

BMVdigest

ISSUE • JAN - FEB 2023

For Non-Muslims only

Vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādeṭhā
All component things are impermanent. Work diligently for your liberation.



Bodhi Trees at Buddhist Maha Vihara

1. The Bodhi tree on the left grew from a sapling brought from the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka and was planted by our late Chief Incumbent Ven Dr K Sri Dhammananda Maha Nayaka Thera on 24th October 1982. Before this sapling arrived, there was an earlier Bodhi tree (also a sapling from Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi) that was planted in 1911 but unfortunately was blown down during a severe storm in 1982.

2. The Bodhi tree on the right grew from a sapling brought from the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi and re-planted in a ceremony officiated by YB Dato' Alex Lee Yu Long on 21st May 1995 as part of the Centenary Year celebrations of the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society. Before this sapling was planted, there stood in this exact spot, a common Bo fig tree that stood since the inception of the Society in 1894. This tree was dying from termite infestation and thereby was cut down in stages and uprooted in 1992 after more than a 100 years.

Photo Credit: Pamela Jayawardena

- Editor's Note – **Page 2**
- Message from the President – **Page 3**
- What is Abhidhamma? - **Page 3-4**
- Why You Should Let Go of Judging Others – **Page 5**
- 'See More, Hear More, Love More': The African Philosophy of Ubuntu – **Page 6**
- A Sinhalese missionary's quest to reclaim the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya for Buddhists – **Page 7-8**
- BMV News & Events – **Page 8-9**
- Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School – **Page 10**
- Pen Portraits – **Page 11**
- Ahimsa – **Page 11**
- Treasury of Truth – The Dhammapada – **Page 12**
- Seeing and Revering Nature with Love : Trees of Dharamsala – **Page 13-14**
- Projects Page - Lend a Hand - **Page 15**
- Daily/Weekly Activities and Projects - **Page 16**



Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year 2023 and my best wishes for a Happy and Prosperous Chinese New Year.

BMV Digest will be 7 years old this year. It seems like it was just yesterday when the then President, Bro Sirisena Perera told me about his plans and mission for the BMV Newsletter. For the first 3 years, the Newsletter was produced monthly after which it evolved to bi-monthly status and re-named "BMV Digest" to reflect the many excellent and profound articles by renowned Buddhist monks and lay Buddhist writers. From printing hard copies by the hundreds, the Digest went fully digital in July 2021 for practical reasons. It is available for your reading pleasure at our BMV website www.buddhistmahavihara.org or simply email us at info@buddhistmahavihara.org to place your free subscription. I would like to thank Bro Siri for his faith in my ability and giving me the free hand to steer the Digest to greater heights under his able stewardship. Now that he has stepped down as the President, my best wishes to him in all his future endeavours.

I hope the Digest has been able to serve and inspire you to lead a mindful and spiritual life following the teachings of the Buddha. We have covered quite a number of controversial topics that are considered taboo. I received good feedback on topics like suicide, homosexuality, depression, child abuse and racism. Devotees approached me and were grateful that they were able to understand and address their difficulties from a Buddhist point of view. We have also produced original articles from our own stable of writers consisting of monks, professors, former Sunday School teachers and wellness professionals. We are appreciative of their generous time and effort and hope more will join them and contribute their perspective and knowledge so that the understanding and practice of Buddhism flourishes in today's world.

Two years ago, I came up with a theme for the Digest's cover page. Buddha images from our very own International Pagoda kick-started the idea. Last year, spectacular stupas from around the world adorned the cover pages. This year, you will see the beauty of the sacred Bodhi trees from different parts of the world spread across the front page. Starting with our very own twin Bodhi trees at Buddhist Maha Vihara. It's uncommon to see two bodhi trees at a Buddhist temple but with anything that's unusual, you will find a story there.

Hope you, our dear readers will share the Digest with your family and friends and continue to subscribe and benefit from it. Thank you for your continuous support and encouragement.

May the New Year bring you and your family peace, prosperity, good health and happiness. May the Noble Triple Gem bless and guide you always.

Pamela Jayawardena

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Dhammapada Chap 1 Verse 20

**Appaṇ pi cē sahitaṃ bhāsamāno
dhammassa hōti anudhammacārī |
ragaṇ ca dōsaṇ ca pahāya mōhaṃ
sammappajānō suvimuttacittō |
anupādiyānō idha vā huraṃ vā
sa bhāgavā sāmāññaṣa hōti**

**Though few of the sacred texts he chant
in Dhamma does his practice run,
clear of delusion, lust and hate,
wisdom perfected, with heart well-freed.**



**The Chief Sangha Nayaka of Buddhist Maha Vihara,
Venerable Datuk K. Sri Dhammaratana Nayaka Maha
Thera, President K D Prematilake Serisena, The Committee
of Management of the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana
Society, all BMV resident organisations and BMV Admin
Staff would like to wish all our devotees and well-wishers a
Happy New Year 2023 and Gong Xi Fa Cai. May the new
year bring you and your loved ones, peace, prosperity,
good health and happiness.**

Photo by Zoltan Tasi



President's Message

Prematilaka K D Serisena

Firstly, allow me to thank the members of Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society (SAWS), for electing me President to serve this 128-year-old organisation. The first lesson the Buddha taught the world was gratitude to the tree that had sheltered him during his struggle for Buddhahood. In a similar vein, I am grateful to the Late Ven Dr K Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Maha Thera, the leaders of SAWS, my late parents, siblings, wife and daughter for all the lessons I have learned and become the person I am today.

Further, on behalf of the Committee of Management, I would like to express my gratitude, appreciation and humble thanks to the many donors and well-wishers who have over the years extended their goodwill and financial support to help us realise our ambition of making Buddhist Maha Vihara the leading centre for the learning and dissemination of the Dhamma.

Our society has grown enormously over the past years. Our lay community has been playing a leading role in growing and sustaining Buddhist teachings in Malaysia and the world over. Where did it all begin? At the Buddhist Maha Vihara.

The Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS), The K Sri Dhammananda Institute, and Friends of Vihara will be the anchors for the continuous growth of Buddhist Maha Vihara.

Our members are prominent in the umbrella organisations that are working to bring the varying Buddhist organisations together in harmony so that we can speak nationally and internationally as one voice. These umbrella organisations also work to maintain a high standard of Buddhist teachings.

The pressures building around financial and organisational governance can no longer be ignored. Our society needs to make strategic plans to professionalise its operations. Like some of our members, I too, look back wistfully at the days when everything was volunteer-based, where putting forward effort would see things through, but our society now is different. It is no longer a small outfit, and our constitution needs to reflect this reality.

We are definitely maturing as an organisation; we are developing experience and as such we have responsibilities. Many new organisations take the lead from us. We need to be mature in our dealings with one another. Consensus should always be the aim, but if that is not possible, we need to trust that the majority opinion is best, and if it's not, we need to be able to forgive and make things right. This is always about the journey we are on, and the journey continues until we are wise enough to become enlightened. We are working with a paradox. It is always "me and the other" and enlightenment is all about unifying these extremes.

In conclusion, I wish to thank Venerable Datuk K Sri Dhammaratana, Venerable KL Vijitha, visiting members of the Sangha and Members of the Committee of Management for the encouragement and guidance. My sincere gratitude also to the staff of Buddhist Maha Vihara for their faithful service. To our Chinese devotees a very Happy and Prosperous Chinese New Year 2023.

Feature

What is Abhidhamma?



By Ven Dr K Sri Dhammananda Maha Nayaka Thera JSM., PhD., D. Litt.

Abhidhamma is the analytical doctrine of mental faculties and elements.

The Abhidhamma Pitaka contains the profound moral psychology and philosophy of the Buddha's teaching, in contrast to the simpler discourses in the Sutta Pitaka.

The knowledge gained from the sutta can certainly help us in overcoming our difficulties, as well as in developing our moral conduct and training the mind. Having such knowledge will enable one to lead a life which is peaceful, respectable, harmless and noble. By listening to the discourses, we develop understanding of the Dhamma and can mould our daily lives accordingly. The concepts behind certain words and terms used in the Sutta Pitaka are, however, subject to changes and should be interpreted within the context of the social environment prevailing at the Buddha's time. The concepts used in the sutta are like the conventional words and terms lay people use to express scientific subjects. While concepts in the sutta are to be understood in the conventional sense, those used in the Abhidhamma must be understood in the ultimate sense. The concepts expressed in the Abhidhamma are like the precise scientific words and terms used by scientists to prevent misinterpretations.

It is only in the Abhidhamma that explanations are given on how and at which mental beats a person can create good and bad karmic thoughts, according to his desires and other mental states. Clear explanations of the nature of the different mental faculties and precise analytical interpretations of the elements can be found in this important collection of discourses.

