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**HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE
CONNECT WITH THE DHARMA
IN OUR FAST-MOVING WORLD?**

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Editorial

Dear readers,

With great pleasure I present to you the fourth installment of our European Buddhist Magazine.

How do young people connect with the Dharma in our fast-moving world? This is the question we pose in this issue. You will find some quite personal takes from young Buddhists, coming from different countries and traditions, on how they found the Dharma and what it means for them to practice Buddhism.

Personally, I found it quite enlightening to read these thoughts and they reminded me of the time when I myself stepped on the path, in a time before the Internet and cell phones, which seems very distant right now.

I wish you a joyful reading, which may inspire you as much as it did me!

With a deep bow and my best wishes in the Dharma,



Ron Eichhorn - Mio Sop
European Buddhist Union President



Vision, Energy, Action inspiring the next generation of Buddhists

By Prajnaketu

As the Triratna Young Buddhist Coordinator for Europe, I'm often asked 'how can we attract more young people?'. In a way, the answer is simple: we present the Dharma in its most essential, radical, form. In this form, the Dharma simply is attractive – to young and old alike. That said, we often need some more practical guidance on what this does and doesn't look like. In this piece, drawn from a document I wrote in 2016, Vision, Energy, Action: a guide to inspiring young Buddhists, I explore some of the ways in which we can support young people in our sanghas. Although my experience is inevitably rooted in the Triratna Buddhist Community (henceforth 'Triratna'), I hope that some of our insights in this area may be of interest more widely.

Vision

Many young people respond to boldness, ambition, and a myth of being part of something

bigger than themselves. The myth of building a community that has a clear altruistic dimension alongside personal development has been central to Ugyen Sangharakshita's (the founder of the Triratna) teaching. Themes such as the New Society, Building the Buddhaland, Transforming Self and World, and the Bodhisattva Ideal have been present throughout Triratna's fifty-year history. And such an emphasis is as attractive as ever. It's also very attractive to see other people of (all ages) who are passionate about changing the world and are clearly putting it into practice. My view is that the more that Buddhists look outwards at what we can offer the world, the more attractive Buddhism will become to young people.

Dana (generosity) forms a strong part of this vision. Dana appeals to the idealism of young people as an immediate way of addressing the consumerist

economic paradigm that is the cause of so much suffering in the world. It also addresses the fact that a lot of young people struggle financially. For example, it is very common for people in their twenties, in the UK at least, to have student debts of GBP 35,000-40,000 (EUR 40,000-46,000) – so publicising that our Dharma events are run on a dana basis removes one obstacle to young people getting involved.

In Triratna we've found it helps to highlight on websites and social media that we are part of an international movement whose aim is to make the Buddha's teaching of personal liberation and social transformation available in the modern world.

We also emphasise that the more contemplative elements of Buddhist practice are conditions for making this transformation possible, not ends in themselves: "To help the world become a better place we need to become a

bigger person. We need to train ourselves in becoming wiser, more courageous, creative, empathetic and committed" (Triratna London Buddhist Centre publicity)

It can be inspiring to hear that world-transformation starts with dana because if we want to change the world we need to think more in terms of contributing than consuming. And this goes for the teachers as well as the participants. So rather than talking about dana exclusively in terms of 'covering costs', we might say it's the basis of a radical new way of relating to what we value. "Generosity is of fundamental importance in Buddhism... our aim is to inspire a culture of generosity in the way we share Buddhist teachings." (Triratna Sheffield Buddhist Centre website)

A lot of young people respond positively to publicity that challenges, and differentiates the Dharma from, the soft, passive, undemanding, individualistic image that Buddhism sometimes has in Western culture. (Just type 'meditation images' into a search engine to see what I mean!) Challenging stereotypes can be perceived as edgy and exciting, and there can also be a degree of pride in being part of something distinctive – as well as being truer to the spirit of the Dharma.

So, for example (all from

Triratna London Buddhist Centre publicity):

- We can emphasise clarity and the systematic nature of Dharma practice to differentiate from 'New Age'. E.g. "These courses are a step-by-step guide that can transform your perspective on the world and provide you with tools you can use for a lifetime"
- We can emphasise the Transcendental to differentiate from 'self-help' and therapeutic contexts. E.g. "This [introduction to devotional practice] takes us through the stages that help us glimpse, move towards and realise our limitless potential"
- We can emphasise altruism, compassionate action, and community to differentiate from 'lifestyles' or 'well-being'. E.g. "Being a Buddhist and joining the Sangha is not like joining a group, but a radically new way of living and relating to others. With shared practices and ideals, we not only become more of an individual, but form the nucleus of a new society; one that is beneficial for ourselves and the world."
- And we can emphasise mystery and adventure

to differentiate from adult education. E.g. "[These mornings aim at] how to move beyond ordinary, divided consciousness into Samadhi."

