

N.2 • 2019

# EUROPEAN BUDDHIST

magazine



## BUDDHISM IN EUROPEAN SOCIETY



# Contents

---

- 4**      To cure the heart
- 10**     The power of Buddhahood in society
- 14**     Challenge, chance and wisdom of  
language diversity in Europe
- 20**     Through us, good things should come  
into the world  
*An Interview with the 17. Karmapa OGYEN TRINLEY DORJE*
- 24**     Begin with gratitude
- 28**     The Buddhist pioneers of same-sex  
marriage in the West: a little-known  
history of compassion in action
- 34**     Position of the Animal in Buddhism  
A Dharma look at the animals
- 38**     The Three Pillars of the Path
- 42**     Tolerance and Its Limits



# Editorial

*Dear readers, dear friends,*

*Welcome to the second issue of our EBU magazine!*

*One of the core aspects of the Mission of the European Buddhist Union is "to spread Buddhist principles into European Society".*

*The number of Buddhists in Europe is relatively small compared to the majority of the population, but we still aim at our voices being heard and our actions becoming visible.*

*As in the case of our previous inaugural issue, we are very fortunate and grateful to have been able to convince prolific Buddhist teachers and authors to contribute to this magazine.*

*I sincerely hope the following pages will make for an inspiring reading for you, and will contribute to our society being full of love, grace and gratitude.*

*With my best wishes in the Dharma,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Eichhorn', with a long, sweeping underline.

**Ron Eichhorn - Mio Sop JJN**  
**European Buddhist Union President**



# TO CURE THE HEART

A course in meditation  
for people who  
are HIV-positive

By Dario Doshin Girolami



Studies confirm that stress can rapidly lower the levels of CD4 T lymphocytes, the white blood cells that orchestrate the immune response to infections but that succumb to the ravages of HIV. What effect, then, might follow a reduction of stress through the practice of meditation? A study recently conducted at the Center of Psychoneuroimmunology at UCLA has demonstrated that such a practice can indeed measurably reduce stress and slow down the progression of HIV. The regular exercise of meditation, it implies, can be a powerful complementary treatment for HIV when used in conjunction with medical treatments.

Over the years, mindfulness-based meditation has found a space in treatment programs in institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and schools, for its preventive and rehabilitative clinical potential, and in various other organizations, for confronting many of the physical

and psychological problems associated with stress and illness.

Most people who have completed a course of meditation report a perceptible and lasting reduction in stress and other physical and psychological symptoms; they also report an increased ability to relax, greater ability to interact with others in stressful situations of short or long duration, increased energy and desire to live, higher self-esteem, and a reduction in levels of pain.

Knowing about these beneficial effects, I approached the Di Gay Project Association (DGP) with a proposal for a course in meditation for seropositive people, which would provide basic instruction in Right Mindfulness practice. The method was based on techniques developed at the Maitri Hospice of San Francisco, the first Buddhist hospice in the world for supporting people affected by HIV/AIDS. The objective of the course was to reduce the stress felt by the participants and to bring them to a deep and liberating acceptance of their illness.

Buddha has been called the Great Doctor. He defined the Four Noble Truths—the truths of suffering, of the origin of suffering, of freedom from suffering, and of the Way that leads to this liberation. In this, he was following the model of Indian doctors of the period, who would identify a sickness, the origin of the sickness, and the possibility of a cure for the sickness.

The Second Noble Truth, in particular, teaches that the origin of suffering lies in attachment. More specifically, Buddha taught that reality is impermanent. Everything is in a state of constant change: what is born, dies. Nothing is eternal. Since human beings develop attachments to things and to people, and delude themselves that these things and people will last forever, when things change or people die, or relationships end, suffering arises. In the same way, health too is impermanent and can change into sickness.

But Buddha also defined old age, sickness, and death as “heavenly messengers,” because these events can make us more mindful of impermanence.

The practice of meditation has a lot to do with mindfulness and, in particular, with mindfulness of impermanence, starting with the observation of the impermanence of breath—a practice that is also fundamental for calming the mind and for making it possible to observe one’s own fears from a clearer perspective.

A person’s reaction to being diagnosed with something like HIV is often one of fear: fear of the pain that the disease will bring and/or of medications that will cause pain, fear of being abandoned or isolated, fear of losing one’s self—that is, of becoming different from the person one knows—and fear of death. It is therefore essential to work with all these fears in the



practice of meditation, including the fear of the unknown.

But what separation is there, in fact, between health and sickness? It is our mind that tells us: "Health is good, I like it, I want it - I don't like being sick, I don't want it." This constitutes duality. It is one thing to have preferences (in this case, for health), and another to separate oneself dualistically from one's own life when it shows itself to be unhealthy.

Meditation leads us to accept the reality of our lives, to accept impermanence. And impermanence means that health changes into sickness. So, can we succeed in being happy in this state of impermanence? Reality is impermanent—to wish otherwise is simply delusion. The Way consists of opening one's eyes and seeing reality as impermanent; the Way consists of developing a happiness that includes everything, not one that is selective—otherwise it is not the happiness that Buddha was talking about. If we can develop an inclusive view of life, which welcomes light and shadow, health and sickness, youth and old age, life and death, this then is the true happiness, and we develop along with it compassion for all beings.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, the Zen master who founded the school that I belong to, died of cancer at the age of 67. In one of his last teachings, he said: "We may think that the purpose of meditation is to make ourselves physically strong or to make ourselves mentally healthy or strong. But healthy mind is not just 'healthy mind' in its usual

sense, and weak body is not weak body in its usual sense." Then he said, "Even though I die, with me it is all right. That is Buddha." Then he added, "We should be very grateful to have a limited body."

What does it mean to say we should be grateful to have a limited body? We delude ourselves that everything is permanent, but reality tells us constantly that everything is impermanent, starting with our own bodies. That is life. There is winter, there is autumn, there is old age, there is death, there is sickness. To hope that it might be otherwise is to create suffering. That is the truth. Either we manage to embrace life as it is or we will live in a constant state of frustration, constant suffering.

A meditation practice that liberates us from attachment to what is impermanent has to be undertaken very patiently. The word for "patience" in Sanskrit is *kshanti*, a term that can also be translated as inclusivity. Suzuki Roshi in fact was speaking of a happiness that was capable of including everything, including impermanence and sickness. So the road to follow is one of patience that accepts everything. The point is to accept reality completely, to be inclusive and not separating in one's approach—to develop an open, luminous, and joyful patience.

In Anguttara Nikaya 4.113, the Patoda sutta, Buddha explains that there are four kinds of horses: the horse that starts to run when it sees the shadow of the whip; the horse that starts to run when it feels the whip touch the hair on its skin; the

one that starts to run when it feels the whip in its flesh; and the one that runs only when it feels the whip in its bones, in its marrow. The sutta goes on to explain that a person who hears that someone in another village is about to die and who begins to reflect on the transient nature of life is like the first horse, which runs when it sees the shadow of the whip. The person who hears that someone in his own village is about to die and who begins then to reflect on the transient nature of life is like the horse that runs when it feels the whip touch the hair on its skin. The person who hears that someone in his family is about to die and who begins to reflect on the transient nature of life is like the horse that runs when it feels the whip in its flesh. Finally, the person who hears that he himself is about to die and who begins to reflect on the transient nature of life is like the horse that runs when it feels the whip in its bones.

Commenting on this story, Zenkei Blanche Hartmann—my first teacher and the first abbess of the San Francisco Zen Center—said, "Impermanence is the whip," and told the story of how she came to have a heart attack—that is, how she had to see impermanence from very close up in order to understand that life is a gift. The whip had to reach her bones: she was in hospital and on the point of death. She was saved by a miracle, but the even greater miracle was that she understood that every single moment is a gift that must not be wasted.







Which type of horse are we?  
What kind of prompt do we need in order to start practicing the Dharma—the teaching of Buddha—or to undertake a spiritual practice, or to confront our life? Does it take just the shadow of a prompt or do we need to feel a blow? Or must the sting reach right down to the bone?

Which type of horse would we like to be? What kind of stimulus do we need? Do we really want to be the kind of horse that needs to feel the pain in its bones? Why do we need such a strong and deep pain in order to wake up? What sort of thing is this whip that Buddha talks about?

Today, more than two-thirds of the people diagnosed as seropositive survive a long time, thanks to the current therapies. Even so, the word “AIDS” is associated, in the minds of patients, with a premature death: a whip that can lead to depression, anxiety, and stress, which only make one’s health worse.

But the pain and fear generated by a significant diagnosis, if met and examined effectively, can generate powerful insights and lead to a deeper emotional and existential maturity. They can open a person not only to the truth of impermanence and the vulnerability of existence but also to compassion and the awareness of the interdependence of everything that exists.

At the start of the meditation sessions with HIV-positive people, what I heard from participants, in implicit and explicit ways, was “I don’t want to die!” Their hearts

seemed to be tied up in a tight knot all the time. They seemed to be generating a one-note, persistent “No, no, no, no.”

But once they had been introduced to meditation practice, to the teachings of impermanence, to the story about the horses, the participants began to sit in meditation with great seriousness, with great effort and a sense of urgency. Gradually, that original “No, no” was transformed into a “Yes, yes.” The participants had learned to embrace fear and to recognize themselves in the virus—no longer seen as the enemy, but as themselves. Learning—thanks to meditation—to be one with the reality of the present moment, in meeting after meeting, they had learned to be one with the illness and all the experiences that came with it, with all the emotions.

Buddha teaches that we are all interrelated and interconnected with one another. It has been an honor and privilege for me to witness how the course participants, having recognized that their suffering was equal to that of their fellow participants, opened themselves to compassion and interdependence.

But there is more. Thanks to this practice, the participants recognized the fact that they were HIV-positive as a “mindfulness bell” that had brought them back to the present moment; they also arrived at a deeper and more authentic understanding of their own selves. It was as if they had passed from a life of negation and make-believe to a life that was more real and

authentic, much closer to the real Self.

When I talk about the meditation classes I lead in prison, I am inundated with questions, given the ever-present topicality of prisons. When I talk about the meditation class for parents who have lost a child, I notice that my listeners are disturbed, but no-one asks questions, perhaps because the thought of losing a child is unbearable. When I talk about meditation for HIV-positive people, I see no reaction at all, and the conversation stops immediately. Why?

