



# Community

*The Amaravati Lay Buddhist Newsletter*



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Community

# editorial



## Truly, Madly, Deeply, Engaged Buddhism

The title is not intended to mock the good works undertaken by Buddhists, far from it. I simply want to highlight a debate that has ebbed and flowed in Buddhist circles—especially the West—for many years. My perspective is that the debate has wound down recently—at least from the position of a conflict between an engaged Buddhism and a supposed ‘quietist’ or deliberately disengaged Buddhism. My view is that this distinction was and is a largely misconceived one, perhaps as a reaction to the great attraction that early (and many current) practitioners have for meditation practices and a misunderstanding over what these practices are. Perhaps our Christian conditioning with its emphasis on charitable work has also influenced our expectations of Buddhism.

A variant of this debate is that certain schools or traditions are portrayed as either more or less engaged. This last assertion might be provable by the numbers of charities fostered by different Buddhist traditions. My feeling—and I would be interested if anyone has current figures for this—is that there is a broad spread of charities with no obvious preponderance associated with a particular tradition. I know of a wide range of charitable enterprises engaged with various African, Indian, Tibetan and other disadvantaged or suffering groups. From those coping with the Tsunami tragedy, to AIDS sufferers, to the Ambedkarites, to Tibetan exiles and Buddhist prisoners—there are many initiatives.

Perhaps the most prominent British Buddhist charity is Angulimala, established over twenty years ago by Ajahn Khemadhammo, a Theravadan Forest Sangha bhikkhu who was recently awarded an OBE for his services. Angulimala organises Buddhist chaplains to visit prisoners across UK prisons and has been very successful in this role.

So, is this range of engagement in defiance of Buddhist teaching? Studying what might be considered the most conservative body of scripture—the Pali Canon—shows that only a partial and selective reading can support the idea that the Buddha taught a wholly quietist and other-

worldly practice with no place for those leading the lives of householders, or for those who wish to help others.

The Pali Canon describes a wealth of practices and teachings including those naturally and inevitably linked with social engagement such as generosity and compassion. These exist alongside the cultivation of calm and insight (concentration and wisdom) which although taken in isolation might seem to be ‘disengaged’ are in fact closely linked with effective and skilful action in the world. The factors of right action and right livelihood are part of the Noble Eightfold Path which itself lies at the heart of the Buddhist path described in the Pali Canon.

The pejorative term ‘do-gooder’ is applied to a person acting from a skilful motive to help others, but who acts foolishly or naively; perhaps heavily influenced by sentimentality. The results of actions influenced by sentimentality or ignorance are often (usually) counterproductive. Not only may the person being helped feel patronised or belittled, but the help given to them may be poorly judged or cause unintended harm to others. A full consideration and application of the Buddhist path encourages a balanced cultivation of wisdom and compassion, or as in a widely followed Pali Canon formulation—generosity, virtue, and cultivation of mind. The skilful motive to help others can then be discharged through actions guided by wisdom as well as compassion.

A concern of some is that Buddhists may see their practice as being about escaping from the world and seeking pleasant mental states. There may indeed be those with such motives. However, it is interesting to consider just what we mean by the ‘world’. What we generally mean is that there is an objective world which is the same for all of us. But this is an assumption. Actually we all create the world according to our own kamma; our own conditioning, opinions, self-view and habits. It is a conceit to believe that our view of the ‘world’ is the right or only one. In fact, one could summarise the Buddhist path as the letting go of ‘my world’ so that we know the world as it truly is. Meditation practice supports letting go of ‘me and mine’ and is an integral part of Buddhism. A clearer knowing of the ‘world’, unclouded by self-view, supports truly effective ‘engagement’—a true compassion—that is naturally linked with selfless action. Saving the world is a real possibility when we are not limited to ‘my world’.

*Chris Ward*

## A Lesson in Judging by Appearances

### A Brief History

When I became Buddhist, 21 years ago, I also became vegetarian, as to me the two naturally went together. Four years ago I became vegan as this seemed the next logical step, but went back to being vegetarian after 18 months as I found it very inconvenient! Then 6 months ago, thankfully, the penny dropped and I realised that it was pretty inconvenient for the animals too. Now I am a committed Buddhist, vegan and also an animal rights campaigner.

### The Stall

Four months ago I made contact with a local campaigner and offered my services if she ever had a street stall/collection in my local area. Well on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2007, I received an urgent phone call from this lady saying that she was on a stall in Luton with another lady but had received a phone call saying her mother was ill and she needed to go to her. Could I urgently help out. For safety and practical purposes you need at least two people on a stall.

This was the first time I had ever done anything like this but why not, in at the deep end and no time to get nervous. But what if someone asked me a question I didn't know the answer to? But then this has happened to me in Buddhism and I have survived! Well what a day, I made two new friends with the ladies on the stall before the one had to go, had a great conversation and laugh with a Muslim man handing out leaflets next to us, this was a prime site near the entrance to a shopping centre where you could 'catch' most people. Then the lesson really started. Amongst many beautiful and caring people there was 'macho-man', shaven head, tattoos everywhere, not a teenager (late 30's) bover boots and camouflage trousers. He told us he was a dog lover, he had five he said then gave a very graphic descrip-

tion of what he would do to anyone he found harming animals. He got out his mobile phone and showed as some photos of his five dogs, well my friend and myself had a job keeping a straight face for there staring back at us was five of the smallest, cutest, hairiest Chihuahuas I had ever seen. When he left I said to my friend I was expecting the hounds from hell or pit bulls at least. You need two on a stall so that you can take turns in going into the shopping centre to get warm and use the facilities etc. When I was inside I noticed an old tramp, 2 huge safety pins kept the front of his trousers closed, string for a belt, filthy long hair, dirty smelly clothes, and a very strong smell of alcohol. He was working his way through all the litter bins in the centre. I had been back at the stall for about 10 minutes when out he came and straight over to us. Right away I thought he is going to ask for some money, but how wrong I was. He didn't say much but looked at the leaflets and posters, signed the petition and NFA (no fixed abode) for the address, then rummaged in a carrier bag. He pulled out an old purse and gave us £2. You can guess how that made me feel!

