

Introduction

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There are nine articles in this composite text. Most of these articles were published previously for the “*Seminar on Significance of Vinaya in the Modern Day Context*”, a project undertaken by Ching Chueh Buddhist Sangha University, in Taiwan; and co-organized by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and the World Chinese Buddhist Sangha Congress – from 13-15 November 2006/B.E. 2549, at Kuang Teh Temple, Alien Township Kaosiung County, Taiwan. The articles written by Thai Buddhist scholars are being re-published to celebrate the United Nations International Day of Vesak 2007/B.E. 2550.

The Venerable Phra Dharmakosajarn contributes three articles: two concerning Vesak/Visakha Puja, and another concerning the Vinaya, the main topic for this publication. First, he contributes the historical background behind Visakha Puja Day, many everyday Dhamma-practice principles and meritorious activities to incorporate into everyday life. Secondly, Phra Dharmakosajarn contributes additional historical material relating to the meaning of Visakha Puja Day from the global perspective and Visakha Puja Day in Thailand – relating to the meaning of the name, proper reverence methods, objects for Buddhist veneration, and the importance of the Buddha as an example for humanity to emulate. Thirdly, Phra Dharmakosajarn contributes his seminar-paper on the Vinaya and the importance for the world to take up moral civil-discipline. All three of his articles teach readers how to incorporate dhamma-principles into everyday life as tools to acquire before one participates or becomes socially-engaged. We learn about the Birth, Enlightenment and Death of the Buddha; principles to incorporate into everyday life, the Four Noble Truths, how and why mindfulness should be applied, and the benefits accrued from Buddhist training. If we undertaking his suggestions for proper Puja, we learn that Buddhists actually revere and honor the Buddha – that we need to conquer our inner problems as Buddhists - capable of cultivating personal inner peace – enabling our ability to commence world peace. Through demonstrating non-hatred, we can overcome hatred, revenge, war and global destruction. Finally, the Venerable Phra Dharmakosajarn suggests that with adaptations and maintaining a proper morality can improve our changing societies through collective discipline.

Phramaha Somjin Sammapanno contributes an article concerning the history and modern usages of monastic robes in Thailand, involving: the color, size and styles worn, as well as many passages from the Tipitaka that support the foundations for his presentation.

Phra Srisitthimuni contributes a discussion concerning monks, money and property; and suggests that modernized capitalistic societies have forced monks to participate in financial exchanges, despite the widely known prohibition against using 'money', or as stated in the Tipitaka: gold or silver.

Phra Sithawatchamethi contributed an interesting article pertaining to monks eating while traveling on an airplane. This article was heavily edited, so there is hope that the spirit of his intentions remains. At the conclusion of his article is an editorial statement pertaining to the mindful duties of a monk. How is it possible for a mindful monk to eat five large meals in twelve hours? Is there a naïve-ignorance pervading in traveling monks? There were other questions any reader could ask, however – the intentions of the author may have been to simply explain the scenario.

Phramaha Booncuay Sirindharo contributes some ideas on Vinaya limitations, and the need for additional awareness tools. He discusses four training principles: discipline [vinaya], sense restraint [indriyasamvara], conduct in connection with the necessities of life [paccayapatisevana] and right-livelihood. He suggests that someone rooted in discipline is in a better position to develop wholesomely. He further suggests a moral society cannot develop unless there is discipline in society; and from that, one may comprehend how to address social problems.

The lengthy final-article is written by Professor Somparn Promta, from Chulalongkorn University. This Buddhist scholar has written numerous books in the Thai language, but only has a few articles available in English, currently. This article is presented in the unedited format, as suggested and derived from his upcoming text: "*An Essay Concerning Buddhist Ethics*". His article here: "*A Buddhist Concept of Good Community*", is the final chapter of his book. There are several questions which need explained, and hopefully these questions will be addressed before he further pursues publication of his own text. To have a good community, he might ask, instead:

- *What is the concept or definition of justice used for this community?*
- *How are individual rights respected in the community?*
- *How is freedom defined by the community?*
- *How is State-political leadership obtained and how deep or far can the leader extend his political power into society?*

If one wishes to begin an inquiry into Buddhist concepts of justice, it is recommended to start with a deep exploration of the *Agganna Sutta*, found in the *Digha-Nikaya*. This sutta is not only on the 'beginning' of the world, but also suggests how unethical behaviors lead to the decay of society. Whether or not someone takes the *Agganna Sutta* as a joke or literal interpretation of the beginnings of the world is irrelevant here; what is important are the details concerning how a 'just' [as in 'justice] world could evolve – and this is worth

considering. Further, Professor Somparn states: "...it is understood that justice is a property of the action provided by the State to its subjects." This should be clarified, because he uses this phrase throughout his text. Does he take a materialistic-physical point of view on 'property' or is this a mental characteristic? What kind of modern state fails to provide justice to its citizens; or what society would accept injustices from the State? The implication is that the State is generous and compassionate and "provides" justice, as a social-benefit.

