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The Teacher or the Teaching?

Charisma and self-empowerment: A study inspired by the Rūpa Sutta (A 2:71), the Puggala-p, pasāda Sutta (A 5.250/3:270) and other canonical sources.

Source: *Charisma in Buddhism* (1992h: §§6.7cd, 6.722 & 6.757)¹

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1 Seekers: 2 kinds and 3 kinds

1.1 THE 2 KINDS OF SEEKERS

1.1.1 There are broadly 2 kinds of seekers: those who seek “teachers” and those who seek “teachings.” A “**teacher-seeker**” may be a wanderer or a collector looking for guru figures who fulfill the seeker’s criteria. The wanderer is a sort of groupie who enjoys collecting blessings and religious autographs but has almost no interest in personal development. In short, he can be a spiritually insecure person, unsure of what he really needs. For such a person, religion is a fashion that one keeps up with rather than a spiritual way of life of inner search and insight.

The 2nd kind of teacher-seeker is the collector, one who looks for some kind of *parent-figure*: in short, a source of approval, security and comfort, someone to father or mother us.² Often when such an authority figure has been found, the teacher-collector would consciously or unconsciously surrender himself totally in one way or another to this Guru figure. So begins a **cult**: the total devotion to a personality, taking this person as the truth and closing oneself to all other possible paths or truths.

1.1.2 The “**teaching-seeker**,” on the other hand, is a truth-seeker, and willing to learn it from anyone, especially someone more knowledgeable and wise—and yet has a clear idea of what he needs for his personal development. He is like a person who has some idea what ailment he has and looks for a suitable and efficacious medicine. It is the medicine and health that matter more than does the doctor.

If the teacher-seeker is like an insect attracted by the scent and sweet nectar of a Venus fly-trap, allowing himself to be digested into the guru figure, then the truth-seeker is a hard-working bee flying in the sunshine happily flitting from flower to flower sipping the sweet essence of the flower (without hurting the flower) and producing his own honey from all this industry. This truth-seeker then does the “8-figure dance” pointing to other bees where the best flowers are—where the noble eightfold path is.

1.2 A THIRD KIND OF SEEKERS

1.2.1 Disillusionment with the Church of England

The 3rd kind of seeker is a contemporary modernist phenomenon—the **teachee-seeker**—that is, someone seeking to become a religious teacher and set up her own centre. This is usually a mature western man or woman, in their 30s up to middle age, single or divorced, who would make a sort “religious quest” to the east either to seek a well known teacher to ordain her, or pick some teachings and methods which she would then use to set up her own centre or even religious order.

One interesting example here is that of Soto Zen master or priestess, **Houn Jiyu-Kennett** (1924-1996), born as Peggy Teresa Nancy Kennett in Sussex, England. As a religious young woman, she studied medi-

¹ Full title: *Buddhist Charisma: A study of the work of Father Sumaṅgalo, Ānanda Maṅgala Mahā.nāyaka Thera and Dr Wong Phui Weng in Malaysia and Singapore & Phra Ajahn Yantra Amaro, Petaling Jaya: Dharmafarer Enterprises, 1992h.*

² On the parent-figure, cf SD 60.1c (1.12.2.1 f.

eval music. Though attracted to Buddhism, she felt a calling to serve the Church of England as a priest. However, church policies did not allow women to be ordained, and this worsened her disillusionment with Christianity.

1.2.2 Japan and Malaysia

During this uncertain period, in the 1950s, she turned to Theravada Buddhism and joined the London Buddhist Vihara, and then the London Buddhist Society, where she studied and lectured. She met Zen scholar, D T Suzuki, and developed a strong interest in Zen Buddhism. In 1960, **Keido Chisan Koho** of the Sojiji in Japan invited her to be his student back in Japan. She agreed, and two years later arrived there.³

In January 1962, Jiyu-Kennett visited Melaka, Malaysia, to accept an award for setting to music a Buddhist hymn, “Welcome Joyous Wesak Day” by Sumangalo, a western Buddhist priest.⁴ Before leaving for Japan she was ordained by Malaysian Chinese Mahāyāna priest, Seck Kim Seng (of the Linji tradition), abbot of the Cheng Hoon Teng, the largest and oldest temple in Melaka, and given the name Sumitra (慈有, *Ciyou*).

However, since there were no training facilities in Malaya or Singapore for Mahāyāna nuns then, and her preceptor, Kim Seng, was himself a typical ritual priest who did not keep the Vinaya, Kennett went on her own steam. The local Buddhists nothing more than nominal or ritual Buddhists. Any kind of Western Buddhist, monastic or lay, monk or nun, was a great sensation in Malaysia and Singapore, with almost no local English-speaking teacher in Buddhism, whether early Buddhism or Mahāyāna.

1.2.3 Soto Zen training

In Japan, she trained at Sojiji under Keido Chisan Koho Zenji, from whom she received Dharma transmission⁵ in 1963. As Koho was a busy administrator, she mostly studied under one of Koho’s senior officers, Suigan Yogo roshi, from whom she also received Dharma transmission in 1967.

Upon graduation, she was installed as abbess of the Unpukuji, a temple in Mie prefecture (Kansai region, Honshu), and by 1969, she was authorized to teach Soto Zen in London, England. That year, she visited the US on a lecture tour and decided to remain there. In 1969, she established the Zen Mission Society in San Francisco, and in 1970, started the Shasta Abbey, northern California, where she experimented with her own form of Zen.

In 1972, her British chapter of the Zen Mission Society started Throssel Hole Priory in Northumberland, England. In 1978 Jiyu-Kennett’s order became known as the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, and her Order members used the initials “OBC” after their names (like the Catholic orders). Apparently, this interesting development arose from her previous Christian conditioning, and a study of her younger days in this connection would be psychologically interesting. [1.2.5]

1.2.4 Illness and visions

When she was in Japan, her health started to deteriorate, and she was plagued by constant illness, physical and mental, till her death. In 1975, she became so ill that she became bedridden. Not long after that, she began having hallucinatory visions. **Stephen Batchelor** describes them as follows:

The visions lasted for 12 months, until 26 January 1977, the first twelve occurring in Oakland, the rest at Shasta, where she returned on 25 October. Each vision unfolded as a dream-like episode,

³ Kay 2004:102 d.

⁴ On Sumangalo, see Piyasilo, *Charisma in Buddhism*, 1992h:1-19. <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Charisma-in-Buddhism.-piyasilo.pdf>.

