



## Precious Human Birth

*Summary of a talk given by the Venerable Ananda Mangala at the Victorian Buddhist Society, Australia, 21 February 1982.*

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The Venerable is the Spiritual Director of the Buddha-Yana Organisation of Singapore. It is a key objective of the Singapore Buddha-Yana Organisation to propagate Buddhism among the youth of Singapore. It aims to promote the study of Buddha from a non-sectarian angle without any racial or national or foreign bias. The Venerable Ananda Mangala is a moving light behind the Singapore Buddha-Yana Organisation (S.B.Y.O). The S.B.Y.O. Publication, The Young Buddhist, 1979, setting out its full aims and objectives is available at the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Library.

With the permission of my Elder, Venerable Shanti Bhadra, and dear seekers of the Dharmas, let me just express my deepest gratitude for giving me this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts. Some may be comforting, some may be very provocative, and some may be very controversial, because it is not my intention to beat around the bush, but to go right on to the dot, even critically, of the Dharma itself.

Awareness: Mindfulness is like a magic word, like an impossible word, and I want you to really tell me yourself there is nothing unusual about this. There is nothing mystical or hidden about it. It is something which you and I have grown within our pure, simple human living.

Awareness: In everything that we do, whatever we do, we exercise this unique, inherent, existing faculty called awareness. But it is mechanistic; we exist in it, but when you really become alive to it, then only it really fashions out with full strength, and you become part of it.

Now to come to a point of a multi-religious concept of it. Religions have confused people more than anything in the world. Religions have had the exclusive copyrights to heaven, or life thereafter. Each religion claims the copyright. That is a shame. Nobody has copyright. We are all copycats.

What does religion say? What part do you play? They seem to all try to create an awareness that we are basically very ignorant people, and they try to educate us, and each religion seems to say - if you follow their way, you succeed. If you follow the other way, you go to damnation.

The Buddha: I see him as a unique man; I respect him because he is a man; I respect him because he is showing me the way. I respect him because he is certainly the wisest man I have known.

The Dharma I respect, not because of any comparative study, it fits to my temperament; it has the freedom of inquiry; it is unafraid of questioning; and it is not a gullible religion. It is a religion of enormous reason and freedom. It does not introduce fear and guilt. It is a courageous, daring approach to living.

What did the wise man say? What did he say? What all wise men have said. Avoid evil, do good. Look, this is the theme of all religions. To grow in awareness, in relation to avoidance of evil, and the cultivation of good. Now, comparatively, what does this mean to us? To me in particular, or to you in particular, are you aware, really aware: are you committed to this awareness that you should avoid evil and perform good? Are you aware where you stand in this, or is it utter hypocrisy? Or just make-believe, just an utterance, or ritual, or a social labour, or living in semantics?

Are you aware? Have you let your awareness grow to the enormous fact of cause and effect?

Are you really committed, are you really aware, are you really mindful, do you get elated when you utilise your personality? When thoughts arise in you, do you reflect, do you inquire, have you got the skill mindfully with awareness to channel it in speech or deed to a point where you cultivate goodness.

Now be aware of this truth. When we accept the concept of as we sow, so we reap, this is Buddha-Dharma, and this is Christianity too. It is in the Gospels. Do we act accordingly? Do you know if you sow greed, what will you reap? Greed. If you sow hatred, what will you reap? Hatred. If you sow delusion, what will you reap? Delusion.

Because of greed, because of hatred, because of delusion, man kills, man steals, man commits adultery, and speaks false. Are you aware of this? When you lack the quality of sharing, when you lack the quality of love, then hatred arises. When you lack the quality of analysis, investigation, study, scrutinisation, not gullibility, if you use these there is no delusion, but if you do not utilize these you are a totally deluded person.

All religions say do not kill. Kill who? Christians say do not kill human beings. Well, not bad. Cultured, excellent I would say. Buddhists consider all life in all forms is to be protected. Therefore, the degree of awareness and the cultivation of good is certainly excellent in the Buddha-Dharma. The awareness of the cultivation of good in other religions is certainly good.

I do not think in the history of Buddhist religion, of Buddhist philosophy that we praise or bless wars. Wars arise because of greed, hatred, delusion. It is a collective commitment of

avoiding good and cultivating evil. The only holy war we know is the war within us. But there is no other war. Just the unique struggle of Mara within us, and there is no other Mara.

