

# A Buddhist Reflects On Leadership And Service

**Success**



**Leadership**

Vijaya Samarawickrama

## Publication of the



## Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society 佛陀教义弘扬协会

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Published for Free Distribution  
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1<sup>st</sup> Print – December 2008 (3500 copies)

Printed by Uniprints Marketing Sdn. Bhd. (493024-K)  
*(A member of Multimedia Printing & Graphics (M) Sdn Bhd)*



## Foreword

Buddhist leadership uses the Buddha as the model supra leader. The biggest motivator of Buddhist leadership is values. The Buddha's supra leadership in all situations of harmony, conflict, adversity, joy, challenge or loss of one's comfort zones, public shame, etc serve to be an exemplary replicating model of actions spurred by values, not negative emotion. Remarkable reactions chosen to all external stimuli, favorable or adverse are indeed the mark of Buddhist leadership par perfection in true Equanimity.

The Buddha set forth the first organized religious missionaries of the world exhorting them thus: **"Go forth O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of gods and men. Let not two go by one way: Preach O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma which is excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle and excellent in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim the Holy Life, altogether perfect and pure."**

**There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who, not hearing the Dhamma, will fall away. There will be those who understand the Dhamma. I too, O Bhikkhus will be going forth, to Uruvela in Senanigama, in order to teach the Dhamma"**

In this very first exhortation, the Buddha has clearly laid out his vision, mission and strategic objectives. The raw nerve this exhortation strikes is it is deeply penetrative. It can be used like the Buddha's Mansion (Jinapanjara) to display the entire complement of the Buddha's Model for Supra Leadership such as the Ten Perfections, Noble Eightfold Path, Four Divine Abodes, etc. Buddhist societies and the Order Sangha should use this exhortation as the only reason they should exist. Doing otherwise is a betrayal to the Buddha Sasana and mires a society in performing non-value added activities.

Management students should attempt to study the Suttas to draw out a treatise of the Buddha's recipe for Supra Leadership. We find them abundant in various Suttas which modern management gurus have repackaged to introduce as their success models or theories of management.

We are honored to publish this well written booklet by Mr Vijaya Samarawickrama who is no stranger to Buddhist societies in Malaysia. He is a Patron of our Society, a former Vice President and a well sought Dhamma speaker who has about 200 Buddhist engagements a year which include meetings, functions, international forums and seminars in Malaysia and overseas. He has authored hundreds of articles for publications in journals locally and overseas. He has also authored 10 books for free publications with more than 100,000 printed in English and Mandarin under the "A Buddhist Reflect Series" published by our Society.

Committee of Management  
**Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society**  
*December 2008*





## **Acknowledgement**

*A big Thank You to the following  
for making this book a reality.*

*Youthful Bro Lee Jin Hwa for the inspiration,*

*Persevering Sis Visakha Chew for typing the text,*

*Loving Amitha Samarawickrama  
for the encouragement,*

*Energetic Vihara team of the Buddhist Maha Vihara  
Office for their support,*

*And a very special thanks to Bro Ng Lid Sine  
for the cover design.*



# **A BUDDHIST REFLECTS ON LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE**

## **PART ONE: INTRODUCTION: CARRYING ON THE LINEAGE**

Buddhism has a long history going back in an unbroken chain for more than twenty five centuries, spreading first throughout Northern India, then the whole of Asia and now covering the entire planet. We can only marvel at the amazing manner in which the sacred teachings which lead to Ultimate Happiness have been handed down to us over one hundred generations. How did it happen? Amazingly this great phenomenon began with a single instance at the very start of the Buddha's ministry. Soon after his enlightenment the Buddha journeyed to Varanasi from Bodh Gaya and instituted the order of monks and when there were sixty arahants in the world, he sent them out in different directions, with the famous advice. "Go forth O monks for the good and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of gods and men. Preach the Dhamma which is excellent in the beginning, the middle and the end. Let no two go in one direction."

Bearing these words in their minds they did go forth indeed, filling their listeners with peace and joy, everywhere they stopped. The listeners in turn went further, taking the sacred message far North to Tibet and China, East to Japan, South to India & Sri Lanka and South East Asia. They did not go for personal gain, or to conquer lands: their only concern was "for the happiness and welfare of gods and men".

Today a hundred generations later we are the proud yet humble recipients of the sacred message. It is not the message to be kept for ourselves but one to be passed on for "the good of the many". Having been privileged to receive the sacred Trust it is our turn now to pass it on just as our ancestors did in China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand.

The task of spreading the message is not entrusted to monks and nuns alone. In the Buddhist community, the third component of the Triple Gem, the Sangha, consists of four parts – monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. It is therefore our responsibility as lay people also to be instrumental in effectively bringing peace and happiness to the rest of the world. In this sense every one of us is an ambassador of the Dharma: a dharmaduta.

We can say that the greatest service we can do to mankind is to bring to them the message of the Buddha, because it is only by putting the Buddha's Teaching into practice that we can bring true and lasting happiness to individuals and to all of humanity: "The gift of Truth excels all other gifts". Spreading the dhamma is not an easy task, but if we can pool our resources under effective leadership and management we can effectively serve our fellow human beings spiritually and materially. Not only that, in helping others we will be able to help ourselves as well. We will find companionship among true friends who will help us along the Path to attain perfect happiness in this world and the next.

We need to view this task of transmission from two perspectives: one, of maintaining the ancient customs and traditions associated with the Dhamma, the other of interpreting these customs and traditions so that they are given a contemporary relevance. The message of the Buddha, his Dhamma, is timeless and eternal: it cannot change according to fashion. No matter how far we travel across time and space, we will always be subjected to the Four Noble Truths: Suffering, the Cause of suffering, its Cessation and the Way to its cessation.