⁵ This is a certification or official acceptance of her into the Shin lineage, the first western woman to do so.

charged with western and Buddhist religious symbolism, superimposing itself on whatever she saw around her. She compared the series of visions to an elaborated contemporary version of the classical Zen images of the ten “ox-herding” pictures. By the time the final vision faded, she was cured. She interpreted the experience as that of a “third *kensho*.”⁶ (1994:133 f)

In 1976, she resigned from her position as abbess of Shasta Abbey and went into retreat in Oakland, California. Still rather ill, of unknown causes, she was attended by her student Daizui MacPhillamy. Following a “kensho” (Zen enlightenment experience) he had, she conferred him Dharma transmission at her bedside in 1976.⁷ She died 1996, aged 72.⁸

1.2.5 Her personality and beliefs

1.2.5.1 As a Zen teacher, Jiyu-Kennett had a commanding presence about her, both intellectually as well as physically. Corpulent in build, she had a loud laughter and was gifted at storytelling.⁹ Of her personality, American Zen priest and Unitarian Universalist minister, **James Ishmael Ford**, writes:

My memories of Jiyu Kennett Roshi as a teacher are mixed. She followed in the authoritarian style of her Japanese inheritance. Interpersonally, she was remarkably invasive. Indeed, in my twenties, she pushed me into a marriage with another student that would cause great unhappiness for both of us. On the other hand, she had genuine insight into the boundless realm and also pushed me toward my own deepest experience of the great matter. (2006:141-143)

Of Jiyu-Kennett’s Zen, *The Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America* records:

Her adaptation of Zen for Westerners has been likened to Japanese Soto Zen with a flavor of the Church of England, for she believed that Zen in North America should adopt Western monastic dress and liturgical forms. For example, she set the traditional Buddhist liturgy to music based on Gregorian chants. (2006:641)

1.2.5.2 As an advocate for sexual equality, Jiyu-Kennett held the view that women would never be deemed as being equal to men if they were not to possess souls (an idea unequivocally rejected by the Buddha)!¹⁰ According to author **Catherine Lowman**, “She asserts that no woman will be certain she is equal ‘until she knows with the certainty that I know, that her own Buddha-nature, or her own soul, exists.’”¹¹ (1993:138).

⁶ It should be noted that awakening (bodhi) is effectively a one-time occurrence, esp arhathood. Kensho is clearly not the bodhi of early Buddhism, and should not be equated so.

⁷ Daizui succeeded her as Head of the Order of Contemplatives (HOBC), but died of lymphatic cancer at age 57 in 2003.

⁸ Further see R Bluck, *British Buddhism*, Routledge, 2006:65-88 (ch 5).

⁹ Boucher 1993:137 f.

¹⁰ Interestingly, this seems to be a problem common enough amongst western Buddhists who are fully free from their Judaeo-Christian conditioning. However, in Asia, we find Buddhists, even successful leaders, who often tacitly at least fall back on the God-idea. See How Buddhism Became Chinese, SD 40b.3 (3.2): fn on “cosmic God-like figure.”

¹¹ **Brahma, jāla Sutta** (D 1), eg, states that there are those who, through cultural conditioning or using reasoning, regard the “mind” (citta), or “thought” [mentation] (mano), or “consciousness” (viññāṇa) [see **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a (12)] as being “permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change: it will remain so just as eternity itself.” (D 1,2.13-1:21), SD 25.2.

1.2.6 Observations

1.2.6.1 In many ways, Jiyu Kennett is an example of a western seeker who, failing to find acceptance and integration in her native western socio-religious milieu, successfully apprenticed herself to eastern religions (in this case, Theravada, Mahayana and Japanese Buddhisms). She was also successful in setting up her own religious order, grafting onto the dry bones of her Buddhism the flesh and blood of Anglicanism, the spirit of which probably remained rooted in her throughout her life. Apparently, she did not outgrow her childhood religious conditioning, which also evinced the failure of her training to be fully enriched by the true life of monastic renunciation.

1.2.6.2 Such episodes in the lives of modern religious teachers (or any such personalities) are helpful in understanding how religion can be either a transformative self-actualization or a self-fulfilling prophecy of a childhood conditioning and personal inclinations. If we look around hard enough, we will always find a religion, a religious sect or group, or a charismatic and famous teacher of means, who would endorse our pet notions.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that the true purpose of Buddhism, at least of early Buddhist training, is to overcome all views.¹² But before we can do that, we need to honestly accept that we do have these views. Then we need to carefully examine how they have arisen. We also need to be aware that such spiritual honesty can become more difficult, even impossible, as we are weighed down or swirled around by the force of fame, wealth and power. Even famous teachers can have wrong views.¹³

1.2.6.3 On a more serious note, if we do have some serious psychological problem or emotional difficulties (and most of the unawakened do), they could be mistaken for hints of religious experience, mystical genius, or even enlightenment itself. The problem with religious language, such as that of the Zen koan, is that it can easily be serviced or domesticated as clever authentication for such deluded states. Extreme religiosity and sheer madness are not always easy to be distinguished, until it is too late.

Personal weaknesses in great teachers are often magnified so that they not only drown themselves in the subhuman realms here and now, but also drag their followers with them. Instead of preparing the fertile ground for spiritual cultivation and awakening for themselves and their followers, they are led astray, perhaps never to return to the right path in this life or many lives to come.¹⁴ For this reason, spiritual friendship is said to the whole of the holy life.¹⁵

1.2.6.4 Jiyu Kennett's apparent success may inspire other western women to similarly work their way up the exotic rungs of traditional Buddhism so that they can qualify themselves as religious teachers. This is clearly a liberation process from a patriarchal society (which much of western religion still is), flowering in having their own centres, or even new orders, catering to the religious needs of the like-minded.

1.2.6.5 As long as they are disciplined in their training, and dedicated in their mission, such women seekers would be successful, prominent enough to fill the pages of a growing number of books on "remarkable Buddhist women." However, clearly not many such seekers even manage to find proper ordination, much less to become independent teachers. Such seekers then remain wanderers, seeking some

¹² See esp **The notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1.

¹³ See **(Ahiṭa) Thera S** (A 4.588), SD 40a.16.

¹⁴ See **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17.

¹⁵ See **Spiritual friendship**, SD 8.1.

kind of enlightenment-experience or at least a perfect guru to give meaning, purpose and fulfillment to their lives.¹⁶

2 Stopping and moving

2.1 People turn to religion for personal and other reasons, that is, everyone has his own reason for believing in a teacher or a teaching, and rejecting others. Although the world religions have very noble and enlightening doctrines and ideals, their followers, as a rule, are led much less by a clear understanding of those doctrines and ideals but are led much more by some kind of **personal attraction to the person** who delivers the message, whether this is the founder himself (or herself) or some figure speaking in the religion's name. In the case of Jiyu Kennett, her previous religious conditionings and psychological needs clearly defined and distorted her views and vision of Buddhism.

2.2 Such seekers are like shoppers with shopping lists who go only to a store because it is very fashionable, unaware of the higher prices, imitation products and poor quality of the goods (despite the "quality" services). Such shoppers simply *stop* seeking once they have crossed out the items on their shopping list (whether those items are useful or not). In fact, such religious shoppers are unaware of what they really need since they have a serious lack of self-understanding and self-confidence, merely waiting for an authority figure or divine "spirit" or some other-power to take over their lives. So, this is the double-bind of a closed mind: he does not tap the full potential of his mind while he has it; and he loses his mind once he finds the "answer."

