

## *Saffron & Green in the Clear Forest Pool*

### **The Environmental Practices of American Buddhist Monastic Communities:**

A Reflection on the Four Noble Truths & Right Effort  
for Revealing, Clarifying and Righting  
Bad Practices Hidden or Justified by Ideology

*Tathālokā Bhikkhunī*

#### **Introduction**

##### *Our Task*

The Buddhist monastic community is founded upon and well endowed with effective practices of honest self-reflection and introspection, an eye for the inter-relatedness of conditions that lead to either our harm or welfare, and a heart of great and compassionate caring sensitivity for humanity and all living beings. We seem well-equipped for this task that we are now called to. Yet answers to the question that has been posed, of what “bad practices” there might be in Buddhism and in our American Buddhist monastic communities—hidden or justified by ideology—are not widely known here. They have neither been readily apparent nor quickly and easily forthcoming. Uncovering them has required a good amount of effort.

Still, the task seems both a noble and an urgent one. In fact, it is a task called for within the Noble Eightfold Path itself in the very definition of the Noble Path-factor of Right Effort. Seeing this, we have gladly undertaken this reflective work as an important part of our Buddhist practice; a truly essential part of the Path taught by the Buddha that we as Buddhist monastics have dedicated our hearts and lives’ energy to.

From the beginning it has seemed that the working methodology proposed for Gethsemani III is very much in accordance with the effective methodology of Right Effort as taught by the Buddha. This is greatly appreciated and we believe that this bodes well for both the process and the outcome. This paper will also follow the framework of the Four Noble Truths, with an emphasis on Right Effort within the Path of Practice.

##### *A Look at the Matrix*

For those who may not yet be completely fluent with the matrix and directives of the Four Noble Truths and the crucial fourfold practice of Right Effort that appears in the Fourth Truth within the Noble Eightfold Path, we will lay them out briefly here. (Please feel free to skip over this part if you already completely knowledgeable of it.)

For the sake of familiarity, Right Effort, or *Sammā Vāyamo* in the Pali-language, is also known by slightly varying names including Wise Endeavor and Right Striving. Right Effort is what all practicing Buddhists are supposed to apply our energies to, by definition, diligently, vigilantly, valiantly, persistently and energetically.

Within the circular wheel illustrating the Noble Eightfold Path, on the one hand, Right Effort is related to Right & Wise Livelihood. Right Livelihood is informed by Right View and then enacted in our intentions, thoughts, words and deeds. On the other hand, Right Effort is intimately related to and dependent upon Right Mindfulness and Recollection, Clear Comprehension and Full Awareness or Presence.

Thus, we will begin here by examining our views and intentions as they have been informed by Buddhist ideology, as that is the underlying motivation for our livelihood and our efforts in every aspect of our lives. But first, how Right Effort works.

The operative scheme of Right Effort is fourfold. In all cases the monastic (or lay) practitioner is guided by the Buddha to:

“Generate desire, endeavor, activate persistence, uphold and exert our intent for...

- (1) ...the non-arising of whatever evil, unskillful qualities have not yet arisen
- (2) ...the reduction and cessation of whatever evil, unskillful qualities have arisen
- (3) ...causing the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen
- (4) ...the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development and culmination of skillful qualities that have already arisen.”

The “Evil” and “unskillful”-- in Pali *papa* and *akusala* -- are generally defined as that which causes short or long-term harm, detriment or suffering to us or others. These are the ‘bad practices’ that we are looking out for. “Others” do not only mean our fellow humans but also all other forms of life. The opposite, “skillful”—in Pali *kusala*— is generally defined as those good and wholesome thoughts, words or actions which lead to short and long-term wellbeing, peace and happiness for ourselves and for others, again not only for our fellow human beings, but for all forms of life.

This is the basic operating framework of Right Effort. It assumes the development of the primary path factor of Right View; that is, knowledge relating to cause and effect, in order to have an understanding of what is evil and what is skillful. It also assumes the development of both mindfulness and clear awareness related to context; that is, what will be right, wise, wholesome and skillful to do in a particular situation according to time, place and person.

