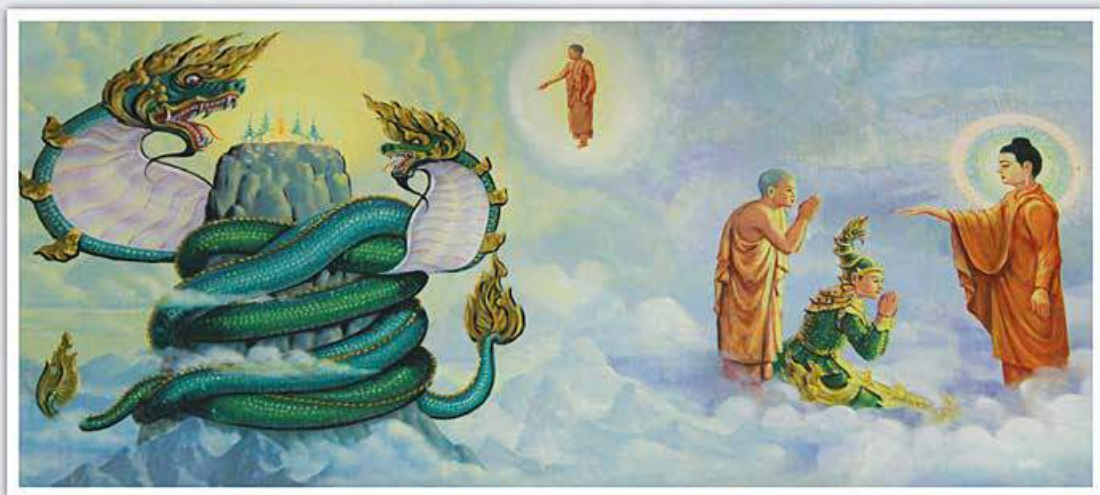




Burmese Buddhist Temple Newsletter

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In this picture the Dragon, Naga Nandopananda and Ven Moggalana, one of the two Chief disciples of the Buddha, were in a battle. Moggalana, under the instruction of the Buddha was to tame the wild and ferocious naga. The Buddha and His disciples while going to Tavatimsa heaven, attracted the attention of the naga who was having a feast hosted by the inhabitants of a village who regarded him as a divine being with supernatural power. The naga thought that the Buddha and His disciples were flying over him and had therefore shown disrespect to it. By its supernatural power the naga transformed itself into a huge serpent and encircled Mount Sumeru seven times with his coils. Then it spread its hood over Tavatimsa heaven. There was an instant gloom over mount Sumeru and the surrounding region as well as the path to Tavatimsa heaven.

In this battle Ven Moggalana also transformed himself into a naga king and encircled over Nandopanada fourteen times. With psychic power he pressed it down and belched out smoke to overcome the naga. The naga did the same thing. Ven Moggalana was not much affected but the naga was greatly distressed. Finally, the naga surrendered to Ven. Moggalana. It changed itself into the form of a prince to prove that it had been tamed. Then it took refuge in the Buddha and appeared in the form of a prince as seen in the corner of this picture.

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Tan Geok Koon

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Editorial

The Buddha said that there are seven treasures in life. (see page 3) But not everyone is aware of them. The first among them is "Sada" in Pali, which has been translated as "faith" or "confidence" or both "faith and confidence". Faith or confidence is matter of the heart. Faith is a belief in accepting the teaching of the Buddha. Confidence is the feeling of certainty that the Dhamma is true or that the Dhamma can lead one to Enlightenment. In the beginning it is faith that prompts a person to go to the Buddha for refuge. There is some simple reasoning going on in the mind to support the belief in the Triple Gem. But that is not enough. In Buddhism faith without the support of understanding is blind faith. Understanding the Dhamma means exploring the Dhamma and discovering the Dhamma. This will lead to putting the Dhamma into practice.

To begin with, let us look at the Four Noble truths as an example. The Four Noble Truths are about life itself. The first Noble truth states that life is dukkha (the experience of unhappiness (suffering) out of dissatisfaction and disappointment). The Second Noble Truth states that dukkha has a cause owing to nature's way or one's own kamma by body, speech and mind. The Third Noble Truth states that suffering does not last forever. It can cease in time. Finally, the Fourth Noble Truth prescribes a way of life that leads to spiritual happiness. It is also called the "Middle Way" because it avoids the two extreme ways of life – the one that indulges in pleasures of the passion and the other in creating suffering for oneself (like the ascetics) by doing penances. When we realised the truth this simple teaching as verified by our own life experience we begin to accept the Dhamma and our faith in the Dhamma increases. Later, we may want to put the Dhamma into practice in the areas of Generosity (**caga**), morality (**Sila**) and Concentration (**Bhavana**).