When you are trained as a Catholic priest, you are well trained to protect life. In the training of a Buddhist monk he is not allowed to keep a weapon with him at all. He has been advised, he has been shown the way, he has been told, he is made to grow in awareness "I shall not keep a weapon". Therefore there is no weapon. The only weapon he has is the weapon of cultivation of mindfulness, metta (loving kindness) and karuna (compassion). Cultivation of mudita (sympathetic joy) and upekkha (equanimity). But these are the cultivations, positive cultivations to meet the negativity of evil. Evil is negative, but goodness is non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion.

Next point - theft. Because of greed, because of hate, because of delusion man kills, man steals. It is a dynamic commitment. In other words: we Buddhists must be uniquely good.

There is a very nice story I will tell you; a Christian story - a very nice story. There was a Catholic priest in Italy who was in love with two beautiful princesses. And when he had gone on a long journey, one of the princesses died, and he returned to Rome to find that she was buried. He was very keen to behold that beautiful face that inspired him to romantic love, and then they exhumed the body to see that pretty face. And there he found her; decay had set in, decomposition had set in, the beauty was just a fleeting moment of time. Blood was oozing out, worms around the eyes and everywhere, and he just shuddered. "Get rid of it!" forgetting that in the rest of the world there were still beautiful women - one of them was still waiting - ran away to a monastery and became a monk.

After several years he chose to go back and see his family, and he came across this other beautiful princess still waiting. When he went there he was received with a great lot of praise and joy, she was beaming with smiles, there was love in her eyes. "Come in, Sir. Please come in, Oh lovely one". And he walked, and then he started saying "I have not stopped yearning for you, needing you, wanting you. I love you. I love you so much". Then he looked around, this priest, looked around really well and then whispered "Shhh... Don't make a noise". She took him to the inner chamber and then again she started the beautiful privilege of a woman to entice, entrap a man. And she excelled in it. It was a privilege of a woman . There was nothing to be ashamed about it. A privilege; nobody can take it away from her. Again this monk looked around and said "Shhh". She took the keys of the jewellery chamber, opened the chamber and asked him to get in. Then he locked the jewellery chamber. Now they are all alone. And the priest looked, with utter shock, amazement, but yet feeling a sense of joy in seeing beauty, seeing form, seeing attraction. Again he looked around him "Shhh". And then she asked "Why?". "God sees, God hears". And this princess became a nun.

Now I want you to be very aware of this. This is the uniqueness of faith, you believe in God, for heaven's sake, just behave this way: "He sees and hears you".

Now the message for us is this: you and I believe in the law of karma, the law of cause and

effect, and how leisurely, lously, lacking awareness, lacking alertness, purely existing in the mechanism of existence, never becoming alive to the fact of realities of the consequences of what you sow. And we sow evil, and we reap evil; we cease to sow good and we therefore cease to reap good. The law of cause and effect.

If each of us has the strength of awareness, not the gullibility of just talking of it, the realistic approach, absolute faith, you really believe. You are convinced in this particular conviction in the mind of a Buddhist, the total awareness, non-distracted, total awareness. Just as much, you know, when you put money in the bank, it gains interest. If you take your money out and spend it you are finished. This is what I would like you do, to recognise in awareness.

Because I feel that there are non-Buddhists here, I have talked to you rather about the Christians and the Muslims. It is just to arouse an awareness, but I love them all.

Now the important factor with awareness, with growing awareness, with alertness, recognise you are responsible, absolutely responsible too. Your process, your nature in these two levels. And what is your task there? With awareness, bring about a synthesis, bring out an integration, make it productive in the terms of investment, assets, positivity. Avoid evil, avoid negativity.

At least observe the five precepts. Do not steal, do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not speak falsely, are themselves in the Ten Commandments. Now the Buddhist must have a greater comprehension, a psychological comprehension of it. No compromise on sociological reasons. And intoxication is the fifth precept. Which is not common. To be intoxicated. Those who do not do this thing, they are observing the precept. Please cultivate this. Let your basis first be proper, proper, thoroughly proper. Avoidance of evil, doing of good must be your exercise. Do not be a bluffer, do not go into the field of hallucination.

All religions observe, all religions meditate. All talk of meditation. Look within you. The areas to rectify. Your doing of good. Is it motivated in the terms of anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering), anatta (no-self), or nicca (permanence), sukha (bliss), atta (self)? That is the exercise. That is the vipassana (insight) in this field. But I ask you know, in the terms of the Dharma, do you hear within you, can you spend time within you, are you that one who says "All this world in mine?" That is in depth knowledge of awareness.

My satippanna is to gain the inherent, inborn areas where you could see the fate, the consequences of all things conditioned, created, originated. Where you could see, feel, sense, articulate. All that is conditioned is miserable, miserable dukkha; also, the continuity without an entity.

