Volume 49b

Life of the Buddha 1

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The Buddha and the arhats awaken the same way; the Buddha discovers the way and the disciples follow after him.

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Piya Tan (TAN Beng Sin), 1949-
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(Aṭṭha Dāna Sutta, A 8.31/4:236)
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Piya Tan, who works on these Suttas and notes, and teaches them, was a former Theravada monk for 20 years. Today he is a full time lay Dharma teacher specializing in early Buddhism. He was consultant and regular lecturer to the Buddhist Studies Team (BUDS) that successfully introduced Buddhist Studies in Singapore Secondary Schools in the 1980s. After that, he was invited as a visiting scholar to the University of California at Berkeley, USA. He has written many ground-breaking and educational books on Buddhism (such as Total Buddhist Work) and social surveys (such as Buddhist Currents and Charisma in Buddhism).

As a full-time Dharma teacher, he runs Buddhist, Sutta and Pali classes like the basic Pali course series, the Sutta Study Group (NUSBS), Dharma courses (the Singapore Buddhist Federation), Sutta Discovery classes (Buddhist Fellowship and elsewhere), and Sutta-based (including meditation) courses (Brahm Education Centre), besides his own full-time Pali translation and research project, the Pali House, and doing a comparative study of the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas. As a Theravāda monk, he learned insight meditation from Mahasi Sayadaw himself in the 1980s. As a lay teacher, he learned forest meditation from the Ajahn Brahmavamso. He has run numerous meditation courses and retreats for students and adults (including non-Buddhists) since 1980s. In 1992, he taught meditation at the University of California at Berkeley, USA, and also to BP, JPMorgan, the Defence Science Organization, GMO, HP and SIA. He is doing all this for the love of Dharma and of Ratna and their two children.
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Hi! [Pali: “For, because; certainly, indeed; alas!”]  

Dharma is here and now

**THE BUDDHA’S TEACHINGS ARE LIKE MAPS.** We may have them but they are useless if we do not look at them. After carefully looking at them, we need to make the journey ourselves. While we are journeying, we will see the path, the landscape and beautiful sights for ourselves, and begin to understand the map even better. When we have reached our destination, we do not need the map any more.

**EXPERIENCE, NOT JUST QUALIFICATION.** Today, we have numerous Buddhist speakers, some qualified ones, some even scholarly specialists, but knowing the Dharma and living it are quite different things. We may know Buddhism (we may have the map), but have we really tasted inner peace (made the journey) and do we really care about others, even those close to us (compassion for other travellers)? **The Lohicca Sutta** (D 12 = SD 34.8) advises us to realize the teaching before teaching it.¹

**DON’T LIVE IN THE PAST.** In a fast-growing affluent society like ours, we tend to measure others by wealth, status, titles, professions, even skin colour. This unhelpful tendency is often because of our colonial past and current globalizing trends. If we do this, then we are living in the past. We must also appreciate the wealth of wholesome potential in our present, and lay a strong foundation for our future as Buddhists. When we speak in this way, we will hear other concerned voices, too. Let us listen together.

In other words, we are still evolving as local Buddhists. We must not only evolve as a group, but more importantly, we must mature as individuals.

**THE TRUTH OF OUR SITUATION.** To correct such difficulties, we must first talk openly about them. The 4 noble truths is a helpful for examining such situations. First, we must accept and define the problem; secondly, identify its causes and conditions; thirdly, think and discuss the possible solutions; and fourthly, work on the solutions.

**WHILE LOOKING AT THE HORIZON, LET US KNOW THE GROUND WE ARE STANDING ON.** Even after working with the Suttas for 15 years, translating and annotating over 50 volumes of Sutta Discovery (SD) (each of about 180-200 A4 pages), I still meet local Buddhists who ask me questions like: “Why do you do it when we already have other translations.” If they care to look at the back covers of the SD books, there are at least 20 reasons for it! Some asked: “Are you sure you are qualified enough to translate the suttas?” Why not read the SD translations for yourself?

Ironically, here is a double bind. We would not know how good a translation is until we have read it. Even then, our judgement depends on how much we love the Dharma ourselves.

**LEARNING FROM OTHERS.** This is still a time when we are learning and serving numerous foreign Buddhist groups. This formative period is vital for the growth of Buddhism here. *True spiritual growth*, however, begins when we realize that Buddhism need not be foreign and exotic: the Dharma is not out there. The Dharma is right here where we live. The Bodhi tree grows here, too, if we plant it, care for it, weed the ground, and gather around it or sit under it enjoying its cool shade. In the Pāṇāñika Sutta 2 (A 3.20 = SD 37.2b) the true practitioner is compared to a shrewd store-keeper²

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For your convenience, look up these Indexes at [http://dharmafarer.org](http://dharmafarer.org):

1. (1) the Sutta Title Index (STI) to SD 1-49 (54 vols),
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