Energy

We all tune-in to the energy of an event very quickly, even if we're not consciously aware of it. Experience within Triratna has shown that a slightly 'rambunctious' atmosphere is most attractive to young people. This kind of energy is one of the characteristic features of young Buddhists' retreats and, I believe, is a major part of their success. In a wider context it can be achieved in a number of ways.

The simplest way is just to have lots of people present – the effect of a buzzing space is attractive to a lot of young people (think: clubs, gigs, festivals, parties...). This can be achieved by lifting the limit on numbers, removing the need to book, and, as I mentioned before, running events on a dana basis. Young people (and men, apparently) are the most likely to leave booking until the last minute – in other words, too late – and even be put off by it. And running events on a dana basis opens them to the widest possible audience. The effect of a crowded space may not be universally popular, but I



Picture: kimson-doan-unsplash

can't put it too strongly that we need to become confident and comfortable with large numbers of people being interested in Buddhism!

In addition, it's been observed that the placement of meditation in an event can make a difference to the energy of a gathering. Placing meditation at the start can set a sleepy, 'precious', refined, or even awkward tone for the evening and can inhibit the extent to which people feel at ease and able to connect with one another when they arrive. This is particularly the case if people arrive for the first time into a

silent room. Within Triratna– and perhaps many Buddhist groups – a tea break is something of an institution so if a lot of the tea-break is devoted to 'coming round' from meditation, this is time that is potentially lost for building connections between people.

It's also been observed that holding meditation as a standalone activity tends to attract people who are more interested in calm or de-stressing, and remaining in their own 'bubble', and as such it doesn't facilitate the growth of a community. I can recall going along to a regular

meditation class in London in the late 2000s and sometimes I would be able to avoid saying a single word to anyone from arrival to exit – needless to say, if we want to encourage a sense of community, we need to counteract this tendency!

Starting off with a lively talk and discussion can help to set a positive tone to the event and also give you a chance to meet and appreciate the newer people who are coming along before everyone goes silent. There is also quite a lot of anecdotal – and scriptural – support for the idea that people are actually better prepared for

meditation after a stimulating Dharma talk and discussion than coming straight from the street or work.

Action

Another key message is to convey regularly is that 'there is still more to learn!'. The Dharma is deep and cannot be fathomed in the course of a single evening or even a series of courses. But how to access those depths, particularly in light of the sometimes bewildering array of events going on in Buddhist sanghas, can be completely opaque to newer people. So, the more systematic and explicit we are in talking about next steps, and personally inviting people to take them, the easier they will find it to pursue the Dharma more deeply. This also conveys the principle that this presentation of the Dharma is systematic and works.

In Oxford where I run a small group, I make a point of encouraging everyone to participate in the running of the Sangha from the very first night of an introductory course. We ask for volunteers to help wash up, put away the mats and cushions, arrive early next time to help set up the room, bake a cake for next week, bring along flowers for the shrine...The idea is to make it clear that dana

involves more than money and that everyone's contribution is valued.

There are as many ways for young people to get practically involved in Buddhist sanghas as there is imagination in the people running them. Asking young people to be involved in the following have been good ways in:

- Designing and/or distributing publicity
- Maintaining a social media presence – websites and beyond!
- Organising Buddhist Action Month activities
- Fundraising
- Hosting socials
- Running festival days
- Doing whatever needs doing!

But 'next steps' don't end with practical matters – within Triratna there is a strong emphasis on study groups, going on retreat, living together with other Buddhists, participating in long residential study courses, and even starting up businesses together. All of these provide avenues along which young people (and others) can pursue their Dharma practice, and yet there are so many opportunities for further developments too.

Young Buddhist groups

Depending on the size or organisation of the sangha one may find that the young people who come along don't know each other very well (though they may be quite ok with not knowing other young people). They may come to different evenings or just not really 'clock' age as something significant (and that's fine too).

But for some young people it can be nothing short of a revelation that there are other young people interested in Buddhism, particularly if your sangha's age demographic is skewed towards the middle-aged, which many are! Such young people will find it tremendously inspiring to encounter others at their stage of life who are asking the same questions as themselves, and who may even be living out some of the answers.

