



A Statement of Conscience

“All beings tremble at the rod” says the Buddha, yet today the ominous rod of terrorism has become one of the gravest problems that we face. No longer is the terrorist threat reserved for the vulnerable public figure or the outspoken adversary. With their lightning speed and global reach, our modern media of communication have given the terrorist cadres a tremendous new power to intimidate whole populations. Far too often the victims of their hits are the helpless and innocent, struck down in a symbolic show of hate.

This appalling increase in terrorist violence pierces the moral consciousness at its core, leaving behind painful and persisting wounds. For those of us who reside in Sri Lanka the problem becomes ever more acute as we witness the tide of terrorism sweep across this traditional homeland of the Dhamma. It is no longer possible for us to immerse ourselves in the comfortable routines of our familiar world. Instead we must struggle in anguish and hope to deal with this frightful menace in our midst—to understand it and to confront it in a manner worthy of our Buddhist heritage. It cannot be disputed that the world-wide rise of terrorism springs from complex causes of a political, economic and social character, which must be tackled by any adequate solution to the problem. At the same time, however, we have to insist that terrorism also has a deeper underlying human dimension that can only be ignored at our peril. If we probe beneath the burning issues of political ideology and ethnic grievances around which the terrorist forces rally, we will discover at its epicentre those same malignant drives that, in less virulent form, motivate so much ordinary human conduct.

As the vital dynamism from which terrorism springs we will find greed, a rapacious lust for power and domination. We will find hate, smouldering within as cold resentment or whipped up into a frenzy of destruction. And we will find delusion, a collective paranoia instilled by inflammatory ideologies or the blind submergence of the individual in the group. These are the hidden human roots of terrorism; fed by personal frustration and social discontent, they yield as their fruits the violence that surrounds us.

As we grapple with the problem of terrorism, asking ourselves what we can contribute to stem its rising tide, we may find an answer closer to home than we imagine. Let us first note that the spread of terrorism is not so much a macabre deviation from prevailing norms as an extreme manifestation of a wholesale decline in human fellow feeling. This lack of empathy and sensitivity to others can already be discerned in the everyday functioning of society—in the spreading disease of corruption, apathy and selfishness infecting the social organism. Add to this a frantic search for a sense of belonging through the rediscovery of ethnic roots, and the result is a potentially very explosive mixture.

If this much is recognised, we may then see that one of the most effective countermeasures we can apply in our individual capacity against the growth of terrorism lies very much within our reach. Simply put, it consists in reaffirming to ourselves, and teaching by precept and example those fundamental ethical values upon which a harmonious and peaceful society is founded. This reaffirmation of genuine moral values of compassion, honesty, truthfulness, tolerance and respect for others will sound a thunderous statement of conscience. Whether made audibly or privately to oneself, it will raise a note of protest against the moral negligence

from which terrorism draws its sustenance, acclaiming our confidence in the power of the good. While we should not cherish unrealistic expectations about our ability to reshape the world, we also should not lose sight of our responsibility to counter prevalent trends. Nor should we discount our ability to make an impact. The clear and decisive commitment to ethical values has a quiet potency that can effect important changes both outwardly and inwardly. While subtly altering the interpersonal aspects of our lives, within our hearts it will fortify those two mental factors that the Buddha called the guardians of the world—shame and moral dread—the former the innate repugnance towards evil, the latter the fear of its consequences. Above all, we must reaffirm the need to rise above the limiting perspectives of the self-centred point of view in which so many today have become entrenched. Recognising that every community, and the world as a whole, is ultimately harmed by the struggle of each faction to secure its individual ends, we must stand up for the development of a sense of humane responsibility that will transcend divisive loyalties. The lesson that we must learn and teach is that embedded in the ancient maxim taught by the Buddha: “Considering others as oneself, do not hurt them or cause them harm.” To recognise others as being essentially the same as oneself and to feel their wish for happiness as one’s own, this is the only effective means we can propose to build the peaceful society for which we yearn.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Exploring the Wheels

Over the past 2000 years Sri Lanka, as a Buddhist country, has brought forth a succession of erudite scholars who have authored numerous commentaries and treatises on the more abstruse aspects of the Dhamma. However, simultaneously, at the popular level a parallel class of Buddhist literature has gradually developed: the didactic composition written in Sinhalese for the populace who did not know Pali. The works of this genre are for the most part compilations of excerpts from the Sutta Pitaka, Jātaka tales retold, pithy maxims, and narratives often composed in verse. Written to instruct the minds and improve the morals of the common people, this body of literature exhorts the reader to lead a life of upright conduct guided by the wisdom of the Dhamma. While there is some evidence that several of these works go back as far as the 8th century, it was between the 13th and 15th centuries that the indigenous Sinhalese Buddhist literature flourished. The works of this period display a vigour and vitality stemming directly from their instructional role, for they were purposely simplified in construction and language to increase their popular appeal.