Generosity does not only mean that one feels happy to give away material gifts to the poor and needy but also to be more liberal in dealing with others. Practicing morality begins with observing the Five Precepts and Concentration implies doing meditation seriously under the guidance of a monk.

Some people who have began practising the Dhamma a little, out of loving kindness and compassion, claimed that they do experience a little spiritual happiness. Some said: "The more I give the happier I am. The more liberal I am towards others the happier I feel towards them. Some said: "After having abstained from wrong doing for some years by applying the Five Precepts to myself I feel humbled." Then, when they heard reports of criminals getting caned and imprisonment they felt protected by the Dhamma. Some who have practised meditation under a monk said: "I feel less agitated and more calm now after having done meditation for some time". These people who have experienced the bliss of Dhamma begin to love the Dhamma more.

So, starting from faith in the Triple Gem one begins to love the Dhamma more and more and this will lead to a sense of commitment for a greater understanding of Dhamma and practising it more seriously for spiritual happiness. Indeed, this could be the first step to Nibbana!



THE SEVEN TREASURES

The teaching of the Buddha is universal. It applies to everyone of us. Every individual is a rich man if only he can be aware of the seven treasures in us. They are born in us. The seven treasures are :

1. **Saddha:** believing in the Dhamma and kamma with its results (cause and effect in life).
2. **Sila:** morality in body, speech and mind.
3. **Hiri:** shame of wrong doing.
4. **Otappa:** fear of evil actions and the consequence of evil doing.
5. **Bahusacca:** having much learning of the Dhamma and committing it to memory.
6. **Caga:** the willingness to give and share with the poor and needy.
7. **Panna:** having a full understanding of the Dhamma and knowing what is right and wrong.

These seven treasures can be categorised under morality (**sila**), generosity (**dana**) and mental cultivation (**bhavana**) the three important forms of character training to attain Nibbana.

Sila consists of 2 (**sila**), 3 (**Hiri**) and 4 (**Otappa**)

Generosity consists of 6 (**caga**)

Bhavana consists of 1 (**Saddha**), 5 (**Bahusacca**) and 7 (**Panna**)

While possession of material treasures like gold and silver, diamonds and precious gems makes us feel happy materially possession of these seven virtues can make us spiritually happy. Acquiring material treasures needs much effort. Developing these spiritual values in us and putting them into practice also require much effort.

Reference: Dhana Sutta Angutara V11, 6

Tan Geok Koon





DOES THE BUDDHA METE OUT PUNISHMENT?

Once the Buddha had a dialogue with Kesi, the horse trainer. The Buddha asked him the methods he used to train his horses.

Kesi answered that he had three ways of training horses. For the tameable beasts he used to train them with gentleness failing which he used the harsh method. If both methods failed he mixed both the gentle and the harsh methods. If all the three methods failed he killed the horse so that his tradition of training would not be tarnished.

Then Kesi asked the Buddha, the Compassionate One, the one who appeared in the world for the welfare of all beings, the methods He used to train men. The Buddha answered that He used both the soft and the harsh methods and sometimes mixed both of them.

When asked to explain further the Buddha said that by soft and kind method He taught the people that good conduct, good speech and good mental conduct lead to good results. By the harsh method He would tell the people that bad conduct, bad speech and bad mental conduct would lead one to misery and suffering and rebirths in animal realm, in hungry ghosts realm or in realms of hell. Sometimes the Buddha used both the gentle method and the harsh method mixed. If all the three methods could not change a person's character for good, the Buddha would leave him alone and would not talk to him about the Dhamma.

Once while the Buddha was residing at Kosambi, a quarrel arose between two groups of monks. One group was expert in the Vinaya and the other was expert in the Dhamma. The Buddha advised them to settle the issue peacefully. He used the gentle method and the harsh method and both the gentle and the harsh methods mixed. But the two groups of monks stubbornly continued to be in disagreement.

Finally, the Buddha left the quarrelling monks at Kosambi and went to stay alone in Palieyaka forest. Leaving the monks alone without giving them guidance. This method is to "kill" them. This is a severe form of punishment.

