monastery where he received not only the modern secular education that his parents wanted for him but the opportunity to study, and practise, the Dharma.

Poverty often breeds ignorance and crime such as drug addiction and trafficking. By living in the protected environment of the monastery, Boonmee was physically shielded from such negative influences which are so pervasive in many poverty-stricken rural areas. And the strong moral foundation that he acquired from his years as a novice monk has the potential to guide him like the North Star for the rest of his life.

This is not to say that wealth necessarily guarantees happiness.

A friend of mine, a wealthy businessman, showered his son with everything that money could buy, including a luxurious apartment in an exclusive district. Eventually, the young man became so bored with life that one day he tried to burn down the place.

A son of another friend of mine went to Canada for studies. My friend visited me in Chiangmai and he was telling me about his son when his mobile phone rang. It was his son. The young man needed a million dollars to buy a house. Dad agreed without hesitation, beaming with pride when he told me what he had just done. I said nothing but I could not help thinking how unfortunate his son was. If money becomes no object and the young man has only to open his mouth to acquire anything he fancies, what can possibly satisfy him in the long run?

In the Buddhist spiritual path, renunciation and wisdom are said to be 2 of the most important spiritual qualities, often compared to the 2 wings of a bird. But to enable the bird to fly, the wings must be balanced and act in tandem, one supporting the other. So it is with renunciation and wisdom. To quote Bhikkhu Bodhi,

'Compassion impels us toward greater renunciation, as we see how our own greed and attachment make us a danger to others. And renunciation impels us toward greater compassion, since the relinquishing of craving enables us to exchange the narrow perspectives of the ego for the wider perspectives of a mind of boundless sympathy. Held together in this mutually strengthening tension, renunciation and compassion contribute to the wholesome balance of the Buddhist path and to the completeness of its final fruit.'

In the *Sedaka Sutta*, the Buddha shows us how to practise the Dharma in a balanced way, benefitting ourselves and others.

In the story, an acrobat instructs his assistant to watch him while they are performing their

act and he will watch the assistant. In that way, they can best protect each other.

To which the young man retorts, *"That's not the way to do it, teacher. You protect yourself, teacher, and I'll protect myself. Thus, each self-guarded and self-protected, we'll display our skills, collect our fee, and get down safely from the bamboo pole."*

Then the Buddha elaborates.

'And how is it, bhikkhus, that by protecting oneself one protects others? By the pursuit, development, and cultivation [of the four establishments of mindfulness]. It is in such a way that by protecting oneself one protects others.'

And how is it, bhikkhus, that by protecting others one protects oneself? By patience, harmlessness, loving kindness, and sympathy. It is in such a way that by protecting others one protects oneself.'

This short discourse is also instructive in another sense. In order to help others, we need first to be able to help ourselves just as when, travelling by plane, adults are required to put on their own life vests first before assisting their children to do the same.

Similarly, in the *Sallekha Sutta*, the Buddha told Cunda –

'Cunda, it is impossible that one who is himself sunk in the mire should pull out another who is sunk in the mire. But it is possible, Cunda, that one not sunk in the mire himself should pull out another who is sunk in the mire.'

It is not possible, Cunda, that one who is himself not restrained, not disciplined and not quenched [as to his passions], should make others restrained and disciplined, should make them attain to the full quenching [of passions]. But it is possible, Cunda, that one who is himself restrained, disciplined and fully quenched [as to his passions] should make others restrained and disciplined, should make them attain to the full quenching [of passions].'

As it is with life, so it is with meditation.

At the Phuket retreat, Alan taught us the proper way to meditate. The key is to maintain balance. As Alan notes in his book – *The Attention Revolution – Unlocking the Power of the Unfocused Mind* –

‘The cultivation of shamatha involves balancing the mind, and that includes balancing the effort exerted in the practice with relaxation.’

‘Be at ease. Be still. Be vigilant. These three qualities of the body are to be maintained throughout all meditation sessions.’

‘...arouse your attention (counteracting laxity) during the in-breath; and relax your attention (counteracting excitation) during the out-breath. But don’t relax so much that you become spaced out or dull ... Meditation is a balancing act between excitation and relaxation.’

Generally, the more relaxed we are, the more stable our attention can become. But that relaxation must be balanced with vigilance...’

