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EUROPEAN BUDDHIST

magazine

EBU conference 2022

“Buddhism in Europe:
Unity in Diversity”



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Introducing our writers



Dharmavidya David Brazier (Rev.Dr.) is head of the Amida Order and Amida Shu Pureland sangha. He is the author of more than a dozen books and many other writings. He is an authority on Buddhist psychology and President of the International Zen Therapy Institute.



Claudine Carayol-Shinoda is born the 6th of August 1949 in Saint-Malo, France. She has 2 children and 2 grandchildren. Qualified in French literature, she went to Japan at the age of 24 where she studied Japanese painting “sumié” under the guidance of Hattori-Shofu, a Zen monk, for 5 years. At the same time, she taught French literature at Nagoya University. She met Reiyukai, Spiritual Friendship Buddhism, in Japan and came back in France with her husband with the common goal to spread Reiyukai Teachings in France. Translator of the Lotus Sutra, other sutras and various Buddhist texts, she dedicates her life to practice and to promote Reiyukai teachings while continuing painting. Vice-president of EBU for 6 years, she was president from 2005 until 2008. She is president in France of Reiyukai, Spiritual Friendship Buddhism.



Dharmacharini Vassika born in England, she discovered the Dharma while at university through classes run by members of the Triratna Buddhist Order (TBO). She was ordained into the TBO in 2001. After studying Psychology, she trained and worked as a British Sign Language Interpreter before joining the team of a vegetarian restaurant in London, a team-based right livelihood Buddhist business, such initiatives being an integral part of the Triratna vision. Two years after her ordination, she moved to Paris with her French partner, also a member of the TBO, to help with the running of the Paris Triratna Centre, founded in 1997, whose spiritual direction she took on after its founder left. In 2019 she passed on the direction of the Centre to concentrate on the purchase and refurbishment of new, larger, premises. Now, having freed herself from these responsibilities, she looks forward to focussing on Dharma teaching and offering spiritual friendship to members of the Triratna Sangha in Paris and in France.



Ton Kamphof studied philosophy and theology, worked in industrial chaplaincy and as a trainer and consultant on the subject of safety and health at the workplace. He has written handbook and articles on this same theme and worked as a meditation and spiritual trainer. Practiced in the tradition of Thay and of the Diamond Approach almost 20 years now. Known as an editor of a special edition of ‘The Klankschaal’, magazine in the Netherlands in the tradition of Thay/Plum Village, called ‘we thank Thay’. Practiced 13 years in this tradition and co-guided a sangha in Utrecht (NL). Writer of a well received book (in Dutch) on Thich Nhat Hanh.



Lama Shenpen Rinpoche is born in 1969, in France. He entered Nalanda monastery at age 16, joined Sera-Jhe monastic university in 1990, where he will spend about 10 years, studying but also taking care of the dispensary. Rinpoche got recognized early in his monk life as the Tulku of Lama Gendun Rabgye, a Geshe from Kharnang Monastery, Kham, Tibet. Rinpoche spend few years in Greece, in Spain, Slovenia, and continues to travel life, Rinpoche continued teaching and transmitting Dharma as lay Lama. Now father of five, Rinpoche has a unique and very practical way of teaching, based on daily life.



Ven. Lama Ngawang Dorje Dondrub. Sakya Buddhist teacher for more than 15 years, expert in the application of Buddhist philosophy in personal development, both in individuals and in organisations and companies. Through his monastic life he has developed a special skill in unravelling the dharma to positivise the individual in the face of everyday difficulties and to transform ordinary conflicts into wonderful challenges. “If you grow you help and if you help you grow”.



Emilia Amalā Raunio is a junior Dharma teacher in the Bodhidharma association, Helsinki. As a background in food science her interest is to heal the world together with our everyday actions. Emilia is vice president of Finnish Buddhist Union and council member of EBU. Emilia is also one of the hosts in EBU’s European Buddha Podcast.



Stefano Davide Bettera is a writer, philosopher and journalist. He alternates his work as an author with teaching and popularising activities. He is editor of the quarterly Buddhism Magazine. He is Vice President of the European Buddhist Union and in the Board of the Italian Buddhist Union. He has published, among others: “Il volto dell’altro. Quando la gioia diventa una scelta di libertà” (Meltemi 2022), “L’abbraccio del mondo. Cultivating the wisdom of the spirit to build an ecological mind” (Oscar Mondadori - 2021), “Il Buddha era una persona concreta” (Rizzoli - 2019).

For more information: www.stefanobettera.com

Editorial

“The community, the place where diversity becomes unity”

One often wonders what the quality, the perspective of a modern Buddhism can be. What role can the Dharma, with its values, its history, the extraordinary quality of its teachings play in the interweaving of complex dynamics such as those we are experiencing today. The strength of the transformation brought about by the Buddha lies precisely in this moving from a contemplative dimension to make it an experience.

An experience that takes on body and authenticity in the relationship, in the encounter with the world and, from there, in taking root in a community. In building the foundations for this community to grow. There is no Buddhist orthopraxis if not within the Sangha, within the community. This is the place where diversity can become unity. It is this belonging to a community of “like/diverse” of “far/united” that invokes the sense of a choice, of an approach, of approaching life with a religious outlook.

Today, the globalised dimension of all societies, in the West as well as in the East, imposes on us an enlarged community dimension, where it is no longer possible to look away from the far as well as the near. The responsibility to act to reduce suffering, where possible, calls us. The fate of every life we encounter becomes our destiny. It becomes the vow we cannot untie. We walk this path because we are convinced that a gesture of kindness to the world is priceless but can be the engine of change. Because, again, it can be the path by which diversity becomes unity.



Stefano Davide Bettera
European Buddhist Union
Vice President

Editorial

As a tradition we like to dedicate our autumn issue to the yearly held Conference. I would warmly like to thank everyone being part of the EBU Conference and making it real and alive, celebrating the unity in diversity. And if You are new to the EBU Conference, welcome to join it in form of this autumn issue of the European Buddhist Magazine.

Perhaps you have noticed that getting together, uniting and sharing has gotten this special fresh and new tone after these pandemic years. Many of us were not able to be in beautiful Nantes, but thanks to technology we could still enjoy the rich conversations, dialogues, talks and Buddhist practice online. When we can hear and experience the manifold traditions and practices it can actually make us understand our own tradition and what we do even more. There is no comparing or race, just learning from each other. And in the end of the day, what a great beauty, in this diversity to understand that we all are actually heading in the same direction in the foot steps of Lord Buddha.

Once again the Conference inspire us to work and thrive in our actions so that it will benefit all living beings and their happiness. As Mahatma Gandhi said: "Our ability to reach unity in diversity is the beauty and the test of our civilisation". So let us celebrate together the richness of our manifold traditions and share the voice of Buddha and hopefully live according it in our everyday actions wherever we go.

Unity in Diversity!

Love

Emilia Amalā Raunio
European Buddhist Union
Editor in chief and Council member

COOPERATION & REVERENCE



By Dhammavidya David Brazier

It's very nice to be here with all of you. I must say I feel a little overawed at being at an in person conference after such a long time of isolation enforced by the pandemic. It's very good to be here. I'm the first speaker so I thought I might use my presentation to raise some questions and share some things that we might then go on talking about in the time ahead. So probably more questions than answers here.

I think I was originally asked to give this presentation because at a previous meeting I had referred to my book called "the dark side of the mirror " which is about the text Genjo Koan by Dogen Zen. So the book is a book about a Zen Master written by myself a "Pure Land" Buddhist teacher. The book was published by Windhorse which is the publishing arm of the Triratna Sangha. So the book, which I have got here, is itself a tangible example of co-operation between Buddhist traditions, and substantially that's what EBU is all about so Ron kindly asked me if I would give this talk since I have produced this item which makes co-operation between Buddhist Sanghas a reality. It raises the

whole question of how much such co-operation is possible and how much it's desirable and I can see several angles to this question. I haven't got time to deal with them all but I can see that all our traditions they all spring from a single root, and the teachings of Sakhyamuni are there. Perhaps we interpret them differently, perhaps we practise differently but these are all ways that we can show to one another to help one another. When I travel around the Buddhist world when I am in the West all too often as soon as I appear people want to know –What is your tradition? What is your practice? In a way that is kind of exclusive – Are you one of us or are you another group? Whereas when I am in the East again people want to know about practice and so on but it has a very different feel. You arrive at a temple. Perhaps the priest takes you in front of the altar and immediately we do some practice. We do some practice in whatever his style is, we ring bells and chant Sutras and so on. Perhaps we circumambulate the altar or perhaps we don't but we do some practice, and then afterwards probably they serve tea and we sit down and the priest says "and what do you do?" It's said with a kind of genuine interest, curiosity, alacrity. Our practice our way of celebrating the Buddha, celebrating the Dharma, celebrating the Sangha. These are things we can share with one another, things that we like to receive from one another. They are not tokens of membership of exclusive groups. They are things

that connect us. So I really have a very strong hope that in the West , in Europe especially, we can make this diversity that we have into an asset rather than a liability. We have a very difficult history behind us as Europeans. So much time and energy has been wasted on conflicts between religious groups on this continent. I certainly hope that we don't become trapped in that kind of conflictual sectarianism. That we are able to demonstrate something different. Something that is a manifestation of the spirit of the Dharma, the spirit of harmony, of co-operation, of working together.

So that's my first point really.

In contrast to this I would like to share, a little, about what's happened in my own Sangha over the past few years. I was the head of the Amida order for approaching twenty years and during that time many people developed in their Dharma practice, advanced along the spiritual path, and some of them became teachers and gradually I would hand over responsibility to other people and all this went extremely well and people took on responsibilities and so on. Little by little I would step back and pass over the reins to other people. And then along came the pandemic and somebody suggested to me that I might start making podcasts. So I did that and out of this a group of new people came into the Sangha and they started to meet and soon we were having online meetings.

