



Buddhist Publication Society

Newsletter

No. 8
Winter 1987

The Balanced Way

Like a bird in flight borne by its two wings, the practice of Dhamma is sustained by two contrasting qualities whose balanced development is essential to straight and steady progress. These two qualities are renunciation and compassion. As a doctrine of renunciation the Dhamma points out that the path to liberation is a personal course of training that centres on the gradual control and mastery of desire, the root cause of suffering. As a teaching of compassion the Dhamma bids us to avoid harming others, to act for their welfare, and to help realize the Buddha's own great resolve to offer the world the way to the Deathless. Considered in isolation, renunciation and compassion have inverse logics that at times seem to point us in opposite directions. The one steers us to greater solitude aimed at personal purification, the other to increased involvement with others issuing in beneficent action. Yet, despite their differences, renunciation and compassion nurture each other in dynamic interplay throughout the practice of the path, from its elementary steps of moral discipline to its culmination in liberating wisdom. The synthesis of the two, their balanced fusion, is expressed most perfectly in the figure of the Fully Enlightened One, who is at once the embodiment of complete renunciation and of all-embracing compassion. Both renunciation and compassion share a common root in the encounter with suffering. The one represents our response to suffering confronted in our own individual experience, the other our response to suffering witnessed in the lives of others. Our spontaneous reactions, however, are only the seeds of these higher qualities, not their substance. To acquire the capacity to sustain our practice of Dhamma, renunciation and compassion must be methodically cultivated, and this requires an ongoing process of reflection which transmutes our initial stirrings into full-fledged spiritual virtues.

The framework within which this reflection is to be exercised is the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, which thus provides the common doctrinal matrix for both renunciation and compassion. Renunciation develops out of our innate urge to avoid suffering and pain. But whereas this urge, prior to reflection, leads to an anxious withdrawal from particular situations perceived as personally threatening, reflection reveals the basic danger to lie in our existential situation itself—in being bound by ignorance and craving to a world which is inherently fearsome, deceptive and unreliable. Thence the governing motive behind the act of renunciation is the longing for spiritual freedom, coupled with the recognition that self-purification is an inward task most easily accomplished when we distance ourselves from the outer circumstances that nourish our unwholesome tendencies.

Compassion develops out of our spontaneous feelings of sympathy with others. However, as a spiritual virtue compassion cannot be equated with a sentimental effusion of emotion, nor does it necessarily imply a dictum to lose oneself in altruistic activity. Though compassion surely includes emotional empathy and often does express itself in action, it comes to full maturity only when guided by wisdom and tempered by detachment. Wisdom enables us to see beyond the adventitious misfortunes with which living beings may be temporarily afflicted to the deep and hidden dimensions of suffering inseparable from conditioned existence. As a profound and comprehensive understanding of the Four Noble Truths, wisdom discloses to us the wide range, diverse gradations, and subtle roots of the suffering to which our fellow beings

are enmeshed, as well as the means to lead them to irreversible release from suffering. Thence the directives of spontaneous sympathy and mature compassion are often contradictory, and only the latter are fully trustworthy as guides to beneficent action effective in the highest degree. Though often the judicious exercise of compassion will require us to act or speak up, sometimes it may well enjoin us to retreat into silence and solitude as the course most conducive to the long-range good of others as well as of ourselves. In our attempt to follow the Dhamma, one or the other of these twin cardinal virtues will have to be given prominence, depending on our temperament and circumstances. However, for monk and householder alike, success in developing the path requires that both receive due attention and that deficiencies in either gradually be remedied. Over time we will find that the two, though tending in different directions, eventually are mutually reinforcing. Compassion impels us towards greater renunciation, as we see how our own greed and attachment make us a danger to others. And renunciation impels us towards greater compassion, since the relinquishing of craving enables us to exchange the narrow perspectives of the ego for the wider perspectives of a mind of boundless sympathy. Held together in this mutually strengthening tension, renunciation and compassion contribute to the wholesome balance of the Buddhist path and to the completeness of its final fruit.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Book Notes

Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha Nikāya). Translated by Maurice Walshe. Wisdom Publications, London. 648 pp. U.K. £17.95; U.S. \$34.95.

Although all four of the main Nikāyas of the Pali Canon have long been available as complete sets in English translation, their contents have remained relatively inaccessible to contemporary English-reading students of Buddhism. One reason for this is the archaic style and stilted diction in which they have been translated, which often give rise to as much bewilderment as comprehension.