2.3 Only when we stop shopping around Buddhist centres and collecting Buddhist teachers will we begin to enjoy and benefit from Dharma teachings and realize that by looking within we will experience a priceless stillness that bears no label. As the Buddha tells Āṅgulimāla to *stop*, so too the Buddha reminds us to *stop and look within*:

I have stopped, Āṅgulimāla! You stop, too!...
I stand still,¹⁷ Āṅgulimāla, all the time,
To all beings, I have laid down the rod.
But you are unrestrained towards living beings.
Therefore I stand still and you stand not still.

(*Āṅgulimāla Sutta*, M 86,6/2:99 = Tha 867), SD 5.11

3 Fatal attraction

3.1 In 2003, the "New Scientist" (Sat 16 Aug 2003) published a study of 600 people in the US regarding their personality and interest in celebrities done by psychologists Lynn McCutcheon of DeVry University in Florida and James Houran of the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. They discovered that there is a very thin line between celebrity worship and fatal attraction.

"Just worshipping a celebrity does not make you dysfunctional," says Houran, "But it does put you at risk of being so." According to the study, people tend to become interested in celebrities when they are

¹⁶ See also **Wanderers of today**, SD 24.6b.

¹⁷ While Āṅgulimāla's question (prec verse) speaks on a worldly level, the Buddha's answer here brings him up to the Dharma level, where "still" (thito, lit "standing") means his mind has been stilled and no more creates new karma. But since, Āṅgulimāla has been killing, he is not still in the Dharma sense. For a study on religious language, see **Two levels of religious language**, SD 10.6.

looking for direction in life, as in their teenage years. The interest can develop into an addiction during a crisis, such as the loss of a loved one.

3.2 The suffering seeker often seeks to **empower** himself since he feels totally powerless over his own life, unable to find any meaning or purpose in it. In an unconscious quest for meaning and power, he is attracted to what he regards as sources of meaning and power. Such a person is easily attracted to father-figures, mother-figures, authority-figure, guru-figures or God-figures. However, since the power is *outside* him, it is never really a part of him, which makes him emotionally dependent upon such power-figures.

3.3 The emptiness left by the absence or loss of “self-power” is often filled by **self-hate**, simply because when one thinks in terms of power, **love** is cancelled out or at least weakened. What the suffering seeker really needs is **self-love**, that is to say, an awareness of his own spiritual goodness and strength. However, such positive qualities are often walled up and made unreachable when the person permanently labels himself as a “victim” by constantly clinging on to the sufferings and losses he has encountered. It is this victim role that he has forced upon himself that is draining all his self-power, weakening him into self-hate.

If we try hard enough, we can always find someone, even a famous teacher, who shares our quirks and follies.

4 Measure and power

4.1 Very often people allow their failures and sufferings to colour and narrow their search for a healthy solution to their problems. Because they have been hurt before (through loss, abuse, failure, etc) there is some sort of emptiness in their lives which they strive to fill. Instead of looking for inner peace through mind-training, they often seek solutions from outside, like looking for more money or power, or losing themselves in self-denial through cultish religions, superstitions, and addictive habits (such as gambling). This dark emptiness remains, usually repressed (lurking and alive), clouding their minds with growing mistrust for almost everyone and everything else.

4.2 Being over-zealous not to be hurt again, they set certain unconscious or half-conscious conditions for whatever saviour or saving truth that they seek. They gauge others with their own standards and measures which effectively become *emotional filters* that only allow in what they regard as safe or desirable. In short, they wear emotional blinkers and probably never have any sustained healthy human relationship. Yet in their desperation, as they slowly drown in their empty darkness they suddenly find themselves clutching at straws in the form of worldly pursuits or religious fanaticism or spiritual power.

5 Charisma

5.1 Unable to see any goodness or love within himself, he thinks in terms of **power** (which can here be taken asura-like, that is, exploitatively, as “what we can do *with* others, or what others can do *for* us”). Ironically, in this quest for power and pleasure, he actually surrenders his own will and life to another (father-figure, mother-figure, guru-figure, God-figure). It is this perception of power in another that gives this other person charisma.

5.2 In this study we shall look at charisma from two angles: as “measure” (*pamāṇa*) and as “power” (*ādhīpateyya*)—both terms found in the Pali Canon. Etymologically, the Greek word **charisma** means “a spiritual gift or talent regarded as divinely granted to a person as a token of grace (*charis*) and favour.”¹⁸ In due course, the word took on a broader sense to mean a personal attraction one has towards another, that is, *an attraction to a person who is perceived to possess a magical or magnetic quality* (usually in the form of some kind of beauty, power or pleasure, or all of them). In short, it is a blessing or gift (*vara*), either projected by others or self-endowed.¹⁹

The success of a guru invariably rests on his ability to satisfy the desires and expectations of his audience, that is, as long they follow him.

Charisma as “measure”

6 The Diamond Sutra

6.1 The **Diamond Sutra** (Vajra-c,chedikā Prajñā,pāramitā Śūtra), a Mahāyana text, warns us against judging things merely from externalities.²⁰

Those who by form have seen me,
And those who have followed me by voice,
Wrong are the efforts they have made—
Me those people would not see.

From the Dharma one should see the Buddhas,
From the Dharma,kāya [Buddha-nature] comes their guidance,
Yet the Dharma’s true name cannot be discerned,
And no one can be conscious of it as an object.

(Diamond Sutra = Vajra-c,chedikā Prajñā,pāramitā Śūtra 261b)

6.2 I have tried to explain this fascinating subject in some detail in *Charisma in Buddhism*,²¹ so shall only briefly deal with it here. The most instructive section of the Diamond Sutra is found in the verses of the elder **Lakuṇṭhaka Bhaddiya** (“the dwarf”):

469 Those who have judged [measured]²² me by looks [appearance] and who follow me by voice,²³ overcome by desire and passion, they know me not.

470 The foolish one, surrounded by mental hindrances, neither understands the inside nor sees the outside—he is indeed misled by voice.

¹⁸ Based on Webster’s 3rd New International Dictionary.

¹⁹ On *charisma*, see SD 52.2 (3.4.2).

²⁰ Diamond Sutra = Vajra-c,chedikā Prajñā,pāramitā Śūtra 261b.

²¹ Piyaṣilo 1992h:81 ff = §6.722.

²² “Have judged,” *pāmiṃsu*, lit “(they) measured.”

²³ “Who follow me by voice,” *ye ca ghosena anvagū*, alt tr “who follow me by my voice.”

- 471** Who understands not the inside, but sees the outside:
seeing only external fruits, he, too, is misled by voice.
- 472** Who understands the inside, and sees the outside:
seeing without obstructions, he is not misled by voice. (Tha 469-472 ≈ A 4.65/2:71)

The elder Lakunṭhaka Bhaddiya, the sweet-voiced dwarf, who speaks these verses in the first person (for the most part, the same verses are reported in the 3rd person in the Rūpa Sutta), is concerned at being misjudged by his deformed looks, and at others' being captivated by his sweet voice.²⁴

Anyway, as far as the unthinking crowd is concerned—a crowd does not think—both looks and voice are good measures of virtue and power. Hence, the use of gossips and rumours by the wanderers who are jealous of the Buddha's success.²⁵ The jealous and desperate wanderers tried to use gossips and rumours as a means of social control over the Buddha and his community.

