

IF WE LIVE FAR AWAY?

WHO AM I?

WHY DID "GOD" CREATE SO MANY RELIGIONS?

REINCARNATION?

QUESTION TIME

with

VENERABLE DR. K. SRI DHAMMANANDA

Volume II

WHY MUST WE BE REBORN?

CAN WE VERIFY

WHEN DOES A SOUL ENTER A BODY?

Publication of the



Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society

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FOREWORD

The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society (SAWS) proudly brings forth “Question Time with Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda – Volume II,” a collection of more of the questions addressed to the Venerable at his Internet Website (www.ksridhammananda.com), along with his ever-lucid answers in the Buddhist context.

The success of the original publication has prompted the Society to bring out a second volume drawing on the flood of questions addressed to the Venerable over the period of his operating the above website. This volume again is based on the same premises that decided the parameters for the earlier selection. Here too the particulars of the letter writers have been disguised under pseudonyms to respect their privacy. In the interests of brevity, good grammar and language, the original letters have been edited without any deviation from the perceived object and spirit of the questions raised.

In the preparation of this booklet, common **Pali** (*ancient Indian dialect spoken by the Buddha – the Enlightened One*) words have been freely used. The object is to enable practising Buddhists to become familiar with **Pali** for the better appreciation of the **Dhamma** (*Teachings of the Buddha*) for it was also used to record the **Dhamma**. All **Pali** words used here are presented in **bold italicised** type, and where it first appears in the booklet, a brief and contextually relevant English meaning is given in italics in parenthesis. Additionally, a Glossary is provided at the end giving all the **Pali** words used, arranged in alphabetical order, followed by their common English meaning/s. We trust this will help readers build up a vocabulary of **Pali** words and/or terms to better understand and appreciate the **Buddha's** Message.

Wherever possible, each letter received and the answer that follows, has been printed on a new page. This has often left precious empty space on several pages. Selections from the **Dhammapada** (*a line or stanza from the Buddha's Teachings*), as translated by the Venerable Sri Acharya Buddharakkhita, have been quoted to familiarise readers with some verses from the **Khuddaka Nikaya** (*Compact Collection*) of the **Tipitaka** (*sacred Buddhist scriptures*). We sincerely hope that these will inspire you to delve further into the **Buddha Dhamma**.

The SAWS gratefully acknowledges the efforts of Mr. Vijaya Samarawickrama, Mr. Sumananda Premaseri and Mr. N.B. Dayananda in the compilation, editing and proof-reading of this booklet.

The Committee of Management,
SASANA ABHIWURDHI WARDHANA SOCIETY
April 2008

Venerable Sir,

Thank you for taking of your valuable time, when I wrote to you on two earlier occasions, to allay some doubts I had about the ***Dhamma***.

I would like to seek clarification on yet another point. I have read the ***Ratana Sutta*** (*Jewel Discourse*) from the Piruwana book. Could you explain to me the importance and the usefulness of such ***suttas*** (*discourses*) because I cannot understand their importance. Thank you.

Sangham Saranam Gachchami (*I go to the Sangha as my refuge*),

Saman

Question 1: What is the importance and usefulness of *suttas* such as the *Ratana Sutta*?

Answer 1:

Dear Saman,

The ***Ratana Sutta*** is an important protective ***sutta***. Along with certain other ***suttas*** e.g. ***Karaniya Metta Sutta*** (*Discourse on Loving-Kindness*), ***Mangala Sutta*** (*Discourse on Blessings*), it can help to ward off fear and sicknesses. Its efficacy has been proven even in these modern times.

This ***sutta*** was first chanted during the time of the ***Buddha*** at Vesali, a city in India, which was plagued with a famine resulting in many deaths. Pestilence followed

bringing even more deaths. The nauseating smell from the decaying bodies attracted evil spirits. Chanting this **sutta** helped to bring rain which cleared the city of the uncertainty engulfing it. By invoking the power of the Truth, the **devas** (*celestial beings*) protected the people and they too gained by the chanting and advice given by the **Buddha**. The **devas** rejoiced in the exhortation given by the **Buddha** at the end of the **Ratana Sutta**.

It is on record that in the 4th Century, a Sinhalese King had the **sutta** recited and it resulted in the breaking of a severe drought.

In the spirit of studying, practising and realising the **Dhamma**, reading its translation gives us some understanding of the true qualities of the **Buddha**, **Dhamma** and **Sangha** (*Buddhist renunciates*) and allows us to reflect on their authenticity. So, when the **sutta** is chanted in **Pali**, we recite it with greater faith and understanding, not like a parrot that just utters sentences with no understanding.

This understanding creates positive psychological states of mind which have beneficial mental and physical effects.

Yours in the **Dhamma**,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Dear Venerable,

Last Chinese New Year, our whole family had gathered at my parents' home. Unfortunately, I had several arguments with my dad about my younger brother who wanted to borrow money again. I had loaned him money three times before (which he had yet to return) and I was not going to make the same mistake again. I had come to realise that I had been a victim of his emotional threats all this while.

My elder brother is shifting out of my dad's house to his own rented place. I think it is a good move for him. I myself was not happy at home and was very happy the day I left.

I think I am from a dysfunctional family, where the girls were raised differently from the boys. The boys were spoilt rotten and the girls were taken for granted, especially when it came to housework and cooking.

I cannot stand it when my family will not see what I am trying to point out to them. I am also very concerned about my sister's three children. She seems to be raising them after my parents' old ways. I passed her some good parenting books but she just could not be bothered. I wonder if there is anything I can do. Can you please advise me? Thank you.

Aw

Question 2: Some advice regarding family circumstances, please.

Answer 2:

Dear Aw,

First and foremost, remove from your mind the thought that you come from a family of dysfunctional people. There is no perfect family or perfect environment as long as we traverse through our journey in **samsara** (*cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth*). But remember, there is no total non-perfection either.

It is only from a pond full of mud that a beautiful and pure lotus flower arises. Even a **Buddha** cannot arise in a totally happy and pleasurable environment or a totally suffering-filled environment for the **Dhamma** can be understood only in a mixed environment of pain and pleasure.

Replace the negative thoughts in your mind with positive reflections and thoughts. Do not allow yourself to dwell on negativities. Each time a negative thought arises in your mind, immediately replace it with a positive reflection and/or a positive memory from the past.

As for your sister's children, shower them with all the positivism in you - your **metta** (*loving-kindness*), your **karuna** (*compassion*), your happiness. Without telling, but by showing, how and what the alternative would be like, your sister will see that her children find you likeable, adorable and someone they like to be around with. This in itself will make your sister feel that there must be a better way and she will see it through your exemplary conduct. Actions speak louder than words and often they become contagious.

As for your younger brother, you are right in not giving in to his selfish behaviour. Be firm with him and do not allow yourself to hate him or your father. They both deserve your *metta*. If you give in to anger, it will only hurt you and others and not benefit anyone.

Every best wish to you with the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the *Dhamma*,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Those who imagine evil where there is none, and do not see evil where it is – upholding false views, they go to states of woe.”

Dhammapada

“Those who discern the wrong as wrong and the right as right – upholding right views, they go to realms of bliss.”

Dhammapada

“Not by passing arbitrary judgements does a man become just; a wise man is he who investigates both right and wrong.”

Dhammapada

Venerable Sir,

I have successfully completed my first hymn which echoes your message to the people. This hymn is about how the **Buddha** introduced Himself when the **Brahmin** (*one who is of the highest caste in the Hindu caste system*) named Dona met him.

Based on my experience, I would agree with you that this is a most important message. I have done some research and study and finally found out where the story comes from. To make sure that I had the details right, I went out on the Internet and found some books which explain this story. It is found in the **Dona Sutta** (*Discourse to the Brahmin Dona*) of the **Anguttara Nikaya** (*component of the Buddhist Canon*).

I have summarised some of the contents and tried to maintain the original meaning of it. I am seeking some help to make sure that what I wrote in English means the same as in **Pali**. In future, I will look forward to come up with more hymns based on your message to me personally, and then discuss and share this in hymns sessions at the Sunday School where I will start teaching next June. Anyway, these hymns will be taught only when the students are ready.

Title: **Tasma Buddho Subramanna** (*Therefore, I am called the Buddha*)

One day, along the road to the city of Setavya,
A **Brahmin**, Dona, met the **Buddha**,
From His footprints, he knew this was no ordinary man,
And so he walked up to the **Buddha** and asked Him,

“Are you a **Deva**?

