

Dhamma and Globalization

Over the past three decades the world has been dramatically transformed in ways that none but a handful of prophets and visionaries could have foreseen even a hundred years ago. From a multitude of loosely connected nation-states it has quickly evolved into a tightly knit global community linked together by rapid means of transportation and instantaneous media of communication. Old barriers of space and time have dropped away, confronting us with new vistas of self-understanding and forcing us to recognize the hard truth that we all face a common human destiny. The claims to special privilege of a particular people, nation, race, or religion now sound hollow. As occupants of the same planet—a bright blue jewel suspended in the frigid blackness of infinite space—we either flourish together or perish together. In the long run, between these two alternatives no middle ground is feasible.

But while our proud technology has enabled us to split the atom and unscramble genetic codes, the daily newspapers remind us that our mastery over the external world has not ushered in the utopia that we had so confidently anticipated. To the contrary, the shrinking of global boundaries has given rise to fresh problems of enormous scope—social, political, and psychological problems so grave that they throw into question the continued survival of our planet and our race. The problems that challenge the global community today come in diverse shapes and sizes. They include the depletion of the earth's natural resources and the despoliation of the environment; regional tensions of ethnic and religious character; the continuing spread of nuclear weapons; disregard for human rights; the widening gap between the rich and the poor. While such problems have been extensively discussed from social, political, and economic points of view, they also cry out for critical examination from a religious viewpoint as well.

A spiritually sensitive mind would not look upon these problems as isolated phenomena to be treated by piecemeal solutions but would insist on probing into unexplored areas for hidden roots and subtle interconnections. From such a perspective, what is most striking when we reflect upon our global ailments as a whole is their essentially symptomatic character. Beneath their outward diversity they appear to be so many manifestations of a common root, of a deep and hidden spiritual malignancy infecting our social organism. This common root might be briefly characterized as a stubborn insistence on placing short-term, narrowly considered self-interests (including the interests of the limited social or ethnic groups to which we happen to belong) above the long-range, vital good of the broader human community. The multitude of social ills that assail us cannot be adequately accounted for without bringing into view the powerful human drives that lie behind them. And what is distinctive about these drives is that they derive from a pernicious distortion in the functioning of the human mind which sends us blindly in pursuit of factional, divisive, circumscribed ends even when such pursuits threaten to be ultimately self-destructive.

The most valuable contribution that the Buddha's teaching can make to helping us

resolve the great dilemmas facing us today is twofold: first, its uncompromisingly realistic analysis of the psychological springs of human suffering, and second, the ethically ennobling discipline it proposes as the solution. The Buddha explains that the hidden springs of human suffering, in both the personal and social dimensions of our lives, consist of three mental factors called the unwholesome roots. These three roots—which may be regarded as the three prongs of the ego-consciousness—are greed, hatred, and delusion. The aim of the Buddhist spiritual path is to gradually subdue these three evil roots by cultivating the mental factors that are directly opposed to them. These are the three wholesome roots, namely: non-greed, which is expressed as generosity, detachment, and contentment; non-hatred, which becomes manifested as loving-kindness, compassion, patience, and forgiveness; and non-delusion, which arises as wisdom, insight, and understanding.

If we contemplate, in the light of the Buddhist analysis, the dangers that hang over us in our globalized world order, it will become clear that they have assumed such precarious proportions due to the unrestrained proliferation of greed, hatred, and delusion as the basis of human conduct. It is not that these dark forces of the mind were first awakened with the Industrial Revolution; they have indeed been the deep springs of so much suffering and destructiveness since time immemorial. But the one-sided development of humankind—the development of outward control over nature, coupled with the almost complete neglect of any attempts to achieve self-understanding—has today given the unwholesome roots an awesome, unprecedented power that veers ever closer to the catastrophic.

Through the prevalence of greed the world has become transformed into a global marketplace where human beings are reduced to the status of consumers, even commodities, and where materialistic desires are provoked at volatile intensities. Through the prevalence of hatred, which is often kindled by competing interests governed by greed, national and ethnic differences become the breeding ground of suspicion and enmity, exploding in violence and destruction, in cruelty and brutality, in endless cycles of revenge. Delusion sustains the other two unwholesome roots by giving rise to false beliefs, dogmatic views, and philosophical ideologies devised in order to promote and justify patterns of conduct motivated by greed and hatred.