Professor Somparn Promta utilizes the Agganna Sutta, only to define Kingship – perhaps because he is Thai. He neglects to see how hoarding of rice, led to the decay of society – capitalism and consumerism are behind modern social imperfections. He neglects to mention: Thai Buddhists derived their legal system from the former Mon Kingdom – a Buddhist kingdom that used a variant of the Hindu Dharmasutras as a legal-text. As a simply stated result, and as one derived from studying, observing and participating in Thai culture: Thailand has a social-philosophy – and one that is not entirely Buddhist. Buddhism is not just a personal way of life, but a way of life for society, and a way for the government to suggest methods to the subjected citizens. Some religions have a social-philosophy over communities – while Professor Somparn uses Islam to justify his position – one can look within the Buddhist tradition, itself: observing how the Buddhist code of monastic conduct administers justice to wayward monks. Furthermore, Professor Somparn Promta seems to be involved in a study of John Rawls rather than exploring what Buddhism would really state pertaining to justice – but it is recognized that Professor Somparn had other intentions relating to a good society.

Because individual Buddhists walk around and participate in society, they do observe, however minutely, that the Tipitaka has a section of duties that lay people are responsible toward, such as: children to their parents and the parents to the children, worker to the boss and the boss to the worker, friend to friends, student to the teacher and the teacher to the student, etc. How are the before mentioned... not social-relationships? These are, indeed, social responsibilities, not individualistic, or not individualistic with the freedom to perform or not perform proper action. These might be methods for social-programming to suggest social-conformity.

Concerning abortions, "the male" or "father" is absent from his discussion, regardless if the pregnancy resulted from a rape or foolishness on the part of young teenagers. Should not the male be additionally responsible for rearing the child? Furthermore, take for instance the new Japanese government policy to have a 'drop-box' for unwanted babies – rather than aborting a future contributor to society. From Buddhist studies, we learn that a prostitute dropped her baby on a rubbish-heap; consequently, a prince rode-by some time later, and adopted and raised up the future doctor for the Buddha's Sangha: Jivaka Komarabhacca. For an online biography, see: http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/j/jivaka.htm .

Abortions have consequential costs, both known and unknown. If the government [of any nation] is interested in taking on Somparn Promta's implications, then a department responsible for social-services [greater than a mere 'orphanage'], could develop unwanted babies to be the nation's future social-leaders, much like a Jivaka Komarabhacca [from being 'unwanted' to being 'in high-demand!']. Additionally, Professor Somparn does not explore the long-term psychological factors or problems faced later by the male and female 'parents'. There is a deeper implication that states Thai society [or many others] frowns upon female rape victims and praises the sexual-conquests of males. However, knowingly, rape starts with unwholesome mental states of a male, but to say women are entirely absent from fault might be an error. Most young women today dress in clothing that reveals a lot of skin – how could an untrained male not notice a woman's 'enchantments'. Should opposite sexes walk around in extreme paranoia, or on opposite sides of the street? The daily newspapers [in Thailand] publish revealing photos of woman on the front page, as well as dead crime-victims – we learn of impermanence, suffering and non-self just from the daily front-pages. The representation of modern-sexuality needs to be explored further.

Professor Somparn employs the usage of a master and slave in a Buddhist community. He has mentioned the freedom fully-granted to Thai slaves early in the 20th century. His example serves as nothing more than an illustration that some people in Thai society still think vertically, in a hierarchical-dominated society. True individual freedoms as defined by leading democratic nations, are unwelcome in a staunchly conservative society. The internationally recognized 'prophet' for freedom, the Rastafarian reggae-musician, Bob Marley, has stated "I don't have an education, but I have inspiration. If I was educated, I would be a damn fool." What he was referring to was the propaganda instilled into students at early ages to accept submission as part of the political system that they are raised in and taught to uphold. What Bob Marley wanted was emancipation from mental-slavery the reliance upon a full-stomach oppressor offering meager food handouts to the hungry-poor. However, Bob Marley was not Buddhist, but he is seen on the t-shirts of younger people in almost every nation, including Buddhist Thailand.