You get the picture.

Suffice it is for me to say that balance is so important in meditation that Alan joked that his name – ‘B. Alan Wallace’ – if re-arranged would read ‘Balance Walla’ (the person in charge of balance).

Here’s one final but important thought. The Middle Way is not a compromise, an aggregation of the least common denominators of the extremes. No, it transcends those extremes. It is, in short, realistic and efficacious in leading practitioners to final liberation from suffering.

As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor



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INTERVIEW

Phra Maha Wiriyophikhu (Phra Jazz)

Interviewed by Chwee Beng

Interpreter: Chatchaphon Ruengtaksinaphong

Translator: Thanakorn Jampamoon

November 20, 2013 at Wat Riab, Songkhla, Thailand.

In May 2013, a historic event of sorts in Thai Buddhist history occurred in the southern Thai province of Songkhla.

A former Miss Tiffany Universe ('TU'), the 2009 winner of the transgender beauty contest, Sorrawee "Jazz" Nattee ordained as a Buddhist monk.

It is easy to sensationalise such an event and use it to cast Buddhism in a bad light.

But it would be more pertinent, and fruitful, to examine whether, and if so, how this particular ordination dovetails with the Buddha's teachings and furthers the cause of those teachings.

The young man – he did not undergo the operation to be a full-fledged woman - reportedly did not make his decision lightly. In ordaining the young man named *Phra Maha Wiriyophikhu* (Person with Great Perseverance), Abbot Atuwathee Bhikkhu, on his part, gave the young man a chance to prove himself worthy of donning the saffron robe.

In its editorial of May 18, 2003, the Nation Newspaper challenged the notion that the ordination would, in some way, undermine Thai Buddhism. After all, the Buddha did famously ordain Angulimala, the notorious serial killer. What had Sorawee done that was worse than this?

'The criticism levelled at him might have greater weight in a society where monks are not caught drunk or sleeping with women on a regular basis.'

'That is the charm of Buddhism. No matter who you are, where you come from or what you have done in the past, the door to the 'try-out' room is always open, and you can check out any time if you don't like it. All you need is the sincere will to look inside.'

I couldn't have said it better.

Phra Jazz can now use this opportunity to benefit himself and others in the best possible way, particularly the sections of the public that identify with him most and with whom he has the unique standing to propagate most efficaciously the Buddha's message of loving kindness, compassion and wisdom. We wish him all the best.

"I was the 3rd child in a poor family. My parents were poor and there were 4 children born year after year. My father was a motorcycle taxi rider and mother a baby sitter. They only earned 100 bahts (S\$4) a day each.

I have been interested in the Dharma since childhood. I used to follow my grandmother and mother to the temple to 'tum boon' (make merit). Life in the temple was 'sabai' (safe) and 'oon jai' (comfortable).

Later I lived in the city alone with responsibility only for myself. But I sent money home.

My elder brother was drafted into the army and killed in southern Thailand. He was only 20 years old. My dad had lung disease because of smoking and alcoholism.

I didn't expect to win the Miss TU contest in

2009. My life changed after that. I earned more money and the respect of many people in Thailand and overseas.

I gave money to my parents. But I also continued my Dharma practice.

I missed my family but I could not be with them. I started thinking to myself – What is happiness? True, my life was financially better but at what cost? I was tired of this life.

So I turned to the temple. I practised meditation, freed birds and fishes frequently and transferred merits to my parents and late brother.

I have achieved the highest (Miss TU) and suffered the worst (my brother's death). My meditation gave me much peace of mind. My father's health improved.

As part of my duties as Miss TU, I toured southern Thailand. I helped the people in the troubled areas for 4 years and tried to give them hope.

I thought that my ordination would make everyone in the family happy. But my parents did not agree when I first asked them for permission to ordain because they needed my financial support.

