

## 70<sup>th</sup> birthday gratitude

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### Septuagenarian

I don't think I would have reached this far, to be a septuagenarian, if not for **you**. In some way, it may be a small gesture but with lasting significance, but many of you have been kind to me far more than any friend, or even relative, have been.

Both my parents lived to about this age I am now. They spent vital years of their lives making sure I was well fed, schooled and knew my relatives. My greatest gratitude to them is that they seemed to know I would be most happy with Buddhism.

They told me I would remember them best if I know Buddhism. How right they are! Like my brother who was taught to love Christ by our aunt and uncle, I was taught to love the Buddha by my parents.

### Brother

Yet, my own **brother**, whenever we chatted (especially when I was a monk), we chatted as brothers. Interestingly, when we were together, he refused to even discuss religion, except speak of how a brother should not be a stumbling-block to another brother.

One of his most brotherly deeds, I recall, was when one day he handed over to me a huge file of papers from COEMAS (Conference of Evangelism in Malaysia and Singapore). He was clearly unhappy that his fellow religionists were trying to deprive those of other religions in Malaysia and Singapore from practising their own faiths.

These were valuable papers on the "plans" that the evangelists had for Buddhists. I ran a few national level residential courses in Malaysia and Singapore to discuss these papers, and to remind our local Buddhists not to be complacent, nor to rely on foreign help in our own local Buddhist issues. From the way many local Buddhist workers are today still using the lessons and methods I have taught then, especially the suttas, we can say that these courses have been very effective.

### Self-reliance

Sadly, the most difficult obstacle (as warned by the Buddha) is not an external one, but an internal one. A powerful foreign Buddhist mission was not happy to see local Buddhists, especially the local young, going on their own seeking the suttas. They used our good works and put their names on it. Many of our own local leaders worked for them, too.

However, a few local Buddhists have stood up to witness how we local Buddhists love the Buddha Dhamma for what it is, not as a racial or class priestcraft. I live and die happy to know that there are local Buddhists who know that our true Dharma-workers are our own humble and diligent lay Buddhists and a few good monastics who stand up for the Dhamma in our own homes. For this I am deeply grateful.

## Sister

My **sister**, who is an octogenarian now, greatly contributed to my early love for reading and learning. She showed me unconditional sisterly love in my adolescent passage. She has been supportive of my Buddhist life, and even try her best to be a good Buddhist herself, reading the suttas and meditating. Her lovingkindness is gratefully remembered.

A few of **you** are closer than friends, like a second family. You have diligently and generously supported our work and my family in our lay Dhamma ministry. Supported by these gifts and invitations to ask, we are able to fully focus on our sutta work, which we love and are best at. For nearly 20 years, we have almost daily been working on this, producing more than 70 Sutta Discovery volumes to date. We should all be grateful to you for this Dhamma gift.

## Ratna

My **wife** Ratna Lim has been and is supportive of our work, and a loving partner in this challenging task. In no small way, the **Lims**, my wife's large extended family, has been supportive of this "banana" (yellow outside, white inside), not well conversant with our dialects.

Yet they have been very warmly communicative. They have shown how even a large diverse network of relatives can be true friends. "Lim" means "forest" in Chinese: they are a rich forest of trees with cool shades and rich fruits, fresh air, and vibrant space, nurtured by love and understanding. For this, I am joyfully grateful as Piya **Tan Lim**.

## Education

Various circumstances have prevented us (Ratna and I) from achieving the highest academic qualifications. However, a UC Berkeley professor thought that our work then (1980s) were on the level of a PhD scholar and I was invited there as a Visiting Scholar.

In significant ways, the Sutta Discovery (SD) work went beyond what any academic programme can reward us with. We do not seek to be entitled but work for the love and life of Dhamma. In short, we are grateful at the progress and significance of the Dharmafarerer work as it was, as it is, as it will be. We well know now the future will not forget but put these sutta translations and their liberating secrets to work their wonder in time.

## Birthday wish

One of my favourite reflections is that on **death**. My years are quickly slipping away. Every moment is precious now to do the good and wholesome. With just a couple of decades left at best, if all goes, well, imagine with me that my **wake** has begun. Please don't wait till my funeral to tell me what you need to say. Indeed, **eulogies** are best given to the living, not a dead body. Then, I will know you are happy, too.

My birthday wish is that you start your own local Sutta Study Group in your own homes in Dhamma fellowship with friends or join one; and enjoy meals together in Dhamma

(commensality). This is how we express our love and gratitude to the one **teacher** that we all have, the Buddha. This way, he will continue to guide us, making our lives meaningful and purposeful against all odds—and let the Dhamma work its wonders.

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