This is what is called awareness. The more you go into awareness, that is what it is. We are able to do good, avoid evil. Nama rupa (name and form) comes in. Are you able totally to grasp, to transcend causation? Are you able to transcend conditionality? That is the Dharma. For all religions talk of heaven and hell. All the religions talk of the beauty of the viharas.

Now for instance: from the kamma loka, from the sensual realm when we meditate, we enter the rupa loka, the form realm. And from the form realm we enter into the arupa loka, the formless realm. All these are achievements.

The Buddha says they are noble, dignified. They are noble indeed, not vulgar, not coarse. But useless is the word. Now till you realise this, you are still disabled. So other meditations have a unique transcendence. As a matter of fact, those of you who have received my magazine, "The Young Buddhist", I wish you to read that article of mine, "Buddhism begins where other religions end". We go with every other religion in many ways, and it is at this point we really begin. From now on you really become a Buddhist. So vipassana, that is, satippanna, is what assists you to gaining to that inner level of the Dharma.

In the Catholic Church where I became a mystic of the Catholic Church, from the kamma loka, I had the privilege to go through, to enter what is called "The might of the senses" and enter the state of mysticism. Then there is another transcendence that is called "the might of the soul".

This is the reward of going through the "might of the senses". The might of the senses is really a very harrowing battle of Mara - Mara of sensuality, and what is called the "might of the sword". There arose in me a unique situation: the arupa loka. There was no form at all. The beautiful gold disappeared, the angels disappeared, all was blank, empty, totally empty.

In this situation there arose in me an awareness which I could not accommodate. For why, when I declared this to my teacher, my revered superior of the Catholic religion - I was a Trappist monk - he told me, "Son, prostrate thyself before the throne of God, and say "Lord that I may see, Lord that I may understand". Most faithfully, with every possible level I had, I met these forces of Mara, but I could not. Everything was empty. Then I asked my teacher, "Why must I do this exercise? Is this not a psychological way of reintroducing into your mind what has already passed away like a passing parade?" It is in this crisis I left the Catholic Church.

But up to this point, I owe it to the Church. I owe it to the Christian training, my strength, my vigour, even now as a Buddhist monk. No question about it. I find I have not lost anything. Not that I love Christ less, Oh no, I love him, but I love Buddha more. And I say, not that I love Christ less, but I love the Wise One more. Why? Now I would compare Christ and Buddha in this moment. I must compare them at a point of wisdom. Christ was a holy person. Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, knowing Lazarus would die one day. By comparison Buddha sent a woman whose baby had died for a house which had not known death. She found death was inevitable, and stopped grieving. Therefore I call the Buddha not just Holy, but absolutely wise. Holy was Christ, no doubt, happy event it was, but in the second sequence you shall know there was no wisdom. Not that I love Christ less, but I choose wisdom.

Now I come to Buddha again. Buddha was moving along and found among his monks one

who was dirty and sick with no-one attending him. He called the monks; nobody came. He carried the monk, put him at a higher level, washed him, cleaned him, clothed him, and then he called after the monks, and said, "Oh monks, if you do not look after yourself, who would look after you?" And then he said those beautiful words "Those who tend the sick, tend me".

So strengthen yourself, tend the sick. What does it mean? Look at every person as a Buddha to be, a Bodhisattva; a crawling, creeping worm, yet someday destined to be a Buddha. Cultivate this spirit of love, feeling love, knowing love. Act upon it, for when you are tending the sick, you tend the Buddha. Do you see this Buddha in everybody? Those who avoid evil, do good, they are the Buddhists. That is not a religion. It is a commitment and a doing.

You see that sick man in the hospital. You think lunatics are in the hospital. There are more lunatics outside the hospital than in the hospital, and there are many sick people not in the hospital. The whole bunch of us are sick. Sick with our greed, our racism, our hatred, and a variety of delusions. the whole world, lots of people are starving. When you lift your heart to those who tend the sick, you see life in a better perspective. Millions of people are starving, millions of people are without homes. Fortunately I have a place to stay, this one meal a day. Happy. This is then to tend the sick, those who are emotionally sick. Have you shunned bad people? The drug addicts? The lesbians and homosexuals? Ridiculous, arrogant hypocrites. Where is your compassion? They need you. Tend the sick. They need your love, your compassion, your understanding. Ask yourself, have you got karuna? There can be a miser being a meditator, thinking he has achieved. He must give, distribute, set out to tend the sick, knowing that he tends the Buddha. So this is a provocative thought I have given you. I have only shaken you up to be alerted, not to deny, not to deprive you of the wealth of the Dharma, but to make you more aware.

## References

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"The gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts".