

# The Three Roots Inc

How the three unwholesome roots are institutionalized  
by Piya Tan ©2009

## 1 Our conditioned selves

### 1.1 THE BUDDHA'S PERENNIAL TEACHINGS.

**1.1.1 Our problems are man-made and mind-made.** The teaching on the three unwholesome roots is one of the most basic of Buddhist teachings.<sup>1</sup> A canonical definition of the three roots is given in **the Mūla Sutta** (A 6.38).<sup>2</sup> **The (Akusala,mūla) Añña,titthiyā Sutta** (A 3.68), which immediately precedes it, explains the level of difficulties in dealing with each of the three roots.<sup>3</sup> These three unwholesome roots easily manifest themselves at the pre-conscious level, motivating us to break the precepts, or do something negative. Any these roots are controlled by something that lie even deeper, in our unconscious, that is, the latent tendencies.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Buddha has given these teachings over 2500 years ago, it is only about a century ago that western learning has come to systematize them, calling them their own. However, even on their own, these ancient Buddhist truths help to give us a good understanding of contemporary social problems, such as the negative effects of urbanization, of globalization, of biotechnology, of war and terrorism, and of climatic change and ecology—and how we can minimize, or even reverse such problems.

Most, if not all, such problems are man-made. If they are man-made, then man can solve them, or at least prevent them. “Man-made” also means “mind-made.” Our problems and issues all begin in our minds and manifest themselves externally. To get to the root of the problem, we must understand ourselves: man needs to understand himself.

**1.1.2 The three unwholesome roots.** The first we need to understand is that we either do not know or we do not care that we are *suffering*. As unawakened beings, we may be healthy physically, but we are definitely sick mentally in some way. We are at some point or other ever sick with lust, with hate or with delusion.

**Greed** or craving or desire (in its negative sense) is a selfish longing that seeks gratification. This selfish longing is in turn fuelled by two powerful delusions: first, that we lack what others have, and that gratification is in appropriating those things. We not only tend to measure ourselves against others, but our measuring is never accurate, as we tend to over-estimate the nature and quality of the objects of our desire: we tend to *idealize* what we desire. As a result, we at the same tune *distort* reality, either perceiving it in our old familiar ways, or superimposing self-made notions and biases upon our experiences. Unremarkably and unnaturally, we become fixated to what we think we lack, and as such it is almost impossible for us to break away from this self-imposed prison.

**Hate** or dislike is the other side of the same coin that bears the face of lust. When there is the one, there is the other. When we lust after something, we *hate* what hinders us from our striving, or when we are unable to grasp our goals. This easily and often manifests itself as anger, whether hidden or expressed, and anger (and other hate-rooted emotions) tends to see only the ugly sides of a person or thing, and can led to other hate-rooted emotions), such as verbal abuse and physical violence. And when such negative emotions are unresolved, we strive for distractions, such as getting drunk or resorting to extreme activities. Such hating minds can distort things to such an uncontrollable level that we become dependent or addicted to such fantasies and destructive conduct. It is difficult to break out of such a negative rut.

**Delusion** is a perceptive defect that clouds up our minds so that we cannot see clearly, much less make any right judgement. Delusion is itself rooted in something even deeper in our unconscious, that is, *ignorance*, which is the lack of self-knowledge and not understanding true reality. Delusion is the most

<sup>1</sup> See **(Akusala,mūla) Añña,titthiyā S** (A 3.68/1:199-201) = SD 16.4.

<sup>2</sup> A 3.69/1:201-205 = SD 18.2.

<sup>3</sup> A 3.68/1:199-201 = SD 16.4.

<sup>4</sup> See *Anusaya* = SD 31.3.

dominant of the three unwholesome roots, as it is due to this mental fogginess that we are mercilessly and painfully thrown about between lust and hate, between liking and disliking.<sup>5</sup>

**1.2 THE THREE KINDS OF SUFFERING.** Generally we are more concerned with creature comforts and status symbols: cash, credit cards, cars, country-club membership, and a condominium.<sup>6</sup> Even when we are working hard to support ourselves with food, clothing, shelter and health, we may still fail to see that we have deeper and more subtle personal weaknesses. Unable or unwilling to see our deeper and more serious flaws, we are more concerned merely with physical well-being, social status and passing fads.

In other words, we are only dealing with our “surface sufferings” or physical discomfort (*dukkha*, *-dukkha*). We imagine that we do not have emotional difficulties (*vipariṇāma dukkha*) until we are really confronted with them. Then we are surprised why only *we* are suffering, and not others. My favourite answer here is, “Why not?” Don’t we have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind like everyone else? Even when we do not, it only proves my point.

Either way, we all have some level of emotional difficulties. If we are aware of them, it is easier to deal with them. If not, they will sink into our unconscious, reinforcing our latent tendencies of lust, aversion and ignorance.<sup>7</sup> If the first kind of suffering arises from chasing after external objects to fill our inner lack, then this second kind of suffering comes from our habit of *treating others as objects*, instead of being individuals in their own right. Again such sufferings could be resolved through counselling and other interpersonal skills.

But these are not the kinds of suffering that the Buddha regards as really urgent. For, it is the third kind—spiritual suffering—that underlies all life and pervades all our actions. This is the unsatisfactoriness that attends our whole conscious being: not just the body, but also our feelings, perception, mental formations (deliberate actions) and consciousness itself.<sup>8</sup>

The immediate reason for this spiritual suffering—a *pervading sense of lack or loss despite our having something or everything*—is that we confuse the grammatical and conventional senses of “I,” “me” and “mine” as being real, even permanent: *I* am the CEO; respect *me*; this is *my* body; all this is *mine*. Yet we brought nothing with us; we take away nothing when we go. Our sense of a pervading self guarantees that we will be suffering a liking, a disliking, or boredom, at some time or another. That is, unless we do something about it, which is what Buddhism is about.

## 2 Collective selves

**2.1 A SELF NEEDS OTHERS.** We live daily with the false views that we have an abiding self. After all, am I not the one doing this and that? Am I not writing this, or reading this? And I remember what I did a while ago, or even a long time ago. And I know how I look like, and I have a name. Ergo, I am my self. But all this is a constructed reality.

This “self” we have created is dependent on others for its existence. For without others, there is no *I*. So we need to approve of our actions. We shamelessly or subtly try to impress others with our things or our abilities, with our kindness or our humility. We go through our daily lives trying to impress others, be impressed by others, or think that we are as impressive as the next person. It is difficult to do *nothing*.

From the day we are born, we have an instinctive tendency to connect with others for the sake of survival. First, we dependently and narcissistically connect with our parents; then with friends who like our toys; then with peers who like us; then with colleagues who are like us. Then we might join a club or religion that agree with our pet views, or fill a vacuum in our lives. Somewhere in between we might find a soul-mate or life-partner with whom we can ourselves, as it were. As we mature, we might want to be a

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<sup>5</sup> Psychologically, these 3 unwholesome roots work on a *pre-conscious* level, that is, we are often aware of their presence, but we allow them to take over, and yet with some self-discipline (*sīla*), we can prevent, or at least, minimize, them, esp with proper meditation training. On a deeper level of the *unconscious*, however, lie the more formidable *latent tendencies* (*anusaya*) of lust, aversion and ignorance, which can only be fully overcome with spiritual wisdom: see *Anusaya* = SD 31.3. See F Didonna 2009:7.

<sup>6</sup> See *Skillful Means* = SD 30.8 (8.1).

<sup>7</sup> See *Anusaya* = SD 31.3 (1.2).

<sup>8</sup> For details, see (*Dve*) *Khandhā S* (S 22.48/3:47 f) = SD 17.1a.

part of a community or country. Or we might feel our community, or even country, too oppressive, and we look for spaciousness abroad. The common feeling is that we are trying to connect to some group we are comfortable with. Consciously or unconsciously, we want a sense of belonging. We want, as it were, a sense of a greater self: maybe it is the group, maybe it is God.

Interestingly, the more confident that we are with our group or view, the more we are likely to think that *other* groups or view are wrong or evil. We seem to be unable to escape from the notion that we are right, and need always to be right. One very effective way of “knowing” that we *are* right is to be surrounded with those who share our views or at least our dislikes. We have become *a member of a tribe*.

**2.2 MANY SELVES MAKE A TRIBE.** So what’s wrong with being a member of a tribe? The main problem with a tribe is that it is often exclusivist, that is, it functions on a self-other dichotomy. At best, it provides security and survival for its members; at worst, it does not tolerate dissidents and outsiders. A tribe arises in an environment that is hostile or harsh, physically, socially or psychologically.

Another important point is that a tribe is a crowd, and a crowd does not think. Normally, individuals think, and thinking usually reflects a personal opinion. In a tribal crowd, there are no individuals, only incomplete members who fit together like a jig-saw. Any thinking in a tribe would be usually by autocratic patriarch or by an oligarchic inner circle of elders. And their word is final, binding upon all its members. In other words, it is a kind of group karma.

Such a group karma works one every member alike, like Norwegian lemmings stampeding in the same direction, and ending up being pushed from behind over the cliff or drowning in the sea. When our sense of a personal self is unable to provide a sense of security, we want to surrender ourselves to the group self. We then begin to identify with the group. No one suffers alone: the suffering of the group is over suffering. The suffering might even become a cement for group solidarity. This is especially when there is a perceived persecutor of the group, against which the group must retaliate and destroy.

Many of our historical problems, especially injustices, discriminations, persecutions, genocides and wars arise from the group self. Institutionalized faith and national religions often reinforces this discrimination: for, you are either with us or against us. [5.3]

The Buddhist teaching on not-self (*anattā*) is an unequivocal rejection of both personal selfhood and group selfhood. For even the individual is a shifting dynamics of body and mind. Secondly, the teaching of lovingkindness (*mettā*) advocates unconditional acceptance of others. Where the group or tribe builds a wall of exclusive security keeping itself in and others out, lovingkindness breaks down all barriers so that it is inclusive of all beings.

The Buddhist conception of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), too, is an all-embracing activity. When someone “goes forth” or renounces the world, he or she leaves the biological family for a more all-inclusive family. In this spiritual family, anyone may freely approach a renunciant without appointment; for, the renunciant lives an open and public life, always available to those in need of counsel and succour. A Buddhist community is a networking of selfless beings.

### **3 The three unwholesome roots institutionalized**

**3.1 TECHNOLOGY AND MNCS.** Buddhist social action is guided by the ideas of not-self, lovingkindness and the universal family. This was certainly a reality in the Buddha’s time, when the tribal confederations still existed alongside the beginnings of an empire. There were no powerful scientific technologies, nor multi-national corporations (MNC), which today assumes the form of a *corporate self*.

The first modern MNC is generally thought to be the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (better known as the Knights Templars), first endorsed by the Catholic pope in 1129. The early transnational corporations go back to 16th century Europe. The East India Company (incorporated in England) and Dutch East India Company were operating in outside their headquarters in various foreign countries, but they all answer to the one headquarters. Such MNCs became so powerful that they took control of the countries where they were located and so began the British empire and the Dutch colonies.

Such technologies and corporations, like unawakened persons, are spurred and fuelled by the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion, which as such can be called “the three corporate poi-

sons.” These technologies and multi-national corporations build themselves up with greed, by seeking great profits, controlling much of the world’s wealth, and unfairly affecting world economy.

In one episode of the TV cartoon series *The Simpsons*, the miserly C Montgomery Burns, owner of Springfield’s nuclear plant, shares his years of business wisdom with Lisa Simpson’s third-grade class. According to Burns, the key to a successful business is to root out three demons: family, religion, and friendship.<sup>9</sup> Burns’ view of a successful business is what sociologists have referred to as a “greedy institution,” an institution that demands total commitment from its members, making them abandon all other kinds of loyalty.<sup>10</sup>

Around every technology and MNC is a wall of hatred, of pushing and keeping away competition, espionage, sabotage, and other paranoia. Religious cults are a prime example of “hating institutions,”<sup>11</sup> often requiring members to cut off ties with outside family members and friends (Coser 1974). Such an institution is the Christian monastery of medieval Europe. According to Christian theology, Christ’s command to love one’s neighbour implied universal good deeds to all, whether friend or foe.

Friendship, later monastic theologians argue, threatens a general love for all humans by focussing on exclusive partners and taking one’s eye away from God’s path. As one influential monastic thinker, Basil of Caesarea (330-379), asserted:

The brothers should maintain mutual love for each other, but not so that two or three at one time conspire to form cliques, for this is not charity but sedition and division. It is a sign of the evil behaviour of those who join together in such a way.<sup>12</sup>

This concern was also reflected in regulations, such as how a novice training to be a Dominican in Rome was supervised, even on walks, so that he and his companions did not always choose the same partners and avoided getting to know each other too well.<sup>13</sup>

Then there is the “delusive institution,” that feeds off a captive global clientele with the delusion of beneficial discoveries and methods, but at a great price in money terms as well as ecological costs. Many such technologies and MNCs today are more dangerous and destructive than any desert tribe or religious community in this planet’s history. The rapid rise of multinational corporations has been a topic of concern among intellectuals, activists and others who see it as a threat to human rights, such as privacy. They have pointed out that MNCs create false needs in consumers and promote consumerism [6.1]. The MNCs have long been known to interfere in the policies of sovereign countries, as they did in the colonial era.

The problem with modern institutions is that they tend to take on a life of their own as new types of *collective ego*. Consider, for example, how a big corporation works. Even if the CEO of a transnational company wants to be socially responsible, he or she is limited by the expectations of stockholders. If profits are threatened by his sensitivity to environmental concerns, he is likely to lose his job. Such corporations are new forms of *impersonal* collective selves, which are very good at preserving themselves and increasing their power, quite apart from the personal motivations of the individuals who serve them.  
(David Loy 2006: 5)

The multi-national corporations make their presence felt and demand our attention and patronage through such methods as aggressive and invasive advertising, such as bill-boards, television advertisements, adware, spam, telemarketing, and child-targeted advertising. Large corporate donations to political

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<sup>9</sup> *The Simpsons*, season 8, ep 174, prod no 4F17, 20 Apr 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Hruschka 2010:54 (Box 7).

<sup>11</sup> Coser uses the term “greedy institution” here, too, but I think “hating institution” reflects the situation here better. Coser’s term, of course, still applies inclusively here.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in McGuire 1988, 2010: 30 n92 (p437): *Constitutiones Monasticae* cap 29 = PG 31: 1418. The latin chapter heading is: *Quod non decet in ascetico instituto peculiarem quandam amicitiam esse inter duos aut tres fratres*.

<sup>13</sup> McGuire 1988:30; qu in Hruschka 2010:54 (Box 7).

campaigns often skew democratic election results to the advantage of the corporations. Countless global news stories like “Martha Stewart”<sup>14</sup> and “Enron”<sup>15</sup> report such widespread corruption and disasters. Films and books that provide insights into the corruption and dangers of multinationals include “Surplus: Terrorized into Being Consumers” (2003),<sup>16</sup> “The Corporation” (2003),<sup>17</sup> *The Shock Doctrine* (2007),<sup>18</sup> and *Downsize This*.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2 RELIGIOUS MNCs.

**3.2.1 Evangelical MNCs.** The first modern MNC, as we have noted, is generally thought to be the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon Knights, crusaders of the mediaeval church that waged a “holy war” against the Muslims over “the holy land,” centre around Jerusalem. The “poor” Knights soon became very wealthy through their conquests and business activities. In fact, they became so influential that, pressured by king Philip IV of France (who was greatly in debt with the Templars over his wars with England), Pope Clement V disbanded the Order in 1312. The Knights were imprisoned all over Europe, many mercilessly tortured to extract confessions, if not they were burnt at the stakes.

Many Christian groups today, with international links, still work as MNCs, with their “world vision” of global conversion. Perhaps, the most successful of such new initiative as world domination by a religious organization with an agenda is **World Vision**, founded in the US in 1950 by Robert Pierce, a young pastor and evangelical missionary, who was first sent to China and South Korea in 1947 by the Youth for Christ missionary organization. Pierce headed World Vision for nearly two decades, but resigned from the organization in 1967. He also founded the evangelical organization, Samaritan’s Purse.<sup>20</sup>

World Vision is an international Christian relief and development organization whose avowed goal is “to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human

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<sup>14</sup> Martha Stewart (b 1941) is a US business magnate, TV host, author and magazine publisher, once declared to be US’s 3<sup>rd</sup> most powerful woman by the Ladies Home Journal (2001). In 2003, Stewart was indicted by the government on nine counts incl charges of securities fraud and obstruction of justice. She was imprisoned for 5 months.

<sup>15</sup> Enron Corporation was an American energy company formed in 1985, and based in Houston, Texas. The **Enron scandal**, revealed in Oct 2001, involved Enron and the accounting, auditing, and consultancy partnership of Arthur Andersen. The corporate scandal eventually led to Enron’s downfall, resulting in the largest bankruptcy in US history. Arthur Andersen, which was one of the 5 largest accounting firms in the world, was dissolved.

<sup>16</sup> *Surplus: Terrorized Into Being Consumers* is a 2003 Swedish documentary film on consumerism and globalization, done by director Erik Gandini and editor Johan Söderberg. It looks at the arguments for capitalism and technology, such as greater efficiency, more time and less work, and shows that these are not being fulfilled.

<sup>17</sup> *The Corporation* is a 2003 Canadian documentary film written by Joel Bakan, and directed by Mark Achbar & Jennifer Abbott. It criticizes the modern-day corporation, revealing it as a class of person, and evaluating its behaviour towards society and the world at large, as a psychiatrist might evaluate an ordinary person. This is explored through specific examples. *The Corporation* downloaded free: [http://www.archive.org/details/The\\_Corporation](http://www.archive.org/details/The_Corporation). Bakan wrote the book, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, during the filming of the documentary.

<sup>18</sup> *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* is a 2007 book by Canadian journalist Naomi Klein. The book argues that the free market policies of Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of Economics have risen to prominence in countries such as [Chile under Pinochet](#), [Russia under Yeltsin](#), the United States (for example in [New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina](#), specifically the privatization of the New Orleans Public Schools), the privatization of Iraq’s economy under the Coalition Provisional Authority, not because they were democratically popular, but because they were pushed through while the citizens of these countries were reacting to disasters or upheavals. It is implied that some of these shocks, such as the Falklands war, may have been created with the intention of being able to push through these unpopular reforms in the wake of the crisis.