Everybody was going on to zoom and we were no different. So a whole range of zoom meetings started to happen and mostly these were the new people and I was much involved in facilitating these groups, and the people from the existing Sangha, you might say the old Sangha, (some of whom were kind of itching to get more responsibility and to do things in their own way), didn't want to come to these meetings and, to cut a long story short, what has actually happened is that the Sangha that we had three years ago has now split into maybe half a dozen separate groups. The different teachers have taken different directions. This, of course, is something that we have seen

over and over again in Buddhist history. Most of the important teachers that we read about had several leading disciples and in due course those disciples go off and do their own thing in their own way with their own people. So when we look at the history of Buddhism what we see is a sort of branching tree structure. From every bough there come branches, from every branch there come twigs, it spreads out like this. So we have these two different tendencies in Buddhism. On the one hand there is nothing intrinsic in the Dharma that prevents groups from co-operating and getting together. At the same time there is a natural tendency towards bifurcation, towards diversification,

towards splitting -as we move from generation to generation, as the Sangha grows and the transmission of the Dharma is through a multiplicity of people. Sometimes they say there are as many Dharmas as Lamas. Each teacher has their own style, they develop their own group in their own way. So two contrasting tendencies, a kind of dialectic probably between the two and so there is a sort of challenge for us to see. Can we make this into a richness which will be fertile ground for the Dharma in the future or is it going to be, like so many times in the past on this continent, a scene of conflict and strife. I guess it is up to us but it is certainly something to think about. I remember that



“ Dalai Lama was once asked if it would be a good thing if all the different schools of Buddhism were unified. And I remember him saying: “Oh no, very bad idea, there is a great diversity of people. Diverse groups of people call for diverse presentations of the Dharma”.

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the Dalai Lama was once asked if it would be a good thing if all the different schools of Buddhism were unified. And I remember him saying: "Oh no very bad idea, there is a great diversity of people. Diverse groups of people call for diverse presentations of the Dharma". So we need this diversity, many groups, many styles, many front doors through which people can come into the house of the Dharma. But once they come through that door we hope that what they will find is love, harmony, compassion, wisdom and not conflict, strife, exclusivism. This is the challenge that we face.

Ok that's that I wanted to say those things, I feel they are quite important. Many people these days are inclined to see religion, and they will count Buddhism as a religion, as being simply a source of trouble and conflict. We have this wound in our culture from the religious conflicts and persecutions that there have been in the past. If we could present a religion which can manifest genuine friendship, co-operation and so on, this could have a hugely healing effect upon our whole continent. It would affect people, not just Buddhist people but everybody. I am now starting to reflect on what you might call the spirit of our times, the culture that we live in. And there is something that I want to say about this because I suspect that we maybe at the cusp of a quite substantial change in the spirit of our times - the culture that we are living in, the assumptions that we make, things that seem most fundamental, things that we just

take for granted. What I have in mind here is that if we think back over history, for several hundred years there has been emerging a kind of what is sometimes called "modernism", a rather rational view of society which has given rise to capitalism and to big technological advances of one sort or another, materialism in various forms.

At the bottom of this collection of broad trends it seems to me that there has been a deep belief in progress. There has been the idea, the assumption, that things inevitably, overall, get better. Even if we are knocked back a bit by wars or disasters of one sort or another, still people have had a faith that their grand children will inevitably occupy a better world than we do ourselves now. This belief has been there, this belief in a sort of inevitability of progress has been deeply ingrained in our culture, in all the assumptions we make, for certainly 200 years, probably rather longer, perhaps since the renaissance. Now when we do think in a kind of historical and comparative fashion this actually is rather unusual. Most of the great civilisations in history have not had this kind of belief in such a central and fundamental place, if they had it at all. Many of the greatest civilisations felt that the golden age was way back in the past. Certainly this was true in China, it was probably true in Ancient Greece. Many of the great civilisations have had this kind of assumption that what was inevitable was that we were in decline, things were getting worse. People believed that life

expectancy was getting less not getting more, that things were getting more difficult. Actually we see this notion, this fundamental notion of decline in Buddhism. In many schools of Buddhism, actually throughout the Buddhist world there are notions of the decline, the stages in the decline of the Dharma. If you were alive at the time of the Buddha then you got the perfect Dharma, the real thing in its fullness. Then five hundred years later, well you certainly had access to some good teachers, but you didn't get Sakhyamuni himself. A thousand years later things were even more difficult, and then grew up the notion of Mappo, of the Dharma ending age. And this notion of decline was certainly part of the taken for granted assumption that was in the background of the culture when Buddhist schools were taking shape; new schools in South Asia, East Asia, China, Japan. They were formed in a climate of public opinion in which the basic assumption was decline. We, in the West, have had this staunch belief in the opposite, in progress. Things get better. We are willing to invest because we think in the future there will be more like that. This is deeply ingrained in all our assumptions, or at least it has been until pretty recently. There are some signs that things are changing. If you do a survey of people now and say "Do you think your grand children will live in a better world than you do?" many people are nowadays, inclined to say no. And this is a very recent phenomenon. I would say, if you had to date it at all, it maybe

began with the financial crash, the subprime loans debacle. It's been accentuated by the experience of the pandemic, but fundamentally it's due to our growing awareness of the ecological peril that we are in. It's very hard to be optimistic, to believe that humans are going to do what is necessary to prevent ecological disaster. We have these big conferences, international agreements, the Paris accords, and so on. They never seem to be enough, they don't go anywhere near it. I read that during the first really severe lockdown at the beginning of the Pandemic there was a sharp reduction in economic activity, in the use of fossil fuels and so on. They said you could see the Himalayas from Katmandu instead of seeing smog like you usually do. But even that apparently, was not as much as we would actually need to change in order to prevent global warming getting out of hand. At that time some people we have an opportunity to do it now, but of course we didn't we all wanted to get back to normal. Normal is what is destroying the planet and as we gradually become more and more aware of this a certain sense of Mappo, of the Kaliuga of the Dharma ending age is bound to arise in us.

Is this going to mean that we change the way that we present the Dharma. Is there something that the Dharma can say in this time of crisis when the whole human species is facing an unprecedented threat?

I think I'm going to have to leave it with you but I do think it is a very

important question and it may well mean that the way that we view the Dharma itself changes. We have to a substantial degree in the West remade the Dharma that we imported from Asia, we have reshaped it to fit our Western attitudes and our Western assumptions. As I have already said those assumptions were not the ones that prevailed at the time when the schools of Dharma that we practice came into being. Is that going to change now? Are we going to see some of the more traditional ways in a new light. I don't know but it's a very interesting question.

OK so I have raised some questions. I hope I have made us think a little bit.

I'd like to share with you a little bit about one particular project which I'm involved in and in some ways has come about in relation to some of these problems. This project is called "Oasis de Longue Vie". It's in central France. It's a small community conceived as being for ageing Buddhists, Buddhist in their later years from any Buddhist school. It was the brainchild of Lama Sherab Namdreul and when it started it was a very small idealistic project. It started with three people. They searched around and they bought some land with a building on it and I think they put a caravan on the land and that is how it started, and they started building. Soon the caravan wasn't needed any more because they had build two

new houses. So the three people they have now got three houses. After three years or so there were still only three people and then one of those died. At this point it looked like the whole project might fold up but they persevered and pretty soon more people started to come along. There are now seven actual resident, several new houses have been built. There will soon be nine residents. There are more people coming and they are well connected with their local community so that when they have their festival days maybe sixty people show up. There is a meditation hall, there is a Stupa, there is also a swimming pool. Each of the residents has their own self contained house. It is not a communal community in the sense of shared meals or shared washing or anything like that. Each person has an independent house. This means that the co-operation that happens between people is entirely voluntary. Events get organised, practice sessions are set up and so on, but you don't have to go if you don't want to. You can just stay in your house.

In actual fact, a huge amount of co-operation occurs and some of the residents are a lot more able bodied than others; they help one another. It's a very successful project now and it provides a wonderful alternative to institutional care or the loneliness of old age. It also fits in with the notion of co-operation and of creating communities or settlements, small settlements, in the countryside away from the big cities, which may well be what will be needed



Picture: Jon Flobrant-unsplash

if ecological problems persist. One of the principles here is small is beautiful, so they don't really want their project to grow and grow and grow. Many of the excellencies of the project, the harmony and co-operation and so on, would be much more difficult to sustain in a larger group people. So probably there will be a limit, ten or a dozen people living there. However there is a pretty steady trickle of visitors who come and say this is wonderful. I would really like to be part of this. Maybe now, maybe later in my life, but it's attractive. So, I was thinking about this and I live about 15 kilometers away from Oasis. I live in a Hermitage with some land. Having thought I about I propose that my land be could become a basis for Oasis Two, a second Oasis, if there is a demand, if there is a need. I would be willing to give my own land and

buildings if other people will come forward with the capital to do the building, because we would need to build houses, It would be, like Oasis one, a self governing community, each resident having one vote in the association which would own the land and buildings, which would be a kind of cross behind a housing association and a religious charity. We have a blue print, we know how it is done because Oasis One have jumped through all the hoops already. Will it happen? Well we will have to wait and see. But for me it's one way of putting into practice the kind of co-operation, inter Sangha harmony, that I've been talking about in this talk. It may also be a way of responding to the changing atmosphere of our times. You may have noticed that up until the pandemic, certainly in France, there was a strong

tendency for the countryside to become increasingly empty as people moved into the cities. Since the pandemic this has gone into reverse. People are moving out of the cities into the countryside. But they don't want to be in the countryside in total isolation. So perhaps we are an idea whose time has come. Well we will see.

It's just an example. It would be nice to see it as part of the spirit of European Buddhism Union.

Pure Land tradition has a somewhat distinctive take on the Dharma and how it should be practised. It is very much a Dharma for ordinary people. It is not really so much a Dharma for ascetic monks living in monasteries. It's a Dharma for ordinary citizens living busy lives out in society. Therefore it involves

a recognition of the strengths but more particularly the limitations of that situation. The founders of Pure Land in Japan certainly took the view that we don't have in this present age (perhaps Mappo), we do not have it in us to become enlightened by our own effort. It simply isn't practical. It is not feasible to lift oneself up by one's bootstraps into being a Buddha when one is an ordinary person in this world. It can't be done. But what is possible is to have a relationship with Buddha. To be grateful for what Buddha has given us, which has been given like a grace.

When Buddha died some people would say he was a pioneer. We have to follow in his footsteps and achieve what he achieved. But you know, Buddha was a pretty exceptional case. Other people would say, no it wasn't quite like that. I was in my village. I hadn't done a great amount of spiritual practice. Maybe none at all and the Buddha came into our village. I had a twenty minute conversation with him and my life has never been the same since. That change was not brought about by my effort, it was not brought about by my practice, my training, my ethical discipline, my study of the

Sutras, or anything of the kind. It was brought about by a power outside of myself. It was brought about by the Buddha coming into my life and I have never been as I was before since that time. I've been transformed by other power and I am immensely grateful. So my practice is not really to achieve something, I don't want to be him but I do want to express my profound gratitude for what he has done for me, what he has given me, for the Dharma which has come into my life as such a grace. This is kind of the tone of Pure Land and I personally have found it amazingly liberating. It takes away all the anxiety of how am I doing with my practice. And it give me a framework within which it is much easier to acknowledge my own shortcoming, vulnerability, limitations, emotions, my proneness to making mistakes for getting things wrong. In Japanese we call this Bombyu, our Bombyu nature, and when you can face that shadow side of yourself and see it's reality it gives rise to a certain kind of humility. It gives rise to compassion, because you see that this must be the case for everybody else as well and it gives rise to the sense of the huge gap or distance between how I am

and how Buddha is. And this is a basis for devotion, adoration. So these are the characteristics of the Pure Land school. It is a relatively, you might say, religious form of Buddhism in which we worship, adore the Buddha and call his name. We are constantly calling the Buddha's name, which means we are constantly taking refuge. Taking refuge is at the heart of every school of Buddhism and we make that our practice.

So we are about at the end of our time. If we have that kind of gratitude to the Buddhas we want to put their spirit into practice and I hope we can do it in the co-operative and harmonious ways I have talked about. I hope we can be sensitive to the ambient society around us and the way it's changing and the problems. I hope we can find responses to those changes. I hope the things I have said interest you. If there is anyone out there who's interested in the oasis project come and talk to me. If anyone wants to know more about Pure Land Buddhism talk to me, but from now on I shall be listening to all the other great teachers who are going to come and speak to us at this conference.

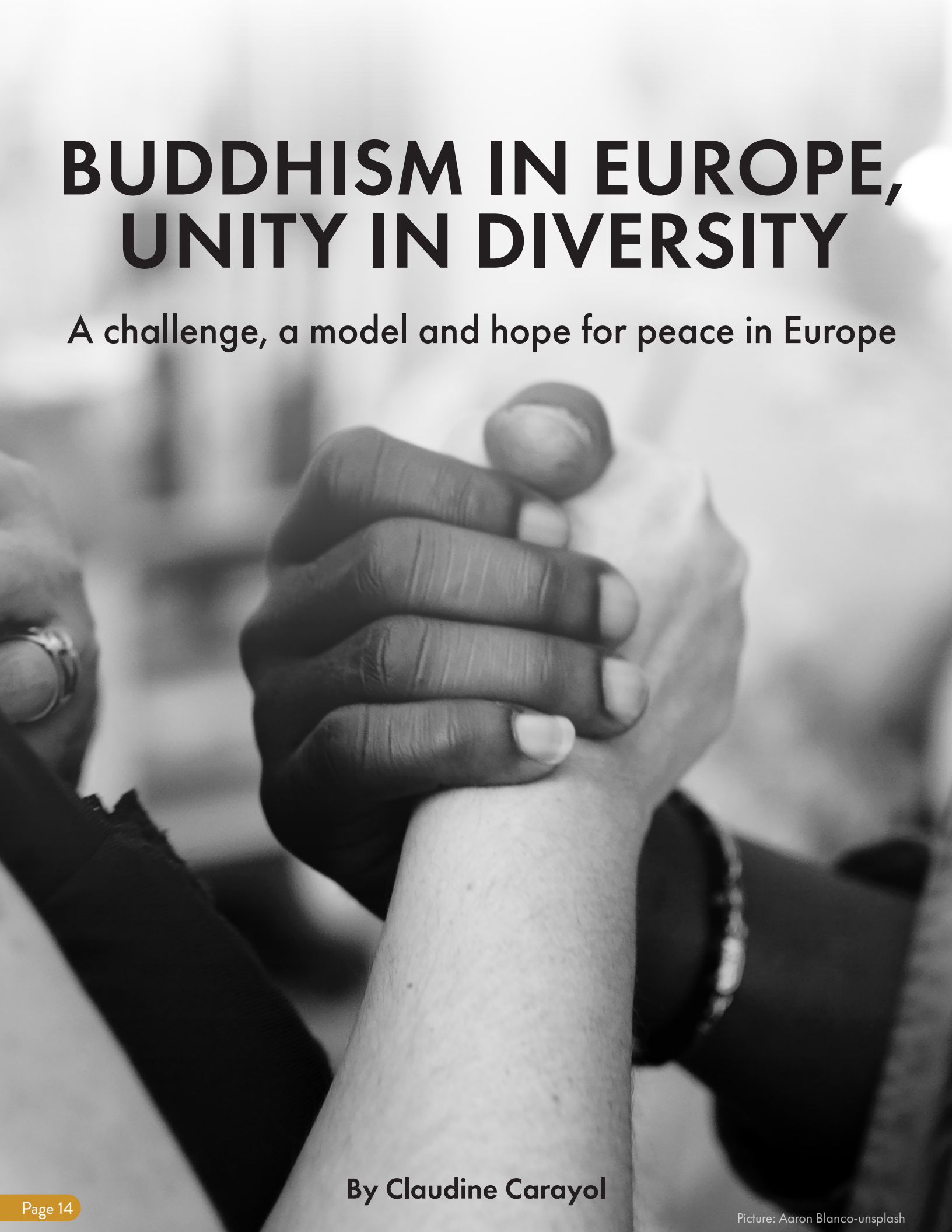
Thank you very much. 🧘





BUDDHISM IN EUROPE, UNITY IN DIVERSITY

A challenge, a model and hope for peace in Europe



By Claudine Carayol

I will first present diversity, the fundamental characteristic of all existence, according to the Buddha's Teachings, then the diversity of European nations and finally the diversity of Buddhist traditions in Europe. You will then understand why I used the word "challenge" which contains the idea of taking on an ambitious and difficult project, such as unity.

I will then talk about the path that leads to unity in diversity, a path that makes diversity an asset and not a source of conflicts. I will conclude by talking about the EBU (European Buddhist Union) as a federation that can contribute to harmony and peace in Europe.

What does the Buddha teach about the diversity of human beings?

As mentioned in my introduction, according to the Buddha's Teachings, diversity is one of the fundamental characteristics of the reality of all existence, and therefore of human beings'. Each person has his or her own place and plays his or her own part, within impermanence and interdependence, according to his or her own nature. Each existence

is unique, particular. In perpetual transformation, it is subject to innumerable conditionings - positive or negative - linked to past actions and their effects. For the effects of actions do not disappear but will always manifest themselves, in a near or distant future, under certain conditions. Human beings, however, are by nature ignorant of these principles which govern reality. They are unable to know the deep causes of the circumstances they encounter and under which conditions these circumstances appear. They are also ignorant of the truth of their conditioned nature and of the truth of their essential nature.

Human beings, who are so diverse, are capable of producing sublime masterpieces, showing the utmost self-sacrifice and exemplary courage. The Buddha teaches that human beings, endowed with marvellous qualities and great talents, are also endowed with the potential to achieve the state of Enlightenment that he himself attained. Yet, let us not forget he also teaches that human beings belong to the ten states of existence - worlds to which all sentient beings belong, in varying

proportions - and as such, they also belong to the lower worlds.

These worlds are made up of the lower states - those of demons, of spirits with insatiable desires, of animals and quarrelsome spirits -, then the world of human beings, the world of celestial spirits, and the world of practitioners of the Buddha's Teachings (traditionally divided into three groups, shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas but we will come back to this division later). The world of the Enlightened, the Buddhas, represents the ultimate state, that of supreme Enlightenment.

This clarification of the complexity and diversity of human nature seems important to me. We belong to these different worlds, we and our family members, those who have preceded us on this earth and whose heritage we have received, as well as all the beings we encounter in this life.

This awareness -and the humility that stems from it- are precious, just as the other great principles enunciated by the Buddha, for they are essential to the building of a deep and solid unity.

Human beings are capable of the best and of the worst! We witness this on a daily basis, and I would like to give just one edifying example, which also allows me to express my gratitude that this conference could be held in our city.

As a matter of fact, Nantes was the last bastion of resistance in France against the spirit of conciliation and tolerance so desired by King Henry IV of France. The ongoing religious war between Catholics and Protestants in the 16th century had caused the death of tens of thousands of people.

Faced with the stubbornness and continuation of the murderous

violence in our city, the King came in person to sign the "Edict of Nantes" (1598). The aim of this Edict was to put an end to this disastrous war by granting Protestants the freedom to worship! Unfortunately, I have to mention that this Edict was revoked barely a century later in 1685!

I am convinced that our meeting today on this important theme of unity in diversity, in this port city which also actively participated in the triangular trade, constitutes dynamic repentance. Is not every action that contributes to the acceptance of others, to tolerance and harmony among all beings,



a source of Enlightenment and peace for many beings in this visible and invisible world?

In the field of all our relationships, may we, through virtuous deeds, free ourselves from conditionings, sometimes stemming from an immemorial past, which are sources of suffering for others! May we perform acts based on the wisdom of the Teachings and on compassion, factors of Enlightenment and happiness for all!

Let us now examine the diversity of European nations: their models of society, their ways of thinking, their cultures, their beliefs, their religions and their history.

Let us also note how each of them has been shaped in all sorts of ways over the centuries by various and numerous influences, by their exchanges and reciprocal relations, good or bad, and by the links that some of them have maintained with the whole world, thanks to trade and through their colonies, for example.

Each nation has its own characteristics. The effects of their past history are part of their present and future - their good as well as their ill deeds. It is up to us to act to dissolve the negative effects of these deeds!

In the midst of this structural European diversity, let us now examine the diversity of Buddhist traditions.

The Buddha used to preach according to people and circumstances. Thus, according to tradition, there are said to be over

84,000 sutras! The choice of this large number was undoubtedly intended to emphasise the importance of transmitting the Teachings with discernment according to the capacities of each person, just as the Buddha himself did! For the number of sutras of the different Buddhist traditions, even if it is a large one, does not reach this figure.

All traditions, however, whatever their sutras, embrace the fundamental principles of the Buddha's Teachings: the Teaching on the relative nature of reality, conditioned, submitted to the principles of impermanence, of interdependence, of the dependant origination of causes and effects on the one hand, and on the other hand, on its essential nature and emptiness, as well as on the potential of all beings to free themselves from conditionings and to attain the state of Buddhahood.