Are you a **Gandhabba** (a life force)?

Are you a **Yakkha** (evil spirit)?

Are you a **Manussa** (human being)?”

Then The **Buddha** said: (Chorus)

“Ahbing Nyeyang Ahbing Nyatang,

(I understand everything that needs to be understood in this world)

Bahava Cebangche Bahabetang,

(I have practised all the good qualities, the Ten Perfections)

Pahadabang Pahenang Me,

(I have eradicated all evil thoughts)

Tasma Buddho Subramanna,

*(Therefore, I am called the **Buddha**)”*

With **metta**,

Michael

Question 3: May I share a hymn I have composed on the *Dona Sutta*?

Answer 3:

Dear Michael,

I am very happy with your enthusiasm and passion for music. There is a group in Singapore working on Buddhist hymns for children. The hymns are sung in English by a group of children calling themselves, “The D’Kids.” So far, they have produced one album. Another group in Melaka or Kuala Lumpur comprising of young adults calling themselves “Messengers of **Dhamma** (MOD)” too have produced an album.

Try to get in touch with them and perhaps you could all team up and come out with some beautiful songs and singers. In the past, the elders in the temple disallowed youths from singing Buddhist hymns. I have instead encouraged them to come forward to sing during the Sunday *Puja*. And that encouragement led to more Buddhist hymns being composed and the rise of so many hymn groups and also the popularising of Buddhist hymns in the Sunday Schools.

Do continue to nurture your enthusiasm.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the *Dhamma*,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“By what track can you trace that trackless *Buddha* of limitless range, whose victory nothing can undo, whom none of the vanquished defilements can ever pursue?”

Dhammapada

“By what track can you trace that trackless *Buddha* of limitless range, in whom exists no longer the entangling and embroiling craving that perpetuates becoming?”

Dhammapada

“Hard is it to be born a man; hard is the life of mortals. Hard is it to gain the opportunity of hearing the Sublime Truth, and hard to encounter is the arising of the *Buddhas*.”

Dhammapada

Dear Master,

I have been studying Buddhism for some time now but I still have many doubts e.g:

a) I realise that in the **Buddha's** Teachings, every master will have a different interpretation of the **Buddha's** Message, so which one should I follow? For example, according to Ven. Shravasti Dhammika, the **Buddha's** Teachings are just a philosophy but you claim that they are not! Different writers interpret it differently too.

b) If we follow the **Buddha's** Teachings and not believe in a God, why do we need to worship and make offerings to many different **Buddhas** and deities?

c) What do you think about the **Vajrayana** (*Tibetan Tantric tradition of Buddhism*) teaching? Also, what about the Guru Rinpoche's teachings and his background?

d) Who can prove if there is rebirth or **Nibbana** (*the ultimate liberation*)?

e) What do you think about **mantras** (*invocations*)?

I find difficulty to translate all my doubts into English but I hope you can understand. I hope Master can provide me clear answers to these questions. May Master continue to be in good health and guide us to be better Buddhists.

Best regards,

Mang

Question 4: Clarification sought on the “different” Buddhist Teachings.

Answer 4:

Dear Mang,

My brief answers to your questions follow:

a) It does not matter what you recognise Buddhism as, but what is more important is practising what the **Buddha** has taught. If religion is defined in the God-man relationship context i.e. to teach mankind to find the way to worship God or a path towards the ultimate union of man and God, Buddhism is certainly not a religion. But if religion is defined as a system of teachings to liberate mankind, then Buddhism certainly fits this description. One also has to remember that the **Buddha** taught for 45 years. His Teachings are thus immense and cover many aspects of life for the **Buddha** taught the **Dhamma** based on the level of understanding of His audience.

It all depends on the angle from which you are evaluating Buddhism. In some aspects, Buddhism can be said to be a science, for the **Buddha** taught the **Kalama Sutta** (*Discourse to the **Kalamas** on Freedom of Thought, Intellectual Honesty and Integrity*) and encouraged the discipline of testing His Teachings and not just accepting them in blind faith. He also taught an impartial approach to reach the Truth without having personal bias.

For a management student, Buddhism is the art of management for in his analysis of the **Buddha's** Teachings, the student could find Industrial Relations, Human Resources and Wealth Management principles in

the ***Sigalovada Sutta*** (*Discourse on the Duties and Responsibilities of a Lay Person*), ***Bhaddekarattha Sutta*** (*Discourse on the Ideal Lover of Solitude*), ***Dighajanu Sutta*** (*Discourse on the Conditions of Welfare*) and ***Adiya Sutta*** (*Discourse on the Benefits to be Obtained from Wealth*), to name a few.

For a student of psychology, the ***Buddha*** is the master of psychology because His Teachings focus a lot on the mind. For a layperson, the ***Buddha's*** Teachings are a way of life for there is so much advice for laypeople. For a "success guru" who conducts seminars on how to get rich and successful, the ***Buddha's*** Teachings are a way to success for He finds the 'Way to Success' in the ***Mangala Sutta, Parabhava Sutta*** (*Discourse on Downfall*), Noble Eightfold Path, etc. Today's "success gurus" merely extract the ancient wisdom and re-package it for a success seminar or book and earn millions from it.

Each of us views a part of the ***Buddha's*** Teachings from our frame of reference. And, the Teachings are so extensive that they fit all our needs. But ultimately, there is only one reason a ***Buddha*** appears in the world - to liberate mankind from the suffering which is clearly explained in his first ***sutta***, the ***Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*** (*Discourse of the Turning of the Wheel of Righteousness*).

Your task is to study the Words of the ***Buddha*** directly and practise them, "Do good. Avoid evil. Purify the mind." This is the Teaching of all the ***Buddhas***.

b) The ***Buddha*** did not ask for blind faith in Him or His Teachings or for us to worship Him or the other ***Buddhas*** before Him. The prime objective of His Teaching is, out of

compassion, to show mankind how to liberate themselves.

But certain people need a starting point of faith to approach religion. For some such, a certain stanza recited or ritual conducted, with faith, would be helpful. For others, contemplating on a **Buddha** image (symbolic of the perfect embodiment of Enlightenment, purity, spiritual liberation, etc) would help.

As they learn more about the **Dhamma**, they will learn to study, practise and realise the **Dhamma**. At that stage, their approach to religion is not from faith but from understanding. They grow from learning to knowing. Just like teenagers or adults move away from the toys they used to enjoy and play with as children, people grow in the spiritual path and rely less on rituals and devotion.

c) **Vajrayana** is another system viewing Buddhism differently. There are three main Buddhist sects – **Theravada** (*Orthodox Buddhist Tradition based on the Pali Canon*), **Mahayana** (*Northern Tradition of Buddhism popular in China*) and **Vajrayana**. Each of the sects emphasises a different aspect of Buddhism but at the core, their teachings are similar. They all have the same goal: perfect happiness through purifying the mind.

d) Rebirth seems to be the only plausible explanation to all the happenings we have today in the world and the only logical after-life explanation. How else could we explain the differences we have in life?

Why are some born rich, some poor?

Why are some born physically perfect, while some are

born deaf, blind, or deformed?

Why are some gifted with intelligence and skills while others are not?

Why do some live long, while some others are stillborn or live for a few hours only?

Certainly, it cannot be due to a God who wants to "test" his creatures for that would be a most cruel thing to do.

How can we explain the case of Mozart who could play music at such a tender age or Bach who could write music when in reality he was identified as deaf? How can we account for the Russian baby who could speak in a foreign language (later found to be Latin) within hours of his birth? How about the young two-year old boy from Sri Lanka who could recite **suttas** from memory so perfectly? On the other hand, even monks today cannot do without the aid of a book of **sutta** compilations. To astound us further, at the age of two, this child could not even read or write.

So many cases are coming to light today (in the West) which upon investigation are found to be true, attesting to the fact that the 'memory recallers' did not make up stories but actually did live the past lives they were relating. The only explanation is that rebirth does occur. You must read Prof. Ian Stevenson's book "20 Cases Suggestive of Rebirth" published by the University of Virginia, USA. It has a collection of twenty cases of the most powerful evidence of rebirth. There are many other books supporting rebirth published by the same university and it is available for sale on websites such as [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

e) **Mantras** have been used in ancient India for a long time. In **Theravada** Buddhism, they use **parittas** (*suttas recited to ward off evil*) to invoke the power of the Truth. These **parittas** are verses uttered by the **Buddha** and when one contemplates them, one gains a lot of confidence and happiness. It is especially useful to recite **parittas** to a person who is sick who upon contemplating on the Truth in the **paritta**, recovers speedily. The monk or person chanting the **paritta** needs to do it mindfully with faith, radiating loving-kindness and compassion. Chanting releases hormones in the listeners' bodies that has a calming effect on both the mind and body.

