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The Path of Joy

Issue 46 (November 2014 – February 2015)
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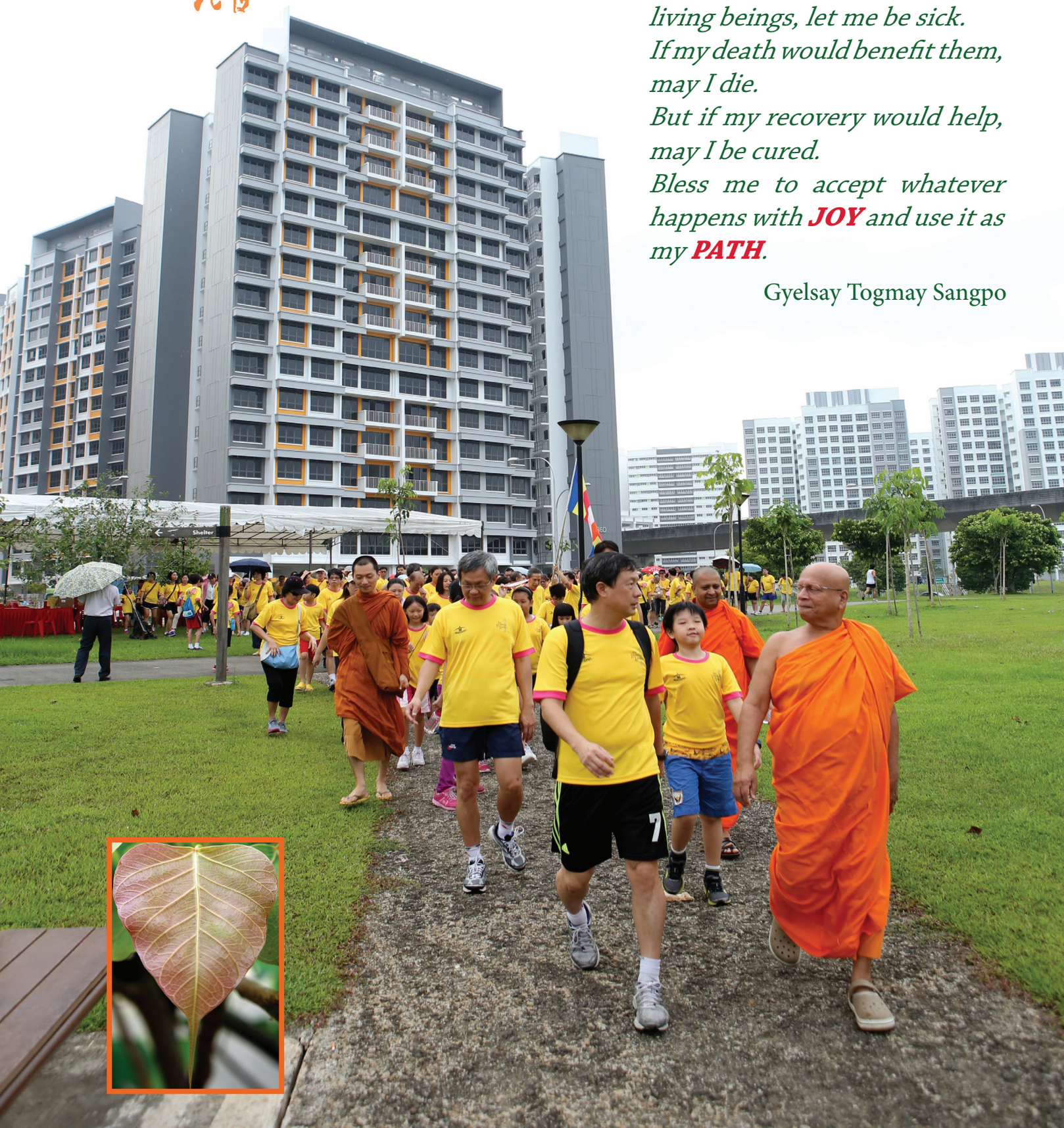
If my sickness is of benefit to living beings, let me be sick.
If my death would benefit them, may I die.
But if my recovery would help, may I be cured.
Bless me to accept whatever happens with ***JOY*** *and use it as my* ***PATH****.*

Gyelsay Togmay Sangpo



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Bhante Says

Levels of Happiness

In January this year, BL conducted two examinations over three days.

On the first day, I went to see the candidates in the examination hall. The question papers had not been distributed to them yet so I took the opportunity to speak to them for a few minutes. I asked one lady, *"How do you feel?"*

She replied, *"Dukkha!"*

The next day, I saw the same lady and asked her the same question. She gave me the same answer.

On the last day, when the candidates had completed their examinations, I again asked the lady the same question. This time she replied, *"Happiness!"*

You can see the difference.

When she said, *"Dukkha"*, she was not referring to a burning body, physical injury or an attack from somebody. Her *dukkha* had a special reason.

She had no peace of mind. Her mind was restless from trying to retain as much knowledge as possible and her stress level was very high.

Dukkha has many aspects. We can be physically fit but something is troubling our mind. And so the main characteristic of *dukkha* is that it comes from the restlessness of our mind as a result of stress. Thus if we translate *dukkha* as *stress*, that is correct. If we say that it is *restlessness of our mind*, that is also true.

But the problem for us as ordinary, unenlightened human beings, is that we are creating more and more stress for ourselves all the time.

The way we work or deal with people in society or the workplace as well as what we do from day to day cause us stress. Let me give you an example.

One day, a lady came with her husband to see me. She talked with me for nearly two hours. I sensed that she wanted my help but she had difficulty articulating what it was. I tried to be patient but finally I had to interrupt her. So I asked her, *"You have spoken for so long. What can I do for you?"*

She told me of her family problem. She and her brother had had a quarrel at their mother's house more than a month previously. Her brother pushed a chair and she fell. Fortunately, she was not injured.