In the forest an elephant picked up fruits to serve the Buddha. A monkey offered the Buddha a honeycomb.

After some time the people of Kosambi were disappointed with the monks and refused to give them alms food. Ananda at Savatti came to know of this happening. He went to the forest and told the Buddha that many people at Savatthi wanted to hear the Dhamma from Him. He invited the Buddha back to Savatti. The day the Buddha left Palieyaka forest the elephant which had served the Buddha died of grief. Later the Buddha said that he was reborn in heaven.

By and by, the monks at Kosambi stopped quarrelling, forgave one another and lived together in harmony.

U Dhammissara



THE FOUR BRAHMA VIHARAS

During the time of the Buddha, Indians worshipped many gods. The chief among them is Brahma which means the highest. This deity is conceived to have four arms and four faces. And – like the god being worshipped at the same time by the Hebrews - he was given various impressive titles – All-seeing, All Powerful, the Lord, Maker, Creator and Ruler, Appointer and Controller, and Father of All that are and All that shall Be. He is also the foremost and the ultimate. However, Brahma was not a vengeful deity. He was thought of as being mainly benign. He lived above the clouds from where he looked down upon the world with one of his four faces. The virtuous and kind he looked on with the face of metta. Those in distress, grieving and enduring pain he looked on with compassion. Those happy and jubilant he looked on with sympathetic joy and rejoice with them. Those who are immoral, selfish and cruel he looked with equanimity without anger and threat or retribution. The way people related to brahma was to call upon him for help, praise him and try to please him with offerings and sacrifices. The hope was to be protected by brahma during life and be reborn in his presence after death.

The Buddha teaches that since the nature of Brahma is loving and compassionate, sympathetic Joy and equanimity, to be reborn in his presence, a person has to possess those qualities of a Brahma. It is not enough to sing in praise of Brahma. The word "vihara" means "to abide". So Brahma Vihara can be translated as "Godly Lifestyle" or better as "Divine Abidings". Thus Brahma Viharas are not states of mind to be visited from time to time or as and when it is convenient but what we dwell in and what dwells in us. Let us have a closer look at each of these Four Brahma Viharas.

Metta (Loving kindness)

In an early commentary it is said that "Metta" means being friendly towards beings, having friendly feelings, being friendly within oneself, being sympathetic, having sympathy and being sympathetic within oneself. It means being beneficent, compassionate, nonviolent, not troubling, non-hating and possessing the root of goodness.

Karuna (Compassion)

Karuna (Compassion), the second of the Brahma Vihara, is the ability to feel distress or pain of others as if it were our own. Compassion in English comes from the Latin "Com" meaning with and "passion" suffering". The Buddhist equivalent is "anukampa", which means "to tremble with compassion. Buddhist psychology has several other synonyms for this same quality including sympathy (anuddayana), empathy (daya), and commiseration (annugganha).

The most noticeable feature of the Buddha's personality was his compassion and this compassion was not just something he felt for others or that they felt in his presence, it was also the motive for much of what he said and did. He said: "What should be done out of compassion for his disciples by a teacher who cares about their welfare and out of compassion for them, I have done for you". He visited and comforted the sick: "out of compassion". Once he went into a lonely forest looking for the serial killer, Angulimala, "out of compassion" for him and his potential victims. The Buddha's compassion seems to have transcended even the bounds of time. He is described sometimes as doing or refraining from doing certain things "out of compassion for future generations." On many occasions he said that his very reason for being was "for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the good and happiness of gods and humans".



In eulogising compassion, the Jatakamala says "Compassion gives birth to other virtues just as cooling rains makes the crops grow". When a person is compassionate he has no desire to harm his neighbour. His body, speech and mind are purified. Concern for his neighbour's welfare increases and states like kindness, patience, happiness and good reputation grow. Being calm, the compassionate person does not arouse fear in the mind of others. He is trusted like a kinsman. He is not agitated by the passions but quenched by the water of compassion. The fire of hatred does not blaze in his heart. Remembering this he strives to develop compassion towards others. He regards others as if they were himself and his offspring.