However, the applications of these Truths in culture and civilization are constantly shifting and taking different shapes as our understanding of the world and the means to understand it are being improved by the day. We must accept that our perception of the world changes along with the physical changes which occur with time in our society. Our second task is to find ways and means to explain the ancient teachings in a manner which is intelligible to people of the modern world.

## **The Importance of Youths**

Perhaps one of the best evidences of this process of change is our attitude to youths. In the past the older generation was regarded as the storehouse of wisdom, as the final arbiter in all matters regarding the welfare of the community. The young were expected to be patient and keep their ideas to themselves until they became gray haired enough to become qualified to be listened to. This system which prevailed in every world culture from the dawn of civilization had its disadvantages, the chief of which was stagnation. For centuries (except for a brief time in Greece) countries in Europe and Asia made little progress, relying on the concept that what was good for our ancestors was good for us. All this changed with the dramatic movements which took place in Europe during the last three hundred years. The first was the French Revolution (1789-1799) when the centuries-old and sacrosanct idea that the king was God's representative on earth with absolute power over the people was overthrown and replaced with the slogan, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, giving power to ordinary people. This had far reaching consequences, the most important of which was to prove that the old, accepted way of running human affairs is not always the best.

The second momentous development in human history was the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century when people moved from farms to cities and created a new social order whereby common people were empowered to guide their own destinies.

This process of change, of replacing old ideas with new ones in the name of progress can be explained through the formula attributed to the German philosopher George Hegel and later mentioned in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It is the concept of the Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis.

In a drastically simplified form it can be explained in the following way:

1. There is a situation (Thesis)
2. There is a reaction to the situation (Antithesis)
3. The conflict between the two are reconciled, giving rise to a new situation (Synthesis) which in turn becomes the new thesis to be challenged.

Civilization progresses relentlessly according to a repetition of this principle, with the old ideas being replaced with new ones.

We must hasten to add here that the whole concept is much more complex than the way it is presented here and it has many critics, but it does support the basic principle of Impermanence, that change is not only automatic, but it can be consciously worked out to control human destiny.

One of the fallouts of the Industrial Revolution was the availability of widespread education of the masses and greater mobility of people. Both processes involved primarily the younger generation and it meant that younger people were more informed and therefore more capable of making mature decisions about matters affecting themselves and the community. Greater mobility meant that they lived away from their parents and were therefore more independent and less reliant on the older generation to make decisions for them.

At this point of our digression we can return to our main discussion which is the process of transmitting the sacred teaching of the Buddha. Today unlike at any other time in history we can rely on the younger generation to take on the responsibility of transmission into the future. This does not mean that the older generation has no usefulness any more. On the contrary their efforts can be even more effective if they join hands with youths to serve mankind. Youths represent a new source of strength to make our world a better place.

Youths today are more educated, more knowledgeable, more socially committed, more proactive, more empowered than youths at any other time in human history. Given the developments in education and technology in the past one hundred years, youths can be regarded as those who best understand what changes are taking place in the world today and what are the greatest concerns of their own generation. We can safely entrust the happiness of future generation to them. The time has come for Buddhist youths to come together to carry on the task of passing on the Teachings by organizing themselves under effective leaders.

## **PART TWO: FRIENDSHIP**

How do we, as Buddhists, receive, preserve and transmit the Sacred Teachings? This is our particular concern. In order to be effective in preserving and disseminating the Dhamma, we must understand that “no man is an island”. Although the Buddha’s first injunction was that “no two must go in one direction”, as time passed, the need for group activity became apparent as monks began to live in communities to make the process of transmission more effective. Given the enormous increases of population and social grouping of human beings in modern times, we must agree that in order to maximize our effectiveness we must pool our resources, share our ideas and support each other: one of the basic ways of pursuing our spiritual goals is by relying on “Kalyana Mitras” – spiritual friends who help us along the Path to Purification.

If youths are to be effective in propagating the Dhamma their best option is to organize themselves, lending and drawing support from each other. Friendship thus plays a pivotal role in determining how effectively the Dhamma is spread.

The Buddha has emphatically stated that Friendship and Fellowship play a very important role in promoting personal and communal welfare. One of the greatest sources of suffering today in the world is loneliness. This is strange, considering that we have

more than six billion people on the planet, but in spite of our great technological advances, we have forgotten how to relate to our fellow human beings. In the past when people relied on agriculture and lived in small communities and extended families they found comfort and security by relating closely with each other. Today with urbanization the extended family has given way to the nuclear family with its members restricted to a very small unit consisting only of parents and children. Modern housing in flats has resulted in neighbours hardly interacting with each other. At this time in our history we need to bring back the value of friendship to society.

As human beings one of our greatest sources of comfort and sense of security is the development of friendships. While our greatest source of security, both emotional and physical is the immediate family, friends are absolutely essential for our well being. The benefits of friendship are: companionship, consideration, communication, affection. These are of course quite obvious. As human beings we tend to dislike being alone and at the same time we may not at times like to share our deepest feelings with our immediate family. Friends are removed enough to be able to provide the distance we need for objective support. Generally speaking the number of friends we have can be extended from one to dozens, but in fact we can only have three or four “intimate” friends. These become our closest confidants who provide us with the comfort of knowing we are not alone at any time in happiness and sorrow.

## **How to Combat Isolation**

We can overcome the problem of loneliness through the development of social groups made up of like – minded people who can come together not only for companionship but also to promote worthy causes like community service and Dharma propagation. When people with the same spiritual aspirations come together to provide support and encouragement we call them Kalyana Mitras or spiritual friends.

There are five benefits to be derived from a meaningful relationship among Friends:

1. Utility: this means friends can provide us with things we need - providing material resources or helping with tasks.
2. Stimulation: providing suggestions for activities.
3. Ego support: providing encouragement by downplaying setbacks and emphasizing successes.
4. Self- affirmation: behaving in ways that re-inforce a friend's good opinion.
5. Security: providing a feeling of safety and unquestioned trust.

