

Using the Buddha

How to grow in Dhamma

[Previously published as fb210221 Piya Tan]

When we know or think that something is really good, we would like to benefit from it. For most of us, our reaction is to “use” that good person or object or knowledge. How we regard that source of good, how we appropriate it, how we benefit from it, differ in each of us depending on the “how.”

Listening to the teacher

Here, we will reflect on how the Buddha’s teaching is “used” today in the ways mentioned. The first way—beginning with the worst—is to use the teachings, especially speaking before a crowd, as if we have fully understood it, as if we are enlightened.

Often, this does not matter if it is an admiring crowd that has gathered to listen to their adorable teacher, not the teaching. It’s like a swarming of insects around a naked flame, and as the front lines of bugs get consumed by the flame, we all keep moving closer until we see the light. This is the way of the Cult Guru.

Sounds like Buddha

Then, there are those speakers who use the suttas, the Buddha’s teachings, as if they are their own thoughts and inventions. Indeed, they are, since they have not really studied the suttas nor even want to talk about them. They use some words or ideas which sound Buddhist: the audience will be none the wiser anyway, especially when it comes from, say, a Chief High Priest.

For that reason, the Buddha warns us in **the (Pañcaka) Thera Sutta** (A 5.88): “even old, famous, wealthy, and learned teachers can have wrong view and perverted vision” (SD 40a.16). But then we do not know this sutta. So, such preachers and priests prosper on our account, and Buddhism, badly used, does not.

Owning what’s not ours

Sometimes, we discover some really good teachings, and we know this will benefit our centre or community. But the Chief High Priest does not allow any “outside” teachings, no matter how true or good. We are told to remove the real author’s name, and use those materials as if they originate from the Priest’s domain. After all, Buddhism is so competitive today; we need successful branding and marketing.

Sutta credits

Then, there are those who are very good in studying suttas, or even love reading it. Often this is part of their academic career. As good students or scholars, they carefully read the suttas to understand them as well as possible. Of course, much of this depends on how well the suttas have been translated: this is another big issue.

Anyway, the student or scholar quotes the suttas or the sources (other writers) of the suttas, and, of course, most of it has to be his own opinions. Some scholars are so clever that they even write about where the Buddha is "wrong" (meaning, they disagree with the Buddha). This is academic license: it's all right, it seems, for the scholars to be wrong so long as they quote our sources rightly (unlike the Chief High Priest).

Source referencing is important because often the lecturer or professor wants to check if what has been written really comes from those references. Otherwise, it would reflect badly on them, too. Buddhism, properly used, benefits everyone, that is, until it's time to weed our own garden at the end of the day. Anyway, this is the Scholar's use of Buddhism.

Faith and joy

Now, there are those who truly love the Dhamma. As soon as they learn that the suttas preserve the early Buddhist texts, ancient teachings that go back to the Buddha himself or his immediate disciples, they eagerly STUDY THE SUTTAS. They are so moved by faith and joy that they make sacrifices to contribute to those who translate the suttas and explain them. From such practice of generosity, we are able to benefit from, for example, the Sutta Discovery series, or this reflection.

Last but not least, we have those who not only love the Dhamma, and show their gratitude by joyfully giving out of faith for the success of SUTTA WORK by full-time Dhamma workers. They are deeply inspired by the true teachings of the Buddha as preserved in the suttas. They discover the SECRET of awakening in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.¹

Secret of awakening

Sorry, this is a secret teaching: you have to uncover the secret yourself. This last group—the true users of Dhamma—have learned this secret. They better understand the meaning of life; and so they know its purpose, too. For that reason, I have myself aspired to reach the path of awakening in this life itself.

There is no better moment: indeed, there is no other moment to do so. We just don't have the time: it comes and we lose it forever. This is better than being reborn than animals, or pretas (addictive ghosts), hell-beings—or insects.

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

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¹ (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta (S 25.1, SD 16.7): <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/16.7-Anicca-Cakkhu-S-s25.1-piya.pdf>