

## When is the Dhamma true?

[Previously published as fb200510 Piya Tan]

### Summary

Even when the holiest person tells us the truth, it's not true for us until we have experienced it for ourself. We don't need that person but we need ourself—that's all we have, that's what we are, that's the truth.

Buddhism is not always Dhamma

Today Buddhist info is like Ganges sand, available so easily and in abundance. Anyone, Buddhist or not, can quote or write a book on Buddhism, and earn the admiration of our local Buddhists who love imported Good (no ass). Notice how many great books on Buddhism have been published so far, how many versions of the Tripitaka and Buddhism, Zen and otherwise, are available today.

Yet, how many of us are really awakened at all? We only quote more quotes, write more books, look for more teachers, be more Zen about it. Buddhism is mushrooming all over the world, so is Covid. We even have a chant, the Ratana Sutta, that can end this plague. Yet, we only chant it like some Tibetan mantra; we have never really used it (just look closely at its words). Otherwise, it remains Tibetan or Greek (both are imports).

Clever monastics

Facebook is making Zuckerberg super wealthy because he has given us this amazing ability to make Enemies we have never met and make Friends with whomever are stupider than we are, so that we always feel **like** right.

Yet with skillfully upheld moral restraint and subject focus, we can gain wisdom on a global scale with Friends from legion nations we may never otherwise meet. We can share the Buddha Dhamma globally; multiply our Dhamma joy transpersonally.

Modern monks

Lately, too, a growing number of monks have tried to **correct** me with their wisdom or charm. Some of them write very insightful pieces on Buddhism. Indeed, many monks with such wisdom have published books, become famous, wealthy, and are able to choose who can be their disciples, and who should not even meet them. They don't seem to shave their hair, and their robes speak elitist bespoke, with pockets, too. Of course, we should never judge others by their looks—which actually raised this issue in the first place.

Vimamsaka Sutta (M 47)

My point is that when some wise words, even the Buddha word, are spoken, how do we know they are actually **authentic**? Yes, it is easy to check the words: the Buddha has given us various ways of checking them with the suttas and the Vinaya.

Even more amazing is that the Buddha has left us **the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta** (M 47), SD 35.6. Here again, we see the Buddha unique amongst the founders and teachers of world religions: he invites his followers or any of us to carefully **investigate** his actions, words and thoughts. If he were to show any greed, hate or delusion, then he has failed, and we should not follow him. Only when we are sure that the Buddha is free of these 3 roots of unwholesome motivation should we accept his teaching and practise it.

#### On-going investigation

Hence, he invites us to carefully investigate even our **teacher**. This is not a job interview, a one time, quality test. It is a lifelong, on-going observation. For, most of us are easily tricked by looks and likes, and we tire of seeing faults in people: when a fault is seen so often, it must be a virtue! That works for us! There will be **no** religion if not for this moral laziness and emotional need to follow a power figure, to imprint ourselves onto something larger than us.

In the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta, the Buddha teaches us a comprehensive self-test for the liberating truth:

- (1) fully and regularly **investigate** the teacher (until we are ourself awakened);
- (2) put the teaching to the test: **practise** it, and see how we better ourselves;
- (3) investigate until we feel and know with **confidence** that it is true and good;
- (4) we must **verify** that this teaching brings us to the path: only by reaching it!

Māra is wise, too

Hence, some world-famous teacher may make some really world-shaking statement that the mass media (eg, the Straits Times) publish it, or your friends quote it. If we notice this teacher keeps quoting the Buddha or some Rumi sophist, and pretend that he is the author, then we can safely conclude that he is a Fake Guru.

Even Māra knows the teachings (better than any PhD venerable doctor). The better we know the teachings, the more we can twist them into our service. We have not changed a bit. For this reason, no matter what sweet words that a monk, nun, professional teacher, or any of us can quote does not in anyway reflect the inner quality of the speaker.

#### Greed, hate, delusion

We do not know whether the speaker's greed, hate or delusion are still there or not. In that case, we should not waste our time listening to such BS. For, these words may be true (in theory), but they are not true of the speaker. We might as well listen to a tape-recorder or digital player, or see it on Facebook.

The point is that we must ourself work to see greed, hate and delusion disappearing from us; that we are surely, even if slowly, growing better. Only we can, in time, know this. When we only trust a teacher's word, we may not fully know the truth of the teaching. When we only follow a teacher's word, we have handed our remote to him.

Then, we can never be better than our teacher: he limits and stunts our growth so that we but his own image: we are only his shadow. Only when we face the light of the Buddha Dhamma will we lose that shadow, when we see our own goodness that liberates us to follow the Buddha's path and fully awaken.

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

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