

Entity or unity?

Reflecting on nonself in Buddhist work
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The Buddha did not start any religion or organization. He noticed a suffering world; went all out to find out what it was all about; discovered the answers by his own efforts; awakened as the Buddha, he taught others, including us, for our spiritual freedom and happiness. His teaching is still with us, or at least some of us.

Even the “noble sangha” who gathered around the Buddha and after him, do so on account of their practice and realization. They were streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats. These are not merely monastic renunciants but also lay practitioners who are inspired by and dedicated to the path of awakening. We cannot be “members” of this community: only by our practice and realization, we BECOME the noble sangha.

Faith and wisdom

In due course, we have groups of people who form their own entities called Temples, Societies, Centres, Organizations, etc. These are always rooted in funds and power; often only these. As a rule, they are successful not out of faith or wisdom, but because of funds, influence (power) and as an “Entity.”

The noble sangha is not even a spiritual entity like any Buddhist organization today. The simple reason is that we rarely even see people who run such organizations seriously studying the suttas, practising what it teaches; every organization tends to follow a certain sect or brand of Buddhism. Even when such an organization claims to be “non-sectarian,” they end up turning this into a sect with its own sectarian views and parochial superstition.

Loving the Buddha

However, this does not mean that all Buddhist groups are alike. Mainly to ensure proper management of funds from the faithful, and also on account of the demands of the country’s laws, Buddhists who work together would register some kind of “entity.” How successful, even “Buddhist” such an Entity it depends, of course, on how it views and practises Buddhism.

The question however remains what this “IT” means. The Entity, even a “Buddhist” Entity is not really Buddhist. As a rule, such an Entity would be dominated or imprinted by the views and ways of its dominant leader or personality, usually the President or the Secretary of that Entity.

All Buddhists are equal?

My reflection here is on how effective can such an Entity be in promoting Buddha Dhamma or just Buddhism, or merely Entity Buddhism. When an Entity puts itself first, and Dhamma only as a part of its calendar of celebrations, then it is merely an Entity (a Self in organizational terms). This becomes even more ironic when it measures the benefits it can

get from using other individuals or “entity” that it measures as being more or lesser than itself.

A Buddhist Organization or Entity would be regarded as being magnanimous when it actually works with other entities or individuals on an equal footing as “Buddhists,” to promote Buddha Dhamma; not because the other entity is huge or the individual is world famous, but to promote Buddha Dhamma. In other words, the Dhamma is put above the Entity, like in the noble sangha of the early Buddhism did.

Legacy of the winds

The disadvantage and danger of seeing an Organization as an Entity is that it is perceived as depriving the inspiration for working for the Dhamma, but merely as promoting the Entity: we are promoting Samsara, not working for the path. We got lost somewhere along the Entity meetings, visits by government and secular VIPs, building projects, accumulating funds; in short, worldly gains (the 4 winds).

When we keep to this trend of work, we are creating a worldly legacy of the winds. We will not attract those who are truly Dhamma-inclined. Notice a significant percentage of Entity membership, even amongst the inner circles (especially so), we have eccentric, even emotionally troubled, persons, who are there perhaps because they have difficulty relating with other people. How can we help them?

Heart drain

Those who are more inspired to work for the Dhamma, who see a more embracing vision of Buddhist work, who are keener on proper practice, are likely to move out of the Entity to work on their own. Entities always suffer from brain drain, sometimes even as a policy, because they are self-promoting and do not tolerate differences and new ideas. Things can get worse when we forget the original inspiration and measure the Entity by its “success” and self-promotion. There will be no one who is better than us, since we have set ourselves, the Entity as the Standard.

Even empires fall, what more an ancient Entity. Entities will fall, too. When others outside the Entity progress better in ideas, ideals, efforts, fellowship, and love for the Dhamma, new groups will grow. Why not attract these spiritual talents now, and work with them? Why not be MORE than a mere Entity and promote Buddha Dhamma than our corporate Self. Indeed, we are seeing a more embracing entity in this way; we avoid the Heart Drain. A heart drain leaves the Entity without a heart.

The Buddha’s way

When we work only to promote an Entity, we are just a Committee member, or a Member. When we work for a Dhamma-first group, we grow with others in Dhamma, we grow as a community. If we think this is daydreaming, then, sadly, we are not capable of thinking beyond the Entity. The most powerful Entity during the Buddha’s time were the Brahmins. The Buddha outshone them. However, after the Buddha, when the later Entity-minded

Buddhists started inventing their own Sects and Buddhisms, Buddhism became a part of Brahmanism (again).

Yet, there are amongst us who are able to live, work and practise as Dhamma-inspired people, many of us are not even Buddhist. Yet we all love the Buddha, practise the Dhamma, and aspire to be the noble sangha. This is the happy and peaceful way that the Buddha has taught us.

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

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