Two of the most highly esteemed works of this type are Gurulugomi’s “Dharmapradmpika” and Vidāgama Maitreya’s “Loveda Sangarāva.” Both are published by the BPS in English translation for the benefit of an international readership.

Soma Thera and Piyadassi Thera have translated excerpts from Gurulugomi’s work under the title *The Lamp of the Law* (Wheel No. 38). This work, written at the end of the 12th century or the beginning of the 13th, deals with the Buddha’s teachings in a style marked by freshness and naturalness of diction. The author obviously wrote from a strong personal conviction in the Buddha’s path, and his longer passages indicate the depth of his feelings, as this passage on patience will show:

Patience is of the essence of all holy living. Without this quality one cannot persevere in good, one cannot maintain oneself in harmlessness, in non-anger, in kindliness; one cannot help others; one cannot become fit for full enlightenment.

His treatment of the other cardinal Buddhist virtues all show the same eloquence and spiritual depth, and bear comparison with Shantideva's classic *Bodhicharyāvātāra*.

The *Loveda Sangarāva* is published under the title *The World's True Welfare* (Wheel No. 296/297). It has been translated by F.M. Rajakaruna, with an introduction to Sinhalese literature by Ananda Kulasuriya. Written in the 15th century in rhymed quatrains, this work used to be an integral part of the school curriculum in Sri Lanka and is still being studied in temple schools. Thus these verses are known and beloved by many generations.

The author's main concern is with the workings of kamma. His purpose in writing these verses to lead his readers away from immorality and to set them on the path of virtue. His simple and direct diction creates an awareness in the reader of the hard realities of life and of the benefits that come from following the Buddha's teachings. The following verse (No. 21) must suffice as an example of the author's skill in shifting tone to achieve a heightened effect:

Like those that would relishingly eat
Of mangoes poisonous and wild,
What use is there in pleasing the mind
In any measure, with pleasure of senses five?
For death stalks even now, behind:
Be diligent and skilful in wholesome acts.

When the perennial Dhamma of the Buddha flourished among the people of Sri Lanka, it inspired the nation's gifted writers to express their Buddhist insights in language and imagery suited to the national temperament. These two Wheel issues will give the reader a small taste of the treasures of classical Sinhalese Buddhist literature resulting from that happy fusion.

—Ayya Nyanasiri

Book Reviews

The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation As Taught by S. N. Goenka. William Hart. Harper & Row, San Francisco. 167 pp. \$9.95.

S. N. Goenka is one of the most popular present-day teachers of vipassanā meditation and now the head of an international network of meditation centres radiating from his main centre at Igatpuri near Bombay. A disciple of the late U Ba Khin of Burma, he is best known for his short intensive courses which combine meditation on the breath with the "sweeping" contemplation of sensations in the body.

William Hart, one of Goenka's assistants, has compiled this book from his teacher's discourses given during 10-day retreats as well as from his published articles. Hart has organised this material into a coherent sequence which unfolds in accordance with the Four Noble Truths and the threefold division of the path. Each chapter consists of three sections—a formal discourse, Goenka's replies to questions, and brief stories illustrating the teaching—and the whole book ends with a chapter on the application of vipassanā to daily life.

Although the title suggests that the book may be offering a soft sell presentation of vipassanā tailored to popular expectations, Goenka's exposition of Buddhist doctrine and practice is, with a few important exceptions to be noted, surprisingly traditional. His discourses set forth an extremely clear and lively account of the teachings, and his style is marked by a buoyancy and exuberance that bespeak the strength of his own confidence in the practice.

