



Buddhist Publication Society

Newsletter

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Vision and Routine

All human activity can be viewed as an interplay between two contrary but equally essential factors—vision and repetitive routine. Vision is the creative element in activity, whose presence ensures that over and above the settled conditions pressing down upon us from the past we still enjoy a margin of openness to the future, a freedom to discern more meaningful ends and to discover more efficient ways to achieve them. Repetitive routine, in contrast, provides the conservative element in activity. It is the principle that accounts for the persistence of the past in the present, and that enables the successful achievements of the present to be preserved intact and faithfully transmitted to the future.

Though pulling in opposite directions—the one towards change, the other towards stability—vision and routine intermesh in a variety of ways and every course of action can be found to participate to some extent in both. For any particular action to be both meaningful and effective the attainment of a healthy balance between the two is necessary. When one factor prevails at the expense of the other, the consequences are invariably undesirable. If we are bound to a repetitive cycle of work that deprives us of our freedom to inquire and understand, we soon bog down, crippled by the chains of routine. If we are spurred to act by elevating ideals but lack the discipline to implement them, eventually we find ourselves wallowing in dreams or exhausting our energies on frivolous pursuits. It is only when accustomed routines are infused from within by vision that they become springboards to discovery rather than deadening ruts. And it is only when inspired vision gives birth to a course of repeatable actions that we can bring our ideals down from the ethereal sphere of imagination to the sombre realm of fact. It took a flash of genius for Michelangelo to behold the figure of David invisible in a shapeless block of stone; but it required years of prior training, and countless blows with hammer and chisel, to work the miracle that would leave us a masterpiece of art.

These reflections concerning the relationship between vision and routine apply with equal validity to the practice of the Buddhist path. Like all other human activities, the treading of the way to the cessation of suffering requires that the intelligent grasp of new disclosures of truth be fused with the patient and stabilising discipline of repetition. The factor of vision enters the path under the heading of right view—as the understanding of the undistorted truths concerning our existence and as the continued penetration of those same truths through deepening contemplation and reflection. The factor of repetition enters the path as the onerous task imposed by the practice itself: the need to undertake specific modes of training and to cultivate them diligently in the prescribed sequence until they yield their fruit. The course of spiritual growth along the Buddhist path might in fact be conceived as an alternating succession of stages in which, during one phase, the element of vision is dominant, during the next the element of routine. It is a flash of vision that opens our inner eye to the essential meaning of the Dhamma, gradual training that makes our insight secure, and again the urge for still more vision that propels the practice forward to its culmination in final knowledge.

Though the emphasis may alternate from phase to phase, ultimate success in the development of the path always hinges upon balancing vision with routine in such a way that

each can make its maximal contribution. However, because our minds are keyed to fix upon the new and distinctive, in our practice we are prone to place a one-sided emphasis on vision at the expense of repetitive routine. Thus we are elated by expectations concerning the stages of the path far beyond our reach, while at the same time we tend to neglect the lower stages—dull and drab, but far more urgent and immediate - lying just beneath our feet. To adopt this attitude, however, is to forget the crucial fact that vision always operates upon a groundwork of previously established routine and must in turn give rise to new patterns of routine adequate to the attainment of its intended aim. Thus if we are to close the gap between ideal and actuality—between the envisaged aim of striving and the lived experience of our everyday lives - it is necessary for us to pay greater heed to the task of repetition. Every wholesome thought, every pure intention, every effort to train the mind represents a potential for growth along the Noble Eightfold Path. But to be converted from a mere potential into an active power leading to the end of suffering, the fleeting wholesome thought-formations must be repeated, fostered and cultivated, made into enduring qualities of our being. Feeble in their individuality, when their forces are consolidated by repetition they acquire a strength that is invincible.

