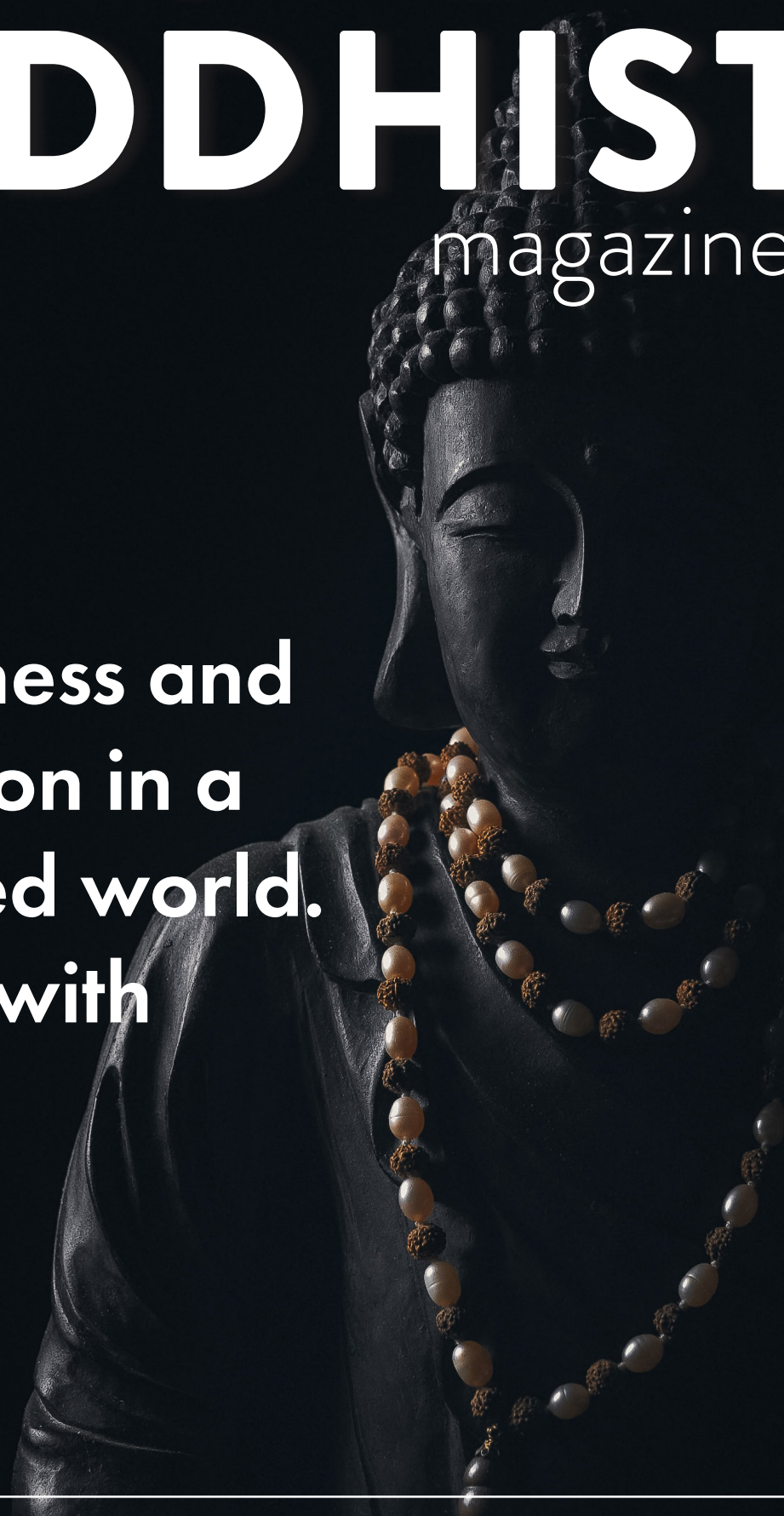


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EUROPEAN BUDDHIST

magazine

**Mindfulness and
Meditation in a
connected world.
Dealing with
conflict**



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Editorial

Dear friends and readers,

I sincerely hope this message finds you healthy and in good spirits.

Certainly, this time of the Coronavirus pandemic is a challenge for you, as it is for all of us. Moreover, challenges like climate change and social injustice still persist and are sources of worry and unrest all over the world.

It is important to meditate, to have a calm mind which has peace and serenity. Yet we don't close our eyes and ears to suffering. As Buddhists, we have the responsibility to raise our voice and act if it can help sentient beings and this wonderful globe.

This issue of our European Buddhist Magazine aims to reflect on some aspects of this current state of the world, which is why we have two subjects in the title - Mindfulness and Meditation in a connected world, and Dealing with conflicts.

We are happy and proud to present you the thoughts of some very prolific authors: Prof. Robert Szuksztul sheds a light on how conflicts can be approached and solved in a Buddhist context.

Reverend Satya Robyn wonders "What keeps Buddhist activists sane?" while Patrick Duhoux shares his personal experience with a difficult situation and how his Buddhist practice supported him in these trying times. David Viafora and Simon Brenner explain why keeping contact with your Sangha and disseminating the Dharma through online tools are an opportunity, especially when physical contact becomes impossible.

And finally, Ven. Lama Dondrub, Ricardo Guerrero and myself reflect on Mindfulness and Meditation in our busy world.

Every crisis, as the proverb goes, is also an opportunity.

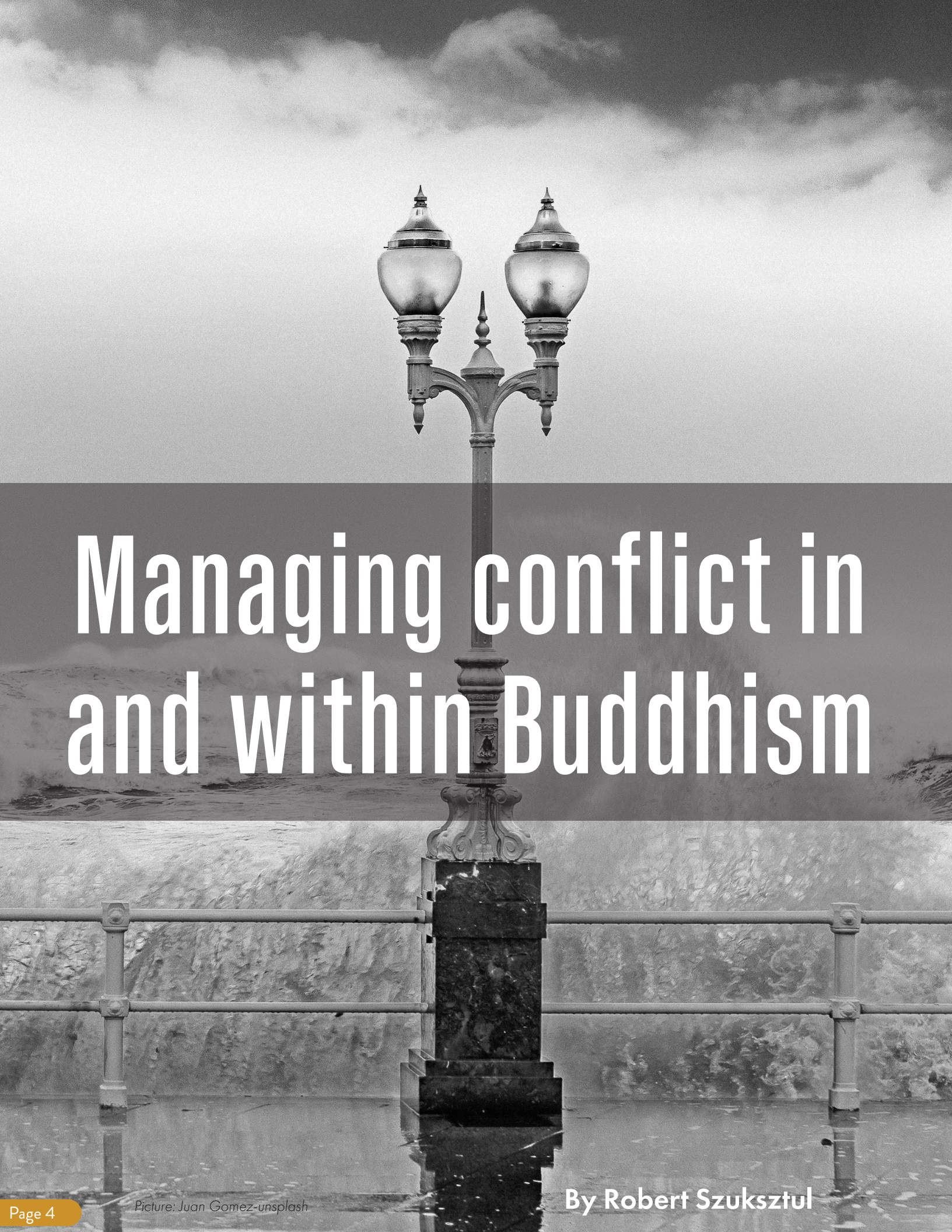
In this particular case, I believe it is a chance for us collectively and also for each one of us individually, which allows us to check whether we want to continue just as before, or if our course should be adjusted.

I am very confident that our planet will be a more healthy and beautiful one in the future, if we take this opportunity to look at ourselves and the way we live and deal with one another. We will have to have courage and endurance, and most of all, a mind of goodness.

All my best in the Dharma and stay healthy,



Ron Eichhorn - Mio Sop
European Buddhist Union President



Managing conflict in and within Buddhism

By Robert Szuksztul

Picture: Juan Gomez-unsplash

There is a story in the pali vinaya (Vin. Kd. 4.1.11 ff.) about a group of monks who decided to spend vassa (rain season, when monastics ceased to travel) in total silence in order to "all together, on friendly terms and harmonious, spend a comfortable rainy season and not go short of almsfood". The chapter is characteristically titled "Dwelling not in comfort" – the Buddha rebukes the monks for their behaviour, noting that it will not lead to the positive perceptions of the sangha in the wider society. Instead of approving of a superficial harmony based on limiting interaction, the Buddha lays down a rule about invitation (*pāvaranā*) to criticism about perceived acts of misbehaviour. Such invitation given to the Order is expected of every monastic, and seen as a way of conduct purification, where misdeeds are acknowledged and amends made (see: Horner and Brahmali, 2014, pp. 1613–17).

This story is very relevant to the problem of right conflict management. What it tells us, is that in order to really dwell in comfort (i.e. the satisfaction and peace of mind resulting from good conduct), one often needs to face uncomfortable situations, criticisms and disagreements. Avoiding such challenges, for example by cutting contact, is in fact described as unwholesome and unbeneficial by the Buddha. Both individuals and groups require feedback about their actions by the surrounding social environment. Such mutual keeping in check provides healthy condition for the Buddhist sangha or any other organisation for that matter. That was the reason why the Buddha always kept the monastic sangha in a very close contact with the lay society. In addition to its being unwholesome, it is also futile to try to avoid conflicts altogether; speaking very generally, any organised structure (or any individual within such structure) will ultimately

be faced with the problem of choice due to the changes of internal and/or external environment. Given the plurality of plausible choices, differences in motivations, backgrounds etc., the creation of conflicting branching groups is a natural and unavoidable process. The goal, therefore, should be to engage in right types of conflict, for the right reasons, and in the right way, and to embrace them for their purifying, clarifying and unifying potential for the present and future contexts. What follows is the elaboration of that goal.