However, although I find much in this book that is worthy of appreciation, there are several caveats that I feel should be raised. One comes to the fore in Goenka's reply to a question whether he is teaching Buddhism. Goenka answers that he does not teach an "ism," a sectarian doctrine, but Dhamma, an art of living which anyone can practise regardless of his faith and which will make any individual a better practitioner of his own religion. Now this reply, though superficially attractive, will be found on closer examination to involve some flawed thinking. Not only does it imply, mistakenly, that the Buddha did not teach precise doctrines that are in principle incompatible with doctrines taught by other religions, but it also slights the important point that the practice of vipassanā is intended to generate insights into those very teachings that set the Buddha's Dhamma off from other creeds. It seems, moreover, to take the practice of vipassanā out of its framework of going for refuge to the Triple Gem. It may be true that anyone who practises basic meditation techniques will experience concrete benefits. But if one committed to the belief structure of another religion is offered vipassanā simply as an "art of living," not a path to deliverance, he may eventually find himself drawn into a profound inner conflict detrimental to his spiritual welfare.

My second reservation concerns the explanation Goenka offers of how vipassanā meditation purifies the mind. Goenka states that when the meditator attains a state of dispassionate equanimity, his old accumulations of saṅkhāras, "conditionings," arise in the form of sensations, to be eradicated by the non-reactive awareness of those sensations. Finally, when "all the past saṅkhāras, are eradicated, we enjoy the limitless happiness of full liberation." If this were the case, however, full liberation would be unobtainable. For during the beginningless past of saṃsāra we have each accumulated an immeasurable stock of kammic conditionings. If these can only be eradicated by being contemplated with equanimity when they arise as sensations, we would have to contemplate sensations through an endless future and thus infinite time would be required to gain liberation. Obviously this explanation—which has no basis either in the Buddha's discourses or the Pali commentaries—cannot be maintained, and the dilemma to which it leads points to a weak spot in an approach to vipassanā which makes bare awareness and equanimity the core of the practice. In the Buddha's own exposition vipassanā purifies not simply by enhancing awareness and equanimity but by issuing in a penetration of the essential characteristics of the conditioned world. This penetration—which requires investigation and discernment—brings about a revulsion towards the conditioned, and thence leads to the abolition of clinging and the mind's liberation from defilements.

When earlier parts of the book indicate that Goenka has a firm grasp of many basic aspects of the Dhamma, it remains a puzzle why he has developed an interpretation of the path that deviates significantly from the Buddha's teachings set forth in the Pali Canon.

The Word of the Buddha: The Tipitaka and Its Interpretation in Theravada Buddhism. George. D. Bond. M. D. Gunasena, No. 217, Olcott Mawatha, Colombo. 221 pp. S.L. Rs. 55; US \$4.
Available from BPS.

Although this book has been in print since 1982, its publication by a Sri Lankan publishing house has probably prevented it from gaining the wider readership it well deserves. The author's aim in writing the book is to examine the approach to the interpretation of the Tipitaka developed by Theravada Buddhism. While the theme and style of presentation are directed primarily at professional scholars, Bond's lucid, thorough and careful treatment of his topic should make this work extremely rewarding reading for serious non-academic students of Theravada Buddhism as well.

In his first chapter Bond raises the problem of interpretation for Theravada Buddhism, which arises out of the high authority which Theravada ascribes to the Tipitaka. For the Theravada the

Pali Canon is not the mere record of a sagely human teacher, but a transcription of the transcendental wisdom of the Buddha, offering a complete diagnosis of the human condition and a blueprint for salvation. Thence the need becomes felt for an accurate and trustworthy interpretation of the Canon, one which is both true to the Buddha's own intention and capable of making his teaching intelligible to people whose minds still function on the mundane level.

Bond posits two solutions evolved by Theravada Buddhism to the problem of interpreting the Canon. One is the methodology laid out in the *Netti Pakarana*, an ancient exegetical work available in English translation by Ven. Nānamoli (*The Guide*; Pali Text Society, 1960). Bond's treatment of the *Netti* is detailed and will be found illuminating by those who are familiar with this difficult work. Those, however, who find this chapter daunting might be advised to read only the opening and concluding sections and to pass on to the next chapter.

Chapter 3 deals with the commentaries to the Tipitaka, including the *Visuddhimagga*, the foundation stone of the commentarial method. Bond calls the commentaries "Theravada's second and final solution to the problem of interpretation," which superseded the *Netti* because they provided a full exposition of the Dhamma whereas the *Netti* offered only an abstract methodology. Bond discusses the commentarial approach to interpretation in terms of their two main objectives—to provide an exposition of the meaning of the teaching and to explain the practical methods of spiritual development. This chapter should be helpful to students of the *Visuddhimagga* who have been puzzled by the complex maze of projects undertaken in that massive treatise.