I was very pleasantly surprised at the number of teenagers who were interested. They all gave money, sometimes only 20p, took as many leaflets as they could and seemed genuinely interested, hopefully this is a sign of an up and coming caring generation. One young man probably about 14 years old was with two friends, looking like possible trouble makers. All were very interested but he couldn't keep his attention from the large posters we had and asked many questions. He left us with tears in his eyes. After five hours on the stall I thought I had seen everything, but then came a lady wearing pyjamas and slippers, everyone stopped and stared as she bought a coffee from a bakers and then came over to us. She signed our petition, and gave a big donation. She smiled and whispered that she was from a building society near to our stall and the staff were doing a Red Nose Day for Comic Relief!

At the end of the day I was frozen outside, but I had a very warm heart and a good feeling inside, and know that in the future I will try not to judge anyone by appearances alone.

*Supannya*

## No Suffering

When I told a friend at work that I was going to teach a meditation retreat he said; 'What I can't stand about Buddhism is the idea that everything is suffering. I'm not suffering. I smoke and drink and I guess I'll die a horrible death, but I'm not suffering. I once went to a Buddhist monastery in Ladakh and tried meditating and all I got was the mind going; 'Yap, yap, yap'. That's suffering.'

If you look around you will find 'the Buddha taught everything is suffering' in many places. The British Museum and the British Library both describe the Buddha's teaching in this way. Odd that this should have become a world religion!

So what did the Buddha teach?

He pointed to suffering and said that we need to understand it. He said that even when we are happy, we sow seeds of suffering into the happiness, to the extent that we want it to last. So you could say that he pointed out there is no escape from suffering – as long as we continue to create it. Yes, he taught us about suffering, but he only did so, so that we might free ourselves from suffering. We should say, more accurately, that the Buddha taught the end of suffering.

The word the Buddha used, in Pali, is Dukkha. This gets translated in all sorts of different ways because it is a concept we don't have in English. It's more than suffering. We could translate it as 'life's not fair'. If it were fair we wouldn't get sick, get old or die. We would be happy all the time. We would never be dissatisfied, never miserable. We'd never suffer pain. We wouldn't have difficult relationships, we'd not be abused, we wouldn't hate ourselves or other people; we'd be loved, valued and appreciated – by everyone.

But as this isn't the case we suffer. And the Buddha taught us that this is the place to look if we want to be free from suffering. Look right into the suffering, and what do we see? Simply that these things are just as they are. Old age, sickness and death; being miserable, being dissatisfied, being despised, abused, hated; these are just the stuff of life. Suffering is something we add to them, we create suffering out of them. How? By wanting it to be otherwise.

And it's the same with being loved, appreciated, valued, respected – being happy. Look at what we do. We pluck the flower. As soon as we experience something beautiful we grasp it and squeeze it so tight we kill it off. This is dukkha.

'What I can't stand...is the idea that everything is suffering'

What didn't the Buddha teach? He didn't teach us how to become wise. This is important because this is what a lot of us want out of Buddhism. The Buddha wasn't interested in teaching anything other than the end of suffering. He once compared his teaching to a handful of leaves, saying that there are so many leaves in the forest but what he taught was just this much— all we need to know to free ourselves from suffering.

So you want to be wise. Will you ever really know when you are? Do you want to be wise so you can point out to others they are fools? Is this desire to be wise making you happy, or is it dukkha?

Forget being wise. I was looking at a river last week. It was a sunny day, unbroken blue sky. The skylarks were singing, a turquoise damselfly was resting on the leaf of a yellow flag (a waterside plant that flowers with a yellow iris-like flower). The current of the water flowing under the footbridge was creating small whirlpools which caused shadows on the riverbed; constantly moving circles weaving into each other and disappearing down stream with the flow of water.

Leaning over the bridge, looking into the river; there was no need to add anything, no need to create anything. But as soon as I added the thought, 'what does this mean?', I knew I was destroying something. It was perfect in itself – and I didn't need to try to make sense of it.

Isn't life easy, simple, until we try to make sense of it. I went back to my job in the afternoon, as Chief Accountant, to put numbers in boxes, knowing how important it was they went into the right box, because the Auditors were coming the next week and if they weren't in the right box they would write in their report that they were in the wrong box. And that would be an awful thing, not just for me but also for my staff and I would have to explain the mistake to my Directors, and the Board Members... But I could see I didn't need to make sense of all of this, and this too was perfect in itself.

We don't need to make sense of it all. It's how it is. If we're shot by an arrow, we don't need to know who fired it, we just need to take it out. We don't need to become wise, we just need to free ourselves from suffering.

Our resistance, our wanting it to be otherwise, our wanting to stay by the river and have a paddle when we should be going back to work; or our wanting to get back to work when we could stay a bit longer and have a paddle (why shouldn't an aging be-suited gentleman go paddling in his lunchtime?). There's no making sense of it. But we can observe – and that's what we should do.

The key to the Buddha's teaching, is mindfulness. Simply to observe, to be aware of the way things really are from moment to moment. The desire to make sense of it, then, is simply observed, along with all the other moment by moment experiences. The desire to stay by the river with the skylarks and the yellow flag is of equal value with the desire to get back to work and be ready for the Auditors, as just two thought moments that arise and disappear like whirlpools in a river.

When we first hear about mindfulness we think we must try to be mindful of something. But there is nothing we need to create to be mindful of. All we need to do is be mindful. Mindful of our whole experience of me and my experience. Otherwise we overlook the self – the experienter of the experience - but this is where we need to look closest.

