

Buddhas die if we worship them¹

THE HEROIC LIFE. The Pali word for “nervousness” or “fearfulness” is *sāraja*, and its opposite is *vesāraja*, “moral courage, intrepidity.”² To be nervous means to be nose-led by our “nerves,” that is, our physical body, putting undue importance to our physical being and appearance. When we are attached to physical things, we *fear* losing them, as they are by nature *impermanent*, a truth which we are either unwilling or unable to accept.

In the **Soṇa,daṇḍa Sutta** (D 4), we see how the kiasu³ brahmin Soṇa,daṇḍa’s fear of losing face is motivated by his desire for respect and patronage of his peers, without which his status and wealth would diminish. After all, he is the lord of Campā, a fief given to him by the rajah Bimbi-sāra.⁴ He is clearly nose-led by “social fearfulness” (*sāraja*).⁵ Suffice it here for us to note that according to the **Sāraja Sutta** (A 5.101), the opposite of social fearfulness is intrepidity (*vesāraja*) or true confidence.

The (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta (S 25.1) and the nine discourses following it are all reflections on the *impermanence* of our senses, external sense-objects and other aspects of our being, either through *faith* (that all existence is impermanent) or through *wisdom* (by way of careful investigation), we are assured of streamwinning, the first step in the path to awakening *in this life itself*, that is, we would be “incapable of dying without having attained the fruit of streamwinning.”⁶ It is as simple as that.

This is surely the most empowering teaching, but we seem to have forgotten it, overwhelmed instead by the myth of wealth and greatness, or caught up in working under some respectable a seth⁷ or a professional,⁸ or worse, fully faithful to a guru or a master, or accumulating merit to

¹ You are recommended to read the full annotated version, see **Myth in Buddhism** = SD 36.1 (7.2-3): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/36.1-Myth-in-Buddhism-piya.pdf>

² On *sāraja* and *vesāraja*, see **Piṇḍolya Sutta** (S 22.80) @ SD 28.9a(3). On the Buddha’s 4 intrepidities, see **Mahā Sīha, nāda Sutta** (M 12.22-28/1:71 f) = SD 49.1.

³ On kiasu in local Chinese means “afraid of losing”: for details, see **Myth in Buddhism** = SD 36.1 (7.2-3).

⁴ D 4/1:111-126 = SD 30.5.

⁵ See **Piṇḍolya Sutta** (S 22.80) @ SD 28.9a(3): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/28.9a-Pindolya-S-s22.80-piya.pdf>

⁶ S 25.1/3:225 & SD 16.7(1.1.3). The other 9 discourses of **Okkanti Vagga** (the Chapter on the Descent), ie, ch 25 of the Saṃyutta Nikāya are: **(Anicca) Rūpa Sutta** (S 25.2), **(Anicca) Viññāṇa Sutta** (S 25.3), **(Anicca) Phassa Sutta** (S 25.4), **(Anicca) Vedanā Sutta** (S 25.5) = SD 17.3(4.5a), **(Anicca) Saññā Sutta** (S 25.6) = SD 17.4(10), **(Anicca) Saṅkhāra Sutta** (S 25.7), **(Anicca) Taṇhā Sutta** (S 25.8), **(Anicca) Dhātu Sutta** (S 25.9), and **(Anicca) Khandha Sutta** (S 25.10) (S 25.1-10/3:225-229). All these suttas make a distinction between 2 types of individuals—the faith follower (*saddhā’nusārī*) and the truth-follower (*dhammānusārī*), who enter into “the certainty of rightness” (*sammatta, niyāma*), ie, the transcendent noble eightfold path, or the path of streamwinning (*sotāpatti, magga*). See also Gethin 2001:133-138.

⁷ Skt *śreṣṭhī*, P *seṭṭhī*. The traditional definition of *seṭṭhi* is given in the PED as “foreman of a guild, treasurer, banker, “City man,” wealthy merchant, V 1:15 f, 271 f, 2:110 f, 157, S 1:89...etc.” *Seth* is a modern Hindi word for a wealthy entrepreneur, a successful businessman or any wealthy person of means.

⁸ A professional here refers esp to anyone, incl monastics, with professional qualifications, who are looked up to for their status rather than their spirituality.

meet the future Buddha. The truth is that we have forgotten the present Buddha's teachings in the Suttas, blinded by the false myth that they are too difficult or boring to be learned or mastered. The point is that we are letting ourselves wallow in our own defilements. We have forgotten we are capable of heroic deeds, of self-awakening and awakening others to this fact.

THE BUDDHA'S HEROISM IS STILL WITH US. Despite the Buddha expressly reminding us immediately after his awakening and just before his final nirvana.⁹ that we should take only the Dharma, no one and nothing else, as our guide and refuge, many who come after him seem not to heed this vital advice. After the Buddha's death, we begin worshipping him, turning him into a deity, and making images of him, but often failing to reflect what they really stand for.

The Buddha is truly dead to us if we merely worship him. He has instructed us that the supreme worship, the best way to honour him, is to practise the Dharma "in accordance with the Dharma," that is, just as he has taught it.¹⁰ It is only through realizing the Dharma to which the Buddha himself has awakened so that we would really know him, that he is really beyond life and death. For that is what nirvana is.

Many of us, especially those faith-inclined, even refuse to accept that a fully self-awakened Buddha could die (despite his numerous reminders), and so we fall into a protracted death-denial, egged on by our "perfect" guru. We imagine the Buddha is still around, perhaps in some cosmic form, able to grant us succour and success, if we perform the right rituals, fervently pray to him, or invoke his name millions of times. We have gone into the business of perpetual mourning of a teacher who is truly beyond life and death.¹¹

God and gods die when they are no more worshipped; *the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas die when they are worshipped.* The Buddha is a cosmic hero, who has not only blazed the trail through the jungle of ignorance to the ancient and vibrant city of Nirvana, but has left us detailed maps, clear directions, even guides, for the journey to that city. But some of us would rather carelessly doodle our fancies and frivolities on these precious maps, we make jokes of the directions, and flirt with the guides. The day comes when we realize, too late, that we are really stuck in our own wasteland, left behind by the wise and the noble who are well on their way to the journey's end.

The reality is that *we are meant to be heroes*—beings of effort and energy who assert themselves — to walk this path and helping others along the way.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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⁹ See **Myth in Buddhism** = SD 36.1 (3.4.1): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/36.1-Myth-in-Buddhism-piya.pdf>

¹⁰ See **Myth in Buddhism** = SD 36.1 (6.2.4), link: same as above.

¹¹ See **Myth in Buddhism** = SD 36.1 (1.8.1), link: same as above.