

DHAMMA MATTERS

A Buddhist Reflects



Oh Teik Bin

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THE GIFT OF DHAMMA EXCELS ALL OTHER GIFTS

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This Dhamma-Dana publication is dedicated to:

My Parents,
My Primary and Secondary School Teachers,
Dhamma Teachers and Meditation Teachers
who have taught at Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak, Teluk Intan

Sincere Thanks and Gratitude to the following:

All Sangha and lay members who have taught the sublime
Dhamma at Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak, Teluk Intan
since it was established in 1987

All lay Dhamma Speakers who have shared the Dhamma and
helped me learn, understand and practise the Dhamma

All Dhamma friends who have in one way or other contributed
to my growth in the Dhamma

Bro. Jinavamsa who so kindly and selflessly went over, checked,
commented on, edited my manuscript and helped
in getting it published.

DEDICATION OF MERITS

May all beings share in the merits of this Dhamma-Dana.
May they find happiness, peace and liberation.

Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu!

CONTENTS

Dedication/Acknowledgements	
Preface	
1 Am I A Buddhist?	7
2 Eight Worldly Conditions	13
3 Accepting Things...	16
4 Dhamma Lessons from Coffin Incidents	19
5 The Devils in us	23
6 Of Motor Bikes, Accidents and Dhamma	27
7 A Buddhist Sunday School Trip	31
8 Learning From Insults	35
9 On Heedlessness, Unmindfulness...	38
10 Zen Stories To Ponder On	44
11 A Trip To Hospital Bahagia	49
12 Can I Help?	53
13 Counting Our Blessings	57
14 How Am I Doing?	61
15 So Smart Children?	68
16 Kiasu Philosophy	74
17 Superstitious and Deluded Beliefs	78
18 Of 5C's and The Dhamma	82
19 Of Rites, Rituals and Offerings	86
20 Aspirations and Resolutions	91
21 On Mindfulness and Compassion	97
22 Dhamma Youth Camps	104
23 A Wesak Message	109
24 Of Intoxicants and The 5 th Precept	112
25 The Internet and Motivational Stories	119
26 Of Quotations, Reflection and The Dhamma	125
27 Was I An Asura?	131
28 Of Dreams, Ghosts, Psychic Powers...	135
29 Do You Wonder Why?	139

PREFACE

Dhamma Matters is a collection of articles and writings with a Dhamma message, and is based on actual happenings and the experiences of the author, a Dhammaduta worker of more than twenty years at the Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak, Teluk Intan. These writings are reflective accounts of the numerous activities and programmes carried out at the Association over the years. This publication is written with the following objectives:

- To impart the basic Teachings of The Buddha.
- To help us realise and correct our weaknesses and defilements.
- To help Dhammaduta workers cope with the many challenges and obstacles.
- To motivate us into Dhamma practice.

In conveying the messages of the Sublime Teachings of the Buddha, various approaches or techniques are used: stories, anecdotes, humour, satire, illustrative diagrams, actual situational challenges, narrative accounts and etc. 'Dhamma Matters' is written in a simple language so that both adults and youths can grasp the intended Dhamma messages - messages to reflect upon and actualise in one's mind.

The author expresses his sincere thanks and gratitude to all the Sangha members, Dhamma brothers and sisters who have over the years taught and shared invaluable Dhamma with him, as he strives along the Dhamma Path.

May All Beings Be Well And Happy!

OH TEIK BIN
May 2010



CHAPTER 1 AM I A BUDDHIST?



Many people declare themselves to be ‘Buddhists’ when in actual fact they do not know what being Buddhists really means. Many people when required to fill forms state their religion as “Buddhism” or “Agama Buddha” although they have no idea at all what the core of the Teachings of the Buddha (Dhamma) is all about ...let alone understanding and practising the Dhamma. (I was once like that too.)

Today, we see so many different ‘Brands’ of “Buddhists”. Let us look at them and do some reflection.

The ‘Burning’ “Buddhist”

You see quite a number of such “Buddhists” ... they burn bundles of joss sticks, joss paper and other paper paraphernalia at home, in Buddhist Associations and even Buddhist temples. Poor Mother Earth! She is choking and suffering and our environment gets more and more polluted. Talk about wise, wholesome and good Kammic actions! When will such “Buddhists” ever learn that the ‘gods will not be appeased’ (and we don’t get peace within and without) through a ‘combustion reaction’? We need to conquer the Devils of Greed, Hatred and Delusion.

The ‘Wesak’ “Buddhist”

These ‘once a year’ “Wesak Buddhists” throng Buddhist associations and temples on Wesak Day carrying out so many deluded practices. They perform many meaningless rituals, have their fortunes read, their amulets and talismans blessed, rush for

free Dana food (the “Hungry Ghost” Realm is very real!) and “Holy Water”. They make supplication to the Buddha, asking for all sorts of favours with promises to do certain things if their material wishes are granted. Poor Buddha! He must be very tired listening to the “bargains” of these “Wesak Buddhists”.

The ‘Intellectual’ “Buddhist”

I have come across many friends who are like “Walking Encyclopedias” when it comes to ‘intellectual Dhamma’. They devour one Dhamma book after another, listen to many Dhamma speakers, tapes and compact discs but alas all these remain at the intellectual level.

The Dhamma is not practised and actualised. Such intellectual Buddhists still cling on to their negative traits and habits. Talk about the practice of Dana ... ha, now we understand partly why so many Buddhist organisations lack volunteer workers for Dhammaduta work. We have too many “intellectual Buddhists” walking around!

The ‘Ceremonies’ “Buddhist”

We can see such Buddhists in some Buddhist temples and associations. They are caught up in lots of devotional rites, rituals and ceremonies the whole year long. So much of their time and energies are sapped indulging in unnecessary rites and rituals. When will they ever learn, understand, practise and realise the Sublime Teachings of the Buddha? Unless and until they do, the defilements will remain or even multiply. We do not deny the role of a certain degree of devotional Buddhism but beware...rites and rituals can bind us more and more to the Wheel of Samsara.

The ‘Social’ “Buddhist”

There are Buddhists who are particularly active when it comes to socialising and fun activities. Of course, we need good Buddhist fellowships, excursions, tours and other healthy recreational

activities. But beware! Our primary aim in being a Buddhist is to learn, understand and practise the Dhamma, to seek and realise Enlightenment. ‘Social’ Buddhists sometimes frequent Buddhist temples, Buddhist societies and associations with ulterior motives. They may be looking for potential life partners or have a hidden business or political agenda. The Dhamma takes backstage.

The ‘Deity’ “Buddhist”

It is interesting to note that many Chinese “Buddhists” regard the Buddha as another of their gods or deities. If you visit their homes, you can find the image of the Buddha placed at their shrine altar together with a host of other gods. ‘Deity’ “Buddhists” perhaps believe in this: “The more gods, the better (and merrier) ... more protection and security!” Will they ever learn the meaning of true refuge in the Triple Gem? I know of a ‘long-time Buddhist’ (*He is also an ex-committee member of a Buddhist organisation.*) who was so afraid of removing his many gods from his shrine altar at home. He believes misfortune can strike him if he does so!

The ‘Emergency times’ “Buddhist”

Such Buddhists only pray to the Buddha or Kuan Yin in times of trouble, problems and conflicts. They pray for immediate solutions to their problems of health, poor business, love relationships, academic studies etc. etc. At other times, when they are relatively trouble-free, they will be too busy chasing material wealth and indulging in sensual pursuits. For such Buddhists, there is no time and place for Dhamma.

I remember some time ago, there was a male “Buddhist” member who came to our Buddhist association with a very lost and stressed-up look. He wanted to learn meditation to solve immediately his big problems... insomnia and business loss. I suggested that he joined our Dhamma Study Class first. He did

but it did not last. He was not patient and he just wanted to solve his 'emergency' problems.

The 'Preaching' "Buddhist"

The Buddha once said, "Others' faults are easy to see but one's own faults one hides like a fowler in disguise." "Preaching" Buddhists do a lot of talking, suggesting, ordering and commanding. They project themselves as the "Know-All" in Dhamma but they themselves do little when it comes to real Dhammaduta work and Dana. Such Buddhists can be quite intelligent and creative but alas they don't really practise the Dhamma. Talking and suggesting is one thing but wise pro-active action is another. Intelligence and wisdom can be worlds apart.

The 'Cultish' "Buddhist"

Such Buddhists can be found everywhere. They can be filled with delusion, ego and conceit. Instead of spending their time practising good Dana (Generosity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (Mental Cultivation), they waste much time and energy chasing after many "cultivated monks/nuns", arguing over hair-splitting Dhamma points, attempting to convert others to their "cultish" brand of Buddhism and hero-worshipping and tending to their 'enlightened' leaders or teachers.

Let us not forget that our real Teacher is the Dhamma. The Buddha says, "He who sees the Dhamma sees Me."

Now, What is A Good Buddhist?

What follows below is a summary of what, to my mind, constitutes a good Buddhist:

A GOOD BUDDHIST...

Goes to the	Buddha for refuge
Learns and	Understands the Dhamma
Goes to the	Dhamma for refuge
Shows great	Diligence in Dhamma practice
Cultivates good	Harmony within and without
Strives to develop	Insight through mindfulness
Goes to the	Sangha for refuge
Follows the 5	Training Rules with dedication

A good Buddhist:

- **Takes refuge in The Triple Gem: The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.**

He accepts The Buddha as the highest ideal in life.

He learns, understands, practises and realises the Dhamma on his way to Enlightenment.

He is in and helps the Community of monks, nuns and Dhamma practitioners in walking The Buddha-Dhamma Path.

- **Observes The 5 Precepts:**

He or she does not kill, does not steal, does not indulge in sexual misconduct, does not speak untruth, does not consume intoxicating drinks.

- **Strives on with diligence, determination and dedication in Dhamma Practice.**
- **Goes about his life cultivating peace within himself and living in harmony with others and the environment.**
- **Trains his mind (mental cultivation or Bhavana).**

He cultivates his mind so that it is imbued with loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity.

He practises mindfulness meditation to eventually liberate his mind from the bondage of greed, hatred and delusion.



CHAPTER 2

EIGHT WORLDLY CONDITIONS (VICISSITUDES OF LIFE)

No one person in Samsara is free from the following Eight Worldly Conditions:

*** Gain and Loss * Happiness and Pain * Praise and Blame
* Fame and Dishonour**

When we constantly reflect on this, we can build up our mental strength and cope much better with the ups and downs of life. Think of the trees that live on so naturally and peacefully in the four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter. In times when we are fortunate to have gain, benefits, happiness, pleasure, praise, fame, recognition or honour, do not be overwhelmed and get sucked into attachment. Learn to observe these changing states and experiences. Like all conditioned things, they will pass.

Likewise, when we face or encounter problems, adversities, conflicts, misfortunes and hardship, let us learn to be patient, understanding, tolerant and courageous. Watch that mind of ours; learn not to react. We should just try our best to solve the problems. These negative states too will pass.

I remember an old lady devotee in our Association. She was a friend of mine. Some years ago, she used to join our Pali Chanting sessions and I'd sometimes give her lifts home. She must have been in her seventies. One day, she approached me. Our conversation went on something like this:

Madam X: Brother, I am very angry; somebody told me that there is a certain person who behind my back, liked to criticise my clothes; she says that the clothes I wear are not proper ('bu chuan yan'); this busybody! Hasn't she got anything better to do than talk about people's clothes? She is here to pray to Buddha,

isn't it? I want you to tell me who this person is and I'll give her a piece of my mind!

(I realised I had to explain to Madam X some Dhamma points.)

Me: Auntie, you are much older than I am but I am going to say something you may not like; you may be angry with me.

You should not be so sensitive over such things; do not react. For one thing, you are not even sure whether there is a person who commented on you; it's heresay and you are getting upset and ruining your health over nothing!

Now, even if it's true that there was this person who said things about you, SO WHAT? She is the one practising wrong speech, not you. Remain unperturbed; let your mind be peaceful. Do you know that even Buddha, The Enlightened One was blamed, abused and accused of wrong doings? He remained calm, peaceful and steady in His mind. The truth prevailed in the end. Think: if, even an Enlightened One is blamed, what more about we worldlings full of defilements?

(Madam X calmed down; she seemed to accept what I said. She even appeared relieved!)

Madam X: Is it so? How come I don't know about this?

Me: Well, it's written in the Buddhist scriptures. You can read about it if you wish.

(I thought everything was settled. A few weeks later, Madam X confronted me again.)

Madam X: Brother, I am very angry! I want you to tell me which lady commented on my clothes!

(Back to Square One!)

Dhamma Points for Contemplation

Oftentimes we are caught in our own traits, conditioned habits/thinking and reactions...only sustained, persistent and patient Dhamma practice (Dana, Sila and Bhavana) can uproot these defilements that cause suffering.

Always keep reflecting on the Eight Worldly Conditions.

Others' faults are easy to see; one's own, one hides or tries to rationalise them away.

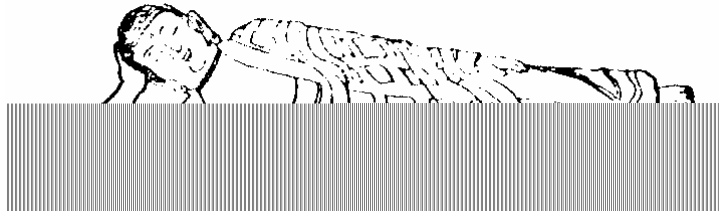
We foolishly dwell on many things of the past and bring about Dukkha (suffering) to ourselves.

BE WITH THE MOMENT.

May You Be Well And Happy!



CHAPTER 3 ACCEPTING THINGS ...



Some years ago, I learnt a very important Dhamma point or principle from a monk. He said, “When reality does not agree or match with what one considers to be ideal, with what one expects, desires, wishes or likes, then Dukkha (suffering, conflict, pain, problems, agitation, mental upset and a host of other negative mental states) can arise in the untrained mind.” When we reflect on this, we can see the truth of this in our life.

Who has not experienced one or more of the following at one time or other?

- We want to get good grades but things do not turn out the way we want them.
- Certain persons treat us the way that we detest.
- We want to possess certain things but are not able to.
- Sickness and pain afflict us; we expect good health or take it for granted.
- We do not get the promotions, posts, titles etc that we yearn for.
- We encounter people we don’t like and people whom we like are separated from us.
- We lose our material possessions and our loved ones.
- States of affairs do not turn out the way we think they should.

- We are ‘down’ for no apparent reasons; we want to feel good.
- Misfortunes or ‘attacks of bad luck’ come upon us.

One who does not understand and realise the true nature of things will experience even more Dukkha. We merely react according to our conditioning, habits, “muddled thinking” and our ego and delusion.

The Buddha once said, **“Tolerance, patience and understanding are the highest virtues a man can develop.”**

Try applying this with regard to the above-mentioned matters. I recall a past experience where a student (he was doing his ‘A-Level’) showed admirable qualities of patience, calmness and ability to accept things as they come along (unavoidably). He was one of the youngest members in our Buddhist Pilgrimage Tour to India in December 1996. In the itinerary, we were supposed to visit 8 Holy Places, namely

1. Lumbini, where Siddhattha Gautama was born
2. Bodhgaya, where He gained Enlightenment
3. Sarnath, where the First Sermon took place
4. Sāvattthī, where He spent the most Rains Retreats
5. Rajagaha, where He tamed the drunken elephant, Nalagiri
6. Vesali, where He preached the Ratana Sutta
7. Sankasia, where He descended from Tavatimsa Heaven after teaching His mother
8. Kushinagar, where He passed into Parinibbana

We managed to visit all except Sankasia. On 11 December 1996, we travelled from New Delhi at 5.00 a.m. by train (a couple of hours) to Agra, to see the Taj Mahal. After this, near noon, we travelled by bus (*a very tough and rough journey for a few hours*) to visit Sankasia. When we were near the place, we were told that the bridge leading to Sankasia had collapsed earlier. Imagine

the disappointment, complaints, mental upsets etc of so many tour members. We had to turn back to Agra!

And there was this student who took it so well... he was patient, calm and understanding. He said, 'This is my second pilgrimage visit to India.' In my first visit a few years ago, I too missed visiting Sankasia after the other seven holy places. Well, it does not matter. We have to accept things positively...sometimes they just cannot be helped. Maybe, I can visit Sankasia sometime in the future.'

You know, I learnt some very good Dhamma from him.



Sankasia

CHAPTER 4

DHAMMA LESSONS FROM 'COFFIN INCIDENTS'

There is so much fear, negative thought and taboo associated with death and coffins among many people. This is born out of ignorance, superstition, conditioning and a lack of clear understanding of Dhamma. Isn't it strange or ironical that, among many other things:

- Many are afraid to look at coffins or dead bodies (*these can't harm you*) but yet are so 'brave' (*or rather foolhardy*) to do foolish things like speeding recklessly, going to dangerous places at night, indulging in liquor, drugs, risky sexual behaviour, committing crimes etc.?
- Many turn their backs towards the coffins (*isn't that disrespectful to the deceased?*) at certain times during the funeral services?
- Many burn so much paper paraphernalia, joss sticks to 'benefit' the dead when in actual fact they are harming poor Mother Earth?
- Many carry out so many meaningless funeral rites and rituals (*There is so much unnecessary expenditure...the money is better utilised for the needy.*) and the poor family members suffer so much more?
- So much commercialisation has gone into funeral rites and ceremonies?

I remember a 'coffin incident' some years ago from which we can realise some good Dhamma.

One of our Association members' father passed away and she requested our Association to conduct Buddhist funeral rites. I took part in the chanting wake services the night before the funeral day and also on the funeral day itself. After the religious services on the morning of the funeral, we proceeded with the

hearse to the burial ground, about twenty miles away from Teluk Intan. At the burial place, as the coffin was being carried down from the hearse, the mourners and the other people who came along, turned away with their backs facing the coffin. We the Buddhist Association members doing the chanting, of course watched and chanted and did the transference of merits. You know, the workers carrying the coffin down from the hearse nearly knocked into the mourners with the coffin. We called out to the mourners to watch out and move away. Only then did they turn to see what was happening! Then they moved away from the path of the coffin. Imagine! If an 'accident' were to happen, superstitious people would be quick to say: "Bad omen! *Suih!* Why didn't the Buddha protect us?"

It's just a simple case of being mindful and using common sense reasoning! You know, so much Dukkha comes about because of a lack of mindfulness and delusions in our minds.

I remember another 'coffin incident' some years ago which taught me and is still reminding me of some very good Dhamma. We were conducting Buddhist funeral rites for a deceased Buddhist member. We followed the hearse to the Kampar crematorium for the cremation. When the hearse reached the place, a few of us had to carry the coffin down from the hearse. The family members and relatives of the deceased were afraid to come near. They were a distance away, with their backs turned. I was at the tail part of the hearse getting ready to help to pull the coffin down the rail in the hearse. The coffin was quite heavy and we needed more helpers. The worker at the head part of the coffin up on the vehicle called out to the family members to come and help. I was distracted and turned to look at the family members who were at a small distance away. My mindfulness and concentration at that moment was broken...I didn't realise that the worker at the head part had already started to push the coffin down the rail! My left little finger got caught between the coffin bottom and the rail...it was painful. I quickly pulled my

hand away. There was a bad wound on the finger (*luckily it was not severed!*) and the blood was gushing out. Well, I asked our other Association members to continue with the last rites while I thumbbed a lift to a clinic in Kampar town to seek medical assistance. After being tended to by the doctor, I returned to the crematorium to join the others. They had just finished the cremation. Well, many were very concerned about me but they kept on saying and believing very illogical and superstitious things like:

“It’s bad luck to touch a coffin or a dead body.” (*Ha! If it were so, then doctors, the police, the firemen, the undertakers etc must be the most miserable people! Incidentally, our local Cantonese undertaker and his wife, who are very nice and happy people that I know, are blessed with many good things ...wealth, health, and successful children who are professionals overseas.*)

“He got this accident because he was not given an “Ang Pow” before the funeral ceremony.” (*Ha! After the incident, many started putting ‘Red Packets’ in my pocket! They meant well but sad to say, they did not understand the Dhamma.*)

“His ‘oon’(spiritual level?) is bad this year...he must not get involved in ‘white matters’ (*meaning deaths and perhaps other not so happy occasions*).”

“Perhaps the time chosen for cremation is not auspicious!”