You can see how this whole idea of mindfulness, if misunderstood, is adding something to the moment; the thought, 'I want to be mindful of this or that'. This sets up the conditions for failure and confusion. And the way out of this confusion? We need to realise we can be aware of the confusion too, and the desire not to be confused, as just another thought moment. Every thought moment is of equal value in mindfulness, there's not a moment we can call our own. Every thought of me and mine is to be mindful of. It's like riding on the back of a wild horse. However much it bucks and kicks, the job of mindfulness is to stay on there. Don't let the mind throw you off.

Don't let the mind fool you in any way. You don't have to make sense of it, you just have to stay right there with mindfulness. Then a wonderful thing happens, the truth comes to you. Your mind will reveal itself to you, the way it is, the way you are. You don't have to become wise, you just have to be patient and watch the truth that's hidden inside your delusion turn itself inside out, using this practice of mindfulness.



When I was young I used to ride horses. I used to ride bareback. This was because I never had a horse so I used to ride other peoples'. I used to hang around the local stables or go along to the gymkhanas and chat up the girls so they'd let me have a ride on their horses. I used to fall off all the time. As soon as the horse put its head down to eat some grass I'd slither down its neck. But I'd get back on again and after a while I got to know how to stay on. It's like that – being mindful. At first we slither off every time the mind goes after a tasty blade of grass. After a while we learn how to stay on even when the mind is racing at a gallop.

There's no success or failure with mindfulness. It's all of equal value. We should measure our 'success' by our even-minded mindfulness of whatever arises, especially thoughts of success or failure. There's no thought moment you can't be mindful of, no sense of self that won't be revealed. So we're right there, whether the mind is calm and quiet, or going 'yap, yap, yap' as it is so often. When we are observing the flow of the mind, moment by moment, we are mindful of the yap, yap mind, mindful of our aversion to it, and mindful of the yap, yap again if that's what the next moment brings. This isn't suffering is it. It's freedom. Freedom to experience and know things as they really are. It doesn't matter if the mind is yapping, it doesn't matter if it's still, when we can maintain that constant even-minded mindfulness of it.

Talking in similes can be helpful, but don't take it too far. Don't hold onto anything, don't believe in anything, let it all go. What is insight? We've never experienced an insight that didn't show us that our mind had made a fool of us. Something that's true, as soon as we hold onto it turns false. Ultimately there's no me, no mind, no rider and no horse. But don't believe such things.

This 'truth' of no self is not to be believed in, it has to be realised. And how? By waking up to the present moment. We don't need to make it complicated by trying to make sense of it. Let the truth come to you in its own time, don't be in a hurry and try to grasp it by reasoning it out. Our logical reasoning is based on conditioning, mindfulness enables us to cut through our conditioned way of thinking. It takes us to the very centre of our sense of self, and keeps us there until the illusion is seen. And this is simply a laying down of a burden. Now you can relax. Nothing to prove, nothing to become, nothing to be.

*Martin Evans*

## The Perfections – Honesty

The Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association has been following the overall theme of the Perfections for 2007. We recently ran a weekend retreat on the subject of 'honesty' (*sacca* in Pali). The following excerpts and notes are an adapted version taken from the handout used on the retreat. The purpose of such material is to acquaint participants with some relevant teachings from the Pali Canon, and from Forest Sangha sources on the subject of honesty, and encourage reflection on this virtue both during and after the retreat.

### **Honesty / Truthfulness**

A working definition of truthfulness is the action of accurately and objectively representing an object of the senses (including the mind sense) to oneself and others. (*CW*)

### **Speaking The Truth**

... someone avoids lying and abstains from it. He speaks the truth, is devoted to the truth, reliable, worthy of confidence, not a deceiver of men. Being at a meeting, or amongst people, or in the midst of his relatives, or in a society, or in the king's court, and called upon and asked as witness to tell what he knows, he answers, if he knows nothing: 'I know nothing', and if he knows, he answers: 'I know'; if he has seen nothing, he answers: 'I have seen nothing', and if he has seen, he answers: 'I have seen'. Thus he never knowingly speaks a lie, either for the sake of his own advantage, or for the sake of another person's advantage, or for the sake of any advantage whatsoever. (*A.nguttara Nikaya X. 176*)

### **Right Speech**

"And what is right speech? Abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, & from idle chatter: This is called right speech." (*Samyutta Nikaya 45 8*)

## **The Ten Perfections**

In Theravada Buddhism the Ten Perfections (dasa pāramiyo) are (original terms in Pali):

**Dāna** parami : generosity, giving of oneself

**Sīla** parami : virtue, morality, proper conduct

**Nekkhamma** parami : renunciation

**Paññā** parami : transcendental wisdom, insight

**Viriya** (also spelt *vīriya*) parami : energy, diligence, vigour, effort

**Khanti** parami : patience, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance

**Sacca** parami : truthfulness, honesty

**Adhiṭṭhāna** (*adhitthana*) parami : determination, resolution

**Mettā** parami : loving-kindness

**Upekkhā** parami : equanimity, serenity

Two of the above virtues, **Metta** and **Upekkha**, also comprise two of the Four Immeasurables (**Brahmavihara**).

## **Views, opinions and beliefs**

"If a person has belief, his statement, 'This is my belief,' safeguards the truth. But he doesn't yet come to the definite conclusion that 'Only this is true; anything else is worthless.' To this extent, ... there is the safeguarding of the truth. .... But it is not yet an awakening to the truth.

"If a person likes something ... holds [to] an unbroken tradition ... has something reasoned through analogy ... has something he agrees to, having a considered opinion, his statement, 'This is what I agree to, having a considered opinion,' safeguards the truth. But he doesn't yet

Cont...

come to the definite conclusion that 'Only this is true; anything else is worthless.' To this extent, ... there is the safeguarding of the truth.... But it is not yet an awakening to the truth." (Majjhima Nikaya 95)

## The criteria for deciding what is worth saying

[1] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial (or: not connected with the goal), unendearing & disagreeable to others, he does not say them.

