



Buddhist Publication Society

Newsletter

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Taking Stock of Oneself

Though in principle the Buddhist path leads straight and unerringly from bondage to freedom, when we apply it to ourselves it often seems to take a tortuous route as imposed by the twists and turns of our own contorted mental topography. Unless we have exceptionally mature wholesome roots, we cannot expect to approach the goal “as the crow flies,” soaring unhindered through the quick and blissful skyways of the jhānas and higher insights. Instead we must be prepared to tread the path at ground level, moving slowly, steadily and cautiously through the winding mountain roads of our own minds. We begin at the inevitable point of departure—with the unique constellation of personal qualities, habits and potentials that we bring with us into the practice. Our ingrained defilements and obstinate delusions, as well as our hidden reserves of goodness, inner strength and wisdom—these are at once the material out of which the practice is forged, the terrain to be passed through, and the vehicle that takes us to our destination.

Confidence in the Buddhist path is a prerequisite for persisting on this journey. Yet it often happens that though we may be fully convinced of the liberating efficacy of the Dhamma, we stumble along perplexed as to how we can apply the Dhamma fruitfully to ourselves. One major step towards reaping the benefits of Dhamma practice consists in making an honest assessment of one’s own character. If we are to utilise effectively the methods the Buddha has taught for overcoming the mind’s defilements, we first must take stock of those particular defilements that are prevalent in our individual makeup. It will not suffice for us to sit back and console ourselves with the thought that the path leads infallibly to the end of greed, hate and delusion. For the path to be effective in our own practice, we have to become familiar with our own persistent greeds, hates and delusions as they crop up in the round of daily life. Without this honest confrontation with ourselves, all our other pursuits of Dhamma may be to no avail and can actually lead us astray. Though we may gain extensive knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures, clarify our view and sharpen our powers of thought, invest so many hours on the meditation cushion and walkway, if we do not attend to the blemishes in our characters, these other achievements, far from extricating the defilements, may instead only go to reinforce them.

Yet, though honest self-assessment is one of the most vital steps in Dhamma practice, it is also one of the most difficult. What makes it so difficult is the radically new perspective that must be adopted to undertake an investigation of oneself and the dense barriers that must be penetrated to arrive at truthful self-understanding. In attempting to assess ourselves we are no longer observing an external entity which we can treat as an adventitious object to be evaluated in terms of our subjective purposes. We are observing instead the seat of observation itself, that most elusive centre from which we gaze out upon the world, and we are doing so in a mode which casts all its motives and projects in a critical light. To enter this domain of inquiry is to run smack up against our very sense of personal identity, and thus to have to pierce the thick screens of delusion and blind emotion which keep that sense of identity intact.

Normally, in subservience to our need to confirm to ourselves our uniqueness and irreplaceable importance, we proceed to construct mental pictures—indeed, a picture gallery—

of what we imagine ourselves to be. The self-image that emerges from these pictures becomes simultaneously a mainstay which we cling to in order to maintain our self-esteem and a standpoint from which we orient ourselves towards others and launch our projects in the world. To secure its tenuous status the mind employs a variety of tactics “behind the back” of our conscious awareness. It throws up blinders which keep out disturbing information, it flatters us with fantasied projections, it drives us to manipulate people and situations in ways that will seem to validate our tacit assumptions about our virtues and identity.

All these projects born of the quest to substantiate our sense of identity only increase our suffering. The more we lock ourselves into the images we form of ourselves, the more we alienate ourselves from others and close off our access to liberating truth. Thence release from suffering requires that we gradually discard our delusive self-images through rigorous examination of our minds.

The venerable Sāriputta, in the Discourse on No Blemishes (Majjh. 5), stresses the role of honest self-assessment as a prerequisite of spiritual growth. He points out that just as a dirty bronze bowl, deposited in a dusty place and utterly neglected, only becomes dirtier and dustier, so if we fail to recognise the blemishes of our minds we will not make any effort to eliminate them, but will continue to harbour greed, hate and delusion and will die with a corrupted mind. And just as a dirty bronze bowl which is cleaned and polished will in time become bright and radiant, so if we recognise the blemishes of our minds we will arouse our energy to purify them, and having purged ourselves of blemishes we will die with an undefiled mind. The task of self-knowledge is always a difficult one, but it is only by knowing our minds that we will be able to shape them, and it is only by shaping our minds that we can liberate them.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Exploring the Wheels

Far too often we Buddhists forget that the Dhamma is to be lived during our ordinary day-to-day routine, not just when we’re meditating or observing devotional activities. Two collections of short essays by Ananda Pereira, *Live Now* (WHEEL 24/25) and *Escape to Reality* (WHEEL 45/46), may be just the spur needed to identify our human frailties and to make the Buddha’s Teachings a vital part of our daily lives.