Blah! Blah! Blah! Imagine how our minds can be so clouded and deluded. The accident was just a case of cause and effect. It was perhaps mainly my own fault. There was a break in my judgment and mindfulness. Anyway, I count my blessings... it could have been worse. My little finger could have been entirely severed. Now there is a scar on the finger to remind me of so many Dhamma things like:

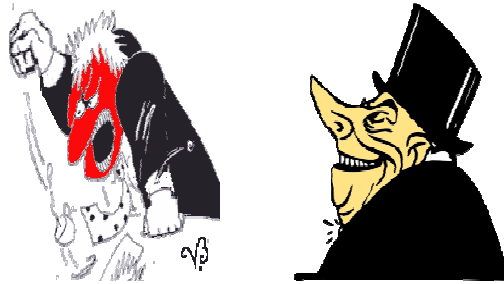
- Everything is impermanent. Learn to forget and forgive.
- Death: all have to face it one day. (*We don't know when.*) Make good use of our life now as a human being. Remember this motto: Serve to be perfect. Be perfect to serve. (*'Reaching Out, Looking In'?*)
- Mindfulness. (Sati) True liberation of the mind will be attained as we practise Right Mindfulness.
- The problems that we face or the hardships we have are actually quite small compared to so much suffering in the world today...natural calamities, wars, famines, terrible sicknesses and diseases, tragic accidents etc. Learn to appreciate what we have and count our blessings.
- When our minds lack training, cultivation and clarity, (lack of wisdom) we suffer even more. We merely react according to our habits and conditioned thinking.
- As the point of our transition is uncertain (*There is no bargaining with 'Prince Death'.*), there is an urgency for us to practise the Dhamma. (DANA, SILA and BHAVANA)

You know, there is so much we can learn in this life. We should strive towards a growth of our compassion and wisdom. It is always good to reflect and contemplate on the Buddha's last words before He passed into Parinibbana:

“Behold, O disciples, I exhort you. Subject to change are all component things. Strive on with diligence.”



CHAPTER 5 “THE DEVILS IN US”



The roots of all our Dukkha ...suffering, trouble, conflict, problems, stress, worry, fear, anxiety and all painful states actually lie in the “ *three big Devils* ” and their ‘*disciple devils*’. The ‘Devils’ are:

- **GREED, attachment, selfishness, covetousness, craving, lust.**
- **HATRED, anger, ill will, aversion, enmity, jealousy, cruelty, resentment.**
- **DELUSION, ignorance, ego, conceit, pride.**

The following ‘Devilish’ characters as listed in the following pages with their utterances/statements/talk are created to help us reflect on the Dhamma. Any insults, sarcasm or other negative statements do not refer to anyone in particular and are not meant to offend. Through the wit and humour, let us reflect to what extent the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion reside inside our minds and hearts. Contemplation and reflection perhaps can help us have some realisation of our weaknesses and thereby strive towards cutting off the defilements.

Introducing the ‘Devils’

1. **“Mr. Chin Tham Sim”** (Hokkien pun for Mr. ‘Greed’)
 - ‘All I want is not much ...just all your POWER!’
 - ‘Even as a baby, I prefer the nurse instead of the bottle.’
 - ‘I may not be a leader of men, but I sure am a follower of women.’
 - ‘I think life is very unfair ... so many pleasures and so little time!’
 - ‘I’m always AWOL After Women or Liquor!’

2. **“Miss Chuah Lau Hea”** (Hokkien pun for Miss ‘Boastful’)
 - ‘The only time I really listen is when I talk.’
 - ‘Every time I look in the mirror, I take a bow!’
 - ‘What you can, I can. What you can’t, I can.’
 - ‘During MY BIRTHDAY, I always send my parents a telegram of Congratulations!’
 - ‘I am very famous. My name is in a very big book ... the telephone directory!’

3. **“Mr. Ho Chong For”** (Cantonese pun for Mr. ‘Great Anger’)
 - ‘My temper is so bad that I make you wish my parents had never met.’
 - ‘No mosquito would dare to bite me...it will drink “boiling blood”.’
 - ‘My tongue may be 3 inches long but it can kill a man 6 feet tall.’
 - ‘I am often too angry to tell you why I am angry!’
 - ‘I have good brains, good looks, good money and a BAD TEMPER!’

4. **“Mr. Khor Kah Kee”** (Hokkien pun for Mr. ‘Self-Centred’)

- ‘I don’t care what happens ... so long as it happens to someone else!’
- ‘A friend in need is a friend to keep away from!’
- ‘Dana? ...Not Me! Welfare Work? ...No Time! Gotong Royong? Why so Stupid? “Makan Treat”? Oh! Sure!’
- ‘I don’t believe in GIVE! GIVE! GIVE! I always TAKE! TAKE! TAKE!’
- ‘Join this? Do this? Be present? ...Ah, what benefits can my family and I get?’

5. **“Miss Wan Toh Sim”** (Hokkien pun for ‘Miss Jealousy’)

- ‘I’ll feel better if I do better than you!’
- ‘You think he’s clever? He must have copied in the exam.’
- ‘I turn GREEN when I see her more successful than me!’
- ‘Wah! The more you suffer, the greater my pleasure!’
- ‘Thank you for failing! It stops the pain in my heart!’

6. **“Mr. Bee Na Tang”** (Malay pun for ‘Mr. Animal’)

- ‘Me No Know, Me No Care; Enjoy-lah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!’
- ‘Sleep, Eat, Enjoy, Sleep, Eat!’
- ‘I do what I want to do. KAMMA? Ha! Ha! Why Worry? I don’t know!’
- ‘Beware! When you kick my heart, your leg will break!’
(Now you know what is meant by stone-hearted!)
- ‘Why think? Why ponder? Just follow your desires!’

When we learn and practise the Dhamma, it is very important for us to constantly check ourselves...to watch our minds, to contemplate and reflect. Whenever the ‘Devils’ come, we must ‘fight’ and ‘kill’ them! Perhaps the following questions can help us to retrospect and reflect:

- Am I full of greed and attachment?
- Do I spend so much of my time ‘chasing’ for things to satisfy my cravings?
- How much DANA (Generosity, Charity) do I practise to ‘kill’ this dangerous SELF?
- How selfish am I? Do I only involve in things that benefit MYSELF or MY family only?
- Am I progressing in my outreach work?
- How often am I filled with anger, hatred, and jealousy?
- Do I put in effort to cut my greed and hatred ...for example through charity work, Metta Bhavana etc.?
- To reduce IGNORANCE/DELUSION, do I put in time and effort in learning, understanding and practising the Dhamma?
- How am I doing in my DANA (Charity), SILA (Morality) and Bhavana (Mental Cultivation)?

Conquering Greed with Generosity

“A believer desires to see those who are virtuous; he desires to hear the good Dhamma; and with a heart free from stinginess, he lives at home generous, clean-handed, delighting in giving, one to ask a favour of, one who delights in sharing things with others.” *Anguttara Nikaya*

Conquering Hatred with Loving-Kindness

“Just as water cools both good and bad, and washes away all impurity and dust, in the same way you should develop thoughts of loving-kindness to friend and foe alike, and having reached perfection in love, you will attain Enlightenment.”

Jataka Nidanakatha

Conquering Delusion with Wisdom

“Wisdom is purified by Virtue, and Virtue is purified by Wisdom. When one is, so is the other. The virtuous person has Wisdom, and the wise person has Virtue. The combination of Virtue and Wisdom is called the highest thing in the world.”

Digha Nikaya



CHAPTER 6 OF MOTOR BIKES, ACCIDENTS AND DHAMMA...

You know, we can learn a lot of Dhamma through our observations of, reflections on and experiences with motor bikes and accidents. Every year, at our local Buddhist association, we hear of motor accidents involving our Buddhist youths. I used to advise and remind them, particularly the 4th, 5th and 6th Form students about the dangers of speeding. (*I suppose many must have considered me a nag and a coward!*) The point is, many do understand logically why one shouldn't speed ...we may lose control of the bike when road conditions are bad; we cannot respond appropriately when we need to (*because there is this thing about momentum*) and so on. But yet, many still speed through habit and conditioning, a lack of mindfulness, a lack of consideration and compassion for others' safety or a strong ego ('*gaya*'?) to show others what they can do!

Once I suggested to some students who used to speed that they do this: put a clear label or sticker at the speedometer bearing these words prominently:

Speed can thrill but it can also KILL!

Some students try to justify their speeding: "Well, I follow all the traffic rules; I am in the **right**...". Bear in mind this: "Oftentimes, in an accident, it's no longer a question of who is **right** but who is **left!**" (*I learnt this pun from my youngest brother.*)

Over the years, interacting with the youths, I have come across so many cases of motor accidents ... some were pretty bad. As I pen these words, I remember the following cases:

- There was this Form 5 student who met with a horrible motor accident just before his exam. He had to have amputations above his right ankle a couple of times because gangrene had set in. I visited him a couple of times in the hospital. Imagine the trauma and agony he and his family had to go through.
- Another Form 5 student who used to speed, met with accidents a few times. There was one occasion where he nearly lost his life. The poor mother ... she was really sick with worry for a few weeks looking after him in the hospital.
- I once called up a Form 4 student to advise him about his speeding. *(His mother used to ask me to help counsel him...both the parents are too busy!)* Well, I did what I could and he promised me he would not speed again. One day, a few weeks later, I was sitting in the main shrine hall looking out at the students coming into the association premises on their bikes. And there was this Form 4 Student zooming in; the moment he saw me in the shrine hall, he suddenly braked *(to slow down!)* ...he nearly had an accident!
- There was this Form 5 girl who had a rather nasty motor accident; her shin bones were smashed and metal rods had to be inserted. *(Don't think girls don't speed. I used to shudder seeing girls speeding, and incredibly they are wearing high heels!)*

Actually I can rattle on with other cases but I may bore you to death.

Observing how people park their motor bikes can be a very good Dhamma lesson in mindfulness practice. So often, I have seen so many people parking their bikes mindlessly, haphazardly blocking traffic, disorderly in dangerous positions ...in fact, many just park anywhere they like, just for their own convenience. There was this girl I saw at our association parking her bike right in front of a red sign which says:

“No Parking For Motor Bikes”

Naturally, I called her up to explain. Can you believe it? She said she was not aware of the sign right in front of her. *(Ha! Is our Education system producing more and more Zombies?)*

Sometimes I wonder why we are encountering so many undesirable happenings. The primary reason I think is a deterioration of our mindfulness in an age that just emphasises on material acquisition. The other reason is that we are getting more and more self-centred ...we think too little of others' welfare. And you know, the great irony is that we study so much in Moral Education (*Pendidikan Moral*) about kindness, helpfulness, consideration for others, initiative and a host of other values!

It's time we realise that virtues, moral and religious values should not be just learnt and memorised. More important, they need to be caught, inculcated, practised and realised.

Still on the subject of motor bikes ...do you know that some people are so attached to their vehicles that they spend umpteen hours on these machines? I don't deny that we have to take some care of our bikes but what I mean is an 'over-attachment'. The first motor bike I had in the early 70's was a Honda 50.

I remember there was this colleague of mine, a 6-footer weighing more than 150 pounds. He owned a new Toyota car; he was very attached to it. When we went to the movies together, he would ask me to fetch him on my Honda 50. Reason? He was afraid to use his car lest it was scratched when parked outside the theatre! I heard that this friend of mine had since 'turned over a new leaf'; he once nearly succumbed to a massive heart attack. *(Perhaps he had realised that everything is impermanent. We don't really own 'our' material possessions; 'our' loved ones*

are not really ours; we have no ultimate control even of 'our' own bodies!)

Talking about motor bikes and accidents, many people have strange ideas and beliefs. They have a lot of superstitions and delusions when it comes to matters like accidents.

I was once at the local Thai Buddhist temple with some other meditators. The resident monk was away and he had been so kind to leave a set of the temple keys with me.

That afternoon, two young men, in their late twenties came to the temple looking for the monk. They had travelled all the way on their motor bikes from a town, about 60 miles away from Teluk Intan.

When I asked them if I could help them, they said they were looking for the monk to bless their Buddha pendants/amulets so that the 'holy items' would have more power. They had paid a big sum for them elsewhere and they said these amulets could protect them from motor accidents.

(They said that there were even more expensive and more powerful ones! These have been blessed by 'Masters'.)

I explained a little Dhamma to them, "If this were so, then the wealthy ones would be very safe from accidents because they can afford very expensive amulets! And what about drunkards who drive? Would their wearing these amulets make them accident-free? What logic! The two men actually could understand all this when pointed out to them.

In fact, they became interested to learn some Dhamma and I took the opportunity to tell them about the practice of **Dana, Sila and Bhavana. (Generosity, Morality and Mental Cultivation)**

"May We Grow in Compassion and Wisdom."

CHAPTER 7 A BUDDHIST SUNDAY SCHOOL TRIP



We can learn a lot of good Dhamma from observing and interacting with little children. I have learnt a lot from being involved in our Buddhist Sunday School programme in the last 20 years or so. Among children, we can see traits of anger, hatred, jealousy, greed, dullness, love, compassion, kindness, aggression, peacefulness and a host of others. It is a challenge for Dhammaduta workers to try to remove negative traits and to develop and cultivate positive ones.

On one occasion, I went along with two buses of children on a one-day trip to various places in Perak. At 8.00 a.m., all were gathered at our association premises. Most of the kids were naturally very excited. By and large they were well-behaved. *(A feather in the cap for our Sunday School teachers!)* However, there were a few ‘monkeys’ ...restless and impatient. *(Reflect: Even some adults are like this and they are not aware!)* I noticed a few children who were really god-likepatient, calm, peaceful and serene. *(I was thinking I should learn and practise to be more like these little ‘angels’.)*

At 8.30 a.m., the buses left for the first stop ... the Langkap Old Folks’ Home. Along the way we enjoyed ourselves with some games and songs. I noticed a few ‘Hungry Ghosts’ – they seemed to be eating junk food non-stop and they did not at all think of sharing with their friends who had none. Of course,

there were a few lovable ones – the ‘devas’ – kind, generous and obedient. I couldn’t help thinking how important a role parents and education play in moulding the character and values of a child. I thought about the time I taught Moral Education in school as an examination subject. To my mind, morals, ethics and values cannot be taught like academic subjects. They have to be caught and inculcated from a very young age.

At the Old Folks’ Home, the children visited and distributed foodstuffs and ‘Ang Pows’ to the inmates. There were a few children who showed great aversion towards the old folks. I suppose they might be living a luxurious life at home ...having too good times most of the time. We had to inculcate some Dhamma in these children. I think today more and more young people are growing insensitive to the plight and suffering of the unfortunate ones. I remember a friend of mine telling me how some of his primary school students laughed and laughed when he told stories about some unfortunate victims of tragedies. It’s important we plant the values or virtues of love, kindness and compassion in the young.

After the Old Folks’ Home, we visited a terrapin farm. We met some very kind villagers. We were most touched by their hospitality and kindness. I couldn’t help thinking whether so-called urban civilisation and development have ‘defiled’ our Buddha-Nature. Thinking of my life, among the simplest, kindest, most natural and peaceful people I have met or interacted with are people in areas regarded as less developed – in Kelantan, Sungai Sumun in Perak, Sarawak, India, Nepal and Myanmar. Isn’t this a real irony?

Our third stop was at a padi field. Imagine – most of the children and adults who went along had never been to a padi field. The farmers were really kind and helpful. They explained patiently the various stages involved in padi planting...from the sowing of seeds to the final crop of padi that we buy for our rice food. It

was really a good lesson in appreciation of the toil and sweat of our fellow human beings in providing us with food. We too often take things for granted in life. It's time more gratitude and appreciation are inculcated in children.

We next visited a guava plantation and a farm that grew lime plants. All along we met with very nice and simple folks. They were really happy to show us around and explain things to us. We were really touched and appreciative of their hospitality.

We had lunch at the Chui Chak Buddhist Association. The members we met there were indeed very nice and kind. Dana was practised so sincerely. I was really touched by the joy of giving our Buddhist brothers and sisters showed. We had lots of things to eat! You know, we reflected on this:

The world would be a happier place if more people practise Dana. These days, too many of us think more of getting and receiving. We have the 'Kiasu syndrome' and so many 'claw' their way up to acquire more wealth, status, and power.

I recalled what the Buddha said in Dhammapada:

***“The fool is worried thinking
'I have sons, I have wealth.'***

***Indeed, when he himself is not his own,
Whence sons? whence wealth?”***

Reflecting profoundly on the above, perhaps we can learn more to reach out to others.

After lunch, we headed for Pasir Salak. We visited the Historical Complex. The Historical 'Time Tunnel' was quite interesting and educational. Of course, there were a few students who complained about it being too coldearlier in the bus, they had

complained that it was too hot! I thought about the Scriptural reading on “Training” that we do during Buddha Puja/Chanting sessions:

***“It’s too cold, it’s too hot, it’s too late,”
With such excuses one who gives up
the practice lets one’s opportunities slip.***

***But one who looks on cold and heat
as no more obstructive than straw
and continues with the practice
does not fall short of happiness.”***

After the Historical Complex, we visited a Pottery/Craft Centre on the way to Botak Kanan. The kind and simple Kampung folks demonstrated their pottery skills. We stayed for a short while only as we were behind schedule ...we were supposed to visit the Wild Life (*Terrapin*) Conservation Centre at 2.30 p.m. and it was already 4.30 p.m.

Finally, we made our way there and reached the place at almost 5.00 p.m. We apologised for being late. The Officer in-charge had waited for us since 2.30 p.m. And he was so patient and showed no sign of being angry, upset or irritated. On the contrary, he was all smiles, so warm, kind, friendly and helpful. I learnt a good Dhamma lesson! I thought of the times when I was angry, upset or disappointed over what to me now were rather small matters. You know, experiences like this can change the way we see things and react to outside stimuli and circumstances.

After a wonderful time at the Conservation Centre, we headed for home. It was almost 7.30 p.m. when we reached our hometown. It had been a most memorable day but what was most significant for me was the many Dhamma lessons I learnt in this one-day outing.

CHAPTER 8 LEARNING FROM INSULTS

Insults are words or acts which offend the honour of others. They belittle, ridicule or slander other people. As good Buddhists, we should practise Right Speech – to refrain from lying, using harsh words, slander and gossip or frivolous talk.



We should not hurt others with insults. Some people think that, sometimes insults meant as jokes or given in humour are harmless. I do not wish to argue on this and I leave it to your better judgment. However, we must be careful and mindful and use our wisdom.

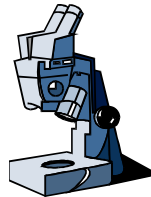
When other people hurl insults at us, we should

- practise patience and tolerance.
- check and restrain ourselves from getting angry.
- take it as an opportunity to practise patience and tolerance.
- look at ourselves to see if we can correct any of our faults and weaknesses.
- view them positively (*and perhaps in lighten vein*).

If we need to defend ourselves, explain or clarify, then do so calmly, with tact and **METTA**.

The following is a fictitious and humorous presentation of some insults. Examine and reflect on them and see what Dhamma elements you can learn from them.

Mr. Pang Tuah Pow
(Hokkien pun for “exaggerating”)
is like a Microscope – he magnifies everything!



Reflection:

Beware of our speech. Be mindful. Nobody likes the “Boaster” or the “Egoist”. Exaggerating can amount to lying – a break of the 4th Precept.

*When **Mr. Chew Sian Ong** (Hokkien pun for “King Drinker”) drinks, he loses his inhibitions and gives exhibitions!*

Reflection:

When one drinks liquor, intoxication can result. A break of the 5th Precept can lead to breaching the other four Precepts – abusing and even killing others, stealing, molesting and sexual assault and wrong speech.

It’s easy to recognise En. Boh San Kan.

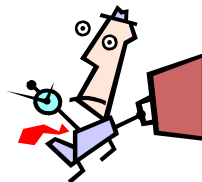
(Malay pun for Mr. “Boring”). If you see two fellows together and one looks bored, he’s the other.

Reflection:

We need to be very mindful in our interaction with others. Too often, we bore others with long, long empty talks. However, we have to practise patience in being good listeners when others talk!

When Mr Chin Chow Khar

(Hokkien pun for Mr. “Dishonest”) left his last apartment, his poor landlady actually wept – he owed six months’ rent.

**Reflection:**

Today, there is so much Dukkha that arises out of our greed – desire and greed for money and material wealth, name and

position, power and status. We find lots of *Kiasu* people all over. Too many, too often, just care about themselves. We cheat, we lie, we use questionable methods to ACHIEVE, to GET and to ATTAIN!



“You said your name is ‘Mo Lay Mau’ (Cantonese pun for ‘No manners’)?

I am sorry I couldn’t remember but your nasty manners are certainly familiar.”

Reflection:

These days, in the mad rush in the rat race, we too often forget some very important principles of human relationship. And one of these is manners and courtesy. We take things for granted and lack the human touch. We forget the great importance of words like “Thank You”, “Please”, “Sorry”, “Excuse Me”, “How are you?” “Good Day” and so on. No one likes an ill-mannered and self-centred person.



Beware! When Miss Quah Kwan Lan

(Hokkien pun for Miss ‘Look up to Status’) is courting you, she is deciding whether she can get someone better!



Reflection:

It’s a highly materialistic world today. It’s indeed strange that so many people live as if life is permanent and certain. When we contemplate on the fact of uncertainty and impermanence, then perhaps we can see the urgency for Dhamma practice before it is too late. We need to integrate Dhamma practice into our ever increasingly busy lives.

CHAPTER 9

ON HEEDLESSNESS, UNMINDFULNESS, POOR ATTENTION, FORGETFULNESS...

Do we realise that so often we bring about Dukkha (suffering) to ourselves and others due to a sheer lack of mindfulness? We can do much harm to ourselves, strain relationship with others and harm the environment when we

- are not mindful of our thoughts, speech and actions.
- do not think and be considerate about the welfare of others.
- are just concerned with our own pleasures and ‘happiness’.
- lead our lives merely to “attain, achieve , acquire” .