In this teaching—the basic foundational doctrine of all schools of Buddhism—we cannot fault the Buddha for what those who identify themselves as Buddhists and as Buddhist monastics, both Western and Eastern, may have done related to our local and global environment and welfare. To my thought, the doctrinal teaching itself is perfect. It is for us to understand, and as the Buddha taught us, to put into action—to make right and wise effort and *strive* to put into action.

And yet, despite the fact that it clearly and skillfully covers the ground of what most all of us would like to do all the time anyway — reduce and eliminate the bad and perpetuate the good — Right Effort is perhaps the most widely unknown and most prevalently misunderstood of all of the basic Buddhist teachings in America today, both amidst the general populace, as well as within the Buddhist community. We will look more into why I say this below.

### *Personal and Social Responsibility*

Despite challenging identifiability, the number of Buddhists in the United States, amongst the 350 to 500 million Buddhists worldwide, was estimated by the US State Department at 5.6 million persons in 2004. The numbers place Buddhism as third amongst faiths in America, following Christianity and Judaism. The numbers of mixed Christian-Buddhists, Jew-Bu's (Jewish Buddhists) and U-Bu's (Unitarian Universalist Buddhists) are also truly substantial. And the number of Buddhist monastics and monastic communities in the West is slowly but steadily on the rise. Thus, we as Buddhists in America cannot and should not say that we have not participated or are not participating in and contributing to our world's environmental situation. We are not simply passive observers or ineffective participants. Rather every thought, word and act of each one of us contributes to the whole; our vote in what our world is and what it becomes. Our choices make a difference. This environmental situation is now being more and more widely recognized as one of present and predictable long-term harm for each of us individually and for our human society as a whole. And we are active and important participants, no matter how passive or inconsequential we imagine our role to be.

*Heedfulness is the path to the Deathless; heedlessness is the path to Death.  
The heedful do not die; the heedless are as if already dead.  
Distinctly understanding this, the wise rejoice in heedfulness,  
delighting in this resort of the Holy Ones.<sup>1</sup>*

-- the Buddha, *Dhammapada* vv 21-22

## **Opening the Question for Introspection**

### *Raising Consciousness*

It seemed appropriate to raise consciousness of the question of "Are there bad practices hidden or justified by Buddhist ideology in our American Buddhist monastic communities related to the environment?" within our greater Buddhist community, both for its own sake, as well as to gain perspective on the subject in preparation for Gethsemane III. Thus, in April of 2008, I broached this question to Insight Forum, an e-network of several thousand Buddhists in our San Francisco Bay Area, as well as to a number of contemplative Western and Eastern Buddhist monastic friends and

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Island* (86): [http://media.audiodharma.org/documents/2009-10-31\\_NibannaTheIsland.pdf](http://media.audiodharma.org/documents/2009-10-31_NibannaTheIsland.pdf) . Based upon the Venerable Balangoda Ananada Maitreya's translation of *The Dhammapada*, Parallax Press/Metta Foundation (1995)

mentors around the world. Having been informed by this process, this paper will represent not only my own personal thoughts and the Buddha’s teaching on the subject, but the collective responses of both Buddhist monastics and lay Buddhist practitioners, our neighbors who see us within our local community as well as those who see us from far away and in our role within the greater global context.

### *The Response*

Responses to this question have largely fallen into two categories which roughly correspond to the *Hidden* and the *Justified by Ideology* in the question above. The first category, worked with here in “Part I” is related to a widespread superficial or incomplete understanding which becomes a misunderstanding within society related to what the Buddha actually taught. This first category relates to underlying views and thus intentions that motivate apathy, disempowerment, complacency, withdrawal and non-action—a grouping of words regularly associated with a “bad” in Buddhist Doctrine—the classical hindrance or *nīvaraṇa* of sloth and torpor. The vast majority of contemplative responses touched on points within this grouping, this category. It was estimated by responding Buddhists that such views were prevalent amongst non-Buddhist Americans regarding the little that they know of Buddhists and the Buddha’s Dhamma.

