

## The Lone Buddhists

Today, as Buddhist “monastics” becomes more modernized and materialistic, more informed Buddhists are shying away from temples and “organized Buddhism” to practise by themselves. Many of them regularly express a sense of deep disillusionment at monks and nuns who do not take their monastic vows seriously.

The more informed Buddhists quietly attend meditation-based or sutta-centred sessions, or only go for Dharma activities and avoid any further involvement, for fear for “temple politics.” Here “temple politics” covers a wide range of worldly affairs, even scandals, where strife and disunity abound on account of such things as over-emphasis on fund-raising, personality cults around monastics and leaders, and a common tendency to measure others by wealth and status.

Far from the crowd of noisy Buddhism, such lone Buddhists quietly talk to their colleagues and co-workers about Dharma. Often they would give away some readable Dharma books, even to their seniors and bosses. The sense of Dharma commitment in such selfless and purposeful pratyeka or “lone” Buddhists is heart-warming.

Such accounts should inspire us not to be afraid to be lone Buddhists if necessary. Indeed, the Buddha Dharma began that way, with the lone radiant figure of the newly awakened Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree. In our moments of spiritual quest, we may often need to be alone, far from the madding crowd, like a lotus blossoming singly in the bright sunshine.

Let us be like bright sweet flowers, ever ready to freely share the Dharma nectar with the birds, bees and bugs that visit us for nourishment. And they carry off with them the fertile Dharma pollen to other flowers, so that our spiritual lives are enriched in joyful ways.

There are also a growing number of pratyeka Buddhists all over the world, as Buddhism becomes better known and more easily available in far-flung “non-Buddhist” areas. Thanks to the internet and a more connected and educated world, we are able to access sutta texts and translations more easily for our personal study and meditation.

Being a Buddhist is not group membership, but *a state of mind*. It begins with an understanding and respect for our body and speech, so that we are healthily energized and calmly dignified. This is what the five precepts are about: *to love life, work hard to support ourselves, understand the true nature of love, be courageous in facing the truth, and keeping the mind calm and clear in preparation for mental cultivation.*

The suttas (“teaching threads”) of the Buddha are full of instructions in personal development, mental cultivation (meditation), and self-healing. If we look carefully enough into the suttas, we will always find something to inspire us, and we need not even be religious about this. It is about self-understanding and other-acceptance in easy stages and doses. All this would inspire a natural happiness and goodness so that we fear no evil, we can work around any difficulty, and see peace in the moment.

It is easy to start a religious group or system or empire if we have management skills and money: we don’t even need to know much about the religion. Without the Dharma, however,

such structures are merely barren hills and mountains that can create and perpetuate dry burning deserts in our lives. From their clouded peaks, the religious might lord over their followers below praying and playing in their sunken oases, careless of those stranded in the sands and darkness around them, and unaware of the approaching sandstorm.

A Dharma-based network begins within our hearts, touched by the Buddha Dharma. Our hearts then beat in synchrony and rhythm so that we are naturally linked actively together with a higher purpose and inner vision. These are the qualities that make our outreach efforts meaningful and effective in nurturing a truly joyful and mature Buddhist community.

Buddhism is a state of mind. It starts off with a vision of self-understanding: our body is impermanent, changing and becoming otherwise. This wisdom behooves us to respect the body to keep it well for our own sake and for the sake of others. For, we are not alone, and our actions affect others and our environment.

This understanding then moves us to work our mind in ever good order: as we think, so we are. So we need to think well and wholesomely. Such wellness and wholesomeness begin and grow with our constant vision of the happy moments in our lives and those of others, a vision of growing joy. Buddhist work begins here, and becomes more and more embracing. The Buddha has given us the wisdom, now we must work our compassion to free our minds.

Revisioning Buddhism 50

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

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