

Samvega

Feeling how Siddhattha felt to leave all behind
[Previously published as fb200501 piya]

This is a very sad period for me to see so many people suffering; so many who don't even know that they are suffering about; so many swarming into crowds, parties; flying into the flames to be burnt alive.

As Vesak approaches, I tell myself, millions in the world will prepare for celebrations in a time of restraint. Even if this were a "normal" time, would people actually be celebrating the real significance of the arising of the Buddha in our lives?

We are all drawn to successful teachers, famous teachers, to buildings, to traditions, to our own beliefs and views, to strange practices and rituals. We don't really care about others. We call this Buddhism, the slave to our own purposes.

How many of us really even try to understand or reflect on what the Bodhisattva really felt when he saw the 4 signs. We are like those scholars, monastic and lay, who look down on the Buddha and Buddhism as simply topics of research and getting their titles, PhDs, status, livelihood. Yet we do not even know the basic reality of awakening; we neither even understand nor accept the realities of impermanence, suffering and nonself.

We who truly want to feel what the Bodhisattva felt when he saw the old, the sick man, and the dead man. How did he really feel? Do we know this feeling? We have never experienced such a feeling. How can we say we know the Buddha's teachings?

Have we truly seen the 4th sight: the renunciant. Are there such sights today? When we look at a monk or nun today, what do we see? They are smiling not out of true joy of the teaching, but smiling for followers, mileage and money. Have we ever seen a thin monk, clean-shaven, mindful and restrained? They are often well fed, overdressed, head over haired.

How many of us really even understand the anguish that Siddhattha felt when he left the palace? The Suttas tell us he left his grieving family in broad daylight. He must have felt terrible anguish to want to go forth and seek the truth.

Do we feel any of such anguish for the truth? We only see strangely dressed, shaven headed titled and entitled people who don't even keep the Vinaya they have vowed to keep, but who twist and sell the Dhamma they are supposed to uphold. They have pockets in their robes.

And we adore and worship these worldly cloths. This is the real Buddhism today. These are the Buddhists. What have we become? This is my anguish. This is what I want to leave behind. What I have left behind. Because I know this is all false.

False teachings. False looks. False behaviour. False teachers. Empty shadows pretending to be bright light. They have lost their way, and we follow them in crowds and droves. See the Vesak crowd: how many of them really know or practise the Buddha's teaching?

I have no answer for this. I just want to know this great anguish, this samvega, that the Bodhisattva felt when he left home. Who can I ask about this who has experienced it? I know not. Who can I speak of this with? There seems to be none.

I reflect on that day the Bodhisattva saw the 4 signs, until the day he left home. He gave up everything for me, for us. Yet we know this not, or we think we know, and mock him for deserting his family. I can only feel its burden. I weep inside me.

When we do not really feel what renunciation is, how can we ever say we follow the Buddha? This feeling arises from a deep love for the Dhamma. Such anguish can only arise from a deep sense of love that knows something is wrong that must be righted. So Siddhattha left home. He never returned until he found the answer: awakening.

This is my period of anguish, reflecting on SAMVEGA. Like Siddhattha, I ride into the dark night of my own ignorance and unskill, putting my faith in the Dhamma. I know I must keep moving on. And as I move on, I am closer to dawn. What will dawn bring?

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

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