As she spoke, tears fell from her cheeks. Clearly she was still very unhappy.

"What is the Buddhist way?" she wanted to know. *"Is it to talk to my brother and other family people and then we ask him to apologise to me? After that we can go back to the same relationship. "*

I replied, *"No. That partly can be a Buddhist way but it is not the real Buddhist way. You are suffering so much. Do you think your brother is also suffering in the same way? It is possible that he has forgotten all about it by now.*

Something happened one month ago and you were badly injured mentally. You may be a very sensitive person. Your pain even now may be worse than on that day. That is my reading anyway. Your pain

is more intense now because you have dwelled on the same incident for so long. The more you think about it, the more you suffer. You are like a person watching the same movie over and over again.

You have family and work commitments, right? The Buddhist way is to leave this problem aside and go back to your normal life. I know it is not easy. But no matter how difficult this is, you have to do it.

Talking to other people, asking your brother to apologise, all these things can come later.

If we demand an apology from him, that is not a Buddhist way.

In the Buddhist way, if we do something wrong to other people, we should apologise to them, on the phone or in person. On the other hand, if other people do something that offends us, and, in return, we refuse to associate with them unless they apologise, that is also not a Buddhist way. If you demand an apology, it will be difficult for you to get rid of your dukkha. Other people also have pride and if you demand an apology, their pride may increase. They probably will never apologise and your pain will not go away."

Just as *dukkha* has a lot to do with stress or restlessness of our mind, happiness results from ending that stress or restlessness.

The lady who took the examination, for example, achieved calmness when the examination ended. Of course, this happiness was temporary only because it was not the result of spiritual development.

In the sutras, the Buddha mentioned different levels of happiness.

It is important to note that he acknowledged, and did not deny, the happiness we experience in this ordinary, sensuous world. He called it *kama sukha* or worldly happiness. *Kama* means things we are attached to. Through our five senses, we experience things and get attached to them. Our eyes are attached to beautiful things, our ears to pleasant sounds, our bodies to comfort, for example, air conditioning, our tongues to good tastes, and our noses to fragrances.

The Buddha did not say that these things are *dukkha*. He used the word *sukha* or happiness for them as well. But he pointed out that this kind of happiness is not the highest level of happiness. It is a very ordinary or mundane level of happiness because it has consequences. In order to achieve this happiness, we struggle or work very hard. Some people even kill, steal or commit adultery. More commonly, people join the rat race and lose their mental calmness or relaxation. Thus to achieve more of this worldly happiness, we have to strive more and inevitably undergo more *dukkha*. But we still call this happiness because this is the only kind of happiness we know from our own experience.

Our five senses are insatiable and that is why *kama sukha* cannot make people happy permanently. Some people compare it to a container without a bottom. No matter how much water you pour water into such a container, it can never be full.

Although we know that this is not the highest level of happiness, this understanding has not penetrated our mind deeply. We habitually or instinctively still think this worldly happiness is the highest happiness. But, of course, when we listen to Dharma teachings, we intellectually understand that this is not the highest happiness but this kind of understanding has no lasting effect.

The Buddha said that in order to get rid of this situation, we have to make an effort to change our way of thinking. There is a simple story that illustrates this very well.

A few people from a village once heard that there were valuable objects in a distant place available just for the taking. If they manage to acquire these things and sell them, the villagers would be able to improve their lives. They therefore set off on their long journey.

Somewhere along the way, they found a rough piece of cloth. Some people thought that they could sell the cloth and earn money so they took it along with them.

While they were passing through another place, they found silver. Most of the people then abandoned the cloth and carried the silver instead. Only one person continued carrying the cloth.

Later on, they found gold. The people who carried the silver, then threw it away, preferring the gold but the one person who carried the cloth continued carrying it.

When they returned to their village, the people who carried gold, sold it and became rich. But the person who carried the cloth remained poor.

We are just like the man with the cloth. We are still stuck with worldly happiness thinking that we can satisfy ourselves with worldly happiness. And so we are unable to give up worldly happiness for higher levels of happiness.

What are these higher levels of happiness? There are two.

We can achieve the second level of happiness by attaining *jhanas* or the highest level of mental stability. We can move away from our attachment to worldly pleasures, things we can experience through our five senses, by practising one pointed *(shamatha)* meditation up to a very high level. The mind achieves happiness because it is free from defilements. This happiness arises from non-attachment. But if we later revert to attachment to worldly pleasures, we will lose this happiness. And so this achievement is also temporary.

A person who achieves this second level of happiness can be equated to the villagers who gave up the cloth to take the silver.

The highest level of happiness is permanent freedom or *nirvana*. To achieve permanent freedom, we have to rid our minds, once and for all, of the three poisons of greed, hatred and delusion. This is what Buddhists call *enlightenment.*

I am not asking you to give up everything and undertake the life of a monk so as to attain nirvana in this very life.

But if we consider ourselves Buddhists, we need to train our mind so as to be able at least to understand, if not appreciate, the different levels of happiness and know that enjoying worldly happiness is not the highest level of happiness available to us as human beings.

An ordinary level of happiness may be sufficient for us to live as ordinary people. But if we think like the man who preferred cotton over silver and gold, we can never improve spiritually.

To conclude, let me quote some lines from a couple of sutras on this very topic. No matter how well anyone, including myself, can explain the Dharma, there is no substitute for the very words spoken by the Buddha himself.

Sukha Sutta

'.... There is worldly happiness, there is unworldly happiness, and there is a still greater unworldly happiness...

"Now, O monks, what is worldly happiness? There are these five cords of sense desire: forms cognizable by the eye... sounds cognizable by the ear... odors cognizable by the nose... flavors cognizable by the tongue... tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for and desired, agreeable and endearing, associated with sense desire and alluring. It is the happiness and gladness that arises dependent on these five cords of sense desire which are called 'worldly happiness.'