Mudita (Appreciative Joy)

The pali word "mudita" comes from "muda" meaning soft or pliable. "Mudita" is usually rendered in English as appreciative joy or sympathetic joy and is the quality of being happy in the happiness of others. The Buddha said of one of his more advanced disciples: "He is pleased and joyous with the gain of others just as he is pleased and joyous with his own gains". This is a good description of the minds of those capable of sympathetic joy. When they hear or see someone getting a windfall, winning a prize, or receiving an accolade for some worthwhile achievement, their jealousy or envy is not aroused. Rather they identify fully with that person's delight. Having a natural tendency to sympathetic joy is to be doubly blessed; we experience and enjoy our own happiness and that of other's as well.


Upekkha (Equanimity)

The last of Brahma Vihara is "Upekkha", usually translated as equanimity. The word is composed of "upa" meaning "on" and "iks" to look and means looking at something from a distance, detached observation. At first, equanimity would seem to be qualitatively different from the other three Brahmas which presuppose an emotional involvement. Equanimity suggests a standing back, even a disinterest. But as a Brahma Vihara

it is somewhat different. Here it is an emotional evenness (susamahita) towards people or situations we would otherwise get excited about, a remaining centred (majjahatta) when someone is acting to our detriment and a composure (thitatta) in the face of provocation. It also includes relating to people with impartiality (samanttata), treating everyone the same whether he is rich or poor, of the same faith as us or different, known to us or not.

As the prefix "upa" in upekkha can have the additional meaning of "over", the word also means overlooking in the sense of forgiving. Forgiveness which the Buddha called "khamati" is related to and has as element of equanimity within it, in the sense of being unmoved by the desire to strike back or to retaliate. The English word for forgiveness suggests giving something to someone, granting them a pardon or being merciful or indulgent towards them. In Buddhism, forgiveness is seen as having a dual value. It frees a person who has it from destructive states like bitterness and grudges, hatred and vengefulness and it frees the person who receives it, from fear of retributions, from shame or prolonged guilt. As almost everyone has injured someone at some time, whether deliberately or inadvertently, if we never forgive we would never have any long term relationship. Forgiveness allows resumption of relationship ruptured by wrongdoing. It is a loving response to human imperfection. It may have a connection with self understanding. The more we can acknowledge our trespasses, the easier it becomes to forgive those of others. The Buddha said, "by three things a wise person can be known. What three? Seeing a shortcoming as it is, on seeing a shortcoming trying to correct it and when another acknowledges it as shortcoming, forgive it as it should be done".

The Brahma Vihara can be looked at from several different perspectives as an orientation of characters, as distinct and separate states of the mind or as a lattice of related states balancing and complementing with each other. Buddhagosha said the brahma viharas are like four sons: one an infant, one an invalid, another in prime of youth and a



fourth successfully making his way in the world. She wants the infant to grow up, the invalid to recover, the one in prime of youth to enjoy his youth and she has no worries for the one making his way in the world.

Another view of the brahma vihara is to regard it as four ways the loving mind relates to beings according to their situations and circumstances. Let us examine this perspective more closely.


When we come into contact with someone for the first time, it shows a loving disposition to relate to him in a friendly manner - smilingly, politely respectfully with courtesy and openness. If further contact shows that they respond to us similarly and that they seem to be ordinary decent people we continue to relate to them in the same manner. In time, our friendliness towards one another become deeper and closer. So the appropriate way love expresses itself to someone who is open to our friendliness is with the friendly aspect of metta.

Sometimes in the midst of a crisis people may be grieving for a loved one, gravely ill, depressed, or preoccupied with some tribulations in their lives. In such situations our metta has to express differently. Not with smiles but to cry with. Use words of sympathy and reassurance. Compassion is the way metta relates to those in distress.

Sometimes people are celebrating or savouring success. Here, metta can manifest itself by celebrating with them and congratulating them. Sympathetic joy is metta's response to those who are happy and successful.

There is another way to practice sympathetic joy. When you are successful invite others to join you in celebrating your success.

It is not appropriate to tell a person: "Love thy enemy." in a situation where he or she has been very wronged. For example, when a girl is raped she will just hate the aggressor. A better way for her to deal with the situation is for her to accept what has happened and look at the event as it is. In time



she will calm down. Tell her not to harbour anger which will damage herself in the long term. Tell her to develop an indifference, an equanimity towards her aggressor. By and by, perhaps, she can get to the stage when she can mentally and emotionally be unmoved when she thinks of her aggressor. If she can do so she will have made the first step in healing herself. Indeed, equanimity is how metta expresses itself towards wicked people.

