

Reading year 2020

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Since 2020 suggests “good and clear vision,” I woke up this 1st dawn of the year reflecting on how we can best live it. (Tikki, my intuitive tabby, is close by watching me as I write this: I think she is wondering when I’ll finish writing and give her breakfast.) Yes, I’m reading her.

First of all, we should never take our **eye-sight** for granted. When we are past 60, we should go for medical check-up to see that our eyes are not secretly failing. Early detection of possible glaucoma (incurable and leads to blindness) can easily prevent its occurrence, common amongst the Chinese, I am told. Then, we have to be diligent in putting those eye-drops and not go bungy-jumping.

Life-long learning

Reading is a great way of continued **learning**, especially reading the **suttas**, which are the closest we have to the Buddha Word. Never trust fully what we hear from anyone, even the famous speakers (especially them: they are often wrong). They often will say anything just to remain famous or popular. Anyway, no one has awakened just listening to them!

Check out the suttas. There are so many good translators. Ah! Even the great translators, especially those commercial translations (don’t be seduced by the cool binding and thickness — it’s like marrying for looks!) Even the Sutta Discovery (SD) translations: we are not error-free. Anyway, most of the time, we are reliable if you take the trouble to read carefully.

Reading Buddhism

There are also great Buddhist **books**, the better ones are often freely available both as hard copies and as PDFs. Sadly, most Singaporean, Malaysian and Indonesian Buddhists do **not** read: we have “virtual illiteracy” (we can read but we don’t—a self-imposed blindness). Such a karma may mean that we will be reborn illiterate or blind, but we can prevent this **now**.

The literacy rate of Thailand, especially the urban areas, is well over 90 percent! Even the som-tam (lime papaya salad) street vendor is likely to be reading some book in between! The Thai translation of Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice” is more poetic than the original (just compare “the quality of mercy” passages, Act 4 Scene 1)!

Reading people

Another kind of reading that is vital to cultivate is that of **reading people** better. Never assume we know someone well even when we're close to them (such as our spouse, children, friends, students, monastics, anyone we communicate with).

We often ask, “How are you?” but never really want to hear more than a platitude. When we do hear some real complaint, we petrify into an uncomfortable silence or divert by talking about Abhidhamma.

Anyway, my point is that we should observe our near and dear ones closely enough, especially seniors. They may seem healthy, but do not assume they are as strong as when we first met them. Of course, we do not want to fuss over them as if they are on their deathbed. We need to be sure we are updated on how they feel about their body, mind and life in general, and see what we can do about it.

It is meaningless and cruel when we care so much about the Temple or Society, but we are not even there when our loved ones need us. Certainly, we should not let our marriage suffer because we admire some lama, sensei, guru, monk, or nun! Don't commit spiritual adultery. Listen to the teachers (no hugging please), follow the teaching (embracing encouraged).

Reading ourself

In the last few decades, we have seen how Buddhism has become a kind of Club for the Rich and Entitled. To be close to the Venerables, we have to be wealthy or powerful. Just try going up to your favourite Venerable and tell him/her that you are a "Buddhist worker" or you love reading suttas, and see what happens!

This means we have to correctly read the **monks and nuns** who are supposed to represent our faith. Well, if they are to represent Buddhism, they should definitely keep to the Vinaya (at least) and study the Dhamma, and not use Buddhism merely as a livelihood for having their own country retreat, house, car, holidays, and what else.

We have to stop spoiling our monastics. We are only encouraging them in the wrong way, and we will face the same bad karma—stuck with them in future lives, too, slaving for them all over again and again.

The Buddha's teaching is about **freedom**. It starts with seeing rightly what's wrong. Doing our little bit to correct the wrongs, or at least not encouraging them.

Blessed start

Let's start 2020 in a blessed way with reading a short **sutta**; with asking someone we care how he or she is really feeling and listening carefully (following up with proper actions perhaps).

Above all, let us read **ourself**: what do we really want in life that is truly good for us?

We may win the approval of some of the people all the time, or the approval of all the people some of the time, but we can never win the approval of all the people all the time. And we don't need to. It's better to really know ourself and go from there. This is the most important reading we must do.

There are no good or great year: we make it so. May 2020 be a beautiful year of **good reading**. Read and be wise for the rest of our life. It may even help us reach the path of awakening in this life itself.

Happy reading 2020.

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

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