

Let the mask fall

[Previously published as fb191020 piya]

When we call ourself a “Buddhist,” what does it mean? We may know **about** Buddhism, but specifically what do we know **of** Buddhism? What have we really seen, heard or known of it? Even more specifically, we should ask: Do I **know** Buddhism?

Most of us, I think, will answer: I know Buddhism from **reading** some books. Let us call this simply **reading Buddhism** (we are reading what others have written about). It’s actually better to write and sell a Buddhist book: it makes money and we don’t even have to be Buddhist!

Or, we may answer: I know Buddhism from this or that speaker or Guru or Teacher. This can be called simply as **talk Buddhism**. We may have deep faith, even admiration and love for this amazing teacher. We have yet to experience it (whatever “it” is).

Meditation

Or, we confidently or calmly say: I have learned **meditation** from this or that teacher. Or, I know this or that meditation. I’ve sat for so many hours, weeks, months, years. This is truly great: we have experienced something. We may even say we are happier now, and so on.

But we may not fully **understand** what we have experienced. We may think we understand, but that’s just it: thinking. With great meditation comes a great responsibility: that of knowing the Buddha Dhamma directly from the suttas. (Otherwise, we are only Reading Buddhists.)

With meditation, we have a good light to help us read and live the suttas. With that sutta understanding, our meditation gets into true perspective. We now understand what we are experiencing, what it really is; we can even teach others when they need it. That’s compassion.

Understanding

We have discussed “Do I know Buddhism?” We have also discussed **understanding** what we know. When we do any of the above: read Buddhist books, follow Buddhist teachers, or do social work—but we do not really know the Dhamma of the suttas—do we really know what we are doing, and doing it right? We get **angry**: we either show it or we don’t. It’s hate, ill will. Maybe we even hate the suffering whom we try to help. Psychologically, this is called reaction formation. We act out our hate in a seemingly holy way.

So what happens to us now? Quite simple really: karmic action and reaction.

When we are Reading Buddhists: we will be reborn as books. Don’t believe this one, but you know what I mean. Imagine if you are a holy book, and people just read you, and do not act good accordingly, how do you feel? I don’t know, but I like this imagery.

We follow Teachers, we can never be better than the teacher, not even as good as the teacher. God forbids! you say! See we have not even gone beyond the G-swear word. But the Buddha wants us to be as good as he is: the Dhamma does that, when we understand the nature of a person.

Chinese Buddhism keeps us Chinese, or we become Chinese, which is not bad if we put race before Buddhism.

If we love Tibetan Buddhism, we must have been a gompa worker in a past life: perhaps we will be reborn in Tibet, whether as a human, it can never certain.

We follow Japanese Buddhism, we will come to know about the nikujiki saitai law. Then, again, no one seems to want to talk about this. Let's Google it. (Oh yes, there is also Google Buddhism, Google meditation.) The ultimate Facebook post: our selfie with Zuckerberg: it trumps mileage!

It seems that Buddhism is all things to all men, women and Buddhists. We have created our own Buddhism; we defend it with all we got. (Of course, it's not only Buddhism.) We get angry when someone else even seems to disagree with our Creation. What does that tell us?

The bottom line, then, is just this—Buddhism is not about Buddhism. It's about how we let go of ourself, our delusion of the self. Self is not the problem, even less so the Soul—neither exists! The problem is our notion that there is One, and we live by that notion. We keep peeling this onion (we wonder why we have tears in our lives), on and on with the I at the heart of it all!

It's better to sit quietly by a still pool and throw a small pebble (the "I") into the water (renunciation). Circles of ripples form, widening and moving towards us, sitting on the shore. Yet no water is moving towards us, just peaks and troughs made by the reaction of the stone into the water.

There's nothing to renounce, but we understand this only after having really renounced. It's like letting our masks, Buddhist or not, fall off. See our true self—look deeply enough.

You need to put the rest together yourself.

R662 Revisioning Buddhism 259

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

Copyright by Piya Tan ©2020