

Community

Spring 2006 / 2549

The Amaravati Lay Buddhist Newsletter

Issue No. 24

Asoka's Rock Edict No 12

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, honours both ascetics and the householders of all religions, and he honours them with gifts and honours of various kinds. But Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does not value gifts and honours as much as he values this -- that there should be growth in the essentials of all religions.

Growth in essentials can be done in different ways, but all of them have as their root, restraint in speech, that is, not praising one's own religion, or condemning the religion of others without good cause. And if there is cause for criticism, it should be done in a mild way. But it is better to honour other religions for this reason. By so doing, one's own religion benefits, and so do other religions, while doing otherwise harms one's own religion and the religions of others.

Whoever praises his own religion, due to excessive devotion, and condemns others with the thought "Let me glorify my own religion," only harms his own religion. Therefore contact (between religions) is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desires that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions.

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editorial

THE END OF THE WORLD — An Editorial to arouse urgency

Scientific evidence appears to be in increasing agreement that the conditioned world as we know it is coming to an end.

We may know, in theory at least, that all conditions are impermanent and that everything is in a state of flux and change. But we normally know this from a sense of security based on the regularity of the seasons, annual holidays, weekly visits to the fully stocked supermarket and the reassuring sounds of BBC radio as we eat our breakfast or commute by car in the daily rush hour to work.

But, we have a sense that there are signs, like clouds on the horizon, that herald changes to the familiar stability of our environment. Knowing the impossibility of endless economic growth, we hear governments proudly announce policies that encourage just that. Knowing the limits of the earths' natural resources, we hear of the expanding economies of China and India and of millions of human beings struggling to attain the living standards that we in the West accept as given – and we know that there are simply not enough resources on this planet for all these aspirations be fulfilled.

Poverty, violence and deprivation are the order of the day for billions of our fellow human beings, whilst deforestation continues apace, ice caps melt, sea currents change and the natural habitats of bird, fish and mammals gradually disappear.

It is only natural to react to all this with fear, helplessness or denial because it touches on the key cause of our suffering, craving or *Tanha*. This craving has three expressions which we can recognise in ourselves, *kama-tanha*, or craving for sensual experience, *bhava-tanha*, craving for existence, and *vibhava-tanha*, craving for non-existence or self annihilation. As the First and Second Noble Truths of suffering and craving become more evident, the remaining two Noble Truths of Cessation and the Eightfold Noble path become correspondingly more relevant.

If we pause and stop, before getting lost in our reactions, we see that in truth we do not actually know exactly what is going to happen. Our fear and denial is about the future that has yet to happen. More importantly, such feelings do nothing to change anything for the better, if anything they can hasten the very things

we fear most. The solution lies in the present, in realising what is real in ourselves. Realisation may not save the conditioned world as we know it, but it is good both for the world and for ourselves

Having a wholesome sense of urgency helps prioritise what we put our energy into, for inner transformation requires attention and effort. The paradox of successful practice is that through acceptance and the letting go of all that we experience, moment by moment, we can discover the cessation of the world within ourselves, as we realise the truths of *Dukkha*, *Anicca* and *Anatta* or unsatisfactoriness, impermanency, and selflessness. With that realisation a Wisdom arises by which we become more sensitive and responsible in our words, actions, and livelihood. Wisdom finds its natural expression in the World as Compassion. We become naturally more generous, understanding and kind to the world around us, thus bringing about changes for the better that mirror the change within us. Informed by Wisdom, these changes happen wherever and whatever we do in life.

Two and half millennia ago The Buddha said that the world is 'on fire', on fire with Greed, Hatred and Delusion, when he taught that all conditions are fundamentally unsatisfactory and impermanent. With the arising of insight into the real nature of this world, these fires die out and give rise to peace.

As a child I remember being told a story about St Francis. He was sweeping the courtyard in his monastery when he was asked what he would do if he was told that he was shortly going to die. He replied that he would carry on sweeping the courtyard. The peace of heart and mind expressed in that reply belongs to no specific tradition. It is a universal peace we are all capable of realising for ourselves.

The Buddhadhamma with its Refuge in the Awakened Mind, in the Teachings which point the way, and in a supportive Community of friends, is a beautifully clear, direct and encouraging vehicle that helps us develop insight into the conditioned world.

By knowing how to live in the world as an enlightened expression of it, in its moment to moment arising and cessation – we come to peace with Life and Death, come what may.

May all beings be free and happy.

Nick Carroll



Religion – Comfort or Challenge

Someone asked me recently whether I found religion a comfort or a challenge. In fact this is a question that has exercised me for around 40 years, since my best friend at school, Angela, had a

‘conversion experience’, after which she pulled me to one side and told me that if I wasn’t prepared to make a commitment to Christianity, and more specifically to attend her evangelical church youth club, I was ‘running away from life’. Try as I might I could not relate to her experience. I’d always enjoyed RE lessons at school and I felt a sense of the numinous when in a dark candlelit church, though not during the family services I was sent to as a child to give me an experience of organised religion which my parents were unwilling to share. My mother was a lapsed Catholic (i.e. still a Catholic in attitude even though not by inclination) and my father came from a non-conformist background and had been at a Methodist boarding school but was determined not to let on that he had anything other than an academic or philosophical interest in religion (though that was considerable). So my attendance at church was a rather isolated part of my life with little connection to the rest of my day-to-day experience.

As I entered adolescence my relationship with religion became the focus for much of my youthful idealism. At our weekly bible class we were told that we were now entitled to make what I seem to remember was called a ‘profession of faith’, which would make us proper members of the Congregational (now United Reformed) Church. We were told that this was a decision for us to take in our own time, when we felt ready, and that it was a matter simply for ourselves and God, so there was no need for us to feel obliged to discuss it with our parents unless we wanted to ... and that when we’d decided to do it we could move up to senior bible class. I was devastated by what I saw as hypocrisy. On the one hand it seemed that we were being encouraged to exercise integrity, to listen to the promptings of our heart, yet on the other it was being made clear that there was a social gain in proceeding and potential humiliation in delay. If God didn’t speak to me I might still be in junior bible class with a bunch of kids when I was 18,

or even completely grown up! I never went back. It was just after this that Angela told me I was running away from life. The discrepancy between the disillusion and lack of connection that I’d felt at church and the fulfilment that Angela was finding was hard to bear and caused me a good deal of pain. I knew that I was searching for something that would give form to my perception that there was more to life than I could see or make sense of, to my aspiration to ‘understand everything’ and my commitment to leading a ‘good life’ that would benefit others, yet I was unable to see it in the place that my closest friend had found it.