Now what is unworldly happiness? Quite secluded from sense desires, secluded from unwholesome states of mind, a monk enters upon and abides in the first meditative absorption... With the stilling of thought-conception and discursive thinking, he enters upon and abides in the second meditative absorption... With the fading away of joy as well, he dwells in equanimity, mindfully and fully aware he feels happiness within, and enters upon and abides in the third meditative absorption of which the Noble Ones announce: 'He dwells in happiness who has equanimity and is mindful.' This is called 'unworldly happiness.'

Editorial

All Habits Die Hard

There is nothing whatsoever that remains difficult as one gets used to it. Thus, through habituation with slight pain, even great pain becomes bearable.

Santideva - A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life

Sometimes critics of Buddhism say that it is pointless to be Buddhist because the Buddha is unable to save his own followers. Look at how poor Buddhists are, they argue, pointing to countries like Myanmar and Mongolia.

The Buddha in his lifetime welcomed a good debate. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to debunk any comment that he thought was baseless.

As Buddhists, we should try to emulate the Buddha as well as we can.

Not only is the alleged causative link between Buddhism (or any other religion, for that matter) and poverty not proved, more pertinently, the seeking of wealth for its own sake is not a pursuit worth pursuing, according to the Buddha.

Another criticism – a more reasonable one - is that the Buddhist spiritual path is very difficult to practise, let alone complete successfully.

One reason is that Buddhists are generally expected to be self-reliant. There is no creator God to save us if only we would believe in him. In the familiar words of the *Dharmapada* -

You, yourselves, must walk the path.
Buddhas only show the way.
Those who are meditative,
who have gotten on the path,
Will be free from the bonds of Mara.

Raja Sutta: Kings

(*Bhante Says* cont'd.)

Any sensual bliss in the world,
any heavenly bliss,
isn't worth one sixteenth-sixteenth
of the bliss of the ending of craving.

I wish you success in your spiritual practice.

Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

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Raja Sutta: Kings (Ud 2.2) Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Another is that the Buddhist spiritual path is long (countless lifetimes) and arduous (perfecting generosity, virtue, patience, zeal, concentration and wisdom).

A good example is this extract from the *Simile of the Saw Sutta* –

'Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding. Even then you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves.'

However, though long and arduous, the Buddhist spiritual goal of enlightenment is humanly achievable, as the Buddha clearly showed by his own example.

The problem is that we have allowed our mind to be polluted by layers and layers of greed, hatred and delusion over countless lifetimes. As the Buddha said in the *Anguttura Nikaya,*

'Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is defiled by incoming defilements. The uninstructed run-of-the-mill person doesn't discern that as it actually is present, which is why I tell you that — for the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person — there is no development of the mind.

Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is freed from incoming defilements. The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones discerns that as it actually is present, which is why I tell you that — for the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones — there is development of the mind.'

To put it mildly, we have habituated ourselves with bad habits over a very, very long time.

We normally don't pay much attention to our habits, good or bad. But research has shown that they play an important role in our lives whether we realise it or not.

In his book, *Making Habits, Breaking Habits*, author Jeremy Dean, a research psychologist, delving into numerous studies on the subject, attempts to answer the questions that form the sub-title of his book - *Why We Do Things, Why We Don't and How to Make Any Change Stick.*

He begins by examining the *'anatomy of a habit'* . Of course, we all know what a habit is. It is something we do on a regular basis, often without even knowing that we are doing it.

As Dean reveals, studies have shown that a habit can take from 21 days to 254 days to form, depending on how strong the habit is and the nature of the activity that forms the habit.

Generally, a habit has three characteristics.

Firstly, we are often unaware or only vaguely aware of performing our habits because we have become so accustomed to them. But this also has a bright side because if we have to ponder over everything we do daily, we won't be able to accomplish very much. And we will stress ourselves to death with what Dean calls *'decision fatigue'.*

Secondly, *'the act of performing a habit is curiously emotionless.'* Thus something that we dread doing when we first have to do it like waking up early to go to school or work becomes routine after some time. The same applies to pleasurable activities. They can also become mundane if repeated often enough. Hence some people crave extreme sports or dangerous activities.

Thirdly, a habit is strongly linked to the circumstances in which it is created or performed. When the circumstances are changed, as for example, having to move to a different residence or transfer to a different college or work place, the new circumstances force us to change our habits too. As Dean puts it, *'habits are strongly rooted in the situations in which they occur.'*

Habituation plays a huge role in Buddhist spiritual practice.

The *Chapaa.na Sutta* is an interesting discourse in which the Buddha compares the way an untrained mind works to the natural inclinations of six animals.

In that discourse, someone ties six different kinds of animals to a strong pillar. As long as they are tied up, the animals' freedom of movement is severely curtailed. But as soon as they are set free, each of them heads straight to its own place of familiarity - the snake to the ant-hill, the crocodile into the water, the bird up in the air, the dog to the village, the jackal to the charnel-ground and the monkey to the forest.

According to the Buddha, this illustrates how the human mind works if left unrestrained.

"... In the same way, monks, whenever a monk fails to practice and develop mindfulness as to body, the eye struggles to draw him towards attractive objects, while unattractive objects are repellent to him... The mind struggles to draw him towards attractive objects of thought, while unattractive objects of thought are repellent to him. This, monks, is lack of restraint.

... And what, monks, is restraint? In this, a monk, seeing objects with the eye, is not drawn to attractive objects, is not repelled by unattractive objects. He remains with firmly established mindfulness as to body, his mind being unrestricted. He knows in truth that liberation of the heart, that liberation by wisdom, through which those evil, unskilled states that have arisen pass away without remainder..."

Thus it is mindfulness that restrains a mind just as a rope restrains the animals.

'Tethered to a stout post or pillar,' monks, denotes mindfulness as to body. Therefore, monks, this is how you must train yourselves: 'We shall practice mindfulness as to body, develop it, make it our vehicle, our dwelling-place, our resort. We will build it up and undertake it thoroughly.' This, monks, is how you must train yourselves.'