Understanding the Dhamma through the knowledge gained from the sutta is like the knowledge acquired from studying the prescriptions for different types of sicknesses. Such knowledge when applied can certainly help to cure certain types of sicknesses. On the other hand, a qualified physician, with his precise knowledge, can diagnose a wider range of sicknesses and discover their causes. This specialized knowledge puts him in a better position to prescribe more effective remedies. Similarly, a person who has studied the Abhidhamma can better understand the nature of the mind and analyse the mental attitudes which cause a human being to commit mistakes and develop the will to avoid evil.

The Abhidhamma teaches that the egoistic beliefs and other concepts such as 'I', 'you', 'man' and 'the world', which we use in daily conversation, do not adequately describe the real nature of existence. The conventional concepts do not reflect the fleeting nature of pleasures, uncertainties, impermanence of every component thing, and the conflict among the elements and energies intrinsic in all animate or inanimate things. The Abhidhamma doctrine gives a clear exposition of the ultimate nature of man and brings the analysis of the human condition further than other studies known to man.

The Abhidhamma deals with realities existing in the ultimate sense, or paramattha dhamma in Pali. There are four such realities:

- 1- **Citta, mind or consciousness, defined as 'that which knows or experiences' an object. Citta occurs as distinct momentary states of consciousness.**
- 2- **Cetasika, the mental factors that arise and occur along with the citta.**
- 3- **Rupa, physical phenomenon or material form.**
- 4- **Nibbana, the unconditioned state of bliss which is the final goal.**

Citta, the cetasika, and rupa are conditioned realities. They arise because of conditions sustaining them cease to continue to do so. They are impermanent states. Nibbana, on the other hand, is an unconditioned reality. It does not arise and, therefore, does not fall away. These four realities can be experienced regardless of the names we may choose to give them. Other than these realities, everything -- be it within ourselves or without, whether in the past, present or future, whether coarse or subtle, low or lofty, far or near -- is a concept and not an ultimate reality.

Citta, cetasika, and Nibbana are also called nama. Nibbana is an unconditioned nama. The two conditioned nama, that is, citta and cetasika, together with rupa (form), make up psychophysical organisms, including human beings. Both mind and matter, or nama-rupa, are analysed in Abhidhamma as though under a microscope. Events connected with the process of birth and death are explained in detail. The Abhidhamma clarifies intricate points of the Dhamma and enables the arising of an understanding of reality, thereby setting forth in clear terms the Path of Emancipation. The realization we gain from the Abhidhamma with regard to our lives and the world is not in a conventional sense, but absolute reality.

The clear exposition of thought processes in Abhidhamma cannot be found in any other psychological treatise either in the east or west. Consciousness is defined, while thoughts are analysed and classified mainly from an ethical standpoint. The composition of each type of consciousness is set forth in detail. The fact that consciousness flows like a stream, a view propounded by psychologists like William James, becomes extremely clear to one who understands the Abhidhamma. In addition, a student of Abhidhamma can fully comprehend the Anatta (No-soul) doctrine, which is important both from a philosophical and ethical standpoint.

The Abhidhamma explains the process of rebirth in various planes after the occurrence of death without anything to pass from one life to another. This explanation provides support to the doctrine of Kamma and Rebirth. It also gives a wealth of details about the mind, as well as the units of mental and material forces, properties of matter, sources of matter, relationship of mind and matter.

In the Abhidhammattha Sangaha, a manual of Abhidhamma, there is a brief exposition of the 'Law of Dependent Origination', followed by a descriptive account of the Causal Relations which finds no parallel in any other study of the human condition anywhere else in the world. Because of its analytics and profound expositions, the Abhidhamma is not a subject of fleeting interest designed for the superficial reader.

To what extent can we compare modern psychology with the analysis provided in the Abhidhamma? Modern psychology, limited as it is, comes within the scope of Abhidhamma in so far as it deals with the mind -- with thoughts, thought processes, and mental states. The difference lies in the fact that Abhidhamma does not accept the concept of a psyche or a soul.

The analysis of the nature of the mind given in the Abhidhamma is not available through any other source.. Even modern psychologists are very much in the dark with regards to subjects like mental impulses or mental beats (Javana Citta) as discussed in the Abhidhamma. Dr. Graham Howe, an eminent Harley Street psychologist, wrote in his book, the Invisible Anatomy:

'In the course of their work many psychologists have found, as the pioneer work of C.G. Jung has shown, that we are near to [the] Buddha. To read a little Buddhism is to realize that the Buddhists knew two thousand five hundred years ago far more about our modern problems of psychology than they have yet been given credit for. They studied these problems long ago, and found the answers too. We are now rediscovering the Ancient Wisdom of the East.'

Some scholars assert that the Abhidhamma is not the teaching of the Buddha, but it grew out of the commentaries on the basic

teachings of the Buddha. These commentaries are said to be the work of great scholar monks. Tradition, however, attributes the nucleus of the Abhidhamma to the Buddha Himself.

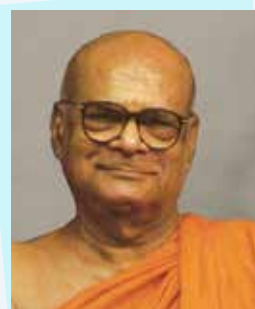
Commentators state that the Buddha, as a mark of gratitude to His mother who was born as a deva in a celestial plane, preached the Abhidhamma to His mother together with other devas continuously for three months. The principal topics (matika) of the advanced teaching, such as moral states (kusala dhamma) and immoral states (akusala dhamma), were then repeated by the Buddha to Venerable Sariputta Thera, who subsequently elaborated them and later compiled them into six books.

From ancient times there were controversies as to whether the Abhidhamma was really taught by the Buddha. While this discussion may be interesting for academic purposes, what is important is for us to experience and understand the realities described in the Abhidhamma. One will realize for oneself that such profound and consistently verifiable truths can only emanate from a supremely enlightened source -- from a Buddha. Much of what is contained in the Abhidhamma is also found in the Sutta Pitaka. Such a statement, of course, cannot be supported by evidence.

According to the Theravada tradition, the essence, fundamentals and framework of the Abhidhamma are ascribed to the Buddha, although the tabulations and classifications may have been the work of later disciples. What is important is the essence. It is this that we would try to experience for ourselves. The Buddha Himself clearly took this stand of using the knowledge of the Abhidhamma to clarify many existing psychological, metaphysical and philosophical problems. Mere intellectual quibbling about whether the Buddha taught the Abhidhamma or not will not help us to understand reality.

The question is also raised whether the Abhidhamma is essential for Dhamma practice. The answer to this will depend on the individual who undertakes the practice. People vary in their levels of understanding, their temperaments and spiritual development. Ideally, all the different spiritual faculties should be harmonized, but some people are quite contented with devotional practices based on faith, while others are keen on developing penetrative insight. The Abhidhamma is most useful to those who want to understand the Dhamma in greater depth and detail. It aids the development of insight into the three characteristics of existence -- impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self. It is useful not only for the periods devoted to formal meditation, but also during the rest of the day when we are engaged in various mundane chores. We derive great benefit from the study of the Abhidhamma when we experience absolute reality. In addition, a comprehensive knowledge of the Abhidhamma is useful for those engaged in teaching and explaining the Dhamma. In fact the real meaning of the most important Buddhist terminologies such as Dhamma, Kamma, Samsara, Sankhara, Paticca Samuppada and Nibbana cannot be understood without a knowledge of Abhidhamma

Source : "What Buddhists Believe" by Ven Dr K Sri Dhammananda



About the Writer : Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda is a household name in the Buddhist world. In more than forty two years as incumbent of the Buddhist Maha Vihara, Malaysia, the Venerable has brought the Buddha Word to countless numbers of devotees who otherwise would have had no access to the sublime message of the Enlightened One. Besides his talks the Venerable has been able to reach an even wider audience through his publications which range from the voluminous "Dhammapada" to little five page pamphlets. He has been able to reach all levels of readers from erudite scholar monks to young school children. His whole approach to the exposition of the Dhamma is governed by his deep concern for giving the ancient teachings a contemporary relevance, to show that the Sublime Message is timeless and has a meaning that cuts across the boundaries of time, space, race, culture and even religious beliefs.

Why You Should Let Go Of Judging Others



By Tony Fahkry

The Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho writes: A young couple moved into a new neighbourhood. The next morning while they were eating breakfast, the young woman saw her neighbour hanging the washing outside. "That laundry is not very clean; she doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on, remaining silent.

Every time her neighbour hung her washing out to dry, the young woman made the same comments. A month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband, "Look, she's finally learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this." The husband replied, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

Complex Lives

Your intolerance of others is largely influenced by the filters you use to perceive them. Regrettably, a distorted lens composed of one's prejudices and limitations obscures your interaction with people.

You are absorbed in your own reality, to walk a mile in another person's shoes comes at the expense of judging them.

Judgement signifies a lack of self-acceptance, because you are at war with yourself. To appease your pain, you cast aspersions onto others to feel good.