The second category relates to aspects of the Buddha’s teaching being followed or interpreted by the Buddhist monastic community in ways and contexts that might be considered environmentally questionable or even dubious—teachings and practices perhaps being used wrongly, out of context, or being used with an eye to only a part of the bigger picture. This second aspect is more related to specific active expressions of, or manifestations of Buddhist Doctrine in the actions and livelihood of the monastic community.

We will begin with the underlying root views in Part I, as it is the views that inform the intentions, motivations, thoughts, and actions—actually informing everything we may be dealing with in either more subtle or blatant ways. Then, in the second part of the paper we will move into laying out, reflecting upon and investigating the particular behaviors in the life and livelihood of the monastic Sangha in some locations that have been brought into question.

## **PART I ~ the Underlying Views and Intentions that Move Us**

### *Misunderstandings*

As misunderstanding is considered in the Buddha’s teaching to be at the root of all of our problems, it is not surprising that we would find misunderstandings underlying a subject that has been identified as being problematic, or in need of introspection and wise working with. And out of misunderstandings arise misrepresentations.

The Venerable Ajahn Pasanno, Co-Abbot of Abhayagiri Forest Monastery and environmental activist within the Thai Buddhist Forest Tradition, in response to the question posed here has written:

*‘What comes up are the themes of misrepresenting the teachings and intention of the Buddha through such things as equanimity being seen as indifference, relinquishing of desire as an excuse for non-action, karma being interpreted as everybody deserves what they get so why do anything about it, contentment being used as a reason for complacency.’<sup>2</sup>*

### *Apathy, Indifference and Complacency*

The first and most prevalent misunderstanding that has repeatedly come to light is related to the most fundamental teaching in Buddhism mentioned above, that of the Four Noble Truths. As expressed by one adult child of a Buddhist parent here on the day of this writing, there is the view that “life is suffering” and the cause of that suffering is attachment. He had understood that since suffering is the essential nature of things all that is to be done is to abandon it and let it go. Thus he was ready to give up on life and the world as hopeless & fatally flawed. Everything being impermanent, he was ready to “blow it off.” Such views can make persons whose lives are informed by them inactive, complacent and apathetic, negative—even depressed—unable to act effectively for their own welfare or that of their society and world. Is this really the Buddha’s teaching?

### *Renunciation*

Let us take a look at disenchantment, renunciation and release related to the world in the Teaching. It is true that in the Third Noble Truth of the Ending of Suffering the Buddha says:

“This monks, is the Noble Truth of the Ending of Suffering: the remainderless fading away and stopping, renunciation, relinquishment, release and letting go of that very craving; [that is, craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming and craving for non-becoming].”<sup>3</sup>

It is these opposing extremes of “craving”—*taṇhā*—which literally means “hunger” or “thirst;” *bhava taṇhā*--wanting to get, be and become the liked, *vibhava taṇhā*—wanting to get rid of the disliked, that the Middle Way stands free and clear of. The types of *taṇhā* are expressed as the two extremes to be avoided: as our consuming/consumptive tendencies related to the world, our own bodies and minds and each other on the one hand, and our destructive, negating and world- and self-hating tendencies on the other.

Additionally, in the second teaching, the *Anattalakkhaṇa* “Characteristics of Non-self” *Sutta*, we find:

---

<sup>2</sup> Personal email correspondence (2008)

<sup>3</sup> *A Chanting Guide* (45): <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/dhammadayut/chanting.pdf>

“The instructed noble disciple grows disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with feelings...disenchanted he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion he is released. With release there is the knowledge of freedom and he discerns that [future re-]birth is exhausted, the Holy Life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.”<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that disenchantment and dispassion here are rightly an absence of enchantment, delusion, intoxication and passion related to both greed/lust and hatred.