<sup>19</sup> *Downsize This! Random Threats from an Unarmed American* is a book by US author and producer Michael Moore. It looks at the state of business and industry in the US and the power they hold over the US government. The book particularly criticizes corporations that care more for stockholders (known as shareholders in the UK) than the safety and wellbeing of the communities who work for them. The book is part of Moore’s ongoing campaign for increased corporate accountability.

<sup>20</sup> It is currently headed by Franklin Graham, son of the Christian evangelist Billy Graham: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritan%27s\\_Purse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritan%27s_Purse).



transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>21</sup> It operates in six continents with a US\$1.6 billion budget (2007). The group’s total revenue, including grants, product and foreign donations is \$2.6 billion (2008).

The first area that World Vision focuses on was orphans and other children in need, beginning in South Korea, then expanding throughout Asia. Today, they operate in more than 90 countries, focusing on larger issues of community development and advocacy for the poor aimed at helping poor children and their families build a sustainable future. In short, it is a very rich and organized evangelizing machine aimed at the Third World.<sup>22</sup>

**3.2.2 Criticisms of World Vision.** Although World Vision has consultative status with UNESCO and partnerships with UN agencies like UNICEF, WHO, UNHCR and ILO, its financial records reveal that it has funded evangelical activities all over the world.<sup>23</sup>

**Andrew Geoghegan**, reporting on a famine in Ethiopia, wrote how he visited his 14-year-old sponsor child, a girl who had “been part of a World Vision program all her life,” yet says (the translated subtitle), “Until recently, I didn’t know I had a sponsor.” When asked about her knowledge of World Vision sponsorship, she said, “Last time they gave me this jacket and a pen.” Geoghegan was disconcerted to find that despite being “told by World Vision that [the girl] was learning English at school, and was improving... she speaks no English at all.”<sup>24</sup>

In their response, World Vision states “World Vision unapologetically takes a community-based approach to development—a fact we publicly promote at every opportunity. Providing money directly to the families of sponsored children simply does not work, no matter how dire the circumstances. A ‘direct benefit’ approach creates jealousy among community members that do not have sponsored children and fosters an ethos of dependency. So while sponsored children may receive some direct benefits—like school materials or a jacket for warmth—this in no way represents the entirety of our work in a community, and it was disingenuous for the Foreign Correspondent story to imply this.”

It is clearly stated on the World Vision website: “When you make a gift, your contributions are pooled with that of other sponsors of children in the community where your child lives. Your child receives health care, education, nutritious food, and the entire community benefits from access to clean water, agricultural assistance, medical care, and more.”

Foreign Correspondent, in its reply to World Vision, says (in part): “Foreign Correspondent sought answers from World Vision representatives on why the organisation’s literature creates the impression that donated money goes directly to the sponsor child. The World Vision representative failed to adequately respond to the questions and instead outlined the community projects where sponsor money is spent. Foreign Correspondent does not dispute the integrity of World Vision projects but questions the way sponsorship is promoted to the public. In its response, World Vision has ignored the reporter’s surprise at finding his sponsor child speaks no English, yet he has been receiving regular reports from the organisation that she’s learning English at school and has a good command of the language.... Andrew Geoghegan has sponsored Tsehaynesh Delago for a decade and yet she claims she was unaware, until recently, that she had a sponsor and says the only benefit she has ever received directly from World Vision is a pen and the denim jacket she wore on the day of filming.”<sup>25</sup>

With the end of Western colonialism, we now see a new form of subtle colonialism, of which World Vision is a clear example. As education, knowledge and human right have grown globally, and nations

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/about/our-mission?Open&lpos=left\\_txt\\_Our-Mission](http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/about/our-mission?Open&lpos=left_txt_Our-Mission).

<sup>22</sup> See further “World Vision,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Vision#cite\\_note-ourmission-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Vision#cite_note-ourmission-0). On evangelization of the Akha hill tribe in north Thailand, see “Prisoner of a White God”: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5151512921334112942#>).

<sup>23</sup> See report by Tehelka, an Indian weekly, [http://www.tehelka.com/story\\_main.asp?filename=ts013004shashi.asp&id=6](http://www.tehelka.com/story_main.asp?filename=ts013004shashi.asp&id=6).

<sup>24</sup> **Geoghegan, Andrew**, “Ethiopia - The Endless Famine,” *Foreign Correspondent*, 25 Nov 2008, ser 18, ep 22, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

<sup>25</sup> ABC Material's Foreign Correspondent, *Foreign Correspondent story from Ethiopia broadcast*, broadcast on 25 Nov 2008, Australian Broadcasting Corp: [http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/World\\_Vision\\_FCPResponse.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/World_Vision_FCPResponse.htm).

become independent of the colonial yoke, the brash evangelical approach hardly works today. Organizations like World Vision ingeniously work with the machinery of social work and human dignity, but the dynamics are still to evangelize the world. Only this time, they are attracting non-Christians, including Buddhists, to donate to the efforts in evangelizing the world, or even, work for them in this direction.

Buddhists need to examine how our wealth and resources are being used, and how capable individuals and wealthy organizations can work together to at least uplift the numerous indigenous tribes and underprivileged peoples, especially those of Asia who have a connection with Buddhism. A good guide to what needs to be done to prevent “the demise of Buddhism” is Paul Hattaway’s *Peoples of the Buddhist World* (Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions, 2004). Although the book’s purpose is to list “lost peoples” to be evangelized for God, the book serves as a good index of those people with Buddhist heritage we need to work with.<sup>26</sup>

**3.3 THE RISE OF URBANIZED BUDDHISM.** Buddhism has been associated with wealth ever since the first monastery-park, the Bamboo Grove (*velu,vana*),<sup>27</sup> near Rājagaha, was donated by king Bimbisāra (c465-413 BCE) to the Buddha. However, during the Buddha’s life-time, none of the monastics owned any personal property. Assets just as the monastery-parks (*ārāma*) or residences (huts, buildings, etc) (*vihāra*)<sup>28</sup> were not donated to an individual, but always to “the Sangha of the four quarters” (*cātuddisa saṅgha*),<sup>29</sup> and was maintained by the donor.<sup>30</sup>

The monastics of the Buddha’s own times, if we accept the early Buddhist texts, live a moneyless life as celibate renunciants who lived mostly in monastic parks (*ārāma*). In due course, lay donors built various kinds of more permanent dwellings. Even though a more settled monastic life might have started in the Buddha’s own time, the majority of monastics were wandering renunciants, a lifestyle preserved by and adhered to by the forest monks of southeast Asia today.

Unfortunately, forest monks left behind practically no evidence of their presence because, as wanderers, they neither build nor dwell in buildings that would leave any trace for future archaeologists to work on. The kind of archaeological evidence provided by such archaeologists and scholars as John Marshall<sup>31</sup> and Gregory Schopen,<sup>32</sup> only reflect the lifestyle and works of *urbanized monks*, whose lives, unlike forest monks, centred around the textual studies and religious rituals (rather than meditation) and ritual purity (rather than moral purity as a basis for meditation).

<sup>26</sup> “Planning the demise of Buddhism,” <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=10,6724,0,0,1,0>. See also <http://www.goconnect.org/content/view/684/217/>.

<sup>27</sup> Further details on the Buddha’s early years at the Bamboo Grove and Rājagaha are found at Mv 1.22 = V 1:35-39, Cv 6.1.1- 6.4.10 = V 2:146-159. See also Nakamura 2000: 309-318 & nn. For defs, see CS Upasak 1975.

<sup>28</sup> Maha,vagga describes how monks of a monastery, having gone into the rain, wetting themselves, then entered “each into their own residence” (*yathā, vihāra*, Mv 8.15.4 = V 1:291); and how Suppiya, entering a monastery, went from *vihāra* to *vihāra*, from *pariveṇa* to *pariveṇa*, looking for any sick monk to attend to (Mv 6.23.1 = V 1:216). The Old Comy on Pārājika 2 (Pār 2.4.13 = V 3:50) def “property” (*vatthu*) as consisting of an *ārāma* or a *vihāra*, serving residences for the monastics. But here “property” should be understood as corporate property, owned by the Sangha as a whole.

<sup>29</sup> See Uma Chakravarti 1987:57.

<sup>30</sup> King Bimbisāra, eg, continued to support the Bamboo Grove after donating it: Mv 6.15 (V 1:206-208). See S Dutt 1962: 58-65.

<sup>31</sup> John Marshall, *Taxila: An illustrated account of archaeological excavations carried out at Taxila under the orders of the government of India between the years 1913-1934*, vol 1, Cambridge, 1951:204. See also RBDR Sahnj, *Archaeological Remains and Excavations at Bairat*, Jaipur, 1937:21 f & DB Diskalkar, “Excavations at Kasrawad,” *Indian Historical Quarterly* 25, 1949:21 ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected essays on the archaeology, epigraphy and texts of monasticism in India*, Studies in Buddhist Tradition series. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997:3-5. From Schopen’s works, he evidently used only archaeological finding but never worked in the field in India. Schopen accuses other scholars of over-relying on ancient Buddhist texts rather than “field-work,” but which he himself seems to have not done! He would certainly lose his credibility amongst serious scholars if he were to maintain the unfounded view that the Buddha was a “businessman” (<http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=106061>), not to mention the negative karma of misrepresenting a noble awakened being.

From the works of Marshall and Schopen (although the latter had never been to India), we apparently have evidence that these urbanized or settled monks *often owned considerable amounts of property, had money at their disposal, lending out money, and even in minting their own.*<sup>33</sup> With such evidence, we can surmise that during the period between the Buddha's passing and the Turkish Muslim invasions of India (leading to the disappearance of Buddhism from the subcontinent), there was a growing *laicization* of the Buddhist monastics in India (which is also growing tendency amongst Buddhist monastics today). This is clearly one of the reasons, and a very important one, too, for the decline and disappearance of Buddhism in India.

Scholars like Schopen propose that archaeological evidence *descriptively* reflects the true situation of the ancient monastics and monasteries, and charge that most scholars tend to look at Buddhism *prescriptively*, based exclusively on the ancient texts. In reality, both approaches are correct, depending on the academic purpose of the study. Schopen is looking only at *the worldly developments* of Buddhist history, while most scholars are interested in the Buddha's teachings.

It would be difficult to understand how such religiously materialistic monks of the Marshall and Schopen's research could ever hand down the kind of Buddhist spirituality we see today in the bona fide forest monks and serious lay practitioners, both of whom are able to taste the joyful stillness and pristine clarity of Buddhist meditation. Such a Dharma transmission is clearly contradictory to what those archaeological relics in question stood for.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.4 SELLING RELIGION.

**3.4.1 Religion as a business.** From the way that certain religions and religious sects propagate their beliefs, treating others has crops to be "harvested," animals to be "herded," regarding themselves as "fishers of men," it is meaningful to see such an approach as that of a commercial enterprise, so that religion becomes a commercial product that need to be sold at any cost, to dumped and flooded everywhere. As businesses are, as a rule, competitive, we inevitably see the rise of other "businesses," so that religious intolerance and social disruptions are common.

"Religious business" is now one a more global proportion than ever before. During the times of religious conquests and the colonial era, only colonizing forms of religion dominate the world, now we see all the world religions trying to span the globe, using a more commercial model of operation.<sup>35</sup> Networks of Buddhist temples, centres and fund-raising outposts, for example, are found all over the world. Clerics and monastics are amongst the richest people in our society, and indeed, in the world. This is what might be called "Business Buddhism."

It is understandable that money-driven Buddhism tends to be more focussed more on external show of faith, such as the thousand and millions of this chant or making religious objects,<sup>36</sup> worshipping relics,

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<sup>33</sup> Marshall, commenting on one of the numerous hoards of coins found at the monastic site surrounding the Dharmarājikā stupa at Taxila, said: "Probably the hollow block of kañjūr [scripture] was merely a secret hiding place where one of the monks hid his store of coins. . . the possession of money by a monk *was contrary, of course, to the rule of the Church*, but the many small hoards that have been found in monasteries of the early mediaeval period leave little room for doubt that by that time the rules had become more or less a dead letter" (1937:21 f). Schopen adds that "Such hoards, in fact, found in Buddhist monasteries that are very much earlier than 'the early mediaeval period'" (1997:17 n19). On the occurrences of money-minting in monasteries at Kasrawad, see Diskalkar, *IHQ* 25, 1949: 15; at Nālandā, B Kumar, *Archaeology of Pataliputra and Nalanda*, Delhi, 1987:212; SSP Sarasvati, *Coinage in Ancient India: A numismatic, archaeochemical and metallurgical study of ancient Indian coins*, vol 1, Delhi, 1986: 202 f; and Schopen 1997:5.

<sup>34</sup> See **Money & monastics** = SD 4.19 (9).

<sup>35</sup> For studies "religious retailing" of Christianity in America, see Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, New Haven: Yale Univ Press, 1995: 222–69; R Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, NY: Oxford Univ Press, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> The *Straits Times* (Singapore), 2 Dec 2009 (p A20) & 12 Dec 2009 (p C12) carried a good example of such an advertisement entitled, "The 100 million Mani chant retreat" led by rimpoches or "incarnate lamas" in Hall 603, Suntec Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre. Ticket price: general public, \$100; students & over-60s, \$80; lunch & dinner provided. Booking fee \$3. The blurb at the top of the advertisement says: "Dedicated



and loud rituals. They seem to bring immediate palpable results, and as such are popular—and most importantly they attract lucrative donations. This is the Buddhist opiate.

**3.4.2 Recidivist Buddhisms.** Much of Buddhism today is not only *brahminized*—we see rituals play a more significant role than self-effort, and monastics are treated as belonging to higher social class—but it is also becoming very much *commercialized*—most temples are preoccupied or heavily involved with fund-raising, buildings, property management and money-related affairs, and their hearts and works are heavily motivated by money and its related evils. But the roots of such a misdemeanour go very far back into our social history.

A careful study of Buddhism in China, for example, will show that since the rise of Chinese Buddhism during the Táng 唐 (690-705) and Sòng 宋 (960-1279) dynasties, is favoured by the powerful or the state, such patronages would result in professional rivalries and a re-definition or re-creation of Buddhism in the image of the elites.

In 8<sup>th</sup> century China, for example, the wily evangelist priest,<sup>37</sup> Shénhuǐ 神會 (688-762), and his followers, by manipulating public funds and by sheer serendipity, succeeded in promoting an image of Chán that we are familiar with to this day, but which, with the discovery of ancient documents in the Dūnhuáng 敦煌 caves, are beginning to unravel.<sup>38</sup>

Shénhuǐ, a southern China priest, jealous of the success and wealth of the northern Chán under the patronage of the empress Wǔ Zétiān 武則天 (r 625-705), accused his northern rival, the priest Shénxiù (神秀 605-706), of teaching a Hīnayānist doctrine of gradual enlightenment, and he himself promoted a “sudden” enlightenment doctrine. Shénhuǐ was in due course exiled for alleged conspiracy against the state, but when the emperor Xuánzōng 玄宗<sup>39</sup> badly needed money for social reconstruction after the devastating Ān Lùshān 安祿山 rebellion (755-763), the crowd-pleasing orator priest sold ordination certificates and raised huge funds for the emperor, who understandably favoured him as a result.

Putting his prodigious tale-spinning genius to his advantage, Shénhuǐ fabricated many of the Chán tales we know today, such as the coming of Bodhidharma from the west, the second Chinese patriarch, Huikě 慧可 cutting his arm before Bodhidharma, and most famously, the legend of the Sixth Patriarch.<sup>40</sup> Understandably, the more serious Chán practitioners today make an effort to return to the more traditional Tathāgata Chán.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, Shénhuǐ was not the only renegade priests. Another charismatic Chinese priest notorious for his jesuitry was the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Chán master Dàhuì Zōnggǎo 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163). To ensure the success of his own lineage, he strenuously discredited other meditation systems, and promoted his own form of koan (*gōng'àn* 公案) tradition, known as the “phrase-observing meditation” (*kānhuà chán* 看話禪).<sup>42</sup>

towards World Peace, End of Calamities & Epidemics. Prosperity & Well-Being of the Nation.” Let the wise tease out the true purpose of such a project.

<sup>37</sup> Sometimes I use the words “monk” and “priest” interchangeably. Where the person was is known to have a lax or controversial attitude to the Vinaya, I have generally used “priest,” as such a person tends to be more in rituals, socializing, even politicizing.

<sup>38</sup> See **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD 40b.7 (5.2.3, 5,2,5,1).

<sup>39</sup> 685-762, r 713-756. The 7<sup>th</sup> and longest reigning emperor of Táng.

<sup>40</sup> To be fair, it should be stated that what is described here refers only to “metropolitan Chán,” while the humble and authentic “Tathāgata Chán” continued quietly in the remote countryside. See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b.7 (5.2.1, 5.2.3-5).

<sup>41</sup> Ironically, it was Tathāgata Chán that Shénhuǐ pretended to uphold in his effort to knock down the “Purity Chán” of the north: see eg McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch’an Buddhism*, Honolulu, 1986: 229 f & WL Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, NY, 2006: 175 f.

<sup>42</sup> ISHII Shūdō, “Kung-an Ch’an and the *Tsung-men t’ung-yao chi*” (tr A Welter), 2000; Foulk, “The form and function of koan literature,” 2000: 22 f. See [http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?77.xml+id\('b770b-8a71-79aa'\)](http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?77.xml+id('b770b-8a71-79aa')).

In a characteristically Chán fashion, he ordered the suppression of his own teacher's masterly collection of koans, *the Blue Cliff Record*,<sup>43</sup> burning all copies and the wooden printing blocks, effectively taking the venerated text out of circulation for the next two centuries.

Although Dàhuì believed that koans were the best way to Chán enlightenment, being deeply influenced by Daoism and Confucianism, he declared, "If one achieves a genuine breakthrough, then (one realizes that) a Confucian is no different from a Buddhist, and a Buddhist is no different from a Confucian; a priest is no different from a layman, and a layman is no different from a priest; an ordinary man is no different from a sage, and a sage is no different from an ordinary man."<sup>44</sup> Either that, or he saw himself as even above China's greatest sages, which would then point to a megalomaniac tendency or delusions of personal grandeur.<sup>45</sup>

Such charismatic priests attracted great followings in their own times, left writings, teachings and monuments that effectively coloured much of Chinese Buddhism after them. Religious history here is indeed written by the powerful. Ambitious worldly priests would well look up to these huge self-made figures for inspiration. The alms-round may be very rare in China, Korea and Japan, but even in China today, it is common for priests to use their alms-bowl to beg for money.<sup>46</sup> After all, we one cannot be as successful as Shénhuì or Dàhuì, one would have to seek one's own living.<sup>47</sup> These are sad but classic examples of greed institutionalized.