In the new era marked by the triumph of the free-market economy the most pernicious delusion that hangs over us is the belief that the path to human fulfillment lies in the satisfaction of artificially induced desires. Such a project can only provoke more and more greed leading to more and more reckless degrees of selfishness, and from the clash of self-seeking factions, the result will necessarily be strife and violence. If there is any validity in the Buddhist diagnosis of the human situation, the task incumbent on humankind today is clear. The entire drive of contemporary civilization has been towards the conquest and mastery of the external world. Science probes ever more deeply into the hidden secrets of matter and life, while technology and industry join hands to harness the discoveries of science for their practical applications. No doubt science and technology have made appreciable contributions towards alleviating human misery and have vastly improved the

quality of our lives. Yet because the human mind, the ultimate agent behind all the monumental achievements of science, has pitifully neglected itself, our patterns of perception, motivations, and drives still move in the same dark channels in which they moved in earlier centuries—the channels of greed, hatred, and delusion—only now equipped with more powerful instruments of destruction.

As long as we continue to shirk the task of turning our attention within, towards the understanding and mastery of our own minds, our impressive accomplishments in the external sphere will fail to yield their proper fruits. While at one level they may make life safer and more comfortable, at another they will spawn baneful consequences of increasing severity and peril, even despite our best intentions. For the human race to flourish in the global age, and to live together happily and peacefully on this shrinking planet, the inescapable challenge facing us is that of coming to understand and transform ourselves.

It is here that the Buddha's Teaching becomes especially timely, even for those who are not prepared to embrace the full range of Buddhist religious faith and philosophical doctrine. In its diagnosis of greed, hatred, and delusion as the underlying causes of human suffering, the Buddha-Dhamma enables us to see the hidden roots of our private and collective predicaments. By defining a practical path of training which helps us to remove what is harmful and to foster the growth of what is beneficial, the Teaching offers us an effective remedy for tackling the problems of the globe in the one place where they are directly accessible to us: in our own minds. Because it places the burden of responsibility for our redemption on ourselves, calling for personal effort and energetic application to the taming of the mind, the Buddha's Teaching will inevitably have a bitter edge. But by providing an acute diagnosis of our illness and a precise path to deliverance, it also offers us in this global era an elevating message of hope.

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Publications

Recent Releases

The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dāgha Nikāya. Translated from the Pāli by Maurice Walshe. This book, a companion volume to our Middle Length Discourses, offers a complete translation of the Dāgha Nikāya. The thirty-four long discourses in this collection include some of the most important suttas in the Pāli Canon: the Brahmajāla on the sixty-two views, the Sāmaññaphala on the gradual training, the Satipaṅṇhāna on the practice of mindfulness, the Mahāparinibbāna on the Buddha's demise. The translation, clear and readable, is introduced with a vivid account of the Buddha's life and a short survey of his teachings. Three volumes in one. (For sale in Asia only.)

Hardback: 648 pages 5.5" x 8.5"

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A Treasury of Buddhist Stories: An Anthology from the Dhammapada Commentary. Translated from the Pāli by E.W. Burlingame. One of the most beloved collections of Buddhist stories is that found in the commentary to the Dhammapada, which relates the background incidents that underlie the Dhammapada verses. The present book is an anthology of 56 of the most popular and memorable of these stories, compiled from Burlingame's classic 3-volume Buddhist Legends. These stories will bring before the reader's mental eye, in vivid and colourful detail, the marvellous deeds of the Buddha and his great disciples as they travelled across Middle India spreading the sublime message of deliverance. The book not only provides absorbing reading for adults but will also prove an enjoyable means of access to the Dhamma for young readers age 14 and over.

Softback: 248 pages 6" x 9"

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An Unentangled Knowing: Lessons in Training the Mind. Upāsikā Kee Nanayon. The author, one of the foremost woman Dhamma teachers in modern Thailand, had a direct, uncompromising style of teaching that matches the great masters of the Thai forest tradition. The teachings in this book deal with a wide range of issues in the training of the mind, emphasizing the earnest determination and penetrating honesty needed to win true knowledge and inner freedom.