I lived in a very Jewish area of London and many of my friends were Jewish. So my next step was to weigh up the possibility of converting to a religion which I admired because it permeated every part of people’s daily lives throughout the week and inspired loyalty and devotion in its adherents. But despite my admiration for the way in which my friends kept to the rules in the face of what I perceived as considerable inconvenience, the content of those rules seemed arbitrary to me in my late 20th century environment, and I was also aware of the history my Jewish friends shared and which I did not – my experience of Judaism was that it was an identity, a discipline and a way of life but not the gateway to the transcendent that I was looking for (of course that’s not how I expressed it at sixteen but that, in summary, was my quest).

For the next few years I channelled all those yearnings into music and nature – I sang in several choirs and spent many happy hours in my grandfather’s wood (he was a forester and this was his retirement project) observing plants and wildlife and reflecting on the long life-cycle of trees, the vastness of the universe and so on. At university I sang in a college chapel choir, so attended services regularly, and I again decided to try to come to some sort of accommodation with Christianity. Again I saw that others seemed able to live quite comfortably with a set of concepts that I found the greatest difficulty in incorporating into my way of looking at the world. The idea that one person, who lived and died in a specific place at a specific time, was nevertheless divine and to be worshipped was a particular stumbling block – it seemed too arbitrary. Why him? Why then? Why there? How could people believe that one person could, exceptionally, defy the laws of nature in his

birth and in his death, and believe it literally, not simply accept it as a metaphor? Why would people not exist, then all of a sudden exist for a short span, and then wait around after death for endless aeons, as if outside the headmaster's study, until somebody came to tell them if they'd been good or not? It seemed too linear, and too unlike the cyclical nature that I perceived in the rest of existence. Why did there need to be a God at all? I found it more natural to accept that things resulted from antecedents, even if I could have no conception of what they were, rather than to bring on a personified entity and call it a Creator and a God. I could recognise the psychological truths behind the narrative, but could not accept the narrative as The Truth. Yet people whom I loved and respected believed and trusted in all this. I decided to be confirmed into the Church of England rather in the spirit of someone going into an arranged marriage – I hoped that love and understanding would grow with time, practice and familiarity. I hoped this throughout the next thirty years ... and it didn't happen. I attended a Quaker meeting for a few months and found myself more attuned to that approach, of listening to God and being aware of His presence, but still I found the personification of that awareness of something greater than oneself and one's everyday existence to be a straitjacket.

Then I picked up a book about Christian meditation and caught a glimpse of an approach that seemed to have more in common with the way I perceived the world. I had the sense that I was nearly there, but still the concept of God got in the way. I felt as though I were being asked to translate my own experience into another language before I could call it valid. It was then that I was browsing in a bookshop and came across Jack Kornfield's *A Path With Heart*, and realised for the first time that there was a way in that didn't require God, a way in that I knew almost nothing about and which I had never even considered before because I had associated it with hippies, flower power and the drug culture of which, for some reason I had never been a part. Up until then religion had been a challenge in itself – something that I wanted very much to integrate into my life and which I simply couldn't do. At no time did it ever feel like a comfort, because I was always so aware that it didn't fit, that it wasn't real for me.

Ironically, though, it was in a church just over three years ago that I realised that the Buddhist path was the one for me. It was soon after I'd started practising meditation (which I was learning from Wildmind, an online meditation resource) and we were guests at the wedding of a friend's son. He and his bride were (and are) committed Christians and the prayers and hymns they had chosen dwelt very much on the primacy of Jesus as Saviour and as an object for worship, and on their relationship to Him rather than on their vows and the life they would

lead together. I found myself feeling a renewed aversion to the imagery used, and more specifically a feeling of being tied down, suffocated or trapped in a piece of tight clothing I couldn't get off. I started to focus on my breath and to be mindful of the thoughts that were coming up, and all at once I felt as though the bonds were loosened and the thick fabric had fallen away. At the same time I felt very smooth as though the world was a jigsaw, and I was the missing piece. I had found the place where I should go and the picture was complete, with no clue that the piece had been missing, or where in the jigsaw the gap had been. The change from fear to joy was almost instantaneous and very intense – I found myself close to tears and remained that way for weeks afterwards. It was as though there were fewer boundaries between my own perceptions and the experiences of everyone else around me, both happy and sad. In addition, I felt a sense of excitement tinged with loss, as though I were setting out on a long journey that I was looking forward to but which would take me away from the familiar landscape of my earlier years. But most of all I felt as though this was a journey home as well as into the unknown.

I continued to feel profoundly changed by the experience, which seemed to be the start of a new relationship with everything around me. It was as though I had dissolved and been recreated and for weeks I was more intensely aware of even the most familiar things – seeing my hands on the keyboard, for example, or hearing a bird sing at the very moment I smelt fresh coffee. Even less obviously pleasant experiences, such as sitting next to someone snoring on the train, seemed like something to celebrate, simply because they were happening now. It was as if each experience was a beloved person instead of an object and took my full attention.

As to how this transformation affected my practice - it's hard to tell, since I was only just taking my first steps in practice and hadn't really developed any familiarity with teachings or techniques. But I have no doubt that that moment in the church was a turning point, and one that put practice and the Buddhist path at the centre of my life. And I've been lucky, too. We were just about to move house at the time, and I was surprised and delighted to discover that Amara-vati was less than ten minutes' drive from our new house - I'd never heard of it and had barely even started to take an interest in Buddhism when we chose the house. Yet now I can give thanks every day for having such easy access to such a rich source of support, companionship, teaching and inspiration.