**3.4.3 A prosperity cult.** Undoubtedly, the Chinese Mahāyāna priests are natural magnets for wealth, and they, as a rule, put their wealth to great religious and material success by way of impressive buildings and huge followings, often on an international, even global, scale. This surely must be the natural penchant of the Chinese to see wealth and prosperity in almost anything.

The famous Chinese Mahāyāna priest **Shì Xīngyún** is one of the world's richest men. And if we were to tally the collective wealth of such moneyed monastics, their collective wealth is easily more than that of a small nation. Such wealth is used to fund projects like impressive Buddhist complexes, centres, hospitals and universities. These are clearly good works in the eye of the world. However, because such projects are self-propelled by charismatic individuals and are heavily money-based, iniquities do plague some of these projects. Such problems include clerics earning corporate-level wages, power-based clanishness (for control of funds), under-declaration of income and profits, and priority got profit-driven projects.<sup>48</sup>

There are at least two factors that act as catalysts for the success of such priestly financial empires, or at least local religious enterprises, that is: (1) the traditional Chinese fetishist view of prosperity, and (2) the culture of silence. A "fetishist view of prosperity" refers to the view that wealth are evident in palpable things (there are many Chinese good luck symbols of prosperity, such as the colour red, the kumquat, the number 8, etc). There is also the view that if one is rich, it is the result of very good karma, and the rich should be respected as such. The Chinese culture of "face-saving" entails not divulging the wrong of others, and expressing only politically correct statements so that harmony is the status quo. There is also a generous view of compassion that if someone has been seen to do much good works, his wrongs should be discounted, even accepted.

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<sup>43</sup> *Biyán Lù* 碧巖錄; Jap *Hekigan roku* (ヘキガンロク); Kor *Byeogam nok* (벽암록); Viet *Bích nham lục*. A collection of 100 *gong'an* 公案, orig compiled by the 4th-generation Yunmen 雲門 monk Xuědòu Zhòngxiǎn 雪竇重顯 (980-1052) and later commented on by the 11<sup>th</sup>-cent monk Yuánwù Kèqín 圓悟克勤 (1063-1135). As an outstanding Chán literary work, it is a central object of study for later *kānhuà* (看話) practitioners [5.1.3.5]. (T2003.-48.139a-292a). For the text, see <http://perso.ens-lyon.fr/eric.boix/Koan/Hekiganroku/index.html>. See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.1.3.5; 5.5.1).

<sup>44</sup> Araki, *Daie Sho* 1969: 145.

<sup>45</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.1.3).

<sup>46</sup> Holmes Welch 1967: 207 f.

<sup>47</sup> For the related phenomena of "false monks and nuns" begging for money in Singapore and Malaysia, see **The Person in Buddhism** = SD 29.6b (4.3.3).

<sup>48</sup> See also the problem of kleptocracy: **Skillful means** = SD 30.8 (8.2).

All this is, of course, *delusion institutionalized*. Such views not only promote a relativist idea of moral goodness, but that wealth and might are right. With a better understanding of the Buddha Dharma, less Chinese Buddhists are subscribing to such unhealthy views.

**3.4.4 The Mingyi scandal.** There is much that we can learn from the sufferings of both the wise and the foolish, especially from current events. In 2008, Singapore Buddhists were greatly shaken and demoralized when her most prominent Mahāyāna Chinese priest, **Shi Mingyi** (GOH Kah Heng), 47, was charged with 10 criminal offences, amongst which were forgery of documents, lying to the Commissioner of Charities, misappropriating S\$350,000,<sup>49</sup> and an unlawful loan of \$50,000 to his close aide and companion, Raymond Yeung, 34, a HK man and ex-airline steward.<sup>50</sup> In November 2009, Mingyi and his companion, Yeung, were found guilty,<sup>51</sup> and given sentences of 10 months and 9 months, respectively, but pending other charges.<sup>52</sup>

Even before his crimes were revealed, Mingyi came into prominence for all the unmonkish reasons. Although the public generally admired his various high-profile stunts (such as abseiling down a 45-storey Singapore skyscraper) to raise funds for the Renci Hospital, where he was CEO (where he earned between S\$16,000-\$20,700 (2001), many were simply shocked and disillusioned when his private life became public.

A priest notwithstanding, Mingyi, the moneyed man of the cloth, was *the consummate materialistic Singaporean* with the 5 C's, that is,

- (1) some S\$570,000 cash in his personal account;
- (2) at least nine credits cards, including a gold card (with three supplementary cards for his aide);
- (3) in six years, he had at least three luxury cars in Singapore and a BMW S540 in Australia at A\$163,500; he gave a BMW 3-series to his aide.
- (4) a Vines Golf & Country Club membership in Perth, Australia, where he also owned property and a horse named Venezuela “as a pet”; and
- (5) a S\$1.38 million condominium in the Atria on upmarket Meyer Road and an A\$1.48 million penthouse (with a private lift), in Melbourne; he bought and sold at least six private properties in Singapore, Australia and the US, over a period of 20 years.

He was reported to have visited the Burswood Casino, Perth, goes on overseas holidays, and loved to go diving.<sup>53</sup> He also admitted to having a PhD title from a degree mill (Mannin University, Ireland). By his own admission, he was a “modern-day monk”:

“Buddhist monks are no longer living in the mountains or in the forest. We are in the city now,” he answered to a question about how religious people were very different now.”<sup>54</sup>

In July, 2009, this report by reporter Carolyn Quek appeared in an online forum:

After witnessing the public backlash from the National Kidney Foundation scandal in 2005, he [Mingyi] did not wish the same fate to befall Ren Ci.

“Yes I knew it was wrong (to cover-up the loan)... if there was a poisonous snake that crept into the building and a lot of people are there and the bite can kill, so I might kill the poisonous snake,” he said.

“Although I was wrong, I was looking at the big picture of Ren Ci. I did not want any more harm to Ren Ci. Because in Buddhism, we are supposed to abstain from killing, we are not supposed to kill. But however, to save more people, I would just have to kill the poisonous snake.”

DPP Singh said: “Were you looking after yourself?”

Ming Yi replied: “I had to look after myself in order to look after others.”

<sup>49</sup> This offence constitutes “defeat” (*pārājika*), but the Mahāyāna hierarchy in Singapore has been silent on this matter.

<sup>50</sup> [http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory\\_357651.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory_357651.html).

<sup>51</sup> [http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory\\_439530.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory_439530.html).

<sup>52</sup> [http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory\\_457359.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory_457359.html).

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/medical-monks-bizarre-perth-connection-20090720-dqnp.html>.

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=57,8414,0,0,1,0> & [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shi\\_Ming\\_Yi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shi_Ming_Yi).

He added: “I think when you talk about impermanence, even in a modern-day monk, in a modern-day world, in a modern-day society, which you talk about impermanence, the properties that I may have, I have sold them, the money that I may have, I will lose them at the end of the day. I will not always cling to it. That is impermanence.”

(<http://www.wallstraits.com/wsforum/showthread.php?tid=2784>)

Sadly, the Mingyi scandal is only the moneytheistic iceberg’s tip. For, when the prosecutor questioned Mingyi, “Is it okay for Buddhist monks to have properties in various parts of the world? Is that what a modern monk does?”

“There are many people who have that,” he ominously replied; that is, to say, there were many other Mahāyāna moneytheistic clergy like him.

Buddhists are generally forgiving, but many were deeply saddened in that he showed no remorse whatsoever throughout the trials. And after the sentence was passed, when a reporter asked for his response, he simply replied, “Life goes on.”<sup>55</sup>

On 21 November 2009 (a day after the Singapore Buddhist Federation celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the official opening of its new premises, attended by the Prime Minister), Mingyi, 47, was sentenced to 10 months’ jail, and his close aide (34-year old Raymond Yeung), to 9 months.<sup>56</sup> The Straits Times (ST 22 Nov 2009) reported that before entering the court for sentencing, the priest “thanked everyone for their concern,” and said that “he slept well the night before.”

Mingyi was jailed in May 2010, and released in September, “on good behaviour,” and put on home detention tagged with an electronic monitoring device for some weeks.<sup>57</sup> On 21 November, to celebrate his “rise to power” (升座庆典 *shēng zuò qìngdiǎn*) and 20-year “service” as Foo Hai Chan abbot, he threw a 60-table dinner (at S\$1000 each) in the Pan Pacific Hotel, reportedly costing a total of S\$200,000 (ST 2 Dec 2010: A8). There was a public uproar, but the Chinese clergy seemed divided as how to discipline or disrobe him. After the Foo Hai Chan temple trustees announced (ST 10 Dec 2010) that Mingyi would be removed from all positions related to finance, and would be relegated only to religious duties, he was not heard of since.<sup>58</sup>

**3.4.5 Marketing religion and its costs.** Religious materialism has reached such a sophisticated level that a growing number of religious organizations are turning to modern management methods, information technology IT (the use of computers, software and the internet) and aggressive marketing strategies. If religion is propaganda, then such organizations have been very successful influencing the masses and winning them as supporters and donors.

Religious moneytheists have long known that the more money we have they money—and power—we can get. The best way to do this is through effective *advertisement and marketing*. **Advertising** is communicating to influence others to purchase our products or services or support us or our views. Advertising are done through mass media methods, such as notices, billboards, fliers, newspapers, booklets, TV, websites, movies and public events.

**Marketing** is how we package ourselves and our products. Modern Buddhist priests wear impressive *uni-forms* which give the impression of status, power, wealth, or holiness. A “residence” (*vihāra*) is no more a tree-foot (*rukkha, mūla*) or monastery-park (*ārāma*), but an impressive temple or building. An im-

<sup>55</sup> On the 2009 cases of the Chinese priests Mingyi and Meow Ee, see **Money and monastics** = SD 4.19 (9.3).

<sup>56</sup> DPP Jaswant Singh remarked that the close and personal relationship between Mingyi and Raymond Yeung was crucial, as it meant Mingyi was willing to give Yeung the money. Mingyi, Yeung and another personal aide, Pang Leong Chuan, 27, were charged in court, Pang, who frequents Mingyi’s condo, pleaded guilty to possessing uncertified and obscene films, and was fined \$37,500 in Sep 2008. For another case of money controversy involving a wealthy Singaporean priest, Shih Meow Ee, over the funding of a building project, see <http://www.asiaone.com/Business/News/Office/Story/A1Story20080521-66279.html>. On the Buddha’s injunctions against monastics dealing with money, see **Money and monastics** = SD 4.19, esp (9.3).

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1077299/1/html>. For details, see <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1077299/1/html>.

<sup>58</sup> **Straits Times report**. The Straits Times (4 Oct 2010: B5) prominently featured him (incl a photo) as one of 6 suspected or convicted of “white-collar crimes” during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



pressive palatial building acts as a powerful meme<sup>59</sup> so that it is perceived as a place of peace, happiness and success.

A corollary to such marketing is to deprive any rival or potential adversary of being known and supported by others. The commonest method used by religious groups is some form of excommunication or exclusion, often imposed by a “silent treatment” of the perceived threat. The idea is to maintain a compassionate and engaging façade, and inducing others to think that the “adversaries” are themselves defective or at fault.

Another vital corollary to marketing themselves, money-based religions often employ well-qualified officers and workers and paying them very well, usually at market rate. Money easily buys the acquiescing loyalty of those who need it, and the organization easily recoups its investment and much more in due course. The presence of such well-qualified staff is itself an excellent marketing strategy.

Another strategy for effective religious marketing here is to engage academic specialists and scholars, or even employ them. After all, academicians cannot live by books and learning alone. Academic would often willingly be employed by wealthy temples or groups, which attaches prestige and credibility to the group and its beliefs and agenda.

All this would work well, of course, if such scholars and employees are either in need of financial support or have no objection to the ideology and intrigues of their employer. However, sooner or later, thoughtful and conscientious workers would be troubled on account of being exposed to the realities of religious materialism and temple intrigues. Serious and sustained breaches of Vinaya rules, misuse of funds, lavishly luxurious lifestyles of those who pretend to champion renunciation, simplicity and celibacy, and the sheer stress from working in an openly or subtly oppressive and worldly ambience, will take its toll. Invariably, the more conscientious Buddhist or morally resolute worker would flee from the scene like one whose turban is on fire—perhaps never again to return to that ghostly realm, or even to Buddhism.

As the Buddha declares in **the Mañi,cūḷaka Sutta** (S 42.10),

For whomever gold and silver [money] are allowable, for him the five cords of sense-pleasure are allowable, too. For whomever the five cords of sense-pleasure are allowable, you can for sure consider him as one who neither has the quality of a recluse nor is he a son of the Sakya.

(S 42.10.8/4:326) = SD 4.21

Money is what money buys. Since an urban monastic would have all the basic necessities in greater abundance than an average lay person, his or her money would go on to purchase what comes next, namely, greater comfort, pleasure and power. Is it morally or legally right that those who claim to be living a “renounced” life, have exponentially higher incomes than their average devotee, enjoying pleasures which even those devotees rarely or do not enjoy, and yet live tax-free lives? Even if they were to pay their taxes, does it make their religious materialism right?<sup>60</sup>

### **3.4.6 Work, wealth and wisdom.**

3.4.6.1 WATERSHED IN SINGAPORE BUDDHISM. Religious materialism has reached such a sophisticated level that we can be easily convinced that good works are more meaningful or valuable than true spiritual change. It is as if Mahāyāna is defined as “good works,” and that Hīnayāna spiritual change, even when positive, is a selfish reality. If we find it difficult to understand the rationale behind such Buddhist moneytheism, it all becomes painfully clear if we see it as *a business model* of religion.

There was a very marked shift in the way the various Buddhist organizations and groups in Singapore operated before 1980s and after that. The 1980s were a significant watershed because the great success of Buddhist Studies as a compulsory Religious Knowledge option in secondary schools in Singapore (1984-1989). The Buddhist Studies option was like a brilliant sunset before the dark night of predominantly

<sup>59</sup> A **meme** is a cultural element projected so that it replicates itself by infecting the minds of others and to draw them to itself. See **Memes** = SD 26.3.

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, one of the reasons for imperial persecutions of the Buddhist clergy was that many became clerics, simply to evade corvée, conscription and paying taxes: see **How Buddhism Became Chinese**: SD 40b (7.4.1).

modern money-based Buddhist activities, leading to the alienation of Buddhist groups in Singapore according to ethnicity. We shall examine these two important developments in turn.

3.4.6.2 BUDDHIST STUDIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS. Buddhist Studies as a Religious Knowledge was offered as a compulsory subject in upper secondary schools (secondary 2-4) in Singapore from 1984 to 1989.<sup>61</sup> This gave Buddhism a phenomenal boost, especially in a subsequent rise in the younger population of Buddhists who joined the tertiary educational institutions' Buddhist societies, and went on to join various Buddhist groups or form their own.<sup>62</sup>

The main reason for the success of Buddhist Studies<sup>63</sup>—the most popular of the six options of Buddhist Studies, Bible Knowledge, Confucian Ethics, Hindu Studies, Islamic Religious Knowledge, and Sikh Studies—was the use of a well-written set of textbooks and teacher's guides in simple language and approach which were well received by both the teachers and students.<sup>64</sup>

The Religious Knowledge option, sadly, was short-lived. On the ground level, I am confident that there are two reasons for this. Firstly, the Christian lobby were understandably uncomfortable with the success of Buddhist Studies, especially when they have a near-monopoly of using Bible Studies to convert the predominantly non-Christian Chinese students who favoured their mission schools.

Secondly, the technocrats (mostly academics, both in the government and in academia) felt that the selection of religions was biased: for example, Daoism, Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahá'ism were left out. Such courses could, they argued, encourage proselytism in schools. Most significantly, the promotion of religions in schools, especially making Religious Studies a compulsory option, goes against the grain of a secular nation.<sup>65</sup>

So in 1989, the Religious Knowledge programme was phased out. Bible Knowledge and Islamic Religious Knowledge continued as before, unaffected, in their respective niches. To complicate the situation, the 1980s saw the rise of *ethnic consciousness* in Singapore.<sup>66</sup> The sentiment apparently affected the elite Buddhists, too; but for quite a different reason, as we shall see.

3.4.6.3 ALIENATION OF BUDDHIST GROUPS. In Chinese Buddhist history, the late 9<sup>th</sup> century was a difficult time for the urban Buddhist elite, especially that of the Chán school. After the persecution of Buddhism in 845,<sup>67</sup> the Chán masters were dying without the rise of new ones. Within fifty years, a whole generation of illustrious Chán masters died one after the other: Guīshān 圭山, 853; Huángbò 黄檗, 855;

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<sup>61</sup> In 1990, the percentage of religious adherents was as follows: Buddhism (31.09%; 2000, 42.5%), Chinese traditional beliefs & Taoism (22.42%), Islam (15.40%), No religion (14.34%), Christianity (12.53%), Hinduism (3.68%), and other religions (0.55%). Of the ethnic composition of Buddhists, we have Chinese (99.61%), others (0.02%), Indians (0.16%), and Malays (0.01%). (KE Lau, *Singapore Census of Population 1990 Statistics Release 6: Religion, Childcare and Leisure Activities*, Singapore: Dept of Statistics, 1994: 47 Table 2).

<sup>62</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the Buddhist Studies project, see KE Kuah 1991. For a summary, see Jason Tan 1997: 612 f. It should be noted however these analyses were academic attempts that did not fully reflect the Buddhist perception of the project.

<sup>63</sup> The percentage breakdown of choices of Secondary 3 students in 1989 was as follows: Buddhist Studies (44.4%), Bible Knowledge (21.4%), Confucian Ethics (17.8%), Islamic Religious Knowledge (13.4%), Hindu Studies (2.7%), and Sikh Studies (0.4%): Jason Tan 2000: 89.

<sup>64</sup> Piya Tan (then **Piyasilo Bhikkhu**) served as regular consultant and lecturer of the Buddhist Studies Team (BUDS) of the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, led by Dr Ang Beng Choo, on (Buddhist Studies for Secondary Schools in Singapore, Ministry of Education). He was invited on board the team when previous proposals of syllabus and texts were rejected. Piyasilo submitted his sets of textbooks and the Integrated Syllabus, on which the Buddhist Studies syllabus and texts were based. See Piya Tan, *History of Buddhism*, 2004: ch 2 The spread of Buddhism (36).

<sup>65</sup> See Jason Tan 1997 & 2000. Charlene Tan (2008), in her journal paper, discusses some of the problems associated with the phenomenological approach to the teaching of religious knowledge in Singapore schools. She argues that such an approach may not be effective in helping the government achieve its educational objectives.

<sup>66</sup> H Mutalib, "Singapore's quest for a national identity: the triumphs and trials of government policies," in (eds) Ban Kah Choon, A Pakir & Tong Chee Kiong. *Imagining Singapore*, Singapore: Times Academic, 1992. See also Kuan Khun Eng 1998.

<sup>67</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (7.4.1.3).

Déshān 德山, 865; Línjì 臨濟, 866; Dōngshān 洞山, 869; Yǎngshān 仰山, 891; and Cáoshān 曹山, 900 [5.3.2]. Unlike Tiāntái or Huáyán, both of which were scripture-based, or Pure Land which was faith-based—Chán Buddhism *had always stressed on a personal religious experience*, that is, the Chán enlightenment and its certification by a living master. An important reason for the rise of the koan (*gōng'àn* 公案) [3.4.2] was that it served as a legitimizing ritual in the absence of a charismatic living master. In fact, the rise of *gōng'àn* anthologies was mainly due to this internal crisis<sup>68</sup>

A parallel crisis came to a head in the 1980s in Singapore Buddhism. The two key Chinese Mahāyāna patriarchs, SECK Hong Choon (釋宏船 SHÌ Hóngchuán, 1907-1990) and SECK Siong Khye (釋常凱 SHÌ Chángkǎi, 1916-1990), died in December and in September of 1990—dying within months of each other. The deaths of these two key leaders marked the end of the traditional era of Chinese Buddhism in Singapore, hallmarked by intra-Buddhist networking and inter-denominational cooperation. Under Hong Choon's quiet and gentle leadership, **the Singapore Buddhist Federation (SBF)** was a broad umbrella for local Buddhist organizations, while **the Singapore Buddhist Sangha Organization (SBSO)** brought together the monastics of the various denominations in the country.<sup>69</sup>

In the early 2000s, the SBF is apparently only an umbrella body of *Chinese Mahāyāna* organizations in Singapore. And the SBSO seems to have vanished altogether, not founded even on the internet. The Thai temples have their own Thai Sangha Samatcha or Thai Sangha Council. The Sinhalese missions each have their own Mahānāyaka Thera or chief high priest. There is only one major Myanmar temple here. And the various Tibetan temples, I was told by one of their administrators, do not want to have any umbrella organization since the lamas come only for rituals and fund-raising, and do not wish to be hampered in any way. There are no truly Singapore Buddhist temples at the moment.

Another disturbing development is the hegemony of particular Buddhist organizations (local and overseas) over the various tertiary Buddhist societies, so that their activities are controlled or dominated by a particular organization.<sup>70</sup> Usually, such organizations would give generous financial supports to these tertiary groups. Apparently, only the National University of Singapore Buddhist Society has managed to stay independent and non-sectarian, the main reason is probably because its Management Committee always comprises of various inter-national students.

In short, the Buddhist groups in Singapore during this period (2000s) are alienated, each going on their own steam. Never have the local Buddhist groups been so disunited and ethnically polarized as they are now in the 2000s. But there is one common feature in all these groups: they are all in quest of good works and wealth, or enjoying the benefits of their works and wealth. [6.2.3]

3.4.6.4 THE SPIRITUAL PURPOSE OF WEALTH. Both biblical Christianity and early Buddhism have a central teaching that *we are not saved by works alone*. In Buddhism, this means that even good karma chains us, albeit pleasantly, to the rut of the wheel of life and death, but bad karma holds us back in painful cycles. But most Buddhists have forgotten or choose to ignore this teaching, and go about collecting merit without training the mind. [7.3]

Both traditional Islam and early Buddhism exhort that *the wealthy should help the needy*. But most Buddhists of our times practise almost only ritual giving, not for the good of others, but only for selfish ends [6.4.1.]. On a social level, giving should benefit both the giver and the recipient. The giver practises charity (which is karmically wholesome), while the recipient is able to satisfy his basic needs and go on to cultivate his mind [7.4]. We give joyfully because we appreciate another being. In other words, Buddhist giving is not giving until it hurts, but giving until we cry with joy.

**3.4.7 Measuring religion by worldly success.** We often tend to judge a religion by its worldly success and statistics than by seeing how it helps in truly resolving our real problems. It is not that such reli-

<sup>68</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.1.3.4).

<sup>69</sup> As monk, I was made an SBSO member by the Hon Secretary, Maha Suvan Suranat himself.

<sup>70</sup> A main reason understandably is to control a source of graduates or technocrats to work for the organizations. Sadly, there was a serious lack of people-caring of these tertiary members. In Nov 2005, however, former NTUBS President, Toh Ai Kit, converted to evangelical Christianity (Campus Crusade for Christ), claiming that “loss of identity...no meaning and direction in what I was doing...my weak health...difficult to share my problems with others...suicidal thoughts”: <http://campus.sccc.org.sg/node/411>.

gious methods do not work, but it is like going to a *general practitioner* (GP) for a life-long illness, and being treated only *symptomatically*, so that we need to see the doctor again and again and become dependent on his medicines and advice. On the other hand, Buddhism provides a *specialist* approach, training us to look deep into our own minds for ourselves (for, who can do better?). In doing so, we see our issues at their roots, and as such are able to resolve them where *religion* only provides a diversion, or even go on to complicate the conditions.

Anyone caught up in the vicissitudes and challenges of the corporate, financial and professional lives, sooner or later feel the need to upgrade themselves. And there are numerous “get-rich-quick” and “sure success” courses by high-flying gurus, charging high fees. Very often, the finest minutes of such gurus’ spins are suspiciously a re-hash of religious ideals, especially Buddhist mind-training principles. One of the darkest episodes of Tibetan Buddhism today began when the American “geshe” **Michael Roach** (b 1952) was ordained as a Gelugpa monk (1983). In 1995, he received the *geshe* degree,<sup>71</sup> the first westerner to do so. But soon Roach showed his true colours.

Roach spent three years in “silent retreat” in the Arizona desert (Mar 2000-Jun 2003), accompanied by a woman “spiritual partner,” Christie McNally.<sup>72</sup> Roach’s behavior caused a shocking controversy in the Gelugpa community because he continued to call himself a Buddhist monk ordained within the tradition and wore the robes of a monk, despite living with a female partner.<sup>73</sup>

One of the most basic practices of a Buddhist monk or nun is to keep the head shaven and not to let the hair grow longer than the width of two fingers, and not to wear jewelry, perfumes or other adornments. After his three-year retreat, Roach wore his hair very long, and wore bangles and other jewelry. He claimed that his long hair and jewelry were to help “trigger” his final transformation to Buddhahood (claiming, by his actions, to be an 8th level Bodhisattva). In other words, he wore his hair and jewelry of the Buddhist Deity that he wished to become.

The Office of the Dalai Lama had spoken out against Roach, stating that his “unconventional behavior does not accord with His Holiness’s teachings and practices.” (id). On 24 May and 5 June 2006, the Private Secretary to the Dalai Lama wrote to Michael Roach, advising him not to visit Dharmasala to attend the Dalai Lama’s public teachings, thus: “...we advise you not to visit Dharmasala in the greater interest of the purity of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.”<sup>74</sup>

In recent times, Roach has risen in popularity in the US and elsewhere, and has followers and a centre, even in Singapore. The fever of the quest for wealth, success and power easily blinds us to the fact that the end does not justify the means. It is simply unethical and unwholesome that a monk makes money,<sup>75</sup> or worse, that a monk lives with a woman.<sup>76</sup>

The Roach aberration shows how religion can justify and glorify an intelligent self-centredness into the heights of a cavalier self-confidence. It also means that we need to seriously re-examine and overhaul certain traditional and cultural approaches to Buddhism in the face of the westernization, modernization and globalization of Buddhism. Otherwise, more Roaches would work with Māra at sucking away the life-sap of the Buddha Dharma.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> **Geshe** (Tib *dge bshes*, short for *dge ba'i bshes gnyen*, “virtuous friend,” tr of Skt *kalyana, mitra*) is a Tibetan Buddhist academic degree for monks. The degree is emphasized primarily by the Gelug lineage (to which the Dalai Lama belongs), but is also awarded in the Sakya and Bön traditions. It is like a western doctorate in Buddhist philosophy, but takes over 20 years to complete.

<sup>72</sup> See <http://diamondmountain.org/roots> & <http://www.mtexpress.com/2004/04-04-09/04-04-09monk.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/15/garden/15buddhists.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=1&ei=5087&em&en=729a029c0a34c0e5&ex=1211083200](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/15/garden/15buddhists.html?_r=1&pagewanted=1&ei=5087&em&en=729a029c0a34c0e5&ex=1211083200).

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.diamond-cutter.org/dalai-lama-office/dalai-lama-office-denounce.html>.

<sup>75</sup> See **Money and monastics** = SD 4.19-23. In Dec 2009, Roach appeared in the Popular Bookstore’s Bookfest-@Singapore (Suntec City) to promote “a more successful way of working and living.” The promotion poster showed him dressed in a suit, sporting well-groomed long hair.

<sup>76</sup> See **Sexuality** = SD 31.7 (2).

<sup>77</sup> See “mental slavery”: **The person in Buddhism** = SD 29.6b (7.4).



**3.5 MONASTICS SHOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH MONEY.** In the **(Abbha) Upakkilesa Sutta** (A 4.50), the Buddha warns renunciants against four things—*taking intoxicants, indulging in sex and sense-pleasures, using money, and wrong livelihood*—for, just as cloud, fog, haze and eclipse hide the sky, these activities effectively destroy the monastic life.<sup>78</sup> The fate of those who are *generous* (including being socially engaged, etc), says **the Jāṇussoṇī Sutta** (A 10.177), but *do not keep the precepts*, is not good either: they are reborn as well-loved elephants, horses, cows, chickens (that is, as mascots or pets), who would be recipients “of food, drink, garlands and various adornments”!<sup>79</sup> Regarding such teachings as “inferior” (*hīna, yāna*) does not change the truth an iota: if karma does not catch up with us, the law will, as clearly evident in Singapore in our own days.<sup>80</sup>

The point should be clear that *whatever activity a monastic indulges in, no matter how noble or compassionate, it should never be an excuse for belittling or banishing the Vinaya rules*. The Vinaya defines the monastic and his relationship with the laity: the monastic’s aim should be to awaken here and now, or at least work towards becoming an arhat or a bodhisattva—and not merely giving lip-service to a grand vision and printing free booklets about it. It would be very painful to fall from the high horse of monasticism.<sup>81</sup>

The Vinaya is unequivocally against monastic having anything to do with money and worldliness. But Buddhism is not against wealth for the laity. A number of important discourses address this issue. **The Anaṇa Sutta** (A 4.62), for example, speaks of the four kinds of happiness for a lay follower, as follows:

- (1) The joy of ownership (*atthi sukha*), that is, the bliss of knowing that we have honestly earned wealth through our own sweat and toil.
- (2) The joy of enjoyment (*bhoga sukha*), that is, the bliss of putting out wealth to beneficial use and doing acts of merit.
- (3) The joy of debtlessness (*anana sukha*), that is, the bliss, knowing that we have discharged all our debts.
- (4) The joy of blamelessness (*anavajja sukha*), that is, the blissful fact that we have done no wrong by way of body, speech or mind: we are morally virtuous and of wholesome heart.

(A 4.62/2:69) = SD 2.2<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, discourses such as **the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31) and **the Dīgha, jānu Sutta** (A 8.54. under “spiritual welfare”) admonish that if we are wealthy, it is our duty to bring happiness to others and help them.<sup>83</sup>

We must never forget an important historical fact. One of the reasons for the Turkish marauders’ targeting the Buddhist monasteries of 11<sup>th</sup>-century India was that they were very wealthy institutions. They knew of the fabulous wealth and lavish lifestyles of the Indian Buddhist monastics for decades, and descended on them like wolves upon a flock of fattened sheep. We need to rethink and redeploy our wealth in a Dharma-moved way, and we need to return to our spiritual roots.

**3.6 BUDDHIST ANTIDOTES TO INSTITUTIONALIZED EVILS.** The Buddhist understanding of karma is not merely the supremacy of good works. On the contrary, good works may help create and sustain present and future presence conditions of well-being., but the bottom line is that karma is a double-bind: it holds us back in samsara, the cycle of joy and pain, of redeath and rebirth.

<sup>78</sup> A 4.50/2:53 = SD 4.20.

<sup>79</sup> A 10.177/5:271 f = SD 2.6.

<sup>80</sup> On the cases of the 2009 monks Mingyi and Meow Ee, see **Money and Monastics** = SD 4.19 (9.3).

<sup>81</sup> MA 4:165 has a simile: falling from training in a non-Buddhist system is like falling from the back of a donkey: one is, at worst, covered with dust; but falling from monastic training is like falling from the back of an elephant, ie, because one has freely taken up the rules of training but fails to keep to them. On the 4 ways of living on alms—as a thief, a debtor, an heir and an owner—see MA 5:32, SA 2:199.

<sup>82</sup> See also **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54/4:281-285) = SD 5.10 & **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31) = SD 4.1 Intro (4).

<sup>83</sup> **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54.10-15/4:284 f) = SD 5.10 & **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31) = SD 4.1.

It should be properly understood that “**karma is intention**” (*cetanā’ham kamman vadāmi*).<sup>84</sup> Our negative intentions are those unwholesomely rooted in greed, hate and delusion. Each time a negative action is done with such an intention, it reinforces itself as a latent tendency. Its chance of arising again increases exponentially.<sup>85</sup>

The three unwholesome roots arise from our tendency to dichotomize things: we think and act in terms of the duality of our conceptions of good and evil. The grossest form of duality is to regard what reinforces our self-view as being good, and what benefits others as evil. When we rise above this self-other dichotomy, treating ourselves as we would others, then we would benefit both self and others. This is known as unconditional love or *lovingkindness*.

When we no more view the world in dualistic manner, we begin to transform the three unwholesome roots into their wholesome opposites, that is, greed into generosity, hate into lovingkindness, and delusion into wisdom. *Generosity* is not simply giving away our surpluses, but doing what we can to bridge or at least narrow the opportunity gap, as it were, between self and others. Out of *lovingkindness*, we help others so that they are in a better position to see the true qualities and potential. The underlying *wisdom* of this relationship is our awareness of the *interbeing of life and reality*, that nothing exists in itself, but continuously reflects one another.

We often discuss Buddhist doctrines on a micro-level, such as the development of the individual mind. When discussing the three unwholesome roots, we can usefully apply it on a macro-scale, for a better understanding of how corporations and institutions around us operate, **David Loy** gives us an insight into this widespread problem:

This brings us to a very important question for socially engaged Buddhism: do the three poisons also operate collectively? If there are collective selves, does that mean there are also collective greed, collective ill will, collective delusion?

The short answer, I believe, is yes: our present economic system institutionalizes greed, our militarism institutionalizes ill will, and our corporate media system institutionalizes delusion.

To repeat, the problem is not only that the three poisons operate collectively, but also that they have become institutionalized, with a life of their own. Today it is crucial for us to wake up and face the implications of these three institutional poisons. (2006: 5)

## 4 Institutionalized greed and lust

**4.1 SWALLOWING WORLDS.** Those of us living in cities and urban areas will always see eye-catching advertisements on ubiquitous billboards, windows and other prominent places. Such advertisements always try to sell us some products or services, whether we need them or not, and create new wants. The supermarkets and shopping complexes are even more enticing. Goods are arranged in ways that somehow would meet our eyes and our pockets. Once we start buying, we often buy more than we need, and pay more than originally planned.

While advertisements inform us about various products so that we have a range of products or services to choose from, we have to indirectly pay for costs of these advertising whenever we purchase it. We are also regularly reminded that better models of these products are available. So we are enticed into buying and spending things.

Often we are made to believe that a product is being offered very cheaply or in an affordable way, but once we sign the hire-purchase agreement, we end up repaying a loan with interests. The product actually costs more than if we had paid cash, or shopped around more carefully for what we really need. The professional sweet talk of the sales-person only convinces us to buy and spend more.

So we are caught in between the twin rocks of buying more than we need, and paying more than we have to. Our economic system has institutionalized *greed* by making us feel that the product is desirable, and as such need to spend more. This is even more formidably true on a macro-level: corporations are

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<sup>84</sup> A 3:416; Kvu 8.9.36/392.

<sup>85</sup> See *Anusaya* = SD 31.3.

*ever hungry for profits* (like the Marvel god-like character Galactus, swallowing planets and world systems, but is distant and beyond reproach). And we are conditioned by such companies and corporations that we are never buying or spending enough, we need to be constant consumers, like Galactus. So the world suffers.

**4.2 THE LATE-2000S RECESSION.** The global financial recession of 2007-2009 has been linked with the reckless and unsustainable lending practices resulting from the deregulation<sup>86</sup> and securitization<sup>87</sup> of real estate mortgages in the US.<sup>88</sup> The emergence of *sub-prime loan*<sup>89</sup> losses in 2007 triggered the crisis and exposed other risky loans and over-inflated asset prices. With loan losses rising and the fall of Lehman Brothers on 15 September 2008,<sup>90</sup> a major panic broke out on the inter-bank loan market. As share and housing prices rejected many large and well established investment and commercial banks in the US and Europe suffered huge losses and even faced bankruptcy, resulting in massive public financial assistance. The ensuing global recession resulted in a sharp drop in international trade, rising unemployment and slumping commodity prices.

Several interesting facts became apparent in the course of the recession. Richard Fuld, head of Lehman Brothers, hauled up before the US House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, was questioned by Rep Henry Waxman (D-CA): "Your company is now bankrupt, our economy is in crisis, but you get to keep \$480 million (£276 million). I have a very basic question for you, is this fair?" Fuld said that he had in fact taken about only \$300 million (£173 million) in pay and bonuses over the past eight years.<sup>91</sup> The truth is that such funds executives were still drawing huge pay and bonuses while others suffered during the recession.

On 12 March 2009, Bernard Madoff (former NASDAQ chairman and founder of Bernard L Madoff Investment Securities LLC) pled guilty to 11 federal offenses and admitted to operating what has been called the largest investor fraud ever committed by an individual. On 29 June 2009, he was sentenced to 150 years in prison with restitution of \$170 billion.<sup>92</sup> The repercussions of the recession and the selfish ploys of Madoff and others like him were global, with many losing huge savings; many committed suicide, as a result.

In 2009, Alan Greenspan, former US Federal Reserve chairman, admitted that he was "partially wrong" to oppose regulation of the markets, and expressed "shocked disbelief" at the failure of the self interest of the markets.<sup>93</sup> In other words, the experts were wrong and unsure what really happened.<sup>94</sup> The bottom line is the money people were greed-driven, either ignorant of their significance of the fact, or were not bothered by it. In either case, they were not concerned the broader social and global impact of their greed.

**4.3 AN ETHICAL "BLACK HOLE." David Loy**, in his paper, "The Three Poisons Institutionalized"

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<sup>86</sup> Deregulation is the removal or simplification of government rules and regulations that constrain the operation of market forces. See Arthur Sullivan & Steven M Sheffrin, *Economics: Principles in Action*, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2002.

<sup>87</sup> Securitisatation is a structured finance process that distributes risk by aggregating debt instruments in a pool, then issues new securities backed by the pool. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Securitization>.

<sup>88</sup> Fredric S Mishkin (governor, US Federal Reserve System), "How Should We Respond to Asset Price Bubbles?" (15 May 2008): <http://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/mishkin20080515a.htm>.

<sup>89</sup> Subprime lending (near-prime, non-prime, or second-chance lending) in finance means making loans that are in the riskiest category of consumer loans and are typically sold in a market from prime loans (less risky). Eg, because the Lims had not established a credit rating, they were forced to use a *sub-prime loan* to finance their first home purchase. The loan entailed interest payments at 9% per year and a cash down payment of 25%, whereas the going mortgage interest rate was 7.5% with 10% down payments readily available to more creditworthy borrowers.

<sup>90</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bankruptcy\\_of\\_Lehman\\_Brothers#cite\\_note-Fuld\\_punched\\_in\\_face-40](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bankruptcy_of_Lehman_Brothers#cite_note-Fuld_punched_in_face-40).

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financetopics/financialcrisis/3150319/Richard-Fuld-punched-in-face-in-Lehman-Brothers-gym.html>.

<sup>92</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madoff\\_investment\\_scandal#Suicide\\_of\\_clients](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madoff_investment_scandal#Suicide_of_clients).

<sup>93</sup> Mark Felsenthal (Reuters, 23 Oct 2009): [Greenspan "shocked" at credit system breakdown](http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/10/23/greenspan-shocked-at-credit-system-breakdown).

<sup>94</sup> On late-2000s recession, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late-2000s\\_recession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late-2000s_recession). For background financial market events to the crisis, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Financial\\_crisis\\_of\\_2007%E2%80%932009](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Financial_crisis_of_2007%E2%80%932009).

(2006) describes how the stock market works tends to function as an ethical “black hole” that dilutes the responsibility for the actual consequences of the collective greed that now fuels economic growth. On the one side of that hole, investors want increasing returns in the form of dividends and higher share prices. That is all that most of them care about, or need to care about—not because investors are bad people, but because *the system does not encourage any other kind of responsibility*.

On the other side of that black hole, however, this generalized expectation translates into an impersonal but constant pressure for profitability and growth, preferably in the short run. The globalization of corporate capitalism means that this emphasis on profitability and growth is firing up the engine of the world’s economic activity and over-riding everything else. Such things as the environment and the quality of life are apparently subordinated to this anonymous insatiable demand for ever more profit and growth.

Who is responsible for the pressure for growth? That’s the point: the system has attained a life of its own. We all participate in this process, as workers, employers, consumers, investors, and pensioners, with little if any personal sense of moral responsibility for what happens. Such awareness has been diffused so completely that it has become lost in the impersonal anonymity of the corporate economic system. In short, greed has been thoroughly institutionalized. (2006: 6)

**4.4 MORAL DECLINE IN THAI MONASTICISM.** Economic growth and success may bring greater wealth and higher living standards, but as history repeatedly shows, their impact of urban Buddhist monasticism tends to institutionalize greed. The case of Thai Buddhism had been well documented by specialists. Thailand had one of the fastest growth rates in the world, and as noted by **Kulick and Wilson**, she had to pay her price by way of social inequality (rural poor and urban rich), pollution and AIDS.<sup>95</sup>

Kulick and Wilson also note that Thailand’s rapid economic progress had a major negative impact on Buddhism. As a result of commercialism and consumerism, Thai Buddhism today had developed “many different faces” in its response to modernity: while some remained backward looking, others were more aligned to the individualistic urbanism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (1992: 103).

Since the 1990s, the marked moral decline of the Thai sangha was of serious concern among the Thai community. Thai monks become more involved in consumerism, commercial activities and scandals. Veteran Thai activist, **Sulak Sivaraksa**, notes that the Thai sangha was declining because “the monks follow the laity in consumer culture.” (1995: 4). **Santikaro Bhikkhu**, in an *Asiaweek* interview, similarly notes that many Thai monks have been corrupted by money, resulting in their moral decline.<sup>96</sup>

Commercialized Buddhism, or *phuttha phanit* (“Buddhist business”) includes a range of profitable and problematic activities, such as trading of expensive amulets and religious relics, using charismatic and high-profile monks as media superstars and selling religious products associated with them, and some monks and monasteries doing dishonest business dealings.<sup>97</sup>

One major scandal was that involving **Phra Dhammachayo**, the abbot of Wat Dhammakaya, one of the largest, wealthiest and most controversial temples in Thailand. He was charged with fraud, corruption and embezzlement of temple funds.<sup>98</sup> He was released on bail, after which he temporarily stepped down from clerical duties.<sup>99</sup> Another major scandal was that of the monk, **Wanchai Unsap**, who was arrested for impersonating an army colonel and cavorting with two women in a townhouse in suburban Bangkok. The police also found pornographic magazines, women’s lingerie, and whisky in his house.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Elliot Kulick & Dick Wilson, *Thailand’s Turn: Profile of a New Dragon*, NY: St Martin’s Press, 1992:115-123.

<sup>96</sup> *Asiaweek* 4 June 1999.

<sup>97</sup> Jackson 1997: 83.

<sup>98</sup> *Asiaweek* 14 May 1999; *The Nation* 11 June 1999; *Asiaweek* 17 Sep 1999.

<sup>99</sup> *Asiaweek* 22 Oct 1999.

<sup>100</sup> *Associated Press* 25 Oct 2000. I have discussed modern Thai Buddhism because, its social realities are well documented by specialists. Anthropologists have also noted similar developments in Sinhalese Buddhism. **Martin Southwold**, eg, says that in Sri Lanka, “it is a common saying that every temple has a well worn footpath at the back leading to the house of the priest’s mistress,” and quotes the example of a certain Guṇajoti (1983: 37). **Michael Carrithers** tells us that a priest Sumana “admitted to having committed a *pārājika* offence, that of theft...and he



Drug abuse was a serious problem in the Thai sangha, too. According to the Religious Affairs Department, about 10% of the monks needed help to overcome drug addiction. But the problem was shrouded by denial for fear of backlash from the faithful and the public.<sup>101</sup>

Such sad developments caused “widespread popular disenchantment with the established monkhood and fuelled a search for alternative, less tainted form of Buddhism.”<sup>102</sup> On a government level, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra made two minor changes to the 1962 Sangha Act, one in 1992 and the other in 2004. The 1992 amendment removes the king’s power to approve the appointment of the Supreme Patriarch (Article 7),<sup>103</sup> and the 2004 amendment appoints a panel of seven high-ranking monks to work on behalf of the ailing Supreme Patriarch.<sup>104</sup>

The revised Sangha Act was a religious legislation to arrest the moral decline of the Thai sangha. Of special significance is Section 26, which states that monks found guilty of any of the four defeat (*pārājika*) rules<sup>105</sup> will be defrocked within 24 hours, and those who refuse to do so shall be liable to a maximum sentence of 6 months’ jail. It has a number of other strict measures, such as summary defrocking of indisciplined monks, like those caught fighting.<sup>106</sup>

Only time will tell if the government legislation would work in arresting the moral decline of the Thai sangha. But here a legislation is better than none. Singapore, on the other hand, as a secular country, has no such legislation. As such, when the priest Mingyi [3.4.4] was charged with such crimes as misappropriation of funds (a *pārājika* offence), the local Chinese sangha and Buddhist authorities were silent on whether he should disrobe.<sup>107</sup>

## 5 Institutionalized hatred

**5.1 MILITARY SPENDING.** Before the Industrial Revolution,<sup>108</sup> wars (sustained armed conflicts involving two or more nations) were generally localized affairs or limited to the parties involved, and fought face-to-face between combatants. But the two World Wars show that war can have a global effect. In the twentieth century, between 55-97 million people were killed in wars—most of them non-combatants.<sup>109</sup> The United Nations was formed so that nations could present their issues, debate them, and resolve them without having to war over them.

However, while World War 2 marked the beginning of the end of empires, it also propelled the US into becoming a new world power, and is becoming an increasingly militarized society. Global military expenditures, including the arms trade, amounted to the world’s largest expenditure in 2005: over a trillion US dollars, almost half of which was spent by the US alone. On the other hand, the United Nations,

gave up his fully ordained status, to remain a novice for the rest of his life” (1983: 157). On Myanmar, see Leider 2006.

<sup>101</sup> *South China Morning Post* 28 Mar 2001.

<sup>102</sup> Jackson 1997: 80.

<sup>103</sup> *The Nation* 20 Apr 2002.

<sup>104</sup> *Bangkok Post* 10 Aug 2004.

<sup>105</sup> For monastics, the 4 “defeat” (*pārājika*)—killing a human being or abetting suicide, any kind of sexual act, taking the not-given (worth about 5 cents or more), or claiming to possess higher attainment—automatically makes one lose one’s monastic status. On meaning of *pārājika*, see V:H 3:38 n3.

<sup>106</sup> See Suksamran 2006: 10-12.

<sup>107</sup> A significant case of institutionalized lust is that of the official cover-up of child abuse by the Catholic church, which has been mentioned elsewhere: see *Vedanā* = SD 17.3 (2.3). See esp: <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/sex-crimes-and-the-vatican/> & its transcript <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/5402928.stm>.

<sup>108</sup> The Industrial Revolution, spanning the 18th to the 19th century, introduced major changes in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and transport that had a profound effect on the socioeconomic and cultural conditions in the UK. The changes subsequently spread throughout Europe, North America, and eventually the world. The onset of the Industrial Revolution marked a major turning point in human history, eventually influencing almost every aspect of our daily lives. A major feature of the Revolution was the cheap and large-scale production of goods that could be sold on a global market. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution).

<sup>109</sup> World War 1 (1914-18), 15M-25M; World War 2 (1939-45), 40M-72M. Loy gives higher figures: 105-170M (2006: 6). See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_wars\\_and\\_disasters\\_by\\_death\\_toll](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wars_and_disasters_by_death_toll).

including all of its agencies and funds, spends only about 10 billion dollars a year.<sup>110</sup>

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the US was looking for suitable nations as a scratching pole for its war offensive abilities. In 2003, the quixotic US President George W Bush, with the assistance of Great Britain, unilaterally invaded Iraq, claiming that she had “weapons of mass destruction,” but none of which were ever found. The US, with its military might, occupied Iraq, but embarrassed itself before the world. Bush’s hate of the Muslims only escalated suicide bombings in those areas seen as supporting the US. As **David Loy** observes:

From a Buddhist perspective, the “war on terror” looks like an Abrahamic civil war. Despite being on opposite sides, George W Bush and Osama bin Laden share a similar understanding about the struggle between good and evil, and the need to destroy evil. Ironically, however, one of the main causes of evil historically has been the attempt to get rid of evil. Hitler, Stalin, and Mao were all attempting to purify humanity by eliminating what they saw as its negative elements (Jews, kulaks,<sup>111</sup> landlords)....

Terrorism cannot be destroyed militarily because it is a tactic, not an enemy. If war is the terrorism of the rich, terrorism is the war of the poor and disempowered. We must find other, non-militaristic ways to address its root causes. (2006: 6)

**5.2 QUIXOTIC POLITICS.** George W Bush’s double tenure as US president (2000-2008) is commonly seen as one of the lowest points in US history with painful global implications. Bush won his two-term presidency with the support of the Christian right fundamentalists, and he showed dangerous religious bias. The Bush Doctrine comprised various related foreign policy principles. Initially, this policy was that the US had the right to “secure itself” from any country that harboured or helped any terrorist group. Using this excuse, Bush launched the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan in an effort to destroy the Taliban, an extremist fundamentalist Islamist group.<sup>112</sup>

Later, the doctrine included additional elements, such as: the controversial policy of “preventive war,” which held that the US should depose foreign regimes that it was a potential or perceived threat to its security, even if that threat was not immediate; a policy of spreading democracy (including “religious freedom,” which meant allowing Christian groups to operate) around the world, especially in the Middle East (and China), as a strategy for combating terrorism; and a willingness to pursue US military interests in a unilateral way.<sup>113</sup>

**5.3 ON-GOING CRUSADE?** Two examples of Bush’s quixotically confrontational and belligerent attitude would suffice. Firstly, on 16 September 2001, Bush referred to his war in Afghanistan as a “crusade.”<sup>114</sup> The Arabic word for *crusade* means “war of the cross,” thus, many Arabic speakers misinterpreted this usage as an imperialist attack on the Muslim world as a whole.

Muslims generally understand term *crusade* historically as a European colonization of their lands, and take it to be an example of an attempt to destroy the Muslim way of life. In addition to believing the West had “a well-thought-out scheme the object of which is first to shake the foundations of Islamic beliefs,” **Sayyid Qutb**, for example, wrote that the medieval Christian Crusades were not “a form of imperialism,” but rather Western imperialism was a new form of the Crusades, “latter-day” imperialism in Muslim lands being “but a mask for the crusading spirit.”<sup>115</sup>

<sup>110</sup> This section, a summary of David Loy 2006: 6.

<sup>111</sup> The kulaks (Russian: кулак, *kulak*, “fist”; by extension “tight-fisted”) were a category of relatively wealthy peasant land-owning farmers in the later Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, and early Soviet Union.

<sup>112</sup> Steven R Weisman, “Editorial Observer: President Bush and the Middle East Axis of Ambiguity,” *New York Times*, 13 Apr 2002.

<sup>113</sup> Mike Allen, “Edwards Rejects the 'War on Terror',” *Time*. 2 May 2007. Mark Levin, “...and another thing: First Things First,” *National Review*. 6 Aug 2006. Susan Page, “Confronting Iraq,” *USA Today Education*, 17 Mar 2003.

<sup>114</sup> <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, he Mother Mosque Foundation, 1981: 159-160. Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) was an Egyptian author, educator, Islamist, poet, and the leading intellectual of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the

Secondly, in an address to a joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001, Bush, alluding to the Bible,<sup>116</sup> said, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”<sup>117</sup> Such a unilateral attitude reflects a lack of self-confidence as well as a patriarchal tribalist mentality. Such an ideology ironically sees a clearly divorced I and thou—fuelled by the diktat, “either you are with us or against us”—and if you are against us, you deserve every punishment, including subjugation and death. Indeed, tribalism is at the root of the world’s injustices, persecutions, violence, and wars. As the Irish satirist and social critic, **Jonathan Swift**, writes, “We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.” (*Thoughts on Various Subjects*, 1706).

Hate is institutionalized when a group becomes a tribe that cannot see *beyond* itself, or when a political ideology tries to promote *itself* against others. The false notion of a duality of self and others is operating here, by way of a desire to convert, if not to destroy, the other. On the other hand, a true global leadership is one that is conciliatory, win-win approach, free from religious extremism and proselytism. This begins with the willing to accept that there are others who are different, and that it is all right to be different, and to find ways of contributing to the common good and happiness.<sup>118</sup>

**5.4 BUDDHIST IMPRIMATUR?** When hate is institutionalized, the next stage is that of intolerance and persecution by those in power. This intolerance may take the form of filtering or restricting that flow of Buddhist information, or what is allowed or not allowed to written or spoken of Buddhism—in other words, an *imprimatur* (a Catholic term for the official approval granted before books on the faith could be published).

The *Daily Mirror* (23 Oct 2009) of Sri Lanka reports that the Mahanayaka Theras (chief high priests) of the three Nikayas (Buddhist sects) have submitted a memorandum to President Mahinda Rajapaksa proposing to set up a Board of the Maha Sangha and laymen to vet books pertaining to Buddhism. The Mahanayake Theras of the Malwatta and Asgiriya chapters of the Siyam Nikaya and Amarapura and Ramannya Nikayas in a joint memorandum to President Rajapaksa, stated that this procedure was necessary to “prevent and avoid the publication of books distorting the life of the Buddha and Buddhism.”<sup>119</sup>

If this request by the Mahanayakas were made into law, it would at best only apply to Sri Lanka. The effect sadly would be to restrict the freedom of speech and expression of Buddhists there, but would have no clout anywhere else. The reality, often seen in Buddhist (and religious) history, is that even without an imprimatur law, Buddhism is defined by the elite. Such a situation is especially true when Buddhism enjoyed the status of state religion.<sup>120</sup>

In Singapore, the Media Development Authority would vet religious books and materials, and ban them if they are found to misrepresent or attack a religion. Buddhism and Buddhists are the favourite targets of proselytizing evangelists mainly because we do not have a consolidated front to keep them out. Moreover, Buddhists are generally a very tolerant lot. In fact, Buddhists are often more tolerant of other religionists than they are of other Buddhists. A main reason for this, I think, is that every Buddhist has his own Buddhism, and does not like others who challenge that dogma. Such Buddhists seems to sit on their

1950s and ‘60s. Some Muslims consider him a martyr (*shahid*) because of his execution by Nasser’s government. See also: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War\\_against\\_Islam#Crusades](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_against_Islam#Crusades).

<sup>116</sup> “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” (Matthew 12.30, King James Version)

<sup>117</sup> [WhiteHouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, 20 Sep 2001. See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You%27re\\_either\\_with\\_us\\_or\\_against\\_us#cite\\_note-8](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You%27re_either_with_us_or_against_us#cite_note-8). V I Lenin, Russian Marxist leader of the 1917 October Revolution, in a speech discussing the Chief Committee for Political Education, told the assembled delegates that “It is with absolute frankness that we speak of this struggle of the proletariat; each man must choose between joining our side or the other side. Any attempt to avoid taking sides in this issue must end in fiasco.” (Speech delivered at an All-Russia Conference of Political Education Workers of Gubernia and Uyezd Education Departments, 3 Nov 1920). For refs, see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You're\\_either\\_with\\_us\\_or\\_against\\_us](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You're_either_with_us_or_against_us)

<sup>118</sup> See **Self & selves** = SD 26.9 (4.1).

<sup>119</sup> LB Senaratne, *Daily Mirror*, 23 Oct 2009; see <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=43,8627,0,0,1,0>.

<sup>120</sup> See eg **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD 40b (1.2.5; 5.2.2; 7.4.2).

private mountain peak, and suffers no one to uncloud such peak-experiences. We are then idol-worshippers, too; for, we worship and adore our own views.

**5.5 MOVING ON.** We even pride in the humility that we know nothing about the Suttas, and then go on talking about it anyway. If we lack knowledge of Buddhism, shouldn't we be moved study the Dharma more? If we have only two cents (more or less) worth of Buddhist knowledge, shouldn't we save more before trying to give it away?

On the positive side, when we are really tolerant, we learn more about ourselves, so that we are spiritually stronger.<sup>121</sup> As Buddhists, we generally do not mind others criticizing us. As the Buddha advises us, this is nothing to be upset about:<sup>122</sup> if the criticism were true, then we should thank the person for taking the time and trouble for pointing it out, so that we can rectify that weakness. On the other hand, if the criticism were false, then we need not be troubled by it; for, the truth will out.

Now, why would these mud-slingers sacrifice their precious time to write something “bad” about Buddhism? Firstly, they feel uneasily suspect that the Buddha has taught some profound and powerful truth. Secondly, I think they feel a real sense of threat, that Buddhism is growing too well and too fast. Thirdly, they obviously lack faith in their own religion to think that their religion can grow by their talking bad about other religions!<sup>123</sup> It is meaningless to think that there are good religions because there are bad ones. All religions have a vision of inner joy or emotional independence, but it is up to the pilgrim on that path to go on walking, to keep moving on in that direction.

## 6 Institutionalized delusion

### 6.1 LIVING SPACE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

#### 6.1.1 Ecology and environment

6.1.1.1 BUDDHIST ECOLOGY. The prophetic **Cakka,vatti Siha,nāda Sutta** (D 26) gives an uncannily realistic warning that when society becomes crowded up. The Sutta gives us this ominous picture of a highly urbanized of our own times, as it were:

Bhikshus, amongst humans whose life-span is 80,000 years, this Jambu,dīpa [India], will be powerful and prosperous, with villages, market towns and capitals, no more than a chicken's flight apart.

Bhikshus, amongst humans whose life-span is 80,000 years, this Jambu,dīpa [India], will be crowded with people—it is Avīci,<sup>124</sup> I say—just like a forest of reeds or a forest of rushes.

(D 26.23b/3:73) = SD 36.10

There is a broad hint here on the vital need for space for wholesome living. Furthermore, the *quality* of such a space is essential for wholesome living. The Vinaya, for example, forbids monastics from fouling up the environment: they should dispose of meal leftovers “where there is no grass or drop it into water where there is no life.”<sup>125</sup>

<sup>121</sup> *Ye keci sikkhā,kāmā ti*, D 2:101/3:58, 77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164.

<sup>122</sup> See **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22), where the Buddha instructs the monks not to feel negative when others abuse them, and not to be elated when others praise them (M 22.39/1:140) = SD 3.13. Cf **Mahā Hatthi,padopama S** (M 28.8/1:185 f) = SD 6.16.

<sup>123</sup> See “Talking bad about Buddhism,” in Piya Tan, *Simple Joys*, 2009 (19.8).

<sup>124</sup> **Avīci** (“uninterrupted”) is the most crowded of the hell states (*niraya*). It is possible that the term is first used here in a lit sense meaning “without a gap” (*a-vīci*), and later applied to the hell. See **Cakka,vatti Siha,nāda S** (D 26.23b/3:73) = SD 36.10.

<sup>125</sup> Pāc 20/V 4:48 f (MA 1:94). On the instruction, “I shall dispose of it where there are no plants or drop it into water where there is no life,” see V 1:157, 2:216; M 1:207, 3:157; S 1:169; Sn p15. Pāc 20 and 62 make it an offence for monks knowingly to make use of water than contains life (V 4:48 f, 125). The Training rules (*sekhiya*) prohibits bhikshus, if they are not ill, from easing or spitting on plants.



It is clear from the early Buddhist texts that the Buddha and his saints show a great love and connection with nature.<sup>126</sup> Such a love for nature entails a respect for life, too. In fact, early Buddhism is clearly life-centred, as reflected in the very first of the five precepts, which is the training to refraining from taking life, human or non-human. This affinity with nature is reflected in the early “monasteries” which were spacious and pleasant parks (*ārāma*), so that even monasteries of later times, too, embrace natural spaces and plants. Buddhism, in short, shows a great awareness and respect for a healthy ecology.

6.1.1.2 MAN-CENTRED ECOLOGICAL CRISIS. If Buddhism is ecologically friendly from the start, it is difficult to say the same of other faiths, especially the God-religions. **Lynn White Jr**, in an influential article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967), argues that Judaeo-Christian religious assumptions that underlie Western culture are largely at the root of the attitudes that he blames for our environmental degradation.

Among these attitudes, he claims, is a faith in perpetual progress that is indefensible apart from a particular kind of teleology (God’s purpose). It is based on Bible story in which God creates the world and all living things for the express benefit of man. (Woman is an afterthought and also created for man’s benefit, to prevent him from being lonely.)

According to this religious view, says White, everything in physical creation serves *only* man’s purposes. Man, in other words, is the master of nature and has dominion over all, second only to God himself (as celebrated in Psalm 8). This celebration is rooted in Genesis 1, where God says to Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth.”

As such, argues White, Christianity is *the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen*. He warns that “we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man” (1967:54).

6.1.1.3 DOOMSDAY ECOLOGICAL CRISIS. **Robert T Pennock**, in his *Cambridge Companion to the Philosophy of Biology* entry. “Biology and religion” (2007), list a further religious impediment to solving our environmental problems. This impediment is especially found in the beliefs of certain fundamentalist Christian sects in the United States who hold that we are already living in what they call the “end times.” Such fundamentalists hold that biblical prophesies, particularly in the Book of Revelation, of signs and events portending the end of the world indicate that this would probably happen in our lifetime.

That being the case, they reason, why worry about loss of biodiversity, global warming, or other environmental problems, since the world is about to end and the true believers would be taken to heaven to sit by God?<sup>127</sup> Given that polls show that 59 percent of Americans believe that the prophecies of Revelation would come true, notes veteran US journalist, **Bill Moyers**, this religious impediment to environmental care may be a larger problem than even the Christian stewardship model of the good Saint Francis can overcome.<sup>128</sup> When a religious delusion is upheld by a large dominant community, in this case of God and the environment, it can have widespread, even globally, disastrous impact.

**6.1.2 The moral hazards of urbanization.** The prophetic **Cakka,vatti Siha,nāda Sutta** (D 26) not only warns us of society becoming crowded up [6.1.2], but that such a stifling environment, fed by widespread prosperity, its affluent members, intoxicated by the delusion that often shadows wealth, tend towards various iniquities. Each new immoral generation thereafter become more short lived and more immoral than the preceding. At one point, the Sutta prophesizes:

<sup>126</sup> See eg **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) where the Buddha speaks of the beauty of tree-shrines (D 16.3.1+2/2:102) = SD 9. On Mahā Kassapa’s joy towards nature, see **Mahā Kassapa Tha** (Tha 1051-1090) = SD 75.3. For a tree imagery, see **Rukkha S** (S 46.39/5:96 f) = SD 75.2.

<sup>127</sup> Around 2004, the evangelical James Watt, secretary of the Interior under President Reagan, in public testimony before Congress said that it was unimportant to protect natural resources because of the imminent return of Jesus—“after the last tree is felled, Christ will come back.” Although this attribution was later said to be unfounded, that he was attributed such a statement at all was significant in itself, as it reflected the fundamentalist mindset. See <http://www.grist.org/article/scherer-christian/>.

<sup>128</sup> B Moyers, “On receiving Harvard Medical School’s Global Environment Citizen Award,” see <http://www.commondreams.org/views04/1206-10.htm>, 6 Dec 2006. Quoted by Pennock 2007.

**17e** Now, bhikshus, amongst those humans whose life-span was 500 years, three things were widespread, that is, abnormal lust, uncontrolled desire and deviant conduct.<sup>129</sup>

With the increase of wrong view, the life-span of beings declined, their beauty declined, too.

For these humans whose life-span and beauty were declining, whose lifespan was 2,000 years, that of some of their children was 500 years.

**17f** Bhikshus, with the increase of these three things, the life-span of beings declined, their beauty declined, too.

For these humans whose life-span and beauty were declining, whose lifespan was 500 years, that of some of their children was 250 years, and some 200 years.

**17g** Now, bhikshus, amongst those humans whose life-span was 250 years, these things were widespread amongst humans, that is, disrespect towards mother, disrespect towards father, disrespect towards recluseship [the spiritual life], disrespect towards celibacy [the holy life], and lack of respect for family elders.<sup>130</sup> (D 26.17/3:70) = SD 36.10

In verse 17e, Buddhaghosa explains “**abnormal lust**” (*adhamma, rāga*) as incest, that is, “lust between mother and mother’s sister and father’s sister and maternal uncle’s wife and other such improper situations”; “**excessive greed**” (*visama, lobha*) or “neurotic desire,” as excessive greed by way of consuming things (*paribhoga, yuttesu pi thānesu atibalava, lobho*), in other words, unbridled materialism and consumerism); and “**deviant conduct**” (*micchā, dhamma*) as homosexuality, that is, sex “between men and men, women with women.”<sup>131</sup> (DA 3:853).

It is noteworthy here that *consumerism* is mentioned in the context of an affluent society, beset with other evils, such as incest and homosexuality. Personal affluence and a busy society crowded that alienates individuals foments such psychosocial aberrations. Each of us are forced into an I-pod of narcissistic tendencies. We are already bored with the daily grind and life’s routines, so we seek the spice of variety in other ways. Variety may be the spice of life, but too much spice spoils the dish and harms our health.

The Buddha is familiar with this sort of problem, because troubled the society of his times, too. The Buddhist training begins with moral virtue (at least keeping to the five precepts) because we do not live alone. In fact, we inhabit a bubble bigger than our individual I-pods, and this overwhelming bubble largely determine how we understand ourselves and the world. **Loy** explains:

The institution most responsible for molding our collective sense of self is the mass media, which has become our “group nervous system.” Genuine democracy requires an independent and activist press that can expose abuse and discuss political issues. In the process of becoming mega-corporations, however, the major media have abandoned all but the pretense of objectivity.

Since they are profit-making institutions whose bottom-line is advertising revenue, their main concern is to do whatever maximizes those profits. It is never in their own interest to question the grip of consumerism. Thanks to clever advertisements, my son can learn to crave Nike shoes and Gap shirts without ever wondering about how they are made. I can satisfy my coffee and chocolate cravings without any awareness of the social conditions of the farmers who grow the crops used to make those commodities for me, and, even more disturbingly, without any consciousness of what is happening to the biosphere: global warming, disappearing rainforests, species extinction, and so forth. (2006: 6)

## 6.2 BUDDHIST CONGLOMERATES AND MNCs.

**6.2.1 Cultural Buddhisms.** The Buddhist world today is dominated by conglomerates and MNCs that use the name of Buddhism to propagate themselves. So successful and influential are they that they

<sup>129</sup> *Adhamma, rāgo visama, lobho micchā, dhammo.*

<sup>130</sup> *Amatteyyatā apetteyyatā asāmaññatā abrahmaññatā na kule, jeṭṭh’āpacāyitā.*

<sup>131</sup> See **Saññoga S** (A 7.48/4 :57-59) & SD 8.7 Intro (1).

are re-defining Buddhism. By “conglomerate” I mean Buddhist missions by traditionally Buddhist countries, especially Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar. Such missions as a rule propagate a cultural form of Buddhism—Sinhalese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism and Myanmarese Buddhism—instead of early Buddhism. Cultural forms of Buddhism generally cater for or attract only Buddhists of those cultures or those who “have gone native” (such as partners, spouses and the occasional stragglers). Scholars sometimes call this “immigrant Buddhism” or “imported Buddhism.”<sup>132</sup>

Most non-Asian westerners would not be able to relate to either immigrant Buddhism or imported Buddhism because of cultural differences. Moreover, cultural Buddhism (a generic name for both forms of Buddhism) tends towards rituals and cultural festivals, whereas western Buddhists are more interested in meditation and a more serious study of Buddhist doctrines. On a positive note, we are seeing more of cultural Buddhists in Singapore, Malaysia and Australia who are keen in both a good understanding of the Dharma and of meditation practice.

**6.2.2 How win funds and influence the rich.** One dark side of cultural conglomerates is that they tend to be mainly focussed on fund-raising, and become outposts for priestly fortune-seekers to visit in their quest for linking up with wealthy lay sponsors or accumulate some funds before moving on or returning to their native land. Even in their own native “Buddhist” countries, the situation is not better. **Somboon Sooksamran**, in his paper, “Buddhism, Politics, and scandals: A study of the changing function of the Sangha Act” (2006), makes this ominous observation, that

the Sangha Act has changed from its traditional political functions to take on its new religious functions. As the Thai state becomes increasingly secularized, the Sangha Act is no longer reformed to parallel the secular political transformations of the government and has gradually lost its political purpose. Buddhism has become increasingly commercialized and many monks have become more interested in the consumer culture of the laity than in their own religious affairs. All these have directly and indirectly resulted in the decline in the discipline of the Sangha. The need to strengthen the moral principles of individual monks has become an important concern to the Sangha authorities and the Thai community at large. (2006: 12 f)

The act now acts as a legal tool for the authorities to take legal action against erring monks who have breached monastic discipline, transgressed the law, or committed a crime.

**HL Seneviratne**, in his *The Work of Kings* (1999), asserts that a significant number of Sinhalese monks often use social service as a cover for questionable activities,

going overseas and establishing themselves in foreign lands, facilitated by both philanthropists of those lands and by expatriate communities of Buddhists. A few of these monks control vast revenues and live the life of busy executives, replete with symbols like Mercedes Benzes and BMWs and cellular phones. These monks have a foothold both in the country of their adoption and in Sri Lanka, and hold immigrant status in several countries.

At the lower end of this financially comfortable class are the salary-earning monks, mostly graduates, who, especially if they also have support from laity as well as productive land, are able to invest money in business[es] like repair shops, taxi services, rental properties and tuition classes. A small minority also commercially practice astrology, medicine and various occultisms, the ‘beastly arts’ that are taboo for monks. Throughout history there were monks who practiced these, but they now do so with a new sense of legitimacy and commercialism. These come from the new definition of monk’s role as social service.” (1999:336)

Furthermore, Sinhalese missions (mostly of the wealthy and landed goyigama-caste Siyam Nikāya), such those in Malaysia, are often like multi-national corporations (MNCs) where local wealthy and generous Chinese faithfuls are regarded as a lucrative source of religious funds. To boost profits, a “Dale Car-

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<sup>132</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_the_United_States).

negie” (win friends and influence people) marketing approach to Buddhism is often used (such as easy-reading booklets on how not to worry, how to get rich, etc). Either such MNC missionaries deem the local followers as being incapable of learning Buddhism beyond the prescribed and popular texts or that the less informed their congregation is the better it is for their purposes.

Another common characteristic of these materialistic foreign missionaries is that they lack the spirituality to attract and nurture such vocations and to plant the seeds of an indigenized Buddhism. Currently, we have Chinese temples, Sinhalese temples, Thai temples, Myanmar temples, Tibetan temples, Japanese temples, and so on, but not a Singaporean temple or a Malaysia temple. Here I take “temple” to mean the “study, practice, realization, and propagation” of Buddhism that bring out the best of local talents and resources for the experience and promotion of the Dharma. After all, even as you read this, Buddhism is being westernized in Europe, the Americas and other westernized societies.

**6.2.3 Money, money everywhere, but never enough.** Cultural Buddhism becomes even more financially successful when they operate as MNCs, that is, with branch temples or centres in many different countries, constructed through local funds, collecting local funds, but regularly siphoned to the mother organization in, say, the US or Taiwan.

Lest it be misconstrued that I am denouncing any kind of badly needed fund-raising, especially for worthwhile projects, let me state that I am address organizations that prioritize fund-raising and to maximize the collection by any means possible, even tax evasion. Sadly, the faithful only learn too late of serious irregularities only after the bubble has burst and reported in the mass media. Even then, blinkered faith and wishful thinking would shroud many of us in denial of the truth of the situation and attending sufferings.

The true presence of Buddhism is not marked by impressive buildings alone (which are mostly memes<sup>133</sup> anyway). The Dharma is present like the healthy trees around us, taking only what they need from the soil that supports them, but giving shade, space, fruits, freshness and beauty to every being near it whether we deserve it or not. A tree never asks for anything, but we water or the rains fall, and nurture it, so that it grows with us all the same.

### 6.3 THE INTERNET

#### 6.3.1 The tyranny of email.

6.3.1.1 THE DISINHIBITION EFFECT. The internet has radically changed the way we communicate. Emails, mailing lists, online forums, and web pages facilitate wider communicability, linking the whole globe, as it were. In fact, the internet is well compared to a busy international market-place, where anyone can extend their networking, or peddle words and ware, or simply advertise their boredom.

John Freeman, in his book *The Tyranny of E-mail*, writes that the disembodied nature of e-mail and the speed in which we are expected to respond have caused much grief and misunderstanding amongst its users. Freeman cites a Cisco study that showed how people who collaborated through email for an extended period experienced a communication breakdown in the process.<sup>134</sup>

Psychologists have noted the online disinhibition effect, referring to the way people behave on the Internet, where users tend to show a greater lack of social restraint than they would in real-world face-to-face situations. The notion is related to the concept of *online identity*. Because of the loss of inhibition, some users may exhibit benign tendencies, such as being more willing to open up to others, or being more affectionate, or less guarded about their emotions and communications in an attempt to achieve emotional catharsis. According to **John Suler**,<sup>135</sup> this particular occurrence is called *benign disinhibition*.

Internet users frequently say as they wish without fear of any kind of meaningful reprisal, and in most Internet forums, the worst kind of punishment one can receive for bad behavior is usually being banned from a site. The truth is that this serves little as that person can easily circumvent the ban by simply registering another username and continuing the same behavior. Suler calls this *toxic disinhibition*.

