

The path without dhyana

The path of awakening made easy by the Buddha

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Those of us who have been attending Buddhist centres run by foreign missions for decades, will notice that they teach almost only chanting, blessings and “transference” of merit (as if good karma is a thing that is negotiable!). As we get better informed about the Dhamma as taught by the Buddha, we find that the goal of Buddhism is to reach the path of awakening. For lay Buddhists, this means to become streamwinners or “streamers” in this life itself.

When we only do chanting, receive blessings and “transfer” merit, we become **dependent** on priestcraft. This is a part of “ritual Buddhism,” which will prevent us from reaching the path. This means that we will be reborn in the subhuman planes as animals, pretas or even hellbeings. (No wonder we are taught to pray for the pretas and the dead!) But Buddhism is for the **living**!

These rituals “externalize” Buddhism: we are seeking refuge in things “outside.” The Buddha teaches us to look within ourselves for refuge. This begins with cultivating our **body** by keeping our actions and speech wholesome. Moral virtue is the basis for the mental cultivation: we enjoy a blissful mind that brings calm and clarity. With this calm and clear mind, we are able to see true reality, especially the **impermanence** of all existence. This will surely bring us to the path as streamwinners in this life itself.

Why not encourage streamwinning?

There are 2 key reasons why the temples do not teach us about streamwinning. The 1st reason is probably because the priests there **do not** believe in streamwinning, and teach some other later rituals and superstitions. The 2nd reason is that these temples want to hold us captive with **blind faith** in their Temple and Teacher to receive financial and other support. Buddhism, like other popular religions, has become big business today!

Temples and teachers may notice that more lay Buddhists now know that the Buddha’s original teachings are really much easier to practise than what is taught by these monastics and priests. If we know that Buddhism is so simple and effective to practise, we will become **self-reliant** and not need the monastics and priests any more. This is only partly true: we do not need or want monastics and priests who are worldly or money-minded.

Competitive Buddhism

With so many Buddhist groups and numerous teachers today, and limited resources, we have **religious competition**. Notice how even meditation teachers come up with different, even unique, forms of meditation not found in the suttas. All they need is a few people, or the teachers themselves, to claim that “This method works!” or better, “This is the best and only true meditation method!” In the end, it is all about fund-raising, more buildings, and so on.

Some meditation teachers try to make subtle claims that they are able to attain dhyanas. Some other teachers who are jealous of them then counterclaim that we **don't** need dhyana at all! This is the other extreme.

Dhyana is difficult to do, and there is no way of knowing whether someone is able to get into dhyana or not. In fact, it does not really matter. What matters is that the monastic is not worldly, not socializing around or attracting wealth and titles, or exploiting charisma and claims of holiness. A monastic is a renunciant who has taken vows to walk the path this life itself.

Don't be blur or blind

The sad reality is that the Dhamma of such teachers is shaky and they often have wrong views because they have neither the time nor the inclination to **search the suttas**. They are too busy socializing, globe-trotting and being worldly.

Moreover, most of us do not know the suttas ourselves, so we think that a famous teacher must be teaching the right things. We like the teacher; we like his teachings—so he must be right! This is called **blind faith** and infatuation.

We have forgotten the Kālāma Sutta (A 3.65): Do not blindly accept teachings from teachers. (SD 35.4a)

We do not know the Ahita Thera Sutta (A 5.88): The Buddha warns us that even famous teachers (especially famous teachers) can have wrong views. (SD 40a.16)

No deep meditation needed

One serious wrong view is that we must have **dhyana** in order to become streamwinners. The suttas practically contain no teachings that we must attain dhyana in order to gain streamwinning.

In the Veḷu,dvāreyya Sutta (S 55.7), the Buddha, after defining the first 2 kinds of good conduct (in detail)—the good conduct regarding the body and regarding speech—closes with instructions on the qualities of a streamwinner (SD 1.5).

The omission of the section on the good conduct of **the mind** is very significant: the Buddha is referring to the fact that we do NOT need to attain a high level of mental development (such as dhyana) to become streamwinners.

Wisdom or faith

There are many such sutta passages where the Buddha encourages us to keep the precepts as a basis for gaining streamwinning. A key teaching we should know comes from **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1, SD 16.7), where the Buddha declares we can be assured of attaining streamwinning in this life itself in one of 2 ways:

- (1) **Have faith** in the fact that everything is impermanent; or
- (2) **Use wisdom** and investigate the suttas about impermanence.

When we do this regularly, we create the habitual karma rooted in the understanding that **everything is impermanent**. This way, we do not see our **body** as being permanent. This is so true that there is no chance we will have any **doubt**. When we understand impermanence — that everything will pass — we will not be **superstitious**, too. This way, we will become streamwinners in this life itself. (SD 16.7)

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

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