Ananda Pereira was the Deputy Solicitor General in Sri Lanka and the son of Dr. Cassius Pereira, a prominent Colombo medical man who later became a monk of the Vajirarama Temple known as the Ven. Kassapa Thera. Ananda Pereira was himself making preparations to enter the Order when he suddenly expired during routine surgery, at the age of 51. These essays cover the problems we all have to face: fear, anger, ignorance, nationalism; they also deal with what we are trying to achieve: freedom, generosity, calmness, zeal. Each essay is extremely short—almost all are a mere one to two pages. Yet the author’s pithy style and clear language combined with his insight into the Dhamma as it relates to man’s life, give much food for thought. The tone of the essays varies from the serious, to the exhortatory, to the ironic. An example of his sense of humour can be seen in this passage from “Zeal”:

“We Buddhists of today are feeble specimens indeed, in comparison with the Buddha and the mighty Arahants. We, most of us, regard life as desirable on the whole. We mouth the Buddha’s words and profess to follow his teaching, but our actions are sadly lacking in that zeal, that wholehearted endeavour which is necessary for success. We are like people who have queued up and are patiently waiting at a motor bus halting-place. The Gotama Buddha bus has not yet arrived. So we are waiting, kicking our heels and whiling away the

time in silly gossip about motor buses and service they do for the public. We are waiting to pay our few miserable cents for a ticket to Nibbāna and to be carried there in comfort by Metteyya Buddha, without the slightest exertion on our part. Nothing on earth would induce us to walk.”

The subject of strife, unfortunately still a part of our world, is considered in the essay “Life or Death?”:

“There has never been a war but arose from greed—greed for land, greed for trade, greed for power, greed for all the transient phenomena of life, leading inevitably to strife. Let go, and strife ceases. Think of the other fellow as a human being, with nothing to gain except your common weal, and strife ceases. Help him, and you help yourself. It does not matter what language he speaks, what political opinions he holds. You share the same planet, breathe the same air, need the same food. You cannot destroy him and survive. Your fate is linked with his.”

Worry—and who of us doesn’t worry about something? —is examined in the essay “Me and Mine”:

“Of all the adverse mental states, the most obviously unhealthy and potentially dangerous is prolonged worry. Why, we naturally ask, do people worry? In the ultimate analysis there is only one answer. People worry because of thoughts of “me and mine.” We yearn for security for ourselves and for those we love, in a changing world that offers no permanent security. He who’ builds sand-castles on the beach is afraid of every wave. He who offers hostages to fortune becomes the plaything of fortune. He who identifies himself with any existing state of affairs, and is anxious to preserve that state of affairs inviolate, knows no peace of mind. Thus we worry about our “selves,” our health, our children, our friends, our possessions - yearning always to maintain stability in that which is inherently unstable.”

Why not read one of these essays each day - none takes longer than five minutes to read—and put that knowledge into immediate practice. There are enough essays to cover six weeks, but you’ll find that even before that time, you’ll be well on your way to leading a daily life that has more confidence, understanding, tolerance and kindness than ever before, and your meditative mind will be calmer, clearer, steadier.

—Ayya Nyanasiri

Book Notes

Women and Buddhism. Spring Wind - Buddhist Cultural Forum, Vol. 6, Nos. 1, 2 & 3. Zen Lotus Society - Toronto & Ann Arbor, 400 pp. US \$17.

One of the most striking developments in contemporary Buddhism is the fuller active participation of women and their endeavour to find their own unique ways of expressing their experience of Dhamma. In recognition of this important development, Spring Wind - Buddhist Cultural Forum—a fine Buddhist journal published by the Zen Lotus Society—has devoted three-quarters of a special 400 page issue to the theme of Women and Buddhism. This volume contains a wide assortment of stimulating and thoughtful articles relevant to its theme, only a few of which can be discussed here.

Samu Sunim, the Korean-born monk who directs the Zen Lotus Society, opens the volume with an article entitled “The Women in My Life,” dealing with his childhood relationship with his mother, an unsuccessful marriage, and his experience as a Zen teacher in North America.

The longest portion of his article, the story of his childhood, movingly describes his mother's painful struggles with social humiliation, poverty and hard work, and her eventual collapse into insanity and death. Sunim's prose is simple, but powerful and elegant, and his narrative is deeply gripping.