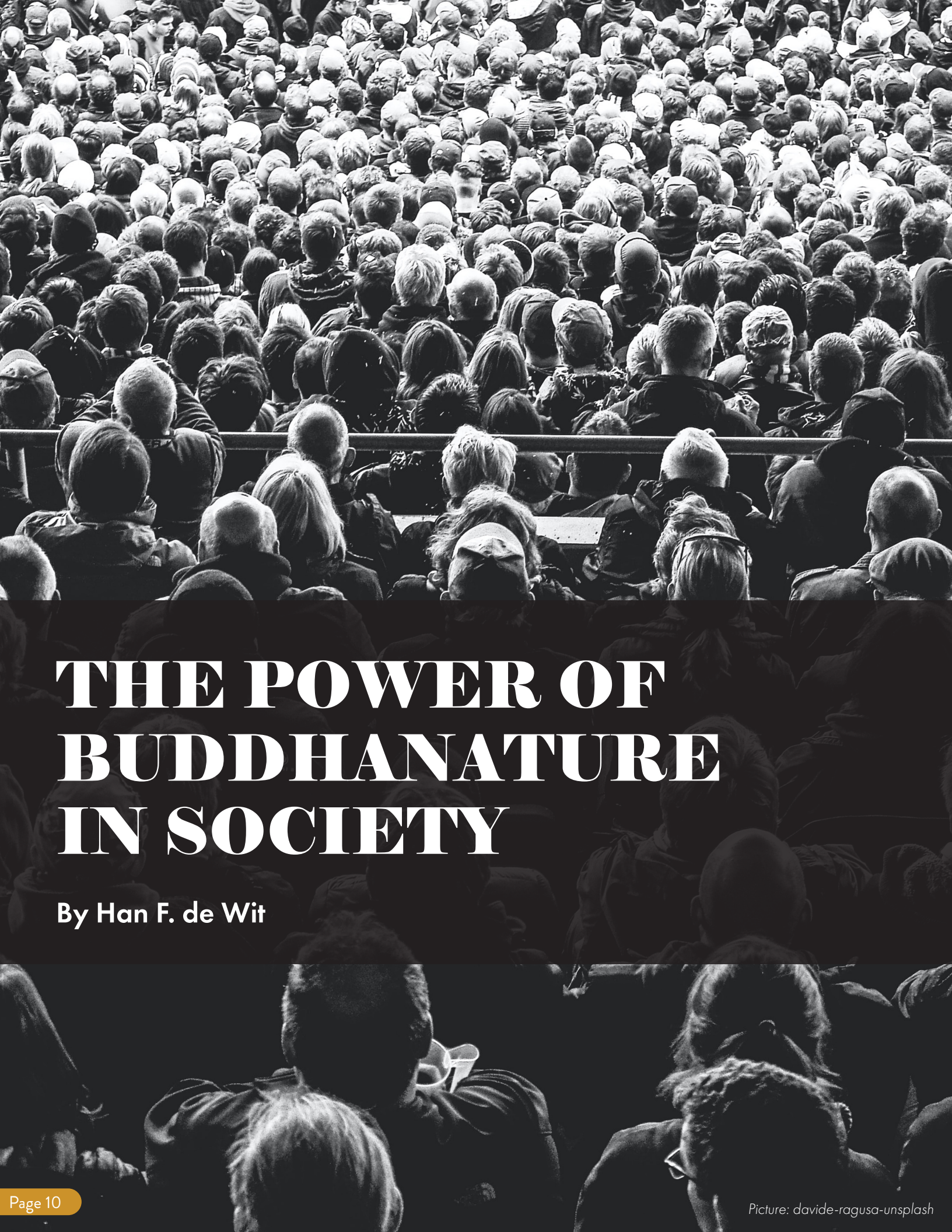
Perhaps because AIDS is a social blind spot, a black hole in our collective vision: something that we do not wish to see because it is too uncomfortable or too associated with the idea of sin. But the problem of AIDS concerns us all and is far from being resolved. In fact, because it is no longer talked about in the media, young people believe that the virus has been defeated and do not take the necessary precautions. I noticed, with pain, that the age of the course participants was low. Young men of 18, 20 years old, ignorant—until a short while ago—of the virus’s presence.

One of the aims of the course was to turn the attention of society at large to the continuing problem of HIV/AIDS, to not set the problem aside and leave HIV-positive people or their families or the medical facilities that serve them to struggle on their own. 🧘









# THE POWER OF BUDDHANATURE IN SOCIETY

By Han F. de Wit



### **Buddha-nature**

When Buddhism became known in the West around the sixties or so of the last century as something that can be practiced and as something that is more than food for scientists of religion and Buddhologists, it entered a culture that on the one hand was shaped by Christian thought and on the other hand was mentally heavily traumatized, certainly in Europe, by the world wars. The idea that man is not capable of any good and is inclined to all evil, as some reformatory Christian traditions maintain, seemed to be confirmed by what happened in the world wars. These two aspects of our culture have seriously undermined the vision of and confidence in the basic goodness of mankind. For the realization, that we deeply long that things are going well for ourselves, for our fellow human beings, yes, for the world, had (and still has often) no place. It is true that we feel this longing ourselves, almost secretly, but we soon think that other people may

not share that longing. And they think that about us. Otherwise, where will all the misery, aggression and harshness we see around us come from? If the devil does not exist, then surely it should be the people themselves in whom devilish powers live! It sounds so logical.

And yet, and yet...we feel this deep longing within ourselves! Isn't it precisely the sadness, anger and frustration that we feel when we see suffering and injustice around us that is conclusive proof that this longing lives in us? And isn't it even present when we do all kinds of stupid things out of that frustration and anger? After all, if it were not present in our lives, we would not care if the fulfilment of this longing were frustrated. It would be all the same to us. But it is not. Rather, it is the other way round; every time this longing is fulfilled, it feels good. It inspires us. It makes us, in the deepest sense of the word, happy. At those moments we are at our best, we feel at our best: we experience what is called in Mahayana Buddhism our Buddha-nature, or our basic goodness as it is called in Shambhala Buddhism<sup>1</sup>. It is a way of experiencing that both goes beyond and comes before any form of conceptual codification of 'good' versus 'bad'. This foundation of our humaneness can also be called basic humanity<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See Chögyam Trungpa, *Shambhala: The sacred path of the warrior*, Shambhala Publications, Berkeley, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> See Han F. de Wit: *The Spiritual Path, An Introduction to the psychology of the spiritual traditions*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1999, A revised edition will be published in 2018 by Shambhala Publications, Boston/London. In Dutch: *De Verborgene Bloei, Ten Have, Kampen*, 2010, 13e printing.

Every time this longing is frustrated, we are unhappy. That this frustration, when it then enters into an unholy alliance with short-sightedness and prejudice and other forms of confusion and blindness, can lead to the most destructive acts and to a great deal of suffering, that is beyond dispute. But even then it is this deep longing that underlies these actions! Therefore, even in these actions, stupid and even mean as they might be, we can recognise the presence of this longing. And from that restored contact, which has clarity of mind in its wake, wells up the longing to repair the damage caused by these acts. Again, we then experience our Buddha-nature.

Nevertheless, even today in our culture, it is almost shocking to say out loud that we experience being deeply benevolent beings; that we mean well, that we have basic goodness. We hardly dare to admit that to ourselves! Did we not learn to mistrust this longing in ourselves and in others, or to doubt its existence? Perhaps we even consider it a worldly-wise action to deny and ignore this longing within ourselves. But this distrust, this doubt is not without consequences! It is at the expense of how we live together and whether we want to live together at all - in the family, organisation, business and society.

Discovering and once again feeling our basic goodness is not an intellectual matter, but an experience. And that experience instantly sweeps all distrust of people's deepest nature from our



ideological drawing tables. Every time that happens it amounts to an inner revolution, that makes us look in a very different way at all this suffering in ourselves and around us resulting from aggression, greed and indifference. In fact, it revolutionizes our self-image and our human image in the direction of an unmistakable confidence and trust in the basic goodness of ourselves and other people. In so doing, it also awakens this deep longing to base and build our society on this trust and to express it in words and deeds in our society.

### ***Individualism, consumerism and imperialism***

Living together is based on connection. And connection is based on trust. Trust in what? In the basic goodness, the Buddha-nature of ourselves and of others.

What if there is a lack of trust in our Buddha-nature? We will then no longer want to, or dare to live together and cooperate with others. And that means that a society - at whatever level, from family to society - falls apart and disintegrates into 'every man for himself and God for us all'. Individualism, wanting to be independent of others, now seems to be the way to human happiness. In the wake of this individualism, when people are no longer trusted as a source of basic goodness and happiness, seeking happiness in material matters seems to be the only remaining option.

As we know the materialistic vision has no connection with this deep longing, with our Buddha

nature. It does not bind or nourish our society. It often awakens and reinforces - let me call it by its name - greed. Or in more veiled language, 'consumerism'. A materialistic culture does not support our basic goodness, but constantly ignores it. It leads people to see each other as consumers and even as consumer goods instead of as fellow human beings. As satisfying our greed only provides a temporary sense of well-being, the need for satisfaction takes on the character of an addiction. This addiction is good for the economy. The ideology is: consuming increases prosperity and prosperity increases happiness. In order to consume one has to spend money and those who do not have money, it is annoying, they just have to borrow. Happiness does not come for free! And what that leads to - the financial crisis - better to not think about it for the moment. Live now, pay later.

Individualism and consumerism do not cultivate our Buddha-nature. Rather they lay the seeds for struggle; they are the breeding ground for organised violence directed at the elimination of what threatens our individualism and consumerism. Imperialism, supported by militarism, is a socially accepted form of aggression in favour of desire and blind self-interest. These three - individualism, consumerism and imperialism - are the social manifestations of the three forces, which in Buddhism are called the three poisons (Sanskrit: klesha): indifference, greed and aggression

respectively.

Where do these three come from? From a sense of separation. Separation, distance, makes unknown. And unknown makes unloved. The more connected, the more intimate we are with other human beings, the less inclined we will be to take advantage of them, to attack them or to treat them with indifference. If the three poisons are unleashed, they ultimately destroy every form of culture, organisation and society at every level.

### ***Enlightened society***

Individualism, consumerism and imperialism are at odds with what Shambhala Buddhism describes as enlightened society. Such a society is based on deep faith in our basic goodness. This trust is not based on opinion or credulity, but on personal experience of basic goodness. This experience and its recognition is the heart blood of this society. Even so, in this society human beings are not saints. But they know what greed, aggression and indifference does to their and others' happiness in life. Therefore they also know how important it is to prevent these three from becoming the cornerstones on which their society is based.

The experience of basic goodness, this deep longing that things go well for oneself and for the world, is the cultural basis of this society. How to create and cultivate such a society is what the Buddha taught to the kings of his time, including Suchandra, the legendary king of Shambhala. Such a society is not



utopian, but it can exist and it has existed.

### **Social Buddhism**

What does all this mean for our dealings with Western society today? Two things. Firstly, that we can learn from the Buddha and from his royal students such as Suchandra, Ashoka and many others how fruitful it is to create a society based on the vision and experience of basic goodness, on all levels: family, school, organisations, businesses and society at large. This royal Buddhism is different from monastic Buddhism. It is a secular Buddhism: society itself is the place of practice. Moreover it is not aimed at achieving personal or individual enlightenment for oneself, separate from society. It is aimed at creating and cultivating a society that supports and develops our humaneness, our Buddha-nature.

Just as King Suchandra, after receiving instruction on this from the Buddha, went in search of those elements in his kingdom that could support the process of an enlightened society, so we too can do so within the contexts in which we ourselves live together with others. How? By looking for those aspects of our society that resonate with our basic goodness, and then, as a second step, by supporting and strengthening those aspects. What these are, we ourselves will have to assess over and over again and freshly in every situation. There is no formula for this. From the experience of basic goodness, from being in contact with our