In times of fear, chanting brings confidence to oneself. In the **Dhajagga Sutta** (*The Banner of Victory Discourse*), the **Buddha** says that in times of fear, one should call upon the power of the Truth - the power of the **Buddha**, **Dhamma** and **Sangha**. When the city of Vesali was devastated by famine and filled with corpses and the dying all over the city, the **Ratana Sutta** was chanted and it brought about a deluge of rain that cleansed the city of the putrefying corpses. The negative forces surrounding it were dispelled too and the city eventually returned to prosperity.

When the elephant **Nalagiri** (*the intoxicated elephant*) ran towards the **Buddha** to attack Him, the **Buddha** radiated His **metta** and **karuna** towards the animal. So intense was the positive emotions emanating from the **Buddha**, that the elephant lost its rage and stopped its attack. We continue to see the efficacy of **parittas** till today and true life examples are abundant.

Mantras, on the other hand, are ancient magic spells which go back to our animistic past. Some people believe

that certain sounds have magic powers which when recited can change the way nature operates. The **Buddha** also said that certain sounds can influence the way we think and feel. But **mantras** and **parittas** are different because the **parittas** are concerned with the declaration of the Truth which we must be mindful of. On the other hand, **mantras** consist of sound syllables repeated to create a certain effect.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the **Dhamma**,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Of all paths the Eightfold Path is the best; of all truths the Four Noble Truths are the best; of all things passionlessness is the best; of men the Seeing One (the **Buddha**) is the best.”

Dhammapada

“Walking upon this path you will make an end of suffering. Having discovered how to pull out the thorn of lust, I make known the path.”

Dhammapada

“If by renouncing a lesser happiness one may realise a greater happiness, let the wise man renounce the lesser, having regard for the greater.”

Dhammapada

Dear Venerable,

I have always wondered what is my purpose in this life? Why do I even exist? And how can I become happy when sometimes things that are happening around me always bring me sadness. I have always counted my blessings and I am very grateful for what I have. But then at times I feel sad. I somehow do not even know why am I here. Of what significance am I to the world?

Regards,

Edwin

Question 5: What is the purpose of my life? Of what significance am I to the world?

Answer 5:

Dear Edwin,

We can choose to make our life on earth a heaven or a hell. It is all in our minds. Often, we cannot change our surroundings or our circumstances but we certainly can choose our reaction towards both.

In this instance, you mentioned that your surroundings create sadness. Take the case of those who are involved in hospice care for the terminally ill. Ultimately they are surrounded by people nearing death and are in a helpless situation where they cannot change the inevitable. If one allows oneself to be overwhelmed by this helplessness, then one becomes an emotional wreck that needs to be helped too.

However, if one always keeps oneself detached from the emotion of helplessness but instead fills oneself with compassion, one can be a source of strength to those who are dying, to live the last phases of their lives in dignity and happiness. This helps one to also help influence the patients' dying moments to be endowed with happiness rather than loneliness, suffering, helplessness, fear, etc.

Our purposes in life can be simple. We can use simple helpful steps towards spirituality, living each day happily and helping others. If one maintains a worldly life, one can earn one's livelihood doing good to oneself and others and avoiding harm to oneself and others. One also can devote some time in the day to the practise of meditation. One could volunteer to do some humanitarian work over the weekend through a society such as Tzu Chi. Or, we could join the local community in some neighbourhood projects to increase fellowship and goodwill.

If one renounces the world to become a monk or nun, one needs to be more intense in one's spiritual practise. By helping oneself and others, one becomes of great service to others. The more you care for others, the less important your own problems become.

So you create your purpose in life. You make yourself significant to others. It all depends on whether you can develop understanding and will power. Your life is in your own hands!

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the ***Dhamma***,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Venerable Sir,

First of all, I want to express my sincere gratitude for the good work you are doing in teaching the ***Dhamma***. Your publications are amazing and I am trying to read all of them. However, a thought struck me when you addressed a question on "mercy killing."

It is said that no matter how good one's intention is, if the action is wrong, then he/she will accumulate some bad ***kamma*** (*good or bad action*). What I initially thought was that ***kamma*** is entirely the result of our intention. No matter how wrong the action seems, if the intention is pure, then no bad ***kamma*** will be generated because of the wrong action.

For instance, if a hungry monk came begging for food and if someone offered him food mixed with poison, then will that person still generate some good ***kamma***? The person's action was right but his intention was bad. If the action plays a role in determining our ***kamma*** then I think that person will still generate some good ***kamma***.

Thanking you always,

Luke

Question 6: What role does intention play, *kammically*, on one's actions?

Answer 6:

Dear Luke,

As you rightly said, the main focus is intention. Take for instance the killing of a person. Two people can act differently - one performs mercy killing, acting out of misguided compassion and killing a friend by pulling the life-sustaining plugs on the machine because he cannot stand to see his friend suffering or because they had a pact that in the event one of them ever had to be in that situation, the other would pull the plug.

Another person kills an individual through pre-meditated murder because of say, business rivalry. In both cases, the end result is the death of an individual. But in the first case, there are mitigating circumstances where the primary motivation has been misguided compassion. There is no hatred in this instance - it was purely ignorance, which in his perception was compassion. He will nevertheless still bear the consequences of his action (for it was killing nonetheless as no one has the right to take away the life of another) but, to a lesser degree. In the Buddhist sense, the suffering individual on the life support machine is bearing the fruit of his *kamma*. Helping him to die prematurely in this life merely postpones his balance of suffering to the next or another life.

In the case of the second person who murdered because of business rivalry, the primary motivation has been anger and it had been so intense that it has led to murder.

The murderer was motivated by greed, anger and ill will and, therefore, the bad **kamma** he accumulated is certainly more than that of the individual who performed the mercy killing.

The **Buddha** has explained that people accumulate bad **kamma** due to greed, hatred and/or delusion. These are the primary motivations for wrongdoing. The mercy killer was deluded whereas the business rival was filled with intense hatred. So, the actions of both resulted in the death of an individual, but the **kammic** effect on each of them differs because their primary motivations differed. In another sense, people who perform holy wars or suicide attacks in the name of religion, could be said to be deluded by brainwashing techniques. But, their primary motivation to take their own lives and that of others is hatred and thus their negative **kammic** consequence is certainly more than the result of the mercy killing. I hope I have briefly answered your question.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the **Dhamma**,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Heedful among the heedless, wide-awake among the sleepy, the wise man advances like a swift horse leaving behind a weak jade.”

Dhammapada

“By heedfulness did Indra* become the overlord of the gods. Heedfulness is ever praised, and heedlessness ever despised.”

Dhammapada

* Ruler of the gods in ancient Indian mythology.

Venerable Sir,

I have lots of questions about the ***Dhamma***. By you answering my questions the last time, you have cleared many doubts about the ***Dhamma***. I would very much appreciate it if you could answer these additional questions for me:

- a) Must a Buddhist be a vegetarian?
- b) I have heard that Buddhist monks should avoid taking money. Is this true and practical?
- c) Is it alright for a Buddhist to have patriotic feelings about his race or country?

Thank you.

Harshana

Question 7: Must a Buddhist be a vegetarian? On Buddhist monks accepting money and on patriotic feelings by Buddhists about race and country.

Answer 7:

Dear Harshana,

Please allow me to be brief on the answers to your questions:

- a) There are various views on this subject. Most important, however, is how we treat this matter as a part of our practice. Laypersons have an easier choice to be

practical vegetarians, understanding how to complement food to meet all nutritional requirements without even touching meat for protein needs. However, remember this is only one small ingredient of a bigger practice, i.e. the threefold practice of avoidance of evil, doing of good and the purification of one's mind, which should be of the foremost priority.

There is no point if you are a vegetarian, but do not follow the threefold practice. It is not the content of our diet that is more important, but rather the intent of our heart (actually, the mind). We must rid ourselves of the defilements in us such as our greed, jealousy, ill will, conceit, etc and suffuse ourselves with loving-kindness, generosity, egolessness, etc.

