

## **The word or the truth**

Live to learn, learn to live

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There is so much we can know about Buddhism than, say, a generation ago, before the early Buddhist texts (EBT) and their good translations are easily available. However, only those who are curious and diligent, who listen to the experts and teachers, who read the EBTs for themselves, who sit in peace to see the liberating truth within.

Most of us, it seems, would rather merely listen and listen again, but never do our homework. Would rather just take down the notes, or, worse, or simply copy the works of others, and put our name to it. We are awarded marks and praises for our efforts, so long as we are not caught and punished.

We are punished by time and change. When we have been living a life of copying notes and missing classes, we look up, and suddenly realize our school days are over. We have age and decay. It's even more difficult to learn, much less to sit with ourselves. When we do sit, we only get assailed by the past of things done and undone, of guilt and shame, of wishes and regrets. But the end is near, and we merely wait like cattle to be slaughtered.

Of course, things are rarely as bad as this, so we think. We are reading a good sutta translation; we are listening to some world-famous teachers; we are following some highly attained masters; we ourselves, often give talks on Buddhism, whether we know it or not. And, of course, we the guidance of those titled priests of learning, the up-to-date masters of modern Buddhism, trying to edit and revise what the Buddha taught according to modern science, modern psychology, modern management.

It's a very competitive market of faith, so every titled teacher tries to come up with a new or better way to teach Buddhism. The idea is to teach and be better than our teaching; to be bigger than what we do; so that we become the Teacher above the teaching. After all, the audience never fails to find the Teacher more interesting, even desirable, than the lifeless old teaching. That's what the teaching has become to us who enslave.

Buddhism has been reborn as Cinderella, and we are the Stepmother and Ugly Sisters who make her slave away for our benefit. Cinderella takes good care of us, makes us happy, but we take all the credit. After all, we are the head of the house, the leaders of our professions and businesses. We have the power; Cinderella has all the diligence.

Behind every Cinderella, there is always a Prince Charming, true royalty of charm, learning and intelligence. These are today the scholar kempt and careful scholars of Buddhism. While the Buddhists are mostly like the crude and careless relatives of the Stepmother, the Scholars give us well written, well reasoned, well published, well read books and journal articles on every imaginable aspect of Buddhism.

Prince Charming lives in the Great Castle of the Word. He is young, exuberant and, well, in love, with Cinderella. In our story, however, Cinderella has none of those brittle and unsafe

glass sandals. She wears proper dancing shoes provided by her thoughtful Fairy Godmother. She's not keen on marriage, seeing the misery that the Ugly Sisters give to the Stepmother.

So Prince Charming keeps looking for her. Our learned Prince writes notices, articles, books, even encyclopaedias about Cinderella, hoping one day, to actually meet her—and, well, marry her. But that would be the end of our story. In this story, they never met: it is an endless quest for both Prince and Cindy. He seeks Cindy, Cindy seeks true happiness.

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