Judging can become entrenched into your psyche so you become oblivious to it. As you make sense of the world early in life, you label and judge what you like and dislike. Moreover, the mind's inherent negativity bias means you exercise unfavourable judgement to explain other people's actions, much to your misfortune.

Judgement perpetuates a destructive mindset since you uphold this negativity when you entertain such thoughts. To overcome your criticism of people, be mindful of your thoughts as they arise.

Equally, self-judgement is difficult to spot because it becomes addictive and you may not be aware of it. At its core, judging others reflects your narrow assessment of yourself.

"If I notice myself judging, I simply witness it and come back to the moment and to what the person facing me is experiencing. If I notice that I am transferring my own fears onto the other, I tap myself on the shoulder metaphorically and redirect my attention to what the other is feeling," affirms psychotherapist and teacher David Richo.

Your knowledge of others is limited at the best of times because your judgement of them is witnessed through an ambiguous lens. There is more depth to a person than your perception of them.

Judging others offers you the opportunity to become curious. Rather than direct anger towards others, become curious and note where the judgement arises. What could it be advising you?

Conceivably, underneath every judgement is the need for love, acceptance and validation. Unless you get to the core of the issue, you will perpetuate the same disempowering emotions each time.



Self-sabotaging Thoughts

There is seldom any justification to judge others because you are unaware of their values, beliefs and outlook. Whilst you might disagree on their life choices, you are a mere bystander exposed to a facet of their being.

Instead of judging them, contemplate the consequences of their actions. This is likely to reveal a deeper layer to their motivation instead of skimming the surface.

I invite you to see others through the eyes of compassion since your judgement of them serves nobody. I am drawn to the Dalai Lama's quote, "Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them."

You can become aware of judging others by observing your thoughts at the time. Judgement has a negative felt energy and if you are attuned to it, you can meet it with openness. Therefore, mindfulness allows you to witness your thoughts before acting on them.

The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh states, "You have to practice breathing mindfully in and out so that compassion always stays with you. You listen without giving advice or passing judgement. You can say to yourself about the other person, 'I am listening to him just because I want to relieve his suffering.' This is called compassionate listening."

Reframe self-talk by investigating your inner dialogue. Don't succumb to destructive thoughts, instead confront them with truthfulness, knowing the self-constructed narrative has no authority unless you award it power.

Label your thoughts when you notice yourself judging others. Notice when you are judging and follow the self-sabotaging thoughts.

I use an inner mantra when I catch myself unconsciously judging others. I silently affirm to myself, "Isn't that interesting." That thought alone is neutral and does not impose my prejudices on them. Instead, I witness it through the eyes of equanimity.

Another useful approach is to move into your body. You may spend a great deal of time engaged in your thoughts, while at the mercy of believing them. Breathe into your body and become mindful of your body sensations.

Exercise and movement is useful to dissipate negative emotions. I'm amazed how good I feel following a brief jog or a resistance session which disperses the cycle of habitual thoughts.

Emotionally resilient people avoid judging others because they recognise the futility of it. Instead, they channel their strengths rather than feeding their weaknesses.

It is vital to heal your pain and resolve the wounds of your past.

Dr. Alex Lickerman writes in *The Undefeated Mind*, "For if we can approach people first and foremost not with judgement but with curiosity we'll have taken an important step on the journey to compassion and thus to an undefeated mind."

To condemn others perpetuates a fear-based mindset and deflects having to look deep into yourself.

As the opening story invites you to consider, seeing others through a darkened lens is toxic to your emotional wellbeing.

Not only do you form a distorted view of people, you diminish your self-worth and project your unresolved emotions on them, instead of meeting them with compassion.



Source : <https://medium.com/the-mission/why-you-should-let-go-of-judging-others-68bee339afe8>

About the Writer : Tony Fahkry is a self-empowerment Author | Renowned Speaker | Expert Life Coach.

See More, Hear More, Love More



By Nobantu Mpotulo

Nobantu Mpotulo reflects on how the spirit of ubuntu shaped her family.

"Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are"

The African philosophy of ubuntu teaches that we are human only through the humanity of others. A Buddhist of African descent explore the synergy between ubuntu and the Buddhist teachings on interdependence.

Nelson Mandela said that ubuntu is "the profound sense that we are human only through the humanity of others; that if we are to accomplish anything in this world, it will in equal measure be due to the work and achievement of others."

I can relate Mandela's statement to my upbringing. When my mother was pregnant with me, she went through immense suffering because my father left her. She was a teacher, and at that time teachers who gave birth had to take an unpaid leave of absence for a year. My mother could not afford to take this leave, as she wouldn't have been able to provide for her three sons.

So my mother and my aunt concealed the fact that she'd just given birth, and when I was only a month old, my aunt took me in, even though she had six other children, including an eighteen-month-old daughter. My aunt brought me up as her own, and I called her "Mama." Guests were not able to distinguish who were her biological children. My aunt's house was always full of extended family. When we had supper, there would be twenty plates on the table, plus two extra plates in case someone hungry came by.

This is a taste of the ubuntu spirit, the ability to forget yourself as an individual and regard yourself as interconnected to others. If we compare ubuntu to Buddhist teachings, it's closely linked to anatta (no-self). I have to consider the wellness of the whole before I consider my own interests and needs. This is the culture that has been passed on to me by my ancestors.

Bishop Desmond Tutu says, "A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished."

In South Africa, where I'm from, when we greet, we say, "sawubona." This means I see you; I see myself in you; I see your hopes, your dreams, and your struggles; I see your ancestors as well. Because interconnectedness does not end with the two people who are greeting each other; it extends to include the ancestors.

In practicing with ubuntu, and anatta, we regard all beings and Mother Nature as interconnected; there is no sense of being separate. This supports us in embodying non-duality. I see myself in all beings, and therefore, if I harm other beings or Mother Nature, it translates into self-harming. This informs our practice of non-harming.



We have a lot to learn from nature about ubuntu and anatta. For example, fungi have a partnership with plants and trees. Through their tiny vegetal threads called mycelium, fungi serve as a communication network among plants that allows them to warn each other about insect infestations and share nutrients. According to some researchers, trees and the mushrooms growing around them are so interconnected that in many ways they aren't separate entities.

Then there is the mutualistic coexistence of bees and flowers, which Khalil Gibran described in his poem "On Pleasure":

It is the pleasure of the bee to gather honey of the flower,

But it is also the pleasure of the flower to yield its honey to the bee.

For the bee a flower is a fountain of life,

And to the flower a bee is a messenger of love,

And to both, bee and flower, the giving and the receiving of pleasure is a need and an ecstasy.

Ubuntu is also in harmony with what in the Buddhist tradition are called metta (loving-kindness), karuna (compassion), and mudita (empathic joy). Both ubuntu and these Buddhist virtues



put us in touch with our deepest humaneness, help us meet suffering with courage and resilience, and support us in loving and accepting people who are challenging to us.

The Bemba Tribe of Zambia takes ubuntu, metta, karuna, and mudita to another level. If in a community there's

a member who is troublesome, the whole community—the young and the old—come together and form a circle, placing the troublemaker in the center. They find the goodness in the person, highlighting their good deeds and showering them with appreciation. Then there's a celebratory feast held in the person's honor.

Applying the principles of ubuntu, anatta, metta, and karuna helps us integrate the head, heart, body, soul, and spirit. The mantra I use to reflect on this is: "See more; hear more; love more; illuminate more; be more and do less."



Source : https://www.lionsroar.com/ubuntu-i-am-because-we-are/?utm_content=bufferdf34d&utm

About the Writer : Nobantu Mpotulo is a mindfulness teacher and life coach who leads workshops for other coaches, teaching them how to integrate ubuntu into coaching.



Anagarika Dharmapala

A Sinhalese missionary's quest to reclaim the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya for Buddhists

In the 1890s, Anagarika Dharmapala launched a movement to restore control of the holy Buddhist shrine from a Saivite sect.

By Ajay Kamalakaran

In the 19th century, when the English poet and journalist Edwin Arnold called on Buddhists everywhere to help restore their religious shrines in India, a young Sinhalese man decided to take up the cause of the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya. Anagarika Dharmapala was just 26 then and had a religious status that lay between a monk and a layperson. In 1891, spurred by Arnold's exhortation, he decided to go on his first pilgrimage to the Mahabodhi Temple and pray at the spot under the Bodhi Tree that is believed to be where the Buddha attained enlightenment.

The temple in Bodh Gaya was originally built by Emperor Ashoka in 3rd century BCE, according to the cultural agency of the United Nations, Unesco. It was restored several times over the centuries, but fell into a state of ruin after 13th century Turkic invasions of the region. Many parts of the temple complex were buried by elements of nature and remained there until they were excavated between 1879 and 1885 under the leadership of Alexander Cunningham, a British Army engineer who founded what would later become the Archaeological Survey of India.

The official website of the temple says a wandering Saivite Sanyasi named Mahant Ghamandi Giri, who arrived in Bodh Gaya in 1590, laid claim to the shrine. Before long, the control of the temple had passed to him and his successors.

In his book titled *The Light of Asia: The Poem that Defined the Buddha*, politician Jairam Ramesh corroborates the story of the mahant. "In August 1727, a Mughal prince gave the Sivaites a deed to establish ownership rights in the area (although it was unclear whether the deed covered the actual temple or not)," Ramesh says in the book that is a tribute to Edwin Arnold. "The Sivaites took control of the temple and its surroundings following the grant of the deed and from then on, both Hindus and Buddhists had access to it."

When Arnold, who authored *The Light of Asia*, travelled to Bodh Gaya in the 19th century, the temple was still under the control of the mahant's successors. By the 1890s, it had become a pilgrimage spot for both Southeast Asian Buddhists as well as Indian and Nepalese Hindus, many of whom considered the Buddha a reincarnation of Vishnu.

Anagarika Dharmapala (born Don David Hemavitharane) first visited the temple in January 1891 during a two-month stay in Bodh Gaya. A few months later, Dharmapala, Arnold and Sinhalese monk Weligama Sri Sumangala co-founded the Maha Bodhi Society of India with the aim of reviving Buddhism in India and restoring holy sites in places like Bodh Gaya and Sarnath.

Tensions rise

Although the Mahabodhi Temple was controlled by the Hindu mahant, Buddhist and Hindu pilgrims prayed there until late 19th century without much conflict. The first signs of tensions emerged when Dharmapala, who believed that Buddhism was a distinct religion from Hinduism, noticed Hindu rituals being performed on the main Buddha statue at the temple.

In January 1895, Dharmapala took his mother and 44 other Sinhalese Buddhist pilgrims to Bodh Gaya. What he saw displeased him:

"When I visited the Temple in January last, I observed that the image [the Buddha statue] had undergone alteration – in particular, that paint of red colour had put on the forehead and the whole body covered with cloth so as to conceal its Buddha appearance, and flowers placed on its head. When I saw the image four years ago, it had no paint on its forehead, no flowers on the head and it had only on a cloth occasionally and that of plain yellow colour, such as Buddhist Bhikshus (monks) wear. The cloth I have now seen on is not a mere cloth, but a regular dress for the image and of orange colour – a little lighter than the colour which the Sanyasis accused wear (points to a bright orange colour a spectator is wearing on his puggree). All these changes are certainly such as defile the image of the Buddha."

Dharmapala made the above statement to the Gaya Magistrate in 1895 in a case he filed against a group of Saivites for disrupting his prayers. He alleged that the Saivites, supported by the deputy magistrate and sub-registrar of Gaya, prevented him from installing a 700-year-old Japanese Buddha statue in the temple in February of that year. As a remedy, he requested the magistrate to hand over the temple's control to Buddhists.

Both the plaintiff and the defendants were represented by English lawyers, and it was in this case that the subject of the rightful ownership of a temple was first discussed in a court of law. The proceedings of the case were transcribed and



Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya, Bihar.
Credit: Santosh Kumar Flickr

compiled by Dharmapala in a book titled *The Budh-Gaya Temple Case: H. Dharmapala Versus Jaipal Gir and Others*, (Prosecution Under Sections 295, 296, 297, 143 & 506 of the Indian Penal Code). After many depositions, the English magistrate partly ruled in favour of the Sinhalese missionary and convicted three of the defendants for disturbing the worship

of Dharmapala and other Ceylonese Buddhists. The trio was handed a fine and a prison sentence of one month.

"The case is one of importance, as the disturbance in sought to be justified by the defendants on the ground that their superior, the Mahant of Bodh-Gaya, claims the right, though a Hindu, of regulating what worship shall be performed in this famous shrine, known as the Great Temple of Mahabodhi, and regarded by the Buddhists, that is, by about one-third of the human race, as the most sacred spot on earth," the magistrate said.

However, the magistrate did not agree to hand over the control of the temple to Buddhists. The verdict was challenged before a sessions judge, who suspended the prison sentences but kept the fines. Not content, the three Hindus approached the Calcutta High Court, which struck down the convictions and virtually maintained status quo on the control of the temple.

In the ruling, one of the High Court judges who heard the case, Justice Macpherson, said, "The Government has had no occasion to interfere in the internal management, even if it could do so, and that is not a question which need be considered in this case. If the control and superintendence of the temple is not vested in the Mahant, it does not appear to be vested in any one."

The other judge on the High Court bench, Justice Banerjee, agreed: "I deem it right here to observe that the question what the exact nature and extent of the Mahant's control over the temple is, the evidence adduced in the case does not enable us to determine."

Gandhi and Tagore

Dharmapala continued to unsuccessfully fight legal cases until 1906. Although the issue of ownership rights of the temple stayed close to his heart, he did not approach the courts again. "During the remaining 27 years of his life, he ceaselessly agitated for his cause, having the issue brought before the Indian National Congress on three occasions petitioning the government and mobilising public opinion," Australian-born Buddhist monk Shrivasthi Dhammika wrote in his book Middle Land, Middle Way: A Pilgrim's Guide to the Buddha's India. "In India public opinion gradually moved in favour of Buddhist control and eminent intellectuals and scholars began to speak out on this issue."

Among the intellectual elite who spoke about the rights of Buddhists to claim the temple was Rabindranath Tagore. "I am sure it will be admitted by all Hindus who are true to their own ideals, that it is an intolerable wrong to allow the temple raised on the spot where Lord Buddha attained his enlightenment to remain under the control of a rival sect which can neither have the intimate knowledge of or sympathy for the Buddhist religion and its rites of worship," Tagore said. "I consider it to be a sacred duty for all individuals believing in freedom and justice this great historical site to the community of people who still reverently carry on that particular current of history in their own living faith."



Anagarika Dharmapala at Bodhi Gaya in 1933

In 1922, when Gaya hosted the Indian National Congress Session, members of the Maha Bodhi Society approached Mahatma Gandhi on the issue of the control of the temple. The leader of India's freedom struggle expressed sympathy with the Buddhist cause. Dhammika's book carries a quote from the Mahatma: "There is no doubt that the possession of the temple should vest in the Buddhists. There may be legal difficulties. They must be overcome. If the report is true that animal sacrifice is offered in the temple it is a sacrilege. It is equally a sacrilege if the worship is offered, as it is alleged, in a way calculated to wound the



Dharmapala seated centre with representatives from different countries at a meeting at the Mahabodhi Society HQ in Calcutta circa 1890s

susceptibilities of the Buddhist." According to Jairam Ramesh, Gandhi delegated this responsibility to Rajendra Prasad, who would later become the first president of India.

Meanwhile, Dharmapala went on to become a full-fledged Buddhist monk and took the name Devamitta Dharmapala. He died in 1933 at the age of 68. It would take another 16 years after his death for the Bihar government in independent India to pass the Bodhi Gaya Temple Act, under which the ownership of the temple passed from the mahant to the state government. The Act, first amended in 1955, provided for the setting up of a committee of four Hindus and four Buddhists to manage the affairs of the temple.

"This arrangement was far from satisfactory, but was better than what had prevailed previously," Shrivasthi Dhammika wrote. One contentious part of the law was Section 3(3), which called for the district magistrate to be the ex-officio chairman of the committee. Under that section, if the district magistrate was non-Hindu, the government had to nominate a Hindu to the post. It was only in 2013 that the Bihar government amended the law to allow a non-Hindu to head the committee. The temple's advisory board comprises of the governor of Bihar and 20-25 members, half of whom are from Buddhist countries.

The Mahabodhi Temple became a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2002 and is now the centrepiece of a Buddhist Circuit project that aims to enhance religious links and encourage tourism to India from Buddhist-majority countries.



Source : <https://scroll.in/magazine/1027752/a-sinhalese-missionarys-quest-to-reclaim-the-mahabodhi-temple-in-bodhi-gaya-for-buddhists>

About the Writer : Ajay Kamalakaran is a writer, primarily based in Mumbai. He is a Kalpalata Fellow for History & Heritage Writings for 2022.

BMV News & Events Past Events from November to December 2022.