### *Living the Way*

Thus the ideas above expressed by the Buddhist’s son are superficially based upon the Four Noble Truths and the teaching of non-self in Buddhism. But it is an incomplete understanding missing key elements as well as the culminating effective discovery of the Buddha’s enlightenment, *the Middle Way*—the Truth of the Path of Practice—the Noble Eightfold Path mentioned above. And at the end of the aforementioned *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, we find the group of the first five *bhikkhus*—rather than becoming depressed—delighted, uplifted and then, “through lack of clinging, utterly and completely released from the cankers, the defilements of the heart & mind. There were then six *arabants* in the world.”

The Four Noble Truths contain the key functional elements of the paradigmatic shift that the Buddha experienced during his awakening and expressed in his first teaching. This new paradigm that became the matrix for his entire teaching and path may be rightly summarized as: suffering is to be understood—thoroughly comprehended, the causes of suffering are to be abandoned or discontinued, the ending of suffering is to be realized and experienced, and there is a Path to do so—which is to be developed. Here, “suffering” or *dukkha* relates to the problem, trouble or dis-ease, a state of imbalance and stress—whether major or minor, internal or external, personal or global.

Through lack of knowledge or understanding, and through covering only the first one, two or three of the Four Noble Truths, the effective, proactive Fourth Truth of the Path of Practice, which the Buddha spoke of in his very first teaching *Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma* as “to be developed” can get utterly blindsided. This is a great loss for those not yet completely enlightened. Blindsiding the Path of Practice, the Noble Truth of the actual realization and experience of the Truth of the End of Suffering also gets forgotten or even negated, as without the cultivation and development of the Path, the ending of suffering may rarely be actually realized or knowingly experienced.

When this happens, people begin to place their hopes upon the ending of suffering happening in some other imagined place and time, such as after death in another more wonderful dimension, rather than here and now, in this very life, in our own world. These ideas can make people feel disempowered or incapable in the present, rather than affirmed and empowered in what we are able and capable as human beings of

---

<sup>4</sup> *A Chanting Guide* (60): <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/dhammadayut/chanting.pdf>

cultivating, developing and finding fulfillment in for our own benefit and happiness and that of our world. According to classical Buddhist teaching it is this world, our world, that is the ideal environment for enlightenment. Thus, within the very first teaching we find:

“Vision arose, knowing arose, wisdom arose, understanding arose, and light arose within me regarding things never heard before: This Noble Truth of the Path of Practice leading to the end of suffering is to be developed.”

-- The Buddha, *Dhamma-cakkappavattana Sutta*<sup>5</sup>

After saying that the Path is to be developed, the Buddha goes on to say that for himself that Path has been fully developed to its completion. His very setting forth to give the first teaching was based upon his seeing that there are those in this world “with little dust in their eyes,” able to see, know, understand, practice and realize this Path as he himself had. The truth of this supposition is then proven with the enlightenment of his companions that occurred during the speaking of the first teaching, with its practice and with its fruition in the second teaching (both quoted in part above), proving that not only the Buddha, but other human beings as well were able to realize and fulfill the Path, not only partially, but completely.

This then is the right basis of Buddhist faith and optimism. That we of humanity have such ability, and that this is what the Buddha compassionately taught for—for us to also use the Path and experience the fruits of the practice.

