

Power and its consequences

How empowerment really works

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History accounts the rise and fall of empires and people in power. Politics helps us understand how people come into power or fall from it, and how we can gain power and benefit from it. Yet, for the founder of a great religion, it is an individual quest for truth and embracing that truth. But his followers who fail to see or accept this, use this religion as a source of power over others for their own worldly gains.

Buddhism as power

The Buddha Dhamma only works FULLY in us when we fully accept it. But we only see Buddhism as electricity and gas, like our work's wages, or investment dividends. Or our children. We may be Buddhists, but first we must be successful, our children must be successful, our family must be powerful. We see Buddhism as a source of our Power: that's the reality of the situation.

At this point, we do not even see the preceding paragraph, but the right time will come when its power will rise in our heart like the bright morning sun. It is like healthy food: we cannot have it and keep it; when we keep it, it rots. To truly "have" it is to mindfully eat the food so that it benefits us. We take food, and we shit the waste. Buddhism is about taking in the good, letting go of the bad.

Teachings of power

So it is with us, but it takes an amazing leap of faith to accept this truth and to admit that we would rather have POWER, that we fear losing what we HAVE. This attitude also explains the rise of LINEAGES in American Buddhism where religion is just a product, a competitive one. It needs authentication, a good brand.

Hence, we import the past (but dead) glory of Zen and Shin from Japan, or the perceived power of Tibetan Buddhism into the West, into Singapore. That is why, even as we follow the Buddha's teaching of renunciation, we sacrifice great wealth for the heraldry of being a Datuk, and invest our wealth in what we see as successful foreign Buddhist missions.

The reason for our double standards is simple: we want to remain in power and yet receive the Buddha's blessings. This also explains how we, without a thought (or mindlessly, we will admit when we are wiser), support big temples, look up to the Chief High Priests (an empty colonial title paid for in Sri Lanka), we gaze eyeless at professional teachers simply because they are titled, thus entitled with Dhamma. We all love POWER, we are drawn to power, we fear losing it.

Imitating the Buddha

To see and accept the truth that the Buddha has awakened to, we have to follow his example: to renounce power, plenty and pleasure. But we love these 3 P's much more than

we even feel for the 3 jewels. How can we ever see the true power, true plenty, true pleasure of the 3 jewels when we don't even understand why the Buddha renounced the world?

The modern monastics of today give up their unhappy homes for luxurious palaces and a ritual life of ease, piety and power. For this same desire for power, those monks of Sri Lanka have "modernized" the Dhamma, rejected the Vinaya; they now dress for power. They live lives like the laity who worship them, who piously donate to them even when they have salaried jobs and have far greater income than the laity. Both sides see the POWER in their illicit relationships.

Power to me!

The so-called "3rd wave" of PSYCHOLOGY—from the psychodynamic, to the humanistic, to the cognitive—can be said to have been fuelled mainly by the psychology of early Buddhism. Just as naïve Buddhists are titillated by Hollywood stars becoming Buddhists (doesn't matter what kind), we are puffed up by psychologization of Buddhism.

It's a "win-win" situation, we like to say: Buddhism gets an unprecedented global boost to the despair of those in power in other world religions. Then, they, too, had to seize the holy grail of Buddhist psychology; for, it is power. So now we even have Christian mindfulness, and lovingkindness is returned to Almighty Brahma, to God, instead of to all beings. Religion, remember, is about power, too.

Those professionals who first saw the power of BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY are now so wealthy that they can afford to declare they are NOT Buddhist, to bite the hand that fed them. Perhaps, they at least remember to graciously send a Christmas card to the Dalai Lama.

Singapore and Malaysia Buddhists celebrate Christmas, too: it is, after all, a holiday of Wealth and Power. Christmas and Vihara Buddhism are not for the poor. To be POOR is bad karma for the rich (no, that's not what I mean: please read this sentence carefully again; then again, how can you ever know what I mean by it!).

Powerlessly moved

One of the most powerful early Buddhist teachings is that of the psychology of THE UNCONSCIOUS. All our actions, as unawakened beings, are moved, in some way, by our unconscious latent tendencies (*anusaya*)—simply put: deep in our unconscious lurk lust, revulsion and ignorance, playing and pulling the strings and leashes of our lives. Our latent tendencies compel us to seek power. How else can we survive in this "dog-eat-dog" world, we rationally rationalize of this lower realm we have fallen into.

So, we must make the best of it by becoming the Alpha Male, the Alpha Female, the Alpha Priest, the Alpha Teacher. Where there is Alpha, there is also Omega, the fall and end of things. Let's not think about the ending: it's not productive! Let's work for Power and keep it! That's the way we are compelled to think.

The power of Dhamma

Now that the Sutta Discovery translation project has been growing for the last 2 decades, we hear of people talking about its fullness, clarity and usefulness. This is POWER: we can use it, as we have done before. Seize these works, you Mighty, put your own names to them the way your Chief High Priest sees only His Name in all things great.

We would rather heed the Buddha.

THE POWER VERSES (Dh 73-74)

The unwise would desire reputation,
precedence amongst the monks,
authority in the monasteries,
honour amongst other families.
(Dh 73)

Let both the laymen and the monks think:
“By me is this done.
In all that should be done or not done,
Let them consult me.”
Such is the desire of the fool
whose desire and pride only increase.
(Dh 75)

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