Three stages of intra-Buddhist conflict management

The right way to tackle internal Buddhist disputes must start from the attunement to its common root, the overarching “spirit” of Buddhism, manifested as a particular diagnosis of reality and a way of life. There are, undoubtedly, very good reasons to speak about many Buddhisms – unique traditions separated by time, location, doctrines, language, clothing and even cuisine. And yet, it is equally clear that those varied forms share common evolutionary history, and common core of ideas and values that allow speaking of them as belonging to one Buddhism. More important, perhaps, than identifying precise set of such shared ideas, is emphasizing their common spirit that is expressed perhaps most concisely by the mettā wish: “may all beings be happy and secure” (Sn 1.8). Mettā expresses the sense of the common fate and interdependence of all sentient beings roaming senselessly in samsara and longing to find permanent peace. This stress upon commonality (common condition, common heritage, common goals and aspirations) is a fundamentally important element for beneficial conflict

resolution. All further steps should be made with this one as a guiding principle.

The second stage in conflict management and resolution consist in a necessity of promoting a common interpretation of key concepts in agreement with the shared root-values – a sort of a common setting or level playing field for all Buddhist groups, firmly grounded in the spirit of the common Buddhist heritage mentioned above. Fidelity to this spirit will positively influence concepts and ideas crucial for tackling conflict, such as a question how to distinguish wholesome and unwholesome roots of conflicts, how to perceive one’s opponents, what constitutes Buddhist community – sangha, or Buddhist heritage. This setting the scene, while keeping with the tradition should be maximally open-ended and inclusive.

The third stage is the most context-dependent, and consists in employing right tools (methods and attitudes) for a given situation. While this tool-set will invariably have to adapt to the specific situation, it should be construed as a natural extension of the first two stages.

Stage two: setting the field

Although there are many issues that could be included here,

for brevity only three will be addressed: (1) distinguishing between two types of conflict, (2) the beneficial understanding of the sangha, (3) the beneficial understanding of the Buddhist heritage.

Two types of conflict

The first type of conflict I would like to discuss has as an objective money, power, influence, and self-gratification. To secure such a goal, a group is set against perceived competitors or critics. It is an unwholesome type of conflict, springing from the three roots of greed, hatred and delusion. The famous Kālāma sutta (Kesaputtiya, AN 3.65), often described as a promulgation of free enquiry begins with the doubt about establishing trust about teaching and teachers:

Bhante, there are some ascetics and brahmins who come to Kesaputta. They explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, denigrate, deride, and denounce the doctrines of others. [...] We are perplexed and in doubt, Bhante, as to which of these good ascetics speak truth and which speak falsehood. (Bodhi, 2012, p. 280)

The answer of the Buddha leads to the observation that the three roots of greed, hatred and delusion are unwholesome



Picture: chris-sabor-unsplash

and have unwholesome consequences, and whatever manifests them should be rejected. This type of conflict must therefore be considered incompatible with fundamental Buddhist goals and have no place in Buddhist communities. The two main problems with this type of conflict are (1) that its drivers are omnipresent in human condition and – as we all know, perhaps – if kept unchecked, constitute a default mode of human behaviour, and (2) that its true nature is often obscured by other, superficial causes, that make it appear noble and good, such as defending

Dharma against internal and external enemies. Alternatively this type of situation may start as a legitimate polemic concerning some practical or theoretical matter, but later slips into an unwholesome form, because of an inherent tribalism in humankind.

The second form of conflict would truly concern the well-being of Buddhism understood as a force to promote advancement of sentient beings. It could address any issue – past, present or future, practical or theoretical, and – if conducted right – could be beneficial. In its wholesome

form, it would require a friendly and respectful dialogue, arguing over differences on an open forum. There isn't a wont of questions within Buddhism justifiably allowing – often well-reasoned – differences in approach. If those differences are met with the right attitude, their discussion may truly enrich Buddhism. It is possible when the parties always keep in mind the difference between the first and the second type of conflict, and never allow confusing or conflating the one type with the other.

Interpretation of sangha

The problem of understanding sangha is a natural extension of the question “one Buddhism vs. many Buddhisms”. We may view various Buddhist sanghas as divided and disconnected groups constantly competing with each other. We can also legitimately view them as constituting different aspects of something that is fundamentally one. There are arguments for both visions, and both undoubtedly find real expression in everyday encounters. The question is how to navigate between the universal and the particular Buddhist identity. Is it necessary to choose one to the exclusion of the other, to be either a Buddhist in general or a Pure Land or Zen practitioner? If not, how those identities relate to one another? Is any primary?

Practice shows that those identities easily coexist. Similar to code-switching in multilingual persons, Buddhist individuals and groups, think, act and refer to themselves as just Buddhists or as members of particular lineage, depending on the context. One must suspect though, that particular group identity, as nearer and more materially embodied in the experiences of an individual, takes chief place. There is nothing problematic with that as long as a healthy balance exists between those two identities.

However, there is always the risk that the group-identity might become as strong as to obscure any other. This might be additionally reinforced in European context by being coloured with the notions of “heresy” and “schism” inherited from the background of Christian Europe. In the context of conflict management, this tendency needs to be actively counterbalanced by actively propagating cooperation and stressing commonality and shared heritage – the most profitable way to tackle conflict is ultimately to address it from the standpoint of one sangha, from the sphere of “we”, not “us” versus “them”. In defining the borders of the sangha understood as “we”, a maximally liberal and inclusive understanding must be employed, in agreement with the spirit of Buddhism discussed above. Like various specialists (mathematician, physicist, chemist, biologist) researching the same object are all scientists, likewise, everyone trying to overcome greed, hatred and delusion, find lasting peace and help on this path fellow beings, belongs to the sangha.

Definition of the Buddhist heritage

A subject closely related to the issue of understanding sangha is defining textual heritage of

Buddhism. Unsurprisingly, the answer follows the same lines as the previous one. To illustrate it let us use a passage from the charter of the Order of Interbeing (chapter 2):

The Order of Interbeing does not consider any sutra or group of sutras as its basic scripture(s). It draws inspiration from the essence of the Buddhadharma in all sutras. It does not accept the systematic arrangements of the Buddhist teachings proposed by any school. The Order of Interbeing seeks to realize the spirit of the Dharma in early Buddhism, as well as in the development of that spirit through the history of the sangha, and its life and teachings in all Buddhist traditions. (“Structure and Organization,” 2011)

The justification for this position can also be found in the exposition of the four great authorities in the Mahāparinibbana sutta (DN 16). It describes a possibility that there will appear a person in the future, claiming to know some genuine Buddhist teaching. The criterion for accepting or rejecting such a claim is a consistency with preserved teaching and discipline. I understand this as a consistency with the fundamental Buddhist spirit described before.

To sum up what have said so far, in conflict management there is the need to be constantly

mindful about the fundamental spirit that permeates Buddhism. This should lead to open and permissive understanding of sangha and Buddhist heritage, extending beyond one's particular group. Of prime importance is distinguishing between a wholesome and an unwholesome type of conflict, and avoiding the latter as essentially injuring main Buddhist principles.

Methods and attitudes in conflict management

In the ideal world, keeping to the principles mentioned above would end conflicts or make them easily manageable in

a friendly atmosphere. That is unfortunately often not the case. The two main reasons for that possibility are "bad actors" within Buddhist community or some profound communication problem where the two sides speak in incompatible terms, totally diverging in interpretation of key concepts. The question is how to manage conflict in such circumstances. The answer to the latter case is more contact, more exchanges, and more dialogue, in search for the common ground. The answer to the former is at least partially the same – entering into dialogue, to calmly point out the perceived divergences from the Buddhist teachings.

The methods or polemical tools are well established by the tradition: the teachings of the scriptures, reasoned interpretation of them and adaptation to new situations by way of extension, rational analysis of logical consistency of some thesis or its potential consequences. Of particular importance is stressing fidelity to the essence of Buddhism (in spirit, not necessarily the letter) as an important argument.

The right attitudes are perhaps even more important in conflict management. For want of time and space I will present the points I consider the most important in the form of a list:



- Positive mental attitude towards the opponents, expressed by the practice of the four Brahma abodes.
- Entering into discussion concerning controversial point in a good faith or refraining from discussion altogether.
- Making conflict less of a personal matter helps in keeping it in a healthy state. Any form of self-identification claims is openly criticised in the Pali Canon (in the form of 20 claims concerning Self).
- Searching for the answers in evolutionary not revolutionary way, marked by respect for the past and responsibility for the future.
- Keeping contacts and dialogue alive as paramount. Whatever matter is of such nature that can be put aside for the resolution in the future in order to secure that goal, it should be put aside. Whenever the matter is perceived as seriously misrepresenting Dhamma the fact should be made known in unequivocal terms.
- The matter may concern some person, but while acknowledging that, the criticism should not be construed in a personal way, but rather to address general mechanisms with the

conclusions applicable to similar cases in the future.

- Openness and transparency at all levels and in all aspects of organisational structures. Lineage, textual heritage, administrative structures, goals, financial settings and transfers should all be made public and easily accessible (we might refer again to the structure of the Order of Interbeing as realizing well at least some of those goals). Transparency influences very positively a general perception and trust.
- Putting trust in the general public (sangha or not). Referring openly about an involvement in a conflict by an open organisation helps setting the general perception as to the causes, culprits and solutions. A voice of a closed organisation of an opaque structure risks being dismissed or criticised as strictly sectarian.
- Making sure the truth is of paramount status, that all parties share the language (understand key subjects in a similar way), and that the discussion is conducted in the right way (right language: truthful, non-divisive, non-hurting, to the point)
- Non-engaging in a case of an unwholesome conflict.

When confronted with the party with unwholesome motivations and actions, one should resort to the attitudes and actions mentioned above, but not to respond in kind to the offending group.

- If all else fails, the goal should be to at least keep conflicts manageable at the base level, by sustaining some rudimentary level of communication, and to openly refer to the public the current developments.

As was said above, conflicts cannot be avoided. What Buddhists need to remember is that a way of responding to a conflict is in itself a reflection of the level of fidelity to the very essence of Buddhist teachings. A conflict may often be a chance for improvement and enrichment of Buddhism; it is however always an exercise in mental cultivation by those engaged in it. ◎

A full-page background image showing a sunset over a turbulent sea. The sky is filled with orange and pink clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon. In the distance, a long pier or breakwater extends across the water. The foreground shows dark, churning waves with white foam.

The text is based on the paper presented during the annual meeting of the European Buddhist Union, shortened and adapted to the requirements of the EBU Magazine.

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Picture: Gleb Lucky-unsplash

SOME THOUGHTS ON MINDFULNESS



By Lama Dondrub

Mindfulness is an expression that in recent times is heard in many places where it was not so usual to occur before. In addition, the meaning that is given to this word, is taking the nuances of the people who are using it, so that sometimes, it may seem that we are talking about different things. The truth is that I personally have been surprised by the interest that has arisen to mindfulness in different environments in which I have been living for many years.