Some traditions emphasise specific aspects of the doctrine, others develop around the tutelary figure of a particular great bodhisattva. Their methods of practice may also differ. Some emphasise devotion, others a method of practice more rooted in the reality of links, and others a more solitary practice, withdrawn from the world. This is said in a non-exhaustive way and always bearing in mind that these various schools include in different proportions all the basic Teachings advocated by the Buddha and which contribute to liberation.

Through commercial, intellectual and other exchanges, these traditions, originating in India,

spread throughout much of Asia. And thanks to its pragmatic approach to the spiritual path, based on reality, the Buddhist Teaching was then instilled in the cultures of Asian countries with very different characteristics, while naturally impregnating itself with cultural, philosophical or religious elements from these countries.

The Buddha's Teachings came to Europe from various sources in ancient times. In the 19th century, it aroused the interest of several philosophers who, by the way, often misinterpreted it.

It was in the second half of the 20th century that the important wave of Asian immigration, caused mainly by wars and decolonisation, led to the arrival of Asian masters. At the same time, some Buddhist traditions arrived in Europe thanks to Westerners who had been to various Eastern countries in search of the Buddha's Teachings.

Such are the main elements of diversity that characterise Buddhism in Europe: a diversity of human beings, a diversity of European nations, a diversity of Buddhist traditions.

How can Buddhism become a model of unity and, even more, a source of inspiration and a factor of peace in Europe?

Sakyamuni Buddha emphasised that one should not worship him, but "rely on oneself and take refuge in the Dharma". Everyone progresses by learning from the experiences of putting the Teachings into practice.

The Buddha taught a path of self-improvement leading to a state in which the human being is completely transformed and, as a result, becomes capable of transforming the world. This dynamic 'state' is an active compassionate relationship with the world, combined with a penetrating vision of the reality of beings.

Thus, in chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha invites practitioners to focus on a thought that is fundamental to their transformation: "I always know who is following the Path and who is not. I expound the Dharma to all living beings with different methods, according to the means that can save them, focused on this one thought: how can I bring all beings to enter the supreme path and quickly achieve the Buddha within?"

This fundamental question, which we are invited to ask ourselves, with our hearts set on the happiness and Enlightenment of those around us, is a source of many benefits and an exceptional factor of empathy and unity.

It reveals and nurtures the individual potential for acceptance and kindness in every relationship, whether easy or difficult.

It enables the development of a penetrating vision of the other and, consequently, of oneself. It generates gratitude towards all beings, all of whom participate, in a small or large way, in our earthly existence.

It is the basis of the dynamic and joyful repentance that characterises practitioners of the Buddha's Teachings. It means that differences and obstacles give way to openness of heart, availability of mind and the promise of discoveries that are essential to our transformation.

Aren't we and all the human beings we are connected to submitted to conditionings of which we are unaware? Do all these people not deserve our gratitude for spurring on inner practice? Don't they enable us to seek beyond ourselves clear insight and unconditional love?

We walk the Path knowing that everything that disturbs us or challenges us can become a source of liberation! We walk the Path by making our differences a source of wisdom and compassion. Diversity, the truth of our reality, is the field of our transformation and our Enlightenment.

Buddhist traditions are many and diverse. But is this not in keeping with the teaching on the fundamental diversity of beings? What revelations does the Buddha make about this?

Let's listen to this excerpt from the parable "Herbs" in chapter 5 of the Lotus Sutra, which answers our question. Not only does this parable highlight the omniscience and omnipresence of the Buddha, but also the universality and plurality of his teaching:

"An immense cloud covers the earth and pours everywhere, in a uniform manner, an abundant

quantity of rain which waters herbs, plants, small and large trees and vegetation of all kinds. The same rain, poured by this cloud, nourishes each plant which grows, flowers and bears fruit according to its qualities, its characters and its particular nature...

The Buddha appears in the world exactly like this great cloud which covers the whole universe. The Dharma he teaches is like the single-flavoured rain. It waters mankind, so that each may reach maturity, the state of Buddhahood. To all, without discrimination, he teaches the supreme Dharma, the Buddha's Dharma that leads to Enlightenment."

In this chapter, the Buddha explains that until now, aware of the inclinations of human beings, he has taught the Dharma with various skilful means according to people's capacities. Then he makes this revelation: there is only one path, the single Buddhist Vehicle. All practitioners are bodhisattvas, beings who progress towards supreme Enlightenment.

As each plant receives the amount of water it needs, a water unique in appearance and flavour, the Buddha says he teaches a Dharma of unique flavour to all equally. The plants symbolise the diversity of practitioners and their varying capacities to hear the Teachings. These heavenly descriptions of all forms of plants growing in harmony and interdependence, absorbing water according to their needs, is a true celebration of diversity and unity!



Whatever their tradition, practitioners make every effort to put into practice the Teachings they are capable of hearing at any given moment. These Teachings are all of the single-Buddha-vehicle. Everyone has encountered the Dharma through their karmic connection with the Buddha and a particular tradition. The diversity of Buddhist schools and traditions is a precious opportunity for human beings, so diverse in their nature and aspirations, to encounter the unique flavour of the Dharma through the tradition that inspires them.

I would like to conclude by mentioning my personal experience within the EBU. It illustrates how much progress can be made by benevolently sharing with others who are different in nature, and in this case, by sharing with different traditions.

Each year's gathering at the EBU General Meeting has allowed me, through the spontaneous exchanges and careful listening to the lectures, to examine the goals of my practice, to question the quality of my aspiration, my ability to hear the Teachings and how I cared about others.

These were profound and joyful moments of sincere and fruitful spiritual friendship. By its example of openness and tolerance, the EBU is potentially a source of inspiration and I can't but hope that it will be a model of harmony and peace for Europe. 🧘

**Cherish the doctrine,
live united,
radiate love**



By Dharmacharini Vassika



I am a member of the Triratna Buddhist Order, founded in England in 1968 by Urgyen Sangharakshita. At the age of sixteen, Sangharakshita read the Diamond Sutra and knew immediately that he was a Buddhist and always had been. As he continued to read and to learn about Buddhism he was confronted with its enormous diversity and sought to understand its unity.

After 20 years in India, during which he was ordained as a Theravada monk, Sangharakshita continued to read widely and studied with a number of teachers from different traditions. His understanding deepened. When he returned to England in the late 1960s, he discovered a great interest in Buddhism and eventually founded an order that gave expression the breadth and depth of his vision of the Buddha's teaching; an order that is not exclusively attached to any school or lineage, but draws its inspiration from the whole of the Buddhist tradition. The question of the unity of Buddhism remained central to Sangharakshita's vision and remains a very alive

question for current members of the Triratna Buddhist Order.

Reflecting on the theme of this conference, it seemed to me that unity and diversity are often seen in the world as opposite poles, as though one cannot have both at the same time, or as though the existence of one would jeopardise the other.

It seems to me that we human beings are often afraid of difference. We are generally more comfortable with people like ourselves. We like to identify with a group, a clan or a nation. And we like to compare, we want to know who is bigger, better, stronger, truer, or superior in some other way.

We tend to associate unity with sameness and to perceive diversity as a threat to unity, and we seek to ensure unity through assimilation, repression and even annihilation of whatever, or whoever, is different, as we may observe in many situations in the world today.

And yet, we are also enriched by diversity. It brings us new perspectives, new experiences, new horizons. To see this, one only has to look at our

passion for travelling and for tasting new foods.

So I think it is worth considering what unity really is, and whether diversity really jeopardises it. If we look at dictionary definitions, we find the notion of uniqueness, the quality of being one and not a plurality. We find the notion of a whole where the different parts constitute an indivisible unit (like the self). We find the notion of what is common or identical for several people (unity of thought or view). And then we find notions of harmony, communion, agreement, solidarity, union and coherence.

There is an image that came to me: We are unified when, instead of looking at each other and comparing ourselves to each other, we stand side by side and look in the same direction, towards the same goal. As Buddhists, we are unified when we stand side by side before the Buddha, when together we move towards Enlightenment.

As Buddhists, we are also very diverse, so much so that someone who is not familiar with Buddhism might wonder if it is really all the same religion. This diversity is a



great source of richness for us, but also a potential trap.

I would suggest that we sometimes fall into the trap of seeing this diversity more as a plurality, i.e., as lots of different Buddhisms. We can fall into thinking that some of us are more Buddhist than others. And sometimes we perhaps have difficulty understanding how the Buddhism of others relates to the Buddhism we ourselves practise. It is a real shame. The world is on fire. Living beings need the Dharma. We have the good fortune to have encountered the Dharma and the best thing we can possibly do is to offer it to the world. And, if we want to offer it to the world, it is obvious that the message will be all the more powerful and convincing if, through harmony and unity, we can offer a living example of it.

We do not want to end up like the blind men in front of the elephant in the parable told by the Buddha. In the story, each person takes hold of the nearest part of the elephant; an ear, the trunk, the tail, a tusk... and each person thinks that the small piece that they have in their hands is the whole of the elephant. Is there a risk that we take for the whole of Buddhism the little bit that we practise?

If we wish to avoid this risk, it is important that we see the totality of the tradition and understand our diversity and where it comes from. It comes from our history, from the evolution of Buddhism throughout the centuries. The message of the Buddha, so essential and so universal, has travelled well. In

each country, each culture, where it has taken root, it has taken on a local flavour, it has expressed itself in a language appropriate to its new context. It has travelled far and wide, adapting itself again and again, throughout the East and now to every continent of the world. The diversity that we find in Europe today is the result of this evolution. We have access to Buddhism in many different expressions, as it has evolved in different countries and cultures over two and a half millennia.

We also have the advantage of the historical perspective that comes from years of academic and comparative study and which allows us to see how each of these expressions evolved and how it is an integral part of the elephant of the whole tradition. We can see that what we have is not a plurality of Buddhisms but one Buddhism, with a diversity of expressions that may all be traced back to the same source.

So, what unites us today? What is the essence of Buddhism that we all have in common?

We need to look beneath the particular practices we undertake and the texts that inspire us. We must look beyond the relative age of our lineages, the differences in our lifestyles, and the emphasis that we place on one aspect of the tradition or another. If we do that, what do we find?

Sangharakshita gave an answer to this question in 1957 in his book *A Survey of Buddhism*:

"The unity of Buddhism consists in the fact that, through differences

and divergences of doctrine innumerable, all schools of Buddhism aim at Enlightenment, at reproducing the spiritual experience of the Buddha."