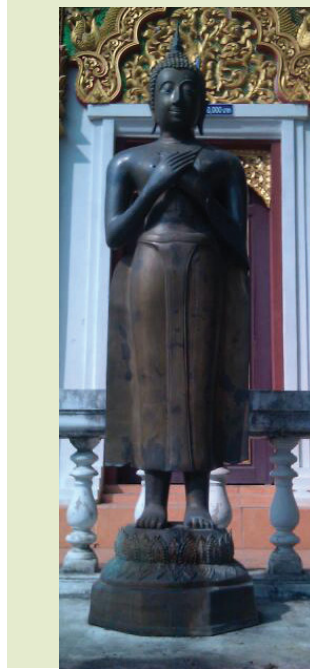
So I continued my Dharma practice. Everyday, I chanted from 1 or 2 am and meditated about 45 mins in the morning.

About 7 months ago, I came across a Buddhist text on the teachings of the Buddha. This original text was sent to Thailand by King Asoka and eventually translated into the Thai language in several volumes.

I studied the text diligently, especially the teaching on dependent origination.

I meditated and reflected on the meaning of the words. This made me more determined to ordain.

Usually Miss TU contest winners undergo an



operation to remove the male sexual organ but I did not do this because of my desire to ordain.

Realising that if I continued to gather more material possessions, it would make it more difficult for me to renounce lay life, I requested my parents again for permission to ordain. I spoke to my mum. She said I should speak to my dad first.

Later she called back and told me that my dad had agreed. I was very happy and stopped all my activities. I went to see the doctor to have an operation to remove the silicone implant.

After the operation, I worried that the monastery wouldn't accept me. Recuperating from my operation, I went to a monastery in Bangkok to study the same text further.

I ordained to help people understand the Dharma, beginning with my parents. Before I can help others, however, I myself have to study and practise the Dharma first.

My advice to Buddhists is simple. Just making merit and giving dana to the temple will not free us from suffering. Practise the Dharma sincerely. At present, society has many problems. If we practise the Dharma, we can face any situation. With loving kindness, we can understand that everyone makes mistakes and we can forgive them. But right now, in Thai society, people look down on other who make mistakes. PoJ

BL EVENT



BL Event : Family Day &
FunFair 2013
Date: November 18, 2013
Venue: Vacant Land adjacent
to Aljunied Station
Photo Credits: Yew Beng &
Yeow Foo





BL EVENT

BL Event : Dharma Day 2013
Date : July 21, 2013
Venue : Buddhist Library
Photo Credit : Yeow Foo



BL EVENT

What do you think of the Retreat?

Being able to explore, experience & train in the Shamatha practice in a gentle, kind, evolving manner over 5 days is a gift.

It is the most informative and beneficial retreat for me.



(Puyee Wong)

(Kai Kia)

What most impressed me during the retreat was (Dr Wallace's) kindness and attentiveness to all participants. A true teacher.

(Renata)

These are the most insightful and clear instructions I have ever received and I benefited tremendously from Dr Wallace's kindness and patience in sharing them with us.

(Edward Ong)

Allan Wallace's gift of crafting words, anecdotes and imagery to provide incisive insight into the practice of Samanatha is unparalleled.

(Karen Tan)

Never have I seen so many exhilarated and grateful retreatants, all 70 of us, with Dr Wallace sharing four decades of learning from many revered gurus and wisdom from thousands of hours of meditation practice, brilliantly distilled, exquisitely delivered and generously shared.

(Sin Tho)

Alan's teaching is quite profound. I am convinced that this experience will open the door to more searching and enquiry.

(Ng Seng Leong)

That was completely mind blowing stuff!

(Ajay Shah)

(Contd. on page 16)

5 DAY SHAMATHA RETREAT

Led by DR B ALAN WALLACE

Date: January 4 - 8, 2014

Venue: Parkroyal Hotel, Beach Road

Photo Credit: Chwee Hock

Retreating with B. Alan Wallace



BOOK REVIEW



Path of Compassion: Stories from the Buddha's life

by Thich Nhat Hanh

Published by Parallax Press (239 pages)

Reviewed by Crystal Ang

Growing up as a Buddhist in the Mahayana tradition which includes the Tibetan tradition, I was familiar with the Buddha. Yet he remained a distant figure lost in the daily Buddhist rituals and practices of my household. I only 'knew' the Buddha through the mantras and the pujas, but little of the Buddha as a man who once lived and walked this earth like us filtered through to me. This was something I found difficult to imagine.