Excluding meat from our diet alone is not good enough. Being vegetarian is a personal practice which one chooses to follow. Of course, vegetarianism is good from a medical point of view. We have a lesser chance of getting heart and other diseases. In terms of the land cultivated to feed us and the food pyramid, it is more cost effective to grow vegetables to feed us directly than to feed the vegetables (grain, soya, alfalfa, etc) to the poultry and livestock which are then slaughtered to feed us. Buddhism does not impose laws on anyone. The choice is yours, based on your realisation that killing is wrong.

b) Yes, the monks' rules disallow it. The granting of support from the lay community should not be towards a particular monk, but towards the **Sangha** as a whole. However, in modern society monks cannot always avoid having to handle money.

In a practical sense, monks who are able to, should be

accompanied by a lay attendant called a **kappiya** (*a lay monk's assistant*). A **dayaka sabha** (*lay organisation*) handles the money on their behalf for purchases of necessities for their continuation of spiritual cultivation.

Student monks in Sri Lanka, for example, who use public transport need to handle money to pay for their travel or to purchase their study requirements. They cannot afford to have a **kappiya** to accompany them. But, in such instances, the money needs to be treated not as one's personal property, but as belonging to the **Sangha**. The money is used strictly for the continuation of one's studies, to purchase books and stationeries for studies, transportation, etc. One should treat it as a means, not an end where one accumulates wealth and makes a mockery of the robe and what it stands for, i.e. detachment and renunciation.

Most importantly, one should never be attached to the money one handles. Where possible, there are monks who strictly follow this **Vinaya** (*the Discipline Code for the Sangha*) rule with the support of laypersons.

c) Ideally, we should be equanimous towards all. We should know our mental state when we are proud of our race or being patriotic. Does it build to a point to make us more egoistic, looking down on others, building hatred, etc? If that is so, then we should be more mindful to be tolerant of others. The **Buddha** pointed out in the **Parabhava Sutta**, being overly conceited about one's birth or clan could be one of the causes that leads to one's downfall.

However, if the pride brings one to be selfless in service to the cause of the country, for example, being benevolent,

building and supporting self-help schemes, it is good.

The extreme end of such patriotism or nationalism could be bigotry where some even would wage wars in the name of race, religion or nationalism. This is certainly not the Buddhist way.

Moderation or the Middle Path, the key to happiness, taught by the **Buddha** serves all well.

Yours in the **Dhamma**,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Good is restraint over the eye; good is restraint over the ear; good is restraint over the nose; good is restraint over the tongue.”

Dhammapada

“Good is restraint in the body; good is restraint in speech; good is restraint in thought. Restraint everywhere is good. The monk restrained in every way is freed from all suffering.”

Dhammapada

Dear **Bhante** (*Venerable Sir*),

I must share with you that I have benefited immensely from your books and writings, in seeking direction in my life. I must add that, although I am far from what is the final destination of the **Dhamma**, I am truly grateful for my good fortune and **kamma** of being able to read your books and to use the Teachings in them as beacons during the dark moments of my life. Thank you, **Bhante**.

May I now seek your advice on an issue that I have some difficulty in reconciling.

I often find it difficult, on the one hand, to be mindful of the Teachings that I should seek contentment and happiness from within and to be grateful for the blessings that I have so far....and on the other hand, drive and motivate myself to be the best and most capable in the field of my career.

It would seem obvious that the answer is found within my question, but then again, it is there that I find my difficulty. In this modern, fast-paced and results-oriented corporate environment that many of us are in, I cannot seem to place together the meaning of being contented, yet at the same time, setting aggressive and dynamic objectives in the attempt to challenge my fullest ability in my career. To me, it seems almost impossible to place these two opposites...contentment and the want to achieve greatness (in the things we do) on the same platform.

I would very much like to seek your guidance and wisdom on this dilemma in shedding a better light on how I should view this issue.

Best regards,

Andrew

Question 8: On contentment and ambition.

Answer 8:

Dear Andrew,

You have asked a very pertinent question. If the ***Bodhisatta*** (the ***Buddha***-to-be in his last birth before attaining Enlightenment) ***Gotama*** (family name of the Prince Siddhatta) had been very contented with things as they were, accepting life as a finality that cannot be changed, we would not have the ***Dhamma*** today. We need to differentiate between contentment and apathy.

In this modern world of continuous improvements, change is the only constant. If we do not continuously innovate, challenging existing processes, initiating a paradigm shift, initiating re-engineering, etc because we accept, or are contented with, things as they are, that is not contentment. It is complacency!

We need to keep innovating to bring our organisations forward if we are in positions of leadership in middle and top management, etc. It is our responsibility to our organisations, our staff who depend on us for the wise and strategic actions we take, and ourselves, to do so.

It is just like the ***Dasa Dhamma Raja*** (Ten Duties of a Ruler or King) that the ***Buddha*** gave. A king cannot say that he is contented and so does not want to proactively perform his duties as the ruler to keep law and order in the country, and to seek to lead his people and his country to prosperity and progress. That king has an obligation to himself, to the nation and the country.

However, a person must not be unduly intent on success and acquisition of power or wealth because that would create unhappiness and stress. He should know when to stop – that is contentment.

If a king wants to move towards the path of spiritual contentment, he needs to ensure he has already done the best for the country, appoint a suitable successor at the right time and then hand the kingdom to him and he could play just an advisory role and let the successor lead. The king who has abdicated could now concentrate more on contentment, spirituality, etc. This was the way of the ***Bodhisatta***, in the past lives of the ***Buddha***.

So, to answer your question - it all depends on where you are in your vocation's hierarchy. The lower you are, the easier it is to attain contentment. The higher you are, the more responsibility is entrusted to you and, therefore, the more dependent your subordinates are on you. Do you have the choice of the King? Are you in an advisory, consultative, etc position where the day-to-day running is entrusted to someone else who is capable? You could then focus more on contentment, spirituality, etc.

Kindly read my booklet "Is it WRONG to be Ambitious?" from the website <http://www.ksridhammananda.com> for a more detailed discussion on the topic.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the ***Dhamma***,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Dear Venerable Dhammananda,

Thank you for your personal advice to me. I am reading your advice again and again to constantly remind myself. I read your book every night before bed and it does calm me down. My problem is not that I do not know about the law of impermanence and other Buddhist Teachings.

I know them, and I counsel or advise my friends in distress using them. But when it comes to me practising them, it is an uphill struggle. I feel that learning the **Dhamma** is not difficult, but practising it is just so difficult. I find myself quite helpless because I am not wise enough to put it to practise to rescue myself from distress.

And I end up being very depressed with my problems because it is difficult to let go, although I know very well I should. Perhaps Venerable with your experience of so many years in the **Dhamma** could point out to me where I have gone wrong. Why am I so foolish? Knowing the **Dhamma**, yet not being able to practise the **Dhamma**. I am desperate to practise the **Dhamma**, but I do not know why my mind is so clouded in times of distress.

I feel very touched that Venerable contributes by your presence in important events and wish you well in that. I am so touched by your efforts that I have signed up to make regular (monthly) donations to The Cancer Research UK, also because I had dealt with a few cancer patients recently and I felt a lot for them.

With **metta**,

Chak

Question 9: How does one practise the *Dhamma* as opposed to just learning and knowing it?

Answer 9:

Dear Chak,

You must be congratulated for having recognised the first hurdle to inner happiness - the First Noble Truth. Most people refuse to even admit that they find it difficult to tread the Noble Eightfold Path. But take heart. Even the ***Buddha*** said that he met with great difficulty in practising the ***Dhamma*** when he was a ***Bodhisatta***.

You mentioned that it is difficult to practise the ***Dhamma***. It certainly is. We are naturally more predisposed to act contrary to the ***Dhamma***. But some Teachings in the ***Dhamma*** are very easy and natural - for example, to have loving-kindness, compassion, etc towards our family, friends, etc.

It is more difficult to practise loving-kindness towards the enemy because we have not been able to let go, to let bygones be bygones and to forgive - all the more if it is a very close friend who has now become a bitter enemy because we expect gratitude in return for all we have done for the person, not the opposite. The bitter sweet within us turns into hatred gradually as communications go dead.