### *Purifying the Heart of Defilement*

Of course, there is the time to put aside all concerns of past and future and to focus the mind solely upon what is here and now, for burning through the hindrances, for purifying and elevating the mind and heart, for looking deeply into the nature of things, and for knowing the freedom of release. Thus we find:

“Here monks, a monk abides in contemplation [of the 4 foundations], ardent, alert and mindful, having put aside greed and distress for the world...[until] mindfulness is established in him, just enough for knowledge and only awareness, he abides with independence, not clinging to anything in the world... [Then] detached from greed and sense desires, detached from unskillful mental states thoughtfully he enters the first *jhāna* born of tranquility, filled with delight and joy; he enters the second *jhāna*, without thinking, born of *samādhī* filled with delight and joy; and with the fading of delight, remaining calm, mindful and clearly aware, experiencing joy he enters the third *jhāna*; giving up pleasure and pain, he enters the fourth *jhāna* beyond pleasure and pain, purified by equanimity and mindfulness.”<sup>6</sup>

--The Buddha, *Maha Satipaṭṭhānā “Establishments of Mindfulness” Sutta*

---

<sup>5</sup> adapted from *A Chanting Guide* (48): <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/dhammayut/chanting.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> based upon DN 22 “*Maha-satipatthana Sutta: The Great Frames of Reference*”: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.22.0.than.html>

In this process the apathy & complacency, as well as the other hindrances, are burned off through our ardency. This is a very important element of Right Effort. And after such deep meditation, when we move our thoughts, and lips and limbs again to words and deeds, our actions are then informed by further purified and elevated view — quenched and cool — further freed from the fires of hatred, lust & greed, clear of the dark and obscuring smoke of delusion.

### *Consummate in Non-Complacency*

After enlightenment, the Blessed One himself walked for 35 years proactively using his purified and liberated mental, verbal and physical energies for the welfare of humanity. Although he acted without attachment, he worked extensively for the welfare of all living beings until passing into final Peace. Not only did he do this himself, but he directed his other pre-eminent disciples to do the same from the founding of his Sangha to the day that he passed into ultimate Peace with the words:

*Khaya vaya-dhammā saṅkhārā, apamādenā sampādetthā<sup>7</sup>*

Phenomenal things are subject to passing away.  
Become consummate through non-complacency.

His very last words are also often translated as “strive on with heedfulness.” From the very first teaching to the last, the Buddha exhorted us in right effort, not with attachment and aversion, but consummate with the qualities of awareness, loving-kindness, compassion, appreciation, equanimity and release. This is the very antithesis of the deadness, apathy and complacency that may lead to non-action and disinterest in the environment and other issues.

### *Wisdom*

As in the Serenity Prayer, *wisdom* in Buddhist Doctrine is to know what we can and should do, and in that we should exert ourselves, knowingly, gladly, energetically. And to know that which is beyond our control — from which we learn true nature, release and peace. That is, when the effort is to be in letting go and abandoning (causes of suffering), and when the effort is to be in developing (the noble Path). To be able to discern between these two is *paññā* (wisdom) at heart and *upāya-kosala* (wholesome and skillful means)<sup>8</sup> in manifest expression — fundamental parts of the higher training in the Buddhist path. And it is in the brightening dynamic energetic tension between these two magnetized poles that enlightenment or crucial openings and quantum shifts may occur.

---

<sup>7</sup> The Buddha, *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* DN 16

<sup>8</sup> Skt: *Upāya-kauśalya*. For an introduction to *upāyakosala* in Pāli-text based Theravāda, see Phra Thepyanmongkol’s *A Study Guide for Right Practice of the Three Trainings* (257) and *upāya-kosala-ñāṇa* in “Pāramī II” of the *Mahā Buddhavaṃsa The Great Chronicle of The Buddhas* by Tipiṭakadhāra Mingun Sayadaw.



## Part II~ the Specifics on Applying the Teaching/Doctrine to Context

### *Coming From a Good Heart*

I would say that the majority of Western Buddhist Monastics that I have met in the USA and elsewhere are making sincere efforts in their monastic lives to follow and live the Buddha’s teaching as they understand it. We have good intentions. And we understand intention to be the fundamental or foundational karma, as all of our words and deeds and the way we live our monastic lives arises from our mind, informed by our intentions.

So the first work that we undertake is purifying our intentions and what may convolute them. Purifying greed and lust through seeing its danger, through restraint, renunciation and generosity. Purifying ill-will through loving-kindness, compassion and appreciation. And purifying delusion through the ardent practice of mindfulness and full awareness as well as looking into both the mind and mental and physical processes in a concentrated and illuminating way.

However, having good intentions is not the same as having the clear and discerning knowledge spoken of above; the knowledge of what is wholesome and unwholesome, of conditional causation, of the interrelationships between causal and contributing factors in a situation, and thus of what is not only well-intentioned but also wise and skillful. We have begun to see how the Buddhist Doctrine is particularly relevant in this regard, and will now look into this briefly at one level deeper.

### *Bringing Along the Toolbox: Mindfulness and Full Awareness*

“Let them not do the slightest thing that the wise would later reprove; wishing, in gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease.”<sup>9</sup>

--The Buddha, *the Metta “Loving-Kindness” Sutta*

In the mindfulness teaching so popular in Buddhist Insight Meditation, *sati* or mindfulness is taught hand in hand with *sampajañña* — clear comprehension or full awareness, within the timeframe of *ātāpi* — that is, dedicated and ardent consistency in applying oneself to the practice. It has been said that there is no real mindfulness or recollection without clear awareness or clear comprehension, and that there is no clear comprehension without recollection and mindfulness.

Looking into the definition of *sampajañña* or clear comprehension we find the question — clear comprehension of what? The nuts and bolts of the “what” is defined as a fourfold progression. This is clear comprehension and full awareness of:

- (1) what is intrinsically wholesome/skillful and unwholesome/unskillful
- (2) knowing what is wholesome/skillful or not--according to time, place & person
- (3) knowing what resources in our practical knowledge of the Dhamma are suitable/matching to resort to and apply in the circumstance

---

<sup>9</sup> *Chanting Book* (28): <https://www.abhayagiri.org/books/abhayagiri-chanting-book>

(4) through the non-confusion/non-delusion that arises from the above 3, becoming progressively and then fully and completely undeluded/unconfused

This is the matrix for clear comprehension and full awareness in action.

With these tools and resources, we are now able to consider how to rightly apply the Buddha's teachings to our particular modern contexts which are changing and evolving and in which there are many interrelated factors involved.

*Are they Bad Practices?*

*The Specific Points of Question in Buddhist Monastic Life*

Below follow the practical questions and issues related to our monastic life and the environment that have been proposed as questionable or bad practices. I include this list of points that have been mentioned to me here for the sake of recognition, acknowledgement, reflection, and consideration for wise response.

- international and national jet travel and car travel by Buddhist monastics (carbon imprint)
- the acceptance of non-vegetarian food as alms (carbon imprint, indirect harm towards other living beings, pollution, wasteful use of resources)
- the use of existing waste management systems (pollution/waste of energy & resources)
- the use of existing electrical systems (pollution/waste)
- the use of imported products offered as alms (pollution/waste)
- the use of chemical dyes for dyeing robes (pollution)
- the acceptance of alms food and water in plastic and other environmentally harmful packaging (pollution, waste and harmfulness to health)
- the acceptance of more alms food than is needed for the monastic community (waste of resources)
- the use of non-environmentally-friendly requisite products offered as alms (pollution/waste)
- the use of non-environmentally-friendly cleaning products in monasteries (pollution and harmfulness to health)
- the development of monasteries using non-environmentally-skillful technologies (pollution/waste) i.e. not using solar, geothermal, wind or water energy or water recycling systems, or making grandiose buildings with high roofs that waste energy to heat and cool
- the use of already existing unskillful/harmful technologies (pollution/waste)

From the list above, I will choose a few of the topics for specific and general introspection.

*Jet and Car Travel vs. the Walker's Practice*

For Buddhist monastics in America, related to environmental pollution (carbon), the first issue repeatedly raised is that of jet and car travel. This modern monastic practice is normally related to the Buddha's injunctions to his monastic community to travel, even far and wide, to share and spread the Dhamma amongst those with eyes to see; to go to learn the Dhamma; and to exert oneself in finding suitable places to practice well

and good companions in the Holy Life. Additionally there are teachings on the benefits to individual members of the monastic community and to the monastic community itself (as well as to other humans) of gathering often in harmony. The Buddhists who have come to Gethsemani Abbey have most probably gathered with thoughts of such benefits inclined to the greater good.