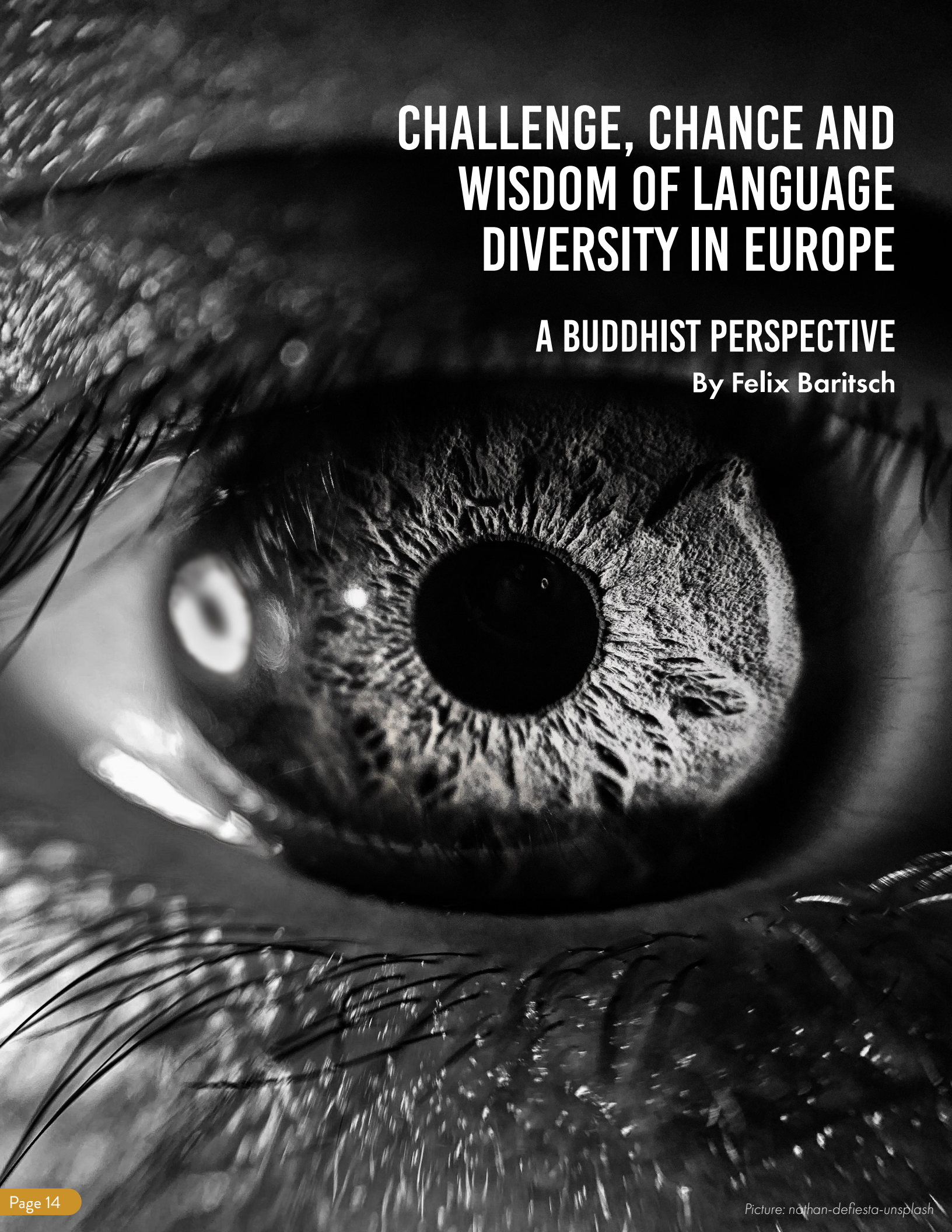
deepest longing that things may go well in the world, we can learn to act and speak, work, organize and what not?? already. Not out of a sense of duty, or out of fear of retaliation or punishment, and certainly not out of a preconceived political or social ideology to which reality should conform, but out of the experience that acting from basic goodness raises and humanizes our culture.

Secondly, if we are serious about developing our Buddha nature, we cannot ignore the tendencies of indifference in the form of individualism, greed in the form of consumerism and aggression in the form of imperialism within ourselves. Society is also within us. It is therefore a question of finding and freeing ourselves from our own indifference, greed and aggressiveness, rather than of thinking, despondently, that this is just the way human beings are. With this in mind, Chögyam Trungpa has brought this social Buddhism of Shambhala to the West, in which the spiritual and the temporal are not separate domains. We will have to anchor ourselves firmly in the experience of basic goodness. That is what the practice of the spiritual path of Shambhala is about. That allows us to recognize and fearlessly cultivate the enlightened aspects of our society. And that makes our humanity blossom and bear fruit. 🧘



*Dr. Han F. de Wit holds a Ph.D. in psychology (from the University of Amsterdam). A research fellow in 1976 at the University of California (Berkeley) and at Naropa University (Boulder) brought him international acclaim as the founder of a new branch of psychology, as outlined in *Contemplative Psychology* (Duchesne University Press, USA, 1991) and *The Spiritual Path: An Introduction to the psychology of the spiritual traditions* (to be republished by Shambhala Publ, 2018), *Bouddha philosophe, L'Iconoclaste*, Paris, 2016, and *El Loto y La Rosa*, Kaicron, Castellón, 2018. As a student of Chögyam Trungpa he was authorized in 1977 to teach Buddhist meditation. In 2000 he has been appointed by his current teacher Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche as Acharya (Buddhist teacher). He gives seminars at the centres of Shambhala International and at other Buddhist organizations. See: <http://www.shambhala.org/teachers/acharya/hdewit.php>*





# CHALLENGE, CHANCE AND WISDOM OF LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN EUROPE

**A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE**

**By Felix Baritsch**



In Europe we live in a small place with many languages. We have to drive only a few miles to find ourselves in a different language environment, where we either know the local language, speak English or have to use intuitive and holistic communication resources. In all cases it allows us to take up another perspective on life, to get a new feeling for situations and to open and train our mind by making it more pliable and flexible. Finally, it makes us wiser, more enlightened, open and tolerant. The identity of Europe consists in different cultures and languages living close to each other in mutual respect while knowing and identifying with the greater whole - a healthy base for a mutually supporting and non-discriminating social system and a healthy sense of multinational community.

From the Buddhist perspective, our multilingual situation is not only a challenge and a chance on the conventional level but it can lead us closer to ultimate reality, the source of all happiness. The

reason for this is the emptiness of reality: according to Buddha, how things are depends in largely on our mind and our conventional language, with its grammar and the words we agree upon. Language not only has a descriptive and epistemological function but also a constructive, creative function and a direct effect on phenomena and their ontological status<sup>1</sup>.

Without doubt, anyone who speaks the local language or at least English has at first sight some communication advantages over someone who does not. Whether this imbalance can be reduced by reducing languages to only a single language for all countries and regions of Europe is highly questionable. Certainly, this would create new injustices and imbalances.

The arguments for a generalization of English as the only official

---

<sup>1</sup> Felix Baritsch (2016): *Sprache, Erkenntnis und Ethik bei Wittgenstein und Nagarjuna – eine Untersuchung in komparativer Sprachphilosophie*. Hamburg 2016, p. 81

European language are mainly social justice and economics. In bio-cybernetics a system is the more stable, stronger, sustainable and effective the more interdependent element in mutual support it contains. I will argue that from a Buddhist perspective, the same is valid for language diversity because languages are not merely descriptive, but co-creative.

A multinational society will function more peacefully and sustainably, the more languages it contains and values in mutual respect. "Unity in Diversity" is the slogan for language diversity in European institutions [European Charta for Regional and Minority Languages].

An additional argument for language diversity is Buddha's teaching on ultimate truth or ultimate reality. According to Buddha, ignorance about the true nature of reality is the source of all suffering. To understand the ultimate nature implies to understand language at its different levels.



## The usual frame of discussion

When language diversity is discussed for Europe usually the alternatives are language diversity versus a unitarian language. That unique language generally is English or Esperanto: English still is the native language of a part of the European population and would give an unfair advantage to some and disadvantage to others, Esperanto is a completely new language to everyone in the same way – but it has not been introduced very successful until now.

### A single language for all Europeans?

The defenders of a unitary language argue that a single language would enhance and strengthen the sense of identification with Europe - just as it historically did to strengthen the European Nationalities in the 19th Century.

Unfortunately, even within a single language, stigmatization and vertical discrimination are widespread: Even the slightest accent can trigger an unconscious discrimination of people originating from slightly geographically different places or of different social background.

An identity imposed through language by force on a European level, would lead to more alienation with the European idea.

Also, it does not seem difficult to learn several languages if this was common educational practice and positively connotated. Many

countries live with several official and unofficial languages: Belgium, Switzerland, Scandinavian countries etc. In many countries all over the world people speak three to four languages and still live peacefully together.

An artificially unique language would not enhance a sense of European identity.

### Costs of language diversity

The costs of translations are another argument against language diversity. For the European institutions (23 languages, 500 combinations) they are more than one billion €/year, but for the total population of 700 Million Europeans it is only 1.5 € to 2 € per person/year.

Is that too much for an efficient balance between unity and diversity? European integration and national identity? Compared to other costs certainly not: military costs in Europe are 200 times higher, costing every European citizen 400€ or more per year.

Also, do we want financial arguments to be the most important criteria for European decisions? An increased GNP neither increases social justice, nor personal or national happiness – it just benefits a few.

To reduce translation costs is not a weighty enough argument to abolish language diversity in Europe either.

### What is language?

Another argument against language diversity stems from a

very restricted understanding of its meaning that might replace spoken language completely by digitalized forms of communication. The usual definition of language is "any specific example of a system that consists of the development, acquisition, maintenance and use of complex systems of communication" [Wikipedia].

In this definition language has been limited to and is only associated with its communication function although traditionally language was much more – also at the time of Buddha.

Since the Greek idea of logos, we in the West think that the phenomenal world is objectively one and language perfectly describes things as they are. If not, it is the fault of language itself. Different languages, we think, describe the same reality with different words. Since the old story of the tower of Babel we even believe that all communication problems come from using many different languages. If we had only one language all problems would be solved.

But if language is understood deeply, we learn more that our world is being constructed according to [the deep grammar of] our language and not according to how things ultimately are [paramarthasatya]. The separation of subject verb and object, of separate "things" remaining identical to themselves through time, is a complete illusion with tremendous Samsaric effects. Just because words do not change very quickly, one cannot







conclude from their inertia that everything with a name has an eternal essence, a svabhava. Not every "thing" cut out of unity has a corresponding non-thing in our reality; this duality is just not how things ultimately are – it is how we can speak about it.

Language is holistic – body expression and gesture, tone and tonus, poetry, situational, temporal, energy, art and especially music. The language of vibration always resounds together with any expression of life - whether it is expressed with words or not.

Once our brain has been imprinted with a certain language those subtle perceptions become unconscious and overruled by the gross dualistic imprints of the intellect. Also, our educational system adds to this. To access those dimensions again we have to dissolve our neurolinguistic programming, our Samsaric patterns. This can be done either by learning different languages or by meditation that goes beyond language altogether.

If languages were taught like music or like energetic healing it would be much easier to learn several languages and different feelings for life. Certain emotions can only be expressed in one and not in another language. One can translate the technical content of technical texts, but not the music in between the lines of a poem. If it is translated it must be done in a creative way as every language transmits a unique and collective world view and understanding. Science uses words as if they were

separated and clearly identifiable svabhava identities with sharp limits allowing us to say: this is exactly this and that is that - with clear-cut and unambiguous limits for all cases. But of course, if you look precisely, nothing exists that way: nothing is sharply delimited, independent of its parts and everlasting.

Language reaches beyond communication serving a creative participation in life and an energetic exchange and flow of energies. Our states of being are mutually understood by resonance and empathically by our whole body (mirror neurons) - not by our intellect only.

Despite our dualistic language we still communicate holistically on many parallel levels at the same time. We can have access to those through language diversity and/or meditation.

### **The specific Buddhist perspective on language:**

Buddha did not say that there is an objective world out there - randomly described in different ways by different people. On the contrary: he said the world is co-emergent with our mind. Thoughts have an effect on reality. It does not mean that our thoughts are completely autonomous or "free" and then individual we create a whole new world. But our language has a constructivist effect on our individual world we live in – mind being the origin of all phenomena (Dhammapada). Collectively then, beings create

whole new worlds or realms of reality.

That is a very important difference to the Western view considering language a mere cultural phenomenon. Buddha showed how reality is dependent on denomination, mind and language – and of parts, causes and circumstances – but that goes without saying.

One factor of [inter]dependent arising (pratityasamutpada) is language. If we follow the Mahayana view on language as shown by Nagarjuna's catuskoti<sup>1</sup>, we arrive at a similar discovery as brain science and quantum field physics, namely that mind/ thoughts and language have a constitutional effect on the world. It is an interdependent process of co-creation. No one arbitrarily creates the world we live in but everyone has an influence in the flow of mutual interdependence.

### **Satyadvaya: ultimate and conventional truth**

Conventionally it might be true to call something a cup. But does it have a cup essence? Is it a cup from its own side? From its own perspective? The answers to all such questions are "NO". The cup has neither a cup essence that was a cup before the particles came together and made it the base on which to impute the name cup and nominate it a cup. The cup is not to be found neither in the material particles, nor outside nor in the mind of anyone but of the interdependent arising of all of that.