Audrey McK. Fernandez provides a historical overview in "Women in Buddhism: For 2500 Years, A. Persisting Force." Her lead question, "Why have women persisted in Buddhist practice despite the adverse conditions they have often met?" takes her back to the founding of the Bhikkhuni Sangha and the early Buddhist nuns. From there she traces the history of women's participation in Buddhism in later India, China and Japan, and the modern West, highlighting both their achievements and the inhibitory social conditions which obstructed their full development. She concludes by observing that women have persisted in following Buddhism because of the universality of the Buddha's message of enlightenment, and she advises Buddhist women in the future both to deepen their own spirituality and also to "speak up, so that enlightened men may understand women's need for full and perfect growth" (p. 53). James Hughes' "Buddhist Feminism" is easily the most provocative essay in the collection. Drawing upon both the insights of Buddhism and the Western liberal tradition, Hughes sets out to criticise those aspects of established Buddhism which have placed restrictions on the involvement of women and to develop a Buddhist feminist agenda appropriate to our own age and culture. Hughes calls our attention to the need to grapple honestly with some difficult problems posed by tensions between traditional Buddhist attitudes and the contemporary situation, but at times he veers into a series of rash formulations and slurs against the mainstream of Buddhist tradition which cast shadows over his more valuable observations.

In her essay "Gain or Drain: Buddhist and Feminist Views on Compassion," scholar Anne Klein explores the potentials for increasing self-empowerment latent in women's preference for "a relational, caring network, in contrast to the more popularly perpetrated ideals of autonomous individualism." Specifically she sets out to show how in Mahayana Buddhism compassionate relatedness is not seen as leading to lack of power but as "magnificently self-empowering." A parallel problem faced in the Theravada tradition might be discovering how attitudes of kindness, compassion, gentleness and self-effacement can become sources of strength in a world which identifies power with the domination and subjugation of others.

One theme emerging out of several articles in this volume seems, to this reviewer, to contain a potential danger. This is the constant stress on Dhamma practice as a means to empowerment, the elevation of personal status, and the fuller actualization of personality. Surely there lurks here the danger that the values proper to the Dhamma may be inverted and that the aim of transcending concern with power, status and the enhancement of personality will be lost sight of. Besides the longer essays, this issue contains several other articles of interest as well as a few which seem bland and insubstantial. The volume includes a resumee of women's monasteries and retreat centres, biographical notes on eminent Western Buddhist women, a 35 page chronology of events involving women and Buddhism, a 16 page bibliography on women and Buddhism, and more.

For ordering information and general subscription information about this pioneering Buddhist journal, write to: Spring Wind, Zen Buddhist Temple - Toronto, 46, Gwynne Avenue, Toronto M6K 2C3, Ontario, Canada; or Zen Buddhist Temple - Ann Arbor, 1214 Packard Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, USA.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Office News

Our readers and associate members must have been struck by some significant improvements in the appearance of recent WHEELS and BODHI LEAVES. Though for long we have prided ourselves on the content of our publications, we have been equally troubled by the shortcomings in their material quality. We earnestly sought ways to improve their appearance, and even considered getting a press of our own, but a study showed this might create more problems than it would solve.

Recently, breakthroughs came to us from two directions. One was the upcountry town of Bandarawela, where American monk Samanera Bodhesako had been using a computer system for the desktop typesetting of a book he had compiled. Venerable Bodhesako offered to use his system to compose WHEEL 339/341, which he edited, and BODHI LEAVES B 110, which he authored, and we were so favourably impressed by the quality of this work that we decided to acquire the same system to compose our own serial publications. The system is now here—a CAF PC-College computer with an NEC Spinwriter Printer—and with the kind help of Ven. Bodhesako an operator is being trained in the intricacies of computer-assisted typesetting. The other direction where a breakthrough occurred was Singapore. Australian monk Ven. Dhammika, compiler of WHEEL 342/344, had his work printed by a printer in Singapore, and the outcome can be seen in his *Gemstones of the Good Dhamma*. Since production costs in Singapore are very reasonable, we hope to make greater use of their printing facilities, and friends of our Society in Singapore are assisting us with this plan, most notably Ven. Bellanvilla Dhammaratna Thera of the Buddhist Research Society.

Though it might take a little time to fully upgrade our production, we expect our most recent issues to be signs of “the shape of things to come.” Quality printing, good paper and binding, attractive design—these we feel will provide the proper package for the precious content that lies within, the sublime teachings of Buddhism.

—Albert Witanachchi

From the Mailbag

I have found the dissertation concerning ‘Purification of Mind’ to be the most clear and precise explication of the basic tenets of the Buddha’s teaching that I have encountered ... I would like to ask permission of the Society to rewrite as précis some of the Bodhi Leaves in my possession, to be published in the newspaper *Ibiza Now*. Here in the Balearic Islands are many who have come to live the bucolic existence as an escape from the inferno of modern city life in Europe and the U.S.A. Sadly, many do not realise that a change of place will not alleviate the karma that is causing them to suffer. Thus I would like to offer them the gift of the Dhamma via this newspaper. Perhaps some may begin to train their minds and, amidst the beauty and tranquillity of our islands, find the escape from the suffering which they have recognised but do not know how to alleviate.