But we need to let go of the bitterness - think of the past good times, think that he/she may have been our parents or a spouse in a past life – and, therefore, how could we hate him or her. It is essential to start slowly on the easier and smaller steps before we take the bigger steps. Do not

try too hard, you need to try slowly in a relaxed atmosphere, calmly. Trying too hard will only draw you further away because you get more restless and frustrated when you fail to achieve the larger objective. Small but sure steps forward are the key.

Move towards it in a relaxed, natural way, not "unnaturally" pushing yourself too hard. Your inner self will greatly resist if you do it that way. Buddhism is a gradual path – you are allowed to fail many times, but the going gets easier if you practise in earnest.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the *Dhamma*,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Little though he recites the sacred texts, but puts the Teaching into practice, forsaking lust, hatred and delusion, with true wisdom and emancipated mind clinging to nothing of this or any other world - he indeed partakes of the blessings of a holy life.”

Dhammapada

“The monk who delights in heedfulness and looks with fear at heedlessness advances like fire, burning all fetters small and large.”

Dhammapada

“The monk who delights in heedfulness and looks with fear at heedlessness will not fall. He is close to *Nibbana*.”

Dhammapada

Dear Chief Dhammananda,

I am in the fourth year of my medical studies and my exams are coming up. I am living in a dormitory and my neighbours are very noisy. For months, I have sunk into depression and have lost a lot of hope in life. I am still trying to pull myself through although currently I am stressed to a breaking point. I am glad that your books came at the right time and by reading them, I hope it will change the way I perceive things and will regain some hope.

Thanks,

Yoong

Question 10: How do I live among noisy neighbours who cause me stress?

Answer 10:

Dear Yoong,

I am happy you have finally received the books. Remember, if you cannot help worrying, worrying cannot help you either.

Do not stress yourself - learn how to let go. Smile and laugh more often at life rather than taking problems personally. Take life in your stride. Only you can make the choice to be happy, stressed or sad to an external stimuli - it is either you allow yourself to be your natural character of easily being predisposed towards negativity or you make the choice to gear yourself towards positivity. No one else can change that for you - you are

the master of your own happiness or sadness.

Do not resent your noisy neighbours – accept them as part of life, that not everything can always be pleasant.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the ***Dhamma***,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“By effort and heedfulness, discipline and self-mastery, let the wise one make for himself an island which no flood can overwhelm.”

Dhammapada

“Just as a fletcher straightens an arrow shaft, even so the discerning man straightens his mind - so fickle and unsteady, so difficult to guard and control.”

Dhammapada

“One truly is the protector of oneself; who else could the protector be? With oneself fully controlled, one gains a mastery that is hard to gain.”

Dhammapada

Dear Venerable,

Greetings to you!

I love to write to you because you are the only monk I know who responds to e-mails. The other monks either do not have an e-mail address or do not make it available. I think all monks should have an e-mail address and we should send all of them to computer classes and so modernise the *Sangha* community.

When I go for talks, I always hear "to find a suitable partner in life, we should look for someone with a similar level of understanding, who usually comes from having the same religion." Sounds familiar? This is absolutely true! My parents adopted different religions, hence they walked separate paths ultimately, and strangely, to my relief!

And I wonder if any Buddhist organisation actually bothers to have a "Buddhist-Social-Development-Unit" to organise activities for singles, in view of the above.

Similar level of understanding in the above is for relationships between humans-and-humans. For relationships between humans-and-religion, I believe the level of understanding should also be similar. However, with the current period of decline, existing humans have a very retarded understanding of religion.

Buddhism sets a very serious tone, and all the time we hear "SUFFERING," "SUFFERING," "SUFFERING." It is so stressful and heavy. I believe that like-attracts-like, and are we attracting all the suffering human beings? In fact, this is the kind of feedback I get from my Christian

friends. They emphasise "LOVE," "HYMNS," "PRAISES," "SONGS." They are more positive and trendy.

Can we kind of re-package Buddhism (Truth) a little, and make it more fun, simple, easy, more acceptable to people-at-large and still be able to achieve the same objectives of **Dhamma** propagation and helping mankind. I am sure the majority of mankind would find **Pali**, **Sanskrit** (*ancient written language of India*) and Buddhist philosophy study tedious, and it will take tonnes of past connections and good **kamma** to be able to have the opportunity to study Buddhism in such a detailed context. It means re-writing the educational materials, adding some pictures, putting Buddhism into educational multi-media CDs, cartoons, meaningful jokes on facts of life and truth, instead of just plain books.

Not that we do not want to know Buddhism, we just do not know how! And we cannot send the **Sangha** to shopping centres to preach about Buddhism (or could we?). Our "outreach" is not enough or has not been adapted. We need to be more proactive.

A couple of days ago, I did **Manjusri Mo** (*a Bodhisatta of the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions associated with wisdom, doctrine and awareness*) reading, for fun and charity for building of a Bhutan retreat centre. I was told that in my previous life I was from a **deva** realm. However, I will end up in the **Naga** (celestial world of demonic creatures) realm in my next rebirth, for all the naughty things I did in the past and now (but I feel like I am going to be a hungry ghost).

How does a **deva** fall into the human realm, and how does a **Naga** go back up to the human realm. Is it possible to

help spread the *Dhamma* in the *Naga* realm, being a *Naga*? How can the human realm preach *Dhamma* to *Nagas* or the lower realms?

I have a long way to go, in my realisation of the Truth. So full of ignorance and all the "poison" you could possibly name. I am late. My head is cracking and there is a great force tearing me apart, right from the centre of my heart. There was something I wanted to do, yet I cannot and I am not sure when I can. I am bleeding and tearing from my heart. And yes..... this is SUFFERING!

Thanks for reading this e-mail!

Katherine

Question 11: Can we re-package the *Dhamma* for it to be more palatable to today's audience?

Answer: 11

Dear Katherine,

Religion is what we make it to be. Some exploit religion dangling a dangerous potent of religion-politics-commerce. This is the order of the day because of the cunning and shrewd way certain world leaders want to stay in power by exploiting the inflammable passions of the ignorant masses.

In Buddhism, it is not suffering that is always talked about, but realism. What is realism here? When we accept that we will one day die, accept the fact that we will continue to fall sick at the most unexpected times and

that we will be subject to the vicissitudes of life. By accepting this reality, it is not suffering by the dictionary definition but realism - we begin to transcend from a life of expectations to a life of realism and proactiveness.

Buddhists see the world as it really is – with all its dislikes, uncertainties, greed and so on. This is why they can stay above these negative factors and remain calm in the face of trouble. We not only talk of suffering but we also talk constantly of Death! This is to remove the fear of death by becoming familiar with it.

We become more positive in our attitudes and are always enjoying the moment because we are contented. If anything happens, we take it as a slip or a small fall. We get up and move on in life. We do not allow our slip or fall to upset us to the point of misery. We get up and move on in life because we have learnt the law of impermanence. Unhappiness or happiness is not everlasting but subject to change too. We have the choice in our hands to be happy, or not to be happy. We are not fatalists giving in to an exterior force that supposedly determines our future, but we become the masters of our own destiny and we do not believe that our problems are caused by external factors like a god but are caused by our own ignorance and our inability to see things as they really are.

We also begin to differentiate our wants from our needs and strive to fulfill our needs and reduce our wants. Isn't this wonderful? It certainly is not suffering.

As for like-minded people getting together, it is true - but it is also how our attitude towards life is. Strangely, sometimes opposites attract. Even people of the same faith have differences as they tread along the path of life,

but what is important is the way they handle their differences. When one is angry, the other must give in. If both are angry and go after each other's throats and are not willing to budge an inch, then the issue of compatibility does not arise at all. As Buddhists, we learn to destroy our ego and selfishness and practise compassion towards others. Understanding and wisdom must prevail over all other traits. This is the secret of harmony.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the *Dhamma*,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one made pure. Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another.”

Dhammapada

“Come! Behold this world, which is like a decorated royal chariot. Here fools flounder, but the wise have no attachment to it.”

Dhammapada

Dear Venerable,

My family tends to believe people easily. My younger brother got cheated in business and I was misled to buy something in haste. I guess we must have owed something to the other party in our previous life but when we think of it, it still bothers me. Is there any advice from you, Venerable? Thank you.

A Buddhist but still very much a layperson,

Yip

Question 12: Is getting cheated “paying back” for past *kamma*?