<sup>133</sup> A meme is a cultural element projected so that it replicates itself by infecting the minds of others and to draw them to itself. See **Memes** = SD 26.3.

<sup>134</sup> J Freeman, *The Tyranny of E-mail: The four thousand-year journey to your inbox*, NY: Scribner, 2009.

<sup>135</sup> J Suler, *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 7 2004: 321-326.



6.3.1.2 SULER'S SIX PRIMARY FACTORS. Suler lists six primary factors behind why people sometimes act differently on the Internet than they do in real life.<sup>136</sup>

(1) “You don't know me” (dissociative anonymity). The anonymity of the Internet gives us a false sense of security within its framework. It allows us to freely express ourselves since our identity is unknown, and we have no identifiable marker except for our username. Sometime we may feel gratified when we feel free to say things we might otherwise be embarrassed to say. Conversely, it also provides us with an outlet for behaviour that others might construe as antisocial or harmful.

(2) “You can't see me” (invisibility). An Internet username or pseudonym usually has nothing to do with the real user. When we hide behind a false name, we can easily project a false personality: for example, an online “male” can pose as a female and vice versa. Internet invisibility further prevents us from properly reading social cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, avoiding eye-contact, etc, which significantly colour the words. In short, online, we may know *what* a person says, but not *how* he says it. On the other hand, even our user's identity is known, the lack of face-to-face communication, is likely to lower our inhibitions.

(3) “See you later” (asynchronicity). On the Internet, conversations do not always happen in real time. A message could have been posted for just a few minutes, or for an extraordinarily longer time. And the writer could have posted it without carefully checking and polishing it, or he might have even changed his mind by the time it is read by us. And we, reacting to a dead horse, may flog it, just to gratify ourselves. On the other hand, the time-lapse between posting and reading also allows us to more carefully prepare what to say. This is helpful if we might otherwise have difficulty in face-to-face interactions.

(4) “It's all in the head” (solipsistic introjection). Without a face-to-face communication, we are likely to project our own impressions and perceptions to the message or its writer. We often relate to others in terms of our past conditionings and present wishes, traits which the real person might not actually have. Goaded by our conditionings and issues, we relate to the Internet “person” by way of psychological defences.<sup>137</sup> We could be simply reacting to our own shadows or tilting at windmills.<sup>138</sup>

(5) “It's just a game” (dissociative imagination). When solipsistic introjection is heightened with imagination, it worsens into *escapism*, that is, addressing a particular need without worrying about its consequences. Suler, in his personal discussion with lawyer Emily Finch (a criminal lawyer studying identity theft in cyberspace), recounts Finch's observation that people may see cyberspace as a kind of game where the normal rules of everyday interaction do not apply to them. In this way, the user is able to dissociate their online persona from the offline person, effectively enabling him to assume that persona or shed it whenever he wishes, simply by logging on or off.<sup>139</sup> This is a veritable digital case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.<sup>140</sup>

(6) “We're equals” (minimizing authority). In a real life situation, people are often hesitant, even reluctant, to say what they really think when they stand before a respectable or authority figure, usually fearing disapproval or punishment. Online, however, unless we know others there well enough, no one will know our social status or surroundings. In what feels like a peer relationship, the presence of authority is absent or minimized. As such, people are much more willing to speak out or even misbehave. Even

<sup>136</sup> <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/disinhibit.html>.

<sup>137</sup> See **Gadrabha Samaṇa S** (A 3.81) = SD 24.10b (2), Unconscious defence mechanisms.

<sup>138</sup> “Tilting at windmills” comes from the Spanish author Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1604), under the title *The Ingenious Knight of La Mancha*. The novel recounts the exploits of would-be knight Don Quixote and his loyal servant Sancho Panza who propose to fight injustice through chivalry. From the book's famous description of how Don Quixote attacks windmills imagining them to be giants, we get the eponymous term *quixotic*, referring to unrealistic striving for a visionary ideal.

<sup>139</sup> J Suler 2004.

<sup>140</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) is a novella famous for its vivid portrayal of *a split personality*. that is, within the same person there is both an apparently good and an evil personality, each being quite distinct from the other. See **Self & Selves** = SD 26.9 (1.6.1). For an annotated study & other sources, see [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Annotated\\_Strange\\_Case\\_Of\\_Dr\\_Jekyll\\_And\\_Mr\\_Hyde](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annotated_Strange_Case_Of_Dr_Jekyll_And_Mr_Hyde).

if we know that someone is of some importance, we are like to be rude or unreasonable to such a person online.

6.3.1.3 PERSONALITY VARIABLES. How we open up or act out in cyberspace, as such, is often determined by the disinhibition effect. The strength of this effect itself is deeply influenced by the strength of our underlying feelings, drives and needs. Our levels of defense mechanisms and habitual tendencies may further aggravate our online behaviour. Extraverted people, for example, tend to be very expressive and emotional. Compulsive people may show their eccentricities in other ways. All these *personality variables* create our online persona: we become Mr Hyde.

For example, if we are ego-deprived, we might be attracted to the attention that a religious person commands. We might think that we have attained streamwinning and declare it on our special blog or website, and let the world have the benefit of the doubt. Or, we could pontificate on an impossible issue that even Dharma practitioners and specialists would hesitate to answer. The Internet is a phantom zone where we are our own master, as it were, and answerable to no one, not even ourselves. It is a great way to institutionalize our self-delusion and globalize our views. The problem is that it is easy to be addicted to the Net, and the signs are often very clear, the main one being that we are unable to really relate well to others, online or offline.<sup>141</sup>

6.3.1.4 THE NET “TAKES TIME.” In a Buddhist sense, one of the greatest setbacks of the Internet is its *impersonal socializing and chats* that certainly “takes time,”<sup>142</sup> which could be more fruitfully used for real-life communication, meditation or Sutta study. When an internet conversation becomes frivolous or unhelpful in any positive social or spiritual sense, it is best to regard it as *agocara* (unsuitable locality), a monastic term which is here applicable to a non-monastic, too.

On the other hand, the global reach of the Internet is a powerfully helpful tool when used for freely sharing scripture (such as the World Tipiṭaka), its translations, and Dharma-related materials that may not be easily available otherwise. We can also use the Internet as a means of continuing communication that enriches real-life communication. The Internet, in other words, properly used, can bring wholesome benefits for the faithful and for outreach.<sup>143</sup>

**6.3.2 Power of networking.** On the positive side, media and digital networking have become important features of modern anti-corporate movements. The speed, flexibility, and ability to reach a massive potential audience has provided a technological foundation for contemporary network of social movement structure. As a result, communities and interpersonal connections have been transformed. The internet supports and strengthens local ties, but also facilitates new patterns for political activity. Activists have used this medium to operate between both the online and offline political spectrums.<sup>144</sup>

Email lists, web pages, and open editing software have allowed for changes in organization and communication. Now, actions are planned, information shared, and documents produced by many people, and all of this can be done in tandem despite physical distance. This has led to increased growth in digital collaboration. Activists can presently link diverse topics, give free access to information, decentralize and increase collaboration, and self-direct networks.<sup>145</sup> Thanks to information technology!

**6.4 INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF COMMUNAL BUDDHISMS.** Even on a local level, say within a small country or a community, institutionalized Buddhism can be unwholesome. We will look at a few key examples of institutionalized Buddhists beliefs and practices which are either cultural forms or later developments. In such cases, there are misconceptions about the nature of giving and merit, rituals designed to attract lucrative donations and collective fear and delusion.

<sup>141</sup> The Straits Times of 12 Dec 2009 (pC5) carries a report entitled, “China’s young Net addicts don’t grow up.”

<sup>142</sup> On this expression, see (**Devatā**) **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20.5/1:9) = SD 21.4.

<sup>143</sup> A monk from a forest monastery in Sri Lanka who communicate with me regarding our Sutta translations, tells me that they connect to the internet for only 3 mins a day to download emails, which I think is a good practice.

<sup>144</sup> Jeffrey S Juris, “The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movements,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597 2005: 189-208: download from <http://www.jeffreyjuris.com/articles/juris.annals.pdf>.

<sup>145</sup> Jeffrey S Juris, “The New Digital Media and Activist Networking,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 599 2005: 191-199.

**6.4.1 Giving: wrong ways, right ways.** Traditionally Buddhists are generally very generous, especially in terms of food and cash—thanks for the generations and centuries of generous grilling of monastics on the merits of giving. Good works of generosity alone, as it were, are sufficient for happiness here and hereafter. For just a long, the foreign missionaries did not teach us any meditation despite our generosity; or even the Suttas of the Nikāyas, despite our loyal attendance at the vihara. But thanks to the forest monks and laymen meditators, we know can learn proper meditation and taste the wealth of the Suttas.

But we still go on giving money to the monks and nuns, to support them in every way we know, because we are taught that they are “the best field of merit.”<sup>146</sup> That is, until we learn that this best field actually comprises the saints of the path. We go on giving money to the monastics, against the Buddha’s own advice, against the Dharma, and against the Vinaya. Why do we do this? **The (Aṭṭha) Dāna Sutta 1** (A 8.31) gives us some clues, in fact, more than half a dozen reasons.<sup>147</sup>

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) “One gives out of love,”                            | —out of lust, or desire for gain, or being biased.  |
| (2) “One gives out of hate,”                            | —fear to “lose face” or status, or we despise or hate the recipient.  |
| (3) “One gives out of delusion,”                        | —through false view, ignorance or misinformation.   |
| (4) “One gives out of fear,”                            | —through guilt, or fear of losing face, or fear of bad rebirth.   |
| (5) Keeping up family tradition,                        | —through custom, or ritual giving, to keep up family name. <sup>148</sup>   |
| (6) For heavenly rebirth,                               | —self-centred giving, probably out of an eternalist view. <sup>149</sup>  |
| (7) For mental peace and joy,                           | —a positive wish, but only temporary and uncertain. <sup>150</sup>  |
| (8) “For adorning the mind, as a support for the mind,” | —the best reason for giving: provides the best conditions for mental cultivation so that we are emotionally independent. <sup>151</sup> |

(A 8.31/4:236) = SD 6.6

These first four motives for giving listed above are known as the four “biases” (*agati*), that is, the bias of lust (*chandāgati*), the bias of hate (*dosāgati*), the bias of delusion (*mohāgati*), and the bias of fear (*bhayaāgati*) (D 3:182, 228; A 2:18). These are the four biases that motivate us to break the precepts, to do unwholesome deeds. The next three reasons for giving (5-7) are not necessarily evil, but they can be *self-centred* and at best bring this-worldly benefits or a good rebirth, but keeping us in the rut of samsara all the same.

The best type of giving is the eighth and last one, that is, giving for the sake of “adoring the mind, as a support for the mind.” This is like charging ourselves up so that we are able to easily focus leading up to dhyanic bliss; if not, at least, to be able to enjoy some mental peace.

**6.4.2 The monastic robe as currency.** Faithful lay Buddhists who have the means would support monastics by offering them one or more of the four necessities of alms-food, robes, shelter (which includes residential and congregational buildings), and health-care, at the right time and in a proper manner. Besides offering alms-food, another common offering is that of robes, especially for those monks who have properly completed the three-month rains retreat.

During such occasions, the monks and the monastery not only receive robes and other suitable implements (such as toiletries, utensils and umbrellas), but also a substantial amount of cash donations (collected and managed by the monastic attendant or *kappiya, kāraka*).<sup>152</sup> This key monastic ceremony is governed by various set of rules and technical details, such as what kinds of cloth is to be used, how to offer it,

<sup>146</sup> On the deliberate narrowing of the concept of the “noble Sangha” as the peerless field of merit to refer only to the conventional sangha, see GA Somaratne, “White-clothed celibate arahants in early Buddhism,” 2009:162-165.

<sup>147</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see A 8.31/4:236 = SD 6.6 Intro (2).

<sup>148</sup> As at **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49.4(3)).

<sup>149</sup> Very similar to **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49.4(1)).

<sup>150</sup> As at **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49.4(6)).

<sup>151</sup> As at **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49.4(7)).

<sup>152</sup> A *kappiya, kāraka* is a suitable layman who accepts, stores, and manages donations (especially cash), making them formally acceptable (*kappiya*) for the monks, ie by getting the monks what they need or using the funds in other proper manner (Mv 6.14.6 = V 1:206). He is usu called *kappiya* for short.

how the cloth is to be cut and made into a robe). In fact, the whole chapter 7 of the Mahā, vaggā of the Vinaya (V 1:251-267) deals with this ceremony.

However, as Buddhism became more institutionalized, the robe-offering ceremony was used by any monk or group of monks to collect donations, especially cash gifts. **Aggacitta Bhikkhu**, in his booklet, *Kathina Then and Now*, explains that “the currently popular practice of temple/monastery committees requiring kathina sponsors to pay for the expenses incurred by the resident monks during the vassa is not part of the scriptural tradition.” (2001: 31).

*The Straits Times* of 24 November 2009 (page A14) carried a quarter-page advertisement for “Tod Pha Par Kartin Ceremony” to offer “kasāka.” Both terms are problematic. The first translates freely as “Offering kathina forest cloth.” The technicalities of the “forest cloth” (Thai, ผ้าป่า *pha-pa*) is clarified by Aggacitta as follows:

... monks, especially of the Thai tradition, are of the opinion that the kathina ceremony cannot be held if there are less than five bhikkhus spending the vassa together. For that reason, they hold a *pha-pa* robe offering ceremony instead.

*Pha-pa* is a Thai term. *Pha* means cloth and *pa* means forest. So *pha-pa* can be translated as “forest cloth”. If we retranslate that into Pali we would get something like *araññadussa* or *vana-dussa*. However, in the Pali recitation for offering *pha-pa* robe, it is rendered as *paṃsukūlacīvara*, which means “discarded (cloth) robe.”

This is rather ironical because discarded cloth is not supposed to be offered. The bhikkhu who observes the *dhutaṅga* (austere practice) of wearing only robes made of discarded cloth is not allowed to accept cloth or robes from lay people. He must obtain discarded material for making his robe from the rubbish dump, cemetery, roadside, etc. The offering of *pha-pa* robes is a Thai custom not found in the scriptural tradition. (Aggacitta, 2001: 39)

The word “kasāka” (despite the long ā) is not a Pali word at all. It is clearly a misspelling for *kasāva* or *kasāya* which is a word for the monastic robe. It has the sense that the robe is made by dyeing in some kind of astringent liquid (from tree-bark) to give it a uniform dark colour. That cash donations are welcome was clear as the advertisement also states: “one kasāka donation \$80.” The next line says “The holy floral shower,” which probably refers to the public sprinkling of “holy-water.”

One last point (but not the least), the advertisement says, “It was told that the Venerable Hui-Neng, the sixth Patriarch of the Chinese School of Ch’an (Japanese as “Zen”), the first monk who being bestowed the Kasāka by the Emperor of Tang Dynasty.” This is both bad English and bad history. Huineng 慧能 did not receive such a robe from any emperor. In fact, it is said that Huineng’s lineage robe was *taken away by the empress Wǔ Zétiān*.<sup>153</sup> That the advertisement takes the trouble to allude to this Chinese legend clearly shows who the intended clients and donors are.<sup>154</sup>

**6.4.3 The monastic robe as a fetish.** During the fifth and sixth centuries, China was politically divided: the north was ruled by non-Chinese autocrats, and the south by the Chinese court. The two societies were different both politically and religiously. While the more intellectual south tended to focus on wisdom philosophy, the “barbarian” north focussed on monastic discipline, meditation and magic. In the fifth century, Northern Liang controlled the overland route through which Buddhism entered China (which included Dūnhuáng 敦煌, a way station for missionaries and traders).

A key Buddhist figure of Northern Liang was Dharma, kṣema (Tánwúchèn 曇無讖 385-433), who was mainly instrumental in introducing the teaching of Buddhist decline that culminated in the conception of *mofa* 末法 (final Dharma).<sup>155</sup> A contributing notion to the *mofa* view was that of the five turbidities,<sup>156</sup>

<sup>153</sup> For details, see **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (5.4.4-5).

<sup>154</sup> On the tendency to exalt the monastic robe and person in themselves, see NG Zhiru 2007: 40-49.

<sup>155</sup> The Chinese Buddhists inherited the Indian eschatological conceptions of the “True Dharma” (*saddhamma*) = 正法 *zhèngfǎ* and of “counterfeit Dharma” (*paṭirūpaka dhamma*) = 像法 *xiàngfǎ*. From this, the Chinese genius linked to the indigenous term 末世 *mòshì* (“world-ending, final age”), which spawned the neologism 末法 *mòfǎ*



which are discussed in such texts as *The Scripture on the Ten Wheels*,<sup>157</sup> which is also a key text on the bodhisattva Kṣīti,garbha (Dìzàng púsà 地藏菩薩).

*The Scripture on the Ten Wheels* was one of the main texts of this turbulent age that highlights the merits of a monk's robe (*kāṣāya*)<sup>158</sup> and the monastic tonsure.<sup>159</sup> As noted by **NG Zhiru**, in China, the supremacy of these externalities was part of a desperate strategy to correct the lack of support, or worse, the mistreatment, of Buddhism by the imperial court. As Ng Zhiru notes, “Whereas the Indian tradition had always hypostatized the autonomy of the religious community and its exemption from state regulation, the power of the sovereign in China was regarded as deriving from a transcendental source, referred to as ‘Heaven’.” (2007: 43).

The emperor, in other words, held absolute power and, as such, the autonomy of the sangha would be construed as a threat to him. In the south, however, with the support Chinese aristocrats and some of the elite monks themselves being aristocrats and classical scholars, there was some latitude. Such an elite monk was Huiyuān (慧遠 334-416) who wrote the memorandum, “Treatise on the Recluse Not Having to Bow to the Emperor” (*Shāmén bùjìng wáng zhě lún* 沙門不敬王者論) (404).<sup>160</sup> The treatise upholds the supremacy of the monastic robe as part of the defence of clerical privileges.<sup>161</sup>

In the north, however, 4<sup>th</sup>-century Central Asian Buddhists missionaries, like Fótúdèng (佛圖澄 232-348) and Dharma, kṣema of Northern Liang (Běi Liáng 北梁) were all directly employed by the autocratic non-Chinese tribal rulers.<sup>162</sup> Unlike the southern Buddhists, these monks could not challenge these rulers by openly petitioning for the rights or privileges of the sangha. But they did voice their grievances—by furtively compiling texts such as *The Scripture of the Ten Wheels*, as veiled arguments for supporting the sangha.<sup>163</sup> The *Scripture*, for example, includes stern admonitions against intervening in sangha matters, contrasting the ideal rulership of the world monarch (*cakra, varti*) to the despotism of the wicked outcaste (*caṇḍāla*) ruler.<sup>164</sup>

On the other hand, imperial patronage of Buddhism had always led to the clerics and temples accumulating great wealth and degenerating in moral laxity and materialism. Such widespread corruption in the sangha—especially in Northern Wei (Běi Wèi 北魏 386-534),<sup>165</sup> was regarded by the Chinese as a clear indication of the impending demise of Buddhism. Ironically, the demise is not of the Dharma, but of the

(“dharma-ending, final dharma”) around the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> cent, and from the 6<sup>th</sup> cent onward, Chinese commentators interpreted *mòfǎ* as the name of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final period in Buddhist history. See Jan Nattier 1991: 90-118; Jamie Hubbard 1996. See also **Arhats who became Bodhisattvas** = SD 27.6b (3.3.3).