Let us reflect on the following which essentially arise out of a lack of mindfulness or attention, bad habits or traits and a lack of consideration, concern or compassion for others.

1. **No Punctuality**

How many times have we stolen people’s time by making people wait at meetings, dinners, talks and other occasions? I think many have been ‘cursed’ for this negative trait ... it is not good for human relationships. I remember a teacher who used to harp on the importance of punctuality to his students. The irony is that this teacher himself is often late for his lessons!

2. **Indiscriminate Parking Of Vehicles**

This terrible habit seems to be getting more prevalent. I have seen too often drivers of motorcycles and cars parking at “**NO PARKING**” places, at road junctions, at places that block others and so on. Imagine how much “curse” they receive. It is not good for their mental health and peace!

3. **Not Keeping Promises**

I remember the times when I waited in vain for students (*and also adults*) who were supposed to turn up for appointments.

(They gave me the opportunity to practise patience!) When asked later why they failed to keep their promises, the usual excuse was: “Sorrylah! Forgot about it!” Saying ‘Sorry’ is easy ... training the mind is hard but vital or essential if one wants to cut Dukkha in our life.

4. Non-Attention To Instructions

So much unnecessary hardship has come about because of people’s lack of attention to the things said to them ...they have ears but hear not! In our Buddhist association, I remember adults and students turning up for classes on holidays, failure to attend meetings because of ‘ignorance’, doing things the wrong way, and so on.

5. Not Aware Of Notices

It’s really unbelievable that many have eyes but ‘see not’. So many don’t read notices and this causes so much Dukkha to themselvesthey complain about their children not getting into Sunday School Classes, Guidance Classes, Camps etc all because they are not aware of notices!

I remember some parents virtually scolding Committee Members because their children could not enroll for classes ...their excuse? They don’t read notices and we should not expect them to do so!

Once a blind Dhamma speaker visited our Association. He was really mindful indeed. He told us about the times in the University when the sighted students had to ask him for information or news displayed at the notice boards!

Sometimes I have to resort to ‘reverse psychology’ to ensure more students read the important notices.

(You know, it wastes a lot of one’s time if one student after another comes to ask about things already clearly explained in the notices.) We put up headers like:

“PLEASE DON’T READ THIS”
(and they would!)
“DO YOU DARE TO READ THIS ?”
(This would draw them to the notices.)

Well, the situation has improved with this. Someone suggested this header *(to ensure that all the students would read the notice):*

“SEX – ONLY ADULTS SHOULD READ THIS !”
(Well, I haven’t dared to try this yet!)

6. Inability To Wake Up On Time

I recall a member of our Association who has this problem. *(The mind can actually be trained to overcome this type of problem).* He probably uses three alarm clocks!

There were a few occasions when this person went with us for trips to other places. He kept the whole bus load of people waiting for him in the morning. Many were already annoyed or angry with him; some cursed and demanded that we left without him. I had to phone him until he got up and rushed over to join the trip. It is not really good to get into people’s bad books.

7. Speeding And Reckless Driving

This is a growing problem especially among the youths or younger generation. We should reflect on the increasing number of road accidents, road bullies, drivers who blatantly flout traffic laws etc. The other day a student was telling me that when one speeds, one is not aware of it! *(Ha! Too immersed in the thrill?)* Gosh! It’s time we become mindful of our speeds before it’s too late and we start smashing legs or heads!

Speeding and reckless driving often can be traced to bad habits picked up when one started driving. Resolve to put a stop to this! Be mindful.

8. Not Returning Things Borrowed

Isn't this breaking the Second Precept? When we don't return borrowed things, we are keeping things not belonging to us. Just as we don't want things like this happening to us, we should be mindful enough to return all borrowed things. If we cannot remember, it is a good habit to make a note in our diary. I've had some experiences with some students who borrowed books from me for general reading, to help in doing their assignments etc.

9. Not Carrying Out Duties Mindfully

We have duty rosters of all sorts in the running and management of our Buddhist Association. We should strive to discharge our duties the best we can and with mindfulness. In this way, we train our minds and others also benefit from our positive actions. Our community library faced some problems with a few librarians who absented themselves without notification. This naturally caused hardship to the library and the people who came to borrow books. The important thing is: Be responsible! Be mindful!

10. Misplacing Things

Very often, many of us waste so much time searching for things we forget where we have placed. The things include books, notes, keys, stationery items and so on. We become annoyed, irritable, impatient and even angry. All this happens because of a lack of attention to our own actions. Our minds are scattered ...going to the future or dwelling in the past instead of being with the moment. I've found that my forgetfulness decreases if I focus more on what I do, noting mindfully my actions. The price we have to pay for forgetfulness can be very big!

11. Mindless Littering

I have seen many people throwing rubbish all over the places ... even right in front of notices which read:

**“DON’T THROW RUBBISH HERE.
YOU CAN BE FINED RM 500”**

So many have so little regard for our poor environment; they care only for their own convenience with little or no thought for others. Some are just careless and heedless. A friend told me once that his neighbour has the habit of dumping rubbish into other neighbours’ compound! Quarrels sometimes arise out of this.

12. Terrible Mindless Habits

From time to time I have reminded students of distracting habits ...playing with ballpoint pens, tapping their fingers on desks, blinking their eyes, shaking their legs etc. Oftentimes they don’t seem to be aware of their own bodily actions. I once had a friend who had the terrible habit of shaking his legs. (*He did not seem to be able to sit still!*) Imagine the times I sat next to him in the cinemas. He would be shaking his legs mindlessly. Poor me...my seat and my head would also shake! What suffering!

13. Not Recognising People

I know of some people who have an atrocious memory with regard to recognising persons. They can encounter real embarrassing moments. There was this teacher who could not recognise the monitor of a class. He used to scold another student for not ‘carrying out his duties’ thinking that he was the monitor! This innocent student had become a poor victim of mistaken identity because of an unmindful teacher!

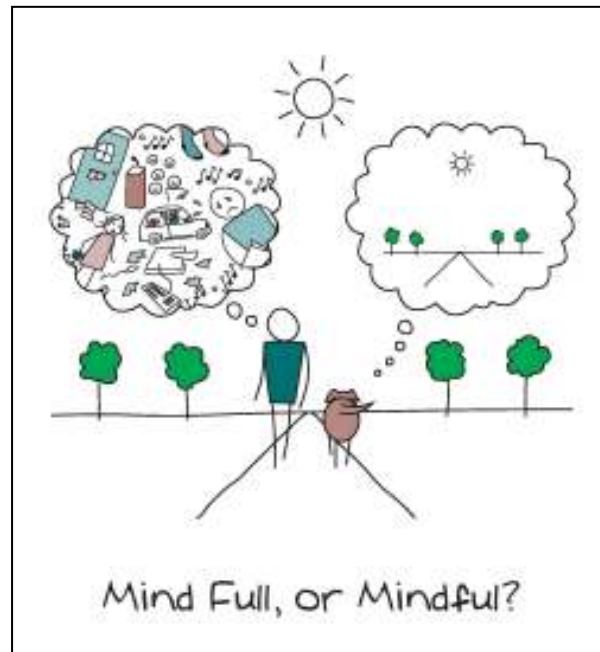
Our poor memory of people usually stems from a lack of attention to the people we interact with and this isn’t very healthy for good human interpersonal relationship.

14. Messing Up Things

One of the Kindergarten lessons we ought to have learnt is:
“Don’t mess up things. If you do, then clear it up!”

Unfortunately, so many people forget this important principle. Plates and cups are left all over after use and thereby attracting ants; lights and fans are not switched off after use; windows are kept open and the rain splashes in; utensils are strewn all over after use; books, stationery materials etc are chucked all over after use; furniture items are left in disarray etc. We ought to give a thought to our mindlessness. Let us resolve not to make others suffer due to our carelessness and heedlessness.

May we be more alert, attentive, heedful and mindful!



CHAPTER 10

ZEN STORIES TO PONDER ON

1. Just Two Words

There was once a monastery which was known to observe very strict rules. Following a vow of silence, no one was allowed to speak at all. But there was one exception to this rule. Every ten years, the monks were permitted to speak just two words.

After spending his first ten years at the monastery, one practising monk went to the head monk.

"It has been ten years," said the head monk. "What are the two words you would like to speak?"

"Bed... hard..." said the monk.

"I see," replied the head monk.

Ten years later, the monk returned to the head monk's office.

"It has been ten more years," said the head monk. "What are the two words you would like to speak?"

"Food... stinks..." said the monk.

"I see," replied the head monk.

Yet another ten years passed and the monk once again met with the head monk who asked, "What are your two words now, after these ten years?"

"I... quit!" said the monk.

"Well, I can see why," replied the head monk.

"All you ever do is to complain."

Points For Reflection

- Is it our habit to complain, complain and complain? There are times when we have to make the best of the

circumstances or situation we are in. Learn to count our blessings and the good things that we have. Remember that in Samsara, nothing is perfect.

- Patience, tolerance and forbearance are great virtues to develop. Without these, we often give up on many things that we start upon to do ... Dhamma study, outreach work (Dana), meditation and so on.
- There is a saying: "There's no gain without pain!" The Path of Dhamma practice and cultivation is a struggle ...it entails much effort, discipline, sacrifice and commitment. Remember Siddhattha Gautama struggled for six long years before Enlightenment ... and he was a Bodhisatta with good paramis! (perfections) Reflecting on this, we know that we, defiled worldlings have to struggle even more!



2. Transient

A famous spiritual teacher came to the front door of the King's palace. None of the guards tried to stop him as he entered and made his way to where the King himself was sitting on his throne.

"What do you want?" asked the King, immediately recognising the visitor.

"I would like a place to sleep in this inn," replied the teacher.

"But this is not an inn," said the King. "It is my palace."

"May I ask who owned this palace before you?"

"My father, he is dead."

"And who owned it before him?"

"My grandfather, he too is dead."

"And this place where people live for a short time and then move on, did I hear you say that it is NOT an inn?"

Points For Reflection

- We are all here for just a short time, and then move on. Reflecting on this, shouldn't we realise a sense of urgency to practise Dhamma before it is too late? Doesn't it make sense to develop our virtues and cut off our defilements of greed, hatred and delusion in this very short life of ours?
- Our true wealth does not lie in our material possessions or in the people we love or attach to. We live and die and never really own anything. How many people today think about this deeply? Too many people entrench themselves in their possessions and positions.
- What is our true wealth? It is our Kamma and the Kamma potential we store up in this fleeting life that will follow us from life to life. When we reflect on this, we should waste no more time to practise Dana, Sila and Bhavana the best we can.



3. Self-control

One day there was an earthquake that shook the entire Zen temple. Parts of it even collapsed. Many of the monks were terrified.

When the earthquake stopped the teacher said, "Now you have had the opportunity to see how a Zen man behaves in a crisis situation. You may have noticed that I did not panic. I was quite aware of what was happening and what to do. I led you all to the kitchen, the strongest part of the temple. It was a good decision, because you see we have all survived without any injuries. However, despite my self-control and composure, I did feel a little bit tense - which you may have deduced from the fact that I drank a large glass of water, something I never do under any ordinary circumstances."

One of the monks smiled, but didn't say anything.
 "What are you laughing at?" asked the teacher.
 "That wasn't water," the monk replied, "it was a large glass of soy sauce."

Points For Reflection

- We see this sort of behaviour often in men. They feel they have to put on a front to appear to be something that they are not. What about us? Do we sincerely watch and recognise our mental weaknesses and take steps to improve? Too often, we are clouded in egoism and delusion. Sometimes, when in certain trying situations, we are not aware of our silly actions until someone else points it out.
- To have a cool and composed mind ... one with calmness and equanimity needs a lot of mental training. Constant Dhamma contemplation and meditation is essential to make us grow and be strong. Many of us give up because we lack patience, effort, determination and perseverance.
- Conquering oneself is indeed the greatest challenge in one's life. We need to take the step now if we still haven't ... we can ill-afford to wait until we grow old or until we face with great problems. Even Zen teachers struggle ... what more about us with our conditioned negative habits and reactions. The wise man looks within and develops or cultivates his mind. He constantly does battle with the Mara forces within us: greed and craving, anger and ill-will, conceit and ego.



Always anxious
is this mind;
the mind is always
agitated
about problems present
and future;
please tell me the release
from FEAR.



**Not apart from
awakening and austerity,
Not apart from sense
restraints,
Not apart from
relinquishing all,
Do I see any safety for living
beings.**

CHAPTER 11

A TRIP TO HOSPITAL BAHAGIA, TANJUNG RAMBUTAN

Some years ago, a bus load of some adult Buddhist association members, librarians and Dhamma students made a one-day trip to the Mental Hospital in Tanjung Rambutan and some places in Ipoh.

We gathered at our Buddhist association premises at 6.00 a.m. It was very good to note that the students (Form 1 to Lower 6) were very punctual.

(You know, these days, punctuality is getting to be a rare virtue ... more and more people seem to be getting into the habit of arriving late for things meetings, wedding dinners, functions etc.)

We had a short Buddha Puja.

(We try to make this a practice for all trips and excursions organised by our association. I think this is good ...we pay Homage and make positive aspirations and also ask for Blessings of The Triple Gem.)

The bus left at 6.30 a.m. and we stopped at Kampar for breakfast. The students were quite well-disciplined ... another happy point to note.

(You know, at the present time, we hear so much about the lack of discipline in schools defiance, rowdiness, lack of manners, loose morals, gang fights, restlessness and so on. It is my sincere conviction that some Dhamma education for students right from the age of 4 or 5 would go a long way to moulding character.)

After breakfast, we continued our journey and reached Tanjung Rambutan at about 9.00 a.m. The Hospital ground is tremendously big and we had to go by bus from one area to the other. Two kind senior nursing Sisters were our guide. What

impressed me most was their dedication, kindness and compassion. One had already served for almost twenty years ...tending to and helping so many who are mentally ill.

(In a materialistic society today, it is not easy to find "Bodhisattas" ... it is a 'rat race', 'dog eat dog ' and 'No Money, No Talk' world. Small surprise that it is very difficult nowadays to get volunteer workers for Dhammaduta work. Our association is no exception ... we struggle to recruit volunteers for Dhamma and outreach work teachers for Dhamma classes, tutors for Guidance classes, helpers to cook for Camps and other functions, counsellors, people to help upkeep the premises, librarians, people to help at Buddhist funeral services, people to run Welfare projects , Camps and so on.)

At the Hospital Bahagia, we were briefed on many informative things and taken to visit some centers where some inmates are occupied in useful work such as workshop work for men, handicraft work for women and gardening/farming. Such work and tasks have very good therapeutic value.

We were also taken to some male and female wards. The patients maintain the cleanliness pretty well under supervision by staff members.

There were many things we learnt at the Hospital Bahagia which are very good for Dhamma Reflection:

- More than 90 % of the patients are Schizophrenic cases. Some are more serious; the majority are not aggressive or violent. They suffer from spells of depression and withdrawal especially if they skip their medication.
- Schizophrenia is incurable and it afflicts about 1 % of the human population. It is really a strange and bizarre mental illness.

(I have long wondered about the link between Kamma and mental illnesses. I remember a prominent local monk once told me that there is a correlation between mental illnesses and heavy breaking of the first and fifth Precepts namely, the Precept not to kill and the Precept to abstain from intoxicants. I find this makes sense just think about the people who “drown” their minds with intoxicants and the mental states of people who, with cruelty, anguish, hatred, anger, ill-will and jealousy, torture and kill others. Sometimes the terrible effects of intoxicants and drugs on the minds already start to take shape pretty soon or in the later years of their lives. I think it is very important for us to inculcate the virtues of kindness and compassion and the need to keep our minds clear, heedful and mindful.)

- People have a lot of taboos and misconceptions about mental illnesses. We don't realise that we unenlightened ones, are all afflicted with mental “diseases” in a way - the “diseases” of Greed, Hatred and Delusion. It's really a matter of degree. *(You know, when I was away for this “Tanjung Rambutan” trip, two of my friends came to see me at my home. When one of my brothers told them that I was in Tanjung Rambutan, they were so shocked and said things like “What happened to him?” “When did this happen?”)*

In Hospital Bahagia, we learnt that many of the inmates' families had already abandoned them. It's really pitiful. Whom could they turn to?

- The number of cases of mental illnesses is on the rise. There is no doubt that **STRESS** is one precipitating factor. This is the price we have to pay for so-called economic progress, technological advancement and what-nots. The Sisters told us that mental illnesses (schizophrenia, depression, neuroticism, anxiety, manic obsession etc.) can affect just about anyone ...people of different race, culture, sex and

professions. At the Hospital, there were secondary and tertiary students who scored many A's. The years ahead are not going to be easy ones in terms of mental health ... and sanity.

(To my mind, Dhamma education and practice is our hope...and salvation but it's not easy to convince others. We feel they have 'dust' in their eyes but they think we are 'Nuts'!)

- It's good to always remind ourselves that **STRESS** is related to one of the following:
 1. We want to GET, ATTAIN, ACHIEVE, ACQUIRE, BE ONE UP ON OTHERS.
 2. We want to satisfy our EGO or SELF.
(In reality there is no "self".)
 3. We are victims of "conditioning"
our upbringing, education, outside influences etc.
(We need to learn, understand, practise and realise the Dhamma in order to "de-condition" the mind.)
 4. We have no real understanding of the true nature of things.
(Dhamma is the only remedy.)
 5. We have the wrong attitude.
(Learn and practise the Dhamma to grow in wisdom)

All in all, we spent about three hours at the Mental Hospital. The rest of the trip was spent visiting some Buddhist caves in Ipoh, The Nalanda Buddhist Library, a recreational park and Jaya Jusco Supermarket.

We arrived back in our association at about 10.00 p.m. It was a good trip for me ...Dhamma-wise.

CHAPTER 12

CAN I HELP?

Many Buddhist organisations doing Dhammaduta work (and also many other bodies involved in voluntary service work) face the ever-growing problem of a shortage of committed volunteers to reach out to others.

Some time ago, I came across a poster that had some very good food for thought and reflection: there were many elements of Dhamma – Dana, service, mindfulness, sacrifice, initiative and so on.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

*There are four people named
EVERYBODY, SOMEBODY, ANYBODY
and **NOBODY**.*

There was one important job to be done,
and **EVERYBODY** was asked to do it.
EVERYBODY was sure **SOMEBODY**
would do it.

ANYBODY could have done it,
but **NOBODY** did it.

SOMEBODY got angry about that,
because it was **EVERYBODY'S** job.

EVERYBODY thought **ANYBODY**
could do it, but
NOBODY realised that **EVERYBODY**
blamed **SOMEBODY**,
when **NOBODY** did what **ANYBODY**
could have done.

REFLECTIONS

- Many of us have a strong “unwillingness to do outreach work that does not give monetary or material gain or a name to boost our EGO”. This is essentially due to the attachment to the SELF. Until and unless we have some Dhamma realisation on this point, many of us would be this “**EVERYBODY**”, “**SOMEBODY**”, “**ANYBODY**” or “**NOBODY**” ... and we would continue to experience Dukkha in this Samsara.
- How often have we become armchair critics (*filled with anger*) “This should be done...You should do this or that ...Why is this not done ...”. Ask ourselves: How much have **I** done?
- We like to give excuses (and rationalisation) for not doing the things that we ought to. Reflect! Change! Reform!
- Heedlessness and a lack of mindfulness cause us and others to suffer ...important tasks are left undone; we make too many careless mistakes; we sink into apathy; we backslide.

Below is a collection of quotes on “Volunteerism” that we hope can help to inspire us in our Dana and outreach work.

When you become detached mentally from yourself and concentrate on helping other people with their difficulties, you will be able to cope with your own more effectively. Somehow, the act of self-giving is a personal power-releasing factor.