1. Virtual Dhamma Sharing (Streamed online via BMV Public Facebook Page)



 <p>Bhante Dr Varabuddhi Thera (USA) Sun, 13th November Transforming Suffering Into Peace and Liberation</p>	 <p>Bhante Akaliko Thera (Australia) Fri, 18th November How to Heal your Hate and be Happy</p>	 <p>Bhante Piyaarthana Thera (Sri Lanka) Sun, 20th November Importance of the Mind</p>	 <p>Bhante W. Magghavihari Thera (Sri Lanka) Sun, 27th November Self Compassion</p>	 <p>Bhikkhuni Dr Prassannawathie Theri (Nepal) Sun, 4th December Importance of Good Friends</p>	 <p>Bhante P. Vijithananda (Sri Lanka) Fri, 9th December A Buddhist Practise for a Happier Life</p>
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BMV News & Events

2. In Person Dhamma Sharing



Bhante P. Piyaarathana (Sri Lanka)

Sun, 11th November

Where is Happiness



Bhante Akaliko (Australia)

Sun, 20th Nov - **Dealing with Distracting Thoughts**

Fri, 25th Nov - **Keeping Things in Perspective**

Sat, 26th Nov - **Generosity as a Spiritual Practice**

Sun, 27th Nov - **Contemplating Death**

3. Non-Stay In Buddhist Spiritual Retreats with Bhante Akaliko

a.1 Day Practice - Sun, 20th November Time 7.00am – 5.00pm



b. 2 Days Practice – Sat, 26th – Sun, 27th November Time - 7.00am – 5.00pm



**Spiritual Retreat Programme – Dhamma discussion,
Mindful Chanting and Guided Meditation**

4. 1 Day Workshop – Critical Thinking Empowering you to Excel



Date -12th November 2022

Venue - BMV

Time - 9.00am – 3.30pm

Trainer - Mr Ravi Varman



A class of 24 participants from our in-house Buddhist community had great fun with innovative activities, discussions and presentations. This Programme is the 2nd this year organised by the BMV's Training Academy to enhance and elevate the life skills of our members.

5. BMV Buddhist Pilgrimage to India – 1st November – 12th November 2022

The BMV organised a much awaited Pilgrimage to important Buddhist sites in Nepal and India from 1 - 12 November 2022. There were 35 layperson's and 2 Buddhist monks accompanying the group - Bhante I Swarnajoothi Thera (Sri Lanka) and Bhante Sanghpal Thera (India). The sites visited were Sravasti, Lumbini, Kapilavasthu, Kushinagar, Veshali, Rajgir, Nalanda, Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Varanasi. They participated in meditation sessions, chanting, self reflection, sponsored a Dana and offered robes to 50 monks and nuns and distributed t-shirts, socks, covid test kits and other requisites to the many needy and impoverished communities along the way.



6. Donation of Buddhist Books to Labunoruwakandha Monastery

The BMV had recently sent 20kg worth of Free Publications printed by the Buddhist Maha Vihara with the kind sponsorship of devotees to the Labunoruwakandha Forest Monastery Library in Sri Lanka. The books were deeply appreciated by the Chief Monks Ven.Mankadawala Sudassana Thero, Ven. Mankadawala Nandarathana Thero and Ven.Kothmale Kumara Kassapa Thero.

Seen here in the pictures is Ven Kotagoda Pesala Thero, a regular speaker at our online Dhamma Dana Series, reviewing the donated books.





Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS)

An unforgettable Gratitude Sunday.

27th of November 2022

*Teamwork makes success *This sums up our Gratitude day celebration.

The EXCO, Organising committee WORK together tirelessly for the past 3 months to organize this event.

Teachers and parents were most cooperative to get the children to participate in the programme.

Appreciation also goes to our Brothers and Sisters from Sanghamitta class for their very meaningful Songs Performance.

Our Gratitude also goes to our Brothers and Sisters from Sariputta class for their Simple and nice decorations of Asoka hall.

Finally 3 loud cheers to all our Enthusiastic Children who give their best to make this performance So Lively and Successful.

This is the most prefect closing for our academic year 2022. See you all in year 2023.

By Sis Chua Gek Khim.

Year 2022 Project member.





Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School

We Are RECRUITING

Are You Ready To Join Our Dhamma Family?



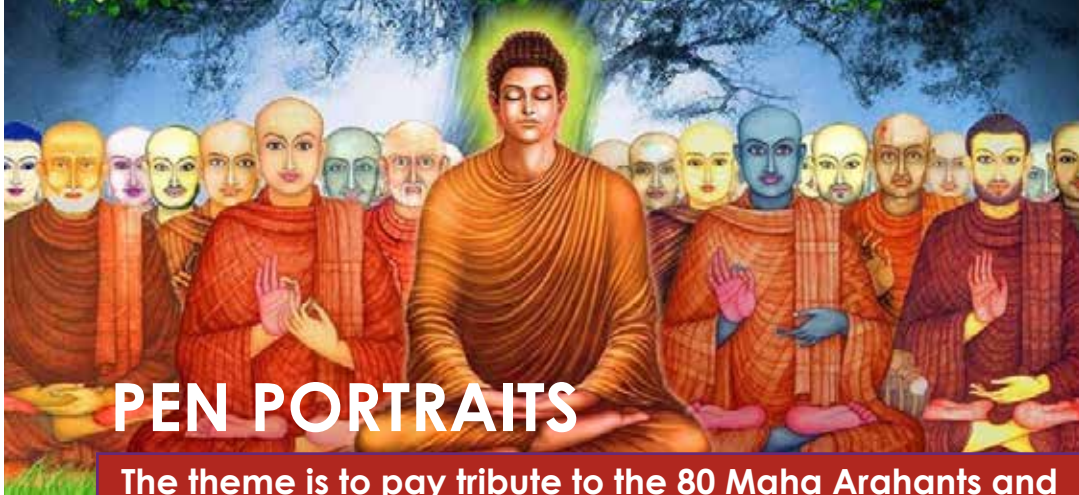
APPLY NOW (100% VOLUNTEER)
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- Dhamma Teachers and Facilitators
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PEN PORTRAITS

The theme is to pay tribute to the 80 Maha Arahants and the 13 Maha Theri Arahants who had by their efforts won emancipation of a rare distinction. They belonged to the innermost circles in the life of the Gautama Buddha. The Buddha and the Maha Arahants were together most of the time.

No 53. Tissa Metteyya Maha Thera

He was called Tissa which was his personal name and Metteyya after his clan. As a follower of Bavari and a leader of 1,000 strong, he had the privilege of asking questions.

His questions to the Buddha were:

- (1) Who is happy in this world?
- (2) Who is not afflicted by craving?
- (3) Who has crossed over to the other shore?

The Buddha replied as follows:-

Whoever saw the shortcomings of craving and by mindfulness in respect of impermanency (Anicca) as well as understanding the Dhamma got rid of desire and lust, such a person had crossed over the ocean of Samsara. In other words he had stopped getting unsatisfactory rebirths by realizing Nibbana. This is the gist of what the Buddha said.

The answers of the Buddha were a revelation to Tissa. He had searched for the Four Noble Truths for a long time. He was not only convinced but converted. Long preparation helped him to make smooth the Path. He and his followers became Arahants and Tissa Metteyya was numbered among the Maha Arahants.

No 54. Punnaka Maha Thera

He was born in the family of a householder of Suppāraka in the Sunāparanta country. When he was grown up, he went with a great caravan of merchandise to Sāvattthi where, having heard the Buddha preach, he left the world and joined the Order. He won favour by attention to his duties. One day he asked the Buddha for a short lesson so that, having learnt it, he might go back to dwell in Sunāparanta. The Buddha preached to him the Punnovāda Sutta. So Punna departed, and, in Sunāparanta, he became an arahant. There he won over many disciples, both male and female, and having built for the Buddha a cell out of red sandalwood (Candanāsālā), he sent him a flower by way of invitation. The Buddha came with five hundred arahants, spent a night in the cell, and went away before dawn.

Ninety one kappas ago, when there was no Buddha alive, Punna was a learned brahmin, and later became a hermit in Himavā. Near his abode a Pacceka Buddha died, and at the moment of his death there appeared a great radiance. The ascetic cremated the body and sprinkled scented water on the pyre to extinguish the flames. A deva, witnessing the event, prophesied his future greatness. His name throughout his many lives was Punna or Punnaka. Thag. vs. 70; ThagA.i.156 ff.; Ap.ii.341.

In Sunāparanta he first lived at Ambahatthapabbata, but, on being recognised by his brother, he went to Samuddagiri vihāra, where was a magnetised walk which none could use. The waves of the sea breaking made great noise, and, in order to help him to concentration, Punna caused the sea to be quiet. From there he went to Mātulagiri, where the incessant cries of birds disturbed him; he finally went to Makulakagāma. While he was there, his brother Cūla Punna, with five hundred others, sailed in a trading ship, and, before embarking, he visited Punna, took the precepts from him, and asked for his protection during the voyage. The ship reached an island where red sandalwood grew; with this the merchants filled the ship, and the spirits of the island, angered by this, raised a great storm and appeared before the sailors in fearful forms. Each merchant thought of his guardian deity and Cūla Punna of his brother. Punna, sensing his brother's need, travelled through the air to the ship, and, at sight of him, the spirits disappeared. In gratitude for their deliverance, the merchants gave to the Elder a share of their sandalwood. It was with this material that the Candanasālā, above referred to, was built.

"LIFE IS DEAR TO ALL"

THE BUDDHA, THE DHAMMAPADA, VERSE 130



ALL LIFE MATTERS



AHIMSA (Non-Harm)

Has the human race any right to expect to live in a peaceful and happy world so long as it allows so much brutal and avoidable cruelty to be inflicted on the animal creation?