The key to development along the Buddhist path is repetitive routine guided by inspirational vision. It is the insight into final freedom - the peace and purity of a liberated mind—that uplifts us and impels us to overcome our limits. But it is by repetition—the methodical cultivation of wholesome practices - that we cover the distance separating us from the goal and draw ever closer to deliverance.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Exploring the Wheels

For more than a decade the West has been promoting women's rights, women's liberation, the "raising of the consciousness of women." Although these ideas reach Buddhist countries through articles, books, and films, they have had little impact on the women living in Buddhist countries. There are two important reasons why these women have ignored the strivings of their Western counterparts: the teachings of the Buddha clearly indicate that women are as able to reach Enlightenment as men; and the civil laws of Buddhist countries reflect these teachings.

In *The Position of Women in Buddhism* (WHEEL 280), Dr. (Mrs.) L.S. Dewaraja, Associate Professor in History at the University of Colombo, has traced the status of women throughout history in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, and Tibet, using the writings of foreigners who had visited these countries. From these accounts, there would seem to be very little change in women's civil rights from the early days of Buddhism up to modern times. Unlike women in other parts of Asia or in the West, women in Buddhist countries then and now have had access to civil liberties unprecedented elsewhere: "the secular nature of the marriage contract, the facility to divorce, the right to remarry, the desegregation of the sexes, and above all else, the right to inherit, own, and dispose of property without let or hindrance from the husband."

LB. Homer, late President of the Pall Text Society, in *Women in Early Buddhist Literature* (WHEEL 30) examines the role of women in the pre-Buddhist age, and the changes which occurred in their lives after Buddhism altered the way women were thought of. She writes: "In the Buddha's times women were not despised and looked down on but, on the contrary, were respected and had a place of honour in the home. The difficulties they had to face and overcome were no more than normal for women in any time or country." She adds: "At the higher, more spiritual level, however, they had the great advantage and great joy of entering the Order of Nuns either because they wanted to get free of worldly sufferings or, more positively, and

above everything else, because they wanted to find the way to the peace and bliss of Nibbāna Whether they have been nuns or lay-devotees, by their response to the majesty of the Buddha's Teaching, (they) have made an imponderable contribution to its strength, vitality, expansion and longevity."

"Women in Ancient India" by G. D. Weerasinghe (BODHI LEAF B 47) presents the history of the founding of the Bhikkhuni Sangha at the request of the Buddha's foster-mother, Mahā Pajāpati, and relates the lives of the earliest members of the Order of Bhikkhunis. These nuns who reached arahatship could rejoice as did Muttā:

"Free am I from birth and dying,
Becoming's cord removed. "

Buddhist Women at the Time of the Buddha by Hellmuth Hecker (translated from the German by Sister Khema, WHEEL 292/293) is one of the publications in the series "Lives of the Disciples." Using various canonical sources, Dr. Hecker has compiled accounts of the lives and thoughts of the earliest bhikkhunis. These accounts, with new translations of the verses of the Therigāthā and the Dhammapada by Ven. Khantipalo, have a fullness and an immediacy which is vivid. Their own words spoken as they themselves have realised the ultimate freedom are thought-provoking. As an example, here is the final verse of Bhikkhuni Sujātā:

"Hearing the words of the Great Sage,
I penetrated Truth:
The Dhamma passionless,
I touched the Dhamma of Deathlessness.
When the True Dhamma had been known,
I went forth to the homeless life;
The three True Knowledges are attained,
Not empty the Buddha's Teaching!"

Therigāthā 145–150

—Ayya Nyanasiri

Book Notes

As a service to our readers, from time to time we will be featuring short notices on recent books from other publishers relevant to students of Theravada Buddhism. These books are not to be ordered from BPS, but from their publishers or retail book dealers.

The Path of Serenity and Insight: An Explanation of the Buddhist Jhānas. Henepola Gunaratana. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. 263 pp. Indian Rs.125.