Answer 12:

Dear Yip,

You and your brother did not owe anything to the other party. You got cheated. Yes, sometimes we lose and we cannot hold on to certain things. But as Buddhists, we are not fatalists who always believe that our destiny is predetermined. No, we made our own *kamma* in the past lives and continue to make fresh *kamma* in this present life. So in other words, we can change our *kamma*.

If we were fated, then we have no choice but to live out our past *kamma* for better or for worse, but *kamma* does not operate like that. There is always opportunity for betterment, and the choice is ours. Of course, if in the past life, we have done much bad, we have to reap the fruits of our bad action, but nothing prevents us from

reducing its impact by doing more good in this life.

Buddhism is a very practical and realistic religion as we always have hope for a better tomorrow by planting the good seeds in this life itself.

If you do not want to be cheated again, do not worry about past **kamma**, but develop your mindfulness and your skill to avoid a bad deal!

Is this not more positive and realistic than giving up and blaming it on God or our past **kamma**? We can chart and master our own destiny. Our past bad **kamma** could be a hiccup but certainly not a ‘show-stopper’ to prevent us from achieving greater heights.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem to you and your family,

Yours in the **Dhamma**,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Truly, misers fare not to heavenly realms; nor, indeed, do fools praise generosity. But the wise man rejoices in giving, and by that alone does he become happy hereafter.”

Dhammapada

Dearest Venerable,

I was very happy to obtain your e-mail address. I hope to be able to communicate with you for some time.

Question/Answer 13:

a) Did you initiate the Novitate programme in Singapore?

Ven. Mahinda started the program in Singapore. Now various other Buddhist centres are organising some too. This is wonderful as it has become popular and a great opportunity for one to reflect closely on the religion in this short Novitiate period of "detachment."

b) How would you know when is the right time for one to renounce? How would you know, if one were destined to renounce?

First of all, we must fulfill our responsibilities and duties. If we have a family, we need to ensure we have made sufficient provision for them. If our children are young, we cannot leave them for renunciation, for they need a father, and the wife needs a husband. We cannot abandon our duties to our aged parents even unless there is someone to take care of them materially and with love.

If we are single and are determined to renounce, we must make sure our responsibilities are well taken care of first. We should not run away from them. We should just try the Novitiate programme first and then live as an Eight or Ten Preceptor. Alternatively, we could live as a renunciate in a temple for a period of a year to have a feel of it. Once we

are confident, we should take up the **Sangha** Precepts and the novice ordination, the first step towards full renunciation.

When Prince **Siddhatta** (*the given name of the Prince Gotama*) decided to renounce the world, he knew his only son and wife would be taken care of in the manner befitting a royal family. He had a father and foster mother who would take good care of their daughter-in-law and grandson with the help of the royal household and they would be showered with much love and care. He was torn between two choices - to stay to give temporal happiness or to leave the palace to search for the Truth and then return to give permanent liberation to all beings, including his wife and son. He chose the latter option, and today because of the great sacrifice made by Prince **Siddhatta**, we are benefited by the gift of the **Dhamma**.

For greatness to be achieved, sacrifices need to be made. Prince **Siddhatta's** cultivation, life after life, brought him closer to the goal of Liberation and it was a matter of time before he walked that Path. It was an eventuality no **Mara** (*the Evil One*) or circumstances could prevent.

In our case, the inclination to renounce will come from within and will be gradual. We should not rush into it. In the meantime, we should focus more time in our cultivation of good speech, thoughts and bodily actions by mindfulness.

c) **I saw the book about you - a pictorial representation. I did not see any nun whom you ordained. Do you think it is necessary to be ordained to serve the world? Or could one be more effective as a layman?**

Either way is okay, as I have mentioned earlier. Please refer to my earlier answer above. Remember, there are many things we cannot do as renunciates. You need to consider this.

At times it is better to be a layperson who is active in serving others than to be a failure in the ***Sangha***. You must clearly know what you are getting yourself into and your priorities. You must not compromise your renunciation or the precepts you undertake.

d) Inequality of gender is prominent in Buddhism. Is female ordination “wasted” in that sense? I have not met any female abbot before. I have only met Venerable Mahinda. There are many nuns in the Mahayana tradition. In the Theravada tradition, there are more than 1000 nuns in Sri Lanka currently. Propagation of other religions like Christianity is more effective in this area in my opinion.

The Buddha did not discriminate against women. In fact, the ***Buddha*** was the first religious teacher in history to accord the right of a monastic community to women. He also criticised the low status accorded to women during His time when women were not even allowed to enter places of worship as they were deemed unworthy by the Indian society then.

But the sustainability of a community of nuns depends on the society that benefits from it. Cultural factors need to be considered too. The revival of the Order of Nuns in Sri Lanka was made possible because it had a historical heritage and lineage it could fall back on. That is why the unbroken tradition could be revived as it could retrace its roots through the Chinese Order of Nuns which was

started by the nuns from Sri Lanka who braved the seas many centuries ago to bring the *Bhikkhuni* (Buddhist nun) Order to China.

e) **I think the Christian methods of “spreading the Word” are more effective because:**

(1) Method of Propagation: They hold peer group Bible discussions. Just like network marketing, propagation does not solely depend on priests (as the number of priests would be insufficient). Thus, believers will hold group Bible discussions, as well as new introductory courses for anyone who might be interested. They even serve a buffet meal for introductory courses for the newcomers, which impressed me. Why do we not do something similar?

This cell group method was first introduced and used effectively by the *Buddha* but has been practised to perfection by modern Christian groups. It is a shame that today's Buddhists do not effectively use it. However, we are seeing the trend change for the positive among Buddhists too.

(2) In church, I find the setup "modern," as they do not have so many "fanciful" decorations - just a simple cross. I find it more acceptable to the younger generation as they find temples, with too many *Buddha/Bodhisattva*/deva images and paintings complicated, confusing, traditional and distracting. I have not seen a simple temple.

More Buddhist centres have adopted this too - this is what the *Buddha* wanted anyway for us to practise - simplicity and moderation. However, let us also not forget

that the temple sometimes also serves as our cultural centre too. It is because of Buddhism that some of Asia's most beautiful art and architecture is still available to us today. Buddhism breathes fresh life into culture, gives a modern meaning to it and nurtures it.

(3) I feel that Buddhism must spread from the West, similar to the spread of Christianity. The social stigma of "West is better than East" does have that influence. That is a reason why the propagation of Buddhism may be harder in the East than the West nowadays. Will foreign Buddhist monks and nuns make greater impact?

Well, in a certain way it does. Buddhism is one of the fastest-growing religions in the West. But more importantly, it is the charisma and active work of Buddhist *Sangha* and leaders in the East that should be focused on. They must have the same zeal, sense of mission and compassion as the *Buddha* had to overcome the mental block of the people. Then we can really propagate the *Dhamma*.

(4) Instead of charity fundraising efforts, why do we not have profit-oriented organisations, designated to make profits for the sole purpose of propagating the *Buddha Dhamma*. And have celestial blessing that these organisations be successful and perpetually contributing to the greatest cause.

Some Buddhist groups have begun to venture into this. But we have to be cautious not to let the means to an end, become the end in itself.

(5) There are so many temples in Singapore. Some are old and wasted, not having many devotees and activities. Can we have "mergers" for greater "strength?" Are temples necessary?

We might lose out from the gains of approach in some areas, and yes, sometimes small is beautiful. We must reach out to the people, be more friendly, more homely, etc. But sometimes you need to take into account the power of synergy, strength, etc. Temples are necessary for providing a sense of community, to have a resident or visiting monks to teach the young and the old.

(6) I do not see someone like "Mother Teresa" in Buddhist organisations.

There are so many of them around, it is just that Buddhists do not go around making big headlines about it. Take the Ven. Sheng Yen of the Tzu Chi Foundation for example. She inspires so much compassion and loving-kindness throughout the world and is a Buddhist model for organised compassion in action. They have an organised charitable network in more than 50 countries. Within Taiwan itself, they run hospitals and a medical school. And in Thailand and Sri Lanka also, Buddhist nuns are quietly serving the community in many ways.

(7) Why are Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and Tibet so ill-fated with tsunami, and "backward" from the view point of the world. I presume, with Buddhist cultivation, we should have more good *kamma* created, and hopefully better well being for all.