Feature

A large proportion of suffering is unnecessary and could be greatly reduced if each individual searched his conscience in the matter and took his part in furthering this desirable end. Many of the atrocities perpetrated on animals are so frightful that sensitive persons refuse even to hear about them; such behavior is often due to cowardice or bad conscience.

Because animal suffering cannot forever be entirely wiped out is no reason for sitting back and doing nothing or wringing one's hands in despair. There is no reason except inertia, indifference and greed or sadism, why the burden placed upon the animal creation should not be lightened, appreciably and at once.

Working towards such a decent goal should be the basis which we all aspire to achieve, but in this world-wide effort, each individual, woman and child must play a part. Let us all help to spread the message of AHIMSA - nonviolence, peace and goodwill to one and all. Let us, each and all, bring kindness and consideration so that we may become Apostles of Harmlessness and Peace.

"Compassion, in which ethics have their roots," says Albert Schweitzer, "can only achieve full scope and depth if it is not limited to men but extended to all living things."

Source : Vesak Lipi 2011

Verse 7



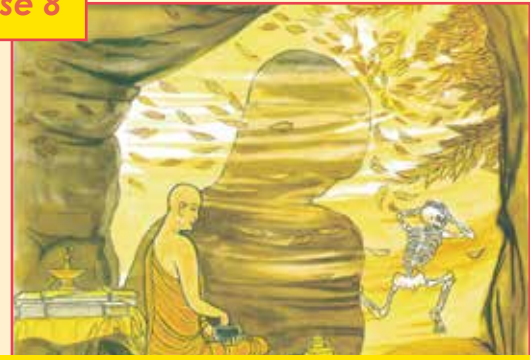
Death overpowers the sensuous, undisciplined and gluttonous like the wind a weak tree

subhānupassim viharantaṃ indriyesu asaṃvutaṃ
bhojanambhi amattaññuṃ kusītaṃ hīnavīriyaṃ
taṃ ve pasahati māro vāto rukkhaṃ'va dubbalaṃ

One who beauty contemplates, whose faculties are unrestrained, in food no moderation knows, is languid, who is indolent: that one does Mara overthrow as wind a tree of little strength.

Explanatory Translation :Those who dwell on the attractiveness of sensual enjoyments, and live with the senses unguarded, and are immoderate in eating, they are slothful and weak in perseverance and will-power. Emotions overpower such persons as easily as the wind overpowers a weak tree.

Verse 8



Death overpowers not the steadfast thinker just as the wind does not tremble a firm rock.

asubhānupassim viharantaṃ indriyesu saṃvutaṃ
bhojanambhi ca mattaññuṃ saddhaṃ āradhaviṇiṇaṃ
taṃ ve nappasahati māro vāto selaṃ'va pabbataṃ

One who foulness contemplates, whose faculties are well-restrained, in food does moderation know, is full of faith, who's diligent: that one no Mara overthrows, as wind does not a rocky mount.

Explanatory Translation :Those who dwell on the unattractiveness of sensual enjoyments, and live with the senses well guarded, and moderate in eating, they are devoted to the Teaching and to persistent methodical practice. Such persons are not overpowered by emotions just as a rocky mountain is not shaken by the wind.

The Story of Monk Mahākāla

While residing in the neighbourhood of the town of Setavya, the Buddha uttered these verses, with reference to Mahākāla and his brother Cūlakāla. For Cūlakāla, Majjhima Kāla, and Mahākāla were three householders who lived in Setavya, and they were brothers. Cūlakāla and Mahākāla, the oldest and youngest respectively, used to travel abroad with their caravan of five hundred carts and bring home goods to sell, and Majjhima Kāla sold the goods they brought. Now on a certain occasion the two brothers, taking wares of various kinds in their five hundred carts, set out for Sāvatti, and halting between Sāvatti and Jetavana, unharnessed their carts. In the evening Mahākāla saw Noble Disciples, residents of Sāvatti, with garlands and perfumes in their hands, going to hear the Law. "Where are they going?" he asked. Receiving the answer that they were going to hear the Law, he thought to himself, "I will go too." So he addressed his youngest brother, "Dear brother, keep watch over the carts; I am going to hear the Law." So saying, he went and paid obeisance to the Buddha and sat down in the outer circle of the congregation.

On that day the Teacher preached the Law in orderly sequence with reference to Mahākāla's disposition of mind, and quoting the Sutta on the Aggregate of Suffering, and other Suttas, discoursed on the sinfulness and folly and contamination of sensual pleasures. Mahākāla, after listening to the discourse, became a monk under the Teacher. Cūlakāla likewise became a monk. But the thought in Cūlakāla's mind was, "After a time I will return to the world and take my brother with me."

Somewhat later Mahākāla made his full profession, and approaching the Teacher, asked him, "How many duties are there in this Religion?" The Teacher informed him that there were two. Said Mahākāla, "Venerable, since I became a monk in old age, I shall not be able to fulfill the Duty of Study, but I can fulfill the Duty of Contemplation." So he had the Teacher instruct him in the Practice of meditation in a cemetery, which leads to Arahatsip. At the end of the first watch, when everyone else was asleep, he went to the cemetery; and at dawn, before anyone else had risen, he returned to the Monastery. Now a certain young woman of station was attacked by a disease, and the very moment the disease attacked her, she died, in the evening, without a sign of old age or weakness. In the evening her kinsfolk and friends brought her body to the burning-ground, with firewood, oil, and other requisites, and said to the keeper of the burning-ground, "Burn this body." And paying the keeper the usual fee, they turned the body over to her and departed. When the keeper of the burning-ground removed the woman's dress and beheld her beautiful golden-hued body, she straightway thought to herself, "This corpse is a suitable Subject of Meditation to show to His reverence." So she went to the Venerable, paid obeisance to him, and said, "I have a remarkably good Subject of Meditation; pray look at it, Venerable." "Very well," said the Venerable. So he went and caused the

dress which covered the corpse to be removed, and surveyed the body from the soles of the feet to the tips of the hair. Then he said, "Throw this beautiful golden-hued body into the fire, and as soon as the tongues of fire have laid hold of it, please tell me." So saying, he went to his own place and sat down. The keeper of the burning-ground did as she was told and went and informed the Venerable. The Venerable came and surveyed the body. Where the flames had touched the flesh, the colour of her body was like that of a mottled cow; the feet stuck out and hung down; the hands were curled back; the forehead was without skin. The Venerable thought to himself, "This body, which but now caused those who looked thereon to forget the Sacred Word, has but now attained decay, has but now attained death." And going to his night-quarters, he sat down, discerning clearly Decay and Death. Mahākāla developed Spiritual Insight and attained Arahatsip, together with the Supernatural Faculties.

When Mahākāla attained Arahatsip, the Buddha, surrounded by the Congregation of Monks, travelling from place to place, arrived at Setavya and entered the Simsapā forest. Cūlakāla's wives, hearing that the Buddha had arrived, thought to themselves, "Now we shall recover our husband." So they went and invited the Buddha. Now when a visit is expected from the Buddha, it is customary for a single monk to go in advance and give warning. When Cūlakāla went home to prepare for almsgiving his wives tore off his robes. Mahākāla's eight wives also thought that they would get their husband to give up the robes. One day, they arranged an alms-giving for the Buddha and the Disciples and asked the Buddha to leave Mahākāla behind to pronounce the formula of thanksgiving after alms-giving. The Buddha left him at his former home and went away with the other disciples.

When the Buddha reached the village gate, the congregation of monks was offended and said, "What a thing for the Buddha to do! Did he do it wittingly or unwittingly? Yesterday Cūlakāla came and that was the end of his monastic life. But today, a different monk came and nothing of the sort happened." The Buddha sent Mahākāla back and continued on his way. Said the monks, "The monk Mahākāla is virtuous and upright. Will they put an end to his monastic life?" Mahākāla's wives tried to make him a layman but he rose into the air through his psychic power as an Arahatsip and appeared before the Buddha as he was reciting these two verses. Monk Mahākāla paid obeisance to the Buddha and the Buddha told the other monks that they were wrong about Arahatsip Mahākāla to compare him with Monk Cūlakāla.

Source : An illustrated Dhammapada authored by Ven. Weragoda Sarada Maha Thero, Chief Monk of the Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre

Buddhist Art, Symbols & Literature



Photographic Art Exhibition:

Seeing and Revering Nature with Love: Trees of Dharamsala by Nicholas Vreeland

By Adele Tomlin

Trees of Dharamsala, a new photographic art exhibition opened at café and art-gallery, "The Other Space", in Dharamsala, India. The photographer is Tibetan Buddhist monk, Nicholas Vreeland (monastic name, Thubten Lhundup) who became a monk in 1985 and is now the abbot of Rato Dratsang, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery under the patronage of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Vreeland is also Director of The Tibet Center, the oldest Tibetan Buddhist Center in New York City and holds a Geshe degree, the equivalent of a PhD. He is generally based in South India at his monastery, following his main teacher, Rato Khyongla Rinpoche, founder of The Tibet Center, whom he met in 1977.