[2] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, unendearing & disagreeable to others, he does not say them.

[3] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, but unendearing & disagreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them.

[4] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, but endearing & agreeable to others, he does not say them.

[5] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, but endearing & agreeable to others, he does not say them.

[6] "In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing & agreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them.

Why is that? Because the Tathagata has sympathy for living beings." (Majjhima Nikaya 58)

## Complete Frankness?

... Then Vassakara the brahman, the minister to the king of Magadha, approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "I am of the view, of the opinion, that when anyone speaks of what he has seen, [saying,] 'Thus have I seen,' there is no fault in that. When anyone speaks of what he has heard, [saying,] 'Thus have I heard,' there is no fault in that. When anyone speaks of what he has

sensed, [saying,] 'Thus have I sensed,' there is no fault in that. When anyone speaks of what he has thought, [saying,] 'Thus have I thought,' there is no fault in that."

[The Blessed One responded:] "I do not say, brahman, that everything that has been seen should be spoken about. Nor do I say that everything that has been seen should not be spoken about. I do not say that everything that has been heard... everything that has been sensed... everything that has been thought should be spoken about. Nor do I say that everything that has been thought should not be spoken about.

"When, for one who speaks of what has been seen, unskillful mental qualities increase and skillful mental qualities decrease, then that sort of thing should not be spoken about. But when, for one who speaks of what has been seen, unskillful mental qualities decrease and skillful mental qualities increase, then that sort of thing should be spoken about.

"When, for one who speaks of what has been heard... what has been sensed... what has been thought, unskillful mental qualities increase and skillful mental qualities decrease, then that sort of thing should not be spoken about. But when, for one who speaks of what has been thought, unskillful mental qualities decrease and skillful mental qualities increase, then that sort of thing should be spoken about."

(Anguttara Nikaya 4.183)

## **The Truth – the Dhamma – the way things are**

The Buddha said that enlightenment of the Dhamma is just knowing Nature, the reality which is all around us, the Nature which is right here! If we don't understand this Nature we experience disappointment and joy, we get lost in moods, giving rise to sorrow and regret. Getting lost in mental objects is getting lost in Nature. When we get lost in Nature then we don't know Dhamma. The Enlightened One merely pointed out this Nature. Having arisen, all things change and die. Things we make, such as plates, bowls and dishes, all have the same characteristic. A bowl is moulded into being due to a Cont...

cause, man's impulse to create, and as we use it, it gets old, breaks up and disappears. Trees, mountains and vines are the same, right up to animals and people.

When Añña Kondañña, the first disciple, heard the Buddha's teaching for the first time, the realization he had was nothing very complicated. He simply saw that whatever thing is born, that thing must change and grow old as a natural condition and eventually it must die. Añña Kondañña had never thought of this before, or if he had it wasn't thoroughly clear, so he hadn't yet let go, he still clung to the khandhas. As he sat mindfully listening to the Buddha's discourse, Buddha-nature arose in him. He received a sort of Dhamma "transmission," which was the knowledge that all conditioned things are impermanent. Any thing which is born must have aging and death as a natural result.

This feeling was different from anything he'd ever known before. He truly realized his mind, and so "Buddha" arose within him. At that time the Buddha declared that Añña Kondañña had received the Eye of Dhamma.

*(A Taste of Freedom by Ajahn Chah)*

## **Spin**

'Spin' is the (mis)representation of objective facts within a broader interpretive framework which is actually speculative conjecture or deliberate propaganda. The intention of the speculative interpretation is to present facts in a favourable light, designed to advertise the merits of a particular person or group; or to represent facts unfavourably to malign a person or group by negative speculation on their motives and behaviour. Spin is often to be found in political activity and may range from mildly, through to severely, deceitful. However, do we not all select the facts to suit a particular situation? It is actually the motive behind the selection that is important. Is the intention to deceive or to make the facts appropriate for a particular audience? *(CW)*

## **The importance of intention**

There must be intent to lie for it to break a precept. Unintentional misrepresentation caused by forgetfulness or misperception is not culpable.

## **Truth, Objective Fact and Science**

Science is driven by the pursuit of objective truth. This is good as far as it goes. Science is based upon an assumption that there is a world of experience which is common to us all, and which obeys the same laws.

Science is particularly successful with the world as experienced through the five senses. It is easier to compare and examine perceptions through the five senses and easier to design experiments and predict and measure possible outcomes

The sixth Buddhist sense—the mind or imagination which looms large in our subjective perceptions and which predominantly colours our experience, is not so readily amenable to scientific exploration. On its own, truthfulness (including its enshrinement in science) is not a complete path, since it lacks wisdom and compassion. However, the objective truthfulness that science values is also valued in Buddhism. (*CW*)

## **Opinion**

We all have opinions. These are accumulated through many conditioning processes. We may earn a living from being asked for, and giving, our opinion on certain matters. To preserve the truth we can make it clear that we hold an opinion, rather than stating the particular opinion as a fact. This may need some insight into our minds to recognise an opinion as such.

An opinion is not necessarily true; it is a partial viewpoint. Therefore we must not only be honest to ourselves that a particular view we hold is an opinion, but also be careful to express this in a skilful way in an appropriate context. As opinion is invariably linked with self-view then we may feel that we have to express it as the truth. Actually this

is a conceit. It may or may not be useful to express an opinion, and we must use other criteria apart from how dear the opinion is to us, to judge when or if to speak it. The earlier readings on the 'criteria for deciding what is worth saying' and 'complete frankness' are worth reading in this regard. (CW)

### **Advice to Rahula on avoiding lying**

"Rahula, it's like a royal elephant: immense, pedigreed, accustomed to battles, its tusks like chariot poles. Having gone into battle, it uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail, but keeps protecting its trunk. The elephant trainer notices that and thinks, 'This royal elephant has not given up its life to the king.' But when the royal elephant... having gone into battle, uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail & his trunk, the trainer notices that and thinks, 'This royal elephant has given up its life to the king. There is nothing it will not do.'