In Triratna in Europe, there are around 30 young Buddhist groups which are mostly run by young people for young people. They vary tremendously in terms of size and formality: from 40-50 people attending a class at the Triratna London Buddhist Centre to 4-5 people meeting up for vegan pizza in Oxford. The point of these groups is twofold: first, for young people to get

experience of responsibility in sharing the Dharma with others and, second, to create peer friendships between those who might be in an age-minority. Whilst the numerical success of these groups has been modest for the most part, one of the major outcomes has been that the facilitators running these groups have got a taste for

communicating and serving the Dharma in our community. In fact, many of the younger people entering the Triratna Order over the last five years have come from this pool of facilitators.

In summary, if we want to inspire the next generations of Dharma practitioners we need to communicate a bold vision of

human life, organise our events so as encourage a positive sense of energy, and signpost next steps to greater depth. Many of us are already doing things along these lines and yet there is still enormous scope for creativity and innovation. I believe it's a very exciting time to be a young Buddhist indeed! 🌀



Why practice under the guidance of a Buddhist master in the 21st century?



By An Soeng Philipp Andriopoulos

As the spokesperson in Vienna for the Yun Hwa Sangha's Young Sangha, I help organize practices and international Retreats for young people. I have practiced Buddhism for 7 years with Supreme Matriarch Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim, the founder of the Yun Hwa Sangha of World Social Buddhism. The title of "Dae Poep Sa Nim" means "Great Dharma Master." In our Sangha, we believe Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim has reached the highest level of enlightenment.

When young people come to our center in Vienna, one of the aspects of our sangha that often determines whether people stay or leave is the fact that we have a master. If you cannot accept having a Master, World Social Buddhism is probably not for you, unless you reconsider your concepts.

Some of the questions that come up in these conversations are:

"How can we know that someone is enlightened? And, if enlightenment exists, how can it be verified?"

"Do you lose yourself when you place so much trust into a single person?"

"Are you not giving up all responsibility for yourself, when you follow the teachings of a single religious or spiritual leader with full commitment?"

These and similar questions are asked when people first join Yun Hwa practice.

While I'm fully dedicated to my Master Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim, I can understand the skepticism that some of the young people that visit us pose. In this article, I will try to explain, from my experience, how I went from a skeptic to a very dedicated student and why I believe that practicing with a Master is the right path for myself and for many others.

Before I practiced Buddhism, I was critical of religions. From what I gathered in school and university, religions usually had to do with power. When paired with governmental power, these conditions often leading to oppression, discrimination of other groups in society, and wars. I could never see myself being part of any religious or spiritual organization.

For westerners, having a master is something that may seem antiquated. It is a concept we either associate with the past or

that might bring up images from science fiction, fantasy or Kung Fu movies.

Society today is very individualistic, everyone seeking to find their own truth combining ideas from here and there. Thereby, the emphasis is often put on diversity rather than committing to a single source of truth. In particular, during this age of fake news and social media bubbles, completely trusting one source can be perceived as being extreme in itself.

The Buddhist tradition, however, has always had masters. Since Shakyamuni Buddha's days 2600 years ago, masters like Bodhidharma, Hui Ke, Nagarjuna, Ma Tsu, Won Hyo or Uicheon, to name a few within the Social Buddhist lineage. But, what exactly is a master? Although we use the word in western culture, the definition or concept of a Master differs when compared to the Asian understanding.

A "master" in Asian culture is someone who receives great, almost unconditional, respect for his accomplishments and attainment. The concept of masterhood was integrated into Asian culture through Buddhism,

Daoism and Confucianism. In most Asian cultures, you do not need to explain the concept of a master because it is innately understood. That kind of respect for a master, elders, or people in high positions is something that is foreign to most westerners.

To be simply admitted to learn from a master, for instance, is considered a great honor in itself. It is never taken for granted in Asian cultures. The master is more than a person; the master embodies the treasure of his or her attainment. In the context of Buddhist belief, it is a level of attainment that was developed over many lives.

When I started practicing, my girlfriend at the time and I had a crisis in our relationship and we were looking for something that might help us fix our relationship. Through her initiative, we started practicing together. Despite having studied Japanese culture and being a fan of Asian literature and movies in general, the first time I heard about Dae Poep Sa Nim, I was not sure what to think. It was not a far stretch for me that enlightenment existed. For some reason, I had always believed that humans could attain something that was greater. But how could I know if I had found the real thing?

Something we recommend to most people who come to our centers from the beginning, is

that they simply try the practice for a couple of weeks and observe what it does for them. Why practice if you do not feel a positive change in your life? Buddhism is based on attainment and that can only be reached through practice. Hence you can only create a change in your life if you practice it. My girlfriend and I were open to this approach.