Softback: 176 pages 6" x 9"

U.S. \$10.00; SL Rs.300 Order No. BP 515S

The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom. Translated by Acharya Buddharakkhita; introduction by Bhikkhu Bodhi. This handsome revised reprint of our classic Dhammapada includes the Pāli text along with the translation.

Softback: 176 pages 4.8" x 7.2"

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The Heart of Buddhist Meditation. Nyanaponika Thera. The great classic on the Buddha's Way of Mindfulness, 35 years in print. (Reprint)

Softback: 224 pages 5.5" x 8.5"

U.S. \$10.00; Rs.300 Order No. BP 509S

In Preparation

Great Disciples of the Buddha. Ven. Nyanaponika Thera & Hellmuth Hecker. This volume combines all past issues of our Wheel titles in the *Lives of the Disciples* series.

Abhidhamma Studies: Researches in Buddhist Psychology. Nyanaponika Thera. Bold and

brilliant essays on the foundations of the Abhidhamma philosophy.

Note: The above two books are to be co-published with Wisdom Publications in the course of 1997 or early 1998.

The Seven Contemplations of Insight. Ven. Mātara Sri āārāma Mahāthera. A profound examination of the seven contemplations of classical Buddhism and of the actual way they are experienced in the course of meditation, by one of Sri Lanka's foremost meditation masters of recent times. Planned for early 1998.

Notes and News

A New Buddhist Journal. *Theravāda* is a new quarterly devoted entirely to the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. The journal will publish articles which represent the Theravāda perspective on current social issues as well as a wide range of material ranging from expository features to scholarly studies. *Theravāda* will be oriented to the lay reader, relevant, engaged, and serious, but never dull. Submissions are welcome. For more information contact: Theravāda, Terowa, RMB 213B, St. Arnaud, Vic. 3478, Australia. By e-mail: Abalone @ hitech.net.au., or: Allen @ mst.casiro.au.

Fragile Palm Leaves Project. The primary aim of this project is to collect palm-leaf and paper manuscripts from antique markets in Thailand in order to prevent the precious literary heritage of Buddhism from being dispersed to private or public collections. The manuscripts will be kept together as a single collection, to be catalogued and reproduced, thus making the materials available internationally for research and publication. The project operates under the auspices of the Pali Text Society. Funds are urgently needed and all donations are welcome. For further information contact: Fragile Palm Leaves, Pali Text Society, 73 Lime Walk, Headington, Oxford OX3 7AD, U.K., or (in Asia): Mr Peter Skilling, 68/123 Prachanivet 4, Prachachun Road, T. Tasai, A. Muang, Nonthaburi 11000, Thailand; e-mail peski @ mozart.inet.co.th.

Book Review

Buddhism After Patriarchy. Rita M. Gross. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. 365 pp., softback. U.S. \$16.95.

Buddhism After Patriarchy is symptomatic, I fear, of much that is wrong with American Buddhism today. After a litany of stereotypes, generalizations, and pop-psychology, Ms. Gross delivers a series of feminist ultimata for the revalorization of Buddhism to fit her own peculiar interests. Given her disregard for the Buddha's stature as the supremely enlightened teacher, her superficial view of the three characteristics, and her facile dismissal of the Sangha, one is left wondering whether her religion is Buddhism or feminism.

Perhaps Ms. Gross could be classed with the group which Harold Bloom (*The Western Canon*) has dubbed "The School of Resentment." This characterization includes those politically correct militants who reduce and deconstruct according to

their own particular agenda, whether Marxist, historicist, Afrocentrist, or feminist. With its singularly intolerant credo, this movement regards itself as the measure of all things. Thoroughly Amerocentric herself, Ms. Gross informs us that ßI most certainly am not content to accept the status quo of gender arrangements in most of the Buddhist world. In fact, if I had to be a Buddhist woman under the conditions that exist in most parts of the Buddhist world, Buddhism would not be my religion of choice (p.135). Is the United States such a Utopia that living there takes priority over the well-expounded Dhamma?

Truth, tradition, and beauty are not considerations for the resenting school. Ms. Gross's own agenda, obviously, is gender and feminism, though she tries to forestall any criticism of her position by appealing to Buddhism's traditional tolerance. When it becomes obvious that her position is untenable, she appeals to the Buddha's teachings on impermanence, claiming that ßcustom, long-standing tradition, and even precedents set down by the historical Buddha ... should be understood to be subject to all-pervasive impermanence (p.212).