"In the same way, Rahula, when anyone feels no shame in telling a deliberate lie, there is no evil, I tell you, he will not do. Thus, Rahula, you should train yourself, 'I will not tell a deliberate lie even in jest.' (Majjhima Nikaya 61)

### ***Questions for Reflection***

These are intended to stimulate reflection and discussion.

1. The precepts are given as training rules. How do we interpret this?
2. What does objectivity mean and is it possible? What is a fact?
3. The word 'Dhamma' can be translated in a number of related ways. It implies a lawfulness and regularity in the 'way things are' rather than a randomness or chaos. Do we experience patterns in our life and experience or does it all seem chaotic?
4. What does truthfulness mean to us?



5. What are the consequences of a compassionate white lie?
6. Does right speech mean that we cannot be direct, straightforward and perhaps provocative in our speech and writing?
7. What is the proper time for advice or admonishment?
8. Why are we deceitful?
9. In what sense are opinions true?
10. How clear can we be about our motives and intentions?

*Chris Ward*

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*Coping with diminishing natural resources*



“There we are madam. Your new grey water collection system fully installed. Just change the water collection vessels when they get full.  
I'll have the methane generator in for next week.”

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## Translating the Karaniya Metta Sutta

*Translated by the Bodhinyana Pali Study Group - March 2007.*

### Introduction

Over the winter of 2006 / 7 a small and variable number of lay followers of Amaravati met every few weeks in each other's homes to study the Pali language and to apply our new skills to some Pali scriptures from the Pali Canon, widely used and respected in most Buddhist traditions, but also established as the scriptural source for the Theravada tradition which is followed at Amaravati.

There is not the space to give a full overview of the trials and tribulations of Pali translation. Suffice it to say that it is not always straightforward and the choice of a suitable word or form of words in English can be something of an art form. Even though the group has produced a version of the well-known Karaniya Metta Sutta, and we hope that this will be helpful, the main value of this enterprise was the building of community and an exploration of the way that we can engage skilfully with scriptures — using them to encourage reflectivity through examining alternative translations and noticing our desire to arrive at the ‘right’ or ‘perfect’ version. There is a growing range of aids available to the Pali scholar. A good place to start is the web site: [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org).

### The Metta Sutta

This is what would be done (1) by one who is  
committed to goodness,      Who has realised  
the path to peace (2).  
(S)he would be skilful (3), honest and  
straight forward,  
Of right speech (4), gentle and not conceited.

Contented, easily satisfied,  
Unburdened with duties, of simple needs,  
With senses calmed, wise, modest  
And not attached to status.

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(S)he would seek to avoid even the slightest  
wrong that the wise might reprove. (And  
would establish awareness with these  
thoughts) (5)

May all be peaceful and at ease,  
May all living beings be truly happy!

Whatever living beings that exist  
Without exception; weak or strong,  
Tall, large,  
Medium, short, minute,

Visible or invisible,  
Those living near or far,  
Those who are born or waiting to be born,  
May all beings be truly happy!

Let none deceive another,  
Nor despise anyone anywhere.  
In anger or ill will,  
May none wish harm upon another.

Even as a mother would protect with her own  
life  
Her only child, (6)  
So would (s)he cultivate a boundless heart  
Towards all beings.

Radiating boundless thoughts of lov-  
ing-kindness  
Throughout the world,  
Above below and all around,  
Without obstruction, without hatred,  
without enmity

Standing, walking, sitting or lying down,  
So long as (s)he is awake,  
(S)he would establish mindfulness with

Cont.

such thoughts. (7)

This is rightly called a divine abiding. (8)

Through abandoning fixed views (9)

Maintaining virtue and perfecting insight,

(S)he would become free from craving for  
sense pleasures, (10)

Never again to be born into this world. (11)

## Notes

(1) Karaniya – those who know the Karaniya Metta Sutta will be familiar with this word. It is derived from karoti, the verb ‘to do’ and it is usually translated as ‘what should be done’. But we have translated this as ‘what would be done’, which changes the meaning of the whole sutta. If you look later in the verse, you can see we are talking about someone who has already realised the path of peace. We concluded that this sutta is about the qualities they would have and the things they would do, naturally, because of what they have already attained. These are the qualities of someone who has realised the path, and how they would behave.

(2) What do we mean by someone ‘who has realised the path to peace’? This could be translated as ‘who has realised the path to enlightenment’. This person has realised at least the stage of stream entry, and is destined with absolute certainty for enlightenment. It is said that this will occur within 7 lives. Whatever you think about this, there is no doubt that once you have glimpsed the truth there is no going back. This life changing experience of realising the path is what all Buddhists should aspire to in this life.

(3) Skilful is a word we use a lot in Buddhist circles. It is more than just clever. You could say it is the beneficial application of wisdom.

(4) Right speech is speaking honestly but kindly.

(5) The words in brackets are necessary to give a context to the words that follow. They are taken from verse 9 line 3. (S)he is cultivating awareness or mindfulness with the mental attitude of loving-kindness, in other words, from the heart.

(6) Ekaputtam means ‘only child’. Sometime mistranslated as ‘only son’,

suggesting that a mother would not protect her only daughter. Puttam is the Pali for son, but it also means child when referring to a child of either sex. It is normal in Pali to use the masculine when referring to a group made up of both male and female. In English also, I think most people would be happy to drop the s in (s)he when chanting and follow the convention that the 'he' in this context is being used to refer to both genders.

(7) Mindfulness must come from the heart, that is, from loving-kindness. Otherwise it will be dry, self-centred, self-critical and intellectual – not 'right' mindfulness at all.

(8) It is not the goal of Buddhism to be born in a heaven world, but to live in a heaven world even in this life is the natural outcome of loving-kindness.