Friendship is a very necessary part of our social framework. However we must be aware that not all friendships are necessarily beneficial. Some friends can help us to improve ourselves while others can lead us to destruction. The Buddha gives us many instructions on how to distinguish between the two. In the Sigalovada Sutra, he explained some of the things which can destroy a person.

“Some are drinking buddies  
Some say, ‘dear friend, dear friend!’  
But whoever in hardship stands close by  
That one truly is a friend.

Sleeping late, adultery  
Hostility, meaninglessness,  
Harmful friends, utter stinginess  
These things destroy a person

Bad friends, bad companions  
Bad practices, spending time in evil ways  
By these one brings oneself to ruin

In this world and the next.

Seduction, gambling, drinking, singing, dancing  
Sleeping by day, wandering all around untimely  
Harmful friends, utter stinginess  
These things destroy a person”

In the Veluka Jataka (No 43) there is a story about the danger of choosing the wrong friends. It tells of the time when the Buddha was born into a rich family, but he saw no value in wealth and he renounced and eventually became the leader of a large group of ascetics. Now, one of them found a poisonous snake and decided to adopt it as a pet. He kept it in a bamboo container and grew very fond of it. The future Buddha warned him about keeping such a dangerous creature as a friend, but the hermit ignored the advice. One day he had to go away into the forest to collect fruits and he left the snake in the hermitage. He was delayed in returning but as soon as he did a few days later, he hurried to his hut to feed his pet which was very hungry by this time. As soon as he put his hand into the container it struck him, killing him instantly. Here we see how important it is to choose our companions wisely.

To conclude this section of friendship, let us examine a definition from Wikipedia: *“friendship is a term used to devote co-operative and supportive behavior between two or more humans. It is a relationship which involves mutual knowledge, esteem and affection. Friends will welcome each other’s company and exhibit loyalty towards each other, often to the point of altruism. Their tastes will usually be similar and may converge and they will share enjoyable activities. They will also engage in mutually helping behavior, such as exchange of advice and the sharing of hardship. A friend is someone who may often demonstrate reciprocating and reflective behaviors, yet for many, friendship is nothing more than the trust that someone or something will not harm them. Value that is found in friendships is often the result of a friend demonstrating on a constant basis:*

1. *The tendency to desire what is best for the other*
2. *Sympathy and empathy*
3. *Honesty, perhaps in situations where it may be difficult for others to speak the truth, especially in terms of pointing out the perceived faults of one's counterpart.*
4. *Mutual understanding."*

Contrary to popular belief, friendships are not necessarily natural and spontaneous but can be carefully cultivated among several people, provided that they are all sincerely prepared to practice the four Brahma Viharas. Social organizations among Buddhists must be based on them.

In modern societies we can counter the tendency towards individualism by forming societies of people with similar interests to forge friendships as well as to marshal the strengths of the group to work for the betterment of humanity. The Teachings of the Buddha emphasize the great advantages to be gained by working for the welfare of others. That human beings have been able to bring physical and mental happiness to others is in no small way due to the Teachings, so we have a duty to preserve and transmit them as well as to practice them for our benefit. We can do so as individuals, but we can be far more effective if we can pool our resources together and apply our common effort for the welfare of mankind. This is how we can effectively perform as the fourfold sangha of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.

### **PART THREE: SERVICE**

We have examined how modern society has changed in its composition and how the development of friendships can benefit human beings. We also mentioned how the Buddha's order of monks made themselves effective tools for the transmission of the Sacred Teachings by organizing themselves and supporting each other altruistically, without any motive other than to bring benefit to humanity. We present day Buddhists can do no better than our forebears but continue to carry out this sacred task. However we

must recognize that many changes have taken place in the world over the past twenty five centuries and we must adapt to these changes by understanding the process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis in influencing the course of human history.

We progress as human beings by reacting to outmoded patterns of thought with new ideas and evolving new ways of behavior resulting from the reaction. This means not totally rejecting the past but not being totally enslaved to it either. In 2001, Carly Fiorina, chairman & CEO of Hewlett-Packard said, “It becomes the job of leaders.....to find an intelligent synthesis – the way to “preserve the best and reinvent the rest””

The challenge ahead of Buddhist leaders is to see how best we can preserve the best and reinvent the rest. We are all agreed that the Dhamma being the best deserves to be preserved, but the way in which it is transmitted as a living legacy needs re-inventing. We are living in an era that is vastly different from what prevailed during the time of the Buddha. People’s needs and expectations are different. At the same time the BASICS of Buddhism remain the same. There are a vast number of elements which we regard as BASIC (e.g. Wisdom, Compassion, Love, Liberality) with regard to Buddhist practice but we must restrict ourselves in this particular discussion to SERVICE. It is an integral aspect of Practical Buddhism and is emphasized as an important factor in alleviating suffering and destroying the Ego-illusion.

Service is closely related to one of the foundations of Buddhism, which is our understanding of the workings of Kamma. Kamma literally means action. But action originates in the mind:

“Mind is the forerunner of all states  
If one acts with an evil mind  
Then evil actions follow  
Just as the wheels of the cart follow  
the hooves of the ox.” (Dhp 1)