Ms. Gross is quite candid about her own difficulties in accepting her gender, in finding herself, and adjusting to her society. But why should any Buddhist accept her demands to radically change Buddhism ßso that we can 'get it right' this time (p.27)? Why should any Theravàda Buddhist (I will not speak for Mahàyanists or Tibetans) give her a hearing when she argues that we must ßmandate gender equality to regard it as of utmost importance, as a normative obligation for all Buddhists. Theravàda Buddhists regard it as a wonder and blessing that the Sàsana has lasted this long for the welfare of the world.

Ms. Gross even criticizes the Buddha for having neglected his fair share of parenting responsibilities when he abandoned his wife and new-born child to enter the homeless life (p.282). Her priorities are clear when she states: ßBecause patriarchal religions will not rid themselves of their patriarchy, a feminist who wishes to remain within that tradition must take nothing on faith and test everything. Ultimately, this includes the beloved heart of Buddhist lifePits emphasis on meditative and spiritual disciplines, an emphasis which sometimes seems extreme and one-sided (p.282).

Ms. Gross makes the claim that Brighteousness (p.282) does not easily enter into Buddhist discussions of social ethics, and she argues that Buddhism must enrich itself by importing ßa concern for righteousness (p.282) from the Judeo-Christian tradition. What she fails to recognize is that ßdhamma, in an ethical context, means precisely righteousness or justice, and that ßdhamma in this sense has functioned as the main pillar of Buddhist social and ethical ideals from its very inception. Hence the need she feels to import this concern from elsewhere is gratuitous.

For Ms. Gross old age, sickness, and death are not major problems. Her understanding of suffering seems restricted to the domination of women by men: ßIs life so counterproductive, she asks, ßthat one must so rigorously struggle to make one's energies flow in contrary directions? Is death so intractable? (p.282). According to Ms. Gross, feminist Buddhism will see that ßlife conditions are fundamentally sane and satisfactory. The point of spiritual discipline and of

Buddhism, she feels, is to be able to let ourselves be fully human, and to find freedom within the world (pp.284-85).

It seems inconceivable for a Buddhist to claim that freedom from rebirth [does] not seem to be relevant, but this is what Ms. Gross does (p.288). Her conclusion goes even further, rejecting the Buddha's liberation in Nibbàna as the goal in favour of a new alternative: To become sane, to live in community with each other and our earth, is to experience freedom within the world—the mutual goal of feminism and of (post-patriarchal) Buddhism (p.288).

Ms. Gross has misunderstood the Buddha's Teaching and the role of the Sangha, yet she has assumed for herself the role of reinterpreting that Teaching according to her personal and professional feminist needs. This is not an inconsequential matter but one that could be quite detrimental to the still fragile American Buddhism. I hope that this egregious book will not mislead other Westerners into dismissing the true Dhamma or placing demands on the Teacher. We can use the Buddha's analogy of stubbornly refusing to allow a surgeon to extract a poisoned arrow until the identity (and gender bias) of the archer is known. Long before the irrelevant issues which Ms. Gross raises could be resolved, the victim would be dead.

Living the holy life does not depend on class, caste, colour, nationality, language, or gender. We need to attend to what is connected with the goal, what is conducive to letting go, to giving up, to stilling, to higher knowledge, to awakening, and to Nibbàna. It would be a pity if an interested person were deterred by this book from investigating for himself or herself the Truth taught by the Buddha.

Visakha Kawasaki

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Guidelines to Sutta Study

Sutta: Kandaraka Sutta, MN 51.

Reminder: When the meditator's insight into the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena is fully matured, the knowledge of the supramundane path arises penetrating the Four Noble Truths.

In his first sermon, The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma, the Buddha states that each of the Four Noble Truths must be penetrated in its own particular way. The truths are not merely facts. Each noble truth poses a task, a function that for the disciple in training is a challenge to be met, for the arahant an achievement that has been fulfilled. The practice of Dhamma is the active endeavour to fulfil these four tasks. When the practice is complete, the four tasks have been accomplished and then nothing more remains to be done.