---

<sup>1</sup> Baritsch (2016) p. 67



The name itself is also void of any cup essence, or can you drink from the word “cup”?

In this sense all its material and linguistical parts are empty of a self-being of a cup, thus leaving the beingness of something in an open condition or in a fluid state. You can still use true and conventionally appropriate words and thus communicate, but you become free of the illusion, that your words can ever describe things how they really are, describe their ultimate way of existence. This creates a humbleness in communicative interaction. Every person brings his own world view along and many problems only concern who is right and who is wrong and the struggle begins. Nowadays people are allowed to have their own world view and the ideal of a democracy and “diversity in unity” is a good expression of that.

Learning deeply different languages teaches you exactly that: not only can it teach you different world views and senses of reality; it can also teach you that the reality you live in depends on the language you speak and feel with. In this sense it is a direct introduction into some of the most central aspects of Buddhism. Instead of translating satyadvaya as two truths it can also be understood as a “dual truth<sup>2</sup>”, the understanding that - depending on your perspective – the outcome will be either conventional or ultimate, but always in interdependence or co-emerging with your input.

In a modern understanding of Buddha’s teaching, pratyasamutpada more fundamentally means “holistic interdependence”: our world view influences others and other influence us, both mutually influence the whole. In a holistic system all parts mutuality influence each other and the whole, which is more than the parts; but neither the whole nor the parts are prior to one another. Also, the whole system is open - just as in organic life.

Language is open, in constant exchange with its parts, its users, other languages, society and mankind as a whole and in a constant flow of transformation. It is empty of being other than that – a svabhava cannot be found.

Also, there is no differentiation between ontology and epistemology in Sanskrit: prapañca signifies at the same time the multiplicity of ideas and concepts, as well as the multiplicity of phenomena in the whole world. If one disappears, the other one disappears also. Words and worlds are two co-emergent expressions of oneness.

Furthermore, it is by discovering the otherness of somebody’s point of view, we discover our own point of view – so to speak in dialogue. Truth is always relational, an inter-truth. One language is not enough to understand yourself. To learn many languages helps to find one’s identity in a multi-language and multi-cultural environment and the healthy sense “I am what I am

only in relation to you” just as a flower in a bouquet.

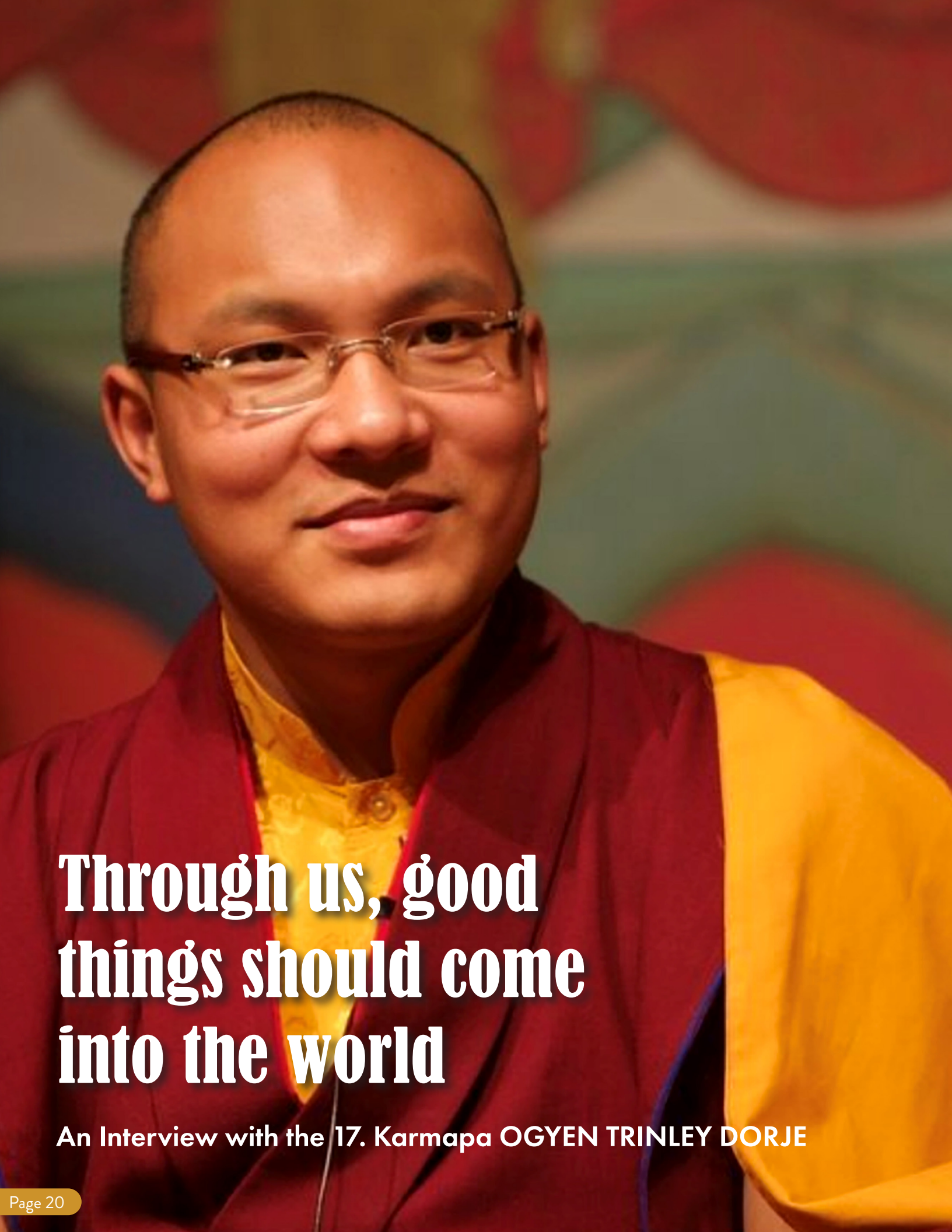
From all of this we should, as Buddhists, remember and train in the awareness, that the relativity due to different perspectives and due to different languages is not merely epistemological or descriptive but that we shape reality and the way we relate to it through our language. Life naturally wants to diversify and not to artificially unify. The old Babylonian paradigm “If we only had one language we could reach the heavens” is a fairy tale. Multiplicity of languages is the richest source for mutual understanding beyond the intellect, for wisdom, compassion and tolerance. For this the Buddhist wisdom of the “dual Truth” and codependent arising are of major importance. Language diversity is in accord with the essential reality, its multifaceted aspects and its layers of energy. It can be fostered by silence, meditation and mindfulness practices. Together they would create a sound base for a peaceful, just and prosperous humanity as a whole.

***Let us create an enlightened Europe!***

***May all be auspicious!***

***Om Sarva Mangalam!*** 



A portrait of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, a Buddhist monk. He is wearing glasses and traditional maroon and yellow robes. The background is a blurred, colorful pattern.

# Through us, good things should come into the world

An Interview with the 17. Karmapa OGYEN TRINLEY DORJE



***Buddhismus Aktuell: Modernity has many challenges. How can Buddhism help people and communities to deal with today's problems?***

Karmapa Ogyen Thrinley Dorje:  
From the Buddhist point of view, one tries to look more at the causes. Everything is originating from causes. Consequently, there is nothing that could have come into being without a cause.

People should therefore understand these problems as consequences and as such recognize them according to the cause-effect principle. The problems we are having nowadays are primarily based on the fact that people have many thoughts of malicious nature, which involve mutual harm and injury. Fighting, quarreling, poverty and strife arise from such an attitude of mind. Consequently, these problems can only be solved through an inner transformation, a renewed attitude of mind. From a Buddhist point of view, we try to understand how the effects on society can be traced back on a particular mindset.

*BA: Today we are facing economic crises, ecological crises, financial crises and so on. Would you say that we are also in a spiritual crisis?*

K: You could certainly say that with regard to China, for example. They have many thousands of years of history of Buddhism and Daoism, but in the last decades there has been a great change. Not least due to the enormous economic upswing. Externally, people in China have become much richer, but internally they are impoverished. So you could say: They have a lot of goods, but they have become empty in their hearts. From this perspective, they are unstable. This inner emptiness combined with external wealth is, if you like, a spiritual crisis that, on the other hand, has also persuaded many to look at religious paths with new interest.

*BA: In your teachings here in Germany you often spoke of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva who is said to hear all the sounds of the world and can help with his many arms. Could this Bodhisattva be a role model for us today?*

K: To speak of Avalokiteshvara as a heroic role model is difficult because there is no story that testifies that he really existed. It is a legend that is primarily important from the perspective of those who follow the religious path. But when it comes to finding examples to guide us, we should better look at the history of humanity. There are countless good examples of people who have shown the world that Avalokiteshvara's great compassion is more like a yardstick to see how far you could develop your own compassion. We should prefer to look at role models of our current time, not those who operated in prehistoric times. We are challenged because we live in an age in which we are all very strongly connected. Events are no longer far away, because we learn much more directly about the needs of others and can help better and quicker. It is important that we use our opportunities to be active ourselves and to show courage.

*BA: Isn't it also always the question of how one can be open minded to the suffering in the world, without*



*being overwhelmed by it at the same time?*

K: Compassion does not mean focusing only on the suffering of others. Compassion or sympathizing is above all an attitude of the heart which leans towards courage, which by definition is always the desire to free others from suffering.

*BA: You also said that Avalokiteshvara is the embodiment of love and compassion and he embodies the stream of all Buddhas. How can we connect with it?*

K: We can connect with it because our consciousness is not limited. That is, no one can forbid us to think certain things. In this respect, there are no limits to the strengthening of compassion in our consciousness. If we now say that Avalokitesvara is the concentration of all Buddhas, then we can hardly grasp this in our imagination. But what we can do, is to strengthen our own compassion for others, to an unlimited extent. With Avalokitesvara, this schooling has led to such an open heart, such strength, that even things we normally perceive as obstacles, have become helpful, inviting opportunities for him to help.

*BA: How can we as normal people strengthen this power within ourselves?*

K: It is indeed very difficult to develop this courage of the heart. We're all very different from each other. In Tibetan, we say: The

differences between people are a hundred thousandfold. This also applies to the negative sides - some people are so harmful and evil that we can hardly imagine it. I am thinking, for example, of the IS terrorists. We always are frightened about which cruelties come to their minds. But if one can imagine this incredible degree of malice in comparison to us, one can also imagine that there could be an equally great degree of goodness. As we move in the right direction, we realize that we may not be able to achieve this one hundred percent, but perhaps we will be able to develop in this direction to a certain extent. For courage of the heart you need people who are willing to show the determination and the willingness to do something and to grow without limits, without prejudice and barriers to thinking.

*BA: What would be your advice to young people who are looking for a meaningful life for themselves?*

K: Maybe a story will help. The story is about gold and mud talking. The gold said: Look, I am so radiant and immaculate, and you are so dirty!" The mud replied: "I am dirty and muddy, but through me lotus flowers are born. I'm making vegetables thrive." The meaning of this story is that nowadays we should spend less time wondering what our lives are worth. Instead of always exploring what we are, we should look at what good can come from us in the world. When we observe this, we will lead a meaningful life.

*BA: From your lectures and books we see you have a deep understanding of the situation of women. What made you a feminist?*

K: My mother! I always think she was my first spiritual leader. She is a very friendly, compassionate woman. Since I left Tibet almost 16 years ago, I can't see her anymore. But I still think of her, and every time I remember her, those memories, childhood memories, become more numerous. For example, how she is not only friendly to people, but also to small insects. That's why I believe that she made me want to care for the well-being of others. That's why I think she made me a feminist, too.