I've described this incident in detail (basing my account on what I wrote shortly afterwards in my

journal) because it was the moment when my relationship to 'religion' changed irrevocably. As I've said, before then religion itself had been a challenge – rather than being a source of support and comfort it was itself the problem. Now, paradoxically, I think I understand more about how my Christian friends experience their faith than I ever did when I was trying so hard to be a Christian myself. Instead of being something external and separate like an ill-fitting garment, 'religion' is part of me and is what integrates and makes sense of an otherwise discrete collection of attitudes and perceptions. I find that metaphors start to run riot when I try to put some of these intangible thoughts into words, and the best match I've found so far is to say that the Dhamma is my operating system – but that isn't enough to convey the perception I have that it is inside and outside, that it's what I perceive and what I perceive it with.

So, is religion a comfort or a challenge? For me it's more that life is the challenge, and that religion is the comforter, in an etymologically literal sense of being a source of strength. It's a comfort that can give me heart to acknowledge and work with an emotional, moral or ethical challenge that I might otherwise either consciously push away to deal with later, or even fail to notice. So yes, it sometimes makes life feel more complicated, but at the same time it gives me trust and confidence to persist with practice and thus to meet those challenge with effective tools and skills. And that brings joy even when things are difficult and painful.

Alison Moore

Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association Retreats

We have three retreats planned for 2006. These will cover major factors of the Ennobling Eightfold Path as follows:

July 14-16 **W/end Retreat:** *Wisdom: Right View*
Sep 15-19 **5 Day Retreat:** *Virtue: Right Action, Speech, and Livelihood*
Nov 10-12 **W/end Retreat** *Meditation: Right Effort, Mindfulness and Concentration*

These events will be led by one or more experienced lay Buddhists and will provide a mixture of meditation practice, Dhamma teaching, exercise, and discussion. There will be opportunities for discussing your practice with the leaders and for questions. The events are suitable for all levels of experience and will take place in the Amaravati Retreat Centre.

Retreat booking forms may be downloaded from the web site www.buddhacommunity.org

SUNYATA RETREAT SCHEDULE 2006

April 28th – May 1st *Introduction to Mindfulness Based Psychotherapy* Rory Singer
May 5th – 7th *Heartfelt Awareness Monastic-style Meditation Retreat* Ajahn Thaniya
May 19th – 21st *The Way of Chi Kung* Max Weier
June 9th – 11th *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy* Nick Carroll
June 30th – July 2nd *Yoga & Meditation Weekend* June Durkin & Marjo Oosterhoff
Aug 4th – 7th *Holiday-weekend Retreat* Jitindriya

For information on retreats and bookings (unless otherwise specified) please contact the retreat managers at Sunyata –

Tel: +353+(0)61 367 073; email: info@sunyatacentre.com

Or visit our web-site: www.sunyatacentre.com

WHAT A FUDGE!

THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND WORSHIP IN SCHOOLS

Every school funded by a local authority is supposed to commence the day with a collective act of worship. Unless the school has a religious character, for example, Jewish, or Sikh, the act of worship should be 'broadly' Christian. Frequently this does not reflect the religious background of pupils and their families. Schools can opt out but this is not easy, so not many do. Instead, they fudge the broadly Christian issue, preferring to reflect pupil backgrounds.

Not many secondary schools can have a collective act of worship each day as the school halls are not large enough, so year groups tend to take it in turn.

Teachers cannot be forced to lead a religious assembly and many choose not to. There is usually a willing soul in a school somewhere who will do it, but if not the issue gets fudged again.

When schools are inspected by Ofsted, they are often judged not to be following the rules of collective worship and it may become an area for improvement. However, few schools worry about this as they have plenty of excuses not to comply. It remains a commonly flouted rule. In the new style Ofsted inspections started this September, inspectors will be able to overlook this rule altogether. It will save a lot of mutual embarrassment!

SHOULD WE TEACH R.E. IN SCHOOLS?

When I meet French people, I enjoy shocking them by telling them that Religious Education is taught in UK schools and that I take religious assemblies. They feel that should be a job for parents, and pupils attending Sunday School. But as time goes by I am more and more convinced that in a multi-religious society children should learn to understand the key differences in religious practice and to know how to show tolerance at least, and ideally respect, for each other. Some pupils arrive in nursery school with prejudices they have learned at home. The main place that will contest these ideas and make children think again is school.

SACRE

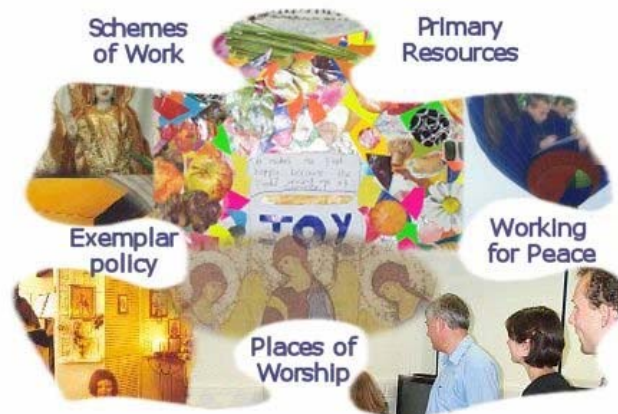
Every Local Authority should have one! SACRE stands for Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. They are charged with the role of monitoring the teaching of RE in their authority and for adopting a syllabus.

Religious education is a compulsory subject unless a parent chooses to exercise their right to withdraw their child. It is compulsory for all pupils attending schools. However, if a pupil attends a further education college instead of a sixth form, RE will not be compulsory. Another fudge in my opinion, but there again if it was a compulsory subject in colleges, it would be unenforceable.