If an action is motivated by wisdom and understanding, it leads to ultimate, enduring happiness and is therefore termed Kusala Kamma (skillful action). On the other hand if an action is motivated by ignorance, not understanding things as they really are, then the action is termed Akusala (unskillful). There is a third kind of kamma which we call Punna Kamma (Meritorious deed). It is the kind of good deeds we do based on ignorance, whereby we act in order to gain rewards, like going to heaven because we believe in an entity which can receive rewards. Throughout his career as a Bodhisattva (a future Buddha) the Buddha practiced Ten Perfections which included various kinds of service in the form of dana which he performed for the benefit of others as he struggled to destroy his belief in an Ego or Self. Even after his Enlightenment he worked tirelessly for the welfare of mankind. Of course his main concern was to provide spiritual upliftment for those who came to him. But there are instances when his compassion was manifested in physical ways as well. There is the famous story which has inspired Buddhists ever since to work selflessly for the physical welfare of all living beings. There was once a monk in Savatthi who was afflicted with an outbreak of sores all over his body. He was covered with pus and blood which gave out such a terrible stench (he was therefore called Putigatta Tissa) that the other monks could not go near him. The Buddha came to know of this and visited him. The Blessed One immediately attended to the unfortunate monk by asking for water to be boiled. His robes were removed to be washed and sores attended to. When Putigatta Tissa had been cared for, he felt fresh and comfortable and his mind was eased. The Buddha preached to him and he attained arahantahood before he passed away. This story has been repeated all over the world and has inspired people to care for others as part of their Buddhist practice. We need to note here that the Buddha rendered two kinds of service – physical (cleaning the sores) and spiritual (teaching the Dhamma). As Buddhists we must also concentrate on both in order to provide effective service to our fellow beings. In fact the service of imparting Dhamma knowledge is considered to be even more important than the service of providing physical comfort.

A question was once asked at an Inter religious Forum as to why Buddhists are not seen to be as active as Christians when it comes to charitable and social activities. The reply was that first of all Buddhists do not tend to publicize their work in the name of charity, but more importantly Buddhists emphasize the need to alleviate mental suffering which is more acute than physical suffering. When the mind is calmed and controlled it becomes easier to bear the physical pain. The Buddha says, “When the body is sick, do not allow the mind to be sick as well”. This is not to say that Buddhists are lagging behind in community service. We only have to mention organizations like the Tzu Chi Foundation, the Fu Guang San, Tiratana and Mahakaruna among a host of others to realize the huge amount of service they provide on a world wide basis. But when we speak of service in Buddhism we must look at the physical as well as the mental support we provide to the community. In this sense, spreading knowledge of the Dhamma which is the service of peace and happiness becomes an important aspect of service: “The gift of the Dhamma excel all gifts”. At the same time we cannot forget our responsibility to our fellow inhabitants on this earth – humans, animals and plants – to ensure their protection and well being. We are all interconnected and whatever we do affects all others as well. Service in Buddhism encompasses all these aspects of sharing.

We have a well known Buddhist analogy to stress this point: imagine that this entire cosmos is one enormous net. Now a net is made up of knots. Imagine that each knot represents a single creature in this universe – an elephant, a child, a cockroach, a fish and so on. Now what happens if you shake one single knot in the net? The entire net gets disturbed. Similarly if we disturb a single creature in the universe, we disturb the whole universe. Conversely we are asked to imagine that each knot holds a diamond, and we are one of those diamonds. Now if we radiate our light to the other diamonds they pick it up and in turn light up the other diamonds. In this way the entire universe is lit up. If we radiate our Metta, our feelings of brotherliness towards others, we become instrumental in lighting up the universe! How beautiful.

What is our purpose in life? At the most basic level we could say that it is to ensure that we made some contribution, no matter how small, to leave the world a better place than when we came to it. This is the service we give to our fellow beings.

Although we should not perform meritorious actions in expectation of any reward, there are rewards. From a Buddhist point of view we can be rewarded by rebirth in fortunate future existences either in heaven or on earth. But if we perform actions with wisdom and correct understanding the highest reward will be the attainment of Ultimate Happiness, Nirvana, which transcends the impermanent rebirth in heaven. As explained earlier rebirth in fortunate existences is the result of Punna Kamma whereas the attainment of Nirvana results from the performance of Kusala Kamma.

“Appamadena Maghava  
Devanam setthatam gato” (Dhp 30)

*Maghava attained supremacy over  
gods through heedfulness*

Maghava's other name is Sakka and he is the king of the gods of Tavatimsa or heaven of the 33 gods. He was originally a human who with his thirty three companions was living a life of pleasure like many young men today. When he realized how he was wasting his life in useless pursuits, he inspired his friends to carry out community service projects like clearing roads, building shelters and digging wells for the benefit of the public. As a result of their good work, of their 'heedfulness', they were rewarded by being reborn in Tavatimsa heaven as gods. They had performed Punna Kamma.

In contrast, the Buddha, during his career as a Bodhisattva performed many meritorious actions, but with the sole aim of attaining Buddhahood, which came from his Perfect Understanding. When we perform actions with Nibbana as the goal we perform Kusala Kamma.

Some people may ask, but why bother about doing good at all when we have no verifiable proof that we will reap the benefits after death? The Buddha has an answer for that. He asks us to reflect in the following manner:

*"Now, Kalamas, one who is a disciple of the Noble One — his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure — acquires four assurances in the here-&-now:*

**"If there is a world after death, if there is the fruit of actions rightly & wrongly done, then this is the basis by which, with the break-up of the body, after death, I will reappear in a good destination, the heavenly world.'** *This is the first assurance he acquires.*

**"But if there is no world after death, if there is no fruit of actions rightly & wrongly done, then here in the present life I look after myself with ease — free from hostility, free from ill will, free from trouble.'** *This is the second assurance he acquires.*

**"If evil is done through acting, still I have willed no evil for anyone. Having done no evil action, from where will suffering touch me?'** *This is the third assurance he acquires.*

**"But if no evil is done through acting, then I can assume myself pure in both respects.'** *This is the fourth assurance he acquires.*

*"One who is a disciple of the Noble One — his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure — acquires these four assurances in the here-&-now. (kalama Sutta)*

We can also argue that virtue is its own reward. There are other benefits of virtue, according to the Buddha:

“These five advantages come to the virtuous man because of his practice of virtue. The virtuous man, possessed of virtue, by reason of his earnestness, comes by great wealth, gains a good reputation, in whatever community or society he enters – he does

so confidently and unconfused, dies without remorse And lastly after death is reborn in heaven. (Ud:87)

Of meritorious deeds, the Buddha says:

*“Planters of groves and fruitful trees  
And they who build causeways and dams  
And construct wells and watering – sheds,  
And shelter give to the homeless  
For such as these by day and night  
Forever doth the merit grow  
In righteousness and virtues might  
Such folk from earth to heaven go (S.1:32)*

Leaving all these considerations aside there are many reasons for helping others through voluntary service:

- It feels good
- It strengthens the community
- It helps one to spend time usefully
- It teaches compassion, tolerance and patience

When we talk from the point of view of spiritual emancipation then we have to admit that the path to Nibbana must be trodden individually. It is significant that the Buddha gained enlightenment soon after his companions who had striven with him for six years had left him. It has been suggested that left alone the Buddha made the necessary progress.