*BA: That sounds like an equivalent of Yab-Yum. (1)*

K: In the Buddhist tradition and especially in Tibetan we emphasize this kind of balance or perhaps equality between the female and the male energy. You can say that the feminine symbolizes wisdom and the masculine the skilful means. We all need these two types of strength or energy. I am thinking particularly of leading personalities. I think it is very important to have this female energy, kindness and loving kindness, like a mother. You should be like a mother.

*BA: In your teachings you emphasize the importance of very practical daily practice.*

K: I believe that we should go to some kind of common cause, return to some basic situation. Sure,





Picture: Julia Volk-Pexels

we all have religious traditions with wonderful philosophies and logic. But sometimes we think too much about all these things and forget about that as human beings we should care about each other and value each other. I think that's the most important thing. Moreover, this world has become more complex; it is clear that we are all interdependent. Therefore, we should try our best to seek a full understanding of this interdependence. Also, we should take responsibility because we are interconnected and interdependent. My joy and grief depend on other people. The joy or sadness of others can also be part of your joy and sadness. So there is really not much difference between me and others, nor is there any difference between what we think. I therefore believe that we should start from this common

reason or the fundamental situation.

*BA: From an ethical - and in this sense Buddhist - perspective, what are currently the most important tasks for people who practice - or for people in general?*

K: I think we must control our greed. Each and every one of us must control our own greed. Because our greed is endless, but the natural resources we use are limited. These limited resources cannot satisfy our boundless greed. It's important that we differentiate between what we want and what we really need. Maybe our wishes are many and we want them all. But maybe what we need isn't that much. Yes, possibly it's not much.

*Explanatory note:*

*1 Yab-Yum, literally "father-mother" in Tibetan, is a frequently used symbol in the Buddhist art of India, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet, depicting the original Unity of Wisdom and Compassion in the form of the sexual union of a god with a goddess.*

*This Interview first appeared in "Buddhismus Aktuell", the magazine of the German Buddhist Union (DBU). 🧘*



# Begin with gratitude

By Acharya Kaspalita





Three and a half years ago we moved into this two hundred year old hotel and created a Buddhist Temple. We turned the breakfast room into a dharma hall, placing our standing Buddha on a shrine in front of the tall Georgian windows. We hung our Buddhist temple sign where the old hotel sign used to be.

One way of framing the job of a Buddhist temple is to spread wisdom and compassion. What is wisdom? Clearly seeing samsara and nirvana, or in other words, seeing human nature: its foolishness and the deep impulse to love. What is compassion? The fellow-feeling that arises from clear seeing and the acts of kindness that follow.

We can work to spread wisdom and compassion through picturing an ideal and trying to get closer to it, or we can work from a place of celebrating what we have already been given.

Over the last three years I have learnt of the dangers of wanting, and I am moving from a place of idealism to a place of gratitude.

We haven't just been creating temple, but a community. We have space for people to live in the building; we have people coming to practice with us from the local area; and we have volunteers

coming to help get the building in order and keep it clean and tidy, and transform the garden from something basic into something beautiful.

Living and working alongside people provides opportunities for entanglement, and getting knocked out of shape. It provides opportunities for discovering the depth of our own karma, and the karma of the people alongside us.

One of the things that most frustrated me in the early days of our community was when people promised one thing, and then did another or nothing at all.

One resident, displaying good intentions and enthusiasm for living in community took on the responsibility of taking our rubbish and recycling out to the front of the building once a week. Sometimes the black bags of rubbish and the pink bags of recycling would make it out to the front and be taken away, and sometimes they wouldn't.

After missing two or three weeks in a row we started to run out of spaces to keep the waste before it was collected. I was triggered into frustration and anxiety. Frustration because I felt like I was already working near my limit in those early days of the community, and anxiety

because I was anticipating a conversation with that resident that I wasn't sure would go well, and I was wondering what message we were sending to our neighbours.

I steeled myself to talk with this person. I boxed up my feelings of frustration and shoved them to the back of my mind. I'm sure they still leaked into the conversation, but the more we talked my feelings softened. I connected with the real person in front of me and the struggles in their own life. They recommitted to the job, and we parted as friends.

Not long after they started to forget to take out the rubbish again. We talked and it became clear that there was too much going on in their life for them to manage this regular job. We agreed that he would step down from this responsibility. We moved into a position of congruence: both of our expectations became more rooted in what was actually possible.

I could list a dozen other examples where I became frustrated by this kind of behaviour. I heard my teacher's teacher's words echoing in my ears, "Listen to what they say, and then watch what they do", yet still I found myself falling into hope and then disappointment and frustration.



When I look back on this time, I can see that my frustration had two roots. The first was falling into believing what people believed about themselves. When I was presented with a strong self-story, there was an invitation for me support that self-story – and for the sake of an easy life I agreed with what I was being told.

The second root is more profound. I was acting from a place of wanting. A traditional reading of the Four Noble Truths teaches us the danger of desire, and many of us will have noticed the pattern of wanting and then disappointment in our own lives.

Both of these habits set up a conflict with reality. In the first there's a dissonance between the story and the actual bundle of habits and patterns that the person is acting out. In the second there's a conflict between what I want, and what is actually manifesting or even possible.

Acting from a place of gratitude cuts through both of these roots, and anchors me in reality.

As I began to focus on what I was receiving, rather than what I lacked, I connected with a sense of being profoundly supported.

From a material point of view, I already have more than I need to live – and from a spiritual point of view, I have already been given the great gifts of teachings, practices, and the presence of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and the Sangha to support me. How wonderful!

If you investigate the causes and conditions of your own life, you may find the same to be true.

Even when encountering difficulty there is usually something good to give our attention too.

In the second Āghāta Pativīya Sutta, Sāriputta teaches us that if we meet someone who spends their time speaking unwholesome words, and performing unwholesome acts, but whose heart occasionally opens to goodness, we should give our attention to that goodness. Sāriputta compares that small amount of goodness to a finding a hoof-print filled with water when we are thirsty and the road is dry – rather than scooping it up with our hands and disturbing the mud we put our lips to the water and drink, taking in and appreciating what is pure.

Every teaching has a shadow. Just as the shadow of idealism is disconnect and delusion, the shadow of gratitude and connecting with what is good is avoiding what needs to be addressed. I am not advocating ignoring what troubles us, but making sure that we also pay attention to what supports us.

So often when the windshield is cracked we spend our time obsessing about the crack, instead of looking out at the beautiful view, and being thankful for the chassis and wheels supporting us. I'm not suggesting we ignore the crack – nobody wants a shattered windshield – but acting from a place of gratitude makes it easier

to fix the crack, and to live with the cracks that can't be fixed.

In our community – when I began to focus on what volunteers and residents were offering – rather than what they could not offer – I began to feel differently. I relaxed; reality was not as troubling as I had first thought. I was more pleased to see people than I had been before. I got to know them better, and the agreements we made were more realistic and more likely to manifest good results.

When things did go “wrong” I took a step back and remembered all the innumerable ways in which I am supported, and then I stepped forward again from a different place, bringing a different quality of mind to the engagement. Sometimes the stepping back and remembering didn't happen until after the encounter. I'm not a perfectly enlightened Buddha, after all.

For me wisdom begins with gratitude: trusting in the presence of nirvana allows me to look clearly at suffering and human foolishness – particularly my own greed, hate and delusion. Starting from gratitude also means that I am more likely to feel resourced to reach out to others, and to take compassionate action.

How wonderful it is to realise there is so much to be thankful for. 🧘





Acharya Kaspalita is a Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist. He co-runs Amida Mandala Buddhist Temple, in Malvern, UK, and is deputy head of the ministry team in the Amida Order.





# **THE BUDDHIST PIONEERS OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN THE WEST: A LITTLE-KNOWN HISTORY OF COMPASSION IN ACTION**

**By Dr Michael Vermeulen**



At the dawn of the 21st century, several countries legalised same-sex marriage. This evolution towards marriage equality is often pictured by opponents as something recent, Western and anti-religious. But few people know that Buddhists played an important role in this social struggle for equality<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout its long history, Buddhism never claimed marriage as an exclusive or 'sacred' Buddhist religious institution, nor did it reject marriage in favour of celibacy. It has always shown flexibility to adjust marriage to local needs and accepted polygamy, polyandry (in Tibet) and

same-sex marriage with adoption rights (in China). It did so again when the gay community in the West asked for marriage equality in the second half of the 20th century.

### **Buddhist same-sex marriage in the West**

The Netherlands were the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage, followed by Belgium in 2003, Spain and Canada in 2005 and South Africa in 2006. In South Africa the Supreme Court mentioned explicitly that refusing marriage equality would install a new form of Apartheid.

Buddhism did not wait for this: the first European Buddhist same-sex marriage took place near Paris in 1995 (see picture). In a survey among the members of the EBU and some other Buddhist

communities in 2013, respondents from all traditions said they had no objections to a legal same-sex marriage. Some reported they were not used to do religious weddings, but would be happy to do a blessing as for straight couples. All those who did perform religious weddings said they would be happy to do so for gays and lesbians too, but very few had received a request from within their community.

The hostility towards the gay community in the West was often religiously motivated. Most Christians responded negative to the request by the gay community for respect and recognition, let alone marriage equality. This fuelled the conviction - by Christians and queers alike - that there is an opposition between gay and god. When gays were looking for a spiritual environment they were bluntly rejected: "The

---

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed history, see my article: 'The rise of Rainbow Dharma: Buddhism on sexual diversity and same-sex marriage' [ <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/ArticlesCompilationForbAndSexuality.pdf> ] Here you can find the full references for all quotes in this article.



answer most often given was that there was none. The dominant Christian ... declared gays to be grievous sinners. To discover that one was gay, apparently, meant that one could not have a spiritual life. One could only have sex." [Corless (2000) pp. 270-271]

The response by the Buddhist community was from the start very different. In the early 70s Rev. Koshin Ogui was assigned to the Buddhist Church of San Francisco, a temple of the Pure Land Shin tradition. When a gay Buddhist couple from his community asked to be married, he accepted immediately and with no objections [Wilson (2012)]. This was almost half a century before the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the US in 2015. There was also no secrecy, not towards

the local community and not towards higher clergy. The same ceremony (with the adjustment of personal pronouns) and the same venue were used as for straight couples. In the following years all main Buddhist traditions in North America started performing Buddhist same-sex marriages, most of them in Zen, Shin and SGI-USA.

The Christian picture looks very different. While some individual ministers also tried to accommodate the gay wish for marriage equality, this was often done in secrecy and - for doctrinal reasons - under a different name such as 'holy union' or 'blessing'. Once the higher hierarchy got aware of these practices, most churches banned the practice and started campaigning against legal marriage equality too, often with

severe hate speech. American Buddhists on the other hand were actively campaigning for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in their states, especially in Hawaii and California.

In 2012 both national Buddhist organisations of Australia (one for the lay and one for the clergy) asked their government to legalise same-sex marriage.

### **Buddhist same-sex marriage in the East**

Worldwide there is also a gradual acceptance noticeable within traditional Buddhist countries. In 2004 king Norodom Sihanuk of Cambodia expressed the wish that his country would legalise same-sex marriage. In Japan the Zen Shunkoin Temple in Kyoto started performing Buddhist



*The male same-sex 'alliance ceremony' of Fabrice Midal (in white) and Bruno Tyszler (24 Jun 1995) near Paris, performed by Julia Sagebien, with the approval of Vajradhatu/Shambhala's spiritual leader Chögyam Trungpa. The same ritual was used as for other weddings. 'Alliance ceremony' was used instead of 'marriage' for legal, not doctrinal reasons. France would only legalise same-sex partnerships in 1999 and same-sex marriage in 2013. (photo with permission from Fabrice Midal)*



same-sex wedding ceremonies in 2010. In 2013 Thailand debated new legislation in parliament (which is on hold due to political tensions). In 2014 HH the Dalai Lama expressed public support for secular same-sex marriage, and in 2017 the Constitutional Court of Taiwan ruled that not allowing same-sex marriage was a violation of people's right to marry and of people's right to equality.