We can express metta towards a difficult person or one who injured us by trying to sooth any resentment or ill will we might have. With equanimity we may even start to feel genuinely sorry for him and regard him with compassion. When compassion comes, forgiveness and pardon usually follow. Eventually, we may even be able to have a reconciliation with him. But a person can be so grievously hurt by another that he wants no contact with him anymore. It would be too painful and would reawaken distressing association. If equanimity and forgiveness have dissipated all the old hate, that is sufficient. The reality is that the deeper the wounds, the more time they take to heal. The road from hatred to freedom may be long but its mile posts are all marked "Equanimity".

There are times when we are too harsh to ourselves and we develop guilt in ourselves. The reverse is also true. In order to be able to forgive others we should forgive ourselves first. Incidentally, equanimity towards those who have harmed us is not just being loving towards them, it is also being loving towards ourselves. A humble acceptance is many times more kindly than scolding ourselves for not being perfect. We try to have patience and understanding towards other people's unhappiness, so why should we not try to be like this towards our own.

Tan Geok Koon

Reference: Brahma Vihara in Like Milk and Water Mixed by S Dhammika



DHAMMA

Three Dhamma students holding
their YMBA certificates posing
with the resident monks:
U Tilokasiri (Centre),
U Jjota (left)
& U Dhammissara (right)





IN ACTION

On Sunday, 23 February 2014, for the first time, the Burmese Buddhist Temple Dhamma Class brought all the Dhamma students together, Burmese and Singaporeans, for an outing at the Botanic Gardens. Many of their teachers and parents also joined in. The event was organized by Dhamma teacher Tay Sin Wah and his daughter, Yue Ee. For such a big event some teachers and parents also lent their hands in making it a successful one. The Temple sponsored the food catered by MacDonald Fast Food Catering Restaurant. The day was bright and fine and everyone enjoyed the experience of Buddhist fellowship in a natural environment provided by the Botanic Gardens.



15 VIRTUES MENTIONED IN METTA SUTTA

One day, five hundred bhikkhus obtained a subject of meditation from the Buddha who was staying at Jetavana. After that they went to meditate in a forested area. The devas and their children that had been residing in the trees could not be around anymore in their dwelling place because the area had been taken up by the Bhikkhus who were arahants. Being upset they appeared in fearful forms to the Bhikkhus in their meditation. Being tremendously disturbed, they went back to the Buddha and told him of their unpleasant experiences. The Buddha taught them to recite Metta Sutta when they returned to their meditation place. Before they could reach their meditation place the devas welcomed them even from afar. After that, with the feeling of loving kindness the devas let the bhikkhus meditate in peace.

The Metta sutta begins with Karaniya matthakusalena. Karaniya means capable of practising sila (morality), Samadhi (concentration) and panna (insight and wisdom). Mattakusalena means one who is desirous of achieving Nibbana and be freed from suffering.

To develop loving kindness, according to the Sutta, one must observe 15 types of virtues:

1. **Sakko** – be competent to practise sila (perfect Morality), Samadhi (perfect Concentration) and panna (perfect Insight and wisdom).
2. **Uju** – be straightforward
3. **Suhuju** – be extremely honest
4. **Suvaco** – be meek and easy of compliance
5. **Mudu** – be gentle, mild and supple (bends in his thinking, without being stubborn)
6. **Anatimani** – do not slight others and thinking highly of oneself
7. **Santusako** – be easily contented
8. **Subharo** – be easily supportable by benefactors
9. **Appakicco** – have few duties and free from care
10. **Sallahukavutti** – having few belongings
11. **Santindriyo** – be serene and do not be affected by the feelings arising out of the six senses
12. **Nipako** – have reflective knowledge
13. **Appagabho** – be polite modest and free from impudence (rudeness)
14. **Kulesu ananugiddho** – do not have feelings of attachment (by monks) to lay people
15. **Naca khuddam samacare kinci** do not commit the slightest wrong which the wise **Yena vinnu pare upavadeyyun** might censure.

This listing of all the 15 virtues above is followed by a wish on loving kindness for all beings:

Sukhino va khemino hontu.

May all beings be happy.

Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta.

May their hearts be whole some.



WHO IS AN OUTCASTE?