The exhibition



Thirteen images make up the exhibition Trees of Dharamsala, with three sections: Tree Portraits, Trees, and Barnet. The visually stunning monochrome images of trees, taken around Dharamsala, resemble intricate line drawings and remind us of their unique yet complex aesthetic beauty, longevity, and importance to nature, wildlife, and humans. Close-ups of ancient barks, like fingerprints, offer evidence of their lives and growth.

Vreeland explained to people on the opening night of the exhibition: "I am an amateur, not a professional photographer like some of you here. I take pictures out of love."

Vreeland kindly granted me an interview to talk about the new exhibition and when I told him that I liked what he said, he explained that the word "amateur" itself comes from "amare," "to love". The "love" of the art and the subject certainly comes through in these works.

I asked Vreeland why he chose trees as a topic and he joked that trees were silent, open, and never objected to being photographed, but also that it took time and patience to photograph a tree. When asked about his artistic influences, he said that he was more inspired by the French photographer Eugene Atget (1857–1927) over Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), whom I mentioned as a possible influence. Vreeland felt that Atget endeavored to "show" the subject more, whereas Stieglitz's aim was to express himself more through his work. For me, there



are definite parallels to be drawn between the aesthetic and purpose of Vreeland's Trees exhibition and Stieglitz's pioneering photographs of clouds, Equivalents. The photos are stark and naked and Vreeland told me there was no Photoshop editing of the photographs—they were developed merely using the digital version of "old-school" techniques of a dark room.

When asked about the connection of spirituality and nature, Vreeland explained how trees are extremely valuable from a Buddhist perspective too:

In Buddhism, trees are not viewed as conscious sentient beings like animals and humans and so on. However, they are sentient in terms of their being living organisms with which the planet, animals and we humans are completely interdependent.

The Other Space is also the perfect backdrop for these exquisite photographic works. Ten minutes' walk from the Dalai Lama's temple, opposite and surrounding it are forests and mountains, on a road that leads up to the circumambulation route around the temple itself. The café has some of the best coffees, pastries, and sunset and moon views in the small town. They often host art exhibitions and people can hire work-spaces there.

Aesthetic value and sublimity

As I wrote about in *Aesthetic Experience* (Routledge 2007), the sublimity and “divinity” of trees and nature has inspired writers, poets, and philosophers for centuries across all cultures and races. The 20th century black human rights activist, Martin Luther King Jr., saw the value of trees as being worth more than gold or silver. In Europe and North America, philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, William James, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among many others, have written stunning analyses and odes to nature, not only for its aesthetic pleasure but for its incredible purpose, language, power, and majesty—in other words, nature’s sublimity.

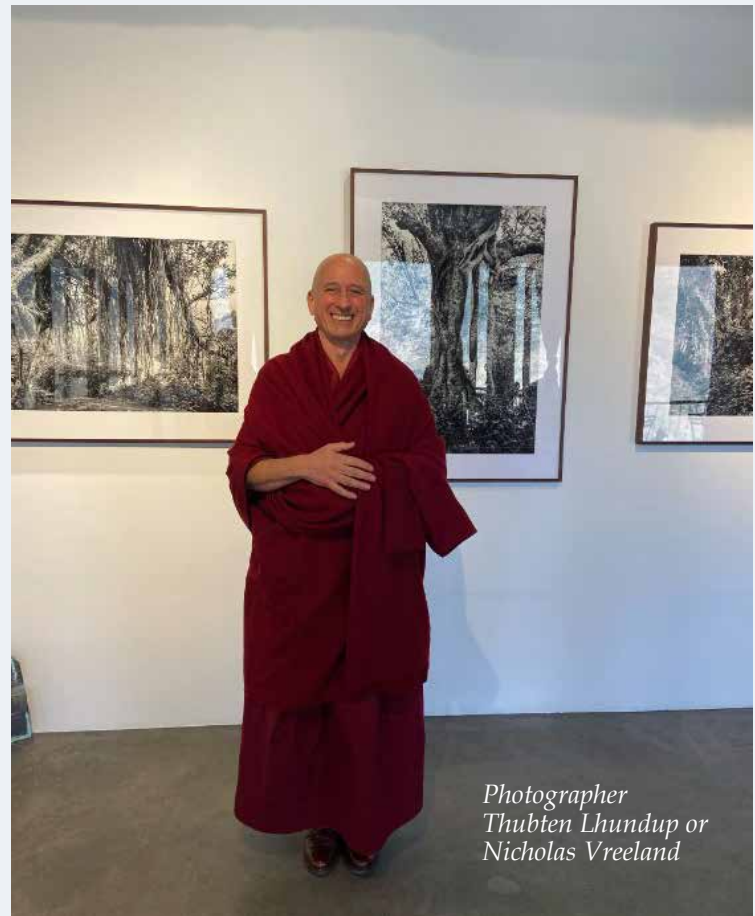
In Emerson’s famous 1836 essay, *Nature*, he divides nature into four usages: *Commodity*, *Beauty*, *Language*, and *Discipline*. Emerson asserts that humans do not fully accept nature’s beauty and that people are distracted by the demands of the world, whereas nature gives but humans fail to reciprocate.* This is similar to the artist, Georgia O’Keeffe’s assertion that, “Nobody sees a flower really; it is so small. We haven’t time, and to see takes time—like to have a friend takes time.” Vreeland’s photos certainly lead us to “see” trees and pay attention to their beauty and value.



Health and environmental importance – oxygen and tree-hugging

Aside from aesthetic value, the importance of trees for breathing and life on Earth are often taken for granted. This is why the destruction and cutting down of the Amazon rainforest—the lungs of the planet—purely for livestock reared and killed for meat, is an ongoing tragedy which causes huge damage to the air, planet, animals, and climate change. Trees are a prime source of oxygen and habitats for many forms of wildlife, in particular birds.

In India, forests—like rivers—are vital to the country’s livelihood. There are heroic stories of Indians planting whole forests of trees, such as India’s “Forest Man”: Jadav “Molai” Payeng, who single-handedly planted an entire forest in Majuli island in Assam after scientists said the island could die after a catastrophic drought.** In 1979, the chemist James Lovelock, in his influential and wise book *Gaia: A Look at New Life on Earth* (Oxford University Press) put forward the Gaia theory, Gaia paradigm, or the Gaia principle, which proposes that living organisms interact with their inorganic surroundings on Earth to form a synergistic and self-regulating, complex system that helps to maintain and perpetuate the conditions for life on the planet. The hypothesis was formulated by Lovelock and co-developed by the microbiologist Lynn Margulis. Lovelock named the idea after Gaia, the primordial goddess who personified the Earth in Greek mythology.



The idea of trees not just being essential for the planet but also for human well-being has also been documented in the “tree-hugging” movement that developed in the 1970s. This activity is not only seen as good for health but in the case of the “tree-hugging” the Chipko activists of 1970s and ‘80s India was part of a strategy used to save forests, by calling attention to the deep interdependence between humans and the natural world.***

Conclusion

In these challenging times, we have all been made more aware than ever of how “mother” nature is more powerful than all of us. We would do well to respect that and make sure we live in harmony with it and the millions of other species on this planet. If we do not listen to the clear messages nature is giving us, and continue to use it as an external object purely for human pleasures and wants, then at some point, nature will “turn on us” and stop such destruction, even if that means wiping out the human race. The Buddhist view of reducing personal desires and interdependence is especially relevant here.

I chose Rudyard Kipling’s “The Way through the Woods” poem to accompany this piece, not only because the Nobel Literature prize winner spent the first years of his life in India, remembering it in later years as almost a paradise, but also because the poem speaks of that power of nature to render anew its roads where humans trod—or fear to tread—of a magical, mystical world of forests, bark, leaves, and bird song.

Source : <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/seeing-and-revering-nature-with-love-trees-of-dharamsala-by-nicholas-vreeland/>



About the Writer : Adele Tomlin is a British writer, poet, scholar, and translator. She is the co-editor of a philosophy collection on *Aesthetic Experience* (Routledge 2007) and author/translator of two books on Buddhist philosophy and practice: *Taranatha’s Commentary on the Heart Sutra* (LTWA 2017) and *The Chariot that Transports to the Four Kayas* (LTWA 2019). She has been studying Tibetan language and Buddhist philosophy since 2007 in Europe, India, and Nepal.

Projects

LEND A HAND

The Buddhist Maha Vihara “Lend A Hand” programme is to support the undertaking of a number of crucial projects that are needed for continuous maintenance and upgrading for the benefit of all devotees. We appeal to your kind generosity to help us realise the following:



Buddha Frieze for the sponsorship @ Meditation Pavilion, BMV

Seated Buddha Frieze
RM 18,000 each
26 statues left to be sponsored

We have the above Seated Buddha Frieze available for sponsorship. Please contact the office for further details. A big Sadhu to all who have sponsored the Standing Buddha Frieze.