But Buddhism's acceptance of sexual diversity and support for same-sex marriage in Asia is not recent. When the first Jesuit missionaries arrived in China and Japan in the 16th century, they were shocked by the acceptance of homosexuality by Buddhism. They would use it as one of their main arguments to prove that the cultures of the Far East were in decline and inferior to the West, and more specifically, that Buddhism was a decadent religion, inferior to Christianity. From their side, the Buddhists were shocked by the hate-speech of the Jesuits when it came to something the Buddhists considered to be a fact of life.

China had a centuries old tradition of same-sex marriages [Hinsch (1990)]. During the Yuan and Ming dynasties (1271-1644), the men in the province of Fujian were famous throughout the empire for their long-term relationships with other men. These were often formalized by legal marriage ceremonies that were almost identical to opposite-sex rituals. Similar records can be found about lesbian relations. For women

who wanted to escape the very patriarchal Confucian society, the only real way out was to become a Buddhist nun. During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) an alternative movement arose in the silk province Guangdong, commonly known as The Golden Orchid sisterhoods [Topley (1975)]. These were societies of women working in the silk industry, who combined forces to stay physically and financially independent from men. They rejected being subordinate to a husband in marriage or to male clergy as a nun.

The Golden Orchid sisterhoods were organised in Buddhist vegetarian halls and secular spinster halls and considered themselves the continuation of the Ten Sisters society which was created by a Buddhist nun centuries earlier. Both movements referred to the Bodhisattva Guan-Yin as their spiritual paragon. Guan-Yin (In Tibet known as the male Avalokiteshvara, in Japan as the female Kannon), is best known in Buddhism as the Bodhisattva of Compassion. She/he sees all the suffering of the world, even in the darkest loneliest corner. Less known is that Guan-Yin somehow became the Buddhist patron saint of sexual diversity. In China there was a popular legend that Guan-Yin was once a princess who refused heterosexual marriage, turning her into the heroine of women opposing patriarchal dominance as well as of people engaged in same-sex relationships. Members of the Golden Orchid sisterhoods swore an oath to Guan-Yin that

they would never marry a man. Some even engaged to commit suicide if they would be forced into a heterosexual marriage.

Many Golden Orchid members lived together in close friendships, others were sexual relationships. Some couples went for - legally recognised - same-sex marriage ceremonies. They also had the right to adopt abandoned or orphaned girls as their legal daughters and heirs. The Golden Orchid sisterhoods would be banned by the Communist Party after the CCP rose to power in 1949.

## **Sex and sexual diversity in Early Buddhism**

The Buddha was at the head of his community of lay and monastic followers for more than four decades. During this long period, he was asked for advice on a very wide variety of issues on sex and sexuality that would impress many present day sexologists. As a result, there are literally

dozens of references in the Buddhist canons to all sorts of sexual relationships and practices, mainly hetero- and homosexual activities but also to pedophilia, bestiality, necrophilia, etc. Given the wide variety of items addressed, the Buddha was obviously not ignorant or naive on human sexual passions and activities in the broadest sense.

It is important to note that almost all his counsels on sexuality are discussed in the Vinaya (the monastic code). In other words, the



most common context is that of a monk or a nun struggling to lead a celibate life. There is no negative attitude towards sex or sexual diversity as such, but towards a lack of discipline to control lust: "It is notable that these prohibitions against homosexuality in the Vinaya are not given any special (homophobic) metaphysical, philosophical, or doctrinal support. They are merely expressions of uncontrolled desire on the part of persons who have vowed to control their desires." [Corless (1998) p. 255]. The focus of the Vinaya is on the tensions between sexuality and celibacy, not on heterosexuality versus homosexuality. As mentioned, the Buddha was well aware of sexual diversity in general and same-sex behaviour in particular. If this had been an issue for him, he had plenty of opportunities to condemn it, or to say that Buddhists should live a heterosexual (or a celibate) life only. He did not.

The Buddha also shows pragmatism in his counsel. In what is probably the oldest documented story on the interface of religious and LGBT- rights, the Buddha was approached by what we nowadays would call a trans-female monk and a trans-male nun [Vin III. 35<sup>2</sup>]. They were not happy as members of their all male and

all female monastic communities (monks and nuns lived mostly separately) and asked for help. The Buddha simply ruled that the trans-female monk should join the nuns and the trans-male nun should join the monks.

In such stories, we see the Buddha as a man willing to listen, willing to identify areas of suffering, willing to look for solutions. A man who didn't see sexual diversity as a threat and who was willing to step out of the traditional patterns he was raised with. It is also important to realise what the Buddha did not do: he didn't react shocked or upset, never used homo-negative language and never said that sex or sexual diversity make someone unfit for the Buddhist Spiritual Path. On the contrary; in the Vasettha Sutta [M.98] the Buddha is very clear in his response to the traditional views of the Brahmins:

*"With humans, no difference of birth makes a distinctive mark in them; nor in the hair nor in the head, ... nor in the buttocks or the breast, nor in the genitals or ways of mating, ... nor in their color or in voice ... In human bodies in themselves, nothing distinctive can be found. Distinctions among human beings are purely verbal designation<sup>3</sup>."*

The pragmatic attitude of the Buddha could inspire us to ask ourselves: how can we listen? Are we willing to see the suffering around us? How can we look for

solutions? Do we feel threatened by differences and the unknown? Are we able to think out of the box of the traditions and patterns we grew up with? Are we able to see that the pigeonholes and labels we use to distinguish people are 'purely verbal designation'?

Part of this process requires that we are open to different opinions and life-styles. It also requires that we are prepared to critically examine our own traditions and look at what is authentic and what is not. But above all, it requires that we trust the Buddha-nature in ourselves and in others; trust our basic willingness and ability to do good. And this 'little goodness of daily life' can flourish if we cultivate metta and karuna - boundless friendliness and compassionate action - to be the main characteristics of our decisions, (re) actions and relationships. 

---

2 The story speaks of a rather magical sudden change of characteristics. Bear in mind that 2500 years ago people did not have the refined vocabulary on sexual diversity as we have these days. In a culture that made no difference between anatomical and social gender, it seems more meaningful to consider this a way to express their 'coming out'.

---

3 M. 98. in: The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha, translation by Bikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Nanamoli, Wisdom Publications, 1995





*“With humans, no difference of birth makes a distinctive mark in them; nor in the hair nor in the head, ... nor in the buttocks or the breast, nor in the genitals or ways of mating, ... nor in their color or in voice ... In human bodies in themselves, nothing distinctive can be found. Distinctions among human beings are purely verbal designation.”*



# **Position of the Animal in Buddhism**

## **A Dharma look at the animals**

By Gerhard Weissgrab





"Compassion and Wisdom" is not only the subject of this publication, but also the shortest explanation of Dharma. Precisely because compassion and wisdom is the Buddhist perspective, the treatment of animals in our world should also be shaped by it.

But if we take a close look, we have to realize that there is far too little contact with animals, which is supported by compassion and wisdom. Unfortunately, this also applies to most Buddhist countries.

Nevertheless, or precisely for this reason, in my understanding Buddhists have a special obligation to stand up for the recognition of animals as sentient beings. The supreme maxim of the Buddha's teaching is to reduce and dissolve existing suffering and not to allow new suffering to arise.

With regard to suffering, there is no difference at all between humans and animals from a Buddhist point of view. Both have a primary need

to avoid suffering and to achieve wellbeing.

This position of animals is a point of difference in the comparison of Buddhism with the monotheistic religions. However I would like to mention here that for example in Christianity the attitude towards animals has also slowly changed, not only by the current Pope, but also by outstanding individual theologians. Nonetheless, the majority of people still claim the right to subjugate the Earth, understanding themselves to be the crown of creation. This is probably one reason for the exploitation of the Earth, our increasing environmental problems and not least the position of animals. Here I would like to refer to the very revealing concept of "productive livestock".

The undesirable developments mentioned above can also very easily be derived from the Second Noble Truth. Above all, greed is the main driving force behind our economic activity, and a blind view of the unavoidable consequences of such actions.

While this action usually leads immediately to the suffering of animals, this suffering usually only comes later and often more indirectly to humans. I may just mention the harmful ingredients in our daily food.

The chain of such unbeneficial developments could probably be continued for a long time. I refer to diets foreign to the species for farm animals, which lead to epidemics as well as torturous ways of selection in breeding,

for instance with dairy cows and chickens for better production, and not least the terrible ways animals are transported over thousands of kilometres.

The reason that it is precisely in the Buddha's teaching that a particularly great task and high responsibility is established for us here lies not only in the equality of man and animal in their ability to suffer. This responsibility is also based on the Buddhist worldview of mutual conditionality.

If we see a need for action here, it is not enough to confine ourselves to dissolving and preventing the suffering of animals. We have to think everything else in the same way. It is not about a confrontational attitude, perpetrators here and victims there, but about both the one and the other.

If we want to reduce the suffering of livestock in agriculture in the future and end it completely in the long run, we must look at the whole system. It is about the farmer, his animals and the entire agricultural economy.

Buddhism as a middle way does not establish any extreme points of view. An action from the middle position must always have the consequences on the whole in view. This is certainly a difficult path, but we can assume that it is also sustainable.

In my opinion, it is part of a committed Buddhism to care not only for the suffering and needs of people, but also in the same way for animals. Quite apart



from the fact that concern for the environment as a whole is a basic prerequisite for a good life for humans and animals.

The Austrian Buddhist Union has been trying to fulfil this task for many years with the help of various networks and associations.

Since the visit of a monk from Taiwan who travels around the world to help animals in particular, we have also founded our own association for a direct commitment to animals: "Animal Compassion" - Buddhist Association for the perception of animals as sentient beings - [www.animalcompassion.de](http://www.animalcompassion.de).

We see it as one of our most important tasks, especially from a Buddhist point of view, to strengthen consciousness in our

society of the different ways our lifestyles cause great suffering to animals. There are excellent animal protection organisations which rescue and free animals from painful situations with direct activities. We also try to do this on a very small scale, but see our main task in the work of raising awareness and promoting attention in our society.

Animal Compassion has also defined the following goals, which could certainly still grow:

The promotion of awareness in society that animals as well as humans are perceived equally as sentient beings. This support takes place in various ways, including in the form of contributions in the media and through public events.

To enable as many needy animals as possible, within the scope of the means and possibilities of "Animal Compassion", to live a good life, free of suffering in accordance with their species.

Should people with pets find themselves in financial distress and therefore not able to give their pets the necessary veterinary treatment, we try to help as best we can.

"Animal Compassion" wants to pick people up where they stand and rejects all radical or extreme actions as not effective. This means aligning the work with given realities. Wherever animals are not given their proper dignity, because they have been exploited by humans for many centuries and in accordance with the particular culture, the particular situation





of these people must also be considered and taken into account. This does not mean accepting the animals' abuse by humans, but calls for a greater effort to strengthen their awareness of the suffering of animals.

Assistance and shared commitment to achieve these goals by people from all directions is highly desirable and worth striving for.

Animal Compassion's work and commitment to the animal is particularly founded and motivated by the Dharma. But that does not mean it is the only source. Fortunately, there are many sources for commitment and empathy with animals, and even where the Dharma is unknown, there are many people who care for animals. A look into the eyes of an

animal can often trigger more than long sermons or articles.

The association "Animal Compassion" has therefore also set itself the goal of working with all people who are committed to engage against the suffering and for the welfare of the animals. I would like to point out the two books at the end of this article written by two members of our advisory board. Both are not fundamentally based on the teachings of the Buddha and are nevertheless in full harmony with the Buddhist attitude towards animals. Unfortunately, both books have been published in German only.