Interestingly, in the chapter entitled *Breaking Habits,* Dean also talks about mindfulness as an effective method for breaking bad habits.

'Being mindful is about living in the moment. In many ways, it's the exact opposite of our experience while performing a habit. Mindfulness is all about increasing your conscious awareness of what you are doing right now. It's often talked about in the context of meditation, but really, it is a way of life or an attitude. Absolutely everything can be done mindfully and paying attention is at its core. But it's not just a case of paying attention; the way in which you pay attention is also important. The attitude that's encouraged in Buddhist mindfulness techniques is affectionate, compassionate, and open-hearted. So you're not just coolly observing your own thoughts; you're also trying to be generous to them, whether they are thoughts that make you feel good or bad. You're not sitting in judgment over yourself, rather you're trying to be present and compassionate to yourself. Those who practice living in the moment say that it can give you a new way of experiencing life.'

A simple but effective way of being mindful, I would suggest, is to recite a mantra anytime a negative or wandering thought comes to mind. This distracts the mind and prevents it from ruminating into anger or frustration. The mind is thus able to detour from a negative frame to something more positive and useful. If we repeat this action long enough, habituation sets in. An automatic response is triggered every time the occasion arises without us even realising it.

Such an automatic response may even prove useful at the moment of death. The notion that the last thought of a person at the moment of death dictates in what form that person is reborn after death is one that every school of Buddhism subscribes to. As death is often accompanied by pain and suffering, it is probably too much to ask an ordinary person to be mindful enough to adopt a positive frame of mind at the crucial time. Thus an automatic response induced by habituation may help.

Dean's book also highlights research that shows that if we are trying to break an old bad habit,

simply suppressing the urge will not suffice. On the contrary, it may even backfire. As Dean says, commenting on the results of one study, *'(t)he very act of first trying to suppress a thought made it fight back all the stronger.'* Instead, what is required to break an old bad habit is to replace it with a new, hopefully good, habit.

This is precisely what happens in meditation practice.

Meditators are specifically advised not to suppress any thoughts that arise but to bring the mind back to the meditation object, whether it be the breath or a Buddha statue, any time the mind wanders. What the meditator is attempting to do is in effect to replace the numerous objects of a distracted mind with a single object of a focused mind.

Someone with a focused mind is, of course, His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama.

His Holiness has had a lifetime – or more – of spiritual training. A scene in the movie *Kundun* gives the audience a glimpse of the kind of rigorous spiritual discipline that His Holiness had to endure.

In that scene, the young Dalai Lama was reciting the refuge prayers in the presence of his tutors. He chanted it clearly and loudly. But it was apparently not good enough. He had to repeat it again and again. What went wrong?

He was, according to a tutor, reciting it with too much pride!

To conclude, we know that the Buddhist spiritual path is long and difficult. The Buddha said so himself when he decided not to teach the Dharma until he was persuaded to change his mind.

Nevertheless, we are not really left to our own devices.

Habituation, skillfully inbuilt into practices such as meditation, chanting, mantra recitation and the like, helps and goes a long way.

Good teachers like those featured in POJ from time to time are, of course, crucial importance.

And then there is this.

At a meditation retreat in Phuket some years ago, I told Dr B Alan Wallace, who led the retreat, that the three eons of practice required for attaining enlightenment is a little daunting to me. He laughed.

Then he said, *"There's always (Amitabha Buddha's) Pure Land. It's our insurance policy. I believe in it."*

As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Editor
Chwee Beng

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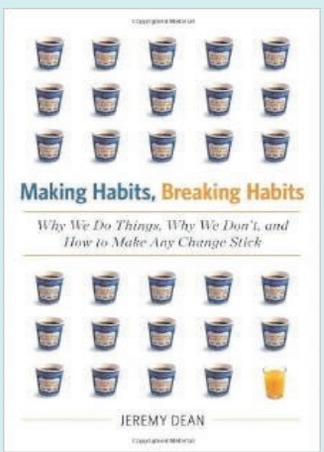


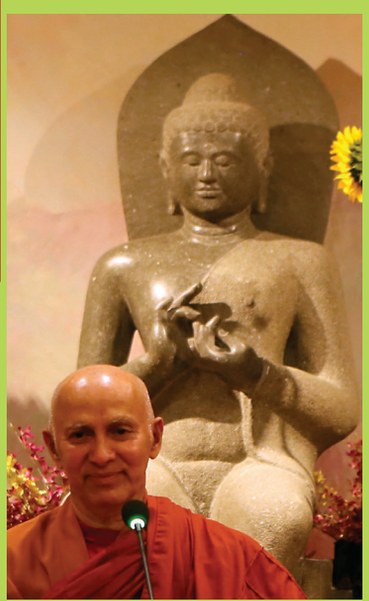
"There's always (Amitabha Buddha's) Pure Land. It's our insurance policy. I believe in it."
Dr. B. Alan Wallace

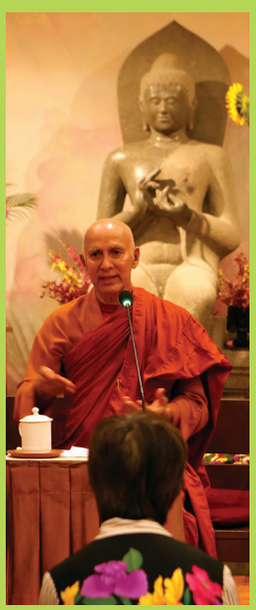
BL EVENT

BL EVENT: DHAMMA DAY 2014
Date: July 21, 2014
Venue: BL Auditorium
Photo Credits: Yew Beng & Yeow Foo

BL EVENT

BL EVENT: LIVING WELL SERIES @ THE BUDDHIST LIBRARY - A MINDFULNESS WORKSHOP WITH VENRABLE SOMALOKA
Date: August 16 - August 18, 2014
Venue: BL Auditorium
Photo Credit: Yeow Foo





BL EVENT

A Mindfulness Workshop - Living Well Series

Led by Venerable Somaloka
Date: August 16 – 22, 2014
Venue: BL Auditorium
Reviewed by Sandy.