As a meditator for more than 35 years, this millennial use of the term mindfulness has made me feel uncomfortable on several occasions. I had produced an internal tension with thoughts connected to the idea that a group of neo-scientists of the mind have just discovered something very basic and because of their momentary falling in love with it, are making improper use of a knowledge too deep for them to fathom.

This feeling of mine increased as it became apparent that the general market accepted mindfulness and adapted it as

one more product, applying the current marketing formulas so that it became more sellable and reached a greater number of people. The market expanded without necessarily applying the protective measures that spiritual traditions have used for millennia. This insight made me have some mental tension for a while, and I felt we were in danger of an uncontrolled global religious catastrophe.

But the years passed and I can see now that the Mindfulness movement has diverse and varied results. As with everything else in samsara, making meditation a profitable product has as many pros and cons. Its validity and expansion also suggest that this movement seems to have come to stay. After the reactive phase against innovation, I see clearly the favorable circumstances that the Mindfulness movement offers us Buddhists. For example, it seems to me a great opportunity for our Sanghas to be more accepted in society and for them to expand. The fact that people who have traditionally shown distance towards Buddhism and had their doubts, now generate

interesting questions about the benefits of mindfulness is a good sign to me. I have met people on several occasions who told me: „I do not meditate, I practice mindfulness“. Don't you think that's fantastic?

I believe that one of the main causes of the success of mindfulness is its ability to make some results visible in the very short term. For the western society, being constantly bombarded with information and possibilities, the obtaining of fast and reliable results is an essential stimulus for keeping up with a technique or practice. The application of mindfulness in academic fields has required continuous evaluation and brought about changes that are verifiable and objectifiable in a fast and evident way.

Another reason for the success of the program has been its suitability for the current state of minds in Western society. I remember that during the 2015 Buddhist Teachers' Meeting near New York, John Kabat-Zinn explained to us that it took many years for his program to

be accepted into his academic medical environment. For more than a decade they strove to demonstrate the results of meditation in the human mind, but very few psychologists and psychiatrists were willing to publicly apply meditation as a method of healing. Thus, we came to a new adjuvant factor for the propagation of movement, the ineffectiveness of certain medications for the healing of stress, associated with the undesirable side effects of that same medicine. I suppose that from the effort to offer the method to those

academic circles so armored to innovation arose the emphasis on separating mindfulness from the concept of meditation, since the latter could have a more religious connotation, and therefore could be more connected with superstition, thus being far from the pragmatic-scientific realm.

But well, I sincerely believe that the success of mindfulness does not have to be an obstacle to the correct expansion of the Buddha-Dharma. Quite the contrary, if we are able to channel the curiosity and

openness it generates into the majority of minds that follow that experiential proposal, more and more people will discover the true meaning of meditation and spiritual growth.

In my case, when I meet people practicing mindfulness, I try to explain to them that what differentiates this practice from the one taught by the Buddha, is simply the reason why, the objectives that move us. It is clear that meditation can help us to be better and to manage mental stress more skillfully, but for Buddhists the ability





to manage mindfulness is not the ultimate goal. Buddhism teaches us that life experience is totally dependent on the state of mind of the being. And that a distracted mind is incapable of discovering the innate capacity of consciousness.

Using the classical metaphor of assimilating the mind obscured by thoughts, sensations and emotions with a dark room, we can see mindfulness as a flashlight. Imagine the situation in which you live for a long time in that place and one day for some reason, you discover a flashlight. It could easily happen that you would use it to cover the needs you have and and it would take you a while to realize, that all those needs you have are due to the fact that you are still in that very room.

In life something similar can happen to us. Without the

correct knowledge, we end up using all our intelligence to cover present and future needs, hours and hours, forgetting to apply ourselves to finding the true path towards liberation from self-generated suffering. This state then, free from ignorance, is the basis for the infinite expansion of consciousness.

Ignorance about the functioning of the mind generates suffering for us. And that suffering is what directs our day to day activities. This is how we find ourselves fleeing from it or we search for the opposite which is compensatory pleasure. But when we manage to combine mindfulness with vigilant attention, and both are trained to remain steadily on the same level of consciousness, that prolonged state enables us to discover its three qualities: luminosity, emptiness and inseparability of both.

A person who has had this direct experience understands that this is his or her natural state and that if we lose it, it is because of habits, tendencies and beliefs that have been in the mind since beginning less time and which have been consolidated in it by the automatic reactions of a mind disturbed by its own ignorance.

A Buddhist teacher might advise something like: Light with full attention the way to liberation and beyond. Train yourself not to allow anything you perceive to distract you from what is truly important. Make your luminous state of consciousness inspire all the beings you meet to obtain the same state of happiness. ◎

A DIFFERENT FINGER POINTING AT THE MOON



By Simon Brenner

Learning and teaching Buddha's Dharma via digital media and the internet – this could be a controversial topic. Every part of our lives is permeated by information technology; and yet – or exactly therefore – the thought of this digital transformation also happening in our Buddhist communities is unsettling for many. Should Buddhism not be our last technology-independent resort? Our domain of de-accelerated mindfulness in a world of instant messaging and instant satisfaction? "Why am I reading this online article instead of actually sitting on the cushion?" you might think now. For many of us, Buddhism is the unmoving root in a whirlpool of information overload and overstimulation.

I like to think about the people of ancient India, who after years of oral tradition of the Buddha's teachings started to write his words and instructions down. Going from "thus I have heard" to "thus I have read" might have been as controversial for the people of the time as it is for us today in regard of our modern attempts to make

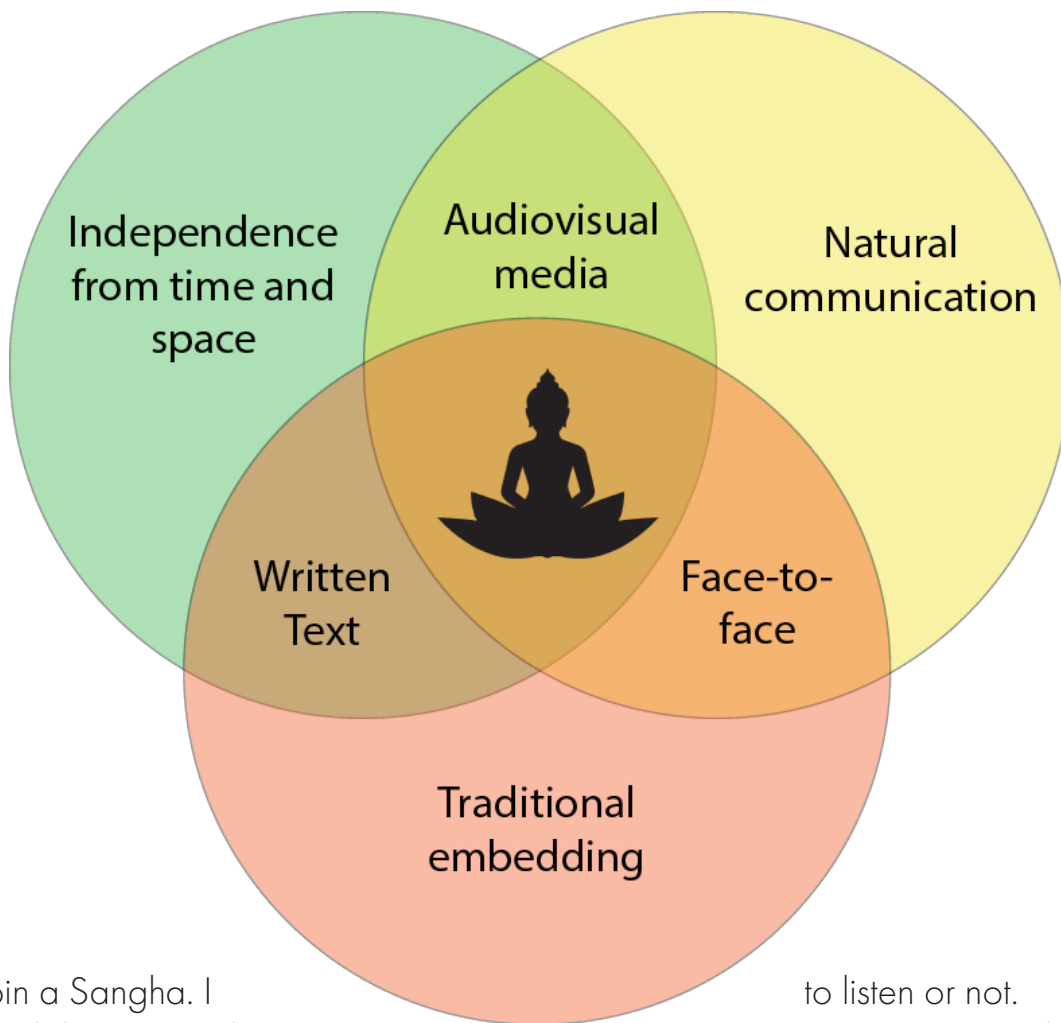
Buddha's Dharma accessible on the internet. In hindsight, textual tradition was probably a good move, considering that it has helped Buddha's teachings to spread to multiple countries and endure the centuries, so much so that even we, as modern Europeans, can benefit from it 2600 years later. We must also acknowledge the fact that the written Sutras have become more than just a medium that conveys information; they themselves have become spiritual entities and have inspired Buddhist schools to form around them.

So here we are, having two modes of transporting the Dharma from one person to another, which feel equally pure, natural and in accordance with tradition: on the one hand the direct person-to-person exchange between master and student or among peer practitioners, and the written texts on the other hand. Different Buddhist traditions may place different emphasis on either of the two, but I think we can all agree that both are irreplaceable. While personal communication is natural for

human beings and can have a spiritual deepness which is difficult being transported in a written form, it is volatile and bound to a small space and time. While written sutras are permanent and widely distributable, they can be hard to access; even more so their non-intellectual components.

Audiovisual media are filling the gaps between text and face-to-face communication, in that they provide an accessible and natural communication channel that is as spatially and temporarily unbound like the written word. So rather than fearing that these media would replace anything that is proven and established for centuries, I would suggest viewing them as a useful tool, an expedient means if you will, to fulfill a certain purpose in a certain situation.

One of these purposes is certainly the lowering of barriers: videos and podcasts can be the perfect entry-level contact for people who are drawn to Buddhist Ideas but not yet determined enough to work through scriptures



or directly join a Sangha. I have heard valid concerns that providing this kind of 'shortcuts' to the Dharma further promotes laziness, short attention spans and a general lack of mindfulness, and thus in a way contradicts values held up by Buddhists. Although this can't be argued with, let me ask you this: if you believe that the traits named above are problems of our modern information society (as do I), and you would like to provide other perspectives, how would you get people to listen? Throwing books at them doesn't sound very promising; personal dialogue is surely most effective but limited in

the number of people you can reach. "Quality before quantity!" I hear my imaginary discussion tell me; but here is what I propose: If you are serious about your beliefs and think that Buddha's Dharma is the way to end suffering and promote peace in this world, then sharing the Dharma with as many people as possible becomes a great purpose (and saving it for the "worthy ones" sounds a bit counterproductive). This is not about proselytizing; if you are visible and offer what you have, everyone is free

to listen or not. However, providing an easy entry to a more serious pursuit of the Dharma is not the only application for digital media. I think especially podcasts deserve our attention here. In comparison to online videos, podcasts tend to be longer and less focused on the grabbing of attention. These quasi on-demand radio shows are generally a good choice for those who want to dive deeper. Plus, listening to podcasts is exceptionally easy to integrate in a busy schedule; car- or train rides are ideal opportunities.