We need to differentiate between *kamma* and the natural happenings in the world. Even if you take the last tsunami

as an example, less than 10% of the total dead were Buddhists. In Sri Lanka, less than 15% of the dead were Buddhists. It is not good to generalise that most of the dead were from other religions, but that is the fact. Just for the record, Hurricane Katrina also wrecked havoc in a very poor section of America and Pakistan was hit by a horrible earthquake that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

But what did the Buddhists do? They went all out to help all, irrespective of race or religion. The Buddhists in Malaysia and Singapore truly rose to the occasions. The Buddhist ***Maha Vihara*** (*Main Temple*) was the largest non-governmental aid collection center for the tsunami relief effort.

We must also not forget the incredible support that the Tzu Chi Foundation gave during the crises in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the US.

We cannot equate disasters with religion. Disasters occur impartially, naturally. What is important is how we respond to them, instead of destroying nature further. And how we react to help those affected by disasters effectively and efficiently!

(8) I am very lost. I want to help the world, but I have not learned even to help myself.

We must suffuse ourselves with compassion and loving-kindness and not let events distress us to the point of grief. Compassion is a positive emotion that should spur us on to positive action. Do small acts of compassion with a big heart, slowly and steadily.

The best way to help yourself is to think well of yourself - think of all the good you have done and can do. Then go out and help others in hospitals, old folks' homes, orphanages, animal shelters, etc and lose yourself in compassion. Then you will be happy because you have no time to think of yourself!

With *metta*,

Shirley

Dear Shirley,

At the outset, greetings of peace, happiness and contentment to you.

Please find my answers to your questions above, immediately after each question.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the *Dhamma*,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Publishers' Note: *Please note that Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda's answers to the queries have been incorporated into the questions above. This has been found necessary as the questions are preceded by an observation, comment or suggestion. Further, this submission is long and varied and to follow the normal format of placing the questions and answers separately would have taken up extra space and too, such a separation would have made for poor comprehension by the reader. Question/Answer 14, which follows is similarly treated.*

Question/Answer 14:

Dear Venerable Sir,

a) **I was made to understand that each Buddhist aims to achieve *Nibbana* or salvation. However, what really happens when a person achieves *Nibbana*? Will the person continue to exist in a different plane, and will he never be reborn again? Or can the person be reborn again if he/she has done something wrong at the new plane? Further, is there any heaven and/or hell in the new plane?**

It is just like the flame of a candle. When the flame is no more, has it gone anywhere? No, it has not. It has merely extinguished but it has gone nowhere. It ceases to exist altogether. The ultimate aim of Buddhists is to attain the state of *Nibbana*. Note that it is a “state” and not a place. It is not a temporary afterlife abode such as heaven (which unfortunately is misunderstood to be an everlasting state).

Heavenly life is so long that some other religions misinterpret it as permanent, but in reality it is not. It is just like imagining a mosquito comparing itself to a human life. In the eyes of the mosquito, the average human life (about 75 years) is everlasting and permanent because it is almost equal to 1303 times the average life span of a mosquito...some thing unthinkable for the mosquito! Heaven is not permanent, and neither is hell. So why aim for a temporary abode, when we should strive for total liberation i.e. *Nibbana*.

After we have exhausted our *kamma* in the new plane, we will move on to another plane based on our *kamma*

which is stored in our consciousness and is not used up.

Nibbana is not nothingness either. This can be very confusing which is why the **Buddha** has always asked us not to ponder or try to understand something which is beyond our current state of understanding, perception or senses because it cannot be understood.

The **Buddha** used the story of explaining land to a fish in the sense of the fish's senses. Imagine the fish understanding that land is something you cannot swim in but can walk on, that it is surrounded by a body of air and not water, that there are four seasons on the land unlike the one season in the water, etc. It is certainly not fathomable to the fish. But this does not mean that land does not exist simply because a fish cannot comprehend it.

b) And is it a must to be a monk or nun to achieve salvation/attain Nibbana?

No, an ordinary layperson too could, if he or she strives hard enough to avoid all evil all the time, do good all the time and cultivate his or her mind through meditation. There are numerous stories of simple housewives who attained the highest levels of spirituality during the **Buddha's** time.

c) Can a person who has undergone only a two-week period of monkhood achieve salvation too?

The **Buddha** has said that if a person strives very hard, concentrates and his conditioning (his past good **kamma**) is right, with the right practise he could achieve salvation within a short period – even within this life.

This point is stressed in Zen Buddhism where it is said that even a murderer can gain mental purity in an instant, if he sets his mind to it. During the *Buddha's* time, *Angulimala* did it with a single phrase of advice from the Blessed One.

d) **There is one more thing about which I am in doubt. My teachers said that we only pay homage to the *Buddha* but I have seen people asking favours of the *Buddha*. Is it the right way to practise Buddhism - asking for favours?**

We pay homage to the *Buddha* for what he has taught us, i.e. the right way of transcending all labels and egos. No, we do not ask the *Buddha* for favours. But we invoke the power of truth of His Teachings, His holy disciples and the *Buddha* Himself and our good *kamma* to help us in our life's pursuits. Thank you.

Tang

Dear Tang,

Kindly look at the answers above.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the *Dhamma*,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Question 15:

Dear Ven,

Regarding the issue of losing money due to being cheated, I still feel angry when I think of it. Is it just attachment to money and also the feeling of getting cheated? May I know how to overcome that?

Do Buddhist say prayers for various reasons? Some people believe prayers have powerful impact on personal growth.

Sometimes, I am meanest to the people who are supposed to be the closest relations e.g. father, sister and brother. What is the psychology behind this?

Thank you, Venerable

Sam

Answer 15:

Dear Sam,

We must learn how to let go, detach. It is a fundamental need in going on with our lives. We cannot keep pent up anger and frustrations within us, as they will only turn into inflammable passions and emotions, which will translate into physical actions so potent, that we could even kill the other party due to our anger. However, while we are suppressing this anger we are slowly killing ourselves daily with these negative emotions.

Every time we think of this person, assume he could have

been your own father, mother, grandparent, sibling, etc in a past life. Could you hate such a person who lovingly brought you up in the past life? Thinking thus your anger changes to compassion and loving-kindness, you learn to replace anger with positive emotions. The **Buddha** says: "No greater harm could anyone do to another, than what one could do to oneself."

This is truly the case - anger causes us more pain than the person it is directed at. One good **sutta** you should chant understanding the meaning behind it (not just chanting for the sake of chanting) is the **Karaniya Metta Sutta** (*the Discourse on Loving Kindness*).

As for being mean to those close to us, it is because we take these relationships for granted. We assume we do not need to nurture, foster or enhance these relationships but take great trouble in nurturing, fostering other relationships which we deem more important. We need to foster and nurture all relationships and not take any for granted.

Another reason is attachment. We are so close to them that we expect too much of them. When Prince **Siddhatta's** son was born, he was named "**Rahula**" or "fetter" because Prince **Siddhatta** knew that his attachment could hold him back from realising his goal. We must learn to develop equanimity towards all beings alike. This does not mean we become uncaring, but recognise that our relatives are no closer to us than total strangers.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the **Dhamma**,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Question 16:

Venerable Sir,

I am happy to tell you that I handed a CD of your talk about "Buddhist Way Of Life" to my elder brother. As mentioned, he did something bad to my parents a few years back and recently something bad happened to him which caused him to lose lots of his wealth. I think he wants to fix that. I hope that what is mentioned in the CD will help him in a way to change his life for the better.

So many things to learn here. Modern Psychology suggests that humans can be classified into 16 types. But the **Buddha** divided humans into 64 types and explained in more detail about the mind.

I plan to do my own study and research about this topic and use them in my work life. I think this is an important topic. I know so many Buddhists in the office and for them, Buddhism is only applicable in the temple. Since many lay people spend almost half of our life working in the office, can the **Buddha Dhamma** be applied there? Can it help them in their daily work and to achieve the goal?

Many find it hard to change as they think that they need to renounce the world straight away in order to learn the **Buddha's** Teachings. Those who do not understand may run away as the changes in their life will be so big. Many are still not aware we could apply the **Buddha's** Teachings everywhere and one of the most common areas is the working life.

A few **Suttas** and books I am using in my study are:

1. **Sigalovada Sutta**
2. **Mangala Sutta**
3. The **Abhidhamma** (*the Doctrine Pure and Simple*)
4. The Buddhist Way Of Life (Your Book)
5. Is It Wrong To Be Ambitious? (Your Book)
6. How To Practise Buddhism? (Your Book)

Hope I could have some suggestions from you. Also, I'm not sure if this sharing with others will come true or not. As a **Dhamma** student, I still have many things to learn.