7 The 4 measures of charisma

7.1 The Rūpa Sutta (A 4.65) gives a clear explanation of the Buddhist notion of charisma. It lists the 4 "measures" (pamāṇā), that is, how we attribute charisma to another, and become "inspired" (*pasanna*) or powerfully moved by that person or an aspect of him.

According to the Rūpa Sutta, there are 4 kinds of persons who attribute charisma to others, that is, how charisma can be attributed to another, namely:²⁶

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| (1) One who measures by looks [form] (<i>rūpa</i>) | and have faith in looks. |
| (2) One who measures by voice (<i>ghosa</i>) | and have faith in voice. |
| (3) One who measures by austerity (<i>lūkha</i>) [external holiness] | and have faith in austerity. |
| (4) One who measures by religiosity (<i>dhamma</i>) | and have faith in religiosity. |
- (A 4.65/2:71), SD 3.14(7); cf Pug 4.22/53 f; Tha 469-472; DhA 1:114; SnA 242

The first three are popular criteria but faulty and personal at best: only the fourth is the true standard for one's faith or devotion to another. The Buddha, however, enjoys all 4 measures from the faithful who know him although he clearly disapproves of them (as evident from the Sutta).

7.2 The 4 measures of charisma are explained in the **Puggala Paññatti** (Pug 4.22) as follows:

What sort of person measures by **looks** (*rūpa*) [looks] and have faith in looks?

Here a person, having seen the height, the breadth, the shape, or the whole (of a person), grasping such measures (*pamāṇa*), feels inspired.

Such a person is one measuring by and inspired by looks.

What sort of person measures by **voice** (*ghosa*) and have faith in voice?

Here a person, on the basis of comments, of praise, of applause, of compliments of others, grasping such measures, feels inspired.²⁷

²⁴ See **Lakunṭhaka Bhaddiya S** (S 21.6/2:279). What is interesting here is that Bhaddiya does not compensate his looks by way of his wonderful voice: see **Samaṇa Gadrabha S** (A 3.81), SD 24.10b (2.2).

²⁵ See for example **Bāhitika S** (M 88) & also U 4.8 = 43-45 (SD 49.23); J 2:415-417.

²⁶ On the relationship of measures (*pamāṇa*) to conceit (*māna*), see **Pubba Sambodha S 1** (S 35.13), SD 14.9 (3) & **Me: The problems of conceit**, SD 19.2a (3.5).

Such a person is one measuring by and inspired by voice.

What sort of person measures by **austerity** (*lūkha*) [external holiness] and have faith in austerity?

Here a person, having seen the austerity (or roughness) of the robes, of the almsbowl, of the lodgings, of various (other) austerities [things difficult to do, including “miracles”], grasping such measures, feels inspired.

Such a person is one measuring by and inspired by austerity.

What sort of person measures by **religiosity** [religious quality] (*dhamma*) and have faith in religiosity?

Having seen the moral virtue, the mental concentration, the wisdom (of another), grasping such measures, one feels inspired.

Such a person is one measuring by and inspired by doctrine.

(Pug 4.22/53 f; PugA 229 f; cf A 2:70; SnA 242; DhA 3:113 f)

8 Commentarial explanations

8.1 Here are summarized the commentarial explanations concerning the doctrine of “measure” (*pamāṇa*) as given in the Dhammapada Commentary, the Sutta Nipāta Commentary and the Puggala Paññatti Commentary, using the first as the main text with explanations from the other two texts [given within square brackets]:

There are **4 measures** among those who dwell together in the world (*loka, sannivāse*).

Having seen the fully self-awakened Buddha, there is none who is not inspired. For those whose measure is **looks** [form] (*rūpa-p, pamāṇikā*) look upon the golden-hued body of the Tathāgata [Buddha thus come], adorned with the major and minor marks [all complete and whole (PugA)],²⁸ [(his) radiant aura extending for a fathom around his body (SnA)], and are inspired by what they see.

Those whose measure is **voice** (*ghosa-p, pamāṇikā*) listen to the report of the Teacher’s virtues through many hundreds of births and to his voice endowed with the 8 qualities [distinct, intelligible, lovely, audible, full, clear, deep, resonant]²⁹, [(sounding) like the Indian cuckoo, sweet (like honey), noiseless and divinely deep (SnA)], in the teaching of the Dharma and are inspired by what they hear.

Those whose measure is “holiness” or **austerity** (*lūkha-p, pamāṇikā*) are inspired by his austere robes [such as its dull colour (PugA)], [austere bowl (austere in colour, form and material (PugA)], physical austerities (SnA, PugA) austere seat (PugA)] and so forth.

Those whose measure is **religiosity** (*dhamma-p, pamāṇikā*), [examining the aggregates of his nature, beginning with moral conduct (SnA)], reflect, “Such is the moral virtue, the concentration, the wisdom of the one with the 10 powers,³⁰ without an end, without a peer.” Thus, they are inspired.

²⁷ Although the Comys def charisma through “voice” by way of *hearsay*, it also implies that we tend to judge teachers by their voice quality and delivery, too.

²⁸ The 32 major marks of the great man (mahā purisa, lakṣhaṇa): for list, see **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3), SD 21.3(2.1.1(1)); for details, see **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 3), SD 36.9 Intro.

²⁹ **Brahmāyu S** (M 91): *visaṭṭho ca viññeyyo ca mañju ca savanīyo ca bindu ca avisārī ca gambhīro ca ninnādī ca* (M 2:140; J 1:96; VvA 217; of Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra’s speech D 2:211 = 227; BHS *aṣṭ’āṅgopeta śvara*, Avadāna Śataka (Speyer) 1:149). I B Horner: “it is distinct and intelligible and sweet and audible and fluent and clear and deep and resonant” (M:H 2:326); Walshe: “distinct, intelligible, pleasant, attractive, compact, concise, deep and resonant” (D:W 296). See MA 3:382 f & BA 61 f.

³⁰ “The one with the 10 powers,” *dasa, bala* or, more fully, *dasa, bala, ñāṇa*. The 10 powers are: (1) knowledge of the possible and the impossible (*tṭhānāṭṭhāna ñāṇa*), such as in the analysis of karma (M 57, 135, 136), and the pos-

Indeed, those who praise the virtues of the Tathāgata lack words to express their praises.

[Amongst all the living beings, out of 3, 2 measure (others) by *looks*, one does not; out of 5, 4 measure (others) by *voice*, one does not; out of 10, 9 measure (others) by *austerity*, one does not; out of a 1,000, only one measures (others) by *religiosity*, the rest do not. (PugA)]

(AA 1:134; DhA 3:114 f; SnA 242; PugA 229 f)

8.2 The last parenthetical remark (in the Puggala Paññatti Commentary) is of statistical interest. In contemporary terms, it says that in a sample group of people:

66.67% will be *looks-inspired* (that is, measure others by looks),
 80% will be *voice-inspired* (that is, measure others by what they hear or from what others say),
 90% will be *austerity-inspired* (that is, religiously biased), and only
 0.001% will be *religiosity-inspired* (that is, measure others in terms of the good teachings they give).