The Buddhist 'Kalama' or Kesaputta Sutta from the Anguttara-Nikaya and the Yodhajiva Sutta found in the Samyutta-Nikaya can teach observant student to question the politically-motivated suggestions disseminated downward from superiors. By what justification does a slave owe his labor-power to the master? It is not from a sense of duty. African slaves had no sense of duty to the white-man; Black-Africans were stolen from their land by greedy evil-flesh traders, capitalizing on inter-tribal warfare. When brought to a distant and foreign land, what could the chained-human do under a constant whipping... of course he labored against his will. The possibility for slavery to become abolished, was actualized, only after the existence of a class of dependent-poor existed – these people were

paid just enough wages to prevent their physical-death... enticed with just enough wages to return to work – allowing for a continual day-to-day existence. This is not Dhamma – but a failure in society to create an educated and capable individual paid well enough to save for leisurely activities. If the duty of the slave-master is to care for the life of a slave [out of getting the most value from his purchase-price?] – does he give enough scraps of unwanted food or animal-intestines – only to allow [of course, compassionately] the continuation of his physical working-life? A slave does not owe the performance of duties to a master, but awaits the day of liberation or freedom from the condition unwillingly placed upon these oppressed people. Slaves, indeed, sought liberation from suffering – this concept should sound familiar to Buddhists, as part of the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination.

The Yodhajiva Sutta, from the Samyutta-Nikaya has the mercenary-village headman asking if he will become reborn into a heaven realm for fighting based on the persuasion of superiors. The Buddha tells Yodhajiva that since his mind was already in a low-state when he was killing, he will be reborn into a hell or animal realm. This has further implications, such as those who are taught or are forced to die for nationalistic causes because they are too young to think freely for themselves. Other Buddhist scholars should take notice of this sutta, one that is possible for creating good and peaceful communities.

In summary, Professor Somparn Promta offers a 'concept of good community' – and he acknowledges himself for his inquiry into Western philosophy, but there are other opinions that can be qualified as Buddhist concepts for developing or creating good communities. He offers a vertical example of community, rather than a horizontal method for good communities. He spends a lot of time listening, respectfully, to the ideas of John Rawls and Immanuel Kant – men who are not employed to comprehend the complexities of the Buddha's Dhamma – and are involved in traditions that claim their own 'enlightenment' equates to what Siddhattha Gotama contemplated on, as he became the Buddha. The 'Great Renunciation' should teach us more about life, apart from the 'divine messengers'. What he renounced was also an oppressive home-state created or manipulated by his father.

Having his newly won-freedom from householder oppression, greater victories awaited Siddhattha Gotama. As his father attempted to tame him with sensual-pleasures, the Buddha had to tame his disciples away from sensual-pleasures. While the Buddha despised the discipline-methods of his father, the Buddha was obliged to create Vinaya-discipline for wayward monks. The Buddha was from a warrior-caste family and therefore was likely to comprehend just as military-discipline draws in new soldiers, Vinaya discipline can draw 'novices' or 'young-recruits' into the monastic setting. The fact that the Vinaya remains intact today is a tribute to Buddhism, and a testament or acknowledgement that

some men need training-rules – this may indeed attract some people to become actual renunciate-monks.

Adaptations, however greatly desired, are actually that: desires – leading to too many similarities between monastic and householder life. Changes to the Vinaya should be carefully considered or there would be fewer reasons to renounce the world to become a monk. Therefore, this collection of articles offers glimpses of the *asavas* - floods or mental-intoxications affecting some members of the Sangha today: sense-desires, becoming, views or speculation and ignorance. Adapting the Vinaya to modern conditions may not be a proper Buddhist prescription; however, one should learn from the opinions and defenses of these recognized Buddhist scholars.

Finally, I have tried to correct most of the errors, either grammatically or doctrinally, to reflect a clearer perception of what the authors intended – as I labored for many hours and days to interpret non-native English writing. As such, I should apologize to them over any future-arising disagreements. However, I feel amends were made during the processes involved to represent their hard work. I respect all of the authors contained in this text, and thank them for the opportunity to read, edit and learn from their work - which ultimately should improve my future contributions to Buddhist studies.

Respectfully,

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as, The Editor

The editor has the following credentials:

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