Norman V. Peale

**Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
To all the people you can
As long as ever you can.**

John Wesley

**Believe, when you are most unhappy, that there
is something for you to do in the world. So long
as you can sweeten another's pain,
life is not in vain.
*Helen Keller***

**We cannot live only for ourselves.
A thousand fibres connect us with our fellow-men;
and along those fibres, as sympathetic threads,
our actions run as causes,
and they come back to us as effects.
*Herman Melville***

**The unselfish effort to
bring cheer to others
will be the beginning
of a happier life
for ourselves.
*Helen Keller***

**The unfortunate need
people who will be
kind to them; the
prosperous need
people to be kind to.
*Aristotle***

DANA

**Kindness Service Love Volunteerism
Interdependence Help Friendship

Generosity Charity
Compassion Giving Sharing Welfare
Loving-kindness Selflessness Benevolence**

**We cannot hold a
torch to light another's
path without
brightening our own.**
Ben Sweetland

**We make a living by
what we get, we make a
life by what we give.**
W.Churchill

*** When I dig another out of trouble, the hole
from which I lift him is the place where I bury my own.**
Winston Churchill

*** You give but little when you give of your possessions.
It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.**
Kahlil Gibran

*** Life becomes harder for us when we live for others,
but it also becomes richer and happier.**
Albert Schweitzer

*** You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know
how soon it will be too late.**
Ralph Waldo Emerson

*** One thing I know: the only ones among you who will be
really happy are those who will have sought
and found how to serve.**
Albert Schweitzer

*** I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is
my chief duty to accomplish small tasks
as if they were great and noble.**
Helen Keller

CHAPTER 13 COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

- * **Countless are those deprived of security and safety.
May we value the opportunity to grow spiritually.**
- * **Countless are those suffering in poverty.
May we be generous and kind.**



- * **Countless are those struck by calamities and disasters.
May we render services selflessly.**
- * **Countless are those dying of hunger.
May we not forget the unfortunate ones.**
- * **Countless are those who face adversities in life.
May we develop the strength of mind to cope with problems.**
- * **Countless are those afflicted with sicknesses.
May we not take our health for granted.**

*** Countless are those hit by
the adverse forces of Nature.
May we protect and take care of our environment.**

*** Countless are those who cannot see to read.
May we grow in Life's education!**

*** Countless are those caught in battles and wars.
May we treasure the peace we have
and practise our religion ardently!**



*** Countless are those who lack the power
to reason and ponder.
May we purify our minds!**

*** Countless are those who fall victims
to motor accidents.
May we be mindful and alert!**

*** Countless are those living in states of danger.
We are in a land of peace.
May we help to bring peace to others.**

- * **Countless are those whose minds
are confused and lost.
May we cultivate our minds
to see things clearly as they are.**



- * **Countless are those born handicapped.
May our acts of compassion grow.**
- * **Countless are those who suffer
from frequent pains.
May we endure calmly whatever
unpleasant things we sometimes face with.**
- * **Countless are those with no land and refuge.
May we treasure the good fortune we have.**
- * **Countless are those who cannot move freely.
May our energies be put to good use.**
- * **Countless are those whose health
is threatened by pollution.
May we love and cherish Nature.**

*** Countless are those who fall
victims to terrorist acts.
May we spread Loving-Kindness
to all living beings.**



CHAPTER 14

“HOW AM I DOING?”

The other day, in my Chemistry Guidance Class, I was telling the students how very small we are compared to the vast awesome cosmos we are in. The nearest star to Earth, Alpha Centauri, is about $4 \frac{1}{2}$ light years away and this works out to a distance of $4.5 \times 365 \times 24 \times 60 \times 60 \times 186,000$ miles! And there are billions of stars and galaxies out there. It's mind-boggling. We are really small ... like a grain of sand in the vast seashore. But yet the human being is unique ... he has a mind capable of “more things on Heaven and Earth than can be dreamt of in your Philosophy.” The human mind can be so full of greed, hatred, cruelty, delusion and a host of other terrible dark forces that unleash so much pain and suffering on others. Reflect on the following incidents that you read about in books or the newspaper:

- A woman from the suicide squad straps dynamite on her body. She then ignites herself in a public place killing and maiming so many innocent victims.
- A serial killer abducts, tortures and kills so many innocent young boys and girls.
- A father sexually assaults and physically abuses his very young daughter.
- A man filled with jealousy and rage sets fire to the house in which his lover is sleeping.
- A policeman tortures an immigrant so viciously until some of the internal organs of the victim rupture.

And the list goes on and on How terrible can the human mind become!

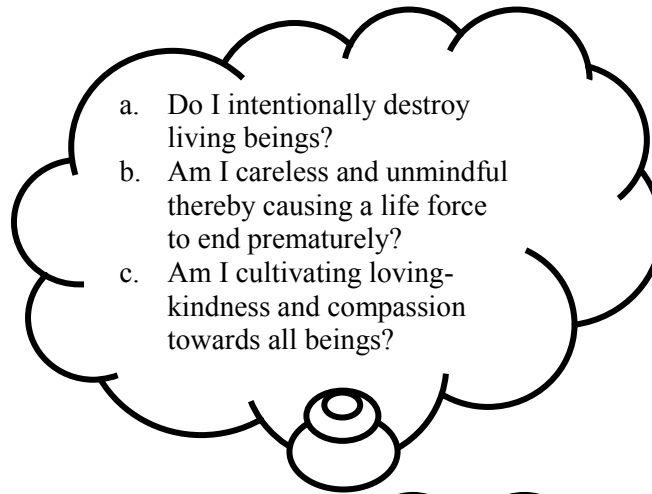
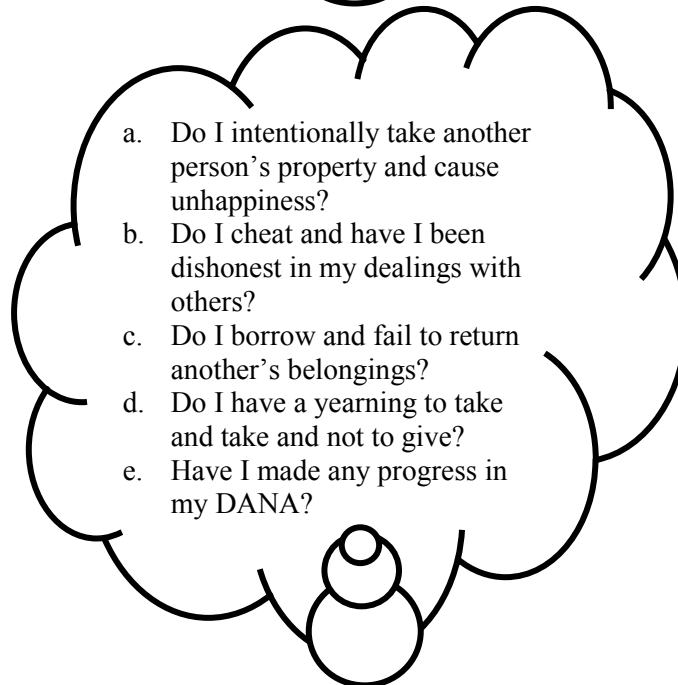
Do not despair! On the other hand, the human mind can also be enriched with so many positive qualities ... love, compassion, kindness, gentleness and selflessness. We have heard of

Bodhisattas and Saints who have rendered untold services to the needy out of selfless love and compassion. When we reflect on this, we come to the realisation that the human mind can spiritually evolve higher and higher until Enlightenment. We would have lived well and meaningfully if we continually grow in compassion and wisdom. This would be our true wealth and treasure that our mind takes with it from life to life until we “return to our Real Home.” Such wealth and treasure cannot be acquired without continuously striving on in the Dhamma. We need to practise ardently with patience, determination and perseverance DANA, SILA and BHAVANA. (Generosity, Morality and Mental Cultivation)

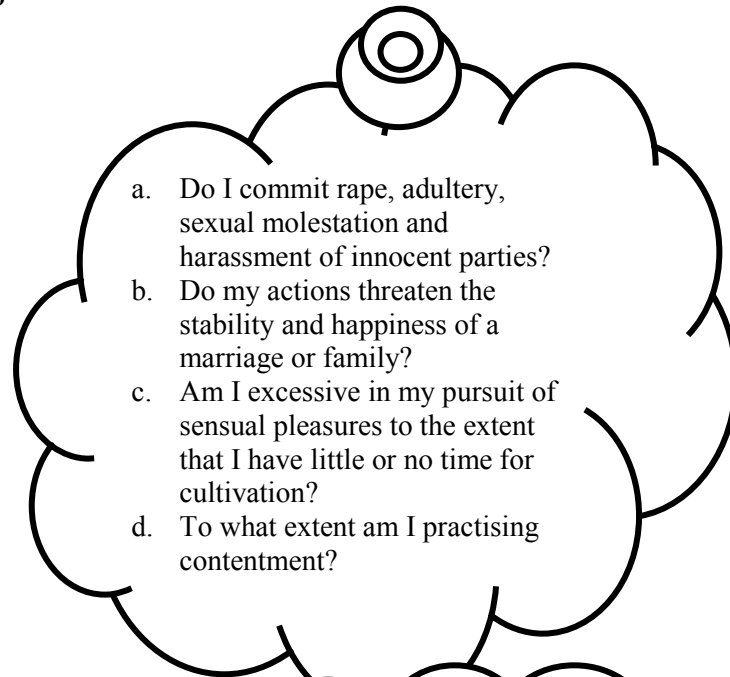
Many of us think we are doing “Okay” ‘cause we think we are observing our five Precepts very well. But we have to be aware of subtle MARA forces that ‘invade’ us from time to time and weaken, pollute and defile our mind.

It is good and beneficial if we constantly watch our mind (“Look out for the ‘Devils’!”) and do retrospection, contemplation and reflection. In this way we can work positively towards developing and purifying the mind.

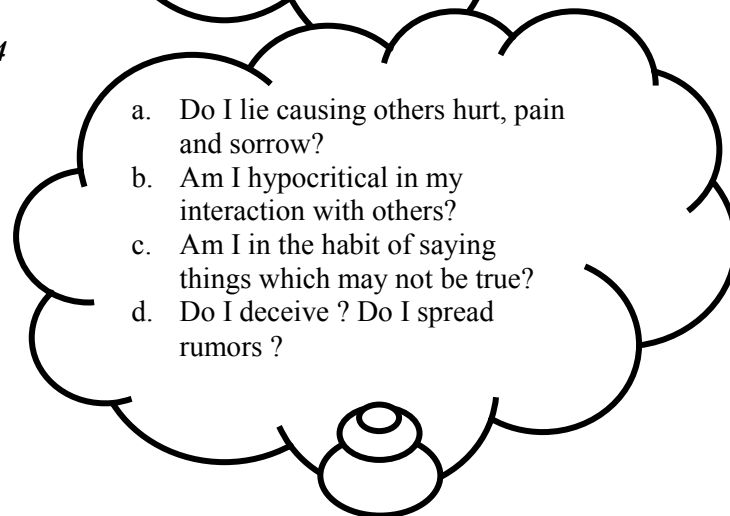
The following reflections done constantly with patience, sincerity, understanding, mindfulness and concentration can help in our Dhamma growth. In this way, we can conquer the “Devils” of Greed, Hatred and Delusion and fill our minds with generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom.

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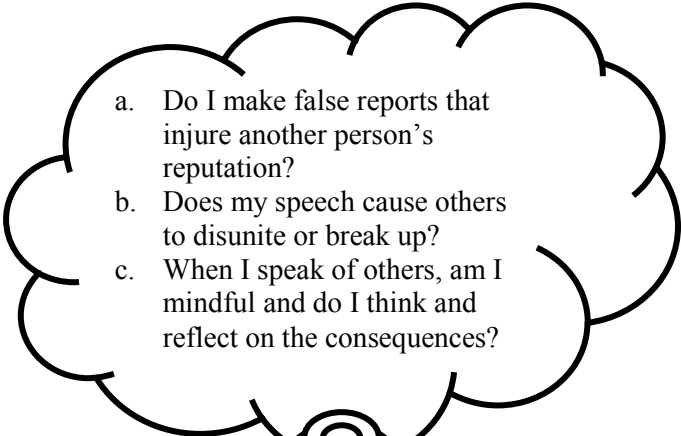
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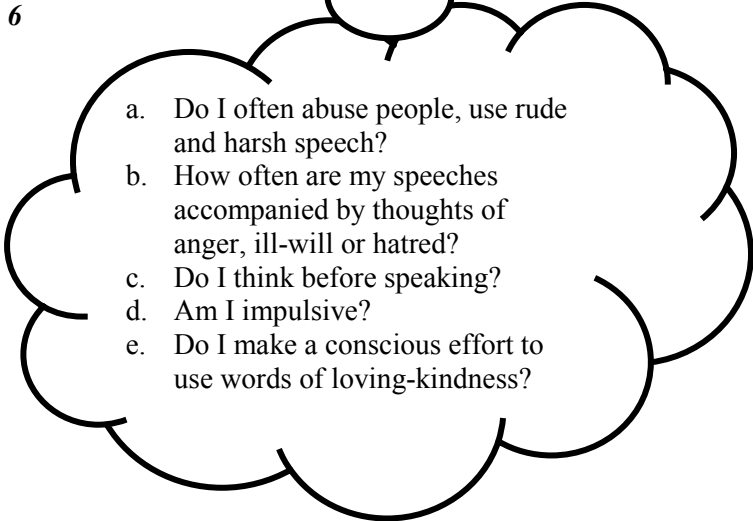
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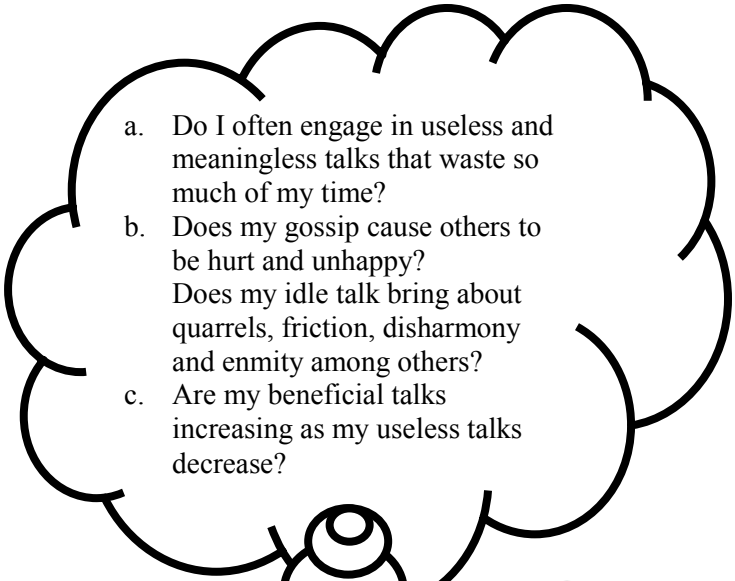
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- a. Do I make false reports that injure another person's reputation?
 - b. Does my speech cause others to disunite or break up?
 - c. When I speak of others, am I mindful and do I think and reflect on the consequences?

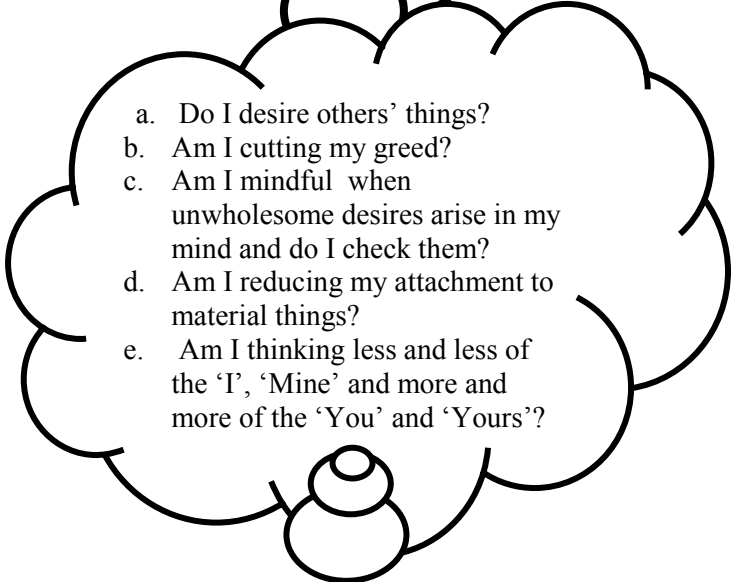
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- a. Do I often abuse people, use rude and harsh speech?
 - b. How often are my speeches accompanied by thoughts of anger, ill-will or hatred?
 - c. Do I think before speaking?
 - d. Am I impulsive?
 - e. Do I make a conscious effort to use words of loving-kindness?

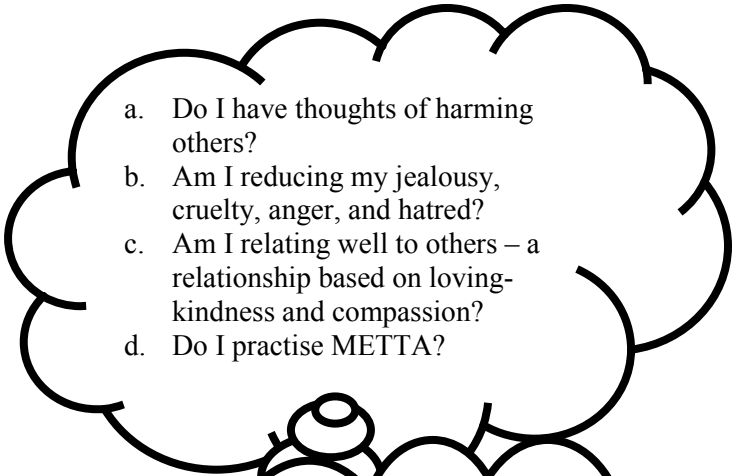
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- a. Do I often engage in useless and meaningless talks that waste so much of my time?
 - b. Does my gossip cause others to be hurt and unhappy?
Does my idle talk bring about quarrels, friction, disharmony and enmity among others?
 - c. Are my beneficial talks increasing as my useless talks decrease?

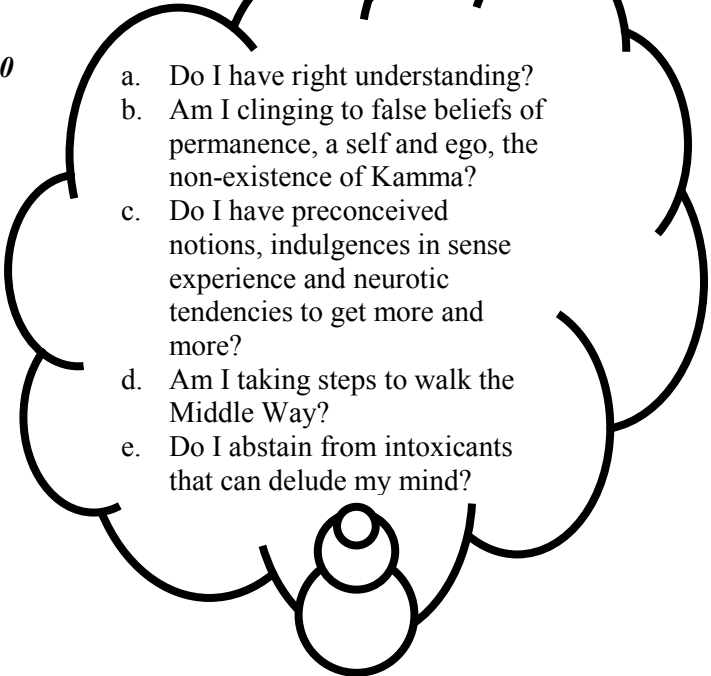
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- 
- a. Do I desire others' things?
 - b. Am I cutting my greed?
 - c. Am I mindful when unwholesome desires arise in my mind and do I check them?
 - d. Am I reducing my attachment to material things?
 - e. Am I thinking less and less of the 'I', 'Mine' and more and more of the 'You' and 'Yours'?

9

- 
- a. Do I have thoughts of harming others?
 - b. Am I reducing my jealousy, cruelty, anger, and hatred?
 - c. Am I relating well to others – a relationship based on loving-kindness and compassion?
 - d. Do I practise METTA?

10

- 
- a. Do I have right understanding?
 - b. Am I clinging to false beliefs of permanence, a self and ego, the non-existence of Kamma?
 - c. Do I have preconceived notions, indulgences in sense experience and neurotic tendencies to get more and more?
 - d. Am I taking steps to walk the Middle Way?
 - e. Do I abstain from intoxicants that can delude my mind?

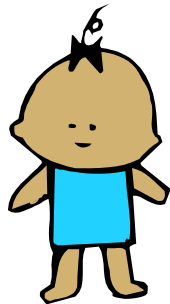
CHAPTER 15

“SO SMART” CHILDREN?

Not long ago, I came across something in a local newspaper that made me wonder. It was a commercial contest that depicted the photos of 10 little children, each with a caption praising the abilities, talents and achievements of the children. Basically, there is nothing wrong with this but the sad and worrying thing is that in nearly all the cases there is no mention, let alone emphasis on the good character traits or moral virtues of the child.

Today, in this rat race society, many seem to have forgotten the importance of character development and the acquisition of moral virtues in the child especially in the formative ages. What is emphasized seems to be merely cognitive skills, academic knowledge and talents in various fields. We do not pay enough attention to inculcate moral values and train the young minds to be good and strong.

Based on what I saw in the newspaper, I would like to do some analysis and reflection. The pictures of the children are mere graphic drawings and fictitious. The names too are figments of the imagination. What is of significance are the questions raised for our reflection.



*Lana, aged 2 years 10 months
Lana has excellent language skills. She
can recite words, poems and nursery
rhymes.*

“Is Lana selfish and self-centered? Does she share her things with others? Are the values of helpfulness, generosity and caring for others being gradually inculcated into her?”



*Shila, aged 3 years 6 months.
Shila can sing, do ballet and loves to imitate Michael Jackson in his dance movements.*

“How is Shila in terms of her discipline and manners? Does she throw tantrums often? How does she relate to others? Is she being trained to be polite in her speech and good in her actions?”



*Nellie, aged 3 years 7 months.
Nellie has good rhythm. She will dance fast to disco beats and slowly when she hears the Waltz.*

**“Is Nellie always crying for attention? Does she ever show consideration for others or is she oblivious of the needs of others?
She must be taught how to care for others.**



Willie, aged 3 years 11 months
Willie loves to play golf with his baby golf clubs and he has a pretty good swing too.