Sadhu (*Excellent*), **Sadhu**, **Sadhu**

Leo

Answer 16:

Dear Leo,

If Buddhism is only applicable at the temple, would not our lives as Buddhists be a life of hypocrisy? Neither is Buddhism applicable for the monks and nuns in the temples only. It certainly is not. It is vibrant and alive for all Buddhists.

Why are so many Westerners turning to Buddhism? If it cannot help them in their life, their work, etc - they would have stayed away from it. As mentioned some time ago, Buddhism is to be lived. It is to be lived at home and at the work place - in fact, everywhere, anytime and all the time. We must live Buddhism mindfully, with forbearance and the joy of not harming others and oneself and the joy of bringing happiness to oneself and others.

We can live as fulfilling Buddhists in so many ways – a kind word here, a smile there, a donation to a beggar, a visit to a stranger in a hospital, etc. Live your Buddhism, it is the way to make yourself and others happy.

You are on the right track.

Yours in the ***Dhamma***,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Wonderful, indeed, it is to subdue the mind, so difficult to subdue, ever swift, and seizing whatever it desires. A tamed mind brings happiness.”

Dhammapada

“Neither mother, father, nor any other relative can do one greater good than one’s own well-directed mind.”

Dhammapada

“Irrigators regulate the waters; fletchers straighten the arrow shaft; carpenters shape the wood; the wise control themselves.”

Dhammapada

Question 17:

Dear Ven. Sri Dhammananda,

I have but one simple question: What is your position on the growing number of lay people who are not monastics but call themselves Buddhist 'reverends' or 'priests'?

Everything I have read in the *suttas* indicate you are either a lay person or a monk, nothing else. I appreciate you taking the time to address this question and look forward to hearing from you.

With *metta*,

David

Answer 17:

Dear David,

Such developments may have happened due to certain conditions in a country and thus you have a semi-monk. But such a person is not in the true sense a monk as he has not fulfilled the requirements of the *Vinaya*. The ordination comes down from the time of the *Buddha* Himself and it has a tremendous spiritual significance.

There are clear guidelines differentiating the laity from the monastics. Mixing them will compromise one's practice. Of course, they would be a step better compared to the laity in opportunities available for their spiritual practise but they would not enjoy the benefits due to a monk.

Fundamentally, even within the monastic community there is already a degeneration among a minority. Monks

today own cars, property, etc and this is against the Teachings of the **Buddha**. As the **Buddha** explained, such a person may appear to be a monk, but is not one in reality and in practise. Thus, they do not represent what the robe stands for.

They are like that lay Buddhist mentioned earlier (or even lower) because if that lay Buddhist has a higher level of spiritual practice, is a celibate or a meditator, they are even at a higher level of spirituality compared to the person donning the saffron robe who is only one in name but not in practise. One such celebrated lay Buddhist was the **Anagarika** (*lay follower who observes the Ten Precepts*) Dharmapala. It was due to his efforts that Buddhism regained many of the important places of pilgrimage in India and he also set up the very active **Maha Bodhi** (*the tree under which the **Buddha** attained Enlightenment*) Society in India.

It is difficult to give a generalisation, but at times parental objections need to be considered. The parents may have not given approval to renounce but allowed the individual to be a homeless one who keeps to the Eight precepts, dedicated to the cause of the religion, short of ordination and, of course, minus the full-fledged monk's robes.

Finally, I agree with you that taking on titles like 'reverend' or 'priest' mean nothing when there is no inner purity. There is an amusing story of a donkey which wore a tiger skin and terrified all the people in the village. One day he forgot himself and brayed like a donkey. He gave himself away and received a thorough beating. Similar undeserving people can fool some of the people some of the time but certainly not all of the people all of the time.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the **Dhamma**,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

GLOSSARY

All **Pali** words in this booklet are in **bold italicised** type and where the **Pali** word first appears in the text, a brief contextual meaning is given in parenthesis. This Glossary of all the **Pali** words used is **arranged in alphabetical order** followed by their meaning/s in English.

Abhidhamma – *theory of the Doctrine; the Doctrine classified; the Doctrine pure and simple*

Adiya Sutta – *Discourse on the Benefits to be Gained from Wealth*

Ahbing Nyeyang Ahbing Nytang – *“I understand everything to be understood in this World”*

Anagarika – *lay Buddhist who observes the Ten Precepts*

Anguttara Nikaya – *component of the Buddhist Canon (the fourth part of the Sutta Pitaka in the Pali scriptures)*

Bahava Cebanche Bahabetang – *“I have practised all the good qualities, the Ten Perfections”*

Bhaddekarattha Sutta – *Discourse on the Ideal Lover of Solitude*

Bhante – *Venerable Sir*

Bhikkhuni – *Buddhist nun; female renunciate*

Bodhisatta – *one who has passed through many previous existences and stages of spiritual development and is in the last birth in which he attains his great destiny to become the Buddha*

Brahmin – *member of the highest caste (who form the priestly class) in the Hindu Brahminal system*

Buddha – *the Enlightened One; the Awakened One*

Dasa Dhamma Raja – *Ten Principles of Good Governance or kingship*

Dayaka Sabha – *society of lay devotees*

Deva/s – *celestial being/s*

Dhajagga Sutta – *Discourse on the Top of the Standard (Banner Protection)*

Dhamma – *the Truth; the true nature; reality; the Teachings of the Buddha*

Dhammacakkapavātana Sutta – *Turning of the Wheel of Righteousness Discourse*

Dhammapada – *a line or stanza from the Buddha's Teachings*

Dighajanu Sutta – *Discourse on the Conditions of Welfare*

Dona Sutta – *Discourse with Dona*

Gandhabba – *the life-force that is waiting to be born*

Gotama – *the family name (surname) of Prince Siddhatta*

Kalama Sutta – *Discourse to the Kalamas on freedom of thought, intellectual honesty and integrity*

Kamma – *volitional kusala (wholesome) or akusala (unwholesome) action*

Kappiya – *a lay person who assists a monk*

Karaniya Metta Sutta – *Discourse on Loving Kindness*

Maha Bodhi – *literally, the "Great Bodhi," the sacred Bodhi Tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment*

Maha Vihara – *main/principal temple/shrine/monastery*

Mangala Sutta – *Discourse on Blessings*

Mahayana – *southern tradition of Buddhism popular in China and North-East Asia*

Manjusri – *a Bodhisatta of the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions associated with wisdom, doctrine and awareness*

Mantra – *invocation chanted (usually in Hinduism) for protection and favours by the gods*

Mara – *the Evil One*

Metta – *loving-kindness; boundless love; the sincere wish for others' safety and happiness*

Manussa - *humans*

Naga – *demonic creatures e.g. dragons, serpents from the celestial worlds*

Nalagiri – *the elephant intoxicated by Devadatta to trample the Buddha*

Nibbana – *the ultimate emancipation/freedom/liberation*

Pahadabang Pahanang Me – *"I have eradicated all evil thoughts"*

Pali – *ancient Indian dialect spoken by the Buddha*

Parabhava Sutta – *Discourse on Downfall*

Paritta – *protective Suttas/recitations chanted to ward off evil Piruwana*

Puja – *offerings*

Rahula – *Prince Siddhatta's son; the name itself means "fetter"*

Ratana Sutta – *"Discourse on the Jewels," a popular paritta recited to avert evil forces*

Sadhu - *Excellent*

Samsara – *the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth*

Sangha – *the community of followers; also, Maha Sangha - the Noble Ones i.e. Buddhist monks, nuns and renunciates*

Sangham Saranam Gacchami – *I go to the Sangha as my refuge*

Sanskrit – *classical liturgical language of the Indian sub-continent used in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism*

Siddhatta – *the given name (meaning "wish fulfilled") of the Prince Gotama*

Sigalovada Sutta – *Discourse on the Duties and Responsibilities of Lay Persons*

Sutta – *discourse in the Buddhist canonical texts*

Tasma Buddho Subramanna – *"Therefore, I am called the Buddha"*

Theravada – *orthodox Buddhist tradition based on the Pali Canon as practised in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, etc; literally, "Tradition of the Elders"*

Vajrayana – *Tantric / Tibetan Buddhist traditions*

Vinaya – *the Discipline Code for the Sangha*

Yakkha – *evil spirit*

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