

## Growing the Bodhi

Buddhism in our own homes and heart  
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Buddhism may be said to be the fastest growing religion in the world: it certainly is in Australia. But then, we can question what is meant by “growth.” We can say that **growth** means that the Buddha Dhamma has taken root in our country and culture as it has done in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and SE Asia generally.

Good as that may be, we can see today very few Sinhala monks actually keep to the Vinaya; some of their monks openly teach intolerance and violence against other religions, and many of them are gainfully employed as lecturers, own extensive properties etc. In Myanmar, too, we see some upheavals of religious intolerance, but all seems controlled for the moment. The Thai Buddhist sangha has been troubled by scandals of sex, drugs, violence and cults, and the monsters of these problems are just lurking and growing in the shadows.

## Lost Buddhism

Buddhism was lost in Khmer (Cambodia) and Laos, but is making a slow comeback there. It is very weak in Laos. Some years back, during Vesak, I was told by a visitor to Cambodia, that most monks there did not even know what it was! In short, we cannot assume the presence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and SE Asia is always a given. Buddhism was very strong in China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia and Tibet, but now they are no more. This is the Ozymandias reality.

Buddhism also disappeared from **India**, but not Jainism. The marauding Turks pillaged the wealthy monasteries for their immense wealth, and destroyed Buddhist idol worship and superstition. The Jains, more ascetic, and the laity themselves diligently and quietly continued teaching and practising their Jain Dharma, and survived in their own homes. That is self-reliance.

On the other hand, we see many missionaries from Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand in our countries. They (We) have built Sinhalese temples, Burmese temples, Thai temples, and we also have Tibetan temples, Japanese centres, and of course Chinese temples. One common characteristic of these entities is that they all thrive on wealth, real estates, worldly rituals, and some kind of race-based or person-based Buddhism.

## Philippines

Buddhism is slowly but surely growing in the **Philippines**. There are a number of Chinese temples there and various cultish centres. Some of these temples are part of a global network of Temples that basically are propagating themselves, a global business network, if you like. The Pinoys have already been colonized by the Spanish, and their religion are still colonizing them. The Pinoys must grow the Bodhi tree themselves in the Philippines. Others can only help in Dhamma; not colonize them again.

## **Buddha Dhamma first**

These “**prefixed**” Buddhism put their race or culture first. Buddhism is in their service: their race and culture come first. Hence, it is not surprising then, when we really have problems, when we go to such places, they cannot help us unconditionally. Also, as a rule, none of these centres place any importance on the Buddha’s suttas. Many of them even reject the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni.

Asia has been colonized by many western powers: the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the British, and so on. If we carefully examine the foreign missionaries here, we will notice little different from our being colonized today by the races that run these foreign temples.

## **Good examples**

Yet we can see some good examples. **Indonesia**, for example, despite being colonized by the Dutch, are able to have their own Sangha vocations. They have many local teachers and so do not have to rely on foreign race-based Buddhisms. They have planted the Bodhi tree in their own soil.

The **west** that once colonized us, too, see Buddhism rising there. Although they are friendly to Asian Buddhists of all races, they have learned the hard painful way from the sex and money scandals involving Zen masters and Tibetan tulkus in the 1990s, to keep a **social distance** from the sangha (monastic and secular). Above all, they are having more trained and experienced westerners as teachers, monastic and lay. They, too, are planting the Bodhi tree in their own lands in the west.

## **Cult Buddhisms**

We have great monks and nuns who are world-famous teachers of Buddhism here and there. In the 1950s-60s, a western priest, Sumangalo, did great work in Malaysia and Singapore. He was, however, not properly trained, joined a number of orders (Theravada, Shin and Mahayana), but never kept his nissaya (no basic training). When he died, his work died with him, too. This was always the pattern.

Today, we have great names like Thich Nhat Hanh, Brahmavamso and so on. They have millions of followers, who revere **them** first, then Buddhism. My point is that Thich is old and dying. Brahmavamso is reaching 70. When they die, it’s just a matter of time, when their followers will also fizzle away.

In that case, they are **cult Buddhisms** since they are person-centred. When the person dies, his Buddhism also dies with him. We should practise a Dhamma-centred teaching based on the suttas, which goes back to the Buddha and the early saints. That is why the Buddha advises us to follow the teaching not the teacher.

### Teaching above teacher

However, when we train ourselves in the **Buddha Dhamma** itself, not promoting nor following the charisma of Teachers, then, we will become a world Buddhism (not the Teaching of this or that Guru) that can bring great human, social and spiritual changes to the world. Now, we are merely standing on the Buddha's shoulders (or head) to reach up to the great teachers we admire, but not nurturing the Teaching that the Buddha has bequeathed to us.

This reflection is a simple reminder: the Teaching must come before the Teacher; the Dhamma before Cults; we should be cool ourself in Dhamma, not fan the Gurus.

We deserve the kind of Buddhism we get. We should work for the best Dhamma, that brings us closer to the path of awakening in this life itself.

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

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