Most of us are drawn to people who *look holy*: we tend to be **austerity-inspired**. We should then study the Buddha's teachings in **the Vimāṃsaka Sutta** (M 47) on how to carefully look up to the truly wholesome teachers in such a person.³¹ Those of us who are drawn to a person's voice, or even his words (which endorses our views), then we should reflect on the elder **Lakuṇṭhaka Bhaddiya's** teachings [8.2]. Those of us who are attracted to the mere form of the teacher or leader, should heed the Buddha's advice to Vakkali, as recorded in **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87).³² Those who are "**religiosity-inspired**," even though the fewest, one in a thousand, especially when they are the fewest, should be regarded as true practitioners, capable to moving towards to the path of awakening.

8.3 The first 3 types of persons—those who measure others by looks, by voice and by austerity—are those who attribute charisma to another from external perception. This was the standard of the Commentarial period (mediaeval India and Sri Lanka), and probably that of ancient India, too.

8.4 However, in our own times, the first 3 figures are more likely to be in the inverse, that is, 90% are more likely to be looks-inspired, 80% voice-inspired (slight or no change), and 66.67% austerity-inspired.

The figure for the teaching-inspired is perhaps even smaller today. This is what the listener or faithful regard as "truth" from what they hear or are informed by the charismatic person.

And in today's affluent society, one might add another "measure", that is, title or status.

For example, in an interesting 1994 analysis of the national cultures of 50 countries, **Geertz Hofstede** rates Malaysia as the highest of all on the "**power distance index**" (PDI) scale. Power distance relates to the tolerance a culture has for the differences between individuals in terms of their power or authority.³³

sibility regarding the realm, circumstances, time and effort, all of which would impede or reinforce the result; and also the cause of karma, etc; (2) knowledge of the result of karma (kamma, vipāka ñāṇa); (3) knowledge of the way leading to all destinies and goals (sabbattha, gāminī, paṭipadā); (4) knowledge of the world with its various elements (nānā, dhātu ñāṇa) (M 115.4-9/3:62 f); (5) knowledge of the different dispositions of beings (nānādhimuttika ñāṇa); (6) knowledge of the maturity level of beings in terms of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom (indriya, paropariyatta ñāṇa) (Vbh §§814-827); (7) knowledge of the defilements, cleansing and emergence in the cases of the meditations, liberations, concentrations and attainments (jhān'ādi, saṅkiles'ādi ñāṇa); (8) knowledge of the recollection of (his own) past lives (pubbe, nivāsānussati ñāṇa); (9) knowledge of the passing away and arising of beings (according to their karma) (cutūpapāta ñāṇa); (10) knowledge of the destruction of the mental defilements (āsava-k, khaya ñāṇa) (M 1:69; A 5:33; Vbh 336). See **Mahā Sīhanāda S** (M 12.9-20/ 1:69-71) for details.

³¹ M 47/1:317-320 (SD 35.6).

³² S 22.87/3:119-124 (SD 8.8).

³³ Geertz Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind*. London: Harper Collins, 1994.

In other words, if one is titled or holds some kind of social, economic or even academic status (especially a Dr or PhD of sorts), this gap is quickly closed—understandably, such blessings make one a more effective Buddhist teacher able to communicate with those who hold such standards.³⁴

9 Dangers of wrong devotion

9.1 The Aṅguttara Nikāya contains **the Puggala-p,pasāda Sutta** (A 5.250/3:270), the Discourse on Faith in a Person, which warns us of the dangers of being devoted to one person. Since this is a very short but very important text, it is here given in full:

SD 3.14(9)

Puggala-p,pasāda Sutta

The Discourse on Faith in a Person | **A 5.250/3:270**

Theme: Have faith in the teaching not the teacher

1 Monks, there are 5 dangers of being devoted to one person. What are the five?

2 (1) When a person becomes deeply devoted (*abhippasanna*) to one person, and that person commits an offence such that the order **suspends him**,³⁵ then, he would think, “The Order has suspended him who is dear and pleasing to me.” And he would not be very devoted to the other monks. From lacking that devotion in those monks, he would not attend to them. From not attending to them, he would not hear the true Dharma. From not listening to the true Dharma, he would fall away from it.

This, monks, is the 1st danger of being devoted to one person.

3 (2) Furthermore, monks, when a person becomes deeply devoted to one person, and that person commits an offence such that the order **makes him sit at the edge of the assembly**; then, he would think, “The order makes him sit at the edge of the assembly, he who is dear and pleasing to me.” And he would not be very devoted to the other monks. From lacking that devotion in those monks, he would not attend to them. From not attending to them, he would not hear the True Dharma. From not listening to the True Dharma, he would fall away from it.

This, monks, is the 2nd danger of being devoted to one person.

4 (3) Furthermore, monks, when a person becomes deeply devoted to one person, and that person **has left for a distant place**; ...

This, monks, is the 3rd danger of being devoted to one person.

(4) Furthermore, monks, ... that person **leaves the order**³⁶...

This, monks, is the 4th danger of being devoted to one person.

³⁴ See “**Me**”: **The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a(2.4).

³⁵ “Suspends him,” ukkhipati. This is a temporary suspension of membership of the Sangha. Such an act is taken against a monastic who refuses to acknowledge his offence, or who declines to make amends for his offence, or who holds a wrong view regarding the Buddha’s Teachings despite being admonished against it. See V 1:326, 2:17-28; A 1:99; VA 1320; J 3:486. Cf V:H 3:28 n4. See also “Money and Monastics” §3 in the Sutta Discovery 2003 series.

³⁶ “Leaves the Order,” so vibbhanto, lit “he strays away (from the Order)” (V 1:72, 2:14, 3:40) or commits a Pārājika (offence entailing defeat) (V 4:216, 3:462).

(5) Furthermore, monks, when a person becomes deeply devoted to one person, and that person **dies**; then, he would think, “He is dead, he who is dear and pleasing to me!” And he would not be very devoted to the other monks. From lacking that devotion in those monks, he would not attend to them. From not attending to them, he would not hear the True Dharma. From not listening to the True Dharma, he would fall away from it.

This, monks, is the 5th danger of being devoted to one person.

These, monks, are the 5 dangers of being devoted to one person. (A 5.250/3:270)

9.2 In the (Kassapa) Ovāda Sutta 3 (S 16.8), Mahā Kassapa, despite the Buddha’s invitation, refuses to teach a group of monks since they are not ready. Unlike in the previous two Ovāda Suttas, the Buddha this time does not urge Kassapa to change his mind, but he himself speaks the reasons for their conduct:

Formerly, Kassapa, there were elders of the Order who were forest dwellers, almsfood eaters, rag-robe wearers, triple-robe users, with few wishes, content, lovers of solitude, aloof from society, energetic—and they spoke in praise of these qualities.

Then, when such a monk visited a monastery, he was warmly welcomed and honoured as being dedicated to the practice of the Dharma. Then the newly ordained monks would also strive to emulate him in his way of life, and as such would lead to their welfare and happiness for a long time.

