

Listen to yourself

My love for the Buddha's discourses began when I was an adolescent, seeking to understand the mysteries of the world's religions, extant and extinct. I'm convinced that if anyone has the freedom and willingness to examine the teachings and stories of whatever religions they encounter, and their hearts seek true happiness, they would surely find early Buddhism so attractive in its simplicity and efficacy.

So I spent 20 years as a Buddhist monk studying the Dharma-Vinaya (the Buddha's teachings and monastic discipline) and Pali, the language of the early Buddhist texts (and a smattering of Sanskrit). Early Buddhism is best read in Pali, but not everyone has a good command of it. English translations of the Pali texts then are the next best choice.

Even after I left the monastic order to work as a full-time lay teacher, my love for the Pali texts grows. In fact, I find myself continuing to translate them for the classes I teach, and giving them away as resources for those who seek learning and teaching materials. It is a great joy to be able to translate the Pali texts, as it keeps me in constant link with the Dharma and meditation, ever surprising me with new and liberating insights into life, human nature and self-knowing.

The greatest gift that my love affair with the early Suttas is the assurance of spiritual awakening in the life itself as a streamwinner (*sotāpanna*), a figurative term for one who has boarded a stress-free boat that safely flows downstream into the ocean of nirvana. This same assurance goes for anyone who is able to turn away from self-doubt, worldly distractions and excuses for not wishing to learn.

See how the world passes, everything is but a moment; flow with it selflessly. You will awaken in this life itself; if not, surely at the end of this sleep and dream we have fallen into.¹ Then we truly awaken to a zestful life of clear vision, like a lost traveller leaving a desert to find a well of cool, clean water, so that we can invite others to come and drink, too.

The great thing about being a streamwinner, especially in our own times, is that we need not become monks or nuns. (Or if you really want to be a true Dharma-Vinaya monastics, you would surely travel farther on the path to nirvana.) The Suttas tell us of streamwinners who are kings, teachers, husbands, wives, business-men and other lay people. In other words, we find our lives in this world truly meaningful and purposeful.

The main source of this sustained meaning and purpose is that we are truly happy. We are capable of such joy and love that we are incapable of breaking any of the five precepts. We love life and all living beings; we wish that they are rightfully happy; we respect them just as they are, so that they would grow spiritually; we celebrate communicating with others with truth and healing;

¹ See eg (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta (S 25.1/3:225) = SD 16.7: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/16.7-Anicca-Cakkhu-S-s25.1-piya.pdf>

Above all, we rejoice in keeping our minds and hearts free from intoxication so that we are ever mindful and capable of realizing higher wisdom.

The surprising thing about this is that it does not sound religious at all. We do not need rituals or empowerments for this true awakening. We need not look outside of ourselves for the liberating truth (the truth is *not* out there). All this is because we have overcome self-doubt. This is the best empowerment there is, as it is liberating. It awakens us as true individuals, as emotionally independent beings, who are not defined by others, nor by fear, except the fear of evil. We are filled with unconditional love. The greatest love is not to die for another (we can only do this once), but to *live* for others, loving them as we would love ourselves.

This liberating process begins unassumingly by our simply and joyfully listening to the Buddha's teaching in the Suttas, letting them speak for themselves as they have done for over 2500 years. This is also the best way to guard the Buddha's teaching, that is, by remembering and understanding the Buddha Word. Drop by drop, the water of wisdom fills our pot of attention (cf Dh 121).

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