(9) The Pali word, ditthi, means views, and holding onto any sort of fixed view is wrong in Buddhism. Translations are a good example. Translating is a creative activity and there is no such thing as right – it is always open to question.

(10) A stream enterer is not free from craving for sense pleasures. It is through abandoning wrong views, maintaining virtue and perfecting insight that (s)he would be freed from craving. The Buddha taught the middle way, not following the two extremes of indulgence and denial but developing insight to realise the pointlessness of chasing sense pleasures. When you see sense pleasures clearly, they lose their attractiveness and are no longer alluring.

(11) In Buddhist teaching rebirth is taken for granted, but it is not a goal, in fact it is something to be avoided. It is a dangerous venture because you cannot predict what sort of world you will be born into. Even rebirth in heaven, though pleasant, is impermanent and will inevitably end in suffering. With the ending of craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence itself will also come to an end.

Editor's Note: The Bodhinyana Pali Study Group is still meeting. Please contact Martin Evans at [martin.evans350@ntlworld.com](mailto:martin.evans350@ntlworld.com) if you are interested in joining us

**Book Review - The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins,  
Bantam Press 2006**

*'And I shall not be concerned at all with other religions such as Buddhism or Confucianism. Indeed, there is something to be said for treating these not as religions at all but as ethical systems or philosophies...'*

Thus Richard Dawkins absolves Buddhism from the criticism he levels at the Abrahamic religions in his book, *The God Delusion*.

This has proved to be a popular book, staying in the bestseller lists in the US and UK for most of 2007. It is one of a recent series of books by various authors which raise serious questions about the widespread assumption that religious faith is a good thing.

Undoubtedly, one of the causes of this recent spate of anti-religious books has been the rise of Islamic terrorism and the greater political influence achieved by Christian and other religious organisations, initially in the US, and then in the UK. In the US, there are a number of wealthy fundamentalist Christian groups who exercise a considerable political influence. In the UK, faith schools are being strongly encouraged and religious groups funded to deliver welfare services.

It is against this backdrop that evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins asserts his view that belief in God is delusional and leads to harmful consequences. So, should Buddhists applaud these brave attempts to rid the world of superstition or should we join with our 'religious brothers and sisters' in resisting attacks on religion?

These are deep and treacherous waters—almost every other word is loaded with implications and assumptions—(atheism, faith, religion, fundamentalism, spirituality).

I must admit that I am sympathetic to some of the arguments that Dawkins makes; however his main tactic is to focus on specific examples of bad religiosity and use these to discredit the whole religious enterprise. He picks on fundamentalist sources or wacky individuals or rather antiquated descriptions of God and then generalises from these. The truth is more complex. What we call 'religions' are large collections of ideas, texts, practices, and organisational structures that have accumulated over long periods of time. It is quite easy to find something

crazy in them, but to then assume that a particular crazy element thereby damns the whole collection is too simplistic.

There is no guarantee that any idea or practice will not be abused in some way at some time. In fact Dawkins has suffered this problem with a misuse of ideas from his earlier work 'The Selfish Gene'. He mentions in a footnote at the bottom of page 215 that he was mortified to read that the CEO of Enron derived inspiration of a Social Darwinist character from his work. Darwinist evolutionary ideas have also been used to create the eugenics movement and to inspire Nazi and fascist ideologies. Does this abuse or misunderstanding thereby prove that evolution is a harmful theory? I doubt that Dawkins would agree with this. He would say that using evolutionary ideas to justify oppressive social programmes is a misapplication of the theory. He would certainly not believe that Nazi eugenics activity means we should eradicate evolutionary theory. And I am sure he would not agree with the proposition that even moderate and well-informed supporters of evolutionary theory create a climate in which fascist eugenics ideas can take root, an argument he uses against moderate followers of religion.

In fact many scientific theories have been 'abused', but this does not discredit the pursuit of scientific truth. It just means that truth on its own is not enough; ethical considerations must also apply and this takes us into the area of religion and philosophy. Basically, humans can misunderstand and abuse anything.

So simply drawing attention to abuses of religious ideas or movements is not sufficient argument for discarding the whole religious enterprise, even if such a thing was possible. However, Dawkins does criticise some central religious ideas; for example, that blind faith is a good thing and that God exists.

Mainstream Buddhism does not really value blind faith. Buddhist teachings are hypothesis or recipes to be tested against our own experience. Their application leads to faith as trustful confidence rather than 'blind belief'. Buddhist teachings are also quite rational; they do not often offend the rational mind. However, the insight that they point to is not realised through rational thought; it is not a rational and logical conclusion to some thought sequence. In fact insight is an unexpected and sometimes overwhelming realisation of a hitherto unseen truth. The

Buddhist path is to rationally and deliberately create conditions in which insight can flourish.

Mainstream Buddhism is also not very interested in Gods. They do exist within Buddhist Cosmology, but their position is really as fellow victims of the same basic problems that beset humanity. So a God or Gods are not seen to have the solutions to all of humanities problems, or to have created the universe or to be necessarily involved with the salvation of humanity. For most Western Buddhists, the existence or otherwise of one or more Gods is irrelevant.

Dawkins throws down a challenge to monotheistic religions. Their ideas of God are incoherent. The word 'God' has really ceased to have any meaning. To ask someone whether they believe in God would first require some lengthy discussion on just what is being asked. It is all well and good for a Christian to assert that she no longer believes in an old man on a cloud, but then just what does she believe in? What is meant by 'God'? There seems to be great confusion and self-deception over this question.

Fortunately, mainstream Buddhism has avoided personalising or creating an anthropomorphic representation of the transcendent. It is wiser to avoid describing such things since words inevitably lead to confusion and a sort of idolatry. Indeed, Buddhism regards words (and thought) as fundamentally uncertain conventions. It is just far too easy for each of us to believe that what we think and the words and concepts we are attached to are of the greatest importance and 'true'. An attachment to 'my' idea of the truth underlies all fundamentalism. All strong attachments can blind, including the belief that reason, truth, rationality and science are the complete answers to humanities' problems. I actually hold these ideals in very high regard, but to see them in any sense as simple, certain and applicable in every circumstance is to be deluded.