**“Does Willie like to fight with his toy ‘weapons’?
 Is he being trained to be gentle and kind to others? Is he being motivated to be curious to learn about things around him?”**



Earnie, aged 3 years 9 months
Earnie can serve and hit a shuttlecock.
He can sing many pop songs.

“Is Earnie showing traits of aggression and violence? Is he a hyperactive child? Is he being given simple positive tasks to perform?”



Kennie, aged 3 years 6 months
Kennie loves computer games and plays football, badminton and golf very well.

“Is Kennie a patient and gentle child? Can he play with others in a friendly and cooperative manner or is he often unreasonable, wanting things his way? Is he being exposed to violent computer games at this tender age? Is he often restless?”



*Sonnie, aged 4 years 2 months
Sonnie is great in computer games
and can play the piano too.*

**“Is Sonnie an honest and polite child
or has he already learnt crooked
ways like lying, foul speech
and rowdiness?**

**Is he receiving good moral education
from his parents or are the parents
too busy chasing material wealth?”**



*Ardie, aged 2 years 11 months
Ardie has the potential to be a computer
expert. He knows exactly which CD ROM
to use and how to execute
his interactive games software.*

**“Does Ardie get restless and bored often? How is he
when it comes to getting along with other kids? Has
he already learnt how to boast and be proud of his
‘achievements’?”**



Melanie, aged 3 years 8 months
Melanie loves to dance be it
traditional dances or ballet.
She is also a good storyteller.

**“Is Melanie being taught the importance
of moral virtues like honesty, humility,
patience, helpfulness and kindness?
Does she show traits of
jealousy, ‘Kiasu’ and conceit?”**

Timmie, aged 3 years 7
months
Timmie is musically
inclined. He can play the
violin and
loves to sing.



**“Is Timmie mischievous,
quarrelsome or naughty? Is he being
educated as to what is acceptable
behaviour so that he will not grow
up to be a spoilt brat?”**

Today, in our so-called developed, Hi-Tech and Info-Tech society, ironically, we see a rather large increase in social problems and crime. Someone once said, “Technologically, we may be giants but morally we have become dwarfs”. I think there is a good degree of truth in this. We hear of more and more violent and criminal acts and immoral behaviour.

Personally, I find the youths of today getting more and more impatient, bored and restless. Just think of the number of road accidents and deaths involving young motor bikers. There is no denying that this is usually due to speeding and reckless driving.

Many are losing their sense of religious and moral values. They easily get caught up in a world of materialism, self-centredness and ‘kiasuness’. So many parents do not realise the importance of giving their children (*especially during the formative ages*) good religious and moral education. They just want to give their children a head-start in terms of academic achievements and insufficient attention is given to the moral and character development of the children.

It is time we grow in wisdom for the sake of future generations!

CHAPTER 16

KIASU PHILOSOPHY

The KIASU (*afraid to lose to others*) Syndrome is spreading at a tremendous rate in so many areas of human life. We see so many trying to outdo one another, to be number one, to achieve and attain more and more in the material world. The sad thing is, oftentimes in this mad race, moral principles are sacrificed and the worst in man surfaces out. A little reflection can show us how foolish this Kiasu Syndrome is. It is born out of or associated with the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion. The delusion of an ego-self, an "I", a "Mine" leads us to want to have more and more.

Reflect on what the Buddha said:

**"Sons have I; wealth have I": Thus is the fool worried.
Verily, he himself is not his own.
Whence sons? Whence wealth?
*Dhammapada Verse 62***

Recently a Dhamma friend of mine sent an e-mail attached file to me titled "The A – Z Philosophy of KIASU". There is a lot Dhamma we can learn from it.

I reproduce it here with some reflective comments in italics.

A to Z of the Kiasu Philosophy

A? Always must win!

(Ha! How much stress will this bring us? And what we attain can never truly be ours or permanent.)

B? Borrow but never return.

(We need to check ourselves. Is it due to greed or a lack of mindfulness. Both are unwholesome!)

- C? Cheap is good.**
(Think! How often have we bought things out of need or greed.)
- D? Don't trust anyone.**
(What a mental state! ... suspicion, jealousy, ill-will ...)
- E? Everything also must grab!**
(Watch out! Is our craving increasing?)
- F? Free! Free! Free!**
(Watch our grasping mind! The "free things" that we hoard are not going to bring us mental peace.)
- G? Grab first, talk later!**
(We delude ourselves thinking that the more material things we 'own' the greater will be our happiness. Our real wealth is the Kamma we generate in our lives.)
- H? Help yourself to everything.**
(Such 'Hungry Ghosts' are cursed by others.)
- I? I first, I want, I everything.**
(How many enemies have we made with such an attitude!)
- J? Jump queue.**
(Don't we ever give a thought to others? Practise Patience.)
- K? Keep coming back for more.**
(Can we bring our 'extra things' to the other 'world'?)
- L? Look for discounts.**
(Beware! Is it thriftiness or stinginess or miserliness?)

M? Must not lose face.

(This Ego of ours can bring us untold suffering.)

N? Never mind what they think.

(Oh! We need to live in harmony with others. No one likes 'Kiasu' people who do not think of others.)

O? Outdo everyone you know!

(Ha! Be prepared to be afflicted with anxiety, worry, stress, hypertension, heart attacks, strokes)

P? Pay only when necessary.

(More often than not, this is not being smart but rather there is a deep-rooted stinginess or selfishness.)

Q? Quit while you're ahead.

(Such 'Kiasu' people give little thought to the welfare of the needy ones. They take care of themselves only.)

R? Rush and push to win the race.

(What for? Remember: Life is Uncertain. Death is Certain.)

S? Samples are always welcome.

(To give to the poor? Ha, fat hopes!)

T? Take but don't give.

(These days there are more and more such 'Kiasu' people. No wonder it's so difficult to get people for voluntary work.)

U? Unless I get something, forget it!

(How many Buddhists practise selfless Dana?)

V? Vow to be number one!

(What a vow! Such ignorance and foolishness! We should vow to strive on diligently in our Dhamma Practice.)

W? Winner takes it all! All! All!

*(When will we learn and have the wisdom to care and share?
Beware! We are multiplying our desires and wants. This will
lead to more Dukkha.)*

X? X'tra = More! *(Remember the Second Noble Truth: The
cause of Dukkha is craving.)*

Y? Yell if necessary to get what you want.

*(How many people 'bite and claw' to reach the top? Alas,
they get hurt in the process.)*

Z? Zebras are kiasu because they want to be black and white at
the same time

*(Unless and until 'Kiasus' learn, understand, practise and
realise the Dhamma, they will live a life of anxiety, tension,
stress, worry and much Dukkha...)*

For constant reflection

The Buddha:

'I am subject to aging, have not gone beyond aging.'

'I am subject to illness, have not gone beyond illness.'

'I am subject to death, have not gone beyond death.'

'I will grow different, separate from all that is dear and
appealing to me.'

'I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of
my actions, related through my actions, and have my
actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for
evil, to that will I fall heir'.

CHAPTER 17 SUPERSTITIOUS AND DELUDED BELIEFS

Isn't it ironic that in a world of such advanced science and technology, we still see so much of superstitious and deluded beliefs and practices all around us?

Recently, a local newspaper featured two articles of so-called "Buddhist beliefs and practices" which to my mind, are deluded beliefs and practices having their roots in ignorance, greed, attachment and clinging and a holding-on to a self or ego which in reality is not there.

These are the "unDhammic" points conveyed in the articles:

We can carry out 'Buddhist' ceremonies and rituals to invoke prosperity and longevity quite similar to the "changing luck" ritual practised by some religionists.

Reflect

Such delusion! Can one become wealthy, healthy and acquire longevity through some meaningless rites and rituals? If this were a fact, then so many people of other cultures, countries and religions who do not partake in such rituals must have a tough time trying to earn wealth, stay healthy and fit! Just think! How do wealth, good health and a long life come about? It is an interplay of various factors: one's kamma, living in harmony with the laws of nature, diligent work, living a wise and healthy lifestyle, having and developing a strong and clear mind etc. And this is no monopoly of "Buddhists". Common sense is indeed not so common sometimes.

The Buddha once said, *"Fools wait for a lucky day; for the industrious one, everyday is a lucky day."*

Evil spirits, including hungry ghosts, can be appeased by reciting mantras, prayers coupled with offerings and alms-giving.

Reflect

If we resort to such rituals, aren't we, in a way not much different from our caveman ancestors, who out of ignorance, fear and insecurity had to pray and appeal to and to appease the various gods: god of thunder and lightning, god of the sea, the rain god and what-nots? It reminds me of some religious practices of ancient times (*still prevailing in some places*) where animal sacrifices had to be made to appease the gods.

Then what about Western atheists or scientists who would abhor such rituals ... their lives must be full of torments and disturbances from so many unappeased spirits! These are really illogical beliefs!

What gives one protection and peace is good Dhamma Practice: Dana (Charity; Generosity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (Mental Purification and Development). Of course, we should practise loving-kindness and compassion to all living beings (*spirits included*) and alms-giving and transference of merits are meritorious actions.

Evil and bad luck can be got rid of through a “religious ritual” of burning items or ‘branding’ one’s personal belongings like clothing.

Reflect

Does this stand to reason? I remember my early childhood days when my grandma, due to a type of strange belief, used to send some of our clothes to a Chinese temple to have them stamped with some red marks to ward off any impending bad luck. We dreaded wearing such decorated clothes. Come to think of it, the clothes failed to give the protection we wanted. A lot of “bad

luck” still befell us. Ever since we took refuge in the Triple Gem and practised the Dhamma, our lives have become so much more simple and peaceful.

Evil and bad luck befall upon us through an operation of the Law of Cause and Effect. If we do foolish things or are unmindful, then of course we can expect negative effects. It is as simple as that. “Good begets good; bad begets bad.”

We can call upon the deity to descend and give his blessings. We can perform a ritual to exchange bad luck for good fortune.

Reflect

There was a time when I was young when I was taught to pray and call upon certain specific gods or saints to assist in certain tasks:

- A god to help in looking for lost things
- A god to help in romance matters
- A god to help to sort out travelling problems etc

Looking back, I find all this very amusing. Now I find the Dhamma Teachings of Right Understanding, mindfulness, mental cultivation and so on so much more meaningful than the ‘mumbo jumbo’ stuff I was taught when I was young. Ha! Some ‘so-called Buddhists’ are now preaching this very “mumbo jumbo” stuff. Remember that the Buddha essentially taught The Four Noble Truths. It’s sad to say, so much perversion has crept into Buddhist Teachings ... all because of greed, attachment, craving and delusion.

Indeed, the mental defilement of Delusion is very strong. Beware! Not long ago, a very cultivated Thai monk told me that in Thailand today, so many Buddhists are chasing after blessed talismans and amulets for good luck, fortune and protection. He

once told a group of Buddhist “Holy Water chasers” that if such things really work, then the Thai Government should have taken this step during Thailand’s economic downturn period: Fly planes all over the terrain of Thailand and sprinkle Holy Water on to the ground!

It is really sad that so many Buddhists are not learning, understanding and practising the real Dhamma. Come to think of it, many Buddhists are practising the very opposite of what the Buddha taught: **To cut greed, anger and delusion.** Aren’t the many mal-practices they indulge in increasing their greed, ego and delusion?

I remember an occasion some years back when a few so-called devoted ‘Buddhist’ ladies told me of a ‘miracle’ they had seen performed. They had traveled to a place some miles away to visit a ‘religious’ person with ‘miraculous’ powers. They claimed to have seen this ‘religious’ leader (*cult leader?*) transform some flowers into religious pendants that could be worn for protection from accidents and harm. These ladies seemed to be quite taken by the *cult* group. How gullible and naïve people can be. To me, these ‘miracles’ are in all probability some magician’s tricks or sleight of hand. Just think! If there are such pendants that can protect us from accidents and harm, then all motorists, industrial workers, in fact all citizens should quickly rush to purchase and wear such magical pendants! I told these ladies to learn, understand and practise the true Dhamma rather than rushing all over seeking false refuges.

Let us work hard to know Dhamma and make Dhamma known. In this way we are doing our part to help get rid of so many deluded “Buddhist” beliefs and practices.

CHAPTER 18

OF 5 C'S AND THE DHAMMA

Our local Buddhist association conducted the first English Dhamma Youth Camp in 1993 after a few years of failed attempts due to poor response ... many students still had a 'fear' or 'phobia' for English.

One of the interesting things in every Dhamma Youth Camp that the organising committee had to do was to decide on the names of the Groups in the Camp. They had to be Dhamma-based and from which good Dhamma lessons could be learnt.

Over the years we had used various Group names such as:

- Faith
- Energy
- Concentration
- Mindfulness
- Wisdom

- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Understanding

- Metta
(Loving-Kindness)
- Karuna
(Compassion)
- Mudita
(Altruistic Joy)
- Upekkha
(Equanimity)
- Panna (Wisdom)

- **S**acca (Truth)
- **S**ati
(Mindfulness)
- **S**amadhi
(Concentration)
- **S**addha
(Confidence)
- **S**ila (Morality)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generosity • Morality • Patience • Loving-Kindness • Equanimity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace • Bliss • Happiness • Freedom • Truth
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I remember one year there was a student who suggested that we should name the five Groups using the 5 C's, which according to him are:

- CASH
- CAREER
- CAR
- CONDOMINIUM
- CREDIT CARD

Ha! Such is the tremendous influence of the materialistic world. Naturally we could not use these names. We explained to the student (and his friends) that there are far more important and meaningful things in life than those 5 C's which do not guarantee a person happiness, peace and wisdom. Of course, as lay people, there is nothing wrong with earning some cash honestly, have a career based on Right Livelihood, own a car for use, have a house for shelter and using a credit card to facilitate things in our mundane living. The problems and negative effects arise when one

- Spends one's life chasing the 5 C's with little time for Dhamma. *(Many of us would say: Well, we'll wait until we are older when we have more material comfort before we learn and practise Dhamma. But we forget this IMPORTANT POINT: We can't be sure that there'll be a*

*time and opportunity in the future for us to learn and practise Dhamma. **Life is Uncertain but Death is Certain.** Reflecting on this, wouldn't it be wiser for us to integrate Dhamma into our life, work and our family NOW?)*

- Attaches and clings on to the 5 C's. Do not forget that attachment, craving and clinging are the root cause of Dukkha or Suffering.
- Is 'ambushed' or overwhelmed by more and more greed, anger and delusion in the mad pursuit of these 5 C's.

After explaining to the student and his friends the dangers of these 5 C's, we assure them that we would use 5 C's to name the Groups but in a different way. For the Dhamma Youth Camp that year, the Groups were named as follows:

- **Calmness**
- **Charity**
- **Compassion**
- **Clarity**
- **Confidence**

Calmness A big problem today among the young and old alike is that there is a greater and greater degree of restlessness, agitation and boredom in our mind. When will we learn to tame this mind of ours so that it is more concentrated, calm, mindful, peaceful and wise? It is urgent that we start NOW and the best way is ***The Dhamma Way***.

Charity

Reaching out to others is an integral and essential aspect of Dhamma practice. It is indeed sad to see people becoming more greedy, selfish, self-centred and "kiasu". The practice of Dana or Charity is greatly emphasized by the Buddha and Dana is the

first of the ten Paramis or Perfections and it is a most meritorious action.

Compassion

Karuna or Compassion is one of the 4 Brahma Viharas (The Four Sublime States or Divine Abodes). The cultivation and growth of compassion leads one on the Path to liberation of the mind and perfect bliss. The world would be a better, happier and more peaceful place if more people show compassion to all living beings.

Clarity

To develop a clear and wise mind is one of the most important objectives of a good Buddhist. One walks the Buddha-Dhamma Path cultivating compassion and wisdom until the goal of Nibbana is realised.

Confidence

Saddha or Confidence is one of the Five Spiritual Powers. One must have confidence in the Triple Gem – The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The only true Refuge is Refuge in the Triple Gem.

If we base our life on the wrong 5 C's, we will for sure be afflicted more and more with five more C's:

- * Confusion
- * Conflict
- * Calamity
- * Chaos
- * Clashes

Let us aspire to have or practise the good 5 C's of:

***Calmness *Charity *Compassion *Clarity * Confidence**

CHAPTER 19 OF RITES, RITUALS AND OFFERINGS

In practically every religion, there is a certain degree of ceremony, rites and rituals. Meaningful rites and rituals do play a role in Buddhism. They are the devotional aspects of Buddhism, whether in Theravada, Mahayana or Vajrayana. Some meaningful devotional rites and rituals can serve to:

- Enhance our confidence in the Triple Gem.
- Generate an atmosphere of serenity and spirituality.
- Help us reflect on certain Dhamma points through the symbolic meanings of the rites or rituals.
- Promote a certain degree of spiritual brotherhood or fellowship.
- Give a meaningful form to a religion which otherwise would be so drab and psychologically unappealing.

However, we need to be ever mindful and careful when it comes to rites and rituals. They can be a hindrance, a fetter to our Dhamma growth and realisation especially when they are rooted in ignorance and superstition leading to attachment, clinging and delusion.

I remember my childhood and teenage years when I got pretty disillusioned with the meaningless rites and rituals in our so-called “Buddhist” practices:

- Slaughtering innocent animals (pigs, chickens, ducks etc.) and offering them to the gods. *(My young mind used to reason that the gods, as gods, would not need to eat these ... and they could not possibly come and eat these physical things ... I had seen a number of devotees (with craving?) waiting to grab at these food items instead!)*
- Meaningless burning of lots of joss sticks, incense and strange paper paraphernalia. *(I suffered and choked*

whenever I went to the Chinese temples. How could I have a calm, compassionate and peaceful mind in my praying? Poor Mother Earth! How she is being polluted!)

- Asking the gods for all sorts of talismans, amulets etc. to ward off evil or bad luck. *(Today, how much commercial business has come out of this? And how many innocent and ignorant people have been conned?)*
- Consulting almanacs, mediums, fortune-tellers etc. as to what days and times are lucky enough to do this and that ... and there is a sum of money to pay for this “spiritual” advice. *(Reflect on what the Buddha said: “Fools wait for a lucky day; for the industrious one, everyday is a lucky day.”)*
- The numerous ‘pantangs’ (irrational and superstitious beliefs) observed on occasions such as births, marriages, deaths, New Year, “Hungry Ghost” Month etc. *(so much of conditioned fears, unhealthy mental attitudes and reactions are being planted in the mind ...)*

To my mind, meaningless and harmful rites and rituals should be phased out. This would come through more study, understanding and realisation of the Dhamma. Rites and rituals which

- 1 waste unnecessary money *(the money saved can be put to a better cause like welfare charity etc.)*,
- 2 waste unnecessary time *(time that can be better spent in Dhamma-based activities)*,
- 3 cause our mind to be less peaceful but more attached, clinging and deluded,
- 4 cause disturbance, harm and suffering to other beings *(for example loud noises, killing for sacrifices)*,
- 5 cause harm and negative effects to the Environment *(for example, pollution through open burning)*,

should be eradicated as we develop our wisdom and compassion for Nature and all beings. It is indeed amazing that for

generations we keep on practising meaningless rites and rituals born out of ignorance, fear and conditioned habit and thinking.

There is a beautiful Zen story which illustrates this very well.
(*Reflect on it mindfully.*)

RITUAL CAT



There was once a meditation Teacher living with his disciples in a monastery. There was also a cat which lived in the monastery ground during that time.

Every evening, when the meditation Teacher and his disciples began their evening meditation, the cat would run around and make so much noise that it distracted the meditators. So the Teacher ordered for the cat to be tied up during the evening practice.

Years later, when the Teacher died, the cat continued to be tied up during the meditation session. And when the cat eventually died, another cat was brought to the monastery and tied up during meditation sessions.

Centuries later, learned descendants of the meditation Teacher wrote scholarly treatises about the religious significance of tying up a cat for meditation practice!

Now, what about Buddhist Offerings during a Puja? Done meaningfully in a serene, mindful and concentrated way, they can have tremendous positive effects for the Buddhist devotees. The symbolic meanings of Buddhist Offerings are as follows:

Offerings – Symbolic Significance. Reflections



LIGHTS

Light symbolises Enlightenment, the Light that dispels the darkness of fear, ignorance and suffering.

In the candle light too, we may reflect on Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta (Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness and Non-Self).

INCENSE

As incense emits fragrance, so too our good deeds and aspirations will emit pleasant vibrations.

The burning incense makes us reflect on

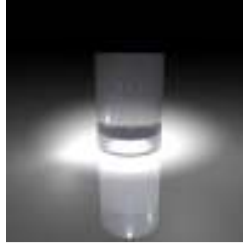
- Impermanence
- Unsatisfactoriness
- Soullessness



Three burning joss sticks can symbolise the burning away of the 3 mental poisons:

- Greed
- Hatred
- Delusion

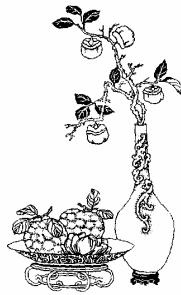
WATER



Like a mirror, water reflects. Let the water reflect our faults and defilements for us to see and remove.

