

Unsubscribe

Revisioning Buddhism 5

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

A book on these Inspirations (commemorating my 60th year) is now in the press even as I write, and will probably be out by the time you read this one. Some of these Inspirations were also published in other periodicals and websites, including bootleg versions (which is a form of flattery if you do not worry about copyright and money).

It always gives me great joy to re-read some of these writings. One reason for this joy is that they reflect the goodness and happiness of the various people who have inspired me to put the joy into the words. It's amazing how sometimes mere words can evoke joy. The reason is simple, there is goodness in you. Joy attracts joy in one who rejoices in truth and goodness.

Sadly, not everyone enjoys these Inspirations. So I am dedicating the reflection to such situations (yes, there are no such things as disliking persons, but just occasions or moments of disliking). Although most people on our mailing list write in about their own joy or ask questions, occasionally we do get a few who write in to unsubscribe from the list.

My first response is that such a person must have read something in my reflection that touched an open wound. In a way, reflections of this nature would often touch some sensitive area. We should ask why is that wound there in the first place? What can I do about it?

Rejecting a message on the first noble truth would not help, no matter how well rationalized, does not help, as the problem remains. Usually, the reason for unsubscribing, I think, has to do with something we do not like in ourselves. We need to ferret out and face this inner dislike of which the unsubscribing tendency is only a symptom.

Further, I noticed that a number of those who wish to unsubscribe are well known monastics whom I do not know, or have not met. One of them often comes to Singapore to give talks to raise funds for her centre overseas and has a big following here. Another is a popular western monk residing in Thailand who did not even bother to email me directly but instead instructed his contact here to email to stop sending the reflections.

Ratna (my wife and secretary) tries to send my reflections to every monastic who has an email. We value learned and spiritual feedbacks from such monastics, especially since they have contact with Singapore. Sadly, not all monastics seem to have unconditional acceptance (which is lovingkindness) for these reflections. I wish they would tell me what's wrong with my writing (or me). For, who else could I get a fruitful feedback from?

Such a rejection, as it were, says: "Keep away!" In a religion of compassion, this tendency is troubling. Is there a growing distance and exclusiveness amongst our

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saccharin-sweet monastics, teachers, speakers, leaders, or followers? They almost never consult one another, much less talk with one another (much less discuss Dharma). They seem to tolerate non-Buddhists better than their own kind. Yet, the Suttas remind us to look at each other with loving eyes, and mix together like milk and water (Dhamma, cetiya Sutta, M 89).

A monastic who is too busy to communicate, or will only communicate on a personal basis with a close or closed following, surely lacks unconditional acceptance of those wishing to learn from them. Perhaps this open reflection will warm and soften their hearts and those of their followers.

On rare occasions, we also receive “unsubscribe” instructions from prominent local Buddhists who declare that their teacher is a certain famous monastic so-and-so, replete with quotations on compassion and kindness to others. This confuses me: it could be misconstrued as that compassion means not accepting a Dharma reflection from a local teacher, and that a foreign teacher is better?

In all such cases, Ratna or I would write to them, asking why they want to unsubscribe, along with our reasons why I write such reflections, and why we send it to them. Almost always, we do not get any response. I suppose we can take silence as consent here. In fact, such an exercise, for me, is a valuable real-life learning experience of human perception of one another.

Oh yes, I receive a lot of unsolicited emails, too. But I have found that it saves more time just to delete something that does not interest me, rather than email to the sender, and telling him I want to unsubscribe, because he is not worth having any of my attention, even if it is only a few minutes of my life (even if it is something I could benefit from). Indeed, occasionally, a letter, a paragraph, a line or even a word, from such emails moves me to write an inspiration or response, or add a useful note to my Sutta translation or share in my Dharma talks.

In accepting others who are unfamiliar or different, we may learn or build an unnoticed or undeveloped aspect of goodness in us. It is called unconditional acceptance. Or, at least, we need to remember there is a human being at the other end of the internet, and not just a computer. Perhaps we could learn something useful here.

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