

Reflection No. 701

where these articles come from; where we're going

[Previously published as fb200419 piya]

This is reflection no. 701. I started writing them since 2007. At first, I wrote and posted them online only occasionally. But since 2010, they were sent out weekly to those on our mailing list to announce the following week's sutta class.

There was always something about the Dhamma to write about. Sometimes I write to inspire you, or perhaps brighten you up with some Dhamma humour; sometimes I write to prod you to think about some wrong aspects of Buddhism, and how we can be better.

Ideas and energy

Where did I get the ideas and the energy to write so many reflections? The answer is simple enough: I've always loved writing. But to write so many articles, and always on early Buddhism, or something related to it, I have only **one reason** to do so.

I have discovered, after some 50 years of studying and practising Buddha Dhamma that it is very simple, that I can reach the noble eightfold path in this life itself, by simply **aspiring** to become a streamwinner, as taught in the 10 suttas of chapter 25 of the Saṃyutta Nikaya (S 25).

Meaning and purpose

Once I realized this, everything becomes clearer than ever before. My life has **meaning**: it is impermanent, like everything else. My life has **purpose**: tell people how they change but can become better. But this can only happen when we **want** to really better ourself.

The suttas keep telling us this: we can be better. We can be happier by leading simpler lives. It brings us more inner peace, inner clarity, true joy. We only need to turn to the Buddha: we call this "going for refuge in the Buddha."

To go to the Buddha for refuge is like going up to the Bodhi tree and seeing the Buddha up close. To do this, we must see **true reality**: that everything is impermanent.

Buddhism of self

Why is it that we do **not** see impermanence in our lives, even though we keep saying it, we keep listening to Buddhist talks; we follow famous, even learned PhD, monks and nuns, holy teachers, charismatic Gurus? We even chant Pali or Sanskrit; we even know that everything is "empty": Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

Yet, our lives have not really changed. We have started Groups and feel important. This is **our** group. In fact, we are so confident, even proud, that we know Buddhism, we argue and quarrel with others who think different, or do not listen to us.

If this is the situation, then, surely these are the hindrances preventing us from knowing the Buddha's true teachings. We are distracted by Buddhism itself; we follow the Teachers but turn away from the Buddha. We don't even know this for a long time. We have become religious parrots.

Creating Buddhisms

This is understandable. When we look at those teaching Buddhism, important monks, smiling nuns, well-to-do men, well-dressed women, preaching Buddhism, we also notice almost none of them believe that we can become arhats in this life itself. Many of them are not even Buddhist. This is true because many of these monks and nuns do not even follow the Vinaya! We treat them like royalty or gods. What does that make us?

Most of these well-to-do Teachers do not even believe we can become streamwinners, to reach the path of awakening in this life itself. They teach Buddhism to show how successful they are: they have good karma, and we admire them (consciously or unconsciously) for that. Or, they look holy, or handsome, or pretty. Sounds silly, but we act even sillier.

Fan Buddhism

We are attracted to them because of their voice: they make us laugh. Or we feel safe because of the way they dress, or the hairstyle they keep or try to keep. But we laugh at their jokes, we feel happy. So, we are dependent on them, we want to be accepted by the crowd: we follow what others do.

We go by looks, like in most things in our lives. Whenever we look at them, listen to them, we often don't understand them: their teachings are deeply powerful. We **know not**, they know (so we think, or not); so we follow them.

Crowds

Notice that such **crowd** behaviour is what started and quickly spread the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide. It started with some people in China thinking that eating exotic animals (best to eat them live!) will bring us good health and long life. It brought us the plague, the pandemic, death. We stare into the dark: the dark glares back at us!

The pandemic bacteria quickly spread to us when we gather in **crowds**. The news report that this is very common with **religious** crowds. When we gather together to listen to our teachers and speakers, we not only fill our minds with their unawakened views, but we also let these insidious bacteria invade our bodies.

Then, we spread these bacteria to our loved ones, friends, anyone we come into contact with. Both wrong views and unhealthy bacteria spread through crowds and beings socially close to others without really caring about them.

Social distancing

Fortunately, we know (more or less) what to do, what not to do. We are taught **social distancing**. We must keep our distance from each other, even our loved ones—out of arm's length. This is an ancient Buddhist practice: good monks and nuns keep this healthy social space from one another and from others. This is called **respect** and celibacy.

This means that we want to really progress in Dhamma: so we keep social distance from the monastics and teachers. They are all infected with the bacteria and viruses, and need to heal themselves. How can they heal us when they are themselves not healthy?

Renounce the world, stay home

We are told to **stay home** happily, keeping away from the sources of the pandemic. We must renounce the world to be healthy. Stay home to learn the Dhamma. The Pandemic is teaching us a good lesson: We only need to be by **ourself**: stay within the safe space of peace, health and wisdom.

This is our chance to be alone, undistracted, with the Buddha Dhamma. We must work to remove Māra's world-wide web of deceit that makes us think that we are **stupid**, we can never understand the suttas. Suttas are mental-health manuals: they teach us good health, happy living and true freedom. This is the time to be our own **refuge** by taking the Dhamma as refuge, by looking at our own body and mind as teacher: they are **impermanent**.

Impermanence as teacher

Let us find out more about this impermanence before we are overcome by it, and lose our human state, if not already. We start by renouncing the world of animals, ghosts and hellish beings. We return **home** to our humanity, we look within to see our divinity. Then, we close our eyes, see our breath and nirvana's door opens before us.

We only need to want to better ourselves. Then, our life will be better: we simply need to live by seeing impermanence, just as the Buddha has taught us. We can then bring true happiness to others by speaking from our own joyful and liberating experience.

This is just what I am doing with effort number 701. Please join me and turn to the Buddha.

R707 Revisioning Buddhism 290

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

Copyright by Piya Tan ©2021