If our mind attains a clarity like pure water, then we can see things as they really are.

FLOWERS



Flowers symbolise the essence of our existence – Impermanence.
All will decay, grow old and pass away.
Reflecting thus, we should lead a worthy life.

FRUITS



Fruits remind us of KAMMA.
The Law of Kamma is the Moral Law of Cause and Effect.
If you sow good seeds, you will reap a good harvest.
If you sow bad seeds, you will reap a bad harvest.

CHAPTER 20

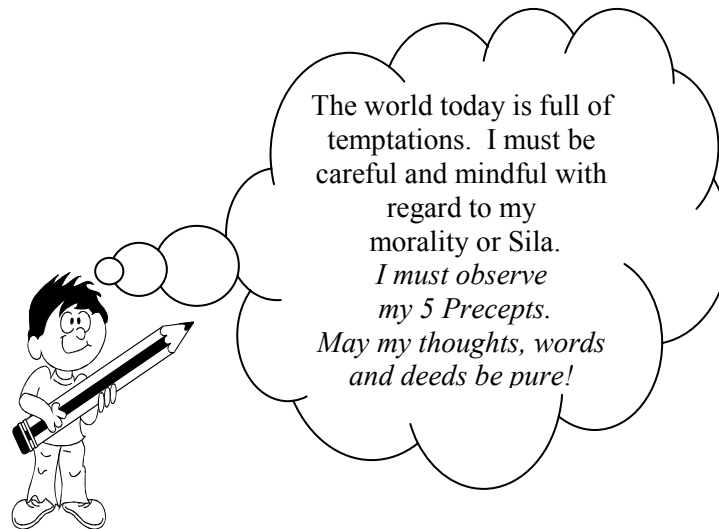
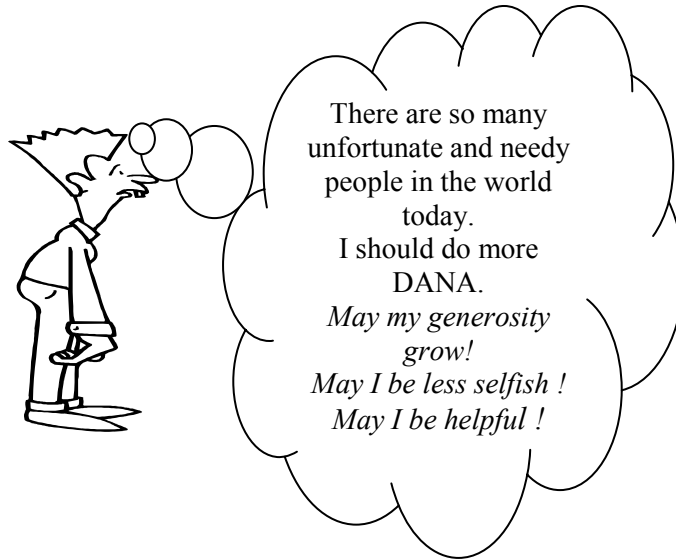
ASPIRATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

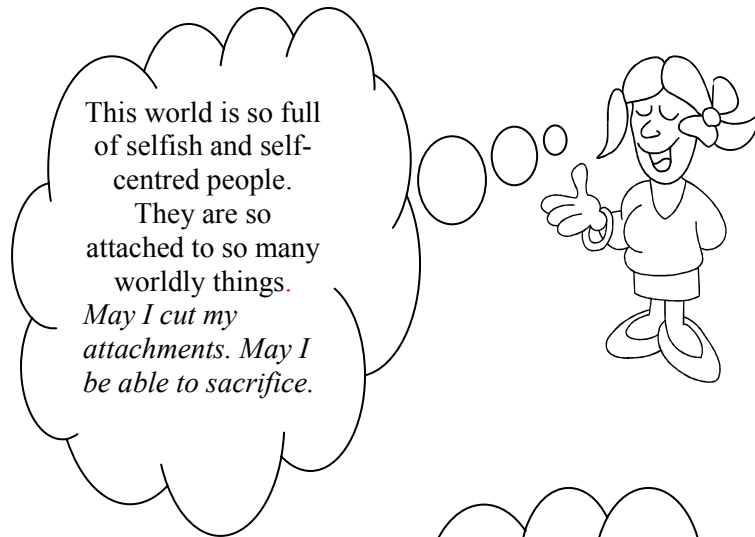
Time passes so very fast. Weeks, months and years seem to zoom past like the twinkling of an eye. Have we taken stock, reflected and examined ourselves to ensure that our Dhamma practice has developed well? Regardless of how busy we are, we need to set aside time to contemplate; we need moments of quiet and solitude to check our course in this journey of life and actualise our Dhamma practice. At the end of the day, everything else comes to nought: our wealth, positions and possessions acquired; the many relationships we have become attached to and a host of other mundane things. The questions that are going to really matter in the final analysis are:

- Has my mind become more trained and controlled?
- Have I grown in my compassion and wisdom?
- How much have I cut the mental defilements that can propel me into woeful states?
- Have I led a life of good charity, generosity and service to others?
- Have I learned to overcome negative states of mind such as attachment, worry, fear, restlessness, ill-will, conceit and hatred?
- Has my mind become more and more peaceful?
- Will I leave this world a more spiritually cultivated person?

From time to time, it is very good for us to make resolutions, aspirations and to take steps to fulfill them.

Reflect on the following aspirations and resolutions. We should then persevere and strive on to actualise them.





I must put in the effort to
learn and understand
the Dhamma.

May I be energetic,
vigourous and persevering.

*May I strive diligently
until I reach my Goal.*

*May I be able to serve
others to the best of my
ability!*



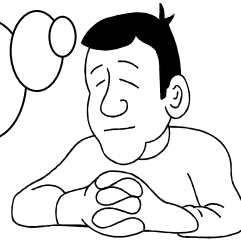
I see so much impatience
in this world. People don't
seem to care
about others.

*May I be patient and
tolerant. I must train my
mind to be more calm,
mindful and peaceful.*



I see so much dishonesty, deceit, corruption and hypocrisy in this rat-race world of ours. Sometimes I fall into this trap and break my Precepts.

May I ever be truthful and honest . May I never swerve away from the Path of Truth.



It is important to learn and practise the Dhamma. But I'm so lazy. I must have determination and perseverance in my Dhamma Practice. I must not waste my life away.





It's a horrible world
with much cruelty,
violence and hatred.
So many people are
suffering. I must do
something for my
fellow human beings.
*May I be kind, caring
and compassionate.*



My poor untrained
suffering mind! I
always react with anger,
jealousy, and hatred.
I must watch my mind.
*May I be calm, serene,
unruffled and peaceful.
I must strive to have
equanimity of mind.*

CHAPTER 21

ON MINDFULNESS AND COMPASSION

Many of the actions and things that we do in our interactions with our fellow human beings lack mindfulness and /or a consideration for the well-being of others. We are careless, heedless and forgetful; we care little about how others would feel or be affected by our actions. As a result of this, oftentimes much suffering, conflicts and problems of human relationship arise. Isn't it an irony that we Buddhists talk and preach so much about the importance of mindfulness and compassion but yet so often in our daily lives we do not practise these qualities? This may be due to one or more of the following reasons:

- Our old bad habits and conditioned thinking and attitude.
- Lack of realisation of the Dhamma. (*We are well-versed with "academic Dhamma" only.*)
- Lack of reflection before we do a thing.
- The defilements of "self", "greed", "covetousness", "ego", "self-centredness" and "selfishness".
- Adverse influences from the mass media, associating with 'fools' etc.

It is time we put in more effort in our Dhamma practice to grow in our compassion and wisdom. We need to strive more ardently,

- in practising Dana (Generosity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (Mental Cultivation).
- in our study, reflection and practice of the Buddha's teachings.
- in our Vipassana Meditation (Insight Meditation).

Listed below are ten actual incidents/happenings to illustrate how our lack of mindfulness and consideration for others brings about negative effects or consequences.

1 ***Incident/Happening***

A certain lady drives her car to the morning market. She parks her car at a ridiculous position blocking other cars that need to go out.

Effects/Consequences

A man whose car is blocked gets real mad when he finds he can't reverse out. He has to wait half an hour for that inconsiderate lady. He curses her and scratches her car.

Notes/Reflections

Think before we act. Be mindful and have a thought for others. It is not good to be cursed by others. Ironically, the inconsiderate lady is a devotee of Kuan Yin – the embodiment of Compassion.

2 ***Incident/Happening***

A certain librarian of a Community Library very often does not turn up for his afternoon duty. He does not inform the head librarian or anybody else. He just can't be bothered.

Effects/Consequences

The library is 'paralysed' for that afternoon. Some students who come from far away to return books feel disappointed; some, as expected get very angry. They condemn the librarian who is irresponsible.

Notes/Reflections

One needs to reflect on one's unskillful action ... how it will cause pain or suffering to others. Effort has to be put in to eradicate any bad habits that might have been with us for a long time.

3 *Incident/Happening*

An adult committee member of a Buddhist association has the habit of coming late for any meeting or appointment. He keeps others waiting.

Effects/Consequences

The other members of the group who have to wait for the person for the meeting or appointment are not happy with him. They have some negative perception about the person. Soon they lose respect for him.

Notes/Reflections

People who are not punctual for things are in a way stealing others' time. Isn't this a break of the Second Precept? If one cares about others, one has to make a determined effort to be on time for meetings and appointments.

4 *Incident/Happening*

A 'Zombie' student is not aware of important notices put up in a local Buddhist association even though she frequently goes there. As a result, she does not apply for the Guidance Class which she so wants to follow. When classes start, it is too late; all places are filled.

Effects/Consequences

The 'Zombie' student is disappointed and upset because she forgets to apply. Her parents are mad with her for failing to be in the Community Guidance Class. News about her case spreads among her friends and she is labelled 'Zombie'.

Notes/Reflections

It's unbelievable that many youths today have eyes but see not and they have ears but hear not. It's all a question of being aware and mentally alert to what is happening in our

surroundings. We need to learn to pay better attention to things around us.

5 *Incident/Happening*

Two Buddhist friends very often go to the local Buddhist association to do their study and revision work in the afternoon. They study in a classroom equipped with fans and air-conditioning. This is more conducive than their homes which are noisy. Sad to say, they often forget to switch off the electric switches of lights/fans/air-con.

Effects/Consequences

Electricity bills go up because of wastage. Despite reminders, the problem recurs. Because of this, these two young persons have earned a bad name and they are not well-liked.

Notes/Reflections

When one develops mindfulness, one lives in greater harmony within oneself, with the environment and with others. Accidents are oftentimes caused by carelessness or a lack of mindfulness.

6 *Incident/Happening*

An adult Buddhist member has this terrible habit of not keeping to his promises or appointments. He would ask to see a person to get some help over certain things. He fails to turn up. The other person is kept waiting in vain. Phone calls to him are not answered as he has gone out.

Effects/Consequences

Word soon spreads about the person's terrible trait. He is regarded as unreliable and his words hold little weight. He does not have many friends. "Once bitten, twice shy," they say.

Notes/Reflections

Not keeping one's words or promises in a way amounts to lying. Isn't this a break of the Fourth Precept? A person who does not keep his promises undoubtedly will have problems of human relationship with others.

7 *Incident/Happening*

A certain student is offered a place in the SPM Community Guidance Class. Competition is very keen for places. This student, after attending one lesson, absents himself for a few weeks without telling the teacher that he does not want to follow the class anymore.

Effects/Consequences

This student is regarded by many as selfish as his place in the Guidance Class could have been given to another deserving student. By having a "couldn't be bothered" attitude, he is developing a bad character.

Who would like such a person?

Notes/Reflections

Many take things for granted and do not give a thought for others. One should reflect and ask oneself: Is my action proper, moral and wise? Am I being selfish?

8 *Incident/Happening*

A 17-year old youth without a valid driving license speeds recklessly on his motor bike along a road in a housing estate. He knocks down a little girl and she succumbs to head injuries.

Effects/Consequences

The parents of the little girl are devastated. They bear terrible hatred towards the reckless youth and they can never forgive him for the death of their little daughter. Of course

the law catches up with the youth for driving recklessly without a license.

Notes/Reflections

Restlessness, recklessness, foolhardiness, lack of wisdom ... we see more and more of this among the youths today. Indeed, they need proper moral and Dhamma education right from the time they are young. The restless mind has to be calmed and tamed ...

9 *Incident/Happening*

A certain Buddhist lady in a local Buddhist Association has the habit of "borrowing" things from the association without permission. Once she "borrowed" for a long period, a cassette recorder without telling anyone. It was months later before it was found out.

Effects/Consequences

Some committee members searched high and low for the 'missing' cassette recorder when it was required for use. It was deemed lost. Months later, the 'loss' was traced to the lady. Word spread around about the lady's unwholesome action. What a reputation she would acquire.

Notes/Reflections

Taking without permission, things that do not belong to us constitutes a break of the Second Precept. Reflect on the action of the Buddhist lady: it caused suffering to others: legitimate persons could not use the equipment and people had to waste so much time and effort searching for the 'missing' item.

10 *Incident/Happening*

A certain Buddhist member is in the habit of leaving messy things around after use ... unwashed cups, plates, tools, books and what-nots. Others have to clear up for him.

Effects/Consequences

This person causes much hardship to others. Soon, many are afraid to work with him. His work habits are poor and people don't think too well of him.

Notes/Reflections

One of the basic lessons in Kindergarten is: "Clear up your own mess". We need to be more mindful. We are relating to others; do not give others *pain* because of our carelessness.

Quotes on Mindfulness

*** "On life's journey faith is nourishment, virtuous deeds are a shelter, wisdom is the light by day and right mindfulness is the protection by night. If a man lives a pure life, nothing can destroy him."**

The Buddha

*** "Loss of mindfulness is why people engage in useless pursuits, do not care for their own interests, and remain unalarmed in the presence of things which actually menace their welfare."**

The Buddha

*** "Do not pursue the past. Do not lose yourself in the future. The past no longer is. The future has not yet come. Look deeply at life as it is. In the very here and now, the practitioner dwells in stability and freedom.**

We must be diligent today.

To wait until tomorrow is too late.

Death comes unexpectedly.

How can we bargain with it? The sage calls a person who knows how to dwell in mindfulness night and day, 'one who knows the better way to live alone.' "

Bhaddekaratta Sutta

CHAPTER 22

DHAMMA YOUTH CAMPS

Dhamma Youth Camps for students are a very important activity in a Buddhist organisation that stresses on Dhamma education and Dhammaduta work. The energetic young people with diverse talents, creativity, drive and spirit need to be trained and exposed to Dhamma ... they are our potential future Dhammaduta leaders and managers. Through Dhamma Youth Camps, the young can

- be exposed to the essential Teachings of the Buddha.
- learn to relate, communicate and interact with others.
- develop their creative talents.
- learn to practise aspects of Buddhism like welfare and charity work, chanting and simple meditation.
- be gradually trained in self-development.

Over here at our local Buddhist association, we run Annual Dhamma Youth Camps both in Chinese and English. Over the years, thousands have been exposed to Dhamma in this way. Some seniors return every year to help in the Camps for the new campers. This Dana is a most praiseworthy Dhammaduta work. It also provides good fellowship for our young Dhammafarrers.

The English Dhamma Youth Camp started in 1993 and it has certainly grown over the years. There is now a DYC Alumni that renders tremendous help to the parent association in so many ways ... conducting Children's Camps, Motivation Camps for students, Youth activities, helping at special functions etc. The Dhamma Youth Camps have a wide variety of activities and programmes among which are:

- Dhamma talks and Discussions/Workshops
- Motivation talks/Forums
- Buddha Puja, Chanting and Meditation

- Dynamics and Sports
- Welfare Projects
- Outdoor trips (“Dhamma in Action”)
- Hymn Singing
- Talent Shows/Concerts
- Fellowship parties
- Slide Shows/ Videos on “The Life Of Buddha”

Every Dhamma Youth Camp has a Dhamma Theme ... through this, the Camp aims to impart to the young vital elements of the Dhamma. For each of the Dhamma Youth Camps, there is a Theme Song with lyrics containing very good Dhamma points.

(The DYC Theme songs of the previous years have been uploaded on You Tube over the Internet for Buddhist fellowship and Dhamma sharing purposes.)

The Themes for the Dhamma Youth Camps of our local Buddhist association from 1993 to 2009 are as follows:

- 1st Dhamma Youth Camp 1993:
Good Heart, Clear Mind
- 2nd Dhamma Youth Camp 1994:
Reaching Out, Looking In
- 3rd Dhamma Youth Camp 1995:
Walk The Dhamma Way
- 4th Dhamma Youth Camp 1996:
Mind Matters, Love Conquers
- 5th Dhamma Youth Camp 1997:
Living Virtuously, Acting Mindfully
- 6th Dhamma Youth Camp 1998:
Right Vision, Good Action
- 7th Dhamma Youth Camp 1999:
Buddha My Guide, Dhamma My Light
- 8th Dhamma Youth Camp 2000:
Walk The Path With Heart

- 9th Dhamma Youth Camp 2001:
Minding My Monkey Mind
- 10th Dhamma Youth Camp 2002:
Sharing Dhamma, Spreading Metta
- 11th Dhamma Youth Camp 2003:
Troubled Times, Dhamma Chimes
- 12th Dhamma Youth Camp 2004:
Seeking Nature's Peace and Bliss
- 13th Dhamma Youth Camp 2005:
Doing Good, Seeking Truth
- 14th Dhamma Youth Camp 2006:
Goodbye Samsara, Hello Nibbana
- 15th Dhamma Youth Camp 2007:
Ehipassiko – Life's Lessons To Know
- 16th Dhamma Youth Camp 2008:
Noble Thoughts, Righteous Ways
- 17th Dhamma Youth Camp 2009:
Open Heart, Radiant Mind

Let us reflect on 2 of the above Dhamma Youth Camp Themes:
‘Buddha My Guide, Dhamma My Light’

Buddha My Guide

- I accept the Buddha as the highest ideal in life.
- I honour and pay homage to the Buddha, The Blessed One, The Worthy One, The Fully Enlightened One.
- The Buddha is the Perfect Guide, The Perfect Teacher of gods and men.
- The Buddha shows me the way to Perfect Happiness, Peace, Bliss and Freedom.
- The Buddha has realised the Ultimate Truth – the Truth that ends all suffering.
- I too can become enlightened through practising and realising the Dhamma – The Teachings of the Buddha.
- Let me cultivate the 10 Perfections of the Fully Enlightened Buddha:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| 1. DANA | (GENEROSITY) |
| 2. SILA | (MORALITY) |
| 3. NEKKHAMMA | (RENUNCIATION) |
| 4. PANNA | (WISDOM) |
| 5. VIRIYA | (ENERGY) |
| 6. KHANTI | (PATIENCE) |
| 7. SACCA | (TRUTHFULNESS) |
| 8. ADHITTHANA | (DETERMINATION) |
| 9. METTA | (LOVING-KINDNESS) |
| 10. UPEKKHA | (EQUANIMITY) |

Dhamma My Light

- The Dhamma, The Teachings of the Buddha, is the Light that dispels the darkness of Ignorance or Delusion
- I follow the Dhamma in my life. The Dhamma will lead me to overcome all problems, conflicts and suffering.
- Through my learning, understanding, practising and realising The Four Noble Truths, I will attain Perfect Happiness and Bliss – NIBBANA .

The Four Noble Truths are

- The First Noble Truth of Suffering.
- The Second Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering.
- The Third Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.
- The Fourth Noble Truth of the Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering (The Noble Eightfold Path)

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of

- RIGHT UNDERSTANDING
- RIGHT THOUGHT
- RIGHT SPEECH
- RIGHT ACTION
- RIGHT LIVELIHOOD
- RIGHT EFFORT
- RIGHT MINDFULNESS
- RIGHT CONCENTRATION

I shall practise the Dhamma with dedication, diligence and determination until I reach my Goal.

Walk The Path With Heart

Everybody wants to be perfectly happy and peaceful ...

The Buddha taught The Four Noble Truths.

The Supreme Goal of all Buddhists is NIBBANA (the state of Perfect Happiness, Peace, Bliss and Freedom).

To attain the highest Goal of Nibbana, we must follow The Noble Eightfold Path.

- In following the Path, compassion is an integral aspect. We need to have a compassionate heart towards all sentient beings. Only then can we eventually realise our *Buddha Nature* through compassion and wisdom.
- In walking the Path, we are faced with all sorts of obstacles and hindrances such as the temptations of sensual desires, restlessness, mental laziness, boredom and so on.
- We have to walk *The Noble Eightfold Path* with a heart full of dedication and determination until we reach our Goal.
- Let us with diligence cultivate patience, understanding and mindfulness as we ...

“Walk The Path With Heart”

CHAPTER 23

A WESAK MESSAGE

Wesak is the most sacred thrice-blessed day for Buddhists throughout the world.

In the year 623 B.C., on a Wesak Full Moon Day, the future Buddha-to-be was born in Lumbini as Prince Siddhattha. He received an excellent education and when he was sixteen, he was married to Yasodhara and they had a son. In his twenty-ninth year, realising the fleeting and unsatisfactory nature of life, he resolved to leave his palace in search of peace and Truth. His departure from home was an unprecedented case of historic renunciation born out of an inner desire to seek the Truth that will lead to the end of suffering.