When the Department for Education (under several different names in the last 15 years) introduced the national curriculum, they did not include religious education. Instead, they left that to the SACRE's. I can speak for Hertfordshire's agreed syllabus as I have taught from it and been involved in the design of the latest version (version 3). I have found it helpful and comprehensive, a useful guide. (But I have to say that, when my school was inspected in 1998, the inspector for R.E. could not criticise us as we were following the agreed syllabus, although he did not think it had enough 'God' in it! There is more God in it now.)

Other authorities have used the Hertfordshire model to base theirs on. However, some local authorities have been very slow to adopt a syllabus of an acceptable standard so the Department for Education made noises that suggested they would design a compulsory syllabus. For that reason Hertfordshire delayed the third revision of its syllabus when it was due last year in case we were inventing a wheel that was not needed.

In the end the Department for Education decided not to make a compulsory syllabus but issued one that could be used or adapted. Hertfordshire chose not to



accept it without adaptations.

One area for adaptation is the issue of how many religions to teach at primary school. The Government version includes teaching about the six major world faiths, (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism) in the primary phase. The law says R.E. teaching should be predominantly Christian, so most schools cover some aspect of Christianity each term and at least one other religion, or compare a theme such as 'harvest or light' with how that is celebrated across religions. In the experience of many primary teachers, introducing too many religions too soon can confuse pupils. One of my pupils addressed me once as a Roman Catholic Hindu. (I knew I had failed!)

If primary schools do not have to teach the full range of the 6 major world faiths, there will be a problem for secondary schools. Primary school teachers, often not subject specialists in religious education, prefer to teach those religions they know best. This will vary from school to school. Secondary schools accept pupils from many feeder schools, especially if they are in any way selective! Secondary teachers will not know which religions have been covered by which pupils and it makes planning to teach with continuity difficult.

The Hertfordshire SACRE committee is made up of four groups of people. There are the County Councillors, of whom I have not encountered a member from a minority ethnic group. There is the Church of England group, the Teachers group and the other Religions group which includes the Methodist member, Free Church member as well as the Hindu, Buddhist, Moslem and Jewish representatives.

ATHEISM AND HUMANISM

There was a lot of publicity in the national news about a year ago, on teaching atheism in schools. Some typical responses to that were; how do you teach a non religion, with no festivals, special food, dress, places of congregation, stories, or doctrinal writings? But humanist groups voiced concern that it is not only religions that can promote lifestyles which emphasise moral and ethical principles. They were concerned that the way religions are taught promotes a sense of religions having the 'copyright' on ethics and morals.

Following that publicity, and perhaps coincidentally, the Hertfordshire SACRE was approached by the British Humanist Association, requesting representation on the committee. The SACRE voted for observer status with no voting powers which is consistent for

those religions which are not listed in the six major world faiths.

The debate that led to that decision was extremely interesting! Personally I will look forward to the opportunity to learn about humanists and their views. I have enjoyed learning from the very nice lady that observes on behalf of the B'hai faith.

Just as it is important to introduce pupils to different views and customs, it is good for us adults, who perhaps did not receive an education in world faiths, to network with people from as many different religious/non religious views as possible.

DROPPING BUDDHISM IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

On the SACRE, if the Church of England votes against or abstains, it is in effect a veto of the agreed syllabus.

This very nearly happened last December when the voting was about to happen. The Church of England group are not happy to include 6 major world faiths in the primary phase and no-one has been able to address the problems that follow from this if this decision is made.

The only way the vote for the agreed syllabus was carried in December, was to agree to a review of the syllabus in two years time. (It will be unpopular with teachers if they have to adapt school plans for coverage so soon). It also leaves us with the debate about which religions should be included or excluded.

How would you feel about Buddhism, the least represented religion in population terms, being the one to be left out?

My thoughts on this issue so far are that if teachers are not able to teach Buddhism confidently and with accuracy, it would be better left out.

Does Buddhism meet the criteria of a world religion if it is non-theistic?

Many westerners seem able to find Buddhism without having been introduced to it in school.

Things that are taught at school may lose their interest/glamour to young people wanting to be different and way out! Buddhism may become more attractive by leaving it off the curriculum!

I would be grateful for contact with other Buddhist SACRE members from other local authorities who can tell me how their committee has decided these issues.

*Gill Williamson
Hertfordshire SACRE Buddhist Representative*

Saturday Meditation Workshop

During the winter monastic retreat, the Saturday meditation workshop at Amaravati is taught by lay people. This is my experience of leading my first Saturday workshop, in February.

After the first meditation, someone who had been sitting right at the front came and asked me a question: 'Can I take a meditation cushion and a stool home with me? I could make a donation. I really need a cushion and stool from the monastery to help me meditate properly at home.'

'Well', I said, 'the monastery doesn't sell cushions and stools. And what it has it uses. But I'll ask at the end if anyone knows where you can buy them.'

But after the walking meditation he didn't come back, and I noticed where he'd been sitting was minus one cushion and one stool. This wasn't what I expected.

I was surprised how restless the group were. I'm not used to this. One anorak rustled for 30 minutes. I know how irritating it can be for the people close by. If only the restless ones would take their anoraks off and be restless quietly no one would mind. It was after I'd suggested that restlessness was something one could watch, that he got up and walked out. It's quite unusual for people to take the hint like that.

During the walking meditation someone asked me this question: 'What do you mean by going to the centre of your thoughts?'

'What I mean is this', I said. 'When a thought arises you can go into the centre of it, right there. It is a way to cultivate mindfulness. It takes you away from the story line of your thoughts and you can stop right there. What do you have? Perhaps a

feeling, a perception, a mental state? Aversion, attraction, pleasure, pain? It doesn't matter what. Whatever you have, you can see it. You can see, 'This is how it is'. Then let go into the centre of that. Don't grasp it, just let it go. Just keep on cutting right through the grasping mind. That's what I mean by going into the centre'

At the end of the second meditation I asked if there were any questions. Someone said: 'When I go into the centre I can't find anything'.



'Exactly', I said. 'It is for looking at this desire to create something that we are practising. This is the purpose of Buddhist meditation, to understand the grasping mind. We can't be satisfied with seeing the way things are, we have to create something out of it. This is what traps us and blinds us.