Maurice Walshe, well known to BPS readers for his contributions to the WHEEL and BODHI LEAVES series, has taken a major step to remedy this problem by offering us a new translation of the Dīgha Nikāya). under the title *Thus Have I Heard*. The Dīgha, the first collection in the Sutta Pitaka, contains several of the most important and interesting of the Pali suttas: the Brahmajala Sutta, on the variety of wrong philosophical views; the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, on the training of the Buddhist monk; the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, on the last days of the Buddha; the Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta, the great discourse on the foundations of mindfulness. This Nikāya is also exemplary in showing the Buddha in his daily encounters with people of different backgrounds typical of the age in which he lived: the brahmin obsessed with pride on account of his birth; the ascetic attached to his extremist practices; a king troubled by an uneasy conscience; the philosopher fettered by his narrow views. The Dīgha thus repeatedly demonstrates the Buddha's masterly skill as a teacher—his dialectical subtlety, his compassion, his ability to lead others out of their errors and direct them to his own gradual training culminating in perfect liberation.

The outstanding virtue of Walshe's translation is its clarity. Avoiding obscure terminology and rigid adherence to the syntax of the Pali, Walshe has given us a translation that is simple, lucid and extremely readable, while at the same time faithful to the text. Walshe does not attempt to be bold and experimental: his choice of renderings follows very closely the terminology which is currently used in BPS's own translations from the Canon. He has trimmed away much of the repetitiveness of the texts (a remnant of the old oral tradition), simplified sentence structure, and cast the whole in an idiom which will make immediate sense to modern

readers. Though I would place question marks next to some of his renderings (e.g. his treatment of par. 20 of the Mahanidāna Sutta seems to have lost the thread of the argument), this would be nitpicking in what is otherwise a fine translation.

Walshe's work contains all three divisions of the Dīgha (issued separately by the PTS) in a single volume. This must be borne in mind by those who would object to the high price of the book, handsomely printed, softbound with illustrations from Thai art. The discourses are preceded by a 34-page introduction which sketches the historical and philosophical background of the age in which the Buddha lived, surveys the main points of the teaching, and provides introductory information on the Pali Canon as a whole and its commentaries. Walshe also includes short summaries of the 34 suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya). which the reader can consult to get a quick idea of the contents of each discourse. It is encouraging to see Wisdom Publications, which began as a specialty publisher in Tibetan Buddhism, branch out into Theravada as well. The firm's enterprising energy should succeed in making the Dīgha more widely available, and Walshe's fluent translation in making it more easily accessible.

Sri Lanka Journal of Buddhist Studies, Vol. I (1987). Buddhist & Pali University of Sri Lanka, Colombo. 201 pp, S. L. Rs. 125; U.S. \$10. Available from BPS.

Buddhist Philosophy and Culture: Essays in Honour of N. A. Jayawickrema, ed. by David J. Kalupahana and W. G. Weeraratne. Published by the Jayawickrema Felicitation Volume Committee, 290 R. A. De Mel Mawatha, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka. 285 pp. Rs. 600 (Sri Lanka Rs. 600, U.K. £15, U.S.A. \$25).

These two volumes, recently published in this country, consist of scholarly essays dealing primarily though not exclusively with diverse aspects of Theravada Buddhism. The Journal contains 13 articles, of which seven are primarily philosophical, three linguistic and textual, and three historical. *Buddhist Philosophy and Culture* (BPC) is divided into a section on philosophical reflections (eight articles); a section on culture and interpretation (six); and a section on literature and history (six). Several prominent scholars are represented in both volumes, though their contributions are different in each case. Though authors of different countries have contributed, the preponderance of scholars from Sri Lanka in both volumes is testimony to the leading role Sri Lanka continues to play in Theravada Buddhist studies, and their articles demonstrate the skill of Sri Lankan Buddhist scholars in assimilating the analytical and critical tools of Western scholarship to the explication of their own Buddhist tradition. In the present review, due to limitation of space, I will have to confine myself to a mere honourable mention of some of the more interesting contributions.

To begin, I wish to call attention to two outstanding articles by Professor Y. Karunadasa. "Anatta as Via Media" in the Journal, which attempts to show the Buddhist teaching of non-self as a philosophical middle way between materialistic and spiritualistic extremes; and "Abhidhamma Theory of Paṇṇatti" in BPC, which deals with the ontology of early Buddhism and with the evolution of a clearcut theory of concepts in scholastic Theravada. Karunadasa is a lucid thinker whose work will be appreciated by those outside the field of academic Buddhist studies who yet retain an interest in early Buddhist philosophical thought.