But now, Kassapa, the elders are no longer forest dwellers, nor almsfood eaters, nor rag-robe wearers, nor triple-robe users, nor are they with few wishes, nor are they content, nor do they love solitude, nor are they aloof from society, nor are they energetic [in their practice]—nor do they speak in praise of these qualities.

Now, it is the monk who is **well known and famous, who gains robes, almsfood, lodgings and medical requisites**, that the elder monks invite to a seat, saying: “Come, monk. What is this monk’s name? This is an excellent monk. This monk is keen on the company of his brothers in the holy life. Come, monk, here’s a seat, sit down.” Then **the newly ordained monks will also strive to emulate him**, and that leads to their harm and suffering for a long time.

Kassapa, one would be speaking rightly to say: “Those leading the holy life are ruined by the ruin of those who lead the holy life. Those leading the holy life are defeated by the defeat of those who lead the holy life.” [That is to say, the decline and fall of the monks—as it is, too, in the case of lay Buddhists—by the wrong examples they emulate.] (S 16.8/2:208-210), SD 88.5

The prophetic tone of these discourses, especially **the Ovāda Sutta 3** (S 16.8/2:208-210), is very clear. As Buddhism today grows in more affluent societies and attracts more affluent members, there is a tendency to associate wealth, worldly success and social status with “good karma” or religious attainment. To rephrase the Buddha’s concern to fit our own times: *“Now, it is those who are well known and famous, who are wealthy, successful, titled and socially influential, that are respected and emulated. This leads to their harm and suffering for a long time.”*³⁷

10 Measure not others!

10.1 In the Miga,sālā Sutta (A 6.44 + 10.75), the Buddha expounds to Ānanda on the knowledge of the diversity³⁸ of individuals. There are these 10 kinds of people (abridged paraphrase of the sutta):

³⁷ On how gain and honour can ruin the holy life, see M 3:116 f.

³⁸ “Diversity,” paro,pariya, lit “lower and higher (states).” Cf parôvara = para avara, “high and low, far and near” (Sn 353, 475, 704, 1048, 1148), glossed as “low and excellent” (hīna-p,paṇītaṃ,

(1) Here, Ānanda, a certain person is **immoral** (*dussīla*) and he does not understand, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that immorality of his ceases without remainder. He is not shaped by what he has heard; and he is not shaped by great learning³⁹ that he has not understood with right view; and he wins not even temporary freedom.⁴⁰ After death, he undergoes decline.

(2) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person is **immoral** but he understands, according to reality, **[140]** that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that immorality of his ceases without remainder. He is shaped by what he has heard; and he is shaped by great learning that he has well understood with right view;⁴¹ and he wins temporary freedom. After death, he undergoes distinction.⁴² ... **[141]**

(3) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person is **morally virtuous** (*sīlavā*) but he does not understand, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that moral virtue of his ceases without remainder. He is not shaped by what he has heard; and he is not shaped by great learning; which he has not understood with right view; and he wins not even temporary freedom. After death, he undergoes decline.

(4) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person is **morally virtuous** and he understands, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that moral virtue of his ceases without remainder. He is shaped by what he has heard; and he is shaped by great learning that he has well understood with right view; and he wins temporary freedom. After death, he undergoes distinction ...

(5) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person has **great lust** (*tibba, rāga*) and he does not understand, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that lust of his ceases without remainder. He is not shaped by what he has heard; and he is not shaped by great learning that he has not understood with right view; and he does not win temporary freedom. After death, he undergoes decline, not distinction.

(6) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person has **great lust** but he understands, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that lust of his ceases without remainder. He is shaped by what he has heard; and he is shaped by great learning; and he has well understood with right view; and he wins temporary freedom. **[142]** After death, he undergoes distinction ...

(7) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person is **angry** (*kodhana*) and he does not understand, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that anger of his

³⁹ "Great learning," bahu, sacca, lit "much listening": sacca here ← suta (heard) + ya.

⁴⁰ "Temporary freedom," sāmāyika vimutti, or more specifically, sāmāyika ceto, vimutti (temporary freedom of mind), refers to the mundane meditative attainments (lokiya samāpatti), ie the absorptions (jhāna) and formless attainments (arūpa samāpatti), ie the form and formless absorptions. It is so called because the mind has momentarily abandoned (tad-aṅga pahāna) its opposing mental hindrances and is resolved upon its object.

⁴¹ "Truly understood through his views," diṭṭhiyā pi suppaṭividdham.

⁴² "Distinction," visesa, alt tr "excellence." It refers to any of the dhyanas (jhāna) or any of the 4 stages of sainthood: streamwinner (soṭ'āpanna), once-returner (sākad'āgāmī), non-returner (anāgāmī) and arhat (arahanta) (D 1:156). For definitions, see eg **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 112,9-12/3:80), SD 7.13. Cf the story of Sāriputta's meeting with Assaji: when Sāriputta realizes that he does not attain any "higher distinction" (upari, visesa), ie any higher attainment than streamwinning, he decided to meet the Buddha himself (DhA 1:94).

ceases without remainder. He is not shaped by what he has heard; and he is not shaped by great learning that he has not understood with right view; and he does not win temporary freedom. After death, when the body has broken up, he undergoes decline.

(8) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person is angry but he understands, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that anger of his ceases without remainder. He is shaped by what he has heard; and he is shaped by great learning that he has well understood with right view; and he wins temporary freedom. After death, he undergoes distinction ...

(9) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person is **restless** (*uddhata*) and he does not understand, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which that restlessness of his ceases without remainder. He is not shaped by what he has heard; and he is not shaped by great learning that he has not understood with right view; and he does not win temporary freedom. After death, he undergoes decline.

(10) Here again, Ānanda, a certain person is restless but he understands, according to reality, that freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom by which his restlessness ceases without remainder. He is shaped by what he has heard; and he is shaped by great learning that he has not understood with right view; [143] and he wins temporary freedom. After death, he undergoes distinction.

Now, Ānanda, those who are measurers would measure thus:

‘The very characteristics of [each of each pair of persons here] are the same as those of the other, but why is the one lowly and the other exalted?’

Such a thought, Ānanda, is to their loss and pain for a long time.

Now, Ānanda, that person is morally virtuous ... *and* wins temporary freedom ...

Because, Ānanda, the Dharma stream⁴³ carries along⁴⁴ this person. Who would know this⁴⁵ except the Tathāgata [Buddha thus come].