In the time of the Buddha the people practised the caste system. The four groups of people within the system were the Brahmans, (priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (warriors and royal families), the Vaishiyas (merchants and farmers) and Shudras (commoners and labourers). Apart from these four groups of people there was the outcastes or untouchables who were despised by society at large. They would be employed by no one. They would do jobs considered unclean like cleaning up cremation grounds, doing work in the tanning industry and employed as executioners. These social positions of individuals are determined by birth not by meritocracy.

Once, while walking on his alms round in the city of Savatthi, the Buddha came near the residence of Brahman Aggikabharadvaja. The people there were busily preparing fire for the ritual of fire worship. Quickly, the brahman called the Buddha an outcaste and prevented Him from entering his house. Patiently and calmly the Buddha told the Brahman that he would want to define the concept of an outcaste. The Brahman agreed. Then the Buddha gave him examples of people's behavior that should be regarded as that of an outcaste.

The Buddha said the following :

1. Whosoever is angry, harbours hatred and is reluctant to speak well of others (discredits the good of others), perverted in views, deceitful – know him as an outcaste.
2. Whosoever in this world kills living beings, once born or twice born, in whom there is no sympathy for living beings – know him as an outcaste.
3. Whosoever destroys and besieges villages and hamlets and becomes notorious as an oppressor – know him as an outcaste.
4. Be it in the village, or in the forest, whosoever steals what belongs to others, taking what is not given to him – know him as an outcaste.
5. Whosoever, having incurred a debt and runs away when he is pressed to pay, saying, 'I owe no debt to you' – know him as an outcaste.
6. Whosoever coveting anything, kills a person going along the road, and grabs whatever that person has – know him as an outcaste.
7. He who is for his own sake or for the sake of others or for the sake of wealth, utter lies when questioned as a witness – know him as an outcaste.
8. Whosoever by force or with consent associates with wives of relatives or friends – know him as an outcaste.
9. Whosoever being wealthy supports not his mother and father who have grown old – know him as an outcaste.
10. Whosoever strikes and annoys by (harsh) speech his mother, father, brother, sister or mother-in-law or father-in-law – know him as an outcaste.
11. Whosoever when questioned about what is good, says what is detrimental, and talks in an evasive manner – know him as an outcaste.
12. Whoever having committed an evil deed, wishes that it may not be known to others, and commits evil in secret – know him as an outcaste.



13. Whosoever having gone to another's house, and partaken of choice food, does not honor that host by offering food when he repays the visit – know him as an outcaste.
14. Whosoever deceives by uttering lies, to a brahman or an ascetic, or any other mendicant – know him as an outcaste.
15. Whosoever, when a Brahman or ascetic appears during mealtime, angers him by harsh speech, and does not offer him any alms – know him as an outcaste.
16. Whosoever in this world, shrouded in ignorance, speaks harsh words or falsehood expecting to gain something – know him as an outcaste.
17. Whosoever debased by his pride, exalts himself and belittles others – know him as an outcaste.
18. Whosoever is given to anger, is miserly, has base desires, and is selfish, deceitful, shameless and fearless (in doing evil) – know him as an outcaste.
19. Whosoever reviles the Enlightened One or a disciple of the Buddha, a recluse or a householder – know him as an outcaste.
20. Whosoever not being an Arahant, a Consummate One, pretends to be so, is a thief in the whole universe – he is the lowest of outcaste.
21. Not by birth is one an outcaste, not by birth is one a Brahman. But by deed one becomes an outcaste, by deed one becomes a Brahman.

When the Buddha had thus spoken, the Brahman Aggikabharadvaja said to the Buddha: "Excellent. O Venerable Gotama, excellent! Just as a man were to set upright what had been overturned, or were to reveal what had been hidden, or were to point the way to one who has gone astray, or were to hold an oil lamp in the dark so that those with eyes may see things, even so in many ways has the venerable Gotama expounded the Dhamma, the doctrine. I take refuge in the Venerable Gotama, the Dhamma and the Sangha. May the Venerable accept me as a lay follower who has taken refuge from this day onwards while life lasts."

Briefly, what the Buddha was trying to tell the Brahman, was that it is one's own Kamma, by body, speech and mind, that determines one's social and moral status. Birth and the parents' social status should not be the criteria to determine one's social and moral status.

It is said that there was a case of man, son of an outcaste, Sopaka also known as Matanga. He became a monk and led a morally good life according to the Eightfold path. He was also able to overcome all his passions. Though born as an outcaste he was reborn in the Brahma realm in his next birth because of his good kamma by body, speech and mind. Those born as children of the Brahmins in the highest caste, could be reborn, in their next lives, in the lower caste or even in the suffering state of existence due to his bad kamma.