I think this lies at the heart of the unease I feel when reading Dawkins work on religion; he is idealistic, rational and intellectually convincing, but lacks an appreciation of the ineffable essence at the heart of religion. It seems that Dawkins has a blind belief that language, logic, rationality and materialism are fundamentally true and certain, rather than fallible human constructs.

*Chris Ward*



## ALBA Connections

Many of you have expressed an interest in making contact with other supporters of Amaravati and its associated monasteries. Maybe you live a long way from a monastery or a local group. Or maybe you are house-bound or otherwise limited in how much you can get out and about. Maybe you would like to meet fellow Buddhists in your part of the country. Or maybe you would simply like to exchange emails or phone calls with like-minded people.

Over the past few months I've received many emails from people interested in making contact with others, and I've made some new friends myself as a result! However, although I have managed to put some of you in touch with each other, I know that some of you are still waiting. It's a fact that people are more likely to come forward with a specific request, say for a lift to the monastery, or to meet someone in their area, than they are explicitly to make themselves available, say for email or telephone contact, or to offer lifts without such a specific request. I am sure, though, that many of you would respond positively if you knew that someone was looking to make contact.

That's why we've now set up a Yahoo! Group, ALBA Connections, which should make it easier for you to find each other, as well as enabling any of our readers to get to know each other better.

Through the group you can let people know directly that you'd like to make contact without the need to go through a third party, and without needing to share your contact details until you are ready. And our network will continue to grow and establish itself.

The group acts as a forum which you can use to discuss Dhamma topics, to support each other's practice, to make practical arrangements, for example for lifts to events at Amaravati, to make contact with people who live near you or simply to make conversation with Dhamma friends.

We also post our email bulletin to the group, so that members have access to regular updates on ALBA events between issues of Community. If you're interested, you can sign up for the group at

Community

[http://us.rd.yahoo.com/evt=42879/\\*http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ALBAconnections](http://us.rd.yahoo.com/evt=42879/*http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ALBAconnections)

And you can call me on 01442 865519 or email me at [metta@petalmoore.net](mailto:metta@petalmoore.net) , to find out more about the group and how it works, or about ALBA Connections in general. Of course, we know that not everyone has access to a computer or to the internet, so you're still welcome to call me at ALBA on 01442 865519 if you want to make an ALBA connection.

*Alison Moore*

Pale cerulean in the east  
Over the Stupa  
With feathers of dusky blue  
Greying to the west  
Silhouette of dark bare  
Thin wispy wintered trees  
Calm after the blustery night.  
Recollect  
Reflect  
Remember  
This moment.  
These moments  
Of five days at Amaravati

*Anna Badar*

*1 / 1 / 2007*

Community

## The Bodhinyana Meditation Group Autumn 2007 Programme

We meet in the Bodhinyana Hall at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery – from 7.30 till 9.30pm on Wednesday evenings. Meetings are open to all and include meditation and discussion around a theme. Please check the website for more details: [www.buddhacommunity.org](http://www.buddhacommunity.org)

12 <sup>th</sup> Sep	<i>Welcome</i>
19 <sup>th</sup> Sep	<i>Essential Buddhism – Introduction</i>
26 <sup>th</sup> Sep	<b>Full Moon</b> We join the Sangha.
3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct	<b>Sister Santacitta</b>
10 <sup>th</sup> Oct	<i>Early Buddhist History</i>
17 <sup>th</sup> Oct	<i>The Four Noble Truths</i>
24 <sup>th</sup> Oct	<i>The Noble Eightfold Path</i>
31 <sup>st</sup> Oct	Virtue before Wisdom?
7 <sup>th</sup> Nov	<i>Kamma, Rebirth &amp; Conditionality</i>
14 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Buddhism without Belief?
21 <sup>st</sup> Nov	<i>The Three Characteristics &amp; Meditation</i>
28 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Samatha, Vipassana, Metta practice
5 <sup>th</sup> Dec	<i>The Buddhist Community</i>
12 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Renunciation and Mindfulness
19 <sup>th</sup> Dec	<i>Summary, feedback, questions and answers</i>

## Teaching & Practice Groups

<b>Ashford, Kent</b>	Bernie Oxland	01233 643848
	email <a href="mailto:Bernardoxland@yahoo.co.uk">Bernardoxland@yahoo.co.uk</a>	
<b>Bath</b>	Bill & Carol Huxley	(01225) 314
500		
<b>Bedford</b>	David Stubbs	(01234) 720 892
<b>Berkshire</b>	Anthea West	(0118) 979 8101
<b>Brighton</b>	Sam Halter	07888 821 525
<b>Cambridge</b>	Dan Jones	(01223) 246 257
<b>Canterbury</b>	Charles Watters	(01227) 463 342
<b>Carlisle</b>	Jean Nelson	(01228) 543491
<b>Harlow</b>	Pamutto	(01279) 724330
<b>Hemel Hempstead</b>	Bodhinyana Group	
	Chris Ward	(01442) 890034
<b>Kendal</b>	Fellside Centre, Low Fellside	
	Sumedha	(01539) 729 793
<b>Leeds Area</b>	Daniela Loeb	(0113) 279 1375
	Anne Grimshaw	(01274) 691447
<b>Liverpool</b>	Ursula Haekel	(0151) 4276668
<b>London Buddhist Society</b>		
	58 Eccleston Square London SW1(Victoria)	(020) 7834
	5858	
<b>London Hampstead</b>		
	1 Hillside (Room 6) London NW5	
	Entrance in Highgate Road	
	Caroline Randall	(020) 8348 0537
	Ann Booth	(020) 7485 0505
<b>London-Notting Hill</b>	Jeffery Craig	(0207) 221 9330
<b>Leigh-on-sea</b>	Rob Howell	(01702) 482 134
<b>Maidstone {Kent}</b>	Shirley McDonald,	01622 203751
	email <a href="mailto:shirleymcd@blueyonder.co.uk">shirleymcd@blueyonder.co.uk</a>	

