

Feeling the wound

The 2 extremes we follow today
[Previously published as fb210428 Piya Tan]

The man wounded by a dart

The parable of the doctor and the man wounded by a dart occurs in at least 3 discourses:

the Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta (M 63), SD 5.8,
the Sunakkhatta Sutta (M 105), SD 94.3,
the Mahā'padāna Sutta (D 14), SD 49.8.

While the physician parable of M 63 warns us against having useless speculative thoughts, the same parable in M 105 exhorts us to understand the true nature of our body, mind and existence, so that we know how to identify our suffering and end it, or begin to do so, right away—as if we are pierced by a poisoned dart, which we should remove immediately.

Of all the followers of religion (or whatever we call it), I think that Buddhists (mostly) disrespect their founding teacher and source teaching the most. Just look around today, and see how Buddhists really know or respect the historical Buddha. Say Buddha, and most of them will think of some strange Chinese looking God-like figure who has his own Paradise!

They can even prove to you that he exists (unlike the historical Buddha who is dead): a few people in China or Central Asia wrote some texts (the written word is sacred, you know). And for most Buddhists, this is proof enough. It takes too much effort to verify it anyway.

After all, if the majority keeps repeating the words or idea (true or false does not matter—like the Buddha's Tooth Relic in a huge golden Temple in the tourist centre of Singapore)—it must be true! After all, it is a big and impressive Temple with lots of gold, images, and relics. That the Tooth is as big as a dinosaur (imagine the Buddha's size) makes it even more holy.

Professional Buddhism

In fact, most Buddhists would accept that anyone with a TITLE, especially a title of power or professionalism, must know Buddhism. This is called the “power of association” and of entitlement. Surely, they must have a lot of money and power to have those titles, and of course GOOD KARMA! This is called Professional Buddhism.

So long as the speaker is Professional, and he says some Buddhist or Buddhist-like words, it is Buddhism. In fact, we hear more of such Professional Truths than any teachings of the Buddha. After all, who wants to read all those repetitive and difficult texts called suttas! They are 2500 years old, and should be updated!

Scholars have discovered ancient texts in Afghanistan older than any of the written or printed versions of early Buddhism. This only shows that Mahayana Buddhism is actually older than the historical Buddha's teachings. We have zealous preachers who pride in this "fact"!

Commercial Buddhism

To be fair, we do have books on the early Buddhist suttas, each Nikaya and the Sutta Nipata put together conveniently in a single volume. In fact, all the repetitive passages have been cut (remember Procrustes and his bed?) for easy reading.

Repetitive calling of “O Monks!” have been removed, too. The Siamese Tipiṭaka (very poor editing all of them, you see!) have been omitted from these beautifully bound commercial volumes.

Huge amounts of donations have gone into printing these beautiful volumes, so that the printing costs are practically cut down. But still these glossy volumes are sold at an exorbitant price. Come on, it’s for a good cause, the Publishing House runs a fund for the preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. Yes, Buddhists are such a tolerant lot: the inferior vehicle supports the Great Vehicle, so it seems.

Commercial Buddhism is the other pillar of Buddhism today. After all, religion is the kind of business that never fails: it’s tax-free, too. It’s the only remittance company that allows us to send our money ahead before we get there: it’s called Transference of Merits (read Funds). Even monks who neither follow the Vinaya nor observe Vassa, hold Kathina ceremonies: more Transferences. Nobody knows what all this means. That’s why Commercial Buddhism works!

Noticing the dart

To be a Buddhist today, then, seems to become most distracted by what Famous Teachers and Titled Professionals teach. Someone called them the Emperors of Enlightenment. No one notices they have no clothes, or perhaps enjoy the pomp and parade.

Yet there are a few little boys and little girls who see that the Emperor of Enlightenment has nothing on. It’s such a painful sight, even when it is such a grand public parade. Their child-like voices are too little, too soft, to be heard or heeded in such a crowd.

Children of the old forest

So these little children quietly move away and live in the quiet and fruitful green forests, their favourite trees. When they see a large old tree, they cannot help but smile: it is as if the Buddha is still sitting there in all his radiance.

These little children notice something spectacular on the nakedness of the Emperors: it is full of wounds, weeping wounds, but unnoticed. The children notice their own wounds, and they learn that the herbs, leaves, flowers, bark, tree-sap, or just hugging an ancient tree is so healing.

Their childlike hearts keep them happy and eager to learn the way of the beautiful old forest. Just like the Buddha does in those days.

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

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