Wouldn't meditation be easy if we could just observe the sitting posture or the breath, and be content with that? But even if the mind stays with the awareness of the body sitting, we think, 'Am I doing this right? Is this all there is?' And it would be so easy if we could just observe the mind and be content with that; and watch mental states as they arise, knowing; this is anger, this is restlessness, this is energy, this is conceit. But what do we do? 'I shouldn't be angry', is what we think. We have to add something of ourselves to the way it is.

I remember once, in a retreat, sitting in meditation with the mind quite still and empty, and the thought arising, 'OK, here I am ready, this is it'. And nothing. And feeling cheated, 'all that effort for nothing!' I thought. But being content with nothing – this is where the grasping mind stops. This is true peace.'

Question: 'But this is all we know, the grasping mind'.

Answer: 'Yes. But it's not who we are. It's the world we are trapped in by our delusion, but there is a way out. The Buddha said there is suffering, and this grasping mind is the cause of that suffering, but there is also cessation. This is what I'm encouraging you to do, to stop, just for a moment. To glimpse cessation, the unconditioned.

We have a body and mind. That is all we have. Whether it is deluded is up to us. Delusion is something we add. Grasping and delusion are just two sides of the same coin. It doesn't matter which side we drop. What we are left with is body and mind. We think it is nothing, but it is everything. It is the way it is, the end of delusion. And it is so close we can't see it.

This requires a shift in our thinking. A complete shift. These words, cessation, the unconditioned, they are meaningless in the world of the grasping mind. To talk of them at all creates ideas or concepts which make no sense when they are grasped.

I thought about this afterwards. It's like this. When we go into the centre, when we turn our attention inwards, it is like taking ourselves to a mirror or a window so we can see. If you take a small child to a mirror or a window what do they do? They go straight for it with their sticky fingers. It doesn't occur to them to look through it. This is our problem. Even when we let go a little, enough to go into the centre of our body / mind experience, we can't just look at what there is, we have to grasp it. We can't see through the glass, we have to put our sticky fingers all over it. It requires a shift in our conditioned way of receiving the world to see it as it is.

And it isn't as though we're trying to make the world different, but that we are shifting our position, so we can see it from a different position, or in fact, no position at all. Yes, just when you thought you were following me, I've pulled away the ideas you could understand. What is 'no position'? This is where we stop. We've filled our lives up to overflowing with easy answers. Time is running out. It is time to look at the real question. What is your relationship with your experience?

Who is this you? Is it something real or just the sticky finger marks that obscure reality?

Another person asked a question: 'When should you speak and when should you be silent?'

Someone said to me afterwards that he thought that was a hard question, and it might be worth thinking of your own answer before you read mine.

I replied: 'The Buddha is really good at practical advice on how to live your life from an ethical standpoint. Right speech is one factor of the eightfold path, the core teaching of the Buddha. It is about speaking truthfully, what is beneficial to oneself and others. But speaking at the right time is the key. It isn't just about keeping silence. We have to have the courage to say what should be said at the appropriate time. If only we could do this, how many problems would never even arise. It is the art of living.'

If life is about timing, where does it come from? When we learn how to stop, how to stop running with the grasping mind, the world of our experience begins to reveal itself to us. It's like the sun rising, gradually lighting up our surroundings. This is mindfulness and clarity, right here, right now. Going right into the moment, into the centre. Then we have more space. When we begin to see the world around us a little clearer, we can see the right moment to speak and act. And we find we have courage we didn't have before to do it. We can see the frightened person inside, we can see the desire to hide, and we can let it go right there.

Mindfulness is about spontaneity. The space I am talking about isn't a space of hesitation, it is a space of clarity. We have to trust this clarity when we speak and act. We have to trust that what we say will be true and beneficial, because how can we know the results of our actions before we take them? It's like trying to catch running water. You can't do it. You might think later that what you said wasn't true or that it didn't appear to be beneficial, but you would say nothing if you had to be certain of these things before you spoke. You have to say what you think is right, when you think the time is right. It is the best anyone can do.

Martin Evans

The Inferior Path - the Mysterious Hīnayāna

It is not long before the Buddhist practitioner encounters the idea of the 'hīnayāna'. Usually, the word is to be found in a Mahāyāna context and quite often, the term is used as though it is based on widely accepted Buddhist teachings.

However, the truth is that there is no such thing as hīnayāna in the sense of a substantive Buddhist school, tradition, or sect, or as a distinct early doctrine, or as any current Buddhist tradition. In these contexts 'hīnayāna' is a mythical beast, which started life as a term of abuse, then expanded to take on a life of its own as the bogeyman of the Mahāyāna, and ended up in Tibetan doctrine as one of a number of 'yānas' (vehicles, or paths of practice). For a scholarly view of the history, see for example, Williams (2000 p.256), Katz, Strong p.88, Gombrich p.112, Harvey p.92-93, and Harrison, p.84-85.

So, what exactly does the word 'hīnayāna' mean? Although sometimes described as 'small or lesser vehicle', 'hīna' is defined in the Pali English Dictionary as 'inferior, low, poor, miserable, vile, base, contemptible, despicable' (and has similar meanings in Sanskrit). So, at best, hīnayāna means the inferior vehicle or path, and at worst, the vile, contemptible, or despicable vehicle. The term was clearly intended to be polemical and abusive (Williams 2000: p.96).

The hīnayāna word first appeared in a few Mahāyāna sūtras and gradually hardened in tone over time. Sūtras, like all early texts, were written by monks and nuns; however, unlike the Pali Canon which is regarded as recording the words of the historic Buddha and his immediate disciples, sūtras generally represent the insights of the later authors. Having said this, it is hardly surprising that over a period of several hundred years following the Buddha's demise some monks and nuns developed profound insights and felt moved to communicate these.