Passing through a long and arduous course of mental training, he made a strong and determined effort for six years in his quest for liberation. One glorious day, seated under the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgaya, he vowed not to stir from his seat until he attained Supreme Buddhahood.

On a happy Wesak Full Moon Day, six years after his great renunciation, He obtained perfect Enlightenment – He was thirty five years of age. For 45 years, the Buddha expounded the Dhamma. He taught the Four Noble Truths:

- The Noble Truth of Dukkha or Unsatisfactoriness
- The Cause of Dukkha
- The Cessation of Dukkha
- The Noble Eightfold Path leading to the Cessation of Dukkha.

With compassion and wisdom, the Buddha worked unceasingly for the good and happiness of Mankind until His dying moment. At His final hour of death, He calmly addressed His disciples:

*“Ripe is My age, short is My life,
 leaving you I shall go.
 I have made Myself My Refuge.
 Be diligent, mindful, and extremely virtuous.
 With thoughts collected,
 guard your mind.
 In this Doctrine and Discipline,
 by striving ardently and diligently,
 you will escape the cycle of rebirth
 and put an end to suffering.
 Think not that you have no Teacher
 after my Death.
 Regard the Dhamma and Vinaya
 I have taught you as your Teacher.
 He who practises My Teaching best
 serves Me most.
 He who sees the Dhamma sees Me.
 Transient are all component things;
 strive on with diligence.”*

Thus in His 80th year, at Kusinara, the Supreme Buddha, our Great Teacher, having successfully completed His Noble Mission, passed into Parinibbana. It was on a Full Moon Day, more than 2540 years ago.

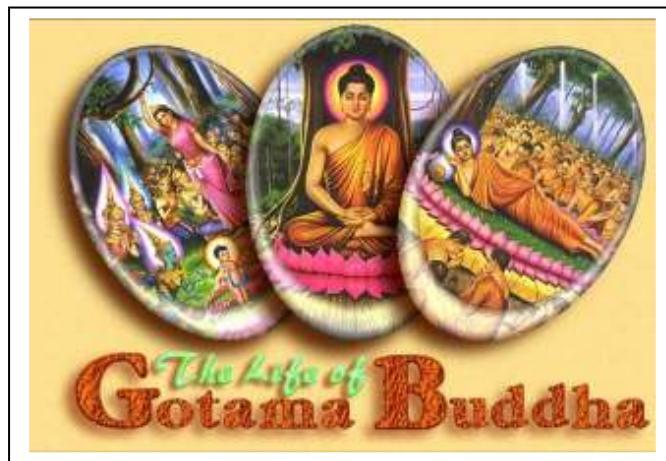
Brothers and Sisters in the Dhamma, on this Wesak Day, which commemorates the Birth of Siddhattha Gautama, His Enlightenment and His passing away into Parinibbana, let us strive to practise with diligence the Teachings of the Buddha, so sublime in the beginning, the middle and the end. Let us all also share these aspirations:

May we be generous and helpful!
May our thoughts, words and deeds be pure!
May we serve sincerely and selflessly!

May we be able to see things as they truly are!
May we strive diligently for liberation!
May we be patient and tolerant!

May we truthful and honest!
May we persevere in the Buddha-Dhamma Path!
May we be kind and compassionate!
My we be calm and peaceful!

*May The Blessings Of The Triple Gem
 Be Upon You!*



CHAPTER 24 OF INTOXICANTS AND THE FIFTH PRECEPT

Many Buddhists chant the 5 Precepts.
The fifth Precept in Pali is:

**Surameraya-Majja-Pamadatthana
Veramani Sikkhapadam
Samadiyami**



This means:

“I undertake to observe the Precept to abstain from taking intoxicants causing intoxication and heedlessness.”

Intoxicants include liquor and substances such as drugs that lead the mind to a state of heedlessness.

The fifth precept is broken when all the following conditions are fulfilled:

1. Presence of the substance that can cause intoxication
2. The knowledge and intention of taking the substance
3. The act of taking the substance
4. The mental state of intoxication results

What are the Kammic consequences of breaking the Fifth Precept? Buddhist books point out the benefits of keeping the Fifth Precept. The following are results which may arise in the present life or in future lives:

- Knowing what ought to be done in the past, present and future
- Endowed with mindfulness
- Having intelligence
- Not being a drunkard
- Not looked down upon

- Not slanderous
- Not using abusive language
- Not engaging in frivolous talk
- Trusted by people
- Not wrathful
- Having Right Views
- Having a lot of wisdom

Based on the above, then, frequent breaking of the Fifth Precept may lead to:

- Mental dullness and stupidity
- Mental deformation and retardation
- Mental delusions, illnesses and madness
- Wrong views that bring suffering
- Wrong speech and not being trusted by others
- Poor intellect and a lack of mindfulness and wisdom

Today, alcohol and drug abuses are very serious problems in our society. So many young people smoke, take liquor or are trapped in drug addiction. Moral and religious education starting at an early age is very important to curb this real menace. The ill-effects of liquor and drugs have to be drummed into the minds of the young.

The consequences of intoxicating drinks include the following:

- Susceptibility to diseases such as hepatitis, cirrhosis, liver cancer, heart trouble and so on
- Alcoholism
- Senility and Dementia
- Loss of wealth
- Relationship problems and conflicts
- Earning a bad reputation
- Weakening of the intellect

Today, we come upon so many cases of mental illnesses and mental deformation.

I remember one occasion, a group of adult Dhammaduta brothers and sisters brought a busload of Form 1 to Form 6 students of a local School Buddhist Society to the Handicapped Children's Home at Batu Gajah to do some welfare and charity work. The conditions here are quite poor and pitiful. So many parents of these handicapped children hardly pay visits or financially support them; we were told that some have abandoned their children.

There was this mentally and physically handicapped child aged about 11 or 12, sitting against a pillar with sharp corners. He was continuously hitting his head against the pillar; some blood oozed out from his head. We got the Home supervisor to help the poor child. This and some other sights (*most of the Home's inmates are quite badly handicapped both physically and mentally*) were quite shocking to many of the first-timer students. They kept asking why such terrible things happen to these poor children. We got the students to do some charity and 'Gotong Royong' work. They also entertained the handicapped children with singing and dancing.

I remember some years ago asking a few monks about mental illnesses and mental retardation and deformation and their Kammic links. I was given to understand that such states have a bearing with past kamma ... probably heavy breaking of the First Precept (killing and torturing sentient beings) and the Fifth Precept (taking intoxicants and being in mental states of heedlessness and delusion). I personally find this most logical. One does not in fact have to wait until death and rebirth to 'see' the effects. Sometimes one can see the terrible effects of intoxication in the later part of the alcoholic person's messed-up life.

When I was in Sixth Form, there was this old lady (*probably in her sixties*) opposite the house I was living in. She must have been drinking for a number of years. She had grown senile and probably suffered from dementia. In the afternoon, she would often walk out of her house without any clothes on.

Many Buddhists like to ask this question: “Is it okay if I just take a glass or two of liquor as long as I don’t get intoxicated?” In Dhamma, there’s no authority figure or an All-Powerful God to ‘okay’ what you do! The law of cause and effect operates impersonally. Now, the question is: how sure are we that a certain ‘limiting volume’ of alcohol will not have any effect on our mindfulness, heedfulness or mental clarity? Just reflect honestly on this: the choice is yours.

Some Buddhists say that they cannot help it but drink a little as a social obligation. Well, again, one has to decide for oneself and be responsible for one's actions. But remember, no member in society can force one to drink liquor if one chooses not to. I recall a reunion dinner I once attended many, many years ago. There were about ten of us. I was the only teetotaler. Picture the scenario:

'Friend' 1 (to me) : What drink? Martel, Vodka or beer?
Me : Let me have fresh orange please.
(There were gasps of 'shock' and laughter all round the dinner table.)

'Friend' 1 : What? You must be joking!

'Friend' 2 : Hey! You mean you don't know how
to drink after all these years of
education?

'Friend' 3 : Mummy asked you not to drink ah?

- Me** : I am sorry. I hope you don't mind me not drinking, just as I don't object to your drinking.
- 'Friend' 4** : Oh! Are you a man or a woman?
- 'Friend' 5** : My friend, tell me, what is the actual reason you don't want to take at least a glass or two of beer?
- Me** : Well, my doctor advises me not to drink.

(Ha! Isn't The Buddha the greatest physician? Of course I did not mention anything of this to my 'non-believer' friends.)

- 'Friend' 1** : Hi Waiter! Please bring a glass of 'Fresh Orange' for this guy!

The dinner went on smoothly. Ha! The 'problem' was solved for me. I was happy I was patient and understanding and did not react to their 'insults'. My nine friends 'enjoyed' their liquor more than their food. Most became somewhat tipsy after that and spoke a lot of 'rubbish'.

Some Buddhists say that it is good to take some liquor for the sake of health! They believe that 'liquor' is a must for women who have just delivered their babies and are in confinement. I don't know from where they got their 'scientific' and 'medical' advice. If it were true, then women of certain cultures who don't drink liquor during confinement periods must be in the poorest state of health!

We have to be very careful and mindful of our tricky mind. Our defilements are very strong ...craving and delusion. Mara is always there to trap or ambush us. We often justify or rationalise our doings to feel 'good' even though an honest analysis based on the Dhamma shows that the actions are unskillful.

The breaking of the Fifth Precept can oftentimes lead to a breach of one or more of the other Precepts. There is this story I came across sometime ago: *(Some of the details or story line might have been changed but the good moral message remains.)*

“A long time ago, a religious person from a village went to live as a hermit in a faraway place. He observed all his five Precepts very well and he was quite peaceful in his mind. One day, after many years, he decided to make a trip back to his home in the village for a break. He soon settled in his old home.

One night, an unwholesome thought entered his mind; he yearned to take some liquor that he had kept for years. He rationalised that a little would be alright ...he would not be breaking his precept. So he went to the storeroom and got out his bottle of old liquor. One glass led to another. He became quite tipsy. Another bad thought crossed his mind. He yearned to have some cooked curry chicken to go with the liquor.

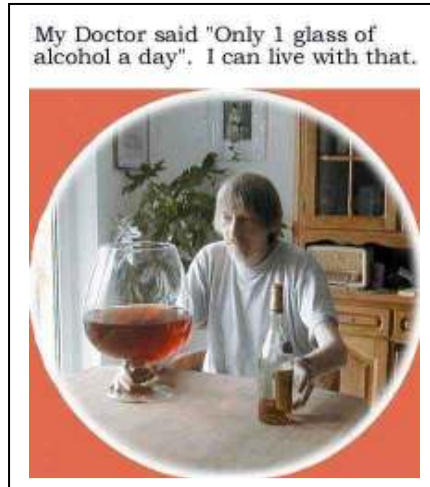
In his intoxicated mind, he got into his neighbour’s backyard and stole a chicken (breaking the Second Precept). He then slaughtered the chicken (breaking the First Precept) and cooked a curry chicken dish and some rice.

He had more liquor and was quite intoxicated when a young maiden happened to pass his house and looked in. The drunkard man saw the pretty lady and was overwhelmed by lust. The intoxicated mind drove him to physically and sexually assault the lady who screamed loudly. She was raped by the drunkard (breaking the Third Precept).

Not long later, many villagers came into the drunkard’s house and confronted him. Still in his drunken state, he denied all his wrong doings ... the theft of the chicken and the rape (breaking the Fourth Precept).

Of course, the villagers did not believe him. The rape victim's family members, in their great anger, beat the drunkard; one enraged member took a kitchen knife and stabbed the drunkard to death

Indeed, breaking the Fifth Precept can cause one to be heedless, deluded... this can bring about terrible consequences.



- * Addiction to alcohol is more and more widespread today - even among the youths and students.
- * Beware! Be heedful! The harm that alcohol can do to the body and mind is indeed immense.
- * Don't start ingesting chemicals that have harmful addictive properties - nicotine from cigarettes, ethanol in liquor and many alkaloids present in drugs. Once addiction sets in, problems and suffering await the afflicted.
Beware! Do not be trapped.
"Prevention is better than cure."
- * A breach of the 5th Precept (which is to refrain from intoxicants) can have its kammic consequences.

CHAPTER 25

THE INTERNET AND MOTIVATIONAL STORIES

This is indeed an “Information Explosion” Age. Practically everyone, particularly the young, is on the Net – surfing the worldwide web, emailing, chit-chatting, downloading music and movies, playing online games, etc. etc.

The Internet can be a tremendous source of useful information. However, if wrongly used or abused it can do more harm than good. So many students waste so much time in aimless chit-chatting into the night, playing aggressive and violent computer games for umpteen hours, spending lots of money and time at cyber cafes playing online network games and even indulging in electronic gambling.

So many social problems and social ills have arisen on account of this. Some parents have lamented to me about how their children have become addicted to Internet chit-chatting, Internet online games and gambling. These children sometimes resort to playing truant, lying, stealing and other unhealthy activities. Can we blame the Internet?

Actually, much depends on how one uses it. In this respect, education, particularly religious and moral, is important right from the formative age of the child. This has to begin at the family level. Education and guidance from the parents are the most important. Kindergartens, schools, religious bodies and so on, also have the important role to inculcate moral and religious values into the young. Unfortunately, many parents today are too busy with their work and careers. And our educational system is “lop-sided” – it is essentially exam-oriented. The system has not been able to effectively inculcate religious and moral values into many students.

As has been said, from the Internet, we can derive lots of useful educational material. There are so many good motivational stories that serve to guide and inspire. In many motivational stories, there is very good Dhamma that one can learn and reflect on. Below is a selection of three.

1. Heaven and Hell

A man spoke with the Lord about Heaven and Hell.

"I will show you Hell," said the Lord.

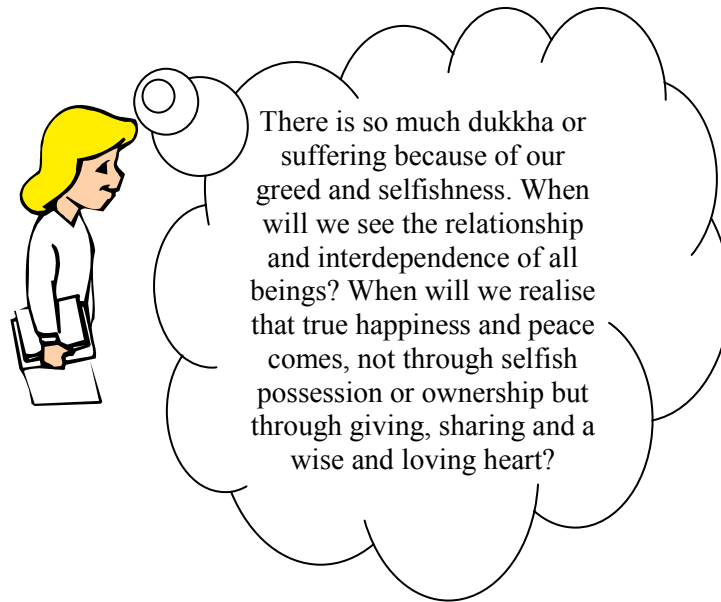
And they went into a room which had a large pot of stew in the middle. The smell was delicious and around the pot sat people who were famished and desperate. All were holding spoons with very long handles which reached to the pot, but because the handles of the spoons were longer than their arms, it was impossible to get the stew into their mouths. Their suffering was terrible.

"Now I will show you Heaven," said the Lord, and they went into an identical room. There was a similar pot of stew and the people had the same identical spoons, but they were well nourished, talking and happy.

At first the man did not understand.

"It is simple," said the Lord. "You see, they have learned to feed each other."

Dhamma Points
for Reflection



2 Destiny

During a momentous battle, a great general decided to attack even though his army was greatly outnumbered. He was confident they would win, but his men were filled with low morale and doubt.

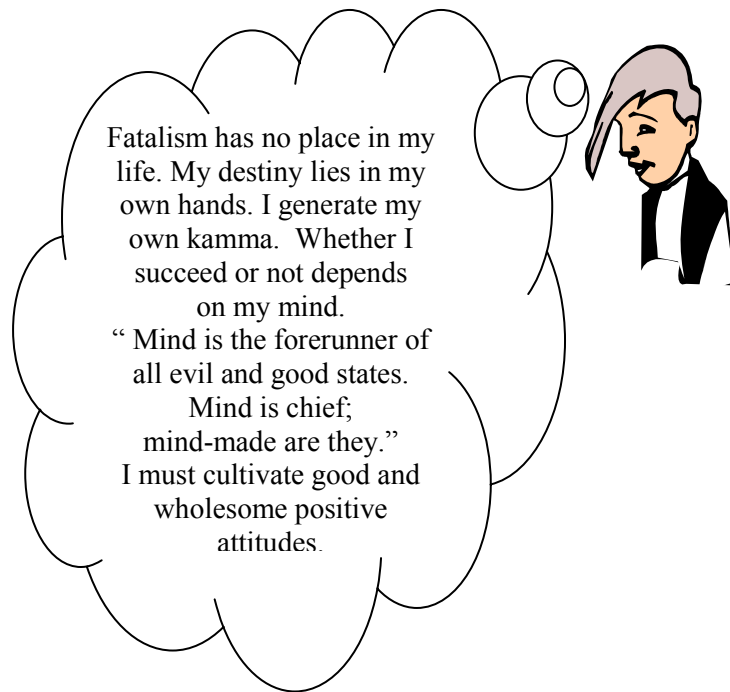
On the way to the battle, they stopped at a religious shrine. After praying with the men, the general took out a coin and said, "I shall now toss this coin. If it is heads, we shall win. If it is tails we shall lose."

"Destiny will now reveal itself."

He threw the coin into the air and all watched intently as it landed. It was heads. The soldiers were so overjoyed and filled with confidence that they vigorously attacked the enemy and were victorious.

After the battle, a lieutenant remarked to the general, "No one can change destiny." "Quite right," the general replied as he showed the lieutenant the coin, which had heads on both sides.

Dhamma Points For Reflection



3. *Lesson from a Terrapin*

There was a boy who found a terrapin, more commonly known as a turtle. He started to examine it but the turtle pulled in its head and closed its shell like a hard object. The boy was upset and he picked up a stick to try to pry it open. The boy's uncle saw all this and remarked, "No, that's not the way! In fact, you may kill the turtle but you'll not get it to open up with a stick."

The uncle took the terrapin into the house and set it near the fireplace. It wasn't but a few minutes when it began to get warm. Then the turtle pushed out its head, gently stretched out all its legs and began steadily to crawl.

"Turtles are like that," said the uncle, "and people, too. You can't force them into anything. But if you first warm them up with some real kindness, more than likely, they will do what you want them to do."

Dhamma Points for Reflection

There is so much enmity, ill-will, aggression, cruelty, hatred and violence in the world today. We hear daily of armed robberies, rapes, tortures, murders and senseless killings. It is sad that man does not realise that "Hatred can never be overcome by hatred; it is overcome by love. This is the Eternal Law."

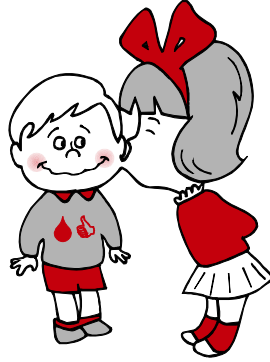
Let us examine our own lives: do we practise charity, loving-kindness and compassion to all sentient beings? How much commitment to practise Dana and be of service to others do we have?

If you want others to be happy, practise compassion. If you want to be happy, practise compassion.

The Dalai Lama

Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.

Mark Twain



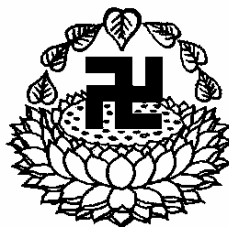
Though we all have the fear and the seeds of anger within us, we must learn not to water those seeds and instead nourish our positive qualities – those of compassion, understanding, and loving kindness.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.

The Buddha

CHAPTER 26

OF QUOTATIONS, REFLECTIONS
AND THE DHAMMA

One very good mental exercise is to read and ponder over selected quotations which contain beautiful elements of the Dhamma. Such quotations can be drawn from the Buddhist scriptures, motivational books, the sayings of wise men in History and so on. One can even keep a record of favourite quotations that inspire from the Dhamma point of view. Constant reflection on them, trying to apply them in one's daily life and actualising them in the mind can help in our cultivation of compassion and wisdom.

Below are some examples and the reflection on the Dhamma we can do as one ponders over the quotations.

You are happy when you have found your life's purpose and you are now working for it.

A Buddhist's ultimate goal is Enlightenment ... total liberation of the mind with no more greed, hatred and delusion. Are we setting our lives on the Path towards this Goal? Do we devote enough time in our busy lives to practise Dana and mental cultivation (Bhavana)? How well do we keep our Precepts?

Inner peace and happiness are the true ingredients of successful living.

True inner peace and happiness come from Dhamma practice and realisation and not through non-stop pursuits of worldly possessions, power and fame. At the end of the day, we would have lived successfully if we have honestly grown in our compassion and wisdom...when we have brought peace and happiness to others and when we have cut lots of our attachments, aversion, anger and our ego.