So, there is only one question remaining: among the flood content out there on the internet, how do you find authentic Buddhist material among all the lifestyle- motivational- personality-building- and- what-have-you- messages that somehow suggest a Buddhist background and philosophy? And where do you start looking? This can be challenging, especially as a "beginner".

The European Buddhist Network is a recent project of the EBU that can help with that. Aside from other goals, we try to collect videos and podcasts from all European Buddhist communities at one place, in order to make authentic Buddhist insights easily accessible to all Europeans, independent of their religious background. We hope that this project will benefit practitioners of various Buddhist traditions, believers of other religions and atheists alike.

For people on the search for their path, the European Buddhist Network provides a concise overview of Buddhist schools in Europe.

However, you will not find any theoretical descriptions there, rather you can listen to videos and podcasts directly from the Sanghas. In this respect, we believe that the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

For Buddhists, the Network promotes a sense of "European Buddhism" and a chance to look a bit beyond their noses. The EBU is doing important work on an institutional level, but these attempts are largely hidden from the individual practitioner. So, the idea was to establish a more tangible level of connected European Buddhism, where the individual Sanghas can be perceived as a part of a beautiful international community rather than a solitary boat. When you are happy and content in your own Sangha, there is hardly any reason to invest time and effort to try and understand others; which is a pity, as these kinds of insights can really enrich your own practice and change your perspective on it. At least this was my experience: After practically growing up with the Yun Hwa Sangha of World Social Buddhism and never feeling

the urge to look for something different, it was not until I got entangled with the EBU that I started to really appreciate the richness of Buddhist traditions that we can find in Europe alone. I believe that the use of audiovisual media could lower the barriers in this context as well and greatly support the mutual awareness and appreciation between Buddhist traditions; a video of a Dharma speech a couple of minutes long might bring give you a taste of a Buddhist school's essence.

Digital media and their distribution over the internet will not substitute traditional personal teaching or the written sutras in any way; let us rather view them as extension to our set of methods for relaying the Dharma. Just a different finger pointing at the moon. ☉

About the Author:

Simon Brenner is a student of Ji Kwang Dae Peop Sa Nim. He is a computer scientist working on the [digital restoration of ancient manuscripts](#).

THE POWER OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES: HOW TO GROW YOUR SANGHA'S VIRTUAL PRESENCE



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By David Viafora

The Power of Online Communities: How to Grow your Sangha's Virtual Presence

"Obstructions can lead to freedom. We can be like the bamboo that crushed by an object will grow around it. We have a chance to learn from this pandemic. We will be socially isolated, but our minds cannot be imprisoned in our houses. Now is the time to dive deeply into our spiritual practices. Now is the time to be the level-headed ones who can be there for others in their suffering. Now is the time to use social media for connection and healing. Now is the time to shine." - Judith Joy

After hearing the long undulating sounds of the bell, Selina slowly massaged her hands and face, tenderly transitioning out of meditation. The crisp pitch of the bell signaled for everyone to stand up and practice walking meditation. Breathing in, she felt the toes and sole of her left foot press firmly into the golden brown wooden floor. Breathing out, she smiled softly with gratitude as her right foot touched the floor. Then Seline slowly walked out of the room and into her baby daughter's

room. Over the wooden crib walls, her darling lay in the same fetal position as before, tucked away under a light blue cotton blanket, and looking as peacefully still as if she too had just benefited from the meditation next door. Seline gazed for a few more moments, and then carefully walked back to her sitting cushion on the floor. She mindfully reopening her laptop, and there was her beloved Sangha - seated beautifully and quietly on her screen, having just finished walking meditation and waiting for another sitting meditation to begin. Present and at ease, Seline was with her Monday evening online Sangha, and she felt truly at home. During the initial outbreak of the corona virus, Seline was heartbroken that she was no longer able to attend her Sangha's gatherings due to social distancing. Her local Sangha was the basis of her practice and social support, especially as a young single mother. Being with them was her weekly emotional and spiritual renewal. When her Sangha stopped meeting, a grey cloud of fear and despair filled Seline's heart. Spring

was coming, but instead of feeling full of warmth and joy, the pandemic filled future looked stormy, dark, and lonely. Without her Sangha, how could she survive alone with only her baby for unknown months in lockdown? Shortly after, Seline's Sangha began transitioning from in-person gatherings to virtual Sangha. Hearing this, Seline's heart soared as if it was leaping out of the confines of her small apartment and into abodes of her wider community. She wouldn't have to brave through this challenging season of isolation alone. Soon after, Seline was receiving invitations for online retreats and weekly meditations from friends in different cities. With meditation groups every day of the week, Seline practices more often now than she was ever able to before as a single mom. She is able to have the best of both worlds, meditating with her Sangha regularly, while being fully present to her child's needs at home. Like so many others, virtual Sangha helped turned Seline's social isolation into spiritual transformation. Even just 10 years ago, this kind of virtual Sangha connection was

impossible for most Sanghas. Hundreds of thousands of practitioners, or perhaps even millions around the world, spanning various languages across dozens of countries are connecting and supporting each other's meditation practice through virtual communities. Virtual conferencing platforms allow people to connect fluidly and reliably through both video and telephone options so that anyone can join a meeting. From the warm and comfy seat of your own couch, simply tap the link, and within moments, you're in. The Sangha home is right there with you.

Opening Virtual Dharma Doors

The global pandemic has wreaked havoc on families and communities everywhere, killing thousands indiscriminately and threatening survival for those already suffering economic depravity. It's at times like this when we need the strength of our spiritual community and practice to lean on and flourish into the most. Refuges of human presence, compassion, and wisdom can replenish our hearts in the darkest moments of fear and isolation. Virtual gatherings are a perfect communal antidote, as Sanghas evolve technologically to become forces of "Karuna action" in the face of Corona Virus. (Karuna is the Pali word for "compassion").

Fortunately, it's never been easier to do this, no matter one's experience in the digital world. Spiritual communities everywhere have been making this transition practically overnight. Hopefully this article can support your community to make the leap to virtual presence more supportive and powerful as well. Last October, I was invited to give the keynote presentation at the European Buddhist Union's annual conference in Barcelona, Spain on the topic of "Digital Dharma." Dozens of teachers and leaders representing different Buddhist traditions throughout European countries came for several days to connect with one another and learn ways to grow their community's online presence among other topics of interest. President of the EBU, Ron Eichorn initiated the Digital Dharma topic about a year ago, knowing how much Buddhist leaders and teachers could grow their Sanghas and expand outreach through more sophisticated online presence. Of course, at the time we had no idea that a pandemic would soon close the doors of almost every zendo around the world. It was wise intuition and great planning by Ron and the EBU Council to support European Sanghas growth in this digital age, and right now it's paying off big time. The conference was a predominantly older group,

representing Sanghas from many corners of Europe. At 39 years old, I wasn't the youngest person at the conference, but I had to be close. The spectrum of tech knowledge and experience in the room spanned between impressive, eyebrow raising, and honestly shocking. People asked questions that would make a teenager cringe with embarrassment. "What is a webinar?", someone asked early on. To make sure he wasn't the only person there with such a question, I asked, "Who knows what a webinar is?" Almost half the room didn't budge. Many had never been on a Zoom call; nearly the same number had never heard of Zoom. "Google Hangouts? Never heard of it," someone else said. "Wow," I thought, "This is going to be a rough ride." But we dove into the material together, exploring virtual resources, answering tons of questions, and learning from various people's experiences about what is possible to offer online. Technology can be intimidating, but I found that they were hungry and excited to learn how to take advantage of these tech resources that were outpacing their Sangha's walking meditation speed. One of the main takeaways was how easy it can be to begin offering online teachings and practice. By the end, I felt hopeful and encouraged by their enthusiasm, but also admittedly skeptical



Picture: conscious-design-unsplash

how much they would actually implement on their own back home. Six months later, and I'm amazed how their Sanghas have grown in leaps and bounds into the virtual world! My conclusion now is that if this group of folks can learn how to bring their Sanghas online, then any Sangha can too. The success stories are much better told by the Sanghas themselves. I recently heard from Gabor Hargitai, a Hungarian Dharma Teacher in Budapest who attended the conference in October and whose Sangha previously had minimal online presence. "After the European Buddhist Union gathering, I told the leaders of our Sangha what I heard, and we started discussions on this topic. We

had time to try this and that, so we slowly started to collect information about the different possibilities. We had some online meetings on Skype, and we created a Facebook group for live streaming. But when the virus crisis appeared, we realized that we must act fast, and based upon our previous experiences and knowledge we installed a system for the online teachings to substitute our group meditations. We stopped all our offline activities and closed the centers for the public; the other teachers and I stopped traveling to other centers. Then we set up a google form to collect registrations for our regular events, which now only go online. We decided to use YouTube for the lectures

because it keeps the recordings, it is quite manageable, and it can be listened too later, etc. Only those who register can access the recordings. From the registrations we have emails of people who wanted to listen our programs, and we regularly send the actual YouTube links for the lectures. We offer meditations for beginners, and these are accessible for everyone on YouTube. For practices which require more intellectual knowledge and meditation experience, we use Google Hangouts Meet, which provides a more intimate, interactive forum. These events can be attended only by invitation. As I see, the Sangha members are very happy and grateful for this possibility! There

are many, who are endangered by the corona virus so they stay at home now. They need the inspiration, teachings, and meditation, and now they can participate in these ways. In the beginning, it was quite difficult to speak to a camera, without any reaction from an audience. But after some time, we started to "feel its taste," as we say in Hungary. Now we are feeling very positive about it all. Although there are many hardships from the virus, we try to turn this situation from a "problem" to a "possibility", which can help more people than we could ever reach before." Another friend of mine, Freedom Rivera practices in a young adult Sangha in the USA. She recently shared, "Wake Up New York held our first Sangha last night! It was wonderful to connect and practice together despite the challenge we are going through in the world. We used Zoom and given that the the group was so big, we

were able to use the break out group rooms for check-ins and sharing our internal weather. We also used the 'shared screen' feature for the group to read the book "Fear" by Thich Nhat Hanh. Then we were able to hang out together online after the official closing." As Gabor and Freedom both share, when their Sangha doors closed, they learned to open new ones. Now their communities are creatively opening more doors of practice to others than before.

Easy, Inexpensive, and Possible

Across the globe, Sanghas are now chanting, "I take refuge in the virtual Sangha." This week alone, I was invited to Sanghas in Toronto, London, Washington DC, Mexico, Northern California, the Netherlands, and many more. I would be tempted to visit Gabor and his Sangha if I spoke Hungarian. But maybe you can, and that's part of the magic of virtual Sanghas.