In his final chapter Bond calls up for criticism those Western scholars who have approached the Tipitaka principally as a source for reconstructing an "original" Buddhism or who attempt to interpret the Canon entirely on their own without consulting the living Theravada tradition. He argues that if scholars wish to understand the Pali Canon as it is understood by Theravadins, they must be prepared to read it in the light of the authorised commentaries.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

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In the Press

Living Buddhist Masters. Jack Kornfield (late 1988).

The Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship: The Sāmaññaphala Sutta and Its Commentaries. Trans. by Bhikkhu Bodhi (late 1988).

Buddhist Dictionary. Nyanatiloka Mahathera (reprint, late 1988).

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Guidelines to Sutta Study

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma (in *Three Cardinal Discourses of the Buddha*, Wheel No. 17), is the first discourse ever spoken by the Buddha. Its unique significance is highlighted by its title, which refers metaphorically to the Buddha's first proclamation of the Dhamma as the setting in motion of a wheel. The commentaries to the Pali Canon explain that the expression "Wheel of the Dhamma" has a twofold meaning. First it signifies the "wheel of penetration," the Buddha's own realisation of truth as he sat beneath the Bodhi Tree. And second it signifies the "wheel of teaching," the expounding of the Dhamma to others out of concern for their welfare. It is this second meaning which is intended by the title of the present sutta.

Though the sutta opens at the Deer Park in Isipatana, near Benares, an account of its origin takes us back to the period immediately following the Buddha's enlightenment. While the Buddha sat in the vicinity of the Bodhi Tree, having just emerged from the bliss of deliverance, the question arose in his mind whether he should attempt to teach others the profound world-transcending truth he had realised. As he contemplated the Dhamma and examined the minds of living beings, he came to the conclusion that the task would be fruitless. The Dhamma was just too deep and subtle for the people of the world to grasp.

But no sooner had his mind inclined to a life of quiet meditation than the high deity Brahma Sahampati became aware of the Master's inclination. In a fraction of a second Brahma left his celestial abode and appeared before the Buddha, entreating him to make known the excellent doctrine. Out of compassion for beings, the Buddha then surveyed the world. With his unobstructed vision he saw that among the masses of humankind swept along by greed and hate there were a few "with little dust in their eyes" who needed only the proclamation of the Dhamma to awaken. He saw as well that there were many others who were like sprouting lotuses: though still immersed in the mud of desires, they were groping towards the light and capable of responding to the truth. Confident that there would be those who could understand, the Buddha consented to take up the task of teaching.

He next considered who would be worthy to receive his first exposition of the Dhamma. He first thought of his two former teachers—Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta—but by clairvoyance he learned that both had just recently passed away. Then he thought of the five ascetics who had served him when he was engaged in the practice of austerities. Though they left him disillusioned when he resumed taking solid food, he saw that their spiritual faculties were sufficiently acute to enable them to comprehend the Dhamma, and thus he set off towards the Deer Park at Isipatana where he knew they had taken up residence.

On completing the week-long journey from Gaya to Isipatana, the Buddha found that he still had one more obstacle to overcome: the five ascetics were not prepared to look upon him as a teacher. When he approached they refused to show him reverence and continued to criticise him for backsliding. Twice the Buddha declared that he was not a backslider, had not reverted to a life of luxury, but was now the Tathāgata, fully enlightened, who could teach the path to the Deathless. Twice, however, the five ascetics protested and refused to hear more. Finally, the Buddha asked them if they had ever known him to claim enlightenment before, and with that the ascetics had to acknowledge his claim. Now prepared to listen, they sat around him

respectfully, intent on learning the way to the goal of the holy life. It is at precisely this point that the Dhammacakka Sutta opens—on the full-moon evening of July, just when the sun was about to set in the west and the moon had arisen in the east.

This background to the sutta explains the apparent lack of logical order in the text. Though the Noble Eightfold Path is the last among the Four Noble Truths which the Buddha intends to expound through his discourse, he presents it first as part of his explanation to his new disciples as to why he decided to abandon the austerities by which they set so much store. The Buddha opens the discourse by declaring that there are two extremes to be avoided by one gone forth from the home life into homelessness. One is devotion to sensual pleasures, the low and common course followed by ordinary worldlings; the other is devotion to self-mortification, a painful and futile pursuit that does not conduce to the goal. Above and beyond these two extremes, the Buddha points out, is the Middle Way discovered by him, which rises up from a foundation of moral and mental training to culminate in enlightenment and Nibbāna. And now, for the first time in history, the Buddha makes known the name and factors of that Middle Way. It is the Noble Eightfold Path, made up of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

(to be continued)

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