Reference: Vasala Sutta

Tan Geok Koon



THE CEREMONY OF PAVARANA

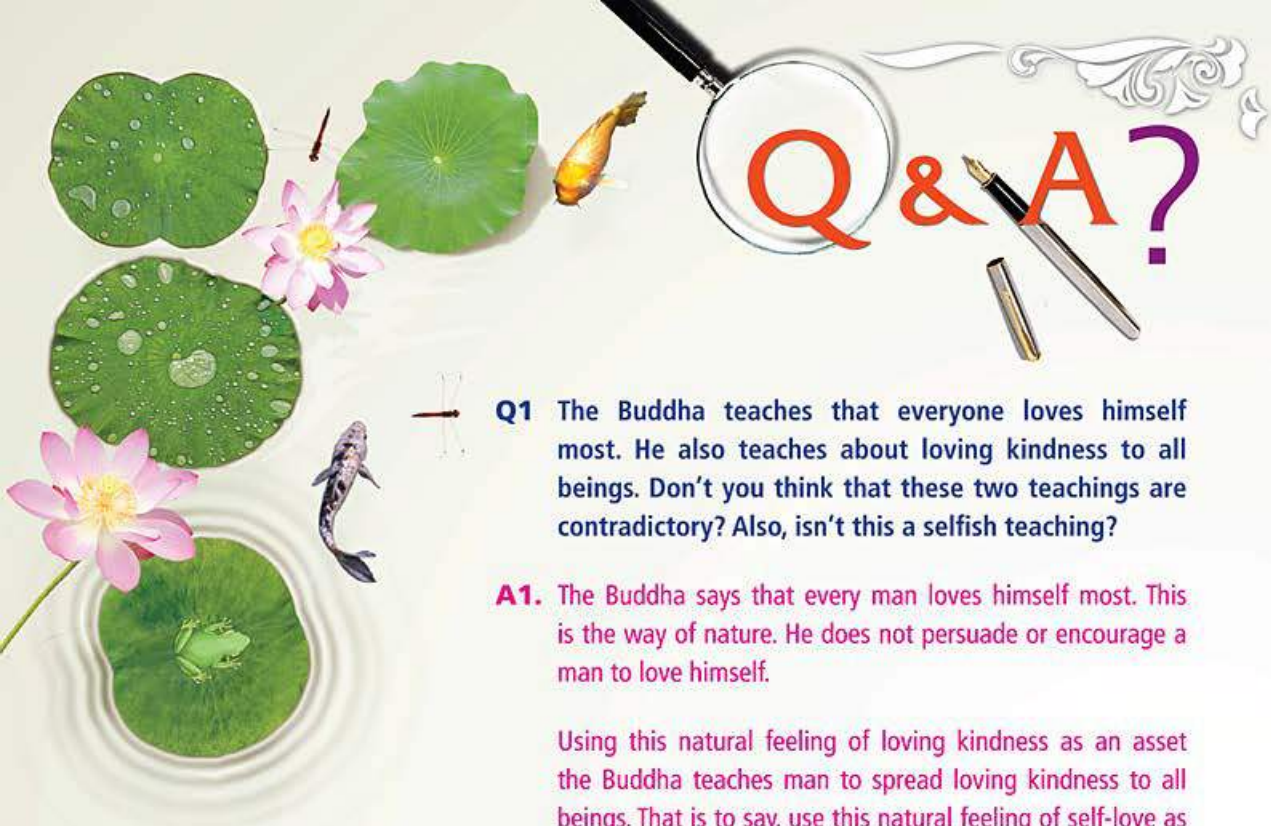
The ceremony of Pavrana falls on the full moon day of October, which marks the end of three month period of rain retreat. At this ceremony a monk who thinks that he has done something wrong or who has been suspected of doing something wrong in body, speech and mind, is allowed to "seek admonition" (Pavarana) from the Sangha openly. The spirit of Pavarana ceremony is one of loving kindness and compassion and everyone involved must be open-minded. The Sangha is to admonish and the wrong doer is to admit his mistake and be willing to make amends. The topic for discussion must be clearly stated. Both parties, the one who is admonishing and the one being admonished, must agree on the details for discussion. If there is a disagreement either party could air his views. When there is no doubt left in the topic for discussion and everyone concerned is clear about the issue, discussion can follow.