You can connect in whatever language, affinity group, or culturally specific Sangha you wish! People are learning how to host online gatherings everywhere, and it's bringing unique benefits to more people and communities every single day. So where can one find or create such a virtual Sangha home? There's dozens of reliable video hosting platforms to use. The most common one Sanghas use is Zoom; it's extremely user friendly, super reliable, and inexpensively priced. It has different features that allow for breakout rooms, recording sessions (video or audio), and either video or telephone call in so that people can join regardless of their devices. There's also free options such as Skype, FreeConferenceCall, and Google Hangouts. But if you have more than a few people, then the connection may become unreliable, especially during social lockdown when millions are online. For 14 euros

Breathe
you are online



per month, a good Sangha connection is worth it! That's how much it costs for Zoom Pro, and you can have up to 100 participants, scheduling meetings whenever you want. It's a lot cheaper than renting a space in the city!

Online Zendo Guidelines

During the past week, hundreds, if not thousands of Sanghas have made the transition from in person to virtual connection, and they have been developing specific guidelines to support the virtual practice space. A friend of mine, Brian Kimmel leads practices with the Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound in Seattle which transitioned three of their Sangha gatherings onto Zoom. Brian shared with me recently, "Zoom is our only functioning practice center at the moment because of restrictions and precautions due to the pandemic. We are also helping our practice facilitators train in being a Zoom host." Brian's Sangha sends people "Online Practice Guidelines" before attending video calls. These guidelines are based on resources such as Plumline and San Francisco Zen Center who have been offering online gatherings for years already. Brian reflected that these resources "made this transition period for our local community a little easier. We did not have

to completely reinvent the wheel. Instead, we added touches that spoke to our local communities." Online guidelines help people understand not just technical information, but also how each individual can help contribute to harmony, concentration, and ease in the collective practice. Every Sangha can adapt them according to their own needs. For example, they may encourage participants to arrive 10 to 15 minutes before the online meeting to settle themselves without distraction or interrupting the meditation. They may encourage a clean workspace so that the computer screen doesn't reveal lots of clutter, or have minimal visual background distractions. Here are a few guidelines that you may like to check out to inform your Sangha's virtual practice: Online Zendo at San Francisco Zen Center, and Still Water Practice Center (Maryland, USA.)

Beyond the Pandemic

Another beaming ray of light that is piercing through the heavy storm clouds of this pandemic is the greater capacity for Sanghas to reach people online even after this public health crisis wanes. When people begin meeting again in person, Sanghas will still have greater outreach through online presence. The infinitely long

arms of the virtual bodhissatva will be able to reach those who were never able to attend in person. Like Seline, so many parents, especially single parents feel left out of Sangha life during the most challenging period of their family's development. Not everyone has a grandparent willing to babysit, and most Sanghas don't have children's programs. But now, the Sangha can come right into one's living room several times a week, while the parent never roams farther than the sound of their baby's voice. Young parents are not the only ones connecting through online mindfulness communities. Consider Joseph, a 34 year old video producer whose work keeps him traveling around Europe. This Wednesday, Joseph is in Barcelona, far from home in London. But it's no problem - his Sangha is traveling with him, just an hour later than usual. He hooks up online, and finds a dozen practitioners ready to practice together. Like many others in the business world, Joseph spends just a fraction of each month at home. His online Sangha has become his most reliable companion, having been with the group for 3 years strong despite his crazy schedule. Some of the his Sangha members have moved multiple times, having left family, friends, and neighbors. Through it all, no matter where



Picture: Sigmund-unsplash

they move, their virtual Sangha keeps traveling with them. In some countries where people live under authoritarian regimes, like China, people are not allowed to have Sangha gatherings freely as they wish. The governments fear the power of these communities and restrict them from meeting in person. Virtual Sangha has been a wonderful refuge where people can still gather online, without feeling afraid that the police will be outside their door when the Sangha is over.

Online Sanghas are Just Beginning

Plumline.org has been the central nursery of newly born online Sanghas in the Plum Village tradition. They have three Zoom accounts and anyone can

start or join an online Sangha group who practices in this tradition, no matter where they live. Over thirty Plumline groups exist in over seven languages, with different themes of practice, meeting every day of the week. Last fall, I interviewed Plumline visionary and co-founder, Alipasha Razzaghipour about why he thought these groups have bloomed in recent years and what's to come. Ali shared "Technology is redefining the intersections of space and contact in our world, radically changing the way we relate to distance and travel." Ali recounted that a dozen years ago, the first online groups were based on text messages. "I will begin meditating now," typed one member into the chat box. "Okay, me too. Enjoy your sit," confirmed another.

Just being aware that another Sangha member was meditating together with them in that moment was already supportive and beneficial for those far away from in person Sanghas. "Not everyone can join a local group, for any number of reasons, so being with a virtual Sangha is better than none at all. Online Sanghas are not for everyone," Ali shared. "But in person Sanghas are not for everyone either." Some virtual Plumline Sanghas are celebrating their 9th and 10th birthdays together! With such longevity, these groups are undoubtedly providing a steady source of Dharma nourishment to people. Practicing mindfulness with others non-locally has other advantages. It presents a golden opportunity for small niche groups of practitioners

to come together in ways that were never before possible. Consider someone living in a small city who wants to practice with a Sangha that is dedicated to exploring environmental issues. Whereas her local group doesn't have the interest, it will be easy to find a dozen (or many more) practitioners across the country with that calling. Some people really wish to hear the Dharma in their native tongue, but there's no Sangha near them that does. This may not seem like a big deal for those who speak the same language as the dominant group in their country of residence. But to live in Vietnam and speak Polish, or to live in Poland and speak Vietnamese, finding an online Sanghas that speaks Polish or Vietnamese can be quite an amazing opportunity! Alipasha admitted that there are a number of drawbacks of meeting online as well, depending on the digital platform. For one, the degree of transmission from teacher to student practitioner is not the same online as in person, and perhaps that gap can never be fully closed. So it's really valuable that new practitioners really taste the experience of practice in person, whether during a retreat or a weekly group. This can happen before or after meeting online. Ideally,

people can practice both in person and online to support their practice. There's also the obvious distractions of being on a computer during meditation. Ali jokingly shared that on several occasions, "I've noticed during Dharma sharing, that someone is wearing glasses and I can see the light reflecting a changing computer screen. They were clear browsing during our practice." He laughed, noting "We are in fact inviting people to meditate right in front of perhaps the biggest source of addiction in their lives - their screens!" Ali advised, "It is important to remind new practitioners to approach the video conference as they would a Dharma Hall. We all have strong conditioning when sitting in front of a screen, from online shopping, to conducting research, to checking emails. If we remind practitioners to bring 'the mind of practice' to the online meeting, treating the space as sacred, then people's behavior and the energy they contribute will naturally change." While meditating online has challenges, it can help transform people's afflictive habits and ambivalent relationships with technology. As technology continues to advance its capacities to provide more lifelike experiences for users, the degrees of separation continue

to dwindle. When asked what the future holds for online communities, Ali assured me that this growth has just begun. "We've seen the evolution of digital Sanghas fly forward in the last few decades; from text based Sanghas, to multiple person phone calls, to Skype, to Google Hangouts, and now to Zoom. Just watch, it won't be long before we are meditating together in a virtual meditation hall." Whatever the future holds for virtual capacities, Sanghas are embracing technology right now more than ever. In this period of Corona virus outbreak, most people don't have the choice of attending in person anymore. It's either virtual Sangha or no Sangha. When offered, people are stepping into refuge of the former. And no one knows how long this will last. ◎



My experience while walking the path of practice

By Patrick Duhoux

**Three words stood out while
I was reciting the Lotus
Sutra: Buddha, Dharma and
Sangha, the Three Jewels.**

Buddha, who reached the end of the Enlightenment Path, transmits the Teachings through the Dharma. Guided by both the spiritual world and the Awakened, we can experiment and verify these Teachings in the midst of the Sangha, the gathering of all the practitioners, elders and companions alike. I want to share this with you because it is what I have been experimenting for the past few months and even more so over the past few weeks.

I am a seasoned practitioner. I have chanted the Sutra thousands of times and then my chanting dwindled and came to a halt. But I recently heard from my elders of the necessity to concentrate on my practice. I must admit, I find it hard to concentrate. Last spring, I started a 21-day practice which consists in chanting the Sutra every day for 21 days. A real challenge for me. I started it in order to be enlightened about a difficult relationship. I did not want to let my head nor my ego rule, nor to act in an ordinary

way. It was initially a personal request but two days later I met with one of my companions in practice and I noticed the extent of her suffering, suffering that I realised was linked to what I had been bearing, with what I was beginning to see thanks to my practice. So, for the first time, I felt in my heart that I needed to support her along the journey to the resolution of her suffering. I felt very strongly that "With companions, we have to work through the issue till the end, until the issue has been cleansed, resolved, purified. Such is our engagement as practice elders." During the same time period I heard my younger son say "I am not doing what I have to do." It was so unexpected coming from him and I wondered "Am I doing what I have to do in my life and in my practice?". I saw how caught up he was with his desires, with the very ordinary aspects of his life. I kept this information to myself and in the summer, I did three 21-day practices one after the other and realised it was working:

unexpected realities appeared, all linked to letting go and to doing what I had to do.

September 9th, Paris, assault: 7 people were violently attacked. The first one was my elder son: very, very serious head trauma, emergency hospitalisation.

At the hospital, while my son was undergoing surgery, I became aware right away that, if this was happening, it was linked to me, there was a deep meaning behind that. When you practise, you hear that whatever happens in your life, it is your world, it is linked to you. So, in the middle of the night I texted the whole lineage of my elders. "Here is what is going on. What deep meaning might it have? How can I adjust my mind and my practice?"

What happened then was quite extraordinary. I believe I was heard by the spiritual world which gave me wonderful presents: it heard my genuine wish to be able to solve the deep causes of these circumstances. When I talked

to my elders, I became aware that violence had taken other aspects in my family. I asked myself "What is there to see? Why does that kind of violence appear?". But, that time, I did not let my brain work. I laid the matter on my altar and asked "What do I have to see? Which conceptions are at the origin of these situations?". It became very clear to me that a great part of this violence was connected to all the ideas, conceptions, desires and illusions, to everything that makes us ordinary human beings. That is what has created wars, tumultuous relationships, interpersonal conflicts... And I thought of my grand-father who had died at war at an early age, and at the impact it still has on my family today.

I felt the deep wish to be able to purify that, even if I did not know how.

For about ten days, I experienced a very strange state. I, who had chanted thousands of sutras, quite often directing my spirit on my practice before I started chanting... and then thinking about my shopping list, suddenly realised I was reading it from beginning to end feeling "Well! It is unbelievable! It is the instruction manual to educate one's heart and spirit. There is nothing else to do but

follow what is written. One doesn't need to do anything else."

My consciousness too was quite different: for example, I was extremely and clearly aware of others. My children's mother, who lives in the country, came immediately after the aggression. I put her up at my place and for me, it was obvious that I was giving her a set of keys and that she was staying there and that together we were going to look after our sons. And then it hit me that she had lived in that flat with me for ten years and that, as she had been away for a number of years, it was probably quite difficult for her to find herself there again. And at the same time, I realized I would never have been aware of that before. This new way of considering her was quite surprising. I then thought of her partner in life: "What about your sweetheart? What state is he in?" "He is certainly devastated" "Why doesn't he come?" "He doesn't dare." "Well, tell him to come." He did come with his daughter and we found ourselves together as a family. And we were happy to have dinner together after the visits at the hospital. Something soft emanated from me, a gentleness for people, devoid of any judgement. It was utterly surprising. I would see people

in the street and think "They are on earth to transform themselves. It's sad, they don't even know it." And it is absolutely true, we are here to transform ourselves thanks to the Teachings.