However the vast majority of us, the putthujana (the many folk) are not up to the task of seeking emancipation individually. Human beings are social animals and we work best in communities. This is why in his infinite wisdom the Buddha praised one’s reliance on the companionship provided by a “kalyana Mitra”, a spiritual friend. Alone we may find it difficult to work towards our release from samsara. With spiritual friends the task is made easier. This is why when Ven. Ananda once remarked that friends are half of the holy life, the Buddha emphasized “No, they are the whole of the holy life”!

So far we have been discussing friendships and service. Now we can bring these two factors together and examine how a group of like-minded people can get together and perform karmically beneficial actions which serve the community and the world. We saw how Maghava moulded his thirty three companions into a socially useful group and eventually ended up in Tavatimsa heaven.

We have around us a great many young people who could contribute enormously to many worthy causes if they are given the opportunity to come together and perform a service to the community.

What kind of service can we offer to our fellow inhabitants on planet earth? Needless to say the list is infinite. There is no creature on earth who does not need some kind of help or other. But we can divide service into two broad categories as we explained in the story of Putigatta Tissa, the sick monk whom the Buddha ministered to. We can render physical service and spiritual service. It would be impossible to serve everyone in every way, so we must carefully choose what service interests us the most and whom we can gather to help us provide that service. Unless we are realistic in our goals we can easily become overwhelmed and become disheartened.

## **PART FOUR: LEADERSHIP**

### **The Need for Leaders**

When people with common interests get together they can form relationships which go a long way to develop a sense of comradeship and friendliness. But any group of any size needs to be organized and this means that one or some members of the group need to take on leadership roles—to set goals and directions as well as oversee the effective running of activities to realize the goals. In this way the lifespan of the group is assured. In this discussion we are looking at how we as Buddhists can get

together to provide companionship as well as to promote the development of Buddhism for future generations. And also how we can pool our resources in order to serve the community.

In the Sangha community this concept of Kalyana Mitras was strongly encouraged by the Buddha. Monks in the Sangha community are people who have left the comforts of the household life. They depend on their fellow monks to provide companionship and comfort. They develop Maitri or friendliness without the burden of emotional involvements. Buddhist youth groups could do well to emulate them and derive the benefits of friendship we mentioned earlier.

When we mentioned Maitri, we were talking about the first of the Four Brahma Viharas which are central to the teachings of the Buddha on how to maintain a divine state of mind. The Buddha teaches that we do not need to die to experience heaven because it is the happiness we enjoy during this existence. It is not a gift from God, but something we develop with our own understanding and effort.

When we practice Maitri (Metta) we radiate a sense of warm friendliness towards ALL beings that share the universe with us. Metta is impartial and extends towards everything that exists. With Metta, we practice love towards all beings impartially. It embraces all beings, “Long and short, two legged, four legged, no legged, seen and unseen, egg born, moisture born, womb born” – no living creature is left out, everyone is a friend.

With Metta we develop another positive state of mind - Karuna or compassion. One of the most important practices of Buddhists is to view all beings, especially the unfortunate ones, with a feeling of compassion. But feeling compassion alone is not enough. We must do all we can in our power to alleviate suffering in all its forms. Again Karuna is extended towards all. This is the motivation to provide service to others.

The third of the Brahma Viharas or divine abiding is Mudita. This is the feeling of joy we experience at others' happiness. Needless to say it is very difficult to practice Mudita over others' success when we ourselves are deprived. It is said parents practice Mudita when they rejoice over their children's happiness and success. However even this is tinged with a sense of selfishness. True Mudita is when we can extend this positive emotion towards ALL beings. It is the best antidote for the negative feelings associated with envy and jealousy.

Finally, at the highest (and most difficult level) we have Upekkha which is a feeling of equanimity transcending any recognition of an ego or self. This level of mental calm protects us from disappointment and fear of loss or from unreasonable expectations.

What have Metta, Karuna, Mudita and Upekkha to do with friendship and service? If we develop these states of mind towards our friends (and of course towards all others) we will be able to work with others in amity. When these positive states of mind prevail we can maximize our effectiveness and productivity because we are not distracted by selfishness, anger, jealousy, ill will, frustration and so on. The four Brahma Viharas are the very foundation of working relationships among people.

## **The role of Leaders**

The time is ripe for us to critically evaluate the needs of Buddhists in Malaysia and come up with an action plan to effectively serve the cause of the Buddha Sasana. I say the "time is ripe" because not only have 20% of our population declared that they are Buddhists, but there is an unprecedented upsurge in interest to practice Buddhism intelligently and meaningfully. Buddhist leaders are hard put to cope with this upsurge not only by providing the physical resources (which they seem to be able to do admirably well) but, more importantly, to provide and manage the human resources to carry out the task. We can observe that a

uniquely 'Malaysian' Buddhism is emerging and it is the responsibility of our generation to foster its development with wisdom and foresight. We are desperately in need of volunteers to cope with the increasing volume of work to cater for the needs of new comers to Buddhism. But we are more desperately in need of the right kind of leaders to draw them and keep them committed and focused.