This tradition of doing the Pavarana ceremony was started by the Buddha himself. During this ceremony the monks would be asked about their experiences during the three month period of rain. A monk could seek admonition from the Buddha by saying: "Venerable One, I seek admonition from the Sangha. According to what has been seen, heard or suspected of my actions, may the Venerable One, out of compassion, admonish me. Having realised my faults I will make amends accordingly."

Some monks living together during the retreat observed noble silence in order to avoid any argument or disagreement among themselves. When the Buddha heard about this he said: "It is not beneficial to any community if someone within it acts as if he were a mute. It is more beneficial to get together at the end of the retreat to openly discuss what one may see as both good and bad about the monastic life so that improvements can be made to the Order." Not long after that, the Buddha laid down a new rule which gave the resident monks of a monastery the opportunity to invite monks from other monasteries for the Pavarana ceremony at the end of each retreat to discuss the pros and cons of monastic life. On this occasion the Pavarana ceremony takes the place of the usual recitation of the Patimokha (the 227 disciplinary rules of the Order).

Ven U Ujjota (M.A. Dhammacariya)





Q1 The Buddha teaches that everyone loves himself most. He also teaches about loving kindness to all beings. Don't you think that these two teachings are contradictory? Also, isn't this a selfish teaching?

A1. The Buddha says that every man loves himself most. This is the way of nature. He does not persuade or encourage a man to love himself.

Using this natural feeling of loving kindness as an asset the Buddha teaches man to spread loving kindness to all beings. That is to say, use this natural feeling of self-love as a starting point to spread loving kindness to others.

Loving kindness (Metta) is opposite of hatred. Loving kindness is not romantic love. Loving kindness is unconditional and pure love, whereas romantic love is conditional and selfish. So the teaching on loving kindness cannot be said as a selfish teaching.

Q2. My Buddhist friend encourages me to observe the five precepts. I am afraid to do so as I think that to break anyone of them, let alone all five, will be a great wrong doing. By not observing them I feel that when I do something wrong I have nothing to do with the Buddha and therefore I would not be punished by him.

The Buddha never punished people for their wrong doing. It is the Law of Karma, the Law of Nature that operates by itself. By the Law of Karma, a natural law, good actions done with good intention bring happiness to the doer. Bad actions done with evil intention bring suffering to the doer. Things just happen naturally.

The Buddha teaches people to observe the five precepts as examples of good actions so that they can be morally upright and be rewarded with happiness. It is good that the five precepts are observed on one's own free will, out of loving kindness and compassion. The practice is: go to a monk, regard him as a teacher and request him to say out the five precepts. Then we repeat them after him. By doing this request it shows that we are observing the five precepts out of our own free will and it is not the monk who forces us to do so.



Look at the wordings of the precepts as prescribed by the Buddha.

1. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from destroying living beings.
2. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from taking things that are not given.
3. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from false speech.
5. I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from taking liquor which causes intoxication and heedlessness.

In Theravada Buddhism when you fail to observe a precept you are breaking a precept and not breaking a vow. When uttering the formula of the five precepts you are revising the teaching of the Buddha and reminding yourself to be morally good.

At the point of uttering the formula of five precepts, you are setting a set of moral standards for yourself. This moral awareness you will never experience anywhere else.

When you feel that you have observed the five precepts successfully for a period of time you get a feeling of achievement and this helps in boosting up your self esteem.

One way of looking at precepts is to count the number of hours, as a period of time, you have abstained from doing wrong. This is the period of moral purity. For example, if you observe the five precepts at 10.00 a.m. and you break the precept of not lying at 10.00 p.m. you can say to yourself: "I have been truthful for the last twelve hours" while continue to remain pure regarding the other four precepts. There is this sense of achievement rather than having a sense of failure.

We can also look at the precepts one at a time. When you break one of the precepts you are still pure of the four other precepts. When we break two of the precepts you are still pure of the three others and so on until when you have left with one precept you are still morally pure of that one precept. Then when you utter the formula of the five precepts again, you begin things afresh. From that time onwards you are pure of the five precepts again.

I encourage you to observe the five precepts with loving kindness and compassion and after some time you will be a happier person. No doubt, we need some efforts, determination and persistence in our endeavour to live up to such moral standard.



Tan Geok Koon



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