The Yun Hwa practice in its full form is quite challenging for newcomers. The practice you do at home for instance, consists of 108 prostrations, Ki Song body exercises, 15-30min sitting meditation in the morning, and another 15-30min of Meditation in the evening. In addition, we have a mantra assignment of counting 1000 mantras throughout the day. Very few

people manage to do the whole practice right away.

My girlfriend and I started mostly with the mantra assignment. After a couple of weeks, we both reflected about our experience. We realized that since we had been doing the mantra, our arguments which had been very heated, became less dramatic. Doing the mantra made us more attentive of each other and less attached to our emotions. In the end, we still separated, but I kept practicing and intensified my practice when the relationship split.

After a couple of months, friends and family started telling me that they perceived a change in me. They felt that I had become calmer, that I dealt with them more respectfully and was more



Picture: pexels-josh-hild

aware of their needs. Before that, the people closest to me often considered me to be moody and impatient. They had noticed that these characteristics began to change.

So, I had tried the Yun Hwa practice and it worked. It added to my life in positive way. At that point, I thought it was time to see the master. Without meeting the master, I could not fully commit to the Yun Hwa Sangha even if I noticed some positive effects. For that, I had to travel to Lotus Buddhist Monastery in Hawaii, the place where Dae Poep Sa Nim lives and teaches.

The first memory I have of Dae Poep Sa Nim is at a large dinner party, where all practitioners of the retreat were invited to dine together. Dae Poep Sa Nim was wearing a long dark blue dress and Dae Poep Sa Nim's hair was styled up beautifully with a decorative hairpin. I sensed a very strong presence. For some reason, it was not easy for me to look at Dae Poep Sa Nim. I felt as though even the most hidden parts of myself were being revealed in that moment. It made me feel uncomfortable and it took a couple of years until that would change. When I reflect on it now, I feel that being in the presence of Dae Poep Sa Nim shows you where your mind is in that moment.

Meeting Dae Poep Sa Nim is something that is difficult to describe and, in reality, can only be experienced in person. From the people I have talked to, everyone experiences it differently, but there often is some sort of strong reaction or impact. I stayed at the retreat for 6 weeks and, like all practitioners, was seeing Dae Poep Sa Nim every day, having lunch, experiencing dharma speeches and having the great opportunity to have a personal interview with Dae Poep Sa Nim.

Although I felt uncomfortable at first, I decided to go along with it for the moment. I was also still dealing with my break-up at the time. One thing that comforted me and convinced me more and more over time were the many stories people told about how they came to the sangha, and how Dae Poep Sa Nim changed their lives.

Another observation I started to make in the first years of joining the Yun Hwa sangha was how the people closest to the master acted and treated people. One of Dae Poep Sa Nim's most profound teachings, in my opinion, is to treat everyone like a Buddha. In that way, the master has equal respect for the student and students in turn should treat everyone with the same respect, from the master to the person

working at the supermarket. The master's attainment is revered and respected because a true master lives life completely for others, offering to the students continuously.

In the end, master or no master, as a student you decide what you do and how you act. You have full responsibility for your actions. A true master teaches you to master yourself and never demands following his teachings blindly. Like taking a driver's license, the master can teach you how to drive, but you are the driver of your car. It is all on you, for better or for worse.

The mind alone creates this world; it can be hell or it can be paradise. Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim reaffirmed my belief in humanity and today I am part of the Yun Hwa Sangha with a feeling of purpose. Thanks to Dae Poep Sa Nim I have no doubt that this world, in its entirety, will one day experience peace. ◎

Guillaume Bloch, Marie Kalfon, Armand Huet and Marie Berthelot are four young practitioners of Reiyukai Buddhism in France. They explain how practising Buddhism and applying Buddhist teachings transforms their lives.

Marie Kalfon

"I discovered the practice with a friend of mine, Barbara. As I was looking for a meditation group, I joined her for her Sutra recitation. I felt the benefit of this recitation physically; it pleased me. At that time, reciting it every day allowed me to build a new life in my home.

Beyond recitation, through discussion with young people, I realised that we are all experiencing difficult situations. At one meeting, I heard a 17-year-old member say: "I want to build my life with the teachings of Reiyukai Buddhism, no longer through the expectations and judgements of my classmates towards me, and more broadly according to the people around me." I was particularly impressed that a person so young could show such humility. His experience reflected the daily reality of many young participants at the meetings, triggering many shared questions as well as moments of friendship. By connecting with the teaching of Reiyukai, we understood that we all bear family karmas that carry us away into emotional states. There are ways to gradually create distance from these states, such as reciting the Sutra or sharing our experiences. In this way, I am progressively creating a different consciousness, through these bonds of spiritual friendship between us.