Mahāyāna sūtras may take earlier teachings and present them in a new light or take them to a logical conclusion, or they may change the emphasis of the earlier teachings (Williams 1989: p28-30). Sūtras often emphasise the importance of compassion and skilful means and the motivation to follow the Bodhisattva path to full Buddhahood.

So who were the early objects of the hīnayāna description? Apart from those who disagreed with the sūtra containing the condemnation, it is not clear. No body or group has ever claimed to be 'hīnayāna'. Neither is there any evidence of conflict to explain the defensiveness in the sūtras. Those monks and nuns who had Mahāyānist tendencies lived amicably with monks and nuns who did

not (Williams 2000: p.97).

And the insults are not returned: there appears to be no non-Mahāyāna writer who felt moved to respond to the charge of being one of the 'hīnayāna', so presumably there was no one who felt that the description applied to them.

If there had been a lively debate between actual Buddhist schools, we might have expected some mention in Buddhaghosa's Path of Purification; a work which is regarded as a compendium of Theravāda doctrine. This is especially so when we consider that Mahāyāna sūtras which used the hīnayāna word were being written from about 100 BCE onwards, and Buddhaghosa was active around 500 CE. He could be expected to have been well aware of any such dispute if one had actually existed.

We might assume then, that the abuse was aimed at hypothetical recipients, in the same way that an old-fashioned school teacher might have said that he does not want any silly slackers in his class. The point is that no one would claim to be from the 'class of silly slackers' just as no tradition has ever called itself hīnayāna.

Nevertheless, in what looks like a compounding of errors, a 2000 year old term of abuse describing hypothetical 'Buddhist silly slackers' was then given fresh substance within the Tibetan tradition. Gradually, leading up to around 1000 – 1200 CE, the idea of the three vehicles arose. These are described as the hīnayāna, the Mahāyāna, and the Vajrayāna. This places the mythical hīnayāna as a basic practice and links it with the idea of the arahant – the perfected human in the Pali Canon and in current Theravāda practice. The Bodhisattva path is emphasised within Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna is presented as the 'fast path' to Buddhahood. This Tibetan hierarchy appears to be partly based upon a mistranslation of hīnayāna into the Tibetan "*theg pa dman pa*" which actually means a poor or limited spiritual motivation.

It is a pity that the hīnayāna word has become conflated with spiritual aspiration in Tibetan teachings, since there is a useful distinction to be made between the levels of altruism or selfishness that practitioners of any Buddhist persuasion (whether Theravāda, or Mahāyāna) may adopt (Williams 2000, p.101-102).

Unfortunately, the 'hīnayāna' confusion has been given a further twist as Buddhism has established itself within the West. The term is often taken at face value and inappropriately used in books and web sites. Some examples follow:

Of the three Buddhist vehicles (yana) of practice, the first is the Hinayana. Hinayana literally means lesser vehicle but this term should in no way be a reproach or be construed to diminish the importance of these teachings. ... If it weren't for these teachings, which are particularly appropriate for those who have limited wisdom or diligence, many persons would never have been able to travel the Mahayana path.

...

The fundamental teachings of the Hinayana are the main subject matter of the first dharma-chakra or turning of the wheel of dharma. ... The main subject matter of these teachings is the four noble truths (along with the teachings on interdependent origination, selflessness, impermanence, etc.)

So, in spite of statements that the term is not pejorative, we see hīnayāna identified with the whole of the teachings of the Pali Canon and intended for those who are of limited wisdom or diligence.

In the following example, also from a web site, we find an explicit equivalence made between hīnayāna and Theravāda:

Shakymuni taught many teachings on the way to teaching the Lotus Sutra. After he died Buddhism took different forms as it spread. It spread in two main forms, the Theravada (or Hinayana - 'lesser vehicle') and the Mahayana ('greater vehicle'), and traveled into China along the commercial Silk Route.

Although modern Theravāda evolved from an early school or schools, it only settled into its current form around 500 CE, well after the 'hīnayāna' term first appeared.

Alternative terms for the various concepts confused in 'hīnayāna' have been discussed for several years. Katz considers using the term 'Sṛāvakayāna' for non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism, since this form emphasizes Arahantship as the highest goal, (although there is a Bodhisatta path, and some do aspire to Buddhahood). Many now prefer to talk of 'Mainstream' Buddhism for non-Mahāyāna forms (Strong p.88-89, Gethin p 4-5, and Williams, 2000, p.255-6, note 2.) Further alternatives are to talk of geographic varieties as in Southern, Northern and Eastern Buddhism, or to consider early, middle and later Buddhism, either from a historical, or

doctrinal perspective.

In summary, modern scholarship indicates that the term 'hīnayāna' cannot be linked with any early or modern Buddhist tradition, but was a general term of abuse used to defend the message contained in new sūtras. No ancient or modern tradition has ever regarded itself as the 'inferior or contemptible path', and the term has no place as a general description of Buddhist practice today.

There are many alternative terms that more accurately describe early or contemporary Buddhist teachings and motivations and which avoid confusion and possible offence. No serious Buddhist would profess to following 'an inferior path', and no polite Buddhist would say this of a fellow practitioner.

It has been said that perhaps the real followers of the mysterious hīnayāna are those who used the term 'hīnayāna'!

Chris Ward

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The Myth of the Hinayana
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinayana>
- See also the Buddha-L group where there is a long discussion of these issues in their archive (2004)
<http://mailman.swcp.com/mailman/listinfo/buddha-l>



Seeing Haiku



I

If an atom is the basic unit of matter, then a haiku is the basic unit of spirit. At least, this is what my father likes to tell me. He dislikes God, but he is infatuated with the world. For him, every mountain is a church and all saints are just people who were too gentle to be explained.

At night, before bed, he reads to my mother and I from the works of the poet Issa. We see Japan in every season, and I go to sleep like a snow-covered bell on the rooftop of a temple. Under his influence I have attempted haiku many times—several journals are filled with three-line interpretations of the autumn wind. They were failures on the whole. The closest I ever came to that essential particle was when I sat in our living room, with its cello leaning against the wall, and a woman, wearing a chestnut-brown scarf, refused a gift. I told my father that I had almost seen a haiku and he asked where it was. “In her hair,” I remembered.