Concerning my son, I also became conscious that in the end reality was at work, a far broader reality than what I could grasp. You can read it in the Sutra, at the end of chapter 2: "Only the Buddhas can completely fathom the Ultimate Reality of every existing thing – because all things have: their characteristics, their nature, their substance, their potential, their functions, their causes, their conditions, their effects, their consequences, and their perfect coherence." As an ordinary human being, I could see that this was out of my reach.

I was also quite surprised to realise that I did not feel any hatred towards the perpetrator. Some people around me were experiencing very strong feelings, but there was no hatred on my part. I thanked the spiritual world for not being trapped there. My energy was put elsewhere.

And then, action. The act of transmitting. At that time, I was straightforward. For instance, I was chanting the Sutra, the telephone would ring and I would stop my reading to pick



up the phone. "What state are you in? Here is what is happening. Here is what I am practising at the moment. You are welcome to come and see." It was like that constantly: it was easy to act, to do what needed to be done in the field of the practice... To do what needed to be done. Three new members are here with me at the seminar today. This has not happened to me in years. While I was chanting the Sutra in my bedroom in front of my small altar with one of my companions, I suddenly remembered I had a wonderful altar handcrafted by one of my friends. But in my head I had decided I needed to finish preparing it before I could use it. I told myself: That's stupid! You have the best ever altar next door and here you are just a dwarf". In the wake of that realisation, we cleaned, prepared and installed the new altar and, as I spoke out the salutations, I felt: "This altar is worth welcoming at least 50 people in this room with you. There we go. Let's do it!"

As my son was in a coma, I was privileged to hear from the mouth of various people who practise here, that at that very time he was choosing to come back or not and that whatever happened, it would be good for him. I was invited not to hold on

to my emotions, to my desires, but to accept a reality broader than the one I could comprehend, so that he would feel neither my desires nor my expectations and that he would be able to make his own choice. And from this large inner washing-machine rose a field of acceptance and openness. I can very clearly perceive today the meaning of the phrase: "to let oneself be guided by the spiritual world". I often had the illusion, as I was chanting the Sutra in front of my altar, that I was asking for guidance. But then, I would go back to my sofa and wait for someone to ring at my door. This is not what practice is all about. It is a path, and walking that path means being on the move. It is because I am walking the path, that the spiritual world will show me shortcuts, highways, small paths behind the bushes, and will open up opportunities that do not appear if I remain seated on my sofa. This is what I am experiencing and what I want to transmit. ◎





A person wearing a white, long-sleeved dress with a thin belt is standing in a desert landscape. They are holding a large, solid blue circle in front of their face, completely obscuring it. The background features a massive, textured rock formation under a clear blue sky. The ground is sandy and sparsely vegetated.

Is the mind
a bright
mirror?

By Ron Eichhorn - Mio Sop

The Buddha did not want people to become Buddhists, I am sure. He wanted them to become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, so they would have a joyous and satisfying life. Naturally, anybody who attains this inherent luminosity to which the word Buddha refers, will spread it to others and thus creates an ambiance of harmony and bliss. In my experience, the transformation from a human being bound by attachment to an image of self - which is our normal state - to a radiant Bodhisattva, is not accomplished by reading books or belief in words. It is mostly depending on one's own mental activity. I have learned that mostly because of the precious teachings of my master Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim.

I was about 22 when I started with Buddhist meditation. That time, I thought it is a great way to learn how to calm down, to fall asleep easier at night and to be able to focus better on whatever task was at hand. And that also worked out fine. Years later, because of my experiences and the precious teachings of my master, I realized that meditation is a priceless tool to become aware of the workings of the mind. Just like looking into a mirror, it allows you to see what your

mind is doing. Being able to observe the mind is a great asset because it creates the possibility to subsequently modify whatever goes on mentally or even emotionally. First, you learn how to see yourself clearly, then you become able to change whatever needs to be changed.

The first book I ever read about Buddhism was on the history of Chan (Zen). It contained the famous poem contest between Shenxiu, the leading disciple of the fifth patriarch of Chan and Huineng, the later famous sixth patriarch, which essentially pitches two levels of attainment against each other. While Shenxiu, who is regarded as the loser of this contest, emphasized that „the body is the tree of enlightenment, and the mind a bright mirror which needs to be polished so no dust would settle“, Huineng stated that „enlightenment is not a tree and that originally there is not one thing - so what place could there be for dust?“

At a young age, my personality had an even more competitive side than today, so I quickly decided that the winner of this contest was right and the loser was wrong. Only because of meditation and insight I finally realized that there is no right or wrong here, but that these verses represent steps on a ladder. Eventually, a lower step and the highest step on the same ladder

are still part of one thing and both are necessary to become a whole useful object. In much the same way, polishing one's mind in meditative states is a vital undertaking if one wants to see the place where dust does not exist.

I have learned that in the Sanskrit language, the meaning of a word is defined by the context. It is much like that with the words „meditation“ and „mindfulness“. Meditation can mean a few things, but on a deeper level, it refers to a state of mind. One could be sitting on a cushion, walking, cutting vegetables or talking to one's lover - the conditions are not important. The calm, clear and aware mind one has in any moment, is the point.

It might not be easy to change the world, but we can certainly change ourselves. This is the great truth the Buddha entrusted to us, and he provided us with all the methods. So, is the mind a bright mirror? Absolutely, if you want it to be. ◎

Ron Eichhorn/Mio Sop is currently president of the European Buddhist Union and a disciple of Supreme Matriarch Ji Kwang Dae Poep Sa Nim in the Yun Hwa denomination of world social Buddhism.



WHAT KEEPS BUDDHIST ACTIVISTS SANE?



Picture: S Migaj-unsplash

By Satya Robyn

This weekend I co-facilitated a weekend retreat for Buddhists from different traditions who were involved in eco-activism. Various themes and questions emerged during our time together. There were questions about how arising anger could be used in the service of activism, and how this fitted with Buddhist ethics. There was frustration about Buddhist colleagues who were in denial about the climate and ecological crisis, and how they might be skilfully influenced. There was a lot of despair and grief.

One of the themes that kept arising was the immensity of the task ahead, and the inadequacy of our efforts. One colleague came up with a beautiful metaphor for this. He described himself as a drop of water, surveying a vast lake. The lake had been whipped up into fierce waves, and he was trying to decide exactly where to add his drop of water in order to calm the whole thing.

This struck me very deeply as I have been wrestling with a similar dilemma. My life is already quite full. I run a Buddhist temple with my husband, which involves wearing various hats – landlord, celebrant, marketing executive, accountant, gardener. I work as a psychotherapist to earn my living, and I make space for writing books as a way to feed my

soul. How can I fit my new role as an eco-activist into this busy schedule without overloading myself and becoming useless as a holder-of-space and as a guide for others. In the precious time I do have available, exactly what should I be doing? The fate we are facing is so terrifying, I also wonder why I don't just relinquish all my other roles, as some of my friends have done, and sign up for full time work with Extinction Rebellion.

We sat with these questions as they swirled inside us. It was helpful to know that others sat with them too. It was also helpful to study a beautiful text by Akuppa on how to be a Shambhala Warrior, with sage advice for Buddhist eco-activists including simplifying our lives, remembering we can't save the world on our own, and balancing outer activity with inner sustenance. Still, I was left feeling daunted and overwhelmed by the task ahead.

On the second morning I offered a piece of our liturgy to the group. As a Pureland Buddhist, my primary relationship is with Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light. Amitabha (or Amida) is flanked by two attendant Bodhisattvas – Quan Shi Yin, also known as Avalokiteshvara or Kannon, and Tai Shi Chih, also known as Mahastamaprapta. The piece I share was the Tai Shi Chih Prayer, written by our teacher Dharmavidya David Brazier, and set to a very simple melody. I have included the text below and the tune is recorded here.

First I sang the verse to the group, and then spoke for a while about the consolation of the bombu paradigm – the Pureland proposition that we are all foolish beings of wayward passions, driven this way and that by our greed hate and delusion. What a relief it is to be reminded of this. It is difficult for us to know what we should be doing because we are looking at things from our own limited view-points. All we can do is do our best, knowing that our motivations will be

mixed and that our actions will be flawed, and trust that the Buddhas accept us just as we are.

We finished by singing the hymn as a group – eighteen voices joined in supplication, joined in our love and grief for the planet, and in our anguish about our insufficiency. Yes, ‘the ego is insatiable’ – yes, our acts have done much harm to dear Earth. And, ‘the light will work its own good work, if only we will trust it’. We can rely on Tai Shi Chih to aid us, we can rely on Tai Shi Chih to lighten our hearts and bring us peace. As we sang, he did indeed do these things, and in the hush after singing we sat together feeling peaceful and held.

I very much value the self-power approach of other parts of Buddhism. There was much of this in Akuppa’s text – how we might train in non-violence, how we might strive towards meeting greed with the spirit of sharing, hate with love. We need to find ways of disciplining ourselves – to do the things that we know are good for us, and to practice with our jealousy, impatience and spitefulness.

Also, I am a person who has lived her life overly reliant on self-power practices. They prop up one of my favourite delusions - that if I do them properly, or for long enough, they will transform me once and for all into the ideal version of Satya. Once this has happened then I can live without suffering, achieving the appropriate levels of fame, success and almost-constant praise. Somehow I will also be perfectly humble and modest, accepting the luxury graciously but not depending on it, as disciples flock from far and wide to hear my luminous teachings... For this reason, I am prone to misusing self-power teachings. I begin to get excited that these are the ones that will work, and throw myself into performing them with as much energy as I can muster. The inevitable disappointment in myself and in the practices is familiar, but it still stings.

Once I ground myself in Tai Shi Chih’s prayer, or, to put it more accurately, once I let go of doing anything myself and allow Tai Shi Chih to help me, then I find myself in a better place to approach eco-activism. I find myself less prone to the fear-driven fantasy that I can single-handedly save the world. I feel less frightened by the consequences of climate and ecological breakdown, trusting that I can face whatever comes with the support of the Buddhas. I feel myself ‘led’ into the right actions – putting my own best ideas to one side, and trusting instead in being a part of an unfolding situation much bigger than anything I could understand.

After chanting Tai Shi Chih’s prayer, I returned to Akuppa’s text and found all the other-power wisdom I’d missed. Ah yes, here is the line that reminds us the Earth’s power will surge through us to help us defend her. Ah, it ends with the advice to let go into the music of life. What a relief!