Another scholar contributing to both volumes who shows a capacity for clear analysis is P. D. Premasiri. In "Early Buddhist Analysis of Varieties of Cognition" (Journal), Premasiri distinguishes the different types of cognition recognized in the Pali suttas; in "Early Buddhist Conception of Ethical Knowledge" (BPC) he seeks to demonstrate the objective, cognitivistic foundations of Buddhist ethics, an important undertaking in light of the subjectivist bias of much modern ethical theory.

Lily de Silva also contributes to both volumes. The Journal contains her essay on “Nibbāna as Experience,” an attempt to describe the experience of the Arahāt in terms of its affective, ethical and cognitive characteristics; BPC includes her “Sense Experience of the Liberated Being,” which contains some contentions that to this reviewer seem very much open to dispute. Ananda Guruge offers sober, carefully researched articles on Emperor Asoka in each volume: in the Journal he writes on “The Place of Asoka in History” and in BPC on “Emperor Asoka and Buddhism.” Space does not permit a fuller treatment of the contents of these two volumes, which both include a wide variety of articles chiefly of academic interest.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Newswatch

We are happy to inform our readers that a Korean offshoot of the BPS has taken birth in Seoul, formed by a small but devoted group of Korean Buddhists with a keen appreciation of the early Buddhist teachings. The new organization, named the Calm Voice Society, launched its entry into the publishing world with well-printed Korean translations of two of our Bodhi Leaves, “Buddhism in Daily Life” by M. O’C. Walshe and “The Training of the Heart” by Ajahn Chah. Both issues have been selling quickly—about 3,000 copies each in only a few months. This is clear evidence of a burning interest among Koreans in lucid, practical expositions of Buddhism, and BPS is honoured to be able to meet that demand with our own publications. In late July one of the founders of CVS, Mr. Hahn Ki-hoh, visited the BPS and signed an agreement with us by which we gave our Korean counterpart the right to publish our books and booklets in Korean translation. Mr. Hahn also met our President, Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathera, who gave his blessings to the new society. Kang Yon-shim, another co-founder, writes that over the coming year, CVS plans to publish about ten Bodhi Leaves and two Wheels. In the future they hope to undertake publication of larger BPS books, and a long-range goal is to have the Pali Nikāyas translated into Korean. As Korea in recent years has been beset by invasions of secular Western materialism and aggressive Christian evangelism, a fresh and relevant expression of the Buddha’s teachings is urgently needed there and we wish our new sister society all success in meeting its objectives. For more information: The Calm Voice Society, C.P.O. Box 1764, Seoul; Tel. 739-6328, 777-1991.

From Korea we have also received a notice announcing the opening of the Lotus Lantern International Buddhist Center. The Centre, founded by a Korean monk, an English nun, and two American laymen, will be offering courses, meditation instruction, tours and information. For visitors to Korea “Lotus Lantern provides a gateway to Korean Buddhism—where to go, how to get there, what to do, and whom to meet.” For more information: Lotus Lantern International Buddhist Centre, Sokyok-dong 148-5, Chongno-gu, Seoul 110; Tel. 735-5347.

Buddhists Concerned for Social Justice and World Peace has sent us A North American Buddhist Resolution on the Situation in Asia, prepared in connection with the Conference on World Buddhism in North America that was held in Ann Arbor this past July. The resolution is a courageous and forthright statement of conscience which calls on Buddhists worldwide to discard their customary attitudes of complacency and resignation and to assume greater responsibility for the fate of Buddhism in Asian countries, where it has suffered so much from wars, invasions, massacres and repression. Issued “with profound sadness and a strong sense of urgency,” the resolution contains clearly formulated declarations on the plight of Buddhism in Tibet, Vietnam, Cambodia, Korea, Bangladesh and Laos, urges the Buddhists of Sri Lanka to seek a peaceful settlement to their ethnic conflict, and calls upon Thailand and Japan to show greater compassion to other Buddhists who seek their help. Copies of the resolution as well as general information about the sponsoring organization may be obtained by writing to: Zen

Lotus Society, 1214 Packard Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, U.S.A.; or Zen Lotus Society, 46 Gwynne Ave., Toronto, Ontario, M6K 2C3, Canada. A Buddhist centre is now being established in Istanbul -the first ever in Turkey. Buddhist writer Ilhan Gunporen and friends are setting up a meditation centre and coffee house. They would like to hear from other Dhamma groups. Contact: Ms. Birson Guney, , Muhurdar Cad. No. 77/5, 813Q0 Istanbul, Turkey.