For example, once when I arrived at a meeting, I was devastated inside. A practitioner welcomed me and said: "You must not bear this state alone, come and pay homage to the family altar with the sangha." Then we exchanged on an ongoing situation in my family: my sister had agreed to external healing help. I realised that I was devastated because I was afraid that she would not be well cared for and that the situation would get out of hand. Then I was able to hear that I, too, have a long way to go. Just like my sister, I must accept the help of others, and stop trying to "save" other people but rather respect their choices. After this, my heightened emotional state subsided. I was able to participate in the end of the meeting with joy."



Armand

"Reiyukai Buddhism encourages us to develop relationships of spiritual friendship with people around us, and especially with those whom we have chosen to practice with us. Our relationships with people are often driven by our expectations and interests. Building a relationship of spiritual friendship is to place common progress in Buddhist teachings at the centre of the relationship. Here is how I tried to develop this kind of a mutual progressive relationship with one of my friends:

This friend of mine had gone to Japan to study for a semester. During my holidays, I had the opportunity to visit him in Tokyo, as he established himself in the city. I was surprised to see how much my friend's mind was entirely taken up by the management of his daily life and his difficulty adapting to the culture, which left little room for our relationship and our common Buddhist research.

When I returned to France, I was disappointed about this encounter and worried about my friend's mindset. My elders encouraged me to develop compassion towards him and build my life in order to develop an awareness of these conditions. When my girlfriend, whom also practices with me, took a new job, I saw the same spirit of management and control rise up in her, and I made the connection with my own spirit in my search for a job. This experience allowed me to become aware of this tendency we all shared and not let myself be led by it. It also allowed me to develop a softer and more understanding heart towards my friend in Japan, who contacted me a month later to express that he had become aware of his own imprisonment, and to apologise.

These bonds of research and spiritual friendship allow us to progress together in our practices, without being based on our conceptions."



Guillaume

"When I was a child, I made choices for my life and my education according to my parents' expectations, and to please others around me. It didn't make me happy and I felt that I had to change many things, in order to build my own life.

I met the Reiyukai at the age of 27, at a very difficult point in my life.

I heard I could recite the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma with the desire to develop gratitude for my ancestors and for those beings around me, and I gradually felt closer to them. Then I accepted my parents as they were, and this change in me even made them want to practice with me.

Practicing with other young people allowed me to mutually develop and taste the kindness and listening between us. This created confidence and I tried new ways that I didn't dare fathom before; for example, in my job. I began to learn how to ask for help when problems arose, instead of staying alone and indulging in avoidance behaviour.

One can change at any age, but I can say that it was a stroke of fortune to meet these teachings at a young age. This is what motivated me to take on a role in developing the practice among young people."



Marie Berthelot

It has been three years since I discovered the Reiyukai Buddha's teachings, and thanks to my practice, I have been able to transform many of my life circumstances, even difficult ones.

Before, I used to be of a solitary and withdrawn nature, which often prevented me from creating relationships with others, especially with young people.

Today, I see that my life is taking a completely different direction. For example, as part of the organisation of the first youth weekend, I agreed to call a list of young people to invite them to attend the seminar. But I typically hate doing this, because talking on the phone makes me feel very anxious. I recited the Sutra to change my mind, overcome my fear, and I finally managed to call everyone. I then felt a feeling of satisfaction.

Since then, I have started a job as a secretary and it doesn't bother me anymore to have to make phone calls.

As I gradually progressed on my path of practice, I saw that I was changing. I finally became part of the youth group's core: seven young people who did not know each other, determined to work together every day for a common cause - to build a team for bettering the lives of young people in France, based on Buddha's teachings. With the young practitioners, I am developing a solid link that enables us to help each other and progress together. It allows us to create a spiritual friendship.

I feel moved as I write these lines, because I think back to who I was three years ago, or rather, the illusion I had of my life at that time. I now see myself full of enthusiasm for being connected with other young people, while I used to think that my happiness lay in solitude. It makes me feel intense joy. ◎



TOUCHING PEACE TOGETHER

By Matthias Grümayer



As young Buddhists all over Europe we have some things in common. The most prominent one being our spiritual ancestor Buddha Shakyamuni, otherwise known as Buddha Gotama, or the Thatagata. He is the root of all our traditions. When he first shared the Dharma with his friends he came up with the 4 Noble Truths: Suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the path.