One evening, in the beginning of summer, a Buddhist nun visited my family. Her mother is a friend of my parents, and my father invited them to dinner. We soon learned that this young woman, as a part of her practice of poverty, eats only one meal a day, and that meal is rarely dinner. Still, she came to our home and sat on the couch in her brown robes and shaven head. Her voice was slow, lingering, giving respect to each syllable. She talked about her recently ended hermitage in the outback of Australia, about the way you lose self-consciousness when you are absorbed in nature. She had been alone there for three years.

I had gotten home from a camping trip that afternoon, and, with my dirty laundry still in a bag on my bed, I listened to her describe the experience of chanting before

the Dalai Lama. She said it was a deep honor, but she was frightened. Afterwards, people told her how they had cried and been so awed by the purity of her voice. All she had heard, she explained to us, was her heart, pounding.

While she spoke, she stroked a smooth, grey stone, which had been perched on the edge of the table at her side. Now it sat in her lap; her hands warming its porous skin. (My father is a great collector of rocks: the building blocks of mountains and churches.) The lamplight snagged on the black stubble of her hair—from each bitten end a streak of light grew, and together they wove a lop-sided halo. Before she left, my father asked if she was able to receive gifts and offered her the stone that she had been caressing. So quietly, she looked at the stone, which she had replaced on the table, and then she shook her head. The stone was happy there, she said.

II

At thirteen years old, clad always in gold slippers which had belonged to my grandmother, I wanted to be a saint. As I have said, my father is an atheist. My mother attends temple; she is Jewish. Still, I loved the Virgin dressed in blue, the white dove, and stained glass. In books of art history, I read about ecstasies and cathedrals. Saints were people of joyful tears, of innocence and eccentricity. Their lives were austere and abundant: renouncing everything, except God. God’s love was an arrow or a flame, but it drew radiance instead of blood. I was interested in God and I was not squeamish.

My schoolmates were fond of observing:

“You’re quiet, aren’t you?” and “You don’t get it, do you?” I confirmed their opinion with a noiseless smile. Talk of boys confused me—they were so loud and always kidding. Some of the girls were patient—they invited me to parties, they waved when we rode the bus together. I never turned up, but I always waved back. The friend who I talked to the most was the elderly librarian who shared caramel almonds and wore her grey hair in two braids. She said most saints were dead and suggested we make daisy chains for my grave.

I had read that visions were the source of enlightenment. When the vision arrived, the saint was often praying or doing some daily task. Sometimes, an animal or a plant appeared; at other times, it was an angel. What was seen mattered less than the act of seeing and the interaction between visionary and vision. I imagined that it was this moment of contact which exposed the soul and left the man or woman raw and awakened. I was inexperienced and in love with art; my hope for a saint’s life came not from a desire to escape physical things, but from a wish to make them sacred.

It was the saint’s capacity to be transformed by sight which enthralled me. I admired the simple awakenings of Saint Francis, Saint Theresa, and Saint Claire. Each different from the other, they were all gifts of a dazzling light, which illumined the world for a moment, for always.

Saint Francis woke from a fever and followed a small brown bird onto the rooftop of his parents’ house. He scooped the bird gently into his hands and walked the length of the tile roof. Upon reaching the edge, he opened his hands: the bird flew away and he raised his arms to the sky.

Saint Theresa wore a robe of rough burlap so she would never forget that her skin was merely a covering

for the soul that lived within. And this soul knew ecstasy when love entered. Pierced by God’s arrows, she suffered a happiness that scarred and healed.

Saint Claire was born into the life of a nun. She baked bread and fed lepers with fragile, brave hands. She cut her long hair and replaced the desire to be loved with the desire to love. She waited patiently and listened to meadows. Seeing through her own beauty, she looked into God.

III

A week ago, I walked home from school with a sore throat, a slack mind, and a collection of haiku entitled Winter. It was late afternoon. Clouds were chasing away the heavy sunlight and a clean wind was dragging dead leaves down to dance in the empty street. My legs felt weak; I put on my headphones to listen to the Anonymous Four and walked more quickly.

The Anonymous Four is cathedral music—chants and polyphony. Four women who sing the works of unknown composers who believed in speaking to God through music. The soaring Latin in my ears and the discarded food wrappers in the gutter made a radiant contrast. I pushed myself forward, toward the quiet neighborhoods which are the bridges between school and home. I wondered if the mailman who passed me looked different because the word “amen” was ringing through my brain.

I have recently taken up the practice of reading while I walk. This combination of thinking and moving creates an unsettled concentration, a concentration that sees passing cars as clearly as words on a page, and still understands the words. My thoughts were melting that afternoon; to harden them, I opened Winter. The brief lines took me in. My feet watched the pavement, dappled with yellow sycamore

Continued

Seeing Haiku continued

leaves, and kept me from tripping. I caught cherry blossoms, stop signs, sunflowers in the cups of my eyelids. Medieval prayers met cats with rice on their whiskers.

And an orange cat came out from behind a sun-filled bush, lingered on the edge of the sidewalk, and looked up at me, his tail arcing back and forth in the wind. The slipcovers of his green eyes slid apart as I knelt to touch his tufted ears. Brown looking became green looking: we saw each other, we saw nothing. Orange fur was orange sunlight, and the bell on his blue collar tinkled, shaking my vision. Before I could speak or stroke his back, he blinked and slithered under a pomegranate hedge. I hesitated, still kneeling, expectant of some return. A car brushed down the street, brushed my hair in peaks away from my forehead.

Slowly, I closed my eyes. Slowly, I stood up. I glanced at the place where the cat had been, then I continued walking. If I tell my father about this, I will not know if the poem was in the bell, or in the hedge, or in my eyes.