<sup>156</sup> *The 5 turbidities* (*wūzhuó* 五濁; Skt *pañca,kaṣāya*) are: (1) The turbidity of time (*kalpa kaṣaya*, world-ending age); (2) The turbidity of views (*drṣṭi,kaṣāya*, predominance of false views); (3) The turbidity of defilements (*kleśa,kaṣāya*, acquiescence of wrong-doings); (4) The turbidity of living beings (*sattva,kaṣāya*, predominance of unhappiness); and (5) The turbidity of lifespan (*āyus,kaṣāya*, shortening of human life).

<sup>157</sup> T410 = 13.681c, 683c; more fully, *Dàfāngguāng shílún jīng* 大方廣十輪經 (“The Fabulously Great Tenfold Wheels Sutra,” T410). See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (1.3.3.3).

<sup>158</sup> Which interestingly sounds like Skt *kaṣāya*, “turbidity, impurity.”

<sup>159</sup> See NG Zhiru 2007: 39 f.

<sup>160</sup> For tr, see Leon Hurvitz 1957. See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (2.3.3.2). On church-state relationship at this time, see Erik Zürcher 1972: 231-239.

<sup>161</sup> See NG Zhiru 2007: 43.

<sup>162</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b (1.2.5).

<sup>163</sup> See Jan Nattier 1991: 129.

<sup>164</sup> *Dàfāngguāng shílún jīng*, T410=13.687a-b.

<sup>165</sup> A popular story of emperor Liáng Wǔdì (梁武帝 464-549) recounts how he, unsatisfied with all the material gifts he had made to the temples, decided to offer himself as a gift. Consequently, his ministers had to redeem him with state funds, the first time in 528, then again in 546 and 547. Sadly, his failure to stem the corruption of his clan and court, and a lack of dedication to statecraft, brought his reign to an end. See Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, Princeton, 1964: 124-128; also **How Buddhism Became Chinese**: SD 40b (1.2.4).

clerics themselves, on account of internal corruption and external reactions from state intervention, regulation, even suppression,<sup>166</sup> and loss of the faithful.<sup>167</sup>

**6.4.4 Merit institutionalized.** A third case where institutionalized Buddhism can be unwholesome is that of the elaborate *Shuilu fǎhuì* 水陸法會 or “water and land” ceremony (ie the liberation of all beings), the grandest of Chinese ceremonies, said to have been introduced on the initiative of the emperor Liáng Wǔdì 梁武帝 (r 502-549).<sup>168</sup> The Chán monk Bǎozhì (寶誌 ?418-514) worked for three years to create the concept and compile the texts for this seven-day festival, fully titled as the “The Liberation Rite of Water and Land” (法界聖凡水陸普度大齋勝會, *Fǎjiè shèngfán shuǐlù pǔdù dàzhāi shèng huì*).

The ceremony is basically an invocation to the higher divine beings to intercede and free the beings in the lower realms of their sufferings. It is composed of seven shrines, each of them with its own smaller ceremony, with its own chanting. One of the texts recited is the “Emperor Liang Jewelled Repentance” (梁皇寶懺 *Liánghuáng bǎochàn*), often recited by itself during 5<sup>th</sup> April “grave-cleaning day” or Qingming (清明節; simplified 清明节; *Qīngmíngjié*) or during the seventh lunar month Ghost Hungry Festival.

The heart of the ceremony is the “Inner Shrine” ritual, where access is strictly limited to only the higher priests, wealthy benefactors, and government officials. Instruments that are not usually used during regular Buddhist functions are used as well. The service also requires the attendance of over one hundred priests, and a limitless number of lay devotees. Because of its huge costs, it is very rare for a Buddhist temple to hold it, as it can drain its funds.

One of its component rituals, the “feeding the hungry ghosts” (放齋口 *fàngyànkǒu*, lit “freeing the flaming-mouths”), is often conducted by itself as it is less elaborate and cheaper. Still, it is an elaborate and expensive ritual for the wellbeing of ancestors reborn as ghosts through the intercessional chanting by a group of monks. The whole ritual takes some four hours, and requires at least seven monks (usually 13-15) monks. There is also a form of the *Fàngyànkǒu* conducted for the living for the sake of longevity.<sup>169</sup>

**6.4.5 Regional differences.** Ashiwa and Wank, in their paper on “The globalization of Chinese Buddhism” (2005), examine the reasons for regional differences in religious practices in north America and in southeast Asia, two main regions of the Chinese diaspora. They note that the Buddhist clergy in southeast Asia were from the same dialect region as the overseas Nanyang Chinese population, that is, Min speakers from southern Fujian. Perhaps, as a consequence, many Chinese Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia have elements and practices close to such popular or folk practices as housing ancestor tablets in temples and performing rituals such as hungry-ghost feeding (*fàngyànkǒu*). [6.4.4]

By contrast, Chinese Buddhism came to the US through movements largely outside the original immigrant community. Many devotees who sponsored monks were educated professionals and former officials who were more interested in the canonical aspects of Buddhism. Moreover, many of the monks were from north China, where Buddhism contained fewer folk elements, such as ancestor-worship. Such reasons possibly explain why major Buddhist temples in North America appear to emphasize sutras and scholarship, and less the ancestor-worship and rituals, practices that predominate Chinese Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

Another noteworthy fact is that immigration policies of the Southeast Asian states were generally more open, even encouraging Chinese migrants, mostly from the peasant stock and a few from the business class. Migration of Chinese into North America, however, was not always open, but more restricted.

<sup>166</sup> One of the four imperial persecutions of Chinese Buddhism was the second (574-577) by emperor Wǔ (Běizhōu Wǔdì 北周武帝 r560-578) of Northern Zhōu (557-581). Besides widespread defrocking of clerics, he introduced a peculiar measure which resulted in the institution of the “bodhisattva monks” (*púsà sēng* 菩薩僧), comprising lay clerics robes in court apparel with heads unshaven. They were given to task of overseeing religious institutions (see Chen Jinhua 2002). Although this reform lasted for only two months, its impact on the Buddhist community was only to intensify the fear of a Dharma-ending age. See **How Buddhism became Chinese**: SD 40b (7.4.1).

<sup>167</sup> For further reading, see Ng Zhiru 2007: 40-49.

<sup>168</sup> See **How Buddhism became Chinese**: SD 40b (1.2.4).

<sup>169</sup> See <http://www.guanyin.org/fjxy/show.asp?id=3814>. For a history of *Shuilu fǎhuì*, see DB Stevenson 2001.

Understandably, the more wealthy and better educated Chinese were more likely to be accepted into the continent.<sup>170</sup>

One last point to note is that in our own times, the mass migrations of Chinese out of China into Southeast Asia and into North America have greatly slowed down. Almost all such migrants (if they are still alive) and the ensuing generations are naturalized citizens. Most of us who belong to this new local-born generation have been exposed to the mixture of local cultures. As such, we need to work towards making Buddhism more relevant to our lives and society. Above all we need to bring Buddhism in to our lives and ever closer to the Buddha Dharma.

**6.5 SUPPORTING FULL-TIME LAY DHARMA WORKERS.** In 2001, my family and I moved to Singapore on the invitation of ex-pupils so that I can continue Dharma work here. After a few years, some lay Buddhists (Lim Soon Kiat, Ang Beng Choo, Ng Yee Kong, and others) proposed that a special fund be set up to provide my family and me with a small monthly stipend of \$1200. Soon with the assistance of a few caring Dharma friends, we were able to buy our own four-room flat in Jurong East with a bank loan, and service the loan with the stipend. This became Pali House, where I live and work on translating the Suttas and writing essays such as this. Twice a year I have to submit three reports: two half-yearly reports, and a summary of proposed activities for the following year, which are useful, as they serve as permanent records of my work.

From 2003 onwards, the special fund was managed by the Firefly Mission (FFM) headed by Ng Yee Kong. For the convenience of administration, the stipends were sent to us once in two months. After a few years, the stipends did not come for months, and we ended up shamelessly emailing “gentle reminders” for them. In 2007, I was told that the stipend would have to end as the donations had not been forthcoming. Moreover, I was told that the FFM’s focus was on overseas emergency development work (like building houses and schools for disaster-hit areas, and assisting overseas monks).

That same year my elder son was diagnosed with Marfan’s syndrome (he had a dilated aorta, and long slender limbs). When the news broke out, many FFM members and others were very concerned, and proposed the stipend should continue. The stipend was continued. Furthermore, more FFM members were involved with my work at the Minding Centre (that is, the on-going Sutta translation project).

The kindness of FFM members in supporting this pioneer effort in supporting a full-time local lay Dharma worker must be mentioned as being *historical*. There will surely be many more full-time lay Dharma workers in the future, and there should be a proper system of supporting them. Unlike monastics, full-time lay Dharma workers, especially those without much savings, who need to be supported by the temple or group they are serving, or by the community at large. In this way, with their basic living support guaranteed, they can focus on their Dharma practice and work.

## 7 Buddhist vision and transformation

**7.1 TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING.** A very important and predominant activity in our modern society is that of *education*. There was a time, before the state or authorities took over the policy and implementation of schooling and education, when we were pupils of a wise individual living teacher who moulded our character as well as inspired us with valuable learning. Much of learning now, however, is institutionalized.

Furthermore, our institutionalized learning is very commercialized and competitive today, as universities become highly lucrative paper mills. Unlike the ancient open fora of teaching and learning (such as in Greece and India), today’s universities can only be afforded by those who are wealthy or if we are fortunate enough to be supported by scholarships.

As far as true education goes, one of the first truths we need to know about it, is that it is possible because *we are capable of positive change*. True education does not merely satisfy our bodily needs, give us creature comforts and wealth, and raise our social status. More importantly, true education (as its etymology—*ē*, out + *dūcere*, to lead out—suggests. Good education brings out the wholesome best in us. **David Loy** observes that

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<sup>170</sup> See Ashiwa & Wank 2005.

The present role of the media, however, is to foreclose most of those possibilities by confining public awareness and discussion within narrow limits. With few exceptions, the world's developed (or "economized") societies are now dominated by a power elite composed of the government and big corporations including the major media. People move seamlessly from each of these institutions to the other, because there is little difference in their worldview or their goals—primarily economic expansion.

Politics remains "the shadow cast by big business over society," as John Dewey put it a long time ago. The role of the media in this unholy alliance is to "normalize" this situation, so that we accept it and continue to perform our roles, especially the frenzied consumption necessary to keep the economy growing. (2006: 6 f)

One of the main reasons that people in urbanized society and corporate worlds are never really happy is that they have a short-sighted view that personal or social development is good and complete in itself. Such urbanites and corporate beings hold the materialist view that this is our only life: so live it well, at any cost! But they are never able to pay that cost.

For, life is never fully lived until and unless we fully feel our hearts, too. To feel our heart is to know our mind—that is, to really *feel* inner bliss and clarity; to be *inwardly* joyful, *independent* of external things, even *other* people. Yet, this joy that bubbles up from within us empowers us to unconditionally accept others, to regard them as we wholesomely regard ourselves. For, although we can only be truly happy *inwardly*, we can also share this happiness with others. Indeed, this is the best way we can bring happiness to others—because we are truly happy ourselves.

**7.2 SOCIAL GROWTH IS BASED ON PERSONAL GROWTH.** Any sustained or effective social change or community development must begin with personal development. A society can be a lonely, selfish, and stressful crowd, or it can be a vibrant community of productive and spiritual individuals. By "productive" is meant the effective and sustainable use of our personal abilities and resources that benefit both self and others. By "spiritual" is meant each person is a self-reliant individual, primed with emotional independence, so that we are able to connect or work with any other similar individual.

As individuals, we have four basic *needs*—food, clothing, shelter and health—and all else would be subjective or relative *wants*. While the needs are easier to satisfy (having eaten we get on with our day's tasks), wants may be insatiable. That is, if we think only of ourselves, without really understanding that others have the same needs.

While our basic needs feed our personal well-being and growth, our wants should be tempered by our social awareness and growth. Our personal and social growth are greatly enhanced when we understand the positive aspects of the five precepts, that is, **the five values** (*pañca,dhamma*). Life is the very first and foremost value for us: for without life there is nothing; hence, this is called "the value of being." A life is worthwhile when it leads to happiness, which we express through ideas and actions, and having things—this is the "value of having." When such ideas or properties (including our physical body) are violated, we are deprived of a vital source of happiness. This violation entails removing the freedom we have over such properties which should be respected by others—this is the "value of doing."

For all these statements to be meaningful and applicable, they have to be *true*—this is the "value of truth." These are all **intrinsic values** that can only be truly realized and enjoyed when we have cultivated a high level of *self-understanding*—this is the "value of wisdom." In daily practice, these five values are embodied in the five precepts.<sup>171</sup>

**7.3 MONASTIC AND LAY.** The best way to have a Buddhist education is to understand the Suttas, and to relate the Dharma preserved therein to real life. Sutta understanding empowers us as lay Buddhists to live in the Dharma, just as the Vinaya empowers the monastic to live in the Dharma. The monks and nuns are not empowered by their *robes*, but by the Dharma-Vinaya, that is, by their keeping to the Teaching and the Discipline.

<sup>171</sup> For details, see **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352-356) = SD 1.5 & **Notion of *ditṭhi*** = SD 40a.1 (13.1).



Buddhist monastics, as such, are not priests who mediate between us and some higher being(s), or who bless us, for some kind of happiness or benefit. Through our efforts in trying to keep the precepts and to understand the Dharma, we strengthen our foundation of greater happiness here and hereafter. In our constant reflection of impermanence, we are sure to attain streamwinning in this life itself, if not surely at the moment of dying.<sup>172</sup>

Making offerings to a monastic is not necessarily better or worse than giving to any other worthy cause. There is a time to prepare our gifts happily, to give happily, and to give until we cry in joy. Great is the merit of an offering to a virtuous sanghin; just as meritorious is an offering to a virtuous lay person—when our mind is happy before, during and after the giving. For, the merit arises in us, not conferred upon us from outside. Best of all it is for us to give the Dharma gift; for, it fully empowers the recipient for spiritual liberation.

“The supreme field of merit” (*anuttara puñña, khetta*) is *not* monks and nuns, especially if they do not keep to the Vinaya. In early Buddhism (according to the suttas), this fertile field of merit is the four kinds of saints (the streamwinner, the once-returner, the non-returner and the arhat)<sup>173</sup> who could be either monastic or lay.<sup>174</sup> Of course, as we may not know them to be saints unless we are one ourselves, it is wise to give happily, give what is appropriate, and to those we confidently feel are morally virtuous.<sup>175</sup>

**7.4 MENTAL DEVELOPMENT.** As emotionally independent individuals, we are capable of contributing to the greater good in our unique and inimitable ways. Yet, our common wholesome efforts are greater than any of our personal contribution. This entails an ability to think positively and creatively for ourselves, and yet to be able to have a heart that is inclusive of others. This inclusivity is the fertile ground that stirs and taps the strength and genius of others towards a greater good. This is the nature of mental development.

The Buddhist vision of mental development begins with bodily cultivation and ends with spiritual liberation. “Bodily cultivation” refers to understanding the true nature of the body, training it to be calm and comfortable on a physical level so that our full attention could be directed to the mind. Mental cultivation begins with sense-restraint, that is, not taking in sense-data more than are necessary, and even then doing so in a positive and realistic manner, that is, to understand and accept that all sense-experiences and sense-objects are *impermanent*.

What is impermanent is also unsatisfactory; it entails suffering. If there is any purpose in our suffering, it is to remind us that a part of us is still undeveloped. We have to identify that part of us which needs to be strengthened: it may be either the head (too much thinking, too little feeling) or the heart (too much feeling, too little thinking). The cultivation of lovingkindness lessens and removes headiness; the breath meditation consolidates the heart. A balance of the two makes an emotionally balanced individual.

**7.5 LIBERATIVE WISDOM.** Seeing impermanence in all things is the beginning of wisdom, that is, liberating knowledge. To *understand* impermanence is to value the impermanent. To *value* the impermanent is to give our full attention to it in its presence in a manner that is mutually liberating. To do this is to go beyond the duality of self and other.

To rise above the dichotomy of self and other is to see that there is no abiding entity in anything, whether animate or inanimate. We are a flowing stream of consciousness, a river of events, into which we can step but once each time. And yet every flow conditions every other, so that it is impossible to point out the beginning of the flow. Things keep going in a circle, like the uroboros painfully biting its own tail.

What seems to perpetuate this tail-biting of suffering? The three unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion. They are the roots of our human and social problems. Our elite groups and institutions are unable to solve our common problems because they are themselves driven by these unwholesome roots. Worse still, they have institutionalized these roots, transmuting them into corporate virtues.

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<sup>172</sup> See the 10 discourses of **the Okkanti Saṃyutta** (S 25), the first of which is **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:-225) = SD 16.7.

<sup>173</sup> See **Aṭṭha Puggala S 1** (A 8.59/4:292) = SD 15.10a.

<sup>174</sup> See **Layman saints** = SD 8.6.

<sup>175</sup> See **Sappurisa Dāna S** (A 5.148/3:172 f) = SD 22.15.

If the elite groups and institutions cannot solve our problems, but are, in fact, the causes of them, or keep silence over them, then we must seek the solution from somewhere else. This solution comes only from *individual awakening*, and when such awakened individuals work together, we have *a social awakening*. Or, at least, those who have awakened from their existential sleep should show care to those who are still asleep, so that they slumber in peace and safety, until they themselves awaken.

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