

How to use others

The Buddhism of true success

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One of the strangest kinds of Buddhists I've met in my lifetime of faith are the "professional Buddhists." Their basic idea is that whatever title or status we have is sufficient for us to qualify as Buddhist teachers. Our success (good karma) speaks for itself.

One such person I knew gave me a few tips on how to succeed without working. His favourite book was Napoleon Hill's "Think and Grow Rich." This reminds me of a certain Chief High Priest who also liked this book, and another better-known book, Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friend and Influence People." He wrote Buddhist books based on such ideas, and the crowd loved them.

OPT, OPE, OPM

The secret to successful Buddhist work, they claim, is OPT, OPE and OPM, that is, "Other People's Time," "Other People Energy," "Other People's Money," or simply using "Other People" (OP). In fact, they are seen to be very successful, teaching what is OPB, "Other People's Buddhism."

OPB means we don't have to learn or practise anything, just be present in the right crowd. Why bother to study and practice: it is so difficult, boring, not profitable, and we are not good enough. Why realize anything: we want to enjoy the world.

The easiest way to succeed professionally with Buddhism is to use OPI, Other People's Ideas, as if they were our own. The admiring audience will always think that what we speak comes from us anyway.

Asura

Over the years, as my study and understanding of Buddhism grew, I learned that there are the Asuras. They exploit others: they leech on the goodness of others and pretend that it is their own. Psychologically, they refer to those who "measure" others, and they love and depend on big crowds. But we know stories of the Buddha often teaching even 1 person.

What's wrong with using Other People's Buddhism, we may fairly ask. The simple answer is that "It is not our experience." The Buddha teaches us to "come and see," and practise it "here and now."

Crowd Buddhism

Now, whenever we go for Buddhist talks, we will often notice that the bigger the crowd, the more hollow the Speaker. My mistake: we do not notice this; that's why we go for it. The crowd likes to hear what crowds like to hear, and they keep coming back for more--because hearing once, or no matter how many times, we can never get enough! Wow. ... Wait. There's something wrong with this sentence. It's time to think for ourself.

For example, Crowd Buddhists love to hear gossips, like certain Movie Stars are Buddhists. This is called “Fame by association.” Imagine Brad Pitt as a Buddhist! But wait: what kind of Buddhist? What practice does he do? Even if he is a good Buddhist, how does that make me a good Buddhist? Time to think for ourself again.

Scientific Buddhism

Then, some of us love to show off that certain Scientists praise Buddhism. Usually this is Albert Einstein. Even when Einstein has something good to say about Buddhism, we should ask: what does he mean by that? What kind of Buddhism is he talking about? Bad news, he is certainly not referring to your Buddhism, only my Buddhism! These are the only 2 kinds of Buddhism.

When we use Science to measure Buddhism, what is the real standard? Science is the standard: Buddhism is measured against science. In other words, Buddhism is less important than science (crudely put). It’s like when I say that your neighbour is handsomer than you. Even such a simple truth will cause great confusion (you will not talk to me again). What more of comparing two different fields of learning. Anyway, most scientists will tell you (in their books), they do not really believe in Buddhism or any religion.

Buddha’s Buddhism

For these reasons, and others which I have written elsewhere, I have tried my best to learn and teach only the Buddha’s teaching. Yes, you are sharp: this is also Other People’s Buddhism. It’s the Buddha’s Buddhism, if you like. But the Buddha has prepared and preserved his teachings in the suttas so that we can and must experience it for ourself.

Learning Buddhism is like being a toddler learning to walk. Notice no matter how often he falls, he gets up again, and again. Finally, he learns to walk. We were all toddlers, Buddhist toddlers. We are being spoon-fed with highly sweetened “other-people” Buddhism. Often, these are drugs that we get addicted to.

Identification

No matter how many holy people we proclaim as Arhats, we are still not on the path ourself. Even if our teacher is an Arhat, we are still not one. We are not even streamwinners.

We are like playful children pretending to be Superman and Spiderman. As we mature, we grow out of such “identifications.” But one kind of identification remains, that is, Self-identification.

We still think in terms of My Body, My Mind, My Views, My Reflections, etc. We think in terms of I, Me, Mine. We tell others not to identify with the self (we heard this from others), and yet we ourself are still identifying with I, Me, Mine—with self, conceit, craving. That is why I often rely on the suttas when I learn and teach.

Learn, teach; teach, learn

As I teach, I learn to notice how my own Ego, Conceit and Craving arise and work. Then I use my sutta learning and Dhamma wisdom to understand what is going on. Then, I learn what moral courage (*vesārajjā*) is: it is better that we are blamed for speaking rightly than be praised for speaking falsely. Moreover, I notice that by sharing these understanding and wisdom with others, I can better remember these vital teachings.

As I learn, I teach; as I teach, I learn.

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

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