What does this word *mindfulness* mean?

It is obvious that each human being looks different from any other person (unless they happen to be identical twins).

But, in reality, all human beings are basically the same. As His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama always says, *"Everyone yearns for happiness. Nobody wants to suffer."*

Ever since I left Japan to go overseas, I have desperately been searching for the answer to one question, *'What does 'mindfulness' really mean?'*

Venerable Somaloka is a great teacher who explicitly and patiently showed the answer to this question during this workshop as well as the 10-day Mindfulness Meditation Retreat held in Sri Lanka from July 31 to August 10, 2014.

Young Japanese children are repeatedly and consistently taught by parents, aunties, uncles and school teachers that they have to be careful as regards what they do and how they speak to other people. As such, seldom do we come cross Japanese people expressing strong emotions, especially in public. Hence foreigners get the impression that Japanese people are polite.

As a Japanese myself, I thought all along that this courtesy is mindfulness. However, one question always bothers me - *If acting politely is mindfulness, why are Japanese people who always act politely still not perfectly happy. Some even commit suicide .*

Gradually I began to wonder whether my understanding of mindfulness is correct.

If Japanese people are being mindful when they behave so politely how can they yet remain at times unhappy?

According to Ven Somaloka, all human beings are conditioned since birth or even since the embryonic stage. The moment we are biologically separated from our mothers, our five senses become fully operational to tell us the difference between *self* and *others*. This perception eventually leads to our mental construction of our *self-image.*

In order to survive in this conditioned world with this *self-image* we do need perception to discriminate between *self* and *others*. After perceiving objects through our sense organs, our feelings and thoughts appear. Then finally we take action according to five Dynamics (Desire, Aggression, Depression, Anxiety and Cognitive Dissonance). Unknowingly, we continue this cycle as long as another cognitive mode, i.e. *mindfulness*, is inoperative. We are able to sense the exhaustion of the body on the superficial level as a result of our unconscious endless mind cycle behavior but the sad thing is that we do not know we are doing this and we suffer from this. This is *dukkha* or *suffering* or *unsatisfactoriness*.

Therefore, Ven Somaloka suggested that we should try to break this cycle with mindfulness, just observing our own breath without judgment or expectation. If we manage to break this cycle even just for ten minutes per day or even just a second, we can step out of this cycle and give incredible kindness and calmness to ourselves in body and mind.

Just be with yourself. This is Ven Somaloka's advice. It sounds simple but it is by no means easy.

Somehow, a moment of truth seemed to arrive in me. I have found it!

The meticulous carefulness with which Japanese people practise courtesy is possibly a sort of mindfulness. It is a little similar to what Ven Somaloka taught.

The difference is that Japanese mindfulness is operated from the other party's viewpoint. We consider carefully how we should behave or speak to this person in front of us so that we do not cause him or her any problem or difficulty. But to the extent that we should ignore our own concerns, it also means we are not mindful to ourselves. We only care about being considerate to others. This may sound beautiful because there will not then be much conflict or dispute with other people but it is also contradictory. Sometimes, just as Ven Somaloka mentioned on one of the nights, for sure, we should care about others but it is not always necessary to sacrifice ourselves in the process. Yes, Japanese are commonly doing this subconsciously based on continuous conditioning and we have lost ourselves somewhere, ending with unhappiness and pain for ourselves.

What is needed, as taught by the Buddha, is a proper balance between the needs of others and our own needs.

In the *Sedaka Sutta*: *The Bamboo Acrobat*, the Buddha told a story of a bamboo acrobat and his young assistant. They went from place to place performing on a bamboo pole. The master positioned himself on the bamboo pole and then told his assistant to climb on his shoulders. Then he said to his assistant, *"You look after me, my dear Medakathalika, and I'll look after you."*

To which, the assistant told the bamboo acrobat, *"That will not do at all, master! You look after yourself, master, and I will look after myself."*

The Buddha then explained what this means to the monks –

'Monks, the establishing of mindfulness is to be practiced with the thought, 'I'll watch after myself.' The establishing of mindfulness is to be practiced with the thought, 'I'll watch after others.' When watching after yourself, you watch after others. When watching after others, you watch after yourself.

... And how do you watch after others when watching after yourself? Through cultivating [the practice], through developing it, through pursuing it. This is how you watch after others when watching after yourself.

And how do you watch after yourself when watching after others? Through endurance, through harmlessness, through a mind of goodwill, and through sympathy. This is how you watch after yourself when watching after others.

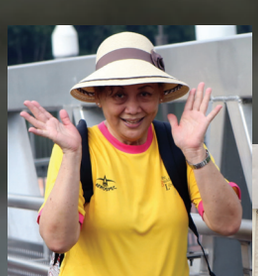
The establishing of mindfulness is to be practiced with the thought, 'I'll watch after myself.' The establishing of mindfulness is to be practiced with the thought, 'I'll watch after others.' When watching after yourself, you watch after others. When watching after others, you watch after yourself.'