May it be possible to change the intercourse and the attitude of our society toward animals so that suffering is reduced and wellbeing

is promoted. Ultimately for the benefit of all sentient beings!

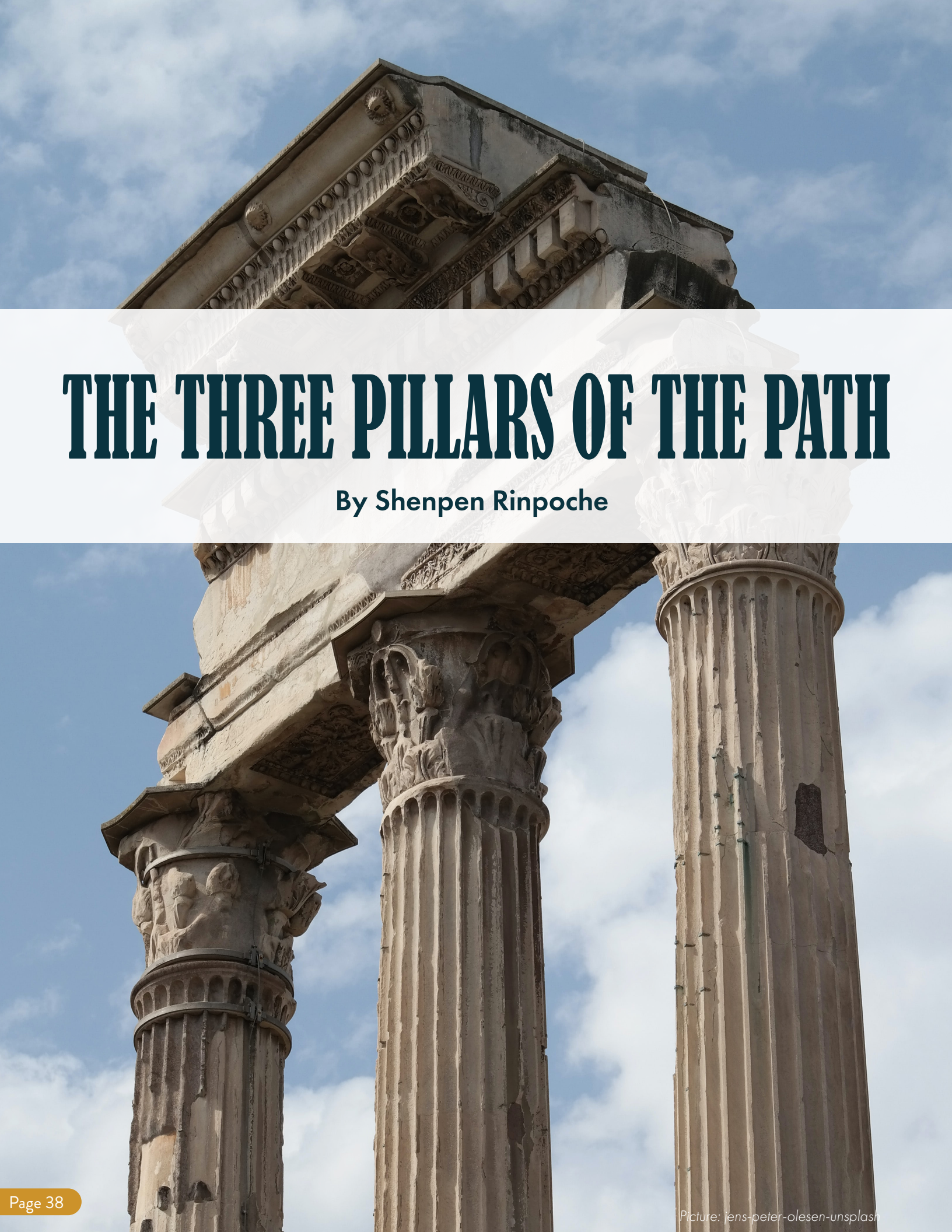
### **Books to read:**

Theresia Raberger – „Alles ist ein Leben“ – edition steinrich

Kurt Remele - „Die Würde des Tieres ist unantastbar“ Eine neue christliche Tierethik – Butzon & Berker. 🧘





The background image is a low-angle photograph of ancient Greek temple architecture. It features three prominent columns with fluted shafts and ornate capitals. Above the columns is a triangular pediment filled with intricate carvings. The sky is a clear blue with some light, wispy clouds. The overall tone is bright and majestic.

# THE THREE PILLARS OF THE PATH

By Shenpen Rinpoche



I would like to present you briefly the Three Pillars of the Path. They are described this way, because if one is missing, the Path is not complete and higher realisations impossible. Whoever doesn't understand the Three Pillars may eventually collect lot of words, learn a lot, even receive initiations and recite prayers and mantras, but won't be able to complete the Path.

We often say that emptiness and Bodhicitta are like two wings of a bird flying towards enlightenment, but we do not say that without renunciation the bird won't even take off.

These three words are easy to remember, anytime, anywhere, and can change a lot: in every sphere of our life, which we make, from its appearance to how we react in front of it.

## **Renunciation**

It's a word that tends to scare most people, because of our strong attachment to Samsaric pleasures, to our tendencies generated since immemorial lifetimes. It scares us because we do not understand well how karma really works, and instead of understanding the

absence of inherent existence of all phenomena, our mind is constantly jumping towards outside objects - or at least what it considers as such - that we either like or dislike, to various degrees.

One person can be surrounded by lot of objects and luxurious items without any clinging, and another can be without anything and hang so much on what he doesn't have. So renunciation doesn't depend on what you possess or not, but on your attitude towards Samsara.

As long as we consider any phenomenon of Samsara as good or attractive, we create bonds which will result in taking rebirth, through the process we call the "Twelve Interdependent Links of Origination".

It doesn't mean that our life has to become miserable and ascetic. Buddhism doesn't condemn pleasurable experiences. Actually, if you are experiencing something pleasurable it is because you have created the causes for it. To become upset by such experience or fight against it would make no sense. What we need to be aware of is the moment next to the mere experience of pleasure, which is the grasping of a phenomenon we

perceive as existing on its own, and which we want to get again and again for the mere purpose of enjoying it.

Yet everything is so impermanent that we can wonder why we get attached to it. Money comes and goes. Beauty fades with time. Health rapidly changes. The only thing of which we can be sure is that we are going to die. But where and when is based solely on unknown causes from the past. And what will happen then (after our death) will result from all causes accumulated from past and current lives. Causes generated by our state of mind, thoughts, words, and actions.

Renunciation is the understanding that there is nothing valuable to gain in Samsara. All is impermanent, illusory, and the cause of suffering. Suffering based on that constant dissatisfaction, the source of all negative attitudes, willing only to seize more and more phenomena, regardless of the pain it could generate for others, or to one's own mind.

## **Bodhicitta**

Though often translated as "compassion", the ultimate



motivation is quite far from the common definition of it, often sounding more like pity, or empathy. Empathy is already very good by the way, as so many lack it, but it's far from enough. What we could translate directly as "Awakening Mind" or "Mind for Enlightenment" is far above any such consideration. It implies a deep personal engagement to help all sentient beings, without exception (equanimity) and without any limit in time or space. It also involves an understanding of the true nature of reality and causality. One engages to walk the Path to enlightenment, for the sake of helping all sentient beings, until Samsara ends. That motivation is unique to Buddhism.

Bodhicitta is the motivation which generates the intention to come back into Samsara to help others, even though the practitioner has realized liberation, cutting all roots to Samsara. Without such motivation, at the time of death, an accomplished meditator could enter into Nirvana and stay in it for eons and eons. But the Bodhisattva will not, he will come back, for his main motivation is to serve as many beings as possible.

We can speak about two types of Bodhicitta:

**Aspirational** Bodhicitta, which is the complete wish to overcome our emotional afflictions and delusions, to realize our full potential to bring all sentient beings to the enlightened state, free from suffering.

**Engaged** Bodhicitta, which means engaging in the practices and behavior that bring about this goal by taking the Bodhisattva Vows to restrain from actions detrimental to it. In taking them, the trainee Bodhisattva vows to abstain from certain negative acts that would defer the Bodhisattva reaching enlightenment.

There are four trainings for Bodhicitta: 1) each day and night, recalling the advantages of the Bodhicitta motivation. 2) Remembering, reaffirming and intensifying this motivation by rededicating our efforts to reaching our enlightenment and the enlightenment of others. 3) Striving to build up positive mental states, deep awareness and wisdom. Benefiting and helping others using all the skills and means at our disposal, as effectively as we can, and doing so with as much deep awareness of reality as is possible. 4) Never giving up trying to help anyone, or at least wishing to be able to do so, no matter how difficult he or she may be.

Bodhicitta is thus not only to be nice to some people or wishing them good; even great good. It is about engaging ourselves for a higher cause, and it needs to be integrated in our everyday life, meditated upon again and again, until all obstacles for its emergence are eliminated. Then the Awakening Mind merges with our current mind, and can't be separated anymore. Like milk poured into water.

## Emptiness

This is the wisdom part. As long as we are "fighting against or for", we live, experience and maintain duality, with all the consequences we know. We need to achieve PEACE in our own mind, which is the result of correct understanding, meditating, and letting go all of our attachments, including attachment to attachment, and attachment to non-attachment.

We don't need to fight our emotions and thoughts; we need to understand and realize that they do not have any self-inherent existence, they are born from past causes, give results in our present, and fade away. But when we seize them, however, we create causes we will need to experience in the future.

We must be in the most important moment ever: the present moment. You are not creating causes in the past, neither in the future; you are creating in the present the causes you will experience in the next moment, year, life, and lives. What we experience now is the result of the past. How we react to these perceptions creates our future

Moreover, our mind perceives phenomena wrongly labelled as "outside", wrongly perceived as "independent" from us, seemingly having their own self-inherent existence, while in reality they do not have this type of existence! They appear within our own mind, outcomes of actions of body, speech and mind we generated.

Past accumulated causes mature according to other



causes and conditions, and result in perceptions; “food” for our mind, energy manifesting within our consciousness and interpreted as objects for our sense consciousnesses. They are born and perceived by our own consciousness, and thus are of the same nature. They are one with the consciousness which perceives them. There are no outside phenomena; they are like an image in the mirror of our own mind, the reflection of the moon in the lake of our own consciousness.

What brings you to justify the independent existence of a phenomenon, say, an object? Because you see it, touch it? What sees it? An eye. How do you prove the existence of that eye? Seeing and touching are feelings, perceptions, signals interpreted in your own mind. When you touch an object in your dreams, does this object really exist? Though at the moment you experience it in your dream reality it seems to be an external phenomenon which you can see, touch, and smell, yet when you wake up, you understand this object was 100% a creation of your own mind. Not 90% or 95%. 100%. That object existed only within your own mind, created and experienced only in your consciousness. Nobody created that perception for you. You can't create an experience for someone else. In the same way, we can understand that, even if conventionally an object in this current reality has a function and a type of existence, ultimately it doesn't hold any self-inherent reality; it appears and is

experienced based upon causes formed by our mind, within our mind, for our mind. Having the correct understanding of these two realities keeps us away from the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism, and enables us to perceive the moment as it is: an illusion without any self-inherent existence, appearing and functioning in our conventional reality, and disappearing when its causes end. But our reaction to it, as long as we are in ignorance, in duality, generates an imprint on our stream of consciousness which will mature, and produce a result: another illusory perception in our reality.

As a first step towards the realization of the true nature of our reality, we need to understand that whatever we perceive, however we perceive, is wrong. We perceive spontaneously as self-inherent existence, which is false. We might not yet fully understand how things work, but they are not how they appear. Thus, we need to hold on our reactions towards what we perceive, to give ourselves a better chance to see correctly, and in order not to generate further causes of suffering.