Later, as his thoughts on the subject matured, he came to the conclusion that it is Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels that is the central and defining act of a Buddhist life.

During his lifetime, when the Buddha met people and spoke to them about the Dharma, those who were convinced by his words would respond by saying:

*Buddham saranam gacchami,
Dhammam saranam gacchami,
Sangham saranam gacchami*

*I go for refuge to the Buddha,
I go for refuge to the
Dhamma (his teaching),
I go for refuge to the Sangha
(the community of the
Buddha's disciples).*

This statement expressed their faith in the Three Jewels, and their commitment to the path taught by the Buddha. It can be seen as a moment of conversion, and many of us still recite this formula of commitment to the Three Jewels today, especially at the moment when we decide that we are Buddhist and commit to following the Buddhist path.

Sangharakshita emphasised that going for refuge to the Three Jewels is something that we do not only at the moment of becoming a Buddhist, but again and again, throughout our spiritual life, at deeper and deeper levels, until eventually there is no separation between us and the refuges

"The unity of Buddhism consists in the fact that, through differences and divergences of doctrine innumerable, all schools of Buddhism aim at Enlightenment, at reproducing the spiritual experience of the Buddha."



because we have come to embody them within ourselves. This is why, in the Triratna Buddhist order, we prefer the phrase “going for refuge” to “taking refuge”. Not only does the word “go” more accurately translate the Pali word “gacchami”, it evokes more clearly the act of continually putting one foot in front of the other on the path to enlightenment.

Going for Refuge is an individual act that each of us undertakes for ourselves. It is a commitment to put the three jewels at the centre of our lives. As such, it is an act that goes beyond merely belonging to a particular Buddhist group. Thus, being a Buddhist is not a question of belonging to a group or a tradition, and the individual commitment that unites us goes

beyond our identification with the tradition in which we practise.

What unites us is the effort that each of us makes to go forward on the path, to transform ourselves in accordance with the ideal represented by the Buddha. And what is really wonderful is that, despite all our diversity, we can meet on this individual level very easily. We just need to talk about our practice. We can share what the Buddha means to us, we can describe how the Dharma has transformed our lives, and we can talk about how our membership of the Sangha supports us on our journey.

In the Purabhedha sutta, in the Sutta Nipata, there is a line that inspires me enormously. Describing an enlightened person the Buddha says:

“He does not see himself as superior, inferior or equal to the world.”

And in the Pingiya sutta, in the same collection, Pingiya says:

“Yes, I will go there, I will go beyond formations, I will go beyond comparisons.”

I said at the beginning of my talk that human beings like to compare. To compare is to insist on diversity at the expense of unity. To compare is to divide. If we wish to live united, we must go beyond comparison. This comes with the practice of letting go of our attachment to ourselves and with spiritual insight into the emptiness of the very concept of a self. It comes when we realise our intimate connection with all that lives.





*"Happy and peaceful,
May all beings be
happy in their hearts
Whoever they may be,
Weak or strong,
Long or wide,
Medium or
short, without exception,
Subtle or gross,
Visible or invisible,
Near or far,
Born or yet to be born..."*

Picture: Carlos de Miguel-unsplash

In the Karaniyametta sutta, the Buddha urges us to develop loving kindness for all, without exception:

*"Happy and peaceful,
May all beings be
happy in their hearts
Whoever they may be,
Weak or strong,
Long or wide,
Medium or
short, without exception,
Subtle or gross,
Visible or invisible,
Near or far,
Born or yet to be born..."*

Looking at others with loving kindness in this way, wishing that all may, without exception, advance towards wisdom and freedom, also leads to unity, between us as Buddhists, and between us and all humanity.

Moving from the ancient texts to the archetypal images of the Mahayana, we find in the mandala of the five dhyani Buddhas, or five jinas, a very beautiful symbol of unity. This

mandala of archetypal Buddhas evolved in the spiritual imagination of our predecessors in the Indo-Tibetan tradition and it gives expression to the diversity and the unity of the different aspects of the Enlightened consciousness. Each of the five Buddhas has his own unique attributes, including his own form of wisdom:

The Buddha Akshobhya sees all things in their true nature, without judgement, without discrimination, just as a mirror reflects the things that appear before it.

The Buddha Ratnasambhava sees all things in their equality, equally empty of a fixed and permanent self-hood.

The Buddha Amitabha sees all things in their uniqueness.

The Buddha Amoghasiddhi sees all things with the eye of compassion and the capacity to act for their benefit.

And at the centre of the mandala, Vairocana unites all these wisdoms in his transcendental vision of emptiness.

There are five Buddhas, five facets of Enlightenment, but Enlightenment remains a single, unified experience.

In the same way, our various currents express different facets of the Buddha's teaching whilst all remaining aspects of one unified Dharma. Let us keep this in mind, let us rejoice in the richness of our diversity and let us collectively cultivate harmony and unity through sharing, listening and understanding, for the benefit of all beings.

I will end with the exhortation of Dharma Rinpoche, one of Sangharakshita's teachers, which I have chosen as the title of my talk. It is the motto of the school for Tibetan refugee children that he founded in Kalimpong, in northern India:

Let us *"Cherish the doctrine, live united, radiate love."* 🧘

*Remembering
Thich Nhat Hanh*

By Ton Kamphof

I have been asked to write about the way I remember Thich Nhat Hanh. He was a dear and special Buddhist teacher to me. Together with the Dalai Lama, he was for many years a world renowned teacher, being a teacher-of-life, also for non-Buddhists. In January he died in Vietnam. 95 years old. Seven years earlier he had a stroke and for the rest of his life, he was seriously handicapped.

Thay (as we call him, it means 'teacher') came into my life because I was looking for a teacher that connected 'the political' with 'the inner life'. I had heard that years ago, he had given much effort to help the victims of war, to end the horrible war in Vietnam through his 'engaged Buddhism'. Buddhism in the middle of society and daily life. After his peace activities (foremost done in the West), he was forced to stay in the West. He established a monastery or meditation center in the South of France, called Plum Village. There he became the founding father of the mindfulness movement. I was curious and in 2003 I went – with my partner – for a retreat week to Plum Village.

Aware in the present moment

My first encounter was amazing, touching. Although it is now almost 20 years ago, I remember it as if it was yesterday.

In the big hall with 400 people Thay entered the stage. I saw him for the first time. A small man. He spoke in a soft and intense way. Slightly introverted. He held a very long talk, much too long for me. I found my mind beginning to protest and getting caught up in inner discussions. Then, suddenly something else happened to me. Not only his words, but also slowly his tone, his presence began having an impact on me. I allowed myself to be touched by Thay's words. They touched me like a gentle May rain. They dripped on the soil of my spirit, heart, and body. I heard: "You don't have to go anywhere, you have already arrived, you are home. All happiness, all peace can be found in the here and now". I heard: 'you only live truly when you live in the now, attentive in the present moment. Not in a hurry'. And I was so often in a hurry! I heard: 'slow down a bit and taste then

what your life can be. Slow down, relax, enjoy. Do so, when you eat, when you walk, when you speak, when you work, when you act'. In Plum Village we were able to practice this right away. That was less easy than it sounded. And I must confess: this practice is still an invitation for me, every day. Living my life in a mindful, attentive way.

Practicing this all week, listening to him I felt his joy, the silence around him, his steadfastness and gentleness, his presence. They touched me deeply. So grateful!

Infectious serenity

An American academic, and politically engaged man, Mitch, met Thay in the '90s. He expressed it this way. 'I sat with him at the Lincoln Memorial and listened to him read poems from the Vietnam War years and reflect on his efforts to share with Americans the suffering caused in both countries by the war. Then we walked silently, reverently past the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I was deeply impressed by the quality of his presence, the flowing calmness of his words and actions and



Picture: Jan Kamphof

the remarkable effect it had on others. Sitting on a cushion, Thich Nhat Hanh spoke softly about love, compassion, about finding peace and joy in every step, in each action. His words and presence created an atmosphere of infectious serenity. The audience of 3000 was wondrously quiet.

Finding peace and joy in each moment, was a lovely idea, but how could I weave that way of being into the fabric of my urban American life....?'. That was Mitch. Nowadays he practices in Maryland, USA.

Healing the inner child

Wim, an inspiring guide for many, expressed it as follows. 'Meeting Thay I felt that his teachings had

heart energy. Thay did what he said. I am only inspired by people – teachers – who do what they say. Having met Thay and practicing in his tradition, I am much more in connection with my heart. That was not easy for me. It has been growing. I realize: my heart is the source of my love, my compassion, my mildness. What can I say: after all these years, I found more inner peace, and also a love for myself. I didn't know that. In Christianity I learned the love for the other. But love for myself? It was a real discovery. When I got in touch with my own heart, I got in touch with its pain. I have always been very busy, very extrovert, etc. I asked myself: why all this action, why do I ask for so much attention? I discovered: that need

came from the hurt of my inner child. On a very early morning during a retreat in Plum Village, I started talking to my inner child. I told him: 'dear Wim, dear little boy of mine. I am so proud that you were so busy compensating, being so loud, being so active in the outside world... you have been so courageous to compensate the inner hurt. And then, when I felt my young heart, I had to cry. I said to my little one, my inner child: 'you are permitted to cry, to cry as long as you want. Your tears are allowed to be there.'

Wim said: Thay has a great expression. 'No mud, no lotus'. The more we care for the 'mud', the pain, the hurt, the 'lotus' in us can flower and shine. The lotus, our Buddha nature, our true nature.

Mindful and serious illness

Being mindful, being compassionately present in all the events of my life was especially felt by me through the case of the serious illness of my partner. In looking for a cure, she/we consulted numerous doctors, therapists, healers etc. etc. Unfortunately, to no avail. This situation fundamentally changed her life and our life together. It wasn't easy at all.... Practicing attentiveness, complete and full presence, supported me in a wonderful way. Once, there was a moment where we thought: 'she will leave this earthly life'. I discovered: there was no panic nor despair inside me, but calm and intimate nearness. I embraced her, we were very intimate, she was calm. So touching. At that moment, a field of presence arose that transgressed borders. Amazing. I am happy and grateful that this could happen. In a way, it made me stronger, generating a new inner strength. I realized: all is good, although it is not good. A surprising and wonderful discovery and realization!