The Pàli Commentaries explain that while these four tasks are performed partly and imperfectly in the preliminary stages of practice, the supramundane path performs

them all impeccably at a single moment. The path consciousness takes as its object Nibbàna, the unconditioned element. At the very moment that it penetrates the unconditioned by way of object (*àrammaòato*) it also penetrates the other three truths by way of function (*kiccatò*) each in accordance with its own nature.

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering (*dukkha-sacca*). This truth, the Buddha says, must be fully understood (*pariñeeyya*); thus the task it imposes is full understanding (*pariñña*). The object of full understanding is personality (*sakkàya*), the compound of five aggregates, the mental and material phenomena that comprise our existence. The path consciousness, unlike insight-wisdom (*vipassana-pañña*), does not take the five aggregates as object; its object, rather, is the unconditioned element. Yet, at the same time that the path arises realizing Nibbàna, it illuminates the true nature of conditioned reality with a degree of clarity that insight-wisdom cannot emulate. When the mind penetrates that which lies beyond impermanence and suffering, it also fully fathoms the impermanency, unsatisfactoriness, and emptiness inherent in the five aggregates. Hence the act of realizing Nibbàna simultaneously performs the function of fully understanding the five aggregates, the truth of suffering.

The truth of the origin of suffering (*samudaya-sacca*) is craving (*taòhà*). When the path arises it eliminates a particular sediment of craving as well as a cluster of secondary defilements associated with craving. Whereas in the preliminary stage of practice the defilements may be suspended temporarily through the cultivation of calm or insight, with the attainment of the path the corresponding set of defilements is cut off permanently right at the very root. Hence the function of the path in regard to the second noble truth is abandonment (*pahàna*) not just temporary abandonment, but permanent abandonment by eradication (*samuccheda-pahàna*).

The truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha-sacca*) is Nibbàna, the cessation of suffering. The function of the path regarding the third noble truth is realization (*sacchikaràòà*), which means seeing directly, in so clear and powerful a way that the experience is almost physical. Thus in the suttas the Buddha describes this experience by the expression: Òhe realizes with the body the supreme truth and sees it by piercing it through with wisdom (MN 70; I 480).

Finally, in regard to the fourth noble truth, the truth of the path (*magga-sacca*), the supramundane path consciousness performs the function of development (*bhàvanà*). The attainment of the first path-experience brings into being (*bhàveti*) the eight factors of the truly noble Eightfold Path, and subsequent practice strengthens and nurtures these eight factors until they are strong enough to extricate all defilements root and branch.

Although the gradual training normally extends over time and involves a sequential attainment of the four paths and their corresponding fruits of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship in the Kandaraka Sutta the Buddha shows the entire process synoptically. He compresses all four stages into one attainment of knowledge, which he calls Òthe knowledge of the destruction of the taints (òsavakkhaya-òòà).

In the previous instalment of this series we quoted the first part of the formula for this knowledge (see NL No. 33). The passage continues:

When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of becoming, and from the taint of ignorance. When it is liberated, there comes the knowledge: ßIt is liberated.û He understands: ßBirth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming back to this world.û

This statement shows that the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths is not a mere acquisition of objective information but an experience of internal transformation that extends to the deepest level of one's being. The most fundamental group of defilements at the base of our minds is the set of three taints (*àsava*) described in the sutta: the taint of sensual desire (*kàmàsava*), the taint of craving for becoming (*bhavàsava*), and the taint of ignorance (*avijjàsava*). As the disciple sees and knows the four truths, that knowledge simultaneously expunges the defilements, and when the process of knowledge is complete the eradication of defilements is also complete: the three main corruptions of attitude and understanding that had driven us on through the beginningless round of becoming are eliminated. Hence, when the final path has accomplished its fourfold task, the disciple, now an arahant or taint-destroyer (*khãòàsava*), boldly roars his lion's roar: ßDestroyed is birth û

With this the Buddha brings to an end his exposition of the gradual training. Concluding the discourse, he returns to the theme with which his exposition began, i.e., the question: ßWhat is the highest type of person?the one who torments neither himself nor others?û Now, having shown the arahant, the liberated one, he can provide the answer: ßThis is called the kind of person who does not torment himself or pursue the practice of torturing himself, and who does not torment others or pursue the practice of torturing others?the one who, since he torments neither himself nor others, is here and now hungerless, extinguished and cooled, and abides experiencing bliss, having himself become holy.û