I want to take these 4 steps as a guideline, a map to compose this article. Beginning with the status quo and ending with the path of healing and transformation.

The question I want to investigate in this article, is: What can we as young Buddhists contribute to make a future possible? What is the path which can lead us out of the difficult situation we face on a collective and individual level? Let's start with the investigation:

1. Suffering or Reality Check!

The world's ecosystems are not in a good shape.

Human beings have a negative impact on the climate, the

pollution of the air, the land and the oceans.

The killing in war zones are often related to the exploitation of resources, like oil or minerals.

Billions of animals are being bred to be killed every year.

Millions of people are starving.

Millions are leaving their home, looking for a better place to life, because of ecological, economic and political reasons.

Many poor countries are being exploited by a few rich countries.

This is the collective level - the global level of suffering. The points above are just a few very general spheres of suffering which have great impact. I put them there in all their ugliness to wake us up, to create a sense of urgency. Many of these factors, if continued as they do today, point to an unpleasant future for mankind. The danger of human extinction is ever increasing, unless we, the young people, initiate a change in a direction of well-being for ourselves and the world and all its living beings.

Face it! This is our reality! Let this in! Let us come into touch with the unpleasantness. Not

to drown in desperation, but to wake us from our sleep of forgetfulness. Our actions have consequences. What have we done as a species? To embrace the current situation is where the journey for awakening begins.

The Bodhisattva Siddharta faced the suffering on his rides out of his palace. There he saw an old man, a dying person, a corpse and a holy man. Confronted with the fate of all those who live, motivated Siddharta to leave his home and to start his quest for enlightenment.

All of us live in a little palace, a bubble of self-indulgence, of carelessness, loosing ourselves in the internet or other "joys" to avoid suffering all together. The first step on the path of awakening is stopping to pretend that suffering is not there. In other words, to turn around and face it directly.

2. The cause of Suffering or WHYYYY??????

When we have the courage to face suffering in and around us and allow our anger, sadness, and frustration to be there and to take care of it - holding it tenderly, breathing in and out in our meditation, we can

begin to see the causes for the situation we find ourselves in. It is our multiplied, collective greed, anger and unwillingness to really look (delusion), that destroys us and our planet. And through reflection we can come to the insight that to revolt and change this situation, means to stop attempting to change things from the outside. The revolution must start from within.

Developing the eyes of interbeing (interdependence) we can see that it is our constant demand for things, cheap means of travel (airplane) and the food we eat that heats up our planet. It is the choices we make, our thirst for alcohol and hunger for meat which are the causes for a lot of suffering which has a long-lasting effect on future generations. It is important for us to ask ourselves: Which forces drive us? From which place do our actions originate? How do we look at ourselves and the world? Do we look with eyes of exploitation, or do we look with the eyes of understanding and love?

3. The End of Suffering or the Revolution of Waking Up

The revolution starts with looking. If we allow ourselves to see and really experience our situation, we can identify the causes for our individual and collective

suffering. If we have identified the causes we can start to work towards the goal of feeding these causes less and less until we stop feeding them all together. This is how I understand Right Diligence: Feeding the good factors and starving the unhelpful-factors. This can mean that we boycott certain brands which harm the environment or the society, or it can mean that we start a diet which reduces suffering of living beings by going vegetarian or even vegan.

4. The path that leads to awakening

We need to question what we learned in school about life and the world, about how our society works. We need to question all the promises that were planted in us by the influence of advertisement.

Is the consumption of stuff really making us happy? Or is the void inside growing bigger and bigger? Asking questions like these, we can start to align our thinking and review our basic assumptions about life and formulate intentions for ourselves which lead us towards a happy present and future.

We can also share these through the means of our speech with our friends, so we can come to a more accurate understanding of reality together. Also, in the

domain of speech, there is a big opportunity to reduce suffering as well. So much harm is done by harmful speech!

First, we have to learn the ability to stop, to calm our body and mind and to see clearly and deeply. Often, we think we need to do something to change the world. But acting blindly, has created all this mass of suffering in the first place.

Through engaging in mindfulness practice, we can learn to come home to our body. By following our inbreath and outbreath we can make contact with ourselves. Coming home to our bodies, we can make contact with our emotions, learn to let them be and hold them with tenderness and kindness. Through this process we learn to take care of ourselves, and the more we will be able to develop kindness towards ourselves. A kindness that will, without trying, radiate outwards to others.