And Thay himself was also an example. Despite all the destruction and pain and killing in the Vietnam War his heart remained open. His example was a transmission. Incredible!!

Inter-being

The view of inter-being in the tradition of Thay was new to me. If I see a flower, I see the sun, the earth, the water, the people who care for the flowers. Wonderful.

Without sun, no flower. Without water, no flower. All elements have their contribution to what arises. Amazing. Everything is deeply interconnected, deeply one. Inter-being is anti-ego. You no longer say: look at what I achieved. But: there are many circumstances, many conditions that had their contribution. Inter-being activates wonder and gratitude!

You can also see this in relation to the perspective of time. I am, because my mother was, my father was and their parents and their parents, and so on. They are all 'in me'. I used to be an animal, a plant, a mineral, as Thay teaches. This insight became more than just a view. It became an experience for me. My goodness!! Who or what is the 'I' I think I am? This way, all limits and borders of a separated self disappear. I 'am' all of history, I am nature, I am as wide as the ocean. The planet is me. Caring for the planet, is caring for myself. Loving nature is loving myself. Loving myself is loving nature. Deep oneness opened itself to me.

Thay waved to me!!

For 13 years I practiced in a sangha in Utrecht, the city I live in. I also guided the sangha for quite some years. I wrote a book on Thay, his message and his life. In Dutch. It was well received. I was happy to be of service, this way. At a certain moment, I decided to leave the sangha. I choose to solely practice in the stream of

the Diamond Approach of A.H. Almaas. An inwardly deeper and more mystical path. I told them, wrote a letter to my sangha, and I inquired about this step with a spiritual friend. In the inner inquiry, I thanked Thay, I bowed to Thay, to the Buddha he was and is for me. And I had to cry, immensely. I couldn't stop crying. And what happened? During this inner inquiry with eyes closed, Thay appeared. I saw him walking on a path alongside a forest. Covered by sunlight. He walked there, turned around and waved to me. He smiled, I smiled. I was very happy. It didn't feel like an approval, it felt like a recognition. We deeply connect. Thay is always in my heart.

Ton Kamphof, Netherlands
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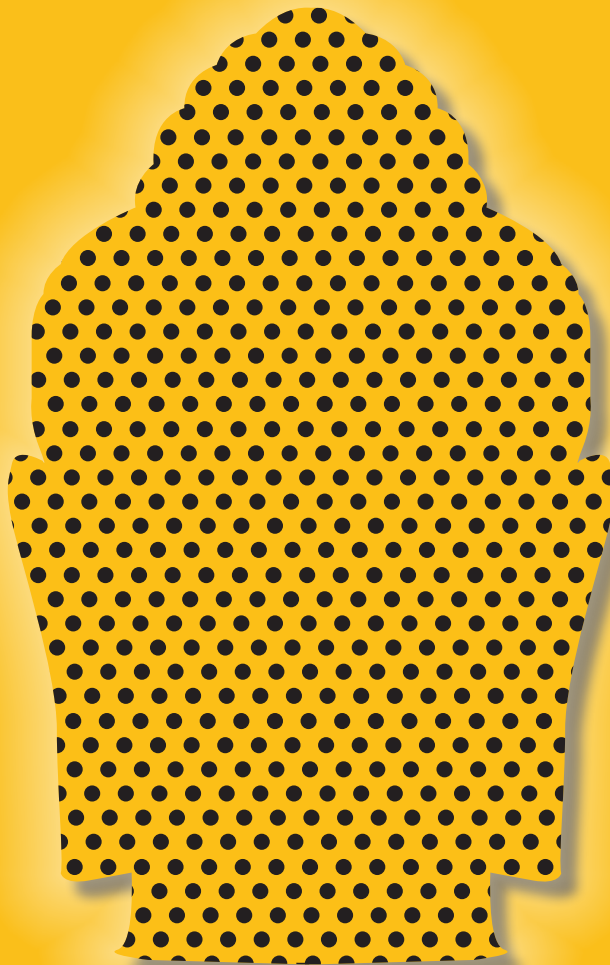


Picture: Ton Kamphof

Thoughts about the Conference

BUDDHISM IN EUROPE, “UNITY IN DIVERSITY”

**23 & 24
APRIL
2022**



**NANTES
FRANCE**

Organised by the European Buddhist Union

6 speakers from the main Buddhist traditions will lead an interactive conference through presentations, workshops, sharing groups and a panel discussion to broaden our understanding of Buddhism in general. Together with our diversities, let us create a world of peace.

Thoughts about the Conference

The European Buddhist Union's Conference on 'Unity and Diversity', held in a magnificent setting with a very warm welcome at the Reiyukai Centre in Nantes, was the occasion for us to discover or rediscover our common roots between various Buddhist schools, and provided us with a better understanding of those present at this event.

We really appreciated the workshops, practice sessions, exchanges, questions and dialogues concerning this unity, rich in content and quality, all of which enabled us to create new friendships.

We look forward to pursuing future opportunities, possibilities or occasions to meet again!

Thank you.

Didier

Unity in diversity really made sense during the panel. I was very grateful to meet people from other congregations. Unity in diversity is a beautiful spirit that is realized in all relationships.

I was very happy to be able to participate on Saturday as a volunteer and on Sunday as a participant.

Thank you for the energy you put into it, it was worth it. Thank you again.

Gwénaëlle

What a joy to feel deeply, during this weekend, that all of us, whatever the specificities of our practices, we are on the same path and have the same goal, that of working for peace!

Danielle

For my part, I really appreciated this weekend, already for having been able to live this moment together at the Centre and to have been able to work on a common event in a warm and open spirit, but also to have been able to exchange with the other members of the Buddhism of spiritual friendship, also present, to help during the weekend, I became aware of the diversity of practices even if I could not attend many conferences. I left with the awareness and the feeling that, beyond our specificities, we have a project that goes in the same direction, working for peace in the world and the development of our humanity. Claudine's talk on Sunday morning really highlighted this aspect and indeed this unity.

I also very much appreciated the intervention of the Lama Shenpen Rinpoche on Sunday morning on the law of cause and effect. I couldn't listen to everything but what I heard brought me back to my practice, this awareness that every action has consequences and that it is important to have a broad vision of our actions and their consequences. And that practice is a simple process that is part of everyday actions.

I am looking forward to the zoom links to listen to all the speakers.

A very big thank you to you.

Véronique

When I read the sutra on Saturday morning with the assembly of practitioners, I really wished I could play my role, be of service to others and learn. And what came to me were the words "it is not my power". This reading was a very strong moment of harmony and unity between the people present and the theme of the conference which was indeed unity in diversity. We were a Sangha of people who were diverse and different but truly united in their aspiration to pay homage and take refuge in the Dharma. One breath, one voice, one mind.

What was said at the conferences about acceptance and openness to others and to other practices also helped to change the conceptions I had. I also went to a "meditation" workshop and that was quite an extraordinary experience for me.

I can say that I came out of those two days different from who I was before. Something opened up in me that I can relate to hope and confidence in my potential and in the Dharma.

Agnès

CLOSER TOGETHER

KARMA



By Shenpen Rinpoche

Today I would like to lead the discussions towards the idea of the reality of our existence and how we perceive this, and specially to realise that we all share a common reality and the very similar way in which we create this reality. At the moment in the world there are a great many attempts to divide and separate people, as the saying goes divide to better control and reign, and it is important to avoid this, and we, and especially those who practice the Dharma should concentrate the centre of their attention on understanding the law of causality, the law of Karma, which constructs what we consider as our reality is at the base of our existence. A good understanding of this mechanism would allow us to come closer together, not to divide ourselves and to practice Bodhicitta with more force, implication, and more conviction.

The law of causality, commonly known as the law of Karma is one of the most fundamental laws, and at the same time one of the most complex mechanisms to understand. Some texts say that only fully enlightened Buddhas can really grasp the meaning of this in all its complexity with the different parameters which are

linked together to construct what we call our reality.

In order to be brief about a subject which could take months, we should remember that each time we think, we speak or we act we generate a certain energy, and this energy will be tinged by our intentions. It is the intention we put into our words, our thoughts and our actions which make this energy we create an energy which will be positive, negative or neutral. So we create almost permanently positive, negative or neutral causes. There are only a few moments of deep sleep when we do not think but all the rest of the time we are in the process of continually generating energies. These energies, like a chemical preparation where we add little elements here and there, accumulate and come together like small pieces of a puzzle and after a time this preparation will react and will produce a result. This result becomes one of our perceptions. We have six senses, five physical senses and one mental sense and the result of this causality, the phenomena appear to us through one of these six senses. This means that when some Karmas reach maturity they produce results and we perceive these results. The result can be a situation, a meeting, an accident, something we can see or hear. And as it is a phenomenon and a process which is being put into place constantly it is what makes our reality. When we see, if it will be only the wall in front of us, it is a phenomenon. I perceive this phenomenon because I have created the cause. If I had not created the causes of perceiving

this wall, I would not perceive it. If I had not created the causes of seeing the sun rise I would not see it rising. There is nothing we perceive for which we have not created the causes.

These are ideas which it is very important to understand, and which avoid a lot of extra negativity which we could project onto what we might consider as being the exterior. We have a tendency to think that all our pain and all our problems and difficulties are the result of the exterior, of people, situations, governments which exist on their own, intrinsically. Whereas the advanced study of the Dharma shows us that all these phenomena do not exist independently. Everything we perceive exists and depends completely on the causes we have created. I have created the causes of what is happening to me in my life, in my reality, and this is true for each individual.

I cannot purify other people's negative Karmas, I cannot directly modify other people's Karmas. Possibly I can teach, I can show by example, write a poem, draw a drawing, something that will make the other person react so that possibly he or her will change their own Karma, will modify the causality which has been created and which is continually being created. The Karma is not something that is engraved in marble forever. Karma is something very fluid which is continually moving. As we think continually we add little pieces of energy continually. By doing this every day we can

modify the Karma which has been previously created. There are even specific practices which permit the purifying of negative Karmas which have been accumulated in past years or even in past lives. For example I think of the practice of Vajrasattva, the 100 syllables mantra, but also practises like the liberation of animals where we save animals and release them to freedom. These are practices which have a very important impact on the causes which have been previously accumulated.