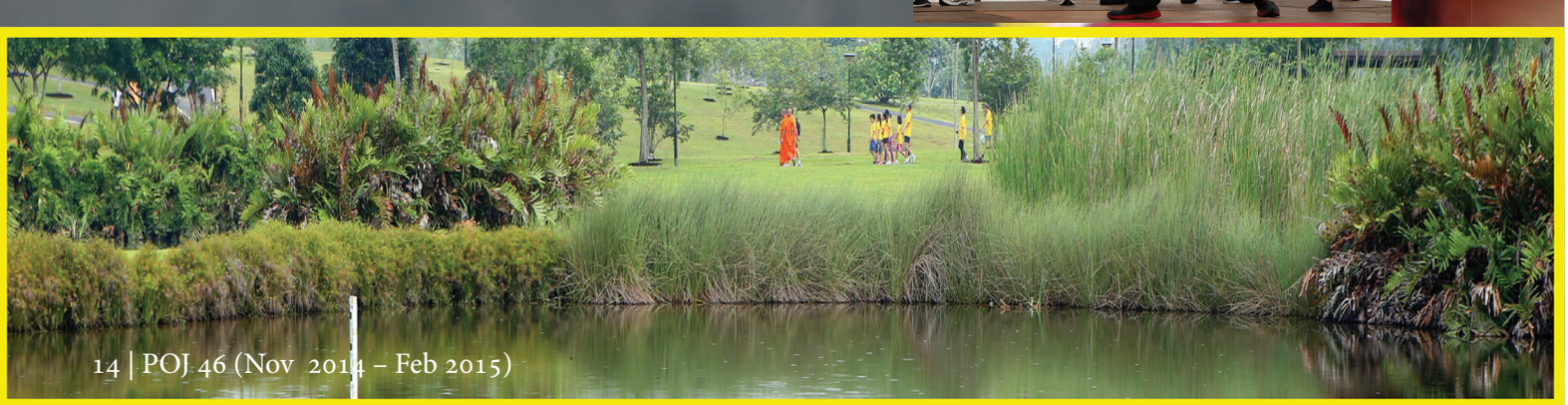
I would like to express tremendous thanks to Ven Somaloka's for sharing with us his profound and scientific insight from his accumulated experience.

Now I know the meaning of *'looking up the sky mindfully'* and *'observing external stimuli with space'.'* I just sit and be with my breath here and now.

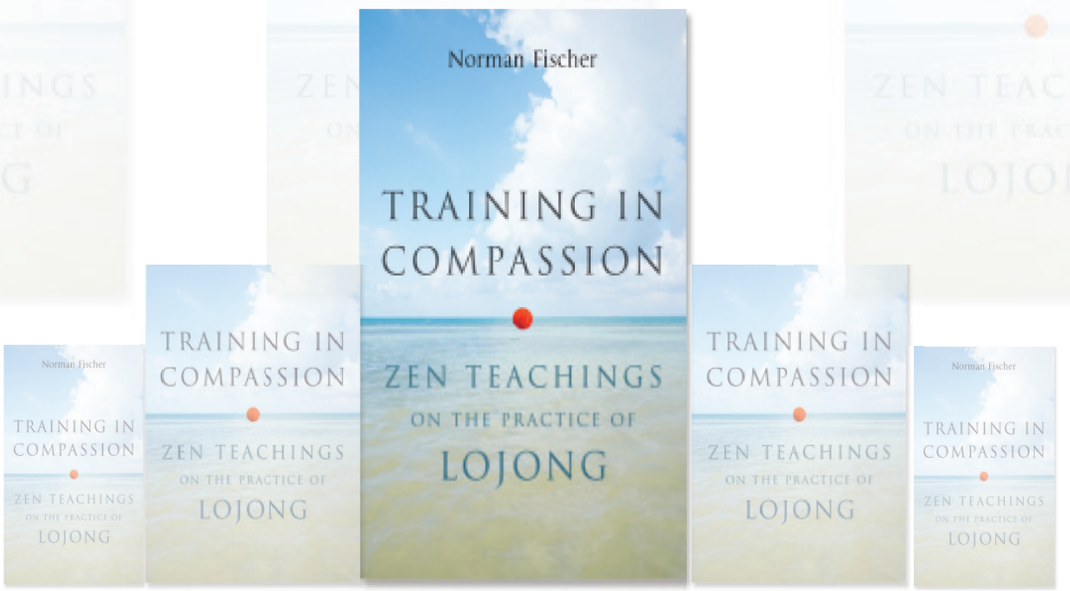
BL EVENT

BL EVENT: BODHI WALK 2014
Date: September 7, 2014
Venue: Sengkang Riverside Park
Photo Credit: Yeow Foo





BOOK REVIEW



Training in Compassion: Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong

by Norman Fischer
Shambala Publications (2012)
Reviewed by Debbie Tan

Training in Compassion is a commentary on the Root Text of the *Seven Points of Training the Mind,* also known as *Lojong,* written by the 12th century Tibetan master, Geshe Chekhawa.

Being a Zen Buddhist priest, Norman Fischer provides an insightful, relevant and practical perspective on the practice of *Lojong* as it can apply in the 21st century.

This Zen approach to a non-Zen text not only explains the teachings with straightforward commonsense simplicity but also provides a thorough and systematic method of cultivating compassion and resilience in our modern life.

The premise behind *Lojong* is that our minds are plastic and hence trainable.

In *Lojong*, slogans are used as tools to develop *Bodhicitta* (the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings) and compassion.

Applying Zen wisdom, Fischer explains how the practice of Lojong can be beneficial for everyone, regardless of whether they are interested in Buddhism or not.

People who find Buddhist explanations of how the mind works, complicated or difficult to understand, would enjoy reading Fischer's explanations, which are illustrated in the context of modern living. Knowing how complex Buddhist teachings can be applied to our everyday lives, not only empowers us to live a life with compassion and wisdom, but also gives us the capacity to develop a greater understanding of ourselves.

Although Fischer has skilfully explained complex Buddhist teachings in ways that would not discourage a new reader, he does not shy away from discussing the profound absolute truth. In fact, Fischer explains the differences between practising absolute Bodhicitta and relative Bodhicitta; how the mind training slogans oscillate between the profound and mundane. Hence *Training in Compassion* provides valuable insights and techniques, not only for people new to Buddhist teachings but also seasoned practitioners. In fact, Fischer's approach to *Lojong* appeals not only to Buddhists, but to all with the basic human aspiration for goodness and happiness.

Readers will find Fischer's commentary on *Lojong* a very handy manual for training the mind.