It is important for us to recognize at the outset that the problem of leadership today is vastly different from what it has been at any time in the past. Many of our problems are uniquely modern because while in the past the task of developing Buddhism was left almost entirely to the members of the ordained Sangha, this responsibility has largely fallen into the hands of the lay people, especially in countries where Buddhism has no state support. Malaysia is a good example of this. Everywhere we see Buddhist organizations and even places of worship run by laypeople. This situation has its advantages and disadvantages, but it is unlikely that it will change drastically anytime soon. In fact it is quite reasonable to conclude that more and more we will have to depend on the laity at least to control the social aspects of Buddhism while we continue to depend on the Sangha to take on the responsibility of catering to our spiritual needs.

Lay leaders must emerge who are able to understand the challenges faced in the country and who can propose viable solutions for them. I would like to suggest that one area of concern is our inability to reconcile two opposing viewpoints regarding the practice of Buddhism. On the one hand there are those who hold that it is simply enough to practice the Teachings by attending the pujas on the designated days, giving dana, making contributions, keeping the precepts overtly. This group, (usually those who are born into the religion and who practice it as part of their culture), holds that the Buddha warned us against excessive intellectualization and getting into specious arguments on petty issues concerning the meaning of the dhamma. The other camp (usually newcomers to Buddhism) holds that since the Buddha warned us not to rely on meaningless rituals as a means to salvation, the correct way is to develop our understanding by

seriously studying the sutras, and meditating . To them the practice is merely a raft to get to the other shore, to be abandoned after crossing the river of samsara.(sometimes the problem arises when people abandon the raft before they cross over!) Over the years, Buddhism in Malaysia has swung back and forth between these two extremes. Dhamma workers are caught in the middle of trying to reconcile cold intellectualism and blind faith and persuading both parties that they are only each half right. Our late Chief Ven K Sri Dhammananda would say that these two aspects are like a blind man and a lame man who want to go on a journey: alone they cannot go far, but together, they can easily reach their destination. Leaders have to understand this issue fully and seek ways to reconcile the two needs.

Human beings have reached the top of the evolutionary ladder, leaving other animals far behind because of three factors: the ability to dream, to realize that dream, and to teach others what had been learnt in the past. For example, humans had dreamed of flying for thousands of years like the mythical Greek Dedalus and Icarus. They tried to realize that dream by sticking feathers on their bodies and flapping their arms like birds. Icarus and Dedalus died in the attempt of course, but that dream was finally made into reality when the Wright brothers invented the Kitty Hawk a century ago. Since then humans have been to the moon and back. This is the power of the dream, the power of vision. However, while everyone can dream only a few have the power to translate dreams into reality. These are the leaders.

Humans have made remarkable advances because besides dreaming and experimenting they have also developed the unique ability to teach. In this way, unlike animals, we have been able to build on past experiences and move forward from where others left off. At the core of this human capacity for progress is the reality of change which pervades all of human existence. We humans cannot stagnate, we must move forward, for better or for worse. If we want to be effective as leaders, this is the first reality we must fully understand: that we are the most important agents of change, who mould our fellow beings to cope with the challenges of human existence, by building on previous experiences and avoiding past mistakes.

But there is a difference between a Dhamma leader and others: in our case our primary task is to mould our fellow Buddhists to understand and practice the teachings of the Buddha in order to make them spiritually happy, useful citizens. For this we must have the vision as well as the skill to translate this vision into a method to bring the ancient wisdom discovered by the Buddha into the modern world. So leaders have to be not only visionaries, the dreamers, but pragmatic activists who effect change.

## Qualities of a Leader

Who is a good leader? There are many kinds of leaders in any organization. There are **implied** leaders whom members of a group defer to because of their knowledge, experience, social ranking or even age. Then there are **emergent** leaders who by ability or by force of personality or even by talking the most take on a leadership role. Such people may not be the best choice in the long run but could be useful to solve short term problems. Then there the best known: **designated** leaders who are appointed by common consent. Finally there may be situations where there is **no specific leader**, but a person may take on a leadership role to complete a task for which he or she is suitable, and then hand over responsibility to another person to carry out another task as the need arises.

There is room for all these kinds of leaders in Buddhist organisations, but what is important to note in all these cases is that no matter what kind of leader exists, they must all demonstrate leadership: not all those appointed to positions can lead. Someone or a team is needed to willingly assume the responsibility to serve the interests of, in our case, the Buddha Sasana. The most important qualifications for a Buddhist leader are that he or she must be knowledgeable about Buddhism, have a clear vision about how Buddhism is to be practiced in Malaysia and have the time, patience, energy and will to transform that vision into reality.

To be good leaders, we must be visionaries, that is, we need to ‘seek’ and ‘plan’. We need to seek out ways to spread the sacred dhamma in fresh and innovative ways; we need to plan strategies which transcend the physical limitations of most temple-based organisations. It is easy to blame these limitations as excuses for ineffective leadership, but if we have the creativity and initiative, we can convert problems into challenges and strike out in new directions to inspire our devotees to rise to the best of their abilities.

No matter how clear-sighted or creative a leader may be, however, he cannot achieve much on his own. To effectively bring about the desired change he has to be a LEADER and a TEAM MEMBER, to be able to ‘collaborate with others’. But you do not only lead devotees—you must also effectively work with others to help you in realizing this dream. As a leader, you need to model and invite collaboration, especially among teams-- a not ‘mine’ but ‘ours’ attitude. It means being able to recognize the skills of others and to include everyone in decision making and operations. It also means accepting that differences of opinion are actually necessary in a democratic process, provided that consensus is finally reached without undue waste of time. Team members must know when to defer to the opinion of the majority. Team leaders must have the skill to hold back an overenthusiastic member. As a leader you must have a vision, then you share that dream and direction in a manner that makes other people want to share and follow.

To summarise what we have been discussing so far, the visionary leader must have a grasp of the following fundamentals:

- clearly set organizational direction and purpose for him / herself, the devotees, for others involved
- inspire loyalty and caring as well as enthusiasm, belief and commitment.