As we are called to come to dear Earth’s aid, we will need as much support as we can gather around us. As Buddhists we are lucky to have a long rich tradition, full of wisdom and heart. If we keep listening to the Buddhas, they will show us the practices that will be most helpful for us – whether this is making offerings, zazen, chanting sutras or connecting deeply with our sangha. Tai Shi Chih reminded me of the importance of letting go of my self-power driven delusions, and of the deliciousness of relaxing back into refuge. I came away from the weekend replenished, heartened, and ready to go forwards into whatever is required of me next. ◎

TAI SHIH CHIH PRAYER

1. In the western sky is the great sun disc
Across its face are bands of cloud
Original nature is dark and light
And I myself fall prey to ill
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

2. The Dharma may be summarised
As good and purity of heart
But I have never mastered all
The precepts or samadhis
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

3. The Great Sage pointed out three ways
Two are ignoble, one is true,
A foolish being such as I
May walk the middle pathway
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

4. A great good fortune will be ours
If we can go beyond conceit
And think of others more than self
Trusting the Tathagata
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

5. Within my heart the bitterness
Remains like mud in a deep pool
I pray the sun above the gloom
Will make a lotus open now
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

6. To know the mind original
Is to know darkness more than light
The light will work its own good work
If only we will trust it
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

7. When I look into your sad eyes
And see the harm my acts have done
What is it that I would defend
Springing to my own defence?
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

8. The ego is insatiable
Its sharp teeth cling tenaciously
Oh, so that it may soon find peace
May tenderness enfold me
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

9. All the harm that's done by me
Is by three poisons set in train
They neither can begin nor cease.
I cannot be proud thereof
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

10. My body, speech and mind are weak
Conditions change and so do I
I weep for all the harm I've done
And yet my heart is lightened
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

11. I see my mind committing wrong
My eyes are opened to the truth
No longer my own advocate
May I now find a refuge
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

12. By my own power I am betrayed
By Buddha's power I am redeemed
The glory of the clouds on high
Comes from the hidden sun beyond.
Tai Shih Chih aid me now

THE SHAMBHALA WARRIOR MIND-TRAINING

By Akuppa

Firmly establish your intention to live your life for the healing of the world. Be conscious of it, honour it, nurture it every day. Be fully present in our time. Find the courage to breathe in the suffering of the world. Allow peace and healing to breathe out through you in return. Do not meet power on its own terms. See through to its real nature - mind- and heart-made. Lead your response from that level. Simplify. Clear away the dead wood in your life. Look for the heartwood and give it the first call on your time; the best of your energy. Put down the leaden burden of saving the world alone. Join with others of like mind. Align yourself with the forces of resolution. Hold in a single vision, in the same thought, the transformation of yourself and the transformation of the world. Live your life around that edge, always keeping it in sight. As a bird flies on two wings, balance outer activity with inner sustenance. Following your heart, realise your gifts. Cultivate them with diligence to

offer knowledge and skill to the world. Train in non-violence of body, speech and mind. With great patience with yourself, learn to make beautiful each action, word and thought. In the crucible of meditation, bring forth day by day into your own heart the treasury of compassion, wisdom and courage for which the world longs. Sit with hatred until you feel the fear beneath it. Sit with fear until you feel the compassion beneath that. Do not set your heart on particular results. Enjoy positive action for its own sake and rest confident that it will bear fruit. When you see violence, greed and narrow-mindedness in the fullness of its power, walk straight into the heart of it, remaining open to the sky and in touch with the earth. Staying open, staying grounded, remember that you are the inheritor of the strengths of thousands of generations of life. Staying open, staying grounded, recall that the thankful prayers of future generations are silently with you. Staying open, staying

grounded, be confident in the magic and power that arise when people come together in a great cause. Staying open, staying grounded, know that the deep forces of Nature will emerge to the aid of those who defend the Earth. Staying open, staying grounded, have faith that the higher forces of wisdom and compassion will manifest through our actions for the healing of the world. When you see weapons of hate, disarm them with love. When you see armies of greed, meet them in the spirit of sharing. When you see fortresses of narrow-mindedness, breach them with truth. When you find yourself enshrouded in dark clouds of dread, dispel them with fearlessness. When forces of power seek to isolate us from each other, reach out with joy. In it all and through it all, holding to your intention, let go into the music of life. **Dance!** 

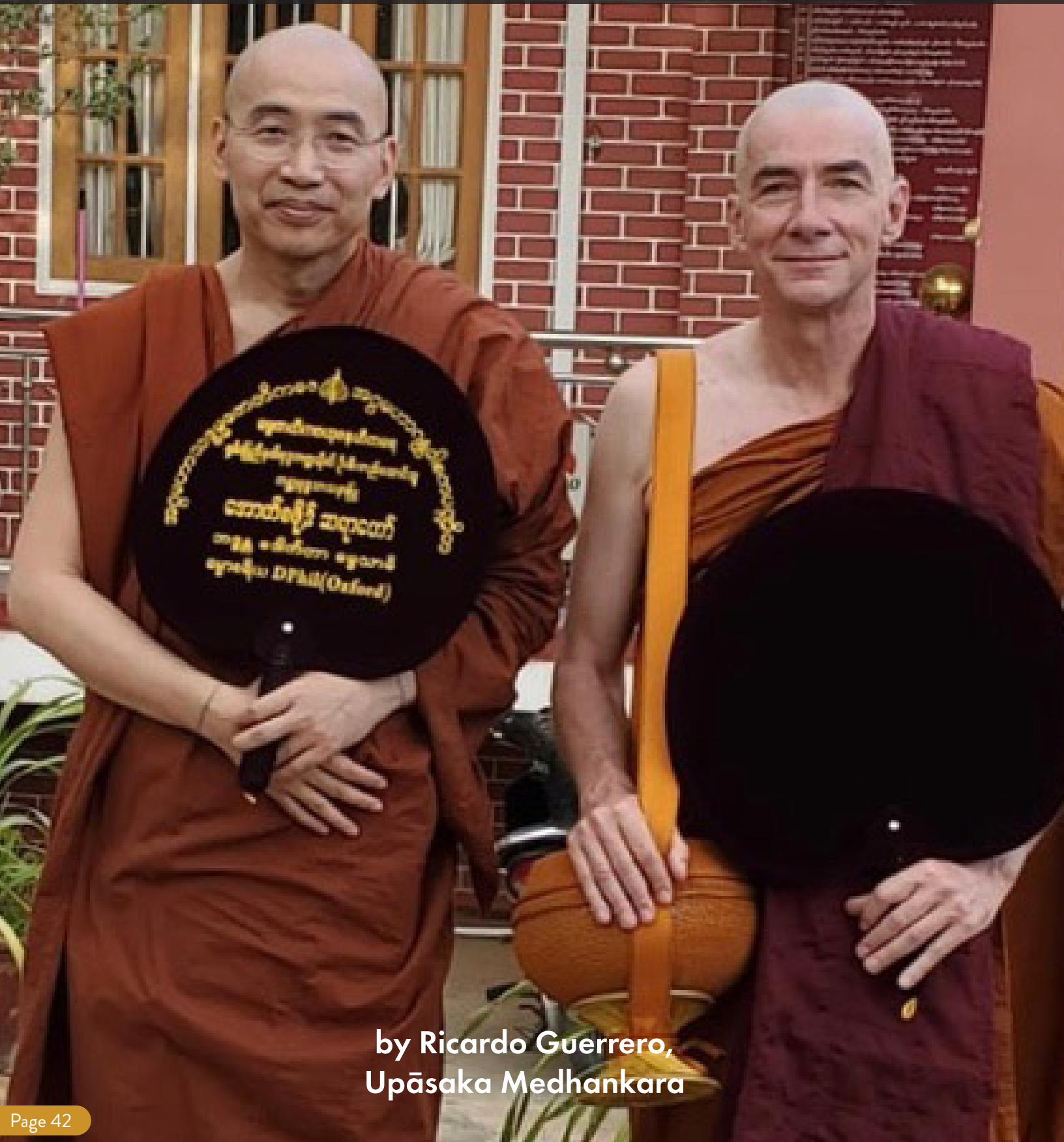
https://thebuddhistcentre.com/system/files/groups/files/shambala_warrior_training.pdf

By Akuppa, 2005

with gratitude to Joanna Macy



MEDITATION ON A NEW LEVEL: MY EXPERIENCE AS AN ORDAINED MONK



by Ricardo Guerrero,
Upāsaka Medhankara

For many years I have read, studied and translated about the Sangha of the Bhikkhus, the Order of monks, about the reasons that led the Buddha to create this particular society different from the society in which it is inserted and from which, no doubt, it depends. But, just as one of the characteristics of the Dhamma is “ehipassiko” –come and see–, as my theoretical knowledge was growing, I was becoming increasingly aware that I could only truly understand it through my own experience.

During the last years, I have been assessing the possibility of a temporary ordination, as allowed by the Theravada tradition and it is customary in some Asian countries, looking for the right opportunity and enough time that allowed me to have that experience with a double objective: to understand the reasons for the existence of the Sangha of the monks and to know from within the operation of this small-scale society to assess the extent to which it could adapt to the characteristics of Western society.

From the reading of the canonical texts and innumerable essays and studies of the different traditions it is deduced that the development of Buddhism over the centuries has only been possible due to the close relationship between the Sangha and the laity based on a series of reciprocal duties and mutual support. The monks are in charge of study, practice, preaching and, above all, the example of a moral life; the laity, support the monks in their material needs in the form of clothing, food, lodging and medicines. This model, which has been successfully reproduced in Asian countries with a Buddhist majority for more than two thousand years, has, however, a number of conditions that, a priori, make it difficult to adapt to increasingly more materialistic and utilitarian Western societies in which spiritual values have almost no value. This experience would allow me to have a clearer idea about this reality.

So, with the help and support of my teacher, Venerable Dr. Khammai Dhammasami, the summer of 2019 has been that of my ordination as a Buddhist monk of the Theravāda tradition; the summer in which, finally, I have been able to realize one of my most beloved personal projects. And now, with this article, I have the opportunity

to share it with all of you, my friends and colleagues within the European Buddhist Union.

I arrived at the Shan State Buddhist University Campus, in Taunggyi, Myanmar, in mid-May and I was warmly received by a community of monks and laity who make up the team in charge of the development and growth of this newly created university. The monastic community, under the direction of its abbot, Venerable Vicitta Kyaungleng, is a very lively young community, committed both to academic life and to its spiritual development and monastic obligations. From the first moment I felt welcome, which encouraged me and reaffirmed myself in the plans that had led me there.

From the first moment I had in mind that this experience could leave a deep and indelible mark on my life so I did not want to allow myself a single carelessness that could mean that some of the aspects of the monastic life I was going to share to go unnoticed. In this case, it was not about having one more experience to add to the set of multiple experiences that make up the life of any person; it was something much more important in my scale of values. Therefore, my first

concern was to "be up to" in order not to fail, neither to my teacher, nor to the monks nor to myself. I had about ten days to prepare before the scheduled date for my ordination, so I decided to embark on a small academic research around the Pātimokkha, the 227 rules of the bhikkhus contained in the Vinaya. To do this, I turned to the original texts in the Pali language and some reference books in English and French. This work and the help of the venerable bhikkhu who was in charge of my instruction allowed me to write a Spanish version of the book while understanding the deep meaning and the reason for each of the rules. My serious

personal commitment was to respect each and every one of them during my months as a monk.

After receiving the ordination as a samanera -novice- the previous day, on June 3 I received the complete ordination as a monk from my preceptor, the Venerable Dhammasami. The simple ceremony in the intimacy of the space of the sima in the temple, with the presence of all the monks of the community as witnesses, was an intense moment and I think I will always remember it as one of the most exciting and important days of my life.