The book is structured around seven categories shown below, which serve as the basis for the fifty-nine slogans discussed.

1) Resolve to Begin
2) Train in Empathy and Compassion
3) Transform Bad Circumstances into the Path
4) Make Practice your Whole Life
5) Assess and Extend
6) The Discipline of Relationship
7) Living with Ease in a Crazy World

One of my favourite slogans is *"Turn things around"*. Fischer explains that the problems and obstacles we face in life are our treasures, which have the potential to bring us much joy and spiritual wealth. In most instances we run away from our suffering and problems, so Fischer provides some helpful tips on how we can face the difficulties and engage them creatively, making use of the pain to make us stronger and more compassionate.

Another slogan is *"Drive all blames into one"*. We are told to take responsibility for all the problems and obstacles we may face. In the words of Fischer, *"eat the blame and it will make you strong"*.

Such slogans are used to train our minds to boldly face the inevitable suffering we experience in *samsara*. They empower us to deal with them positively, turning them into benefits.

Fischer also highlights how the slogans can be used to help us when we feel that our spiritual practice is going nowhere. The slogan *"Practice when you are distracted"* reminds us that when we are distracted or lazy or overwhelmed by anger or jealousy, etc we can make them all part of the practice. As explained by Fischer, *"you fall down on the ground and you use the ground to get up"*.

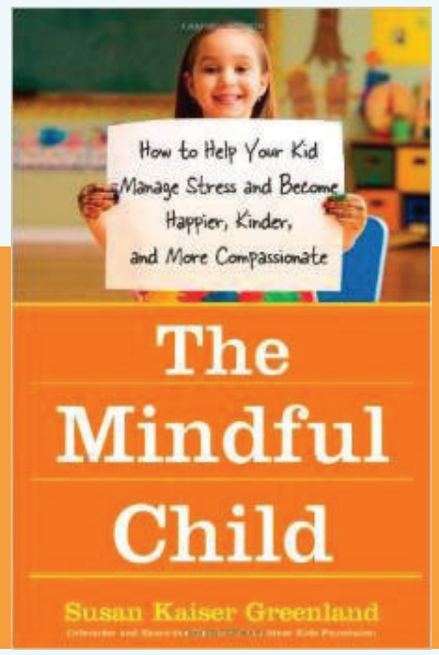
Another slogan *"Abandon hope"* trains us to practise without the concepts of gain and loss. Instead Fischer encourages us to keep on going with the training, based on the understanding that it is worthwhile for its own sake.

Both these slogans train us to be kind and compassionate to ourselves and to accept our inadequacies while turning them into practice. In this way, our whole life becomes practice.

Another powerful slogan is *"Don't be predictable"*. In life, often what we expect to happen does not happen. Fischer explains that *"freshness and openness and a capacity for surprise are hallmarks of mind training"*. Expecting the unexpected and then learning to manage and accept them, builds our capacity to deal with the vicissitudes in life. This helps us to develop compassion and resilience within ourselves.

Mind training in Tibetan Buddhism requires a lot of commitment, repetition and patience. Fischer offers a practical approach towards *Lojong* practice that resonates with the modern mind. In this book, the slogans are introduced in a way that is cogent and filled with wisdom. Fischer's Zen perspective on *Lojong* makes it a valuable aid to anyone who aspires to live life to the fullest, while doing so with ease.

BOOK REVIEW



The Mindful Child

- *How to Help our Kid Manage Stress and Become Happier, Kinder and More Compassionate*

by Susan Kaiser Green land

Reviewed by Crystal Ang

> *' Who is it that can tell me who I am?"*
>
> (*King Lear*, William Shakespeare)

In William Shakespeare's play, *King Lear*, the King suffers a crisis of identity upon the loss of his authority and power. Painfully, he questions his understanding of self.

People experiencing mid-life crisis may identify with King Lear's predicament and young adults can learn the importance of self-awareness and understanding.

Why should anyone, especially the foolish like King Lear, only come to realise that they never knew themselves only when they are old and have nothing left?

This hard fall can be avoided by giving children and young adults the means to understand themselves. Taking up practices in mindfulness comprising simple and easy methods to embark on this journey can fulfill this task.

Unimaginable as it is, mindfulness can be cultivated in children even in their pre-school years.

Written in an easy prose with generous details to guide any parent or reader new to meditation and mindfulness, Greenland provides the reasons and methods for parents to give their child the

tools for self-discovery and management at an early age. She proves that even a rambunctious child can be mindful for short periods of time.

The fun and simple mindfulness practices shared by Greenland may significantly benefit children who have difficulty dealing with people, emotions and stress.

Juggling homework with co-curricular activities (CCAs), project work, academic assessments, meeting parental and school's expectations, and the challenges of maintaining friendships and relationships - the list goes on - these are numerous sources of stress for a child growing up in Singapore.

Parents who love and care for their children are not spared the anxiety as the dampened mood is reflected in the quieter shopping malls during periods of key examinations like the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) and Ordinary level examinations (O'Levels). Therefore, giving children small pockets of time for mindfulness training can help make growing up happier.

The Mindful Child comes with numerous activities to cater to children of various age groups. Using only simple instructions and objects like raisins, beans or soft toys, parents can aid their children to become more mindful of their bodies, e.g. breath, emotions and surroundings. Being mindful helps children become more attuned to their emotions and thinking.

Greenland offers activities for children to look both inwards and outwards, gently nudging them towards compassion, self-awareness and self-mastery.

Parents who can afford to commit periods as short as ten to fifteen minutes in doing these fun and engaging practices with their children will find this a great opportunity to strengthen their bonds with their children.

BL ACTIVITY

Ven Somaloka's Vipassana Retreat

August 1-9, 2014

Paramita Meditation Center, Kadugannawa, Sri Lanka,

A Short Summary by Geok Hua.