General Items for Temple and Devotees’ Use

Items displayed are for illustration purpose only



Supply and Install Visual System at 1st Floor, Puja Hall (for dhamma talks and retreats)

Estimated Cost : RM25,730



Meditation cushion with cushion

Big 2 feet x 2 feet @ RM65 x 62 nos = RM4,030

Small 10 x 14 x 46mm

@ RM55 x 106 nos = RM5,830

Total Estimated Cost : RM 10,120



Wireless Head Set
Microphone

Balance Required : RM2,300



Mobile Stage with Skirting and Staircase

Estimated Cost : RM7,700



Microphone System

Estimated Cost : RM4,800



Skirting for Banquet Table (for 100 tables - 6 ft x 2 ft)

Estimated Cost : RM9,500



10-seater Round
Tables (50 tables)

Estimated Cost : RM7,000

Vehicle for Transport



Balance Required: RM77,500

WISMA DHAMMA CAKRA

8 Lotus Pillars available for sponsorship at RM25,000 each.

Each pillar is named after the Buddha’s core teachings

PILLARS ON MEZZANINE FLOOR TEN MERITORIOUS ACTIONS & EIGHTFOLD NOBLE PATH	5 pillars available for sponsorship
SAMMA VACA (Right Speech)	Available
SAMMA SAMKAPPA (Right Resolve)	Available
SAMMA KAMMANTA (Right Action)	Available
SAMMA VAYAMA (Right Effort)	Available
SAMMA SAMADHI (Right Concentration)	Available

PILLARS ON LEVEL 1 FIVE PRECEPTS	3 pillars available for sponsorship
ADINNA-DANA VERAMANI SIKKHAPADAM SAMADIYAMI (I observe the precept to abstain from taking things not given)	Available
KAMESU MICCHA-CARA VERAMANI SIKKHAPADAM SAMADIYAMI (I observe the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct)	Available
SURA MERAYA-MAJJA-PAMADATTHANA VERAMANI SIKKHAPADAM SAMADIYAMI (I observe the precept to abstain from taking anything causing intoxication or heedlessness)	Available

2 nos Elevators on the Ground Floor available for sponsorship - RM150,000 each



Dhammacakra Wheel
Balance Required: RM100,000

CONTACT BMV ADMIN OFFICE FOR ASSISTANCE

Account Name:

Buddhist Maha Vihara

Account Number: **292-00-01161-8**

Bank: **Hong Leong Bank**

TEL: **03 - 2274 1141 / 011- 2689 6123**

eMAIL: **info@buddhistmahavihara.org**

Tax Exempt Receipts can be issued for sponsorship

Partial Sponsorship

Names of Sponsors for Amounts RM500 and above

For sponsorship of 10-seater round tables

Lim Joo Leong - RM500

Anonymous Donor - RM2,000

With the merits accrued by your generous donations, May you and your family be blessed and protected by the Noble Triple Gem

Sadhu.....Sadhu.....Sadhu

Buddhist Maha Vihara (Established in 1894)

The Vihara was founded by the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, which is the oldest registered Buddhist Society in the country. The Vihara was elevated to that of a Maha Vihara since 1994 with the full complement of the three main sacred objects of veneration namely the Buddha image (1894); the Bodhi Tree (1911) and the International Buddhist Pagoda (1971). Being the oldest Buddhist temple in the Klang Valley, we have served the community selflessly as follows:

Religious Activities

- Daily Buddha Puja at designated hours
- Full Moon and New Moon Buddha Puja
- Bojjangha Puja for good health
- Dhamma Talks
- Meditation Classes and Retreats
- 8 Precept Programme
- Chanting Classes
- Wesak Programme and Candle Light Procession
- All Night Chanting to invoke Blessings
- Kathina Ceremony
- Novitiate Programma



Socio-Welfare Activities

- Weekly Feeding the Homeless and Needy
- Festive Season Midnight Aid Distribution to the Homeless
- Grocery Aid Distribution to Welfare Homes and Orang Asli Settlements
- Weekly Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic
- Pursuing inter-religious harmony through the Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST)

Education Programme

FREE Buddhist education for children and adults via the Sunday School since 1929.

Systematic tertiary Buddhist education.

Distributed more than 2 MILLION free publications and CDs/MP3/DVD/VCD in 30 languages since the 1950s.

Dharma for the Deaf class since 1999

VISION

To be a leading international center for the Learning, Practise and Dissemination of the Buddha Dhamma

MISSION

To provide a conducive environment to:

- promote scholarship and study of the Buddha Dhamma
- propagate the Buddha Dhamma
- be the focus of Buddhist activities for the larger community
- foster Theravada Buddhist cultural and traditional practices

Six Strategic Objectives

To be the Buddhist center of choice for:

1. Pariyatti – Structured Buddhist education for children and adults.
2. Patipatti, Pativedha – Regular programmes for the practice and the realization of the Buddha Dhamma.
3. Dhammadutta – Dhamma materials for the masses locally and abroad
4. Karuna – Compassion in Action
5. Kalyana Mitrata – Networking and Fellowship with Buddhist and non-Buddhist organisations to sustain the Buddha Sasana.
6. Samajivikata – Financial viability while committing to Religious and Cultural Obligations.

Four Ennoblers

1. Loving Kindness
2. Compassion
3. Altruistic Joy
4. Equanimity

Motto

Go forth, for the good, happiness and welfare of the many, out of compassion for the world.

BMV DAILY OPERATING HOURS & PROGRAMMES

BMV GATE 1

Monday to Sunday -
7.00am to 10.00pm

BMV ADMIN OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Saturday
9.00am - 9.00pm
Sunday & Public Holidays
9.00am - 6.00pm

EVENING PUJAS

Daily Puja - 7.30pm at Pagoda
Saturdays Bhojjangha Puja 7.30pm at Pagoda
Full/New Moon Puja - 7.30pm at Shrine Hall

DANA FOR MONKS

Daily Buddha Puja - 7.30am
Breakfast Dana - 8.00am
Daily Buddha Puja - 11.30am
Lunch Dana - 12.00 noon

MEDITATION CLASSES

Monday & Thursday - 7.00pm to 9.00pm
@ Puja Hall - Meditation master - Uncle Chee

ONLINE DHAMMA TALK

Friday & Sunday @ 8.30pm
www.fb.com/groups/Buddhistmahavihara

DHAMMA TALK @ BMV

Saturday @ 2.00pm

FRIENDS OF THE VIHARA (BMV VOLUNTEER GROUP)

Sunday @ 5.00pm
Feeding the Needy & Homeless
Delivery of Food parcels to Old Folks
Home and Orphanage

YOGA CLASS

Tuesday @ 10.30am - 12 noon
Thursday @ 7.00pm - 8.30pm

QIGONG CLASS

Saturday @ 8.00am - 10.30am

CLASSES

SUNDAY DHAMMA CLASSES FOR
CHILDREN & ADULTS
Sunday @ 9.30am to 12.00 noon
www.bisds.org

SUTTA CLASS BY BRO VONG CHOY

Sunday @ 11.00am - 12.00pm

ONLINE DIPLOMA & DEGREE IN
BUDDHISM
Saturday & Sunday

ONLINE DHAMMA FOR THE DEAF

Sunday @ 1.00pm to 2.00pm (fortnightly)

You can donate towards our many projects :

- Dhammadutta
- Free Buddhist Publications
- Welfare Activities
- Monks Dana
- Sunday Dhamma School
- Maintenance of Shrine Hall
- K Sri Dhammananda Library
- Temple Lighting
- BISDS Building Fund

Payments can be made via :

BMV Office Counter : Cash, cheques & credit cards
Postage : Make cheques payable to "Buddhist Maha Vihara" & write your name & contact telephone at back of the cheque.
Direct Debit : Hong Leong Bank Brickfields
Acct : 292-00-01161-8

BMV Statement of Accounts :

Buddhist Maha Vihara's Monthly Statement of Accounts is displayed on the Notice Board at the Reception area for public viewing. Please address all queries to the Hon. Secretary in writing.

We accept VISA and MASTERCARD for donations. Thank You.

Donations to Buddhist Maha Vihara operations are tax exempt.

Any donor who wants a tax exemption for computation of personal or corporate tax can request for a tax exempt receipt.

PLEASE BEWARE OF UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS SOLICITING DONATIONS.

KINDLY ENSURE THAT ALL DONATIONS ARE ISSUED WITH A NUMBERED BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA OFFICIAL RECEIPT.

BMV OFFICE HOURS

MON – SAT : 9.00 am - 9.00 pm

SUN & PUBLIC HOLIDAYS : 9.00 am - 5.00 pm



BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA

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Website: www.buddhistmahavihara.org

www.bisds.org