Each individual works in the same way, that is to say, in the world where we are, beings we perceive or beings we do not perceive exist and function in the same way we do. My neighbour has a life, has a reality based on the same principle as mine. This reflection can lead us, should lead us, not to divide ourselves, not to have the impression that there are beings so different from us. There are no beings so different from us. Even in other kingdoms, if we think for example of the kingdom of animals, the lives of the animals are based on the same mechanism as ours. There are also created Karmic causes there, probably less consciously than us. But animals have Karmic causes and they have created causes in previous existences which have led them to be born again as animals. It is the same thing for the kingdom of spirits, the kingdom of the divine beings like Titans semi gods. All beings exist and perceive with the same mechanism. If we understand this mechanism well it brings us to understand that we have all had

links in the past. We exist since time immemorial, since such ancient times when all the beings were the members of the same family. They were loved, fed and helped each other many many times. The family circle we may have today is the result of the nearest connections, only several lives. The people towards whom we are more indifferent we have certainly met but a very long time ago. All these beings have a similar quest. There is a quest for happiness but we have a tendency to mix up pleasure with happiness and especially immediate pleasure with long term happiness. Therefore we make many mistakes as when looking for immediate pleasure we generate a lot of attachments, we can generate jealousy, mental states and thoughts which are not always virtuous and can generate more negativity and weigh down a little more the negative Karma which we may have.

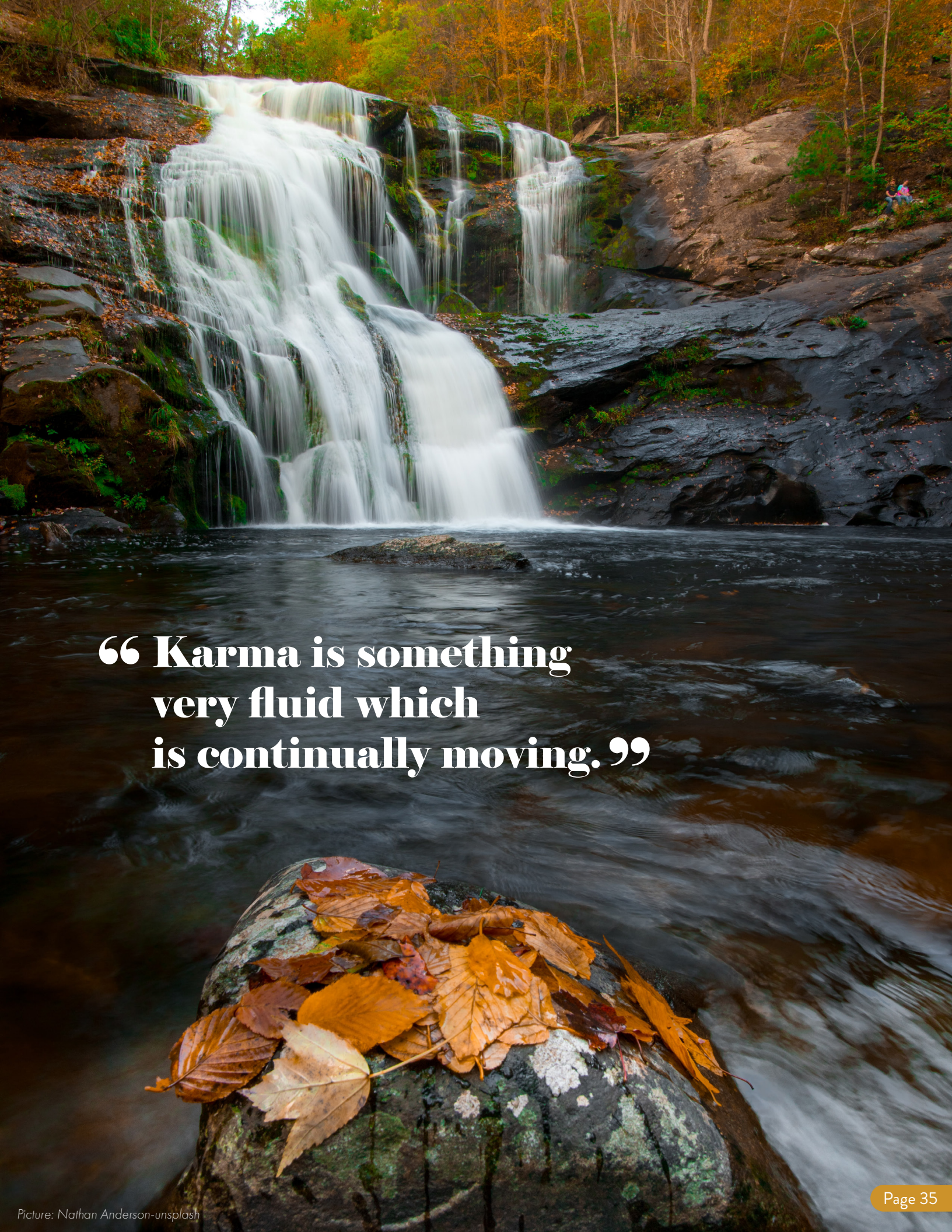
So if we have had the good luck to meet the Dharma, to receive teachings, to meditate, to practice, we understand better this mechanism of causality, we understand better the inherent absence of existence of the phenomena. This inherent absence of existence is coupled with the impermanence of the phenomena which never stay indefinitely in the same state. This is also a phenomenon based on the causality because a phenomenon appears as it appears to us based on this causality. Certain causes have been accumulated to perceive this phenomenon in the way which we perceive

it. These causes, this energy exhaust themselves over time. After some time the causes of the phenomenon disappear and the phenomenon disappears. Thus the way we perceive things will modify itself with time, with education, with teaching, with practice, everything that builds our life. So the phenomena are impermanent, there is no phenomenon which exists on its own independently of the person who perceives it and which remains forever in the same state.

So in everyday life we can see a great deal of diversity of phenomena, a great diversity of people, great diversity of different cultural contributions and this is the result of the causality of all beings. Accepting this diversity, accepting that this diversity sometimes causes us to ask ourselves questions is also admitting that all beings function in a way that is similar to ours but at the same time different, because they have had different lives, different education, because they come from a different culture.

This is true generally and it should be even more true within Buddhism.

Within the Dharma we have numerous families, numerous branches which have developed over time and geographically and which sometimes take certain aspects of the Dharma and focus more on some of these aspects compared with others and this is certainly done to meet the multitude of expectations of sensitive beings. We have different expectations, we have different quests in our lives, different spiritual



**“ Karma is something
very fluid which
is continually moving.”**

desires and the Dharma, through its different aspects, is able to bring answers to these.

Of course there are other religions, other spiritual and philosophical movements which are present to meet other expectations, other desires and they can be respected as long as they respect other sensitive beings, and this is what should define a religion, a spirituality. So we are the result of a great multitude of beings and the way we perceive them depends on the causes we have created. A good healthy understanding of the law of causality, of Karma, enables us to be much more open, much more attentive, much more generous as well, because, as I have said, it is important to understand that this law of causality is continual and constant until we reach enlightenment. That is to say that at one moment it is important to ask ourselves what we want in life, and if we are really looking for ultimate happiness which is not impermanent then we must also adapt our lives, our practices and our way of thinking so as to reach this goal. While doing this, if I search for happiness, I must first stop creating causes of suffering, I must stop creating causes which in the future will manifest themselves as unpleasant situations. I must increase the accumulation of positive Karma of positive causes, and this is done by practice of the six perfections for example, the practice of generosity, of patience, joyful effort etc. up to the development of wisdom. It is through this practice that I will be able to progress. And through this

development, this understanding of causality I will generate fewer and fewer attachments concerning this reality. Why is this, simply because as I realize that this reality is illusory why should I need to attach myself to it, why should I need to project continually the phenomena I seize towards the exterior, whilst I understand better and better that everything I perceive in this reality is in fact a whole set of phenomena which are perceived inside my own spirit.

The better I understand the law of causality, the better I understand that everything I perceive results from causes that I accumulated previously, the less I attach myself to them, the less I seize them the less I project negativity as coming from the exterior, in fact there is none. So if, at certain times, there are situations which are not pleasant, they are the result of causes which I have previously accumulated and I must experience them or I must purify them, but in both cases reacting to an unpleasant situation in a negative manner cannot bring more happiness.

Whatever the situation I am living through, whatever the surroundings, pleasant or unpleasant, it is my today's mental state that will decide what I will experience tomorrow. Hence the importance of "Here and Now", that is to say being conscious of the present moment because when we speak about this law of causality the present moment is the most important one. It is the moment I can change, it is the moment on

which I can have influence, it is the moment which I can make beneficial, even if I had started off with a mental state which was a little disturbed I can change this at any moment, that is my choice. I don't know the previously accumulated causes. Of course I can influence them to a certain extent by purifying practice, but I cannot change everything.

Notably, I cannot change what I perceive today as my reality my surroundings as it has already been manifested; it is already in the field of my perception and I cannot change this and it would be difficult to modify. However, on the other hand what I can change and what is in my hands is my state of mind. I can let it slide, let it be taken over by negativity or I can become aware of this causality, of the importance of my state of mind on the things I create, how I create and perceive things, my surroundings, the others. And that is something I can change, something I can improve and the improvement of this state of mind, here and now, today, will have an impact on the moments which will follow, the months, the years, and even in some cases lives that will follow.

So that was the subject I wanted to share with you during the time I was given, causality, and the importance of understanding this law of causality in order to better live the present and to create causes for the future which will be more in step with a search for happiness, and a search for help to bring to others. 🧘

“ The importance of “Here and Now”, that is to say being conscious of the present moment because when we speak about this law of causality the present moment is the most important one. It is the moment I can change, it is the moment on which I can have influence, it is the moment which I can make beneficial, even if I had started off with a mental state which was a little disturbed I can change this at any moment, that is my choice. ”





Heterogeneous unity in a powerful diversity

By Lama Dondrub

Something that I have always admired is the ability to be yourself in all possible situations and especially being yourself among people. It is a skill that I try to develop by reflecting on the situations in which I find myself in life.

Today I want to share with you this scheme that someone taught me a while ago and that helps me to clarify myself. It consists of paying attention to these four sections before making an important decision. The idea is to generate a chart or table with the contents: You want, You don't want, You have, You don't have.

In a square you will have what you want and do not have.

In another you will have what you want and have.

In another what you do not want and do not have.

In the last what you do not want and have.

In what box do you think I try to put my vital energy?