If the life as a monk were to be defined with one word, it would be "simplicity". All the rules and norms related to the uses of monastic life are aimed at simplifying things, at making the monk to forget the accessory and to focus on his goal of spiritual liberation. The monk only owns three robes and a bowl to receive food. Everything else is accessory and will depend on the generosity of the lay donors. And this, far from supposing a limitation, is a liberation; that of being able to walk without a lot of baggage. Being a Western professional with commitments and responsibilities, I always assumed that adapting to





monastic life was going to be difficult, but it hasn't been that way. The monks' time is highly stipulated, meal times, time dedicated to work, activities, chanting and meditation in community are duly established so, once again, one can even free himself from the schedule. In my case, the work has been academic, eight hours a day in the tranquility of the library, dedicated to reading and translating, which has finally been very fruitful.

The fact of feeling liberated from the accessory, from what normally in our secular daily life is urgent, although trivial, makes the monk can focus on the truly important, which begins with the

inner gaze and self-knowledge. The result is the constant practice of mindfulness to everything that arises at every step, to people, to circumstances, to nature, to one's surroundings... and, much more interesting, to personal reactions and mental processes before all that. Everything that is recorded in the form of a story in the Pitaka Sutta and in the Abhidhamma Pitaka in a technical way, in the monk becomes pure practice. Moral discipline is not an effort, but is assumed and, at the same time as cultivated, it is naturally part of life. Monks make up a community of mutual help and support and that daily practice together with others such as alms of food favor the development of moral perfections.

When I arrived in Spain, some people asked me about possible conflicts between the monks in the monastery and, honestly, I couldn't remember any. In short, I have only been able to summarize my stay as three months without a watch, without taking care of my physical appearance, without having to think about what to do, without criticism or bad comments from anyone to anyone, without stress and without competition. Three months in which I have been able to appreciate the things that normally go unnoticed, that I have been able to be attentive to people, learning from some and helping others, and that I have been able to verify the usefulness of the Sangha for the spiritual development of

its members and that of the community that supports it. I could write much more, because many mentions and thanks remain in the inkwell, but in conclusion I have to say that, after this experience, I can recognize with greater knowledge the greatness of the Triple Jewel, the Buddha as a guide and teacher, the truth and actuality of Dhamma and the relevance and great value of the Sangha. ◎◎





Meditating under the rainbow:

why queer dharma can refresh
and transform your practice

by Dr Michael Vermeulen



Picture: sharon-mccutcheon-unsplash

The roots of queer dharma date back to California in the 1970s and '80s, where a Western Buddhist revolution crossed a Western social revolution.

Out of the Closet & Out of the Cloister

Fifty years ago, people who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans no longer accepted being pushed into 'the closet' where they were invisible, and thus vulnerable to abuse. The Stonewall Riots of June 1969 were an uproar against the systematic bullying of queer people by the New York Police. Stonewall was the culmination of a decade of such protests across the USA. It was also the start of the Pride parades, advocating equal rights for LGBT+ people. Together with the anti-racist and feminist movements, the Gay-Rights movement condemned discrimination within a society that presented itself as neutral, while de facto it was white, patriarchal and heteronormative. LGBT+ people came 'out of the closet' and became visible within their neighbourhoods and social networks. They also

started looking for spiritual homes that would accept them the way they are. The dominant response within Christian churches was one of firm rejection. The dominant response within Buddhist communities however, was one of gradual acceptance.

Meanwhile, a silent revolution took place within Buddhism itself. Buddhism has been practiced in Europe and America for well over a century now. So far, the most visible difference from Asian cultures is that meditation in the West is mainly practiced by lay Buddhists. Lay practitioners often have a job and a family. They are also mostly sexually active. As a result, Western Buddhists look for spiritual guidance on life as a Buddhist in a busy buzzing society, rather than on life as a celibate in a secluded quiet cloister.

Sex & Silence

In the Buddhist canons, most references to sexual activity can be found in the *vinaya* (monastic rules). As these are all about maintaining a celibate life, they are not really relevant to lay practitioners. So other parts of the canons get renewed attention in the West. The (Mahayana) Avatamsaka Sutra for example, tells us about a woman who was a sex-worker at the time of the Buddha, suitably (nick)named Pass-a-Million. She was the 36th of 53 great Masters of Skillful Means who all reached Awakening. Pass-a-Million however, continued working as a sex-worker, now using her skills to help others on their path towards Awakening. Her story proves that - at least for Mahayana - Awakening and having sex are not mutually exclusive.

Buddhologists also pointed out that the *vinaya* never

condemns sex as such (including same-sex). In fact, the Buddha never used any homo-negative vocabulary. But the impact of silence is not independent of its context. The West has a long history of demonising and prosecuting its gay communities, often motivated on religious grounds. Today, millions of people hate LGBT+ people for who they are. That was even more so in 1969, when being 'homosexual' was still considered a psychiatric illness and discrimination was legal. But heterosexual Buddhists were rarely confronted with, or even aware of, queer discrimination. If you are a heterosexual person in a heteronormative society, you will of course not be reminded every day of your sexual orientation. Gay and lesbian Buddhists therefore felt the need to have their own comfort zone from time to time.

Rise of the Posture Queens

In 1980 an ad was published in a local San Franciscan paper calling for a meeting of Buddhist meditators who were also gay. It was the start of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship (GBF), one of the



oldest groups to debate and meditate on what it means to be fully gay and fully Buddhist. Zen priest Issan Dorsey, became the group's 'spiritual adviser':

"A surprisingly large meeting of concerned men coalesced in April 1980, including Issan (...) The group called itself the Gay Buddhist Club and later changed the name to Maitri, the Buddhist word for friendliness. Issan called it the Posture Queens: "At first we'd just sit around and smoke cigarettes and complain about how hard it was to practice and be gay. Gradually, we began to meditate for a while before our discussions, and pretty soon there was a Buddha and incense and flowers."

Issan put Zen Center's facilities at the disposal of the group. He also showed them, with his own integration of homosexuality and Buddhism, that the two were not incompatible" (David Schneider, *Street Zen - The Life and Work of Issan Dorsey*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 1993, pp 128-129). The GBF is not Zen nor a new tradition but an ecumenical Buddhist movement. The name 'Gay Buddhist Fellowship' was adopted in the early 1990s (GBF newsletters can be downloaded at gaybuddhist.org). At present, almost all major Buddhist traditions in Europe and America host events, meditations, and retreats specifically for LGBT+ practitioners. Many have queer teachers too.

monks for example consider themselves at the doorstep of Awakening, while they believe other Buddhists can only hope for a 'better' rebirth (as a lookalike of themselves, i.e. a male heterosexual monastic).

The dichotomy of society based on sexual orientation - between gay (exclusively same-sex attracted) and hetero (exclusively opposite-sex attracted) - is a fairly recent Western addition to this list. The concept 'homosexual' was only created in late 19th century Europe to describe a psychiatric illness, sharply distinct from the rest of society that was presumed to be healthy (read: heterosexual). As soon as proper research was done on sexual orientation, this dichotomy was proven wrong. We now know that in all cultures of all times, people have expressed a wide variety of sexual appetites. Furthermore, research in biology showed this is the same for other animals. Alfred Kinsey, a pioneer in research on human sexual behaviour in the USA wrote: *"Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and*

goats. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories (...) The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects." (Kinsey, et. al, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, 1948, p 639).

Queer Theory

There is no single definition of 'queer' but in the broadest sense it refers to those people whose sexuality or gender identity does not fit the accepted social models of their time and culture. Throughout history almost all cultures gave some space to sexual & gender diversity within their societies. Today however, the theological model of the Christian Middle Ages (in which sex that is not exclusively opposite-sex & in function of procreation is labelled as 'unnatural,' and in which everyone is 'created' heterosexual and cisgender) has colonised the world. Even in Buddhist cultures (which reject the notion of a creator god). This authoritarian model condemned sexual & gender diversity as abnormal and immoral. It excluded more people than any other in history and pushed queer people into illegality and psychiatry.

Queer theorists warn that identity categories should never be used rigidly, because they will always inevitably exclude some people. As Kinsey said: 'nature rarely deals with discrete categories'. Our brain on the other hand has limited capacity to absorb the massive stream of data that our senses receive continuously. It has to classify and simplify, and thus creates categories by which it analyses (but also judges) our world. The problem arises when we confuse our self-created mental taxonomy of the world with reality itself. In other words when we believe that the categories our mind uses as a tool to interact with the world are the real thing. In Buddhist spirituality we call this the untrained mind.

Queer Dharma

There are clear links between Queer Theory and Buddhist Spirituality. David Halperin's definition of queer as 'an identity without an essence' for example resonates strongly with the Buddhists concepts of not-self, interconnectedness and emptiness. In general, queer dharma addresses our mental prisons by which we classify sexual orientation and gender identity:

The untrained mind assigns an essence (svabhava or 'own-being') to our mental constructions. But via meditation "they are found to be illusory, and shunyata (emptiness or, as I prefer to translate, transparency), that is, the lack of inherent existence in persons, places, or things, is seen to be the case. (...) Rita Gross has shown that, at least for the Mahayana, there is considerable support for the argument that there is no such thing as inherent femaleness (and, by extension, no support for inherent maleness) (...) From a Buddhist perspective, the most obvious mistake which patriarchal consciousness makes is to split reality into subject and object. This is identified as a serious block to understanding reality and achieving liberation from samsara. (...) Gay (queer) consciousness challenges dualistic thinking and replaces it with non-dual consciousness, and overturns, inverts, turns inside out, consensus reality. This is a stated goal of Buddhism. Ordinary, eluded views about reality are called "upside down" (viparyasa). The Yogachara school teaches that wisdom is obtained when consciousness is

reversed - literally turned around or turned inside out (paraviritti). Perfect wisdom appears when the deepest level of consciousness is reversed. If this is true, queer consciousness is more compatible with the Buddha Dharma than the traditional patriarchal consciousness, and we can expect queer thinking to refresh and reform Buddhism." (Corless, Sex for Queer Buddhists, GBF Newsletter Aug/Sep 2002, pp 3-4).

Theistic religions also often link our mental binary categories to a (divine) moral judgement between good/superior/healthy versus bad/inferior/ill. Queer dharma reminds us that such moral dualism is alien to Buddhist spirituality: "The Buddha's teaching is an ethical system, but it lacks the moral categories of right and wrong, good and evil, good and bad. (...) The Buddha said that he was only concerned about suffering and the end of suffering (...) He would talk about what is "skillful" and "unskillful," not about what is "good" or "bad." (...) So it is really important to be clear that this judgemental perspective doesn't have any place in the worldview of the

dharma. Our gay sexuality is fine, as long as we do not use it in ways that cause suffering to ourselves or to others." (Eric Kolvig, Gay Sexuality and the Dharma, GBF Newsletter April/May 2006, p 1-2)

Awoken Mind

Queer dharma specifies the non-dual nature of the Awoken mind. This Buddha nature is neither male nor female, neither heterosexual nor gay, neither cisgender nor transgender.

Dividing society into rigid, binary categories and using these for moral judgements are characteristics of the untrained mind. It is a goal of Buddhist spirituality to overcome such preoccupations. Therefore, meditating 'under the rainbow' (to become skillful in identifying and conquering these mental, social and moral constructions) is not only a practice by and for LGBT+ Buddhists. It can also refresh and transform everyone's practice.

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