

Is Buddhism for the rich only?

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In the early 2000s, I met a prominent local priest running some big social project. He introduced himself with some air, "I'm the CEO of ... "

"I'm a full-time lay Dhamma worker ... " I replied. Suddenly, he gave me the silent treatment, went into his office and I could hear horse-laughs from him, as he chatted with his employees.

Right! Speech

Then, I have this rather self-confident good friend (who, as a rule, had his own way) whose good point, however, was that he loved the suttas. He also liked chatting with other priests suggesting how they could improve things.

Since we were close friends, I gently warned him: "Do not speak of the suttas or the Vinaya to the priests." He, of course, took it with a large lump of salt.

Right!

Months passed. I had even forgotten I said this to him. One day, he quietly, almost repentantly, reported to me:

"You are right! I spoke to a number of priests about suttas and the Vinaya. They all just stared at me and walked away!"

We became better friends. We now better understood the meaning of SELF-RELIANCE and taking only the Buddha as our teacher and refuge.

Good cartoons

Cartoons can teach us some profound realities, when we read them rightly (that is, seeing what is meaningful to us). In the cartoon below, the 1st speaker suggests that students should be paid to go to school!

Good karma

I thought this is a great idea! Lay people, especially the unwaged, the retired, the poor, and lay Dhamma teachers (other than the professionals), should be paid for coming to the Temple.

As a rule, Buddhist priests are many times wealthier than all our family income and yours put together. And they have better homes, more servants, latest luxuries and choice pleasures —and they don't pay taxes. Hence, it will be meritorious for them to donate to us instead, especially when they neither really practise the Dhamma nor keep to the Vinaya.

Merit transfer

I like the part where the 2nd speaker points out that "school" is wrongly spelt. This is like my good friend who spoke to the priests about suttas and Vinaya and was rebuffed. Indeed, these priests often teach only what will hold their devotees to them and lighten their wallets for the sake of "merit transfer" (read fund transfer).

Of course, the crude person that I am, I have put all this rather crudely. "Merit transfer" is a very sophisticated way of how the priests get their support from us, despite all that I have said here.

Holy Venerables

I have also met devout priest-followers who berated me, even tried to disrupt my classes with catcalls. Their rationale for my bad karma: "They are Venerables you know! You should respect them!"

I knew that my present task will be very difficult, but that I am on the right track. When I reflected on how many other Dhamma-Vinaya Buddhists have suffered in silence, I realize I must plod on, even if alone.

To a better Dhamma future

It is imperative to understand that what I have written here and elsewhere, as a rule, is never driven by hate nor malice. The feelings are more of sadness (this could be better) and concern (things should be better).

Wholesome change can only occur with wholesome truth. In the current situation, both monastics and lay are living and relating falsely, so that Buddhism is an oddball curiosity rather than a social force to be considered. I believe, and live for the vision, that this will change for the better for all.

It is up to us to change things for the better.

R750 Revisioning Buddhism 315

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

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