1. *Justification of our reaction to a given stimulus.* It is right and appropriate to do. Often when others highlight our faults, we seek to justify our behaviour to protect the image of '*our self*'. In Vipassana practice, this interferes with the learning process in which we wish to discover who we really are and how we function. Justification is usually a way of ameliorating one's reaction, instead of admitting that the behavior was inappropriate.

2. *Self-deception.* Deceiving ourselves into believing that what is really not true 'is true'. This can happen in any situation whether it is a perceived episode or a mental image. An example is the case of the volunteer at a home for the elderly who truly believes that by setting fire to the home and killing the residents he liberates them from their suffering.

3. *Our own value systems*. Influenced and shaped by family, community or culture, social and economic. These are the data we uncontrollably collect and process. They determine our reactions.

4. *Spiritual knowledge & practice.* The danger of trying to fit one into another. By comparing and dismissing one aspect and adding on others, we prevent ourselves from gaining full benefit from this practice. In the worst case scenario, we put the blame on the practice for being ineffective or worthless.

5. *Fear of truly confronting ourselves.* To look and drill deeply into our own psyche to see who we really are. We fear and hesitate, afraid that we may not always be the *'wonderful, kind ...* ' people we appear to be. We need to drill through this facade or construct.

6. *Expectation or fixation on a goal leading to disappointment or intervention.* This prevents us from being able to mindfully observe the process in Vipassana practice which is process of observing that the untamed mind perceives no separation or distinction between the objective stimulus and the onslaught of our reactions. Habitual perception sees both as one and the same. It is in observing the separation that we see the space created between them and realise that the mind can be free from all the defilements because they are not one and the same.

7. *Lack of compassion for this body.* We fail to recognize that life is sacred and that this body has the full potential to actualise both our spiritual and mundane dreams and aspirations.

8. *Unwittingly feeding the 'ego'.* We replace one set of value system with another and judge others by this '*new*' standard. This practice of mindfulness is cultivated by us looking at ourselves and is not to be used to judge others.

It is essential to reflect regularly on these obstacles so that we do not get derailed in our practice and jump off the track before we reach our destination

What do the Retreatants think of their Experience?

Venerable Somaloka reinforced the importance of knowing our motivation very clearly. He taught us to reconstruct our life to be clear and precise by asking ourselves how to lead a productive life without attachment and stay focussed and mindful without expectation.

Nikko Tan

I noticed that I became more subdued over the nine day Vipassana retreat and was able to discover what I would like to believe is my optimal level of calmness to support my other, immediately following, meditational activities, including Vipassana.

Ang Thiam Hong

Bhante Somaloka's welcome was a sobering wakeup call. Forget what you thought you know (or think you know) about Vipassana.

'Angry mind and sad body' is a metaphor for illness. The body has been bullied into submission. Growing mental expectations unrelentingly reinforce self-image constructs by ignoring the overworked body. The familiarity of dukka indeed!

The resolution came when I experienced the 'mindful' pause-button. And what was that process precisely? I leave you with this cliffhanger. Go and be transformed.

Siauw Chong

Perception synthesises sensual stimuli and reactions. Vipassana practice creates the space and time between them. Observing this space and time allows us to note the separation between stimuli and the habitual onslaught of emotions and reactions. When this is observed, the healing process begins naturally.

Geok Hua

Bhante Somaloka has given us clear and incisive instructions on the practice as well as the technique for maintaining mindfulness in the midst of our busy daily activities. It has truly been an extremely fruitful retreat. The rest is for me to keep up with the practice! Thank you Bhante.

Sandy, Saito Shinobu

Bhante Somaloka has been so patient with us, guiding us through the practice.With his subtle but highly impactful technique, I came to know how I became who I am and who I will be as if I see the whole picture. The gift Bhante Somaloka provided so generously was lifelong insight to me. Ayubowan, Bhante Somaloka!.

The interconnectedness of all beings and conditions surfaced clearly in this retreat.

We depend on so many people around us to accommodate a retreat, off the radar, literally, for nine days.

We depend on the originator of the idea (Sin Tho the organiser), the clear teachings of the meditation teacher (Bhante Somaloka); the communal spirit of the retreatants, the care and attention from the Meditation Centre (Bhante and the staff) and the healing vibes of nature, which was abundantly felt in the Centre.

We are not 'separate' beings. When our appreciation of Vipassana grows from this retreat, we bring it back to the world we retreated from. We share our beliefs, not with words, but (hopefully) by living it.

The teaching that jive most with me is -

Create this space, between the initial feelings and resultant action. Take time to pause and breathe every hour. Meditate, even for a short while, every day, because it is the continuity that keeps the benefits from the retreat fresh. And last, but not least, a teaching from myself, checking the handphone only twice a day, is a retreat in itself.

May all beings get a chance such as this.

Lim Mei Ling

Thank you Bhante Dharmaratana for making it possible for the ten of us to receive the Dharma and meditate in a most conducive environment.

Thank you to all the wonderful people at Centre for taking excellent care of us during the retreat.

Last but not least, thank you Bhante Somaloka for diligently and generously sharing the Dharma and guiding us in our meditation practice.

Sin Tho

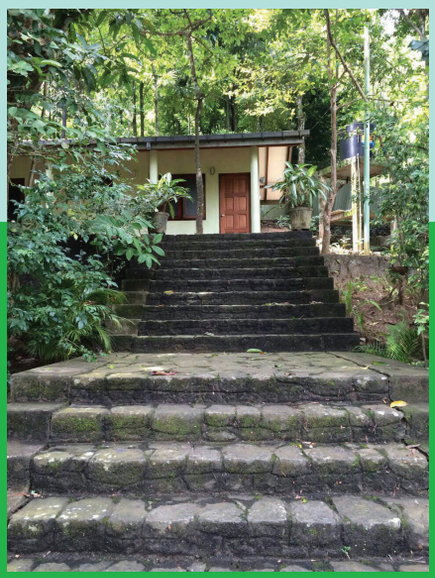


Photo credits : Sin Tho & Ang Thiam Hong