In the oldest scriptures of Theravada Buddhism much attention is given to the jhānas, high levels of meditative attainment distinguished by powerful concentration and purity of mind. The Ven. Dr. Henepola Gunaratana examines these jhānas within the context of Buddhist teachings as a whole and particularly within the meditation disciplines taught by the Buddha. Beginning with the ethical foundation for meditation, the role of the teachers, the classical subjects of meditation, and the appropriateness of these subjects to individual practitioners, the author traces the practice of meditation to the higher reaches of realisation. He carefully analyses the eight stages of jhāna and explains them in terms of their relation to one another and to the ultimate goal of the teaching. For the mind to be free from suffering, the faculty of

wisdom is needed to penetrate the true nature of things, and for wisdom to arise there must first be a base of calm and concentration like that established by the jhānas.

The author makes the critical distinction between the mundane jhānas, which he holds are conducive to but not necessary for full enlightenment, and the supramundane jhānas, which are integral to full enlightenment and mark the stage where the way of serenity and the way of insight become one. The author explains the place of the jhānas among the accomplishments of the arahat and elucidates their usefulness for the dedicated meditator. A scholarly work, but one that will be of interest to non-scholarly meditators who wish to understand the canonical basis for their practice.

News from the Office

As I write this our second Newsletter should be on the way and our first will barely have reached our members overseas, but already we have received several suggestions and words of encouragement. This shows the value of communication which, to be effective, should be two-way.

For the last twenty-seven years it has been mostly one-way. Our quarterly publications have gone out to our members without much disruption (though sometimes late!). Now and again a member would write back making suggestions, or expressing appreciation, or sometimes even criticising us. But other than this there was no dialogue. We hope our newsletter will open a new line of communication.

The very birth of our Society was due to the communication of a “bright idea.” An enthusiastic Buddhist from Kandy suggested to two friends that they launch a series of authentic publications on Buddhism, and his friends—aware that many thoughtful people world-wide sought better knowledge of the Buddha’s teaching - saw great possibilities in his idea and quickly acted upon it.

Their assessment has been accurate. The number of “thoughtful people” has kept on increasing and there is a greater demand for knowledge of the Dhamma. How successful have we been in meeting this increased demand? From occasional letters that we get, sometimes from quite unexpected places and people, we know that our books would be appreciated by a wider section of people, but the problem is to reach them. This is where our members can help.

Our associate members are from over 80 countries as far apart as Iceland and the Tonga Islands! Our publications even penetrate the security of prisons in both the Old and New Worlds - legally of course! The number of libraries, societies, and educational institutes that subscribe to BPS has also increased over the years. And since some of our readers pass on their books to others, we do have a wide readership.

Yet we think that the need for the Buddha’s message was never more relevant to the modern world than now and the number of people who need it is many times more than this. It is this category of persons that we want to reach. So if you have a friend, an institution, a group or society that might be interested in the Buddha-word, please write to us and we will try to contact them. What better help can we give them than introducing them to the Dhamma “excellent in the beginning, the middle, the end,” preached for the “benefit of the many, the welfare of the many”? What better gift could one give?

—Albert Witanachchi

From the Mailbag

I came across a collection of BODHI LEAVES and the WHEEL. I've devoted most of my full time to studying the invaluable contents of the books. This has led me to a profound insight into many supposed enigmas and problems of life (moral, philosophical and religious) which had bothered me since the early age of cognisance and reasoning. I'd never found such a realistic, philosophical and ethical approach to life.

Mante Yaw
Ghana, West Africa

Your publications offer me sanity—which no one else is prepared to offer me.

David Odden
England

I have just completed the reading of your first newsletter. It is worth keeping them to be bound together in due course. Hearty congratulations to all those who have put their shoulders to the wheel. The editorial is truly inspiring. Your "news from the office" will tempt many a Buddhist to visit you.

Palita E. Weeraman
Sri Lanka

Please do come to visit us. We are open Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday, 8 a.m. to noon. (Ed.)