What you want and don't have: The first helps me set short, medium and long-term goals. I write down the topics that motivate and inspire me.

What you want and have: The second helps me to value what I have already achieved and that perhaps I am forgetting about



it. Sometimes focusing too much on what I don't have and want prevents me from enjoying what I have already achieved. This second table is very important, because what I don't want to happen is that when I lose something that I have, that is when I begin to value it.

What you don't want and don't have: The third is the one that is the most difficult for me, since it consists of opening my mind to what happens in life. Sometimes I get in trouble for going into situations that I already know I don't feel like it. Let's watch how we act so as not to

cause what we write in this box to be what we have in the future.

What you don't want and have: The fourth is the easiest for me, knowing that I have more than enough of what I currently have, and what I don't want. But curiously, sometimes I discover situations that I have become so used to that I almost forgot that I do not want that. The ability to adapt to what we have is great to survive, but we must be careful that it should not be the one that is making the important decisions of our lives.

I hope this table will serve you as much as it has helped me. It can also be used to work with other people: couples, friends, family, work team... Doing the reflections out loud, being careful not to judge and not criticize the comments of others, enhances interpersonal relationships, since we will end up getting to better know the current situation of the people with whom we live.

Dedicating time to these reflections and meditations helps me to harmonize my mind and from there to manifest what I think is most useful and beneficial for me and for my environment. These types of exercises bring out information about myself that I was not aware of.

I don't know about you, but it happens to me that by focusing on the goals that I set for myself, sometimes I forget what is important to maintain when I achieve those goals. I try to find the balance between what I want and what it really gives me. In fact, sometimes I've wanted something that didn't really bring me anything, but I hadn't discovered it until I had achieved it.

Well, I believe that this type of reflection and meditation improves us both personally and in our relationships with others. Being aware of what you expect from the situation or from the people, what you can contribute and what you are willing to use, I think is something fundamental and very useful for those of us who want to make the most of the opportunity that life offers us.

The great opportunity to have a physical human body and to be connected with the Dharma can easily be missed if we are not aware of what we decide to do with the time. That is why I want to share with you a second table to detect time thieves.

This time, the texts in the table are: Important, Not Important, Urgent, Not Urgent. There are several ways to use this table, but basically it consists of making a list of all the actions that we carry out in a common day, from the simplest to the most complex, and then placing them in the corresponding box.

What do you think of the proposal? Which box would you like to spend more time in?

This exercise forces us to determine what is important to us and that will only become apparent if we have clear objectives, which in turn will only be evident if we are clear about the meaning of our life.

The first box will be Important and Urgent.

The second will be Important and Not Urgent.

The third is Not Important and Urgent.

The fourth is Not Important and Not Urgent.



Picture: Jamie Street-unsplash

When I am dedicating time to important things, I have the feeling that I am doing what I have to do, when and how I want to do it. In my case they can be situations that only I can do and that I think I should do. There are importances that are more relative than others. For example, something very important would be something that if I didn't do it, I would be left with a feeling of emptiness and frustration. The inner voice that we all have is responsible for reminding us from time to time.

When I am doing something not important, the feeling I have is that time has passed, I have not contributed something that is crucial for me. Thoughts come to me like: this could be done by any other person without the need to have the preparation that I have.

Urgent is everything that pushes you, that forces you to act quickly. That if you don't do it now, you won't be able to do it and therefore, either you or someone else will suffer the consequences. Urgent normally comes with a feeling of pressure, of rush, of stress.

Not urgent, therefore, is when you can do something with time, without haste, without jitters. You can dedicate the time you consider and undertake it when you feel like it.

In which square do you think it makes more sense to stay the longer the better?

What I think we all agree on is that being constantly in the Not Important and Not Urgent is going

to leave us with a considerable feeling of emptiness. Our life will have no meaning: we neither contribute nor are we needed.

I like when I'm in Important and Non-Urgent, because that way I can dedicate as much time as possible to the task at hand.

I know several people who are very comfortable in Important and Urgent, they say that urgency improves their point of concentration and that way they give the best of themselves.

And you, what is your ideal square?

I suggest you stop for a moment and think, in your present situation, what percentage you live in each section, on a normal day.

From my experience in dealing with people I have seen that these types of exercises in which we ask ourselves what we think about the issues and about life are not common practices. I have met many people who are uncomfortable, feeling bad, but do not know why. Because "what remains abstract cannot be improved", they spend their days with these feelings of emptiness, discomfort and not knowing what to do with their lives. By using this table, it allows the information causing these feelings to become visible, no longer abstract.

Meditation helps us in this process of self-knowledge and harmonization. Once we are well with ourselves, the next step comes, and that is sharing our light with the beings around us.

SHARE MY INNER WORLD WITH OTHERS

The personal research process makes us feel good about ourselves and in theory it should help to make what we contribute to our surroundings luminous. It is very pleasant when we connect intimately with some being thanks to mutual understanding. When you feel understood, the presence of the other generates an entity called "we". In this experience the "I" relaxes and expands to give us a sense of spaciousness, connection, belonging, importance. When consciousness manifests itself without fear or filters, it allows its buddha nature to be glimpsed and from there we can enjoy love, compassion, joy and equanimity. Now, how do we share these wonderful feelings?

Communication is an art and certain principles must be taken into account if we want to use it to improve the world.

Correct communication is when the interlocutor creates in his mind an identical image to the one the sender of the message has. And as we already know, that has its complications.

First it is important to know what you want to convey, the clearer you have it, the better. Then you will have to know who your message is addressed to and what you expect to happen when the listener receives it. Next, it is time to decide on the best communication strategy. When all this process has finished, now it is time to issue the message according to the

means that one has (voice, image, texts,...) always considering the state and present abilities of the listener. Finally, it will be time to check that the process has been carried out correctly.

As you know in Buddhism we have specific sutras on correct communication. For example, in his first speech as the Buddha, in what we know as The Four Noble Truths, he declared the four parameters to apply in our communication so that it facilitates awareness and enlightenment for oneself as well as for others:

- **Truthfulness:** which has to do with objectivity and sincerity.
- **Kindness:** we take the interlocutor very much into account when transmitting our message. We adapt it the best way we know how.
- **Utility:** There are different levels of utility, the highest is to help raise the consciousness of others.
- **Foster authentic connection:** by promoting concord, harmony and union.

As what we manifest arises more and more from luminosity and less from automatic processes, we accumulate direct and enriching experiences. Thanks to these experiences, it is easier to connect with the meaning of life, since it becomes visible and is reinforced through communication, to the point that it ends up being the driving force behind our thoughts and actions. When we act from that state and live it from our center, we become generators

of positive environments, we live experiences and learn from them directly. We will no longer be talking about theories, it will be our own experience that will reinforce us and from there the practice of the Dharma will be increasingly essential and natural. The meaning of life and the practice of the Dharma will no longer be two different subjects.

From my point of view, what we call a spiritual path, the search for truth, authentic happiness, absolute happiness... is nothing more than this whole path towards consciousness. I have no doubt that this type of connection with oneself makes it easier to bring out the meaning of life and the motivation to dedicate what is necessary to it until we definitively align ourselves with it.

Living with a group of people matured through this inner work generates two great benefits: on the one hand, it enriches you as a person and on the other, it forces you to continue growing to be worthy of belonging to that group of practitioners.

As I want for myself, and for all the beings who also appreciate it, this type of space, and I consider that the Sangha is the maximum exponent of this activity, a few years ago I decided to dedicate myself to cultivating, preserving and promoting the generation of groups of practitioners, that is, the Sangha since I consider that it is the guarantee of success on the path to Enlightenment.

DEPENDENCE, INDEPENDENCE, INTERDEPENDENCE

When you go through this process, perhaps it is a good way to make the path of inner growth visible. As human beings we are born totally dependent. Without the help of others we could not live. Then over time we can fend for ourselves, until the time comes when we feel like a totally independent being. Later we notice that impulse to contribute to others and generate groups, families, societies...

The inner path passes through exactly the same stages:

We start with a completely chaotic mind, thoughts, sensations and emotions run through the mind generating all kinds of internal conversations, ideas, projections and mental states. This is the dependency phase.

With practice we are able to separate the different components to relax the automatisms and allow the interior luminosity to manifest. There comes a time when we feel good about ourselves, we don't need anyone. This is the independence phase.

After a while of checking how our mind works and realizing that there are many beings who have not yet realized it, we feel the need to share with others in order to help them. From our independence arises interdependence.

We become luminous beings motivated to share that light with others so that they are able to find their own. And for this it is important to learn not to lose it in the attempt. There is no point in



Picture: James Lee-unsplash

losing your light to help others to activate theirs. Whatever happens, don't lose your light.

Making this path inward empowers you to accompany others on their own path and thus, together, generate a more conscious, more luminous world.

The being that illuminates his interior ceases to have an idea of himself as completely separate from others. In fact, the very idea of "I" ceases to have so much importance. In the quantum world it is not so obvious where I begin and end, or what I am or am not. In that world, which is the place that the Dharma practitioner inhabits, the only thing that counts is empowering consciousness, going beyond the limiting beliefs that disable us from enjoying our true essence. It is absolute happiness, beyond any idea that I can comprehend.

Masters say that when you turn on your inner light you see in detail

both the smallest particle and the entire universe. That matter ceases to be an obstacle to knowing. That what we call mind is nothing more than infinite spaciousness and luminosity. Any attempt to explain the experience falls short.

SANGHA OF SANGHAS

Practitioners from all over Europe meet from time to time to share, learn and support each other on this path to Enlightenment. It is fantastic to see how each tradition has adapted the teaching of the Buddha to the situations it has been encountering for 2,600 years.

Each tradition defines its own method to undertake this inner process, so we find different ways of practicing the Dharma. We find different ways of dressing, different texts, different skills to develop, different exercises, different indicators of the way.

At EBU we meet practitioners from different sangha's, each one brings their learning, their experiences and their desire to share the best of themselves to help enable the practice of Buddhist Dharma.

HETEROGENEOUS UNITY IN A POWERFUL DIVERSITY

When we meet and acknowledge we elevate our idea of sangha. Together we generate a multicolored and multifaceted unit in which we all feel as one. No one is trying to convince anyone that their tradition is better than the other, since the being before us is a living example of the effectiveness of that tradition. And it is precisely this diversity that provides us with everything that is needed to illuminate the path of Dharma practice in Europe.

Thank you for your attention and awareness. 🧘

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