Is this all too much? Well, are you up to it? Are you prepared to become an effective agent of change to leave this world a better place than when you came to it?

This leads us to the second part of the discussion which is the part played by VITALITY in transforming Vision and Values into reality. To do this it may be useful to examine what Vitality means. The following list of definitions was compiled after consulting various sources. Vitality means:

- 1 Vital force or principle
- 2 The power to survive: “the vitality of an old tradition”
- 3 Capacity and power to live and develop and grow
- 4 An energetic style
- 5 A healthy capacity for vigorous activity
- 6 Capacity for the continuation of a meaningful or purposeful existence
- 7 Physical or intellectual vigour, energy
- 8 Power to survive

Clearly we can note a few key words which are relevant to our discussion:

**Power, Live, Develop, Grow, Purposeful, Vigour, Energy, Survive, Activity, Force**

All these are concepts which are included in the sixth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is SAMMA VAYAMA or Perfect Effort. The mental factor behind Effort is Viriya, energy. Negatively formulated energy can manifest as desire, aggression, violence or ambition. However, when guided by Perfect Understanding, this energy can be translated into generosity, self discipline, kindness and concentration. All these of course constitute vitality. They are the qualities which are important to a Buddhist leader who must therefore always be a practitioner of the Teachings to the best of his or her ability. In short a Buddhist leader must be a Buddhist first. This is a prerequisite.

Vitality demands that leaders must have the tenacity to stay on course until the goal had been achieved. In this sense, a leader is one who:

- Leads by example
- Builds trust and confidence in fellow workers
- Keeps others informed
- Is accountable for actions
- Involves people by seeking their views
- Has clear objectives, motives and action plans
- Tolerates differences
- Does not easily take offence
- Sees the bigger picture
- Does not give up easily
- Knows when to quit

Now if all Buddhist leaders in Malaysia are committed to move forward, we have to bring together the VISION, which is Perfect Understanding of the direction which Malaysian Buddhism is moving towards, and employ Vitality which is Effort and energy to transform that vision into reality.

Is this all too much to wish for? I do not think so at all, if we consider how Buddhism has developed over the last century from an insignificant, little- understood religion to a fast growing organization comprising no less than 20% of the population. Not only that, the average Malaysian Buddhist today is knowledgeable and accommodating of all the yanas and above all concerned with practicing the Teachings as the Buddha intended it. These successes have given rise to many exciting challenges which call for the best talents among our leaders. Among these challenges are reaching out meaningfully to certain groups who are of particular interest to us.

Basically there are three groups who can be identified as deserving our special attention. Although Buddhists do not actively seek converts Buddhism is attracting a lot of attention among non Buddhists because of its teachings on Wisdom and Compassion.

Then there are many who were born into the religion but know little about its doctrine and practice. The third group comprises the younger generation whose parents are concerned that they have the opportunity to learn the dhamma. Our task is to bring to each of these groups the dhamma stripped of centuries old cultural accretions which have nothing to do with the Four Noble Truths. Above all we should never lose sight of the Buddha's only purpose to spread the dhamma: to relieve suffering.

In the past many able leaders both sangha and lay contributed immensely to give Buddhism a Malaysian face, quite distinct from the way it is practiced elsewhere in the world. Our task today as leaders is to bring these various needs together and foster the development of a form of Buddhism which, while remaining faithful to the Original Buddha Wacana, gives it a contemporary relevance for the good of the many, for the benefit of the many, for the welfare of gods and men.

# Appendix

## SETTING UP YOUR GROUP OR ORGANISATION

How best can we go about setting up an organization which caters for our needs? The answer is quite simple really: by joining hands with our friends and forming a voluntary organization. And how is that done? The following has been taken and adapted from an article in the internet:

([http://www.fit4funding.org.uk/helpand\\_advice/preparation/setting=up/](http://www.fit4funding.org.uk/helpand_advice/preparation/setting=up/)):

Setting up a new group or organisation will involve a variety of work and there are a number of things you will need to consider. The more aware of what you need to do the easier the task will be. Forethought and good planning at this stage can save a lot of wasted effort or work later. Of course it will be a good idea to seek advice from others who have done it before. There is no need to re-invent the wheel!

### Key Questions

**A few key questions may set you on the right path.**

#### **What do we want to do?**

Decide exactly what the group that you are setting up wants to do. Is there a service you are offering to the community at large, like 'counselling for the bereaved'? What do you aim to accomplish?

#### **Where do we want to do it?**

Where are you going to be based? What area will your organisation cover?

#### **Who do we want to do it with?**

#### **How many people do you want in the group?**

#### **Are we overlapping with other groups?**

Are there organisations that already offer what you intend to provide? Duplicating a service can be expensive, a waste of

resources and create ill feeling with those you compete with. Joining an existing organisation and working with them saves a lot of hard work setting yourselves up and getting everything off the ground.

### **Could we work in partnership with any other groups or organisations?**

If there are groups already doing something similar you might work together to develop something new or set up a group for them in your area if they do not already reach there. You might share resources, premises and expertise.

### **Do we have the time, energy, and commitment to do the work ourselves?**

You may already have a core group of people who want to come together to form this organisation. If you all have the time, energy and commitment to do everything yourselves you can get going. If you need a lot more volunteers or other expertise you will have to be sure you can get this help. There are dangers of just getting together a team of planners who are not able to do the work themselves, or equally a group of capable volunteers with no one who has leadership or management skills.

Community pages in local newspapers, local radio, notice boards in community buildings, libraries, schools, colleges, and health centres are all good places to let people know what you are doing and to ask for people to join in.

### **Do we have a plan for action?**

You need to be clear about all the jobs you will need to do and who is going to take on what. It is important to know when people are going to get these jobs done by and what help or support they will need to complete these tasks. A Plan of Action will tell your members, supporters, and other interested people, what you are doing, why, and how you will go about it.