The story of the Buddha's life has been told countless times in various fashions in the different Buddhist traditions. Some stories are more fantastic than others involving miraculous feats and magical powers. I remember being fascinated and awed by these stories of the Buddha as a child.

Now that I am older, I realise how little I know of what the Buddha actually said and taught because I was more interested in his 'miracles'. Under these influences, I grew up viewing the Buddha as an unreachable epitome of super-human powers; a stature unrealistic to attain and beyond compare. However, my misguided perceptions are changed with this book.

In Thich Nhat Hanh's *Path of Compassion: Stories from the Buddha's Life*, the Buddha is presented as a man, human and realistic in all aspects. You can expect neither supernatural powers nor miracles from the Buddha. Instead, the author focuses on the Buddha's experiences as a son, a father, a husband, a brother, a cousin, a leader and a member of his community. These experiences easily resonate with all of us who take up these multiple roles ourselves in our everyday lives.

The Buddha was a man who experienced emotions like anger, disappointment and pain. Before he attained enlightenment, he too suffered like us. Yet the Buddha shows how anyone can practise and achieve liberation even as they hold their positions as a husband, a wife or a child or suffer the torment of our emotional lives.

The Buddha was a human being confronted by universal issues like love, duty, death and sickness just like all of us. The solutions proposed by the Buddha to ease the suffering are timeless ones. However, one does not need to be part of the monastic Sangha to benefit from his teachings.

Like all of us, not everything went smoothly in the Buddha's life. The author presents the challenges the Buddha faced in his lifetime in his journey to reach enlightenment and to spread his teachings. It may surprise some people but the problem of misinterpreting the Buddha's teachings existed even during the Buddha's time. Anyone confronted with difficulties in understanding the Buddha's teachings should go back to the Buddha's words as the Buddha often clarified his teachings.

As readers follow the journey of the Buddha from birth to death, each chapter highlights a particular story related to the Buddha. These stories, written simply and in a concise manner, are highly accessible even for readers who lead hectic lives. These stories will reveal the Buddha as a man of his time, yet he often taught a radical response to the religions and traditions around him, such as the caste system.

The controversial issue of the ordination of women, for instance, is discussed here. The book shows how the Buddha strategically allowed women into the Sangha despite the strict restrictions faced by women in patriarchal, traditional Indian society in the 6th century BCE.

Readers who wonder about the birth of Buddhism and how the Sangha, sutras and precepts came about will have their questions answered here.

In *Path of Compassion*, there is a consistent emphasis on the practice of meditation as the path to liberation. The Buddha urges us to look no further than ourselves as the vehicle and means of our liberation. Urban dwellers will appreciate the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness and meditation even though there may be no forests for us to retreat to. In our pursuit of happiness and attempts to retain our sanity in the rat race of these economically challenging times, the Buddha's words shine like a beacon in the sea of our human experiences. For this, I am grateful to the author, Thich Nhat Hanh, as his writing gave me a new sense of admiration for the Buddha as a radical figure of compassion and courage.

Beginners to Buddhism will also have a clearer idea of what texts they may need to read to further their understanding of Buddhism. For those already well-versed in the Dharma, this book is a great reminder of what is essential and crucial for any practising Buddhist. And for those who only have time to read commuting between home and work and vice versa, this book is also ideal. *PooJ*

(contd. from page 14)

Prof Wallace skillfully communicated various thoughts and feelings with precise words.

(James Khoo)

Ambrosial! I'm afraid (Dr Wallace) has succeeded in infecting many of us – beginner and non-beginner alike – with an incurable interest in practising shamatha beyond this retreat.

(Calvin Low)

Going into this retreat with apprehension, I emerge from it with confidence that I can practise meditation on my own now. Thank you so much, Alan, for sharing with us.

(Shirlyn)

Before, I had difficulty doing a 24 minute session, but I am now confident and committed to do at least one session every day. An annual event, anyone?

(Chwee Hock)

For me, Alan taught wide and deep. But the most important was the simplest – relax!

(Chris Chia)

A successful retreat requires an excellent teacher (Dr Wallace) backed by a team of efficient organisers (Sin Tho and his team).

(Cheng Lian)

The retreat provided me with an absolutely priceless new way of looking at my life in this world, and a breakthrough understanding of finding personal happiness and helping others find theirs.

(Steve)