As such, Ānanda, be not measurers of persons, hold not onto the measure of persons! A person, Ānanda, is ruined by holding on to the measure of persons but I, Ānanda, and those like me, may take the measure of persons

⁴³ “Dharma stream,” *dharmasota*. Obviously here, the Buddha is referring either to streamwinning or one on the way to become one. Hare (S:WH 5:96 etc) renders it as “ear of Dharma”; while Hare (S:WH 3:248 etc) & Bodhi (S:B 1:564 etc) both render it as “stream of Dharma.” Occurrences: ~*ṛ* *saṃāpanna* (S 2:42, 43, 45, 58 f, 80); ~*saṃāpanna* [“entered the stream of Dharma”] (A 3:285-288, 5:356 f, 360); ~*ṛ* *upānaya* [“carried along by the stream of Dharma”] (Ap 1:101 Subhadda Thera 9); ~*o* *nibbāhāti* [“the stream of Dharma carries (one) along”] (A 3:350 f, 5:140, 143). Comy here explains *dharmasota* *nibbāhāti* as “*sūram hutvā* (having become a hero) *pavattamāna*, *vipassanā,ñāṇam* (keeping up insight knowledge), *ariya,bhūmiṃ sampāpeti*, “Insight knowledge, having become strong, takes him along to reach the “noble ground” (level of the Aryas)” (AA 3:375; cf Masefield 1986:79) [I have to thank Nina van Gorkom on her research assistance here.] The Pali *sota* has two Skt forms: (a) *śrotas vśru* → *suṇāti* (he hears), the ear; (b) *srotas* → *srotas vśru* → *savati* (it flows), stream (of water). Comparing the Pali occurrences of the sentences with their BHS cognates or parallels in the Āgama should provide insight into their usages. *Dharmavuddho* thinks that *soṭāpatti* [*soṭāpanna* = “streamwinner”] usually rendered as “stream-entry” could also be translated as “ear-entry” (1999:6), suggesting that one could gain the first stage of sainthood through skillful listening to the Dharma (the thesis of his 1999 article). See Dhs 3:43.

⁴⁴ “Carries ... along,” *nibbāhāti*. Hare thinks that “*Nibbāhāti* is either from *vbarh*, to increase, or *vvah*, to carry, with *nis*, ‘out,’ ‘to completion.’” (A:WH 3”248 n1). See prev n.

⁴⁵ “This,” *tad antaram* (vi *tad anantaram*). Comy: *tad antaram taṃ karaṇam*, “this reason” (AA 3:375).

Ānanda, these are the ten kinds of persons existing in the world.

(A 6.44/3:347-351), SD 3.2; (A 10.75/5:137-144)

10.2 The point of the sutta is that sometimes the bad prosper, the good suffer; sometimes the bad suffer, the good prosper; sometimes the good show unwholesome traits, and the bad show wholesome traits—but other than the Buddha himself or those like him, no one can really know the minds of such people. As such, we should not be measurers or moral judges of others.

10.3 The Buddha’s advice that we should “not to measure” anyone does not mean that we should blindly follow any teacher. If one meets a monk or nun and is uncertain about him or her, it behooves one to ask that teacher who claims to teach Dharma the way that Sāriputta asks Assaḍi on their first meeting, “On whose account have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Whose teaching do you profess?”⁴⁶ If their answer does not accord with the teachings of the Dharma or the Vinaya (such as answering angrily or with pride or deviously), then one should avoid such a person.

10.4 In his response to the tragic scandals involving a world-renowned Tibetan teacher, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (who died a drunk) and his dharma heir, the American Osel Tendzin (who died of AIDS), the Dalai Lama made this declaration in a 1990 conference in Newport Beach, California:

Part of the blame lies with the student, because too much obedience, devotion and blind acceptance spoils a teacher. Part also lies with the spiritual master because he lacks the integrity to be immune to that kind of vulnerability... I recommend never adopting the attitude towards one’s spiritual teacher of seeing his or her every action as divine or noble. This may seem a little bit bold, but if one has a teacher who is not qualified, who is engaged in unsuitable or wrong behavior, then it is appropriate for the student to criticize that behavior.

(Katy Butler, “Encountering the shadow in Buddhist America,” in 1991:146)

11 Attachment to teachers

Ajahn Sumedho’s teachings given at the Chithurst Buddhist Monastery during its first five years contains an insightful article on “**Attachment to teachers**” (1992:127-136). I have here put together excerpts and summaries of sections of it. Sumedho begins by saying:

[127] People have many problems with preferring one monk, one teacher, or one tradition to another. They get adjusted, or attached, to a certain teacher and find that because of that they can’t learn from any other teacher. This is an understandable human problem, because our preferences for one allow us to be open to what he or she is saying, and when somebody else comes along we don’t want to open up and learn from them. We may not like them, or we might feel doubtful or uncertain about them, and so we tend to resent and not want to listen to them. Or, we may have heard rumours, and have heard opinions and views that this teacher is *this* way and that one is *that* way.

[129] Our refuges are deliberately set up as Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, rather than as the personality of any teacher... [Or we become sectarian.] “I’m a Theravada Buddhist; therefore I can’t learn from those Tibetan Buddhists or those Zen Buddhists.” It’s very easy for us to become sectarian in this way because, if something is different from what we’re used to, we sus-

⁴⁶ V 1:40; M 3:238; J 1:85. In **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S**, the Buddha himself asks this question of Pukkusāti who fails to recognize the Teacher (M 140/3:238), SD 4.17.

pect it of not being as good or as pure as what we've devoted ourselves. But in meditation, what we are aiming at is truth, full understanding and enlightenment, inclining away from the jungle of selfishness, conceit, pride, and human passions. So it's not very wise to attach to a particular teacher to the point where you refuse to learn from any other.

But some teachers encourage this attitude. They say, "Once you take me as your teacher, then don't you go to any other teacher! ... and they have very good reasons sometimes, because people just "go shopping." They go from one teacher to another teacher, and another ... and never learn anything. But I think the problem is not so much in "shopping" as in attaching to a teacher or tradition to a point where you have to exclude all others. That makes for a sect, a sectarian mind, with which people cannot recognize wisdom or learn from anything unless it's in the exact words and conventions that they are used to.

That keeps us very limited, narrow and frightened. People become afraid to listen to another teacher because it might cause doubt to arise in their minds, or they might feel that they are not being a loyal student of their particular tradition. The Buddhist Path is to develop wisdom, and loyalty and devotion [130] help in that. But if they are ends in themselves, then they are obstacles.

"Wisdom" in the sense means using wisdom in our practice of meditation...By recognizing our own particular forms of pride, conceit, and the attachments we have to our views and opinions, to the material world, to the tradition and the teacher, to friends we have.

Now this doesn't mean that we *shouldn't* attach, or that we should get rid of all these. That's not wise either, because wisdom is the ability to observe attachment and understand it and let it go—rather than attach to ideas that we shouldn't be attached to anything.

[131] Sumedho then goes on to say that being committed to a teacher can be useful as part of a learning process for students and seekers "so that when they have strength they can let go of us, that's compassion."

[132] Being a monk makes one "totally and completely dependent on other people...[but] I began to appreciate the need, the goodness, of being dependent in the right way, or admitting interdependence. It takes some humility to learn to be dependent on others again. Even if we don't have any joy or love for each other, we can at least be [133] kind, not vindictive or nasty to each other. We can trust each other.

When I was a junior, I used to consider that I must have confidence in my own insight and not depend on everyone around me supporting my particular position. Through the years I've had many chances to be disillusioned in this life...but I keep reflecting, rather than depending on everything going in a positive way for me. What I'm doing I have confidence in, from my own understanding of it, not because I [133] believe or need the support and approval of others. In your life you must ask these questions: is your becoming a samana—a monk or a nun—dependent upon me encouraging you, upon others, upon hope, expectations for the future, upon rewards and all that? Or are you determined in your own right to realize the truth? ...