Your plan should explain:

- What your group intends to do - **Objectives**
- How it intends to do it - **Methods**
- The resources it has available (e.g. people's time and support; any special skills; money; equipment; use of premises etc.)
- Any further resources it needs, and how it hopes to find them (e.g. by finding volunteers or raising money)
- How soon it hopes to do things - **Timetable**

Drawing up a plan will help you to decide on priorities. For example, it might show that you have the resources to start one youth club, but not two, or that you need more money before you recruit more volunteers. The plan will also mean that you can measure your achievements because you will be able to compare what you planned with what the organisation has actually done.

Everyone will have different ideas about what your organisation is doing and how to go about it. If you do not have a set of rules you might be surprised to find you are all pulling in different directions and trying to achieve different things. Getting a constitution gets everyone clear about what you intend to do. Lots of constitutions have been written before and to get one off the shelf rather than invent it all yourself works for most groups. It ensures that important bits are not left out and it is an opportunity for everything you need to think about to get discussed.

### **Do we need a Committee?**

A constitution usually defines the governing body of an organisation as a Committee. You will at least need someone to Chair the meetings, someone to write down what happens at meetings a Secretary and someone who looks after the money, a Treasurer. You can add other Committee Members with or without specific roles and duties.

## **What is a General Meeting?**

All those involved in an organisation are usually members. Since it is run for them it is they who usually ultimately say how it is all organised. At the first General Meeting you should adopt your constitution and elect the Committee Members and Officers. You will normally have at least one General Meeting (Annual General Meeting) a year to complete business, authorise what the committee does and elect members and officers for the Committee for the forthcoming year.

## **Do we need a Bank Account?**

You will need to have a way of handling your group's money. For this reason it is useful to open a bank account. The account should be opened in the name of the group and should have 2 signatories for all cheques. It is often a good idea for groups to have 3 or 4 signatories on an account of whom any 2 can sign cheques to cover when committee members are on holiday or unable to sign cheques for the group.

## **Eleven Tips For An Enthusiastic Team (By Ian Percy)**

- 1 Help Each Other Be Right – Not Wrong
- 2 Look For Ways To Make New Ideas Work – Not For Reasons They Won't
- 3 If In Doubt – Check It Out. Don't Make Negative Assessments About Each Other
- 4 Help Each Other Win And Take Pride In Each Other's Victories
- 5 Speak Positively About Each Other And About Your Organisation At Every Opportunity
- 6 Maintain A Positive Mental Attitude No Matter What The Circumstances
- 7 Act With Initiative And Courage As If It All Depends On You
- 8 Do Everything With Enthusiasm – It's Contagious
- 9 Whatever You Want – Give It Away
- 10 Don't Lose Faith – Never Give Up
- 11 Have Fun!

## **THE BUDDHA'S ADVICE ON HOW TO MAINTAIN A SUCCESSFUL GROUP**

Thereupon the Blessed One rose from his seat, went up to the hall of audience, took his appointed seat there, and addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Seven conditions leading to welfare I shall set forth, bhikkhus. Listen and pay heed to what I shall say."

"So be it, Lord."

"The growth of the bhikkhus is to be expected, not their decline, bhikkhus,

so long as they assemble frequently and in large numbers; meet and disperse peacefully and attend to the affairs of the Sangha in concord;

so long as they appoint no new rules, and do not abolish the existing ones, but proceed in accordance with the code of training (Vinaya) laid down;

so long as they show respect, honor, esteem, and veneration towards the elder bhikkhus, those of long standing, long gone forth, the fathers and leaders of the Sangha, and think it worthwhile to listen to them;

so long as they do not come under the power of the craving that leads to fresh becoming;

so long as they cherish the forest depths for their dwellings;

so long as they establish themselves in mindfulness, so that virtuous brethren of the Order who have not come yet might do so, and those already come might live in peace;

so long, bhikkhus, as these seven conditions leading to welfare endure among the bhikkhus and the bhikkhus are known for it, their growth is to be expected, not their decline.

"Seven further conditions leading to welfare I shall set forth, bhikkhus. Listen and pay heed to what I shall say."

"So be it, Lord."

"The growth of the bhikkhus is to be expected, not their decline, bhikkhus,

so long as they do not delight in, are not pleased with, are not fond of activities, talk, sleep, and company;

so long as they do not harbor, do not come under the spell of evil desires;

have no bad friends, associates, or companions;

so long as they do not stop halfway on account of some trifling achievement.

So long, bhikkhus, as these seven conditions leading to welfare endure among the bhikkhus and the bhikkhus are known for it, their growth is to be expected, not their decline.

(Mahaparinibbana sutra)

## **ATTITUDE OF A LEADER**

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO IS AWARE  
OF ALL THAT IS HAPPENING  
WITHOUT AND WITHIN HIM

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO NOT ONLY  
SEES BUT ALSO LOOKS  
HEARS BUT ALSO LISTENS

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO KNOWS  
WHERE HE IS GOING  
WHY HE IS GOING  
AND HOW HE IS GOING

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO KNOWS  
NO DISCOURAGEMENT  
WHO PRESENTS NO ALIBI

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO KNOWS  
HOW TO LEAD WITHOUT BEING DICTATORIAL

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO KNOWS  
HOW TO BE FIRM YET GENTLE

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO KNOWS  
HOW TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP  
WHILE LEADING

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO KNOWS  
FOR THE GOOD OF MOST CONCERN  
AND NOT FOR PERSONAL  
GRATIFICATION OF HIS OWN IDEALS

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO HAS  
HIS HEAD IN THE CLOUDS  
BUT HIS FEET FIRMLY ON THE GROUND

BLESSED IS THE LEADER WHO  
CONSIDERS LEADERSHIP AN  
OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE MANKIND

(AUTHOR UNKNOWN)

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