

Sutta Centre

Centre for living Dhamma

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The ancient University of Nalanda failed for 2 reasons.

Firstly, as it grew, it became more academic, learning for the sake of learning, instead of teaching and practising what the Buddha taught. It also became very large and rich. This attracted the Turk marauders who had been watching Buddhist monastic **wealth** for centuries before finally invading India 17 times between 1000 and 1027! Finally, they overran northern India.

Buddhism was effectively uprooted from northern India (bad karma?). Yet, the quietist vegetarian **jains** survived intact to this day. The main reason for this was and is that they have lay teachers who kept on teaching the Jaina Dharma in the privacy of their own homes. They protected their Dharma, their Dharma protected them.

Meerkats and rhinoceroses

Buddhism in **the West** is rising, too, because most western Buddhists are serious students of the suttas and Buddha Dhamma. Some even spent years or decades as monks with good teachers in SE Asia. After their monastic training in Dhamma and meditation, they return to layman life in the West, went on to finish some university studies, even a PhD. They then teach the Dhamma, setting up groups and training centres. They are like **meerkats** standing up for the Dhamma in cooperative groups, looking out for one another.

One wholesome quality most western Buddhist lay teachers have is that they easily work together with the other lay teachers. Sadly, most of our local Buddhist leaders and teachers are like fierce shortsighted **rhinoceroses**. They have their own buildings or organization which they often run for life. Often, they hate competition and criticism, and keep their company very private and limited to followers and admirers. Such organizations often die with their founders.

Buddhism is not just a building; more so, it is the building of joyful **self-reliance** and warm **fellowship**.

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Although there are no **sutta colleges** in the West, there are a number of centres that offer well-organized sutta and meditation courses, such as the **Barre Center for Buddhist Studies**. They work in a hands-on manner, focusing only on Dhamma, suttas and meditation. In this way, there is a minimum of administration. They are what we may call “dedicated Dhamma centres.”

My dream is that we can have such a Sutta Centre dedicated to teaching early Buddhism, the suttas, meditation and fellowship. It is best run as a lay group but morally virtuous monastics may, of course, participate. The key purpose of such a centre is to train Dhamma

missioners and Sutta teachers. Such a Sutta Centre in the Philippines will be good for bringing Buddha Dhamma to the 104 million **Filipinos**, and Buddha Dhamma is just taking root there.

Dhamma missionaries are those who are inclined to do Buddhist fieldwork, going forth into the world, such as the Philippines and Africa, to spread the Dhamma by training locals to set up their own centres. A Dhamma missionary has to love languages and people, and ideally know English, with which to learn Pali (optional) and suttas (compulsory).

The **sutta teachers** should serve local centres and temples teaching the Dhamma, suttas, meditation and fellowship. Ideally, they should be supported by the organization they serve. They should focus on teaching and do as little administration work as possible. In other words, they are like “resident sutta pastors.”

The Sutta Discovery translation series are freely available online (<http://dharmafarer.org>) and in time will be published in handy volumes. Any Sutta Centre or Sutta College has free access to such materials and numerous other good translations available for their learning and training purposes.

This is the kind of vision that will give **meaning and purpose** to our Buddhist life. It will in time educate our locals to be mature Dhamma-spirited Buddhists who can contribute to society and social work in their own way. Currently, Asian Buddhists are little more than “foreign aids” and “gold-mines” for monastics from various foreign countries.

Our task is not to enrich the monks and nuns, but to enrich all with the Dhamma. Ethnic Buddhist temples and centres are like **Foreign Embassies**: they can never solve our local problems and never had. Their loyalty and traditions are always to their home country. Their tradition is always a foreign one, and this will seriously divide our local Buddhists as is happening right now in **Malaysia**.

Like the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand, we too must work to plant the Bodhi tree in our own community and land.

R696 Revisioning Buddhism 281

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

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