When we are observing, we meditate on the results of causes created by ourselves. “Why react negatively or with excitement towards the result of my own mind, pictures reflected within myself”? We can still act and react according to conventions, the laws which sustain our reality, on the basis of our best possible

motivation - Bodhicitta - generating that inextinguishable wish and attitude to help others, with the wisdom seeing all phenomena as illusory.

Then we must meditate and meditate, again and again, using both correct reasoning and a pacified mind placed on the result of that correct reasoning until we can “taste”; we can experience first inferentially, then directly, the true nature of the reality: its complete absence of inherent existence, it's existence as being of the same nature as our mind, in total non-duality. We are not fighting against anything anymore.

The mind is then in an unshakeable state of peace and happiness!

From that state of mind having complete renunciation, Mind for Awakening, and ultimate wisdom, we are the perfect tool to spread wisdom and compassion. 🧘



Picture of Shenpen Rinpoche



# **TOLERANCE AND ITS LIMITS**

## **HOW BUDDHISTS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO PEACE-MAKING AND AN EDUCATION FOR PEACE**



**By Dr Martin Ramstedt**



## Point of Departure

With respect to our contemplations on how we as Buddhists can help foster wisdom and compassion in the world, it is important to acknowledge that, lately, Buddhism has received a lot of bad press. I do not aim to launch into a debate here on why Buddhist monks in Myanmar and Sri Lanka advocate violence against Rohingyas and Tamils, or to put into the pillory Buddhist teachers I haven't personally known. I'd rather like to take as point of departure something I personally witnessed, a public intervention of an Austrian Dharma teacher at a panel of a German Christian-Buddhist conference I helped organise.

The conference was convened in February 2018 with the goal to explore the possibility of developing joint projects between Christians and Buddhists that might help alleviate some of the social problems and suffering we face in German society. During the final

panel discussion, said Dharma teacher suddenly called upon us to join forces against "Islam". He then continued to extoll the Christian practice of centuries past to literally take up arms against "the Muslims", which clinched it for me, as well as the plenary, that he was actually recommending militancy in the pursuit of safeguarding "our" European values.

As Buddhists, we know that a distinct sense of inclusion and exclusion is predicated upon false belief in the existence of a separate self and fixed identities. Entertaining such notions is likely to drive us ever further into conceptual judgment and self-righteousness, ultimately clouding our capability of directly relating to our humanity and that of others, and thereby our capacity to bring about peace. In the throes of the three poisons (delusion, greedy clinging and aversion), we will be trapped in suffering, both as actors and as victims. The use of the term "Islam" in Western media tends

to eradicate the individual faces of migrants from Islamic countries in our minds. Rendering people faceless is indeed a first step in the process of dehumanising them. Rhetorical dehumanisation is bound to lead to physical violence, as Victor Klemperer's astute analysis of the development of the language of the Third Reich has shown<sup>1</sup>.

Populist discourses against "Islam" in Europe generally seek to discredit pluralism and to strengthen "national morale". Through the co-optation of Buddhism for nationalist purposes, such as in imperial Japan, postcolonial Myanmar, or present-day Thailand, Buddhists have committed very "un-Buddhist" atrocities<sup>2</sup>. It is time to vocally own

---

<sup>1</sup> My translation, see Klemperer, Victor. 1975. *LTI: Notizbuch eines Philologen*. Leipzig: Reclam, 21.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Victoria, Brian Daizen. 2003. *Zen War Stories*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon; Jerryson, Michael K., and Mark Juergensmeyer (eds.). 2010. *Buddhist Warfare*. Oxford et al.: Oxford

up to this, and to warn against similar attempts at amalgamating nationalist concerns with the dharma among Buddhists in Europe<sup>3</sup>.

## 'Tolerance' and Its Limits

At the aforementioned Christian-Buddhist conference, I proposed a different notion of protection. “Real” protection, I said, would start with seeking out those we find threatening, first opening ourselves to their perspectives, sensitivities and needs. We would then have to share our interests, viewpoints, and fears, while negotiating with them

University Press; Schober, Juliane. 2011. *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

3 I can recommend two additional books that keep us alert on this count: May, Reinhard. (1989) 1996. *Heidegger's Hidden Resources: East Asian Influences on His Work*. London and New York: Routledge; Yamada, Shoji. 2009. *Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

situated agreements on shared values, individual and collective rights and duties, in order for us all to develop community. At the time, I forgot to mention that we as members of Western societies have been playing our parts in provoking massive waves of migration – not the least through our unwholesome consumption patterns our governments seek to actively protect all around the globe. The veracity of such dependent arising necessitates a careful reflexion on how we as Buddhists can really further the growth of wisdom and compassion in our societies. It also calls into question the more conventional virtue of tolerance, the acclaimed ability to “live and let live”. Tolerance has incidentally become a controversial concept not only in populist discourses, but also among supporters of pluralism. Rainer Forst, Professor of Political Science and Philosophy at the Johan Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, for example,

distinguishes between four notions of tolerance<sup>4</sup>:

1. Tolerance as mere toleration of the presence of an alien group by a majority that enjoys a position of privilege, dominance and hegemony. If the minority group begins to threaten the privileges of the majority, toleration may quickly transform into verbal abuse and physical violence.

2. Tolerance as pragmatic coexistence of two groups with similar power. This kind of tolerance is more akin to a truce, because it retains a violent undercurrent that can easily break out once the balance of power tips in favour of one of the parties involved.

4 Forst, Rainer. 2000. 'Toleranz, Gerechtigkeit und Vernunft.' In *Toleranz: Philosophische Grundlagen und gesellschaftliche Praxis einer umstrittenen Tugend*, edited by Rainer Forst Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 123-130.







Picture: pexels-james-wheeler

3. Tolerance that involves a certain respect for an alien group. Here, the fundamental humanity of the members of the respective group is in principle acknowledged, although the majority retains a distinct cultural and ethical distance.

4. Tolerance as appreciation of the very otherness of strangers, which goes beyond mere respect, as it entails the readiness of all groups involved to learn from each other, even though some measure of cultural and ethical distance is kept between them.

Only the last two last two of Rainer Forst's notions of tolerance arguably qualify as ethical stances, because here people are able to

cross over from a "me-first" to a "we-first" attitude. From a Buddhist perspective it is remarkable, though, that neither notion of tolerance is predicated upon a distinct "you-first" attitude.

### **Martin Buber, Emmanuel Lévinas and Marshall Rosenberg**

When, after "9/11", parochial Christian values were increasingly translated into US law, critical legal scholars in the US began to discover the ethics of the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas. They wanted to translate Lévinas' radical "you-first" approach into legal instruments redressing the injustice asylum seekers, migrants, and Muslim

detainees in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and elsewhere had to suffer.

Lévinas' ethics are strongly influenced by Martin Buber's notion of the interdependence between "I and Thou"<sup>5</sup>. Writing in the years after World War I, Buber saw human beings "as imprisoned in the shells of society, state, church, school, economy, public opinion, imprisoned in their own indirectness"<sup>6</sup>. He called upon his readers to break out of their shells, to render service to other human beings, to establish community with them. Lévinas' ethics also consists

<sup>5</sup> Buber, Martin. 1995. *Ich und Du*. Leipzig: Reclam.

<sup>6</sup> Moore, Donald. 1996. *Martin Buber: Prophet of Religious Secularism*. New York: Fordham University Press, 96-97.



of a categorical obligation to respond to the suffering of others. The actual face of a suffering human would in point of fact provoke us into responsiveness, calling out to us: "Do not kill me!" – "Give me!" – "Help me!" – "Love me!"<sup>7</sup>

Interest in Lévinas has sadly subsided. People seem to have found his ethics impossible to apply. Lévinas, too, did not always live up to his own standards. In 1982, he was asked to comment on the recent massacres of Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Shatila, committed by the Phalangists (members of a Lebanese Christian political party). Israeli Defence Forces had not

intervened to stop the killings, even though they obviously could have done so. Lévinas did not explicitly condemn the massacre, though, suggesting that when another turns out to be an enemy, the necessity to respond to his or her suffering would not apply<sup>8</sup>.

Martin Buber also very much influenced Marshall B. Rosenberg, the founder of Non-Violent Communication. Rosenberg offered countless trainings in many war-torn regions of the world in an unceasing effort to promote reconciliation and peace. He also served as mediator in conflict-ridden countries, such as Israel, Palestine, Ireland,

Rwanda, Burundi, Serbia, Croatia, and others<sup>9</sup>. Non-Violent Communication trainings have honed the ability of many people, including Buddhists, to enter and to stay with difficult communication and conflict, furthering a culture of "we-first" through rigorously applying a "you-first" perspective. As Buddhists, we are called upon to wholeheartedly contribute our skilful means to such an education for peace.

7 Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1971. *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 281-284; Lévinas, Emmanuel, and Martin Tom Dieck. 1979. *Le Visage de l'autre*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

8 Bernasconi, Robert. 2006. 'Strangers and Slaves in the Land of Egypt: Levinas and the Politics of Otherness'. In *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, edited by Ashar and Gad Horowitz. Toronto et al.: University of Toronto Press, 247-248.

9 Weckert, Al. 2014. 'Marshall B. Rosenberg: Bausteine einer Biografie – Die Grenzen der klinischen Psychologie und der Weg zu einer besseren Welt.' *Kommunikation und Seminar* 4, 15-16; 'Marshall B. Rosenberg, PhD, Founder and Mediator of Nonviolent Communication', <http://www.jerusalem-academy.org/marshall-b-rosenberg.html>, accessed April 2018.



Dr Martin Ramstedt





## How Buddhists Can Effectively Contribute to Peace-making and an Education for Peace

On the basis of their respective traditions, Buddhists have over the years developed a plethora of skills and methods that are greatly contributing to health care, leadership training, social change programmes, formal education in schools, and peace-making, such as Karuna Training<sup>10</sup>, 5 Keys of Mindful Communication<sup>11</sup>, Deep Listening<sup>12</sup>, Mind with Heart<sup>13</sup>, seminars offered by the European Institute of Applied Buddhism<sup>14</sup>,

---

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.karunatraining.com/>.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.greenzonetalk.com/>.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.sukhavati.eu/akademie/detail/0/deep-listening-3/>.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://charterforcompassion.org/mind-with-heart>.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.eiab.eu/>.

Feeding Your Demons<sup>15</sup>, and many others. It would indeed be worthwhile exploring how the different skills offered in the various trainings might enhance our capacities for peace-making, and might therefore lend themselves to contributing to an interreligious and intercultural education for peace. I do not have the space here to do so, though. Suffice it to say that in heightened situations marked by strong distrust, contempt and hostility, tolerance is obviously not enough. For good reasons, established Buddhist ethics requires us to reach out much further beyond our cultural, cognitive and emotional comfort zones to a hostile you, to exchange self for other. The interdependent

---

<sup>15</sup> See for instance [http://www.feedingyourdemons.co.uk/feeding/Feeding\\_your\\_demons.html](http://www.feedingyourdemons.co.uk/feeding/Feeding_your_demons.html).

contemplative disciplines of compassion and wisdom teach us that we need to develop a firm conviction of the intrinsic value of each person, empathy, deep listening, understanding, the ability to know what to accept and reject, while being able to melt the fear of others that cloud the profound goodness of their as well as our enlightened heart-mind. 🧘







# Colophon

**Final Editing:**  
Ron Eichhorn

**Graphic Design:**  
Noemi Carmona Laan  
from [www.numydesigns.com](http://www.numydesigns.com)



# Contact the EBU

[www.europeanbuddhistunion.org](http://www.europeanbuddhistunion.org)  
[info@europeanbuddhistunion.org](mailto:info@europeanbuddhistunion.org)

 EuropeanBuddhistUnion

The EBU was founded in 1975 in London and is a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders and Religions for Peace.

In 2008 the EBU obtained official participatory status with the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations at the Council of Europe.





THE EBU  
APPRECIATES YOUR  
INTEREST IN OUR  
MAGAZINE