Your Newsletter No. 1 is really interesting and calls upon everyone to take up the long hard task of self-transformation. In this respect I would like to ask you to explain the following. The Buddha has stated: do not commit any evil, do good, and purify the mind. The first two are self-explanatory and need no explanation, but the third requires amplification. I would like you to give more details of the method required to do so.

Cheah Song Leong
Penang, Malaysia

Purification of mind means the complete removal of the three unwholesome roots - greed, hatred and delusion—along with their numerous offshoots. The main method of purifying the mind is meditation. We will be dealing with this topic more fully in our next issue of the newsletter, so please be patient until it is out. (Ed.)

NOTE: We are happy to announce that Wisdom Publications, London, is now distributing most of our full size book publications. For their complete mail order catalogue (including Buddhist books from various publishers) write to: Wisdom Publications, 23, Dering Street, London W1R 9AA, England (not WC1, as incorrectly given in the last issue of our newsletter).

Meditation Centres in Sri Lanka: Kanduboda

The international Centre for Training in Buddhist Meditation at Kanduboda is situated just sixteen miles from Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, in a serene and peaceful area most conducive to undisturbed meditation. Kanduboda Centre was founded in 1958 under the patronage of the late Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw, the venerated meditation teacher of Burma. For 26 years the late Sumathipāla Mahāthera, trained in the Burmese system of vipassanā meditation, guided the training at the centre; today his pupil, Ven. Pemasiri Thera, continues the tradition established by his revered teacher.

Meditators are given individual instruction by a staff of experienced monks and nuns. Instruction is available in English. As the process of meditation is one of natural unfolding and gradual development, each meditator is allowed to proceed at his own pace. An intensive training programme of at least three weeks is recommended. However, shorter or longer stays can be arranged.

At present the centre provides accommodation for 90 training meditators or retreatants. Bhikkhus, laymen and laywomen have separate quarters, a single cubicle for each meditator. Accommodation, meals, and teaching are provided entirely free of charge, but the management invites volunteers to help undertake development of the facilities for future meditators.

For further information please contact: Mr. M.B. Abeywardene, Hony. Secretary, Siyane Vipassana Bhavana Samithiya, Kanduboda-Delgoda, W.P., Sri Lanka.

Buddhist Journals

We wish to call the attention of our readers to two journals of Buddhist studies that have recently come our way. One is called *Buddhist Studies Review* and is published on a biannual basis jointly by the Linh Son Institute of Buddhist Research (Paris) and the Pali Buddhist Union of Europe. The editor is Russell Webb, assisted by Bhikkhu Pāsādika. The issue at hand, Vol. 1, No. 2, includes several substantial articles dealing with Pali Buddhism: “*Nibbana and Abhidhamma*” by L.S. Cousins; “*An Atlas of Abhidhamma Diagrams*” by Bhikkhu Ñāṇajīvako; and “*Developing a Self without Boundaries*” by Peter Harvey. The journal also contains several thoughtful and critical book reviews relevant to Theravada Buddhism. For subscription information: *Buddhist Studies Review*, c/o Russell Webb, 15, Stedham Chambers, Coptic Street, London WC1A 1 NL, England.

The second journal is *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, of which the editor-in-chief is A.K. Narain of the University of Wisconsin. The Journal is published twice yearly, in the summer and winter. The latest number we received, Vol. No. 2 (1984), shows a wide and well-balanced selection of articles covering all the major Buddhist traditions. Articles relating to the Theravada tradition are as follows: “*The Buddhist Path to Liberation*” by Rod Bucknell; “*Temporary Ordination in Sri Lanka*” by Richard Gombrich; “*The Symbolism of the Early Stupa*” by Peter Harvey; “*Buddhism and Belief in Atma*” by Y. Krishan; and “*The Rasavahini and the Sahassavatthu: A Comparison*” by Telwatte Rahula. For subscription information: *The International Association of Buddhist Studies*, c/o Department of South Asian Studies, 1258 Van Hise—1220 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706, U.S.A.

The Buddhist Publication Society

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

For more information about the BPS and our publications, please visit our website, or contact:

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