<b>Midhurst</b>	Barry Durrant (01730) 821 479 Viv Bell (01730) 812362
<b>Newcastle-on-Tyne</b>	Ian Plagaro-Neill (0191) 469 2778
<b>Newent-Gloucs</b>	John Teire (01531) 821 902 <u>Email: <a href="mailto:john.teire@virgin.net">john.teire@virgin.net</a></u>
<b>Norwich</b>	Ian Thompson (01603) 629129
<b>Penzance</b>	Lee (01736) 762 135
<b>Portsmouth</b>	Medhavi (02392)732 280
<b>Redruth</b>	Vanessa (01209) 214 031
<b>Sheffield</b>	Greg Bradshaw (0114)262 1559 <u>Email: <a href="mailto:greg.bradshaw@NOJUNKbtclick.com">greg.bradshaw@NOJUNKbtclick.com</a></u>
<b>South Dorset</b>	Barbara Cohen (01305) 786 821
<b>Southampton</b>	Ivor Minard (023) 8089 4890
<b>Steyning-Sussex</b>	Jayanti (01903) 812 130
<b>Stroud</b>	John Groves ( 07967) 777 742
<b>Surrey-Woking</b>	Rocana (01483) 761 398
<b>Taunton</b>	Annie Fisher (01728) 457 245
<b>Totnes</b>	Jerry (01803) 840 199
<b>Teeside</b>	David Williams (01642) 603 481 John Doyle (01642)587 274

### **Mailing list and Donations**

If you do not wish to remain on the ALBA mailing list or change your address, please let us know. This enables us to reduce the size of mailings and to save money. If you wish to continue on the mailing list then you need do nothing. However, any contributions you can make (to the address below) to cover the production of the newsletter would be greatly appreciated.

Email your changes to :

**[metta@petalmoore.net](mailto:metta@petalmoore.net),**

or post to ALBA at:

ALBA , Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, Herts,  
HP1 3BZ, England

## ALBA News

### **Buddhist Chaplaincy Day.**

We had a unusual event in June. Instead of a standard day of practice, we invited representatives from a number of Buddhist Chaplaincy initiatives to speak about their experiences in this role. We had Colin Ash speaking about Prison and Armed Forces Chaplaincy, Keith Munnings speaking about the Buddhist Hospital Chaplaincy Committee and Ron Maddox speaking on his experience in providing chaplaincy to the Maudsley Psychiatric Hospital. A lot of information was exchanged and a lot of interesting discussion took place. Buddhist chaplaincy is a response to legislation requiring equality of treatment for the major religions in the work space. If an organisation has traditionally offered Christian Chaplaincy, then it must now show that it offers similar services to non-Christians. The results of this has been a gradual and sporadic demand for voluntary Buddhist Chaplains in a range of organisations. Inevitably this raises questions about who is qualified for such a role and how this can be determined, as well as just what does 'Buddhist' mean? How can Chaplains faithfully represent the great range of different traditions in the UK? Although we can make this very bureaucratic and complicated, it is best to be pragmatic and put in place simple structures. Fortunately Angulimala, the Prison Chaplaincy organisation has been operating with just these issues for many years and has evolved helpful working practices.



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

Community

## ALBA Programme for 2008

The dates for the 2008 programme have now been agreed with the Amaravati Community. Please note these in your diaries.

January	12	Day of Practice
February	9	DoP
March	8	DoP
April	11-13	Weekend Retreat
May	31	DoP
July	11-15	5 Day Retreat
August	9	DoP
September	6	DoP
October	17-19	Weekend Retreat
November	1	DoP
December	6	DoP

N.B. The April 11-13 weekend retreat follows a Thera's meeting at Amaravati. We may have to help in preparing some of the rooms for retreat participants

### Amaravati Monastery Contacts

Amaravati Monastery, Great Gaddesden,  
Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire,  
HP1 3BZ

Office Phone : 01442 842455

Retreat Information: 01442 843239

Fax: 01442 843721

For Guest Information: please write to the  
Guest monk / nun or visit the website at

**[www.amaravati.org](http://www.amaravati.org)**

### CONTRIBUTIONS DEADLINE: end Feb 2008

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

**The Editor, Community  
Newsletter  
c/o Amaravati Monastery,  
Great Gaddesden, Hemel  
Hempstead, Herts, HP1  
3BZ**

## Amaravati Lay Events - 2007

These events provide an opportunity to practice together and explore themes relevant to practice and lay life. They include silent and guided meditation, yoga, discussion and study groups, and other activities. Events are led by experienced lay-teachers. All are welcome. Our theme for 2007 is the 'perfections' (*Parami*), to be perfected by one intent on enlightenment. Note that dates for 2008 are now available both in this newsletter and on our web site

*Days of Practice – no need to book, open to all*

*9.45am for 10am-5pm*

*(please bring a packed lunch requiring no preparation or cooking)*

***Retreats – advance booking essential***

*5.30pm Fri. – 4.00pm on last day*

Sat 27th Oct Day of Practice - Determination (*Alison Moore*)

Sat 10th Nov DOP - Kindness (*Martin Evans*)

Sat 1st Dec DOP – Equanimity (*Nick Carroll*)

\*\*Retreat booking forms and late changes to the programme can be found on our web site\*\*:

**[www.buddhacommunity.org](http://www.buddhacommunity.org)**

Organised by the Amaravati Lay Buddhist Association

### **Editorial & Production**

#### **Team :**

Chris Ward, Nick Carroll, Martin Evans, Alison and Peter Moore, plus much help in copying, enveloping, and posting.

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

**If undelivered please**

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