Future Lineup

As excellent manuscripts have arrived at a rate that exceeds our publishing schedule, we find ourselves embarrassed to have to request our authors to patiently await their turn, but pleased to inform our readers that rewarding Dhamma reading can be expected for a long time to come. Next year we will begin our WHEEL series with Inspiration from Enlightened Nuns, a stirring essay on the great theris of old by Susan Jootla. We will publish an incisive study of The Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation by Ven. H. Gunaratana Mahathera, and will finish up our series of Buddhist Stories from the Dhammapada Commentary. We will end the year by issuing, with special permission, A Taste of Freedom by Ven. Ajahn Chah, the great Thai meditation master whose simple direct style has won so many to the Dhamma. A fine lineup of BODHI LEAVES is also in view. As a separate book publication we will be issuing Jack Kornfield's survey of present-day Theravada meditation, Living Buddhist Masters.

Guidelines to Sutta Study

The Ariyapariyesana Sutta, The Discourse on the Noble Quest (Majjhima Nikāya No. 26; Wheel; No. 198), is at once a personal narrative by the Buddha of his own quest for enlightenment and a compendium of guidelines for those who seek to follow in his footsteps. The sutta opens with the venerable Ananda requesting the Buddha to call on some monks staying in a nearby hermitage in order to give them a talk on the Dhamma. When the Buddha arrives at the hermitage, he finds the monks engaged in a Dhamma discussion and commends them with his well-known word of counsel: "When you are gathered together you should either talk about the Dhamma or maintain noble silence." Thereupon the Buddha begins the discourse proper by pointing out that there are two kinds of quest, the noble quest and the ignoble quest. The word "quest" as used in this context signifies more than just an attempt to achieve a particular goal. It refers rather to the fundamental values which give meaning and purpose to our lives, to our choice of guiding ideals and the endeavour to actualize them. It is fitting that the Buddha introduce the distinction between the two kinds of quest at the very outset of his discourse; for the search for enlightenment, which he is about to relate to the monks, acquires fullness of meaning only when understood against the background of its underlying motivation, and the distinction drives home the need to clarify one's reasons for seeking enlightenment before entering upon the quest for it.

The ignoble quest is the life orientation of the worldling, whose thoughts and deeds are rivetted by attachment. Being himself subject to birth, ageing and death, he seeks only objects of enjoyment that are also subject to birth, ageing and death. Fettered by ignorance and craving, he can neither discern the flaws in his mundane concerns nor envisage any higher goal worthy of his attention.

The noble quest, in contrast, is the endeavour to break free from the repetitive round of craving, enjoyment and suffering. This quest begins when we discover the dangers hidden behind our worldly pleasures—their transience, falsity and insatiability. Such a discovery breaks the spell of our enchantment with the mundane and impels us to seek that which is not subject to decay and death—Nibbāna, "the uttermost security from the bonds."

Having drawn the distinction between the two kinds of quest, the Buddha next relates the story of his own renunciation. He explains that in the past, while he was still a Bodhisatta prior to his enlightenment, he sought worldly pleasures just like any ordinary worldling. But at a certain point he discovered the perils in attachment, and in the prime of life, seeking “the incomparable, matchless path to peace,” he went forth from the home life into homelessness.

The body of the sutta then presents an account of the Buddha’s search for enlightenment. The Buddha describes his apprenticeship under the two eminent meditation masters from whom he learned the methods of serenity meditation, and his disillusionment with their teachings consequent upon his realization that they could not lead him to genuine insight and enlightenment. He sketches—in the delicate, suggestive prose of the Pali suttas—his painful struggle in solitude and his eventual awakening to Nibbāna, the goal of the noble quest. There follows the moving account of the Buddha’s decision to teach the Dhamma in the world, and of the inception of his teaching career with the discourse to the five ascetics in the Deer Park at Benares. Concluding the sutta, the Buddha explains that an earnest seeker who has entered on the noble quest should make use of his material requisites—food, clothing and shelter—with restraint and mindfulness. He should use them only as supports to pass beyond the range of Mara, the Lord of Death, into the perfect freedom of the Deathless.

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:

The Administrative Secretary
Buddhist Publication Society
P.O. Box 61
54 Sangharaja Mawatha
Kandy, Sri Lanka
E-mail: bps@bps.lk
Web site: <http://www.bps.lk>
Tel: 0094 81 223 7283
Fax: 0094 81 222 3679