

Three Things to be Grateful For

In March 2011, our family had a house-meeting, as we occasionally do, to bond as a family. This time my wife, Ratna, suggested that each of us state which three things we are grateful for. There are four of us in the family: Ratna, our two young sons, myself (or, five beings, if we include Tikki, our spirited little kitten who loves watching nature documentaries on TV).

Our 14-year-old son, Chai Seng, listed the three things he is most grateful for as follows: a comfortable house, a warm family, and his good health (he is becoming the tallest in the family). Fifteen-year old Chai Leng gave his three things as a supporting family, good home-cooked meals, and a good school near to home and with caring teachers.

Both of them go to a neighbourhood school just across the road, and where Ratna has been the secretary for the Parents' Association for three years running. Chai Leng is doing English Literature, the only one to do so in the school, which does not offer the subject. Every week, on Mondays, Ratna would go to the school for an hour to tutor him, and I would do so every Tuesday morning, tutoring him in Pearl S Buck's *The Good Earth*.

Ratna, in her turn, said that she is most grateful, firstly, for her healthy "hands and feet" to work with, that is, her health. Secondly, she is grateful for our two bright wonderful children. And thirdly, a loving husband who has given her a truly meaningful life. Both Ratna and I are working together as full-time lay Buddhist workers.

The three things I am most grateful for, I told them, beginning with the third one, is our home. Up to 2006, we were living in a rented 3-room HDB flat. As a lay Buddhist worker I earn very much less than an average Singapore priest. As such, I thought that we can only afford our own house when our children have started working, so that we could have a corner-flat for more quiet and privacy, conducive for my Buddhist translation work. Through serendipity and the enthusiasm of family friends, they found for us just the kind of flat we were looking for, and at a good price, too, just before it went up. This is the origin story of Pali House.

The second thing I am grateful for is my loving, patient and hard-working wife, Ratna. When we married, we planned to have at least two children so that they are not lonely in a nuclear family, and our two children are now well into their adolescence. We dedicate this reflection to them and to all Buddhist parents and their adolescents.

What I am *most* grateful for is, undoubtedly, the Buddha Dharma, which has made all things possible. Firstly, the Buddha has filled my life with meaning (we still need to grow spiritually) and purpose (how to grow in happiness). Secondly, Buddhism is both my profession and vocation, simply put, what I am *trained and experienced* in, and what I *love* doing. Buddhism, as such, is what I DO and what I AM. Buddhism is also what we HAVE, as our whole family is supported by right livelihood of the lay Buddhist ministry. We have great faith that this would be a working model for future lay Buddhist workership.

Most important of all, for me, is that the work I am doing now, especially, the Sutta Discovery translation series, is that they are not just teaching and study notes on early

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Buddhism. These Dharma-filled suttas give us both the text (authentic foundation for a Buddhist vision) and the context (an effective mission) for Buddhist reform and wholesome Dharma living.

This reflection is about things we should be “grateful” for. “Grateful” here means these precious things are not merely the fruits of our good karma, but also the many wholesome conditions that allow the healthy trees to bear such fruits and to shade us. These trees are the many selfless and Dharma-moved people, such as yourself, who have deep faith in the Three Jewels, and see us as a part of your compassionate vision. In other words, we are all part of this wondrous Dharma work. And for that we are very grateful.

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