Samara Seibel



As many will notice, our name has changed. We are now known as Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association or ALBA. We decided to change our name to provide a more neutral and perhaps more welcoming title. Some had remarked that the words *Upāsaka* and *Upāsikā* in our former name—which mean devout lay male and female follower of the Buddha respectively—were unfamiliar and a little daunting to some newcomers. ALBA will continue to operate in the same way as the AUA—primarily on the basis of generosity and goodwill. We aim to support lay Buddhist practice in a variety of ways, through organising day and weekend events where lay people can meet, practice, discuss Dhamma, and socialise, and explore the Buddhist life within the freedom and constraints of the householder life.

Good friends are an indispensable part (whole!) of the Buddhist path, and the social side of ALBA is of fundamental importance on a path that can sometimes be portrayed as a lonely and personal ‘slog’. A definition of Buddhism which I have started to use quite a lot is ‘the serious pursuit of true happiness for oneself and others’. Buddhism is not about seeking out and indulging in unhappiness, it is about finding what it is that make us truly happy—or even just temporarily joyful. As one of the seven factors of enlightenment, joy is a wholesome quality to cultivate. Hopefully ALBA will be a ‘joyful association’.

Chris Ward



The Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association (ALBA) was formed to foster and encourage good Buddhist lay practice. It does this by providing a lay forum for all those interested in the Buddhist path in the form of one day and longer events, as well as other gatherings. At the heart of good Dhamma practice lies a commitment to enquiry. Whether you are interested and just beginning, or whether you have been practising for a while, we offer the opportunity to develop all aspects of the Buddhist path in a supportive lay context.

The New Retreat Centre Surveillance System

Yes, they are definitely smoking behind the oak tree:
and I think they are talking as well!

NOTICES

Meditation & Study Groups

Bath	tba	
Bedford	David Stubbs	01234 720892
Berkshire	Penny Henrion	01189 662646
Belfast	Paddy Boyle	02890 427720
Billericay	Rob Howell	01702 482134
Brighton	Nimmala	01273 723378
Bristol	Lynn Goswell (Nirodha)	0117 968 4089
Cambridge	Gillian Wills	01954 780551
	Don Jones	01223 246257
Canterbury	Charles Watters	01227 463342
Dublin	Eugene Kelly	Eire 285 4076
	Rupert Westrup	Eire 280 2832
South Dorset	Barbara Cohen Walters (Sati Sati)	01305 786821
Edinburgh	Muriel Nevin	0131 337 0901
Glasgow	James Scott	0141 637 9731
Harlow	Palmutto	01279 724330
Hemel Hempstead	Chris Ward (Bodhinyana Group)	01442 890034
Hexham	Robert Bluck	01434 602759
Leeds	Daniella Loeb	0113 279 1375
	Anna Voist	01274 691447
Leigh-On-Sea	Rob Howell	01702 482134
Liverpool	Ursula Haeckel	0151 427 6668
London Buddhist Society	58 Eccleston Sq, SW1	0207 834 5858
Hampstead	Caroline Randall	020 8348 0537
Notting Hill	Jeffrey Craig	0207 221 9330
Machynlleth	Angela Llewellyn	01650 511350
Maidstone	Tony Millett	01634 375728
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Newcastle	Andy Hunt	0191 478 2726
Norwich	Elaine Tattersall	01603 260717
Pembrokeshire / S.Wales	Peter & Barbara (Subhdra) Jackson	01239 820790
Portsmouth	David Beal	02392 732280
Redruth	Daniel Davide	01736 753175
Southampton	Robert Elliott	023 80612838
Steyning / Sussex	Jayanti	01903 812130
Stroud	John Groves	0796 7777742
Taunton	Martin Sinclair	01823 321059
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email your changes to :

metta@petalmoore.net,

or post to ALBA at:

ALBA , Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden,
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For Guest Information: please write to the Guest monk /
nun or visit the website at www.amaravati.org

Amaravati Lay Events - 2006

These events provide an opportunity to practice together and explore themes relevant to practice and lay life. They include silent and guided meditation, yoga, discussion and study groups, and other activities. Events are led by experienced lay-teachers. All are welcome.

Days of Practice – no need to book
9.45am for 10am-5pm (please bring food to share)

Retreats – advance booking essential
5.30pm Fri. – 4.00pm on last day

- | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|---|
| May 13 | Day of Practice | Guidance on the Path |
| July 14-16 | W/end Retreat | Right View |
| Aug 12 | Day of Practice | Right Aspiration |
| Sep 15-19 | 5 Day Retreat | Virtue |
| Oct 28 | Day of Practice | Community and Sangha
(includes Annual Community Meeting) |
| Nov 10-12 | W/end Retreat | Right Effort,
Mindfulness and Concentration |
| Dec 2 | Day of Practice | Meditation |

****PLEASE CHECK FOR LATE CHANGES TO THE PROGRAMME ON OUR WEB SITE****
:www.buddhacommunity.org

Retreat booking forms may be downloaded from the web site

Organised by the Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association

The Bodhinyana Meditation Group

Summer 2006 Programme

We meet in the Bodhinyana Hall at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery – from 7.30 till 9.30pm on Wednesday evenings. Meetings are open to all and include meditation and discussion around a theme.

Please check our website for more details:

www.buddhacommunity.org

- Apr 26th Meditation theory and practice
- May 3rd The Bodhinyana Group
- May 10th Happiness
- May 17th Meditation and Reflection
- May 24th The art of listening
- May 31st Renunciation
- Jun 7th Awareness and the Dhamma
- Jun 14th Good thoughts, bad thoughts
- Jun 21st The Kalama Sutta
- Jun 28th Sutta Study
- Jul 5th Rules of conduct between lay and monastic
- Jul 12th The wheel of life
- Jul 19th Understanding the mind

If undelivered please return to:

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C/O Amaravati Monastery
Great Gaddesden,
Hemel Hempstead,
Herts, HP1 3BZ, England**

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The Community Newsletter is put together and published as an offering to others. All views and comments are personal.

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30th Jun 2006

*It helps if you can send your contributions in electronic form, as a basic text file or in MS Word file format, attached to an email and sent to: **info @ buddhacommunity.org***

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