Cultivate good habits...the bad ones all grow wild.

We need to make great conscious efforts to be ever mindful of our defilements be they mental, verbal or our deeds and actions. Not only should we refrain from killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, using wrong speech (lying, slander, harsh speech and gossip) and being in a state of intoxication, but we should constantly practise kindness, generosity, contentment, right speech and heedfulness.

.....in trying times, try.

There will be ups and downs in our lives ... such is the nature of Samsara. Are we making efforts to train and develop our minds so that we can cope better with the tribulations of life? The more we have an understanding of the way things are, the better can we deal with trying times. There is no other better way than The Dhamma Way.

You can never change the past but you can ruin a perfectly good present by worrying about the future.

The past is dead and gone; the future is yet to come. What really matters is the present. Live NOW. Somebody once told me this:

Yesterday is history, a memory;

Tomorrow is uncertainty, a mystery;

What matters is Today ... that's why the PRESENT is a Gift!

Do we train our minds to be mindful from moment to moment?

Nothing is so full of victory as *patience*.

Indeed, patience is a great virtue. It is one of the Paramis (Perfections) of the Bodhisatta as he develops his Perfections on the path to become a Fully Enlightened Buddha. Too often we give up on what we set out to do because of a lack of patience ...our outreach work, our Dhamma study and our meditation. It is time we put in a greater struggle to develop our patience.

Perseverance is to go on when the rest goes off.

Determination, perseverance and persistence are very important qualities to cultivate in our Dhamma Practice. Even the Bodhisatta, with his great Paramis, had to struggle for six strenuous years before he attained Enlightenment. We should always reflect on this whenever we slack in cultivation or when sloth and torpor constantly overwhelm us as we walk the Dhamma Path.

By what I get, I enjoy living. By what I give, I enjoy life.

Too often we are only interested in getting, getting, receiving, receiving. We want to enjoy worldly pleasures. But true joy comes not from having more and more but through sharing, giving and helping. These are spiritual truths we have to realise. Dana (Generosity, Charity) is a very meritorious and enriching spiritual practice.



Your actions and deeds are the best of teachers.




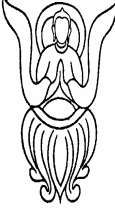
Do we talk and talk, preach and preach but don't practise much of what our teachings tell us? How then can we earn the respect of others? How then can we promote effectively the sublime teachings of The Buddha? We need always to retrospect and be mindful of whatever we do.

No man is truly free if he cannot exercise control, discipline and growth of mind and body.

The key words are “Check” and “Self-restraint”. Unless and until we exercise this, we remain the slaves to our unwholesome nature. Are we prone to anger and other negative emotional outbursts and frequent indulging in unwholesome things that keep increasing the three mental poisons in us ... greed, hatred and delusion? It is time we learn to watch our minds mindfully and to practise Right Effort:

- *Preventing the arising of unwholesome mental states in our minds*
- *Eradicating unwholesome mental states already in our minds*
- *Developing good wholesome mental states in our minds*
- *Maintaining good wholesome mental states already in our minds*

 <p>Peace comes from within. Do not seek it from without.</p>	<p>You must be patient, full of compassion, willing to serve.</p> 
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 <p>Be tolerant among the intolerant, gentle among the violent and free from greed among the greedy.</p>	<p>Wholesome deeds help man to achieve better rebirths and thus bring him nearer to salvation.</p> 
 <p>At all times one should work diligently on improving one's mind for one never knows when death will come.</p>	<p>As rust arisen out of iron, eats itself away, even so his own deeds lead the transgressor to the state of woe.</p> 

He should
make his
speeches
free from
caustic
remarks
against
others.



The world is
in continuous
flux and is
impermanent.



May all
beings be
happy and
secure.
May their
minds be
contented.

From
moment to
moment, a
wise man
removes his
own
impurities as
a smith
removes the
dross of
silver.



CHAPTER 27

‘WAS I AN ASURA’?

I first knew Ah Chai (*not his real name for reasons of confidentiality*) way back in the early 1990s. He was a student in Level 4 (for primary 4 students) of our Buddhist Sunday School and I was one of the teachers who taught him. I handled the basic Dhamma lessons and ‘English and Thinking’ lessons at various levels of the Sunday School. Ah Chai was an extremely ‘difficult’ child ... he had already a ‘reputation’ in his day-school ... he would breach school rules and he often got into trouble with his teachers and his classmates ... playing truant, being a nuisance in class, not doing his homework, fighting, stealing, gambling and showing ‘gangster-like’ behaviour.

Ah Chai was the only son and his parents, you could imagine, were real worried and troubled. Counselling by the parents and the school counsellors did not seem to have any effect and harsh methods of discipline including corporal punishment did not bring about any significant changes in the behaviour and conduct of Ah Chai. He remained hot-tempered, restless, ill-mannered and prone to aggressive and violent behaviour.

Ah Chai’s mother’s health was greatly affected by so many negative incidents involving her only son ... she was literally sick with worry and suffered heart palpitations whenever reports came from the school that her son had got into trouble yet again. His aggression was terrible ... at primary school, he had thrown chairs from the first floor of the school down on to his ‘enemies’ at the ground floor!

His parents came to see me a few times to find a solution to their son’s ‘problems’. We discussed things over and I suggested the ‘Dhamma Way’ to transform Ah Chai. The parents also began

to learn patiently and practise the Dhamma themselves so as to better understand and deal with Ah Chai.

Ah Chai received Dhamma education at our Buddhist association right from his Standard 4 days until he finished his SPM in school. At the Primary level, he attended the various Children's Dhamma Camps and during his Secondary School years, he followed our Dhamma Classes, our Community Guidance Classes and participated in the various Dhamma Youth Camps ... both in Chinese and English. Of course, things could not change overnight and there were still undesirable incidents that happened in his day school as well as in our association.

I remember an incident when Ah Chai was in Form 2 and he slapped a gentle girl in his class. It was a great breach of school discipline and the school told his parents that he would be expelled. His mother approached me and pleaded for help so that her son could still have a school to study in. I went to see a friend of mine who was a Senior Assistant at Ah Chai's school. We discussed matters over and a way was found to enable him to continue his education. Ah Chai had to be transferred immediately to another school in the same town. He had no other choice.

In one of the counselling sessions I had with Ah Chai, I tried to find out more about what happened and to get a better understanding of Ah Chai's mind ... the Dhamma way. It was on this occasion that I first saw the 'Asura' traits in Ah Chai. His personality was transformed and his behaviour was rather bizarre. Anyway, it was patience, understanding, metta and compassion that could calm Ah Chai down.

Over the years, the Dhamma did bring positive changes in Ah Chai ... albeit a slow or gradual process.

I recall another incident when Ah Chai got into real trouble. He had lost a lot of money in a World Cup Football betting. The money was borrowed from some 'loan sharks' and one day some 'bad hats' (*must have been connected with the 'loan sharks'*) came right to our Buddhist association to vandalise Ah Chai's motor bike. Ah Chai was at that time attending one of my Community Guidance Classes in the afternoon. I understand from quite a reliable source that Ah Chai's parents later settled his debts.

The incident I remembered most vividly about Ah Chai's 'Asura' personality happened during one of our early Dhamma Youth Camps. Ah Chai had finished his PMR and was a participant in the Camp. One of the programmes of the Camp was a Talent Show to depict 'The 6 Realms'. I wrote the script for the Show. Each of the five Groups had to pick six members to play the roles of 'A Hell being', 'A Hungry Ghost', 'An Animal', 'An Asura', 'A Human' and 'A Deva'. The Groups had about a week prior to the start of the Camp to do all the preparation work ... costumes, props, dramatisation and so on. I was the advisor to one of the five Groups... unfortunately not the Group Ah Chai was in. It was too late when I realised that Ah Chai's Group had of all things, picked him for the Asura's role.

On the night of the Talent Show, where I was the MC, a most shocking incident took place. When the time came for the five Groups to parade their 'Asura' models and for the models to act out their roles, the situation nearly went out of control because of Ah Chai. He was too 'real' as an Asura ... the other Asuras were terrified and I got apprehensive as Ah Chai did not seem to be just acting ... he 'became an Asura'! With his 'weapon', he was approaching the Buddha Shrine aggressively. I was getting afraid that something untoward might happen. With whatever Dhamma I had realised and whatever metta I had, I managed to 'cast the Asura' out of Ah Chai. It was a relief when the part of the programme involving the 'Asura Realm' was over. It must have

shocked the camp participants and many people in the audience.

When the Talent Show was over at around 10.30 pm and the audience had left, something touching happened. Ah Chai apologised to all the Group members, the Organising Committee and Advisors, for his 'Asura' behaviour. He was shedding real tears. I was touched beyond words. Everybody forgave Ah Chai.

Later in the night, I had a long private heart to heart talk with Ah Chai. He said to me, "Brother, was I an Asura in a previous life? Will I turn into an Asura this life? I feel at times I am a "2 in 1". I spent some time talking Dhamma with Ah Chai. Deep down inside me, I know his Dhamma realisation would transform him. I thought about the great story of Angulimala and his Path to Arahantood.

Ah Chai, after finishing his SPM, continued his education elsewhere. I had met up with him a couple of times when he was furthering his studies in College. He had become a mature young man with many good qualities to be proud of. I knew he would be successful in his career and family ... thanks to the Dhamma.

I have lost touch with Ah Chai over the years. When I look back with fond memories of the wonder of Dhamma, I feel most happy indeed that the power and miracle of Dhamma can transform even an 'Asura' like Ah Chai into a 'deva'.

Ah Chai, wherever you are, may your Dhamma practice and realisation grow and grow. You too, like Angulimala, one day, will cross the sea of Samsara and realise your Buddha nature.

CHAPTER 28

OF DREAMS, GHOSTS, PSYCHIC POWERS...

I started my teaching career way back in the early 1970s when I was in my twenties. My first school was in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. I taught Chemistry and the General Paper for the Higher School Certificate Classes. I thought of myself as a free thinker then ...still searching for the 'Right Religion'. I had my primary and secondary education in Christian Missionary schools and Buddhism and the Dhamma were still very new to me. For many years since my teaching career started, it was 'intellectual Dhamma' that I was caught in ...reading Buddhist books, taking Buddhist Correspondence Courses and attending Dhamma talks and discussion all over. The Dhamma was just like another rather interesting academic subject for me.

One area of study or knowledge that fascinated me tremendously was Parapsychology and the Paranormal. I tried to seek answers to such strange phenomena ... telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, psychometry, precognition and a host of others, through reading, reading and thinking.

I had a colleague in my school, a Physics teacher, who like me, had been posted to Kelantan, a place we had never been before (*in this life!*). I shall refer to this colleague as Richard (*not his real name*). He was also from the West Coast of Peninsula Malaysia, an intelligent graduate fresh out from the university. He was not a follower of any religion and his philosophy was one inclined towards atheism or agnosticism. He was what many people would label as a 'hard core' physicist ... to him, everything has an explanation in scientific principles.

It must have been in 1974 or 1975 when Richard started to have strange psychic experiences and he was really baffled. Once when we had a short camp in Pulau Perhentian, off the coast of

Terengganu, he experienced some inexplicable things. We were sleeping on the beach and Richard had the scary experiences of something invisible pressing on his body and squeezing his neck to the extent that he could not utter a sound or scream. None of us had this sort of experience on the beach. Of course, there were some superstitious friends who came to the conclusion that Richard had been attacked by ghosts! I, on my part, preferred to keep an open mind and not jump to any conclusion. Something inside me told me that his very strange psychic experiences must in an inexplicable way be related to his mind states.

Richard, a bachelor then, was staying in a single rented room in a housing estate about two kilometers from our school. He told me of two occasions when he had rather strange psychic experiences. One late night, when he was all alone in the quiet of his room, a glass tumbler on a table shattered to pieces all by itself. When he narrated the happening to me the following day, I ventured a logical explanation for the incident: A case of *resonance*... an established scientific phenomenon.

Ha! Richard reminded me that he was teaching Physics (*I was a Chemistry teacher!*) and he knew all about resonance. He said all the conditions for resonance to occur were simply not there! Well, we could not explain the puzzling occurrence but once more I thought to myself that it must most probably be related to Richard's mental states again.

An even more 'eerie' thing that Richard experienced was this. It happened on another night. It was past midnight when Richard was going to bed. The position of his bed was facing the door and he would sleep with his legs pointed towards the door. (*Most Chinese have a great 'pantang' on this, but not Richard. He, a skeptic did not believe in many what he called 'Mumbo-Jumbo' things.*)

It was not long after he had laid down on his bed that he felt or saw that the round door knob facing him was turning on its own as if there was someone turning the knob from the other side of the door. He got up from the bed and went to investigate (*like a true scientist or a detective!*). He could not find anybody or anything that could account for the strange happening. When Richard told me about this in school the following day, I could not offer any explanation. I was of the opinion that it was very probably a case of some psycho kinetic effects but I kept this to myself.

Another strange incident involving Richard happened when both of us, with a few other friends went on a visit to a fishing village in Terengganu. We had to go by boat along one of the rivers in Terengganu. All along the boat journey Richard had some of the strangest Déjà vu experiences. He started telling us what was going to happen and the things we would see, even before we reached the fishing village. Naturally, I asked him if he had been to the place before or had read about it or seen pictures or TV programmes of the place. To all this, he said “No”. To the surprise of all of us, Richard told us that he had dreamt many times of the place ... the river, the fishing village and its surroundings!

The psychic experiences of Richard came on and went off over a period of many months. A couple of years later, Richard resigned from his teaching post, got married and went to another town to settle down. We kept in touch and when another few years passed, I made a trip to his home to visit Richard and his family. We talked about the good old times in Kelantan. When I asked him if he still had any psychic experiences after he quit teaching and got married, he replied “No”. He said that he never experienced any of those strange paranormal or psychic things anymore.

It was many years later when my Dhamma learning, understanding, practice and realisation grew, I felt that the explanation for Richard's psychic experiences in Kelantan could be traced to his mind. During the period of his 'strange experiences', Richard's mind was very disturbed. He was having emotional upheavals (*in and out of romances*), mental stress and anxiety. The mind was not settled and peaceful ... perhaps some psychic forces in the mind were unleashed uncontrollably.

In Shakespeare's Hamlet,
I recall the quote:
**"Horatio, there are more things in Heaven and Earth than
are dreamt of in your Philosophy."**

Reflecting on the Dhamma,
the Buddha said in Dhammapada,

**"Mind is the forerunner of all states.
Mind is chief; mind-made are they...."**

In my heart I feel that the most important Dhamma practice is to train, develop and purify the mind ... then one is on the Path to true mental peace, happiness and freedom.

The Buddha, in Dhammapada, said

**"Make an island unto yourself. Strive quickly; become wise.
Purged of stain and passionless, you shall enter
the heavenly stage of the Ariyas."**

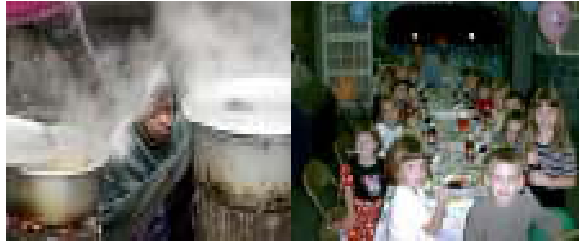


CHAPTER 29

DO YOU WONDER WHY?

Ever since I was a child of six, I used to ponder on the tremendous disparities that exist in human conditions. It was later on in my life, when I started to learn and practise the Dhamma that some light was shed on these philosophical issues.

Some years ago, I did a Power Point presentation based on the thoughts that puzzled me when I was young. The objective was to help make us reflect on the Dhamma – the Way things are, The Four Noble Truths, The Five Universal Orders, The Law of Cause and Effect, Kamma and Rebirth, The Six Realms etc.



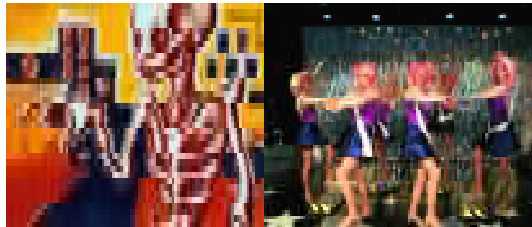
**Living in hunger and
misery
What's in store for this
child's destiny ?**

**Basking in riches and
luxury
How fortunate can
some get to be ?**



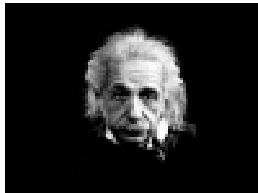
**What has brought
this lady such
ravishing beauty ?**

**Have you wondered
thoughtfully
Why some are born
so ugly ?**

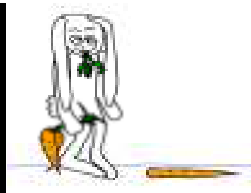


**Many are the diseased
and the sickly.
Some meet with their
end so very quickly.**

**Good health is a
Blessing indeed .
But how can this be
guaranteed ?**



**There are some with a
most intelligent mind.
Would you say this is
due to the
Great Divine ?**



**The imbecile, the fool,
the moronic ...
What makes them
deserve something so
tragic ?**



**Some meet their end
in a violent way.
They cannot bargain
for one more day.**



**There's
impermanence in
everything.
A peaceful death is a
great blessing.**



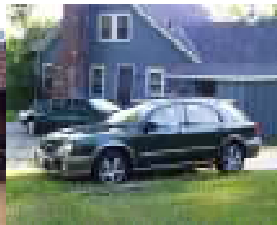
**A mind of calm, peace
and serenity
Is the final Goal
of everybody.**



**There's something
that's really sad
When you meet one
who is mad.**



**Many live in abject
poverty.
Days seem to stretch
for Eternity.**



**Some are born so very
wealthy.
Material things come
easily.**



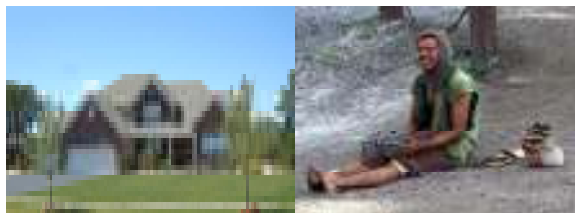
**These children are so
fortunate indeed.
Loving parents tend
to their every need.**

**Fathers and Mothers
they have lost.
Much pain this has
certainly caused.**



**For the handicapped,
times can be rough.
To cope with life they
need to be tough.**

**Being normal physically
and mentally
Would enable one to live
Life meaningfully.**

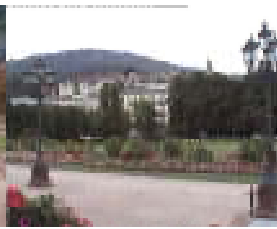


**Would the wealthy one
in his mansion
Catch your undivided
attention ?**

**The homeless ones
wander from place to
place.
They're found in every
nation, every race,**



**When natural
disasters strike,
Many suffer amidst
their might.**



**Living in a land of
peace and harmony
Is truly a real blessing,
don't you agree ?**



**King, Queen or a
Member of
Royalty...
Is it mere chance or
opportunity ?**



**Life is full of
hardship and misery
For one born an
outcast of society.**



**Caught in lands or
times of war and
strife
So many suffer much
in their life.**



**It's a Blessing to live
in a country
That's free from
conflict and adversity.**



**Do you want to know
most eagerly ?
“What is the secret to
longevity” ?**

**We want to live life
joyfully.
No one wants to die so
early.**



**For some life is mostly
painful and sad
With experiences so
trying and bad.**



**Isn't life so specially
good and kind
To those who are happy
most of the time ?**



**Dear Brothers and Sisters Of Great Humanity :
It's time we seek the answers to Life's *Mystery*.
Only then can we clearly chart our Destiny.**

In 'Dhamma Matters: *A Buddhist Reflects*', Oh Teik Bin has penned a collection of articles and writings with a Dhamma message. The book is written with the following objectives:

- * To help to impart the basic Teachings of The Buddha
- * To help us correct our weaknesses and defilements
- * To help Dhammaduta workers cope with challenges
- * To help motivate us into Dhamma practice

The book is written in clear simple language and is spiced with wit, humour, stories and anecdotes to make it interesting and easy to read for both young and old alike.

At the same time, underlying all the writings are important Dhamma lessons for us to learn, practise and actualise as we all walk The Path to grow in compassion and wisdom.

About the author

Oh Teik Bin is a retired teacher and has been involved in Dhammaduta work for more than 20 years at Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak, (PBHP) Teluk Intan. He is one of the founder members of PBHP. His Dhammaduta and outreach work include community guidance classes, Buddhist Sunday School, Dhamma classes, Dhamma Youth Camps, Dhamma sharing and Buddhist wake chanting services. Over the Internet, Oh Teik Bin has posted a lot of educational and Dhamma material at the following Websites:

www.dhammatelukintan.blogspot.com

www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin

www.youtube.com/bteikoh

www.toondoo.com/user/bteikoh

www.scribd.com/teikbin

<http://engagedbuddhists.ning.com/profile/ohteikbin>

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