So we are not here to find *my* teacher, but to be willing to learn from everything—from the rats and the mosquitoes, from the inspired teachers, from the depressed ones, from the ones that disappoint us and the ones that never disappoint us. Because we are not trying to find perfection in conventional forms, or in teachers.

[135] Sumedho then says that we can learn from all kinds of teachers, living as well as dead ones. However, we should not create any teachers in our own image, like parents who still see their adult

children as photo-perfect teenagers. If we do that, then we are merely looking at their past, and can never really get to know them well—or know anyone else well.

For the meditator, everything is teaching us something.

[136] So consider what I've said this evening and reflect on it. Don't believe it, don't disbelieve it. If you have any prejudices or opinions and views, it's all right, just see them as they are, as conditions of your mind, and learn from them.⁴⁷ (1992:127-136)

Self-empowerment

12 Self-love

Some religions today are the sources of religious violence. The believers who perpetrate such violence—bombing of buildings and populated public, intolerance of non-believers, and so on—clearly show that they lack self-love that is replaced by promises of some kind of better life hereafter. This is like burning the bridge before we cross it. For Buddhists, living this life mindfully and fully brings on the wisdom that brings us across the ocean of suffering. Only then can we leave the boat behind, as it were.

A central teaching in Buddhism is self-love, but it only begins there so that this same love is shown to others: we should regard others as we would regard ourself. This is unconditional and boundless love—which is not easy and needs constant practice. Love is an art that needs to be learned and practised and it only gets better with practice. If we cannot love ourself but feign to love others, it is neurotic love, since it tries to fill an emotional emptiness. If we only love ourself, we are narcissistic: this is infantile love. Mature love or spiritual love is when we love others as we love ourself in a wholesome way.

13 Lovingkindness

This unconditional love, that is like a mother's love for her only child, is called lovingkindness (*mettā*). This love is healing and empowering since it eases our pains and clears one's mind. It also gives us spiritual energy to tap deep into our being and discover its beauty, creativity and wisdom. This lovingkindness can be cultivated by and for ourselves. It is the process of arousing this lovingkindness that is healing and empowering since it displaces all the negative emotions and dark energies.

Yet this lovingkindness is incomplete until we are able to show it to all beings without exception. First, we generate this happy feeling within ourselves by holding a joyful thought or happy feeling in our minds. Then using this happy energy, we radiate it over a growing circle of beings until it covers the whole universe. Having cleared our minds of all negative states, our minds are now able to love all beings as if they are our own offspring since we see ourselves as being part of an unbroken jewel-network of living and joyful beings.

14 Take only Dharma as refuge

14.1 The teachings of **the Rūpa Sutta** and the Diamond Sutra can be put into contemporary terms in this manner: our estimation or "measure" of others is merely a mental construction based on the false notion of a permanent self. Ideas and biases in our minds are reified or projected onto external things: *we see in people and things what we want to see*. Yet we are not ourselves because the perceptions are false; they

⁴⁷ On dealing with cult figures, see SD 18.11a(2.3). For some information of cult awareness, see eg http://www.kheper.net/topics/gurus/eastern_gurus_in_the_west.html.

are not themselves because we have projected them. The true “self” is our own mind, which if we understand becomes a helpful tool. Indeed, it is the only real tool we have to deal with ourselves and with the world.

For this reason, just before passing away, the Buddha exhorted us to take the True Teaching as our island and refuge:

Live, monks, as an island unto yourself! Be a refuge unto yourself! Take no other refuge!
Take the Dharma as your island! Take the Dharma as your refuge! Take no other refuge!
(D 2:100, 3:58, 77)

Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ānanda, “It may be, Ānanda, that some of you will think, ‘The word of the Teacher is gone; we have no more Teacher.’ But that, Ānanda, is not the correct view. The Dharma-Vinaya [the teaching and the discipline], Ānanda, which I have taught and explained to you is to be your teacher.” (Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta, D 2:154)

14.2 In keeping with the Buddha’s admonition and also since the Mahāyāna is a scripture-centred system,⁴⁸ the Mahāyāna relies on scriptural authority, as found in such guides as the **Catuh,pratisaraṇa Sūtra**:

Rely on the teaching, not the teacher.
Rely on the meaning, not the letter.
Rely on the definitive meaning (*nītārtha*), not the interpretive meaning (*neyārtha*).
Rely on insight (*jñāna*), not on sense-consciousness (*viññāna*). (Catuhpratisaraṇa Sūtra)

Let us close with the beautiful and instructive verses of **the Ādhipateyya Sutta** (A 3.40/1:147-150):

There is in the world no secret of one who does a bad deed.
You yourself, O human, know what is true and what is false!
Alas! My friend, you, the witness, look down upon your own goodness!
How can you hide the bad that there is in the self from the self?
The devas and the Tathagatas [Buddhas thus come] see the fool living falsely in the world.

Therefore the self-regarding one [who takes self as lord] (*attā’dhipaka*) should live mindfully;
Let the world-regarding one [who takes the world as lord] (*lokādhipaka*) be wise [in guarding the mind] and meditate.

For whom the Dharma is lord (*dharmādhipaka*), one following the Teaching, let him be a (silent) sage striving for the truth.

The one who strives, having conquered Māra [the bad one] and overcome death [the end-maker], wins the end of birth!

Such a one is wise, knower of worlds, the (silent) sage, unshaped by anything in anyway (*sabbesu dhammesu atammayo*).⁴⁹ (A 3.40.4/1:149 f, SD 27.3; cf A 1:213 f, 4:252; Dh 178)

14.3 By way of summary, it must be said that the guru tends to weigh heavy (*garu*) on his student with his personality and weaknesses. An unawakened guru is necessarily very much lesser than the Buddha, or the student might prove to be better than that guru, in time. As such, a guru tends to hold back his

⁴⁸ While early Buddhism is described as an oral tradition, Mahāyāna is usually known as a scribal tradition.

⁴⁹ See Ñāṇānanda, Concept and Reality, 1971:29 & Santikāro Bhikkhu, “Atammayatā: The rebirth of a lost word.” Crossroads 4,2 1989:87-90. See also **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

student's spiritual development: a student can be no better than his guru, especially if the guru is perceived as being "perfect." A true teacher (*satthā*), on the other hand, liberates his student so that he becomes an arhat, buddha-like, if not at least able to have a vision of such a one as a streamwinner.

14.4 In our ignorance and craving, we are like prisoners enclosed by walls, and a good teacher is like to a key or liberator who opens the prison gates to freedom. Some, sadly, might choose to install the key on a beautiful pedestal and worship it. They then complain, "I have been praying to this key for years and nothing happened!" So they throw the key out! Then they look for another key—but we are still in the prison, perhaps a bigger and more fascinating one. All we need is to use the key to open the prison gates.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ One should not stretch similes too far, of course—like only the one right key would open the gate. The point of the simile is that one should oneself make an effort towards wisdom. See original imagery in Sumedho 1992:30 f. For further study, see **Gāraṇa S** (S 6.2/1:138-140), SD 12.3.

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