Engaging in this process we increase our awareness of our actions of body, speech and mind and we can start to see our impulses and if they are helpful or leading to more suffering for ourselves and others. We can start to practice to nourish states of mind like compassion, tenderness, understanding and love towards ourselves and others. On the other hand, we can learn to stop ourselves from

being angry at ourselves or being jealous or watching the 4th episode of a TV series in a row, because we don't want to be in touch with how tired we actually are.

Through the practice of mindfulness, concentration and insight, we start to see the reality of things. With a calm mind we can start to see which actions lead towards a future to be possible, and what that will bring to the future. It will lead to important decisions, like choosing a job which doesn't cause anyone suffering. Do we act out of greed, lust, anger - or do we act in order not to be in touch with suffering, to blind ourselves

To work with the 5 Sila or the 5 Mindfulness trainings, as they are transmitted in the Plumvillage-Tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, are a means of orientation which can be helpful in this endeavor. To have a

direction in life is something very precious. With the practice of the five Buddhist ethical guidelines, we can stop the cycle of destruction. We can start to see that happiness arises from living a simple and ethical life, and that happiness arises from a clear and calm mind.

Touching Peace Together

The more we align ourselves with the five Buddhist ethical guidelines, the more we become real revolutionaries. A part of a worldwide movement which has the aim to create a culture of peace and harmonious living.

Entering a Sangha (the community of practitioners) we enter a community that strives to live in harmony and awareness. In our sangha we can find true refuge. It is a circle of people where the dharma is studied and practiced and where we can be who we are and share our happiness and suffering. In a

time where loneliness is burning like wildfire, it provides a coming together, a network of support, and doing so quenches a deep thirst for togetherness.

Together, we can engage in the true revolution of turning around, to go against the stream of our reaction to pain, fear and other strong emotions. Instead of turning away from our suffering we can learn to embrace it and to start to make peace with ourselves. The more we end the war within, we become a refuge for others.

Feeling accepted and supported on the way we can come together to look deeply, at the way we live and which way is leading into a happy future.

The practice of mindfulness and kindness has the capacity to change the fate of humanity if it is practiced on a mass level. Engaging with the dharma we can make a real change. ◎



BUDDHISM AND YOUNG PEOPLE: THE KEY TO SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

By Takako Yeung



What do the Buddhism which I practice within SGI (hereafter referred to as Buddhism) and young people have in common? At first glance it might seem that the answer is 'nothing at all'. A common view of Buddhism might be that it involves meditation and calmness, perhaps a degree of detachment from everyday life. Whereas young people might be seen as the opposite of this – energetic and self-absorbed as they grapple with establishing themselves, their careers and their lives. However together, Buddhism and young people have the potential to transform the world we live in. And it is this possibility of transformation that is the key to Buddhism's attractiveness to youth. As a religion borne out of the desire

to eliminate suffering based on the inner transformation of individuals, Buddhism has the ability to appeal to young people's wish to improve the world around them.

As a Politics teacher I spend most days surrounded by teenagers discussing how the world works. It is evident that many young people are troubled by what they see around them. Decisions are made by governments that don't necessarily reflect the views of the young and it is easy for them to feel a sense of powerlessness. They often don't think that it's possible to change things and this can lead to them losing hope and feeling that they can't make a difference. Crimes committed by and against young people are frequently reported in the media, and the news cycle can seem relentlessly bleak.

However Buddhism teaches that each individual has incredible power, that our inner transformation can have a positive impact on the world around us. In fact, it is precisely when young people determine to undergo this inner transformation that society has the potential to establish respect for the dignity of all life as its foundation. This, after all, is the aim of Buddhism and it is one that young people share.

Daisaku Ikeda, President of the lay Buddhist organisation Soka Gakkai International (SGI), has particularly high hopes for youth, saying in his 2017 Peace Proposal to the United Nations entitled "The Global Solidarity of Youth: Ushering In a New Era of Hope":

"When youth make the determination to illuminate the corner of the world they inhabit now, it brings into being a space of security in which people can regain hope and the power to live. The determination to live together that is ignited in this space of security shines as an embodiment of the global society in which no one is left behind, inspiring courage in people living in other communities who confront similar challenges."¹

Rather than being thought of as too inexperienced or lacking in the skills necessary to take a lead, Buddhism teaches that young people have a great role in using their passion and determination to instigate great changes not only in their own lives, but also in the lives of those around them. Buddhism teaches that all people are worthy of respect, and that of course includes those who are young. It

¹ The full text is available on the SGI-UK website: www.sgi-uk.org/sjipresident/peace-proposals



that sense, Buddhism embodies ideas of equality that appeal to young people, many of whom have a keen sense of justice.

