

## **So near, yet so far away**

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Unlike a generation ago, today there is an overflow of information on Buddhism. Countless books on almost any aspect of Buddhism written by anyone market-savvy (usually non-Buddhist) can be found in large bookshops. Anyone with some professional title, and a lust for attention, can read up such books or hook up with some scholar or Guru figure, and attract an admiring crowd and preach their brand of Buddhism.

Some of these preachers may look like monastics, but the sad reality is that they are not. In short, Buddhism has been hijacked. We seriously need to reclaim Buddhism if we value it, to go back to the historical Buddha whose teachings are still available to us. Let us be guided by these early teachings, so that we get the Buddhism that we deserve: the one taught by the historical Buddha.

### **How to see the buddha**

**The Saṅghaṭṭi,kaṇṇa Sutta** (It 3.5.3) is given to the monk Vakkali, who is attracted to the Buddha's physical body than to the Dhamma. No matter how closely he follows the Buddha, even holding on to the hem of his robe, he, lacking right mindfulness, will not awaken to true reality.

In this connection, the Buddha declares:

“Bhikshus, even if a monk should hold on to my outer robe's corner, following closely behind me, step for step,” but he is one filled with lust, hate and delusion, “he sees not the Dhamma; not seeing the Dhamma, he sees me not.”

Yet, someone not infatuated with lust, hate and delusion, but is calm and clear in mind, although far away, “he is before me, and I before him.” (SD 24.10a)

### **The ass who thinks he's a cow**

We see today a growing number of those who dress like monks and nuns, but keep long hair, and behave more like the laity. They secretly eat at the wrong time, go shopping, haunt the casinos, go swimming, own properties, and so on. They even indulge in sex and other serious improprieties.

Sometimes, the laity even encourage them, or condone them. This only dilutes the Dhamma and Vinaya (the Buddha's teaching and its quality control system). The Buddha reminds us that merely looking like holy monks and nuns, but not living the life, we only deceive ourselves.

### **The parable of the ass**

In the parable of the ass given in **the Gadrabha Samaṇa Sutta** (A 3.81), the Buddha says:

“Suppose, bhikshus, an ass follows closely behind a herd of cows, thinking, ‘I’m one, too! I’m one, too!’

But his colour is not like that of the cows, nor is his sound like that of the cows, nor are his hoofs like those of the cows.

He merely follows closely behind a herd of cows, thinking, “I’m one, too! I’m one, too!”

Even so, bhikshus, here, a certain monk follows closely behind a community of monks, thinking, “I’m a monk, too! I’m a monk, too!”

But he has no desire to keep the training in higher moral virtue (the Vinaya).

He has no desire to keep the training in higher mind (meditation).

He has no desire to keep the training in higher wisdom.

He remains an ass: even though he follows the cows and thinks he is one, he is not so.  
(SD 24.10b)

**The Vinaya** is the quality controller and preserver of the Buddha’s teaching. Any monastic who rejects or ignores the Vinaya, is not a renunciant, even though he may look like one. Hence, it is vital that we know some basic Vinaya at least to make sure that such monastics are reminded that they can do better, and that RENUNCIATION is the greatest blessing they have, or that it can be the greatest burden that will make them sink into the lowest and darkest suffering states.

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

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