Roger W. Day
Ibiza, Balears

I am a graduate in Western philosophy and I find that the Dhamma has transformed my life. The Dhamma as a world view with values is intellectually satisfying and enriching and the application of its psychological and moral principles has given me the only peace I have ever

known. Thank you, all of you in the Sangha, for your fantastic work in bringing the Dhamma to our troubled, aridly materialistic world. I hope that I may someday have the honour of meeting you all.

Ms. C. V. Cooney
Cape Town, South Africa

Guidelines to Sutta Study

The following article begins a series of brief aids to the study of the Pali suttas which will be featured as a regular column in this newsletter. Following this introduction to the series, each article in subsequent issues will discuss an individual sutta included in the WHEEL series, calling attention to its salient features.

The Sutta Pitaka of the Canon is our oldest and most trustworthy source for the original teachings of the Buddha, comprising as it does a vast number of the Buddha's discourses given by him in the course of his long ministry—from his first sermon at Benares to his final admonition at Kusinara. It is virtually certain that the Sutta Pitaka does not contain every discourse ever spoken by the Buddha, which would hardly be feasible in the case of a teacher who might have given several talks a day during a forty-five year period. But we can be reasonably confident that the suttas included in the Canon cover the full range of his "doctrine and discipline" and give us the essential instructions we need to wend our way towards perfect liberation. To know exactly what the Master taught, and how those teachings are to be practised, there can be no substitute for that precious legacy which has come down to us from his golden mouth over 2500 years ago.

The suttas were arranged into their present form by the senior monks of the early Buddhist councils, who were assigned this responsibility by reason of their wisdom, saintliness and vast learning. The Sutta Pitaka is divided into five nikāyas or collections: the Dīgha Nikāya—the Collection of Long Discourses; the Majjhima Nikāya - the Collection of Medium Length Discourses; the Samyutta Nikāya - the Collection of Topically Connected Discourses; the Anguttara Nikāya - the Collection of Numerical Discourses; and the Khuddaka Nikāya - the Minor Collection, which includes the famous Dhammapada, Sutta-nipāta, and other smaller texts.

There are two features of the suttas which often present special problems for the modern reader: one is the sometimes bewildering diversity in their modes of exposition, which can make it difficult to discern their underlying unity of aim; the other is the sometimes tedious accumulation of repetitions, which can even discourage the reader from persisting with his study. The repetitions derive from the oral manner in which the suttas were first delivered and transmitted.

Doubtlessly, to impress on his listeners the important themes of his discourses and to ensure that they would be remembered, the Buddha himself must have reiterated key passages, particularly when he expounded a single idea with diverse applications for purposes of methodical contemplation. Then, as the suttas were transmitted orally for five hundred years before being committed to writing, the redactors must have further increased the repetitions to suit their mnemonic requirements. The variety in modes of exposition follows from the highly differing circumstances under which the individual suttas were delivered. The purpose underlying all the suttas is essentially the same: to lead their listeners to higher stages of spiritual development and finally to enlightenment and liberation the end of suffering. But each listener begins from a different space, with different problems and potentials, for realisation,

and thus for the teaching to accomplish its aim the presentation must be tailored to his or her own particular needs and capacities.

In the suttas we see the Buddha addressing people from various walks of life: monks and nuns, brahmins and wanderers, kings, lay disciples and sceptics, even gods, spirits and demons. Out of his deep insight into the minds of others, and his skill in lucid exposition, the Buddha has fashioned his teachings in the precise way capable of leading each listener most effectively towards achievement of the goal. Sometimes the exposition points directly to the path and the goal; sometimes it must first dispose of a variety of obstacles to correct comprehension—the pride of a brahmin, the views of an ascetic, the worries of a householder, the recalcitrance of a monk. Sometimes the discourse must even stop short at a mere preparatory level, or plant only a beneficial seed which may require several lives to fructify.

The formats of the suttas also vary. Some suttas take the form of sermons in which the entire content pours forth uninterrupted from the Enlightened One's mouth; others take the form of a dialogue, discussion or debate in which the interlocutor must be gradually led by reasoned argument to perception of the truth. Some suttas are delivered as a series of unembellished doctrinal propositions or directions for practice. In others the formal content is interlaced with memorable parables, similes and metaphors which flash through and light up the dense mass of doctrine. But however great the diversity may be, running through all the suttas and binding them together into a consistent whole are the illuminating insights and inspiring discoveries unique to the Buddha's dispensation: the Four Noble Truths, dependent arising, the three marks of existence, the gradual training, the Noble Eightfold Path. And again pervading them all as the taste of salt pervades all the waters of the ocean is their one taste, the taste of freedom.

A full account of how the suttas were compiled may be found in *Beginnings: The Pali Suttas* by Samanera Bodhesako (WHEEL 313/315), and a description of their contents in *An Analysis of the Pali Canon* by Russell Webb (WHEEL 217/220).

The Buddhist Publication Society

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

For more information about the BPS and our publications, please visit our website, or contact:

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