When young people awaken to the true value of their life, they have the ability to give hope and inspiration to others. They are able to lead lives where they can positively transform any situation and take on any challenge, and their friends and family gain the belief that they too might be able to do the same. This is the complete opposite to the powerlessness that many young people feel or are made to feel.

The Buddhist philosophy practised by SGI members teaches that it is through

each person achieving an unshakeable foundation of happiness, based on absolute respect for their own life and the life of others, that we are able to spread hope and joy to our environment. It is these ripples of hope that will transform our world. With Buddhism young people have a concrete way to achieve the positive change that so many of them long for.

This year Soka Gakkai International-UK (SGI-UK) was able to witness the effect of young people living their lives based on their Buddhist practice. In March 2018, the youth of SGI-UK decided to create an event with 6000 participants called Generation Hope, three meetings held in three locations – Manchester,

Bristol and London – on the same day. It was our way of showing the world that there is a group of young people who haven't given up on society, who know that things can change for the better, and who are determined to be at the forefront of that positive change. It was the largest gathering of youth we had ever had in SGI-UK and the planning and preparation for the event was led by youth with the full support of the entire organisation.

Generation Hope was a great success, achieving the aim of 6000 young people filling all three venues. It enabled every person to feel a sense of empowerment and hope about the possibility of change. This was achieved through cultural

performances such as live music and dance, and through experiences of how Buddhist practice had transformed people's lives. The feedback from those who attended was incredibly positive. One guest said, "I want to remember that one person can make a difference, and to never give up. Change is possible."

Buddhism has so much to offer everyone, and in particular the youth of the world. It gives us the means to reveal our enlightened state. This enlightened state, what Mahayana Buddhists call our Buddha nature, can be displayed by each individual. It is the unleashing of this positive force from within that is the key

to the transformation of our lives and the world around us.

When young people are respected and nurtured in the way that Buddhism teaches, and are given the opportunities and support to reveal their inherent potential, incredible things can happen. SGI-UK has been revitalised as a result of the actions of its youth. Everyone's practice has been refreshed as we engaged in dialogue with those in our environment to encourage them in the spirit of Generation Hope. The joy of practising Buddhism is evident throughout our organisation, and people are brimming with experiences of how Buddhism has enabled them to transform

their lives. It was the youth taking a bold and courageous stand that enabled this to happen. And it was the support and encouragement of our older and more experienced friends in the practice that gave the youth the belief that they could do it. Different generations working together and learning from each other is something the world needs to see and put into action.

The solidarity of youth is a powerful thing. Young people often have a keen sense of justice and have therefore stood up against war, poverty and discrimination at key turning points in history. In a letter to one of his followers, Nichiren Daishonin, the thirteenth century



Buddhist monk who's Buddhist philosophy SGI bases itself on, wrote: 'Great events never have minor omens. When great evil occurs, great good follows.'²

It isn't difficult to see what we might call 'great evil' in the world we're living in. In terms of Nichiren Buddhism, we characterise it as anything that seeks to deny or disrespect the innate dignity of life. It will take a solidarity of people, led by the youth, committed to a peace based on absolute respect for all life to ensure that 'great good' will emerge.

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel recently made a joint appeal to the youth of the world. In it they said:

"There is no challenge that cannot be resolved if we unite in solidarity. We are confident that young people will take up the search for solutions, acting in solidarity from within their respective places of belonging across all differences of spiritual and cultural identity to generate waves of dynamic, shared action. We call on youth to take on the responsibility of walking together with the people, embracing the confidence that each of their actions will produce results in future."³

Buddhism empowers all people and it is this that particularly speaks to young people. What Buddhism teaches us is that right now, just as we are, in the midst of sometimes challenging circumstances, we can reveal our Buddha nature and make a firm determination to illuminate the corner of our world. When young people make a shared pledge to work for peace and the happiness of each individual the world can be transformed. Nobody can deny that this transformation is sorely needed. It is Buddhism that can awaken the young to their ability to change the world, and this is why it is so important for us to share

2 *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Volume 1, p. 168*

3 The full text is available at <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/lect/20180605-esquivel-ikeda-ji-appeal.html>





our philosophy with young people. When we do so, we are taking a firm step towards fulfilling the aim of Buddhism. With young people practising Buddhism we can all be confident that the world we want will definitely be achieved.

Takako Yeung

Youth Division Leader of SGI-UK ©

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