In the Buddhist monastic discipline of the Vinaya, monastics are enjoined to walk, unless otherwise necessitated by illness, rather than to ride in animal- or human-drawn vehicles. We understand this to be so as to not burden or harm any other living beings or enslave them, or make them resentful to us by having to carry our weight, nor to destroy the smaller forms of life that are so difficult for larger moving vehicles to avoid. Jain monastics in India may still be seen to keep this walking practice.

In earlier modern times we had imagined coal or gas-run vehicles to be free of burden and harm to larger living beings and to human beings, and thus Buddhist monastics began to use such modes of transportation more and more widely; first trains, then cars, buses and airplanes. Now only a few maintain the old walking practice, and perhaps even then only for limited special periods of renunciate *dhutanga* (Thai: *thudong*) practice. However, now, in these times, the extensive harm done by such vehicular use, previously unknown, is rapidly becoming more and more apparent.

Still, for those monastics that drive, they may feel that the necessity or the benefit outweighs the harm, particularly related to the Buddha’s injunctions to the monastic community mentioned above. I accept this weighing of harm and benefit as questionable. For those monastics in Asia and those in Forest traditions that do not drive, we may regularly consider riding in a car to be similar to accepting cooked meat from an animal not killed for us as alms food; that is, something in which we are not the main/causal commissioners of the harmful/painful action. “The plane will be flying anyway.” But what of the monastery van? Again, according to our monastic discipline, I accept this as questionable related to the use of various modes of carbon-emitting and polluting transportation. And still, just as with Indian vehicles 2,500 years ago, smaller creatures may and are regularly, unavoidably harmed.

We should not forget the four *devadūtas* — the divine messengers, the fourth of which is the *samaṇa*, the monastic — and the power of the example of the robe and of the monastic livelihood as visible examples of the Buddha’s teaching. The venerable monastics who I have met that have kept the walker’s practice for some time have been powerful and inspiring examples to me.

It was not until several years after my *samaṇerī* (novice) ordination in South Korea that I learned my novice preceptor, the Venerable Elder Hye Am Sunim, a monk of the *San Līm Sōn Jong* (山林禪宗) — Mountain Forest Meditation Tradition, had never ridden in a car in his life. He knew the old mountain forest paths and kept to these ways. His practice of the monastic discipline was strict and strong, clear and true, upright in integrity. The strength and value of such beings very much resonates within the physical and mental energies of my life. I am so glad and encouraged to have had such contact with them. Passing away as Jogye Sangha Patriarch on the last day of

2001, he was one of the last in modern times there to keep this practice, although gladly not the very last.

The example of the *thudong* monks — the *dhutanga-kammattbhāna-bhikkhus* — in Thailand has also been a great and contemporary inspiration. In their numbers they are still a living, although changing tradition. The opportunity to walk in this way in Thailand’s northeast is reckoned among the happiest and richest times amongst the memories of my monastic life. In this walking practice, there was such a sense of release, of heightened awareness and flowing in the Dhamma in the moment. A sense of grace, of communion with the great monastics saints of old, and of freedom. Of closeness to the heart of the Buddha.

But it is not nearly so radical to walk in Asia in a culture where the practice is known, supported and revered as it is to walk here in the United States as Peace Pilgrim, the venerable Reverend Heng Sure, Fr William Skudlarek and Venerable Jotipalo Bhikkhu have. For here, to walk is very different than in Asia and far more than ordinary strolling or hiking. And to walk extendedly on the streets and highways of our country amidst the cars, is an experience that can help us see and know the actions of our society in a whole new way, a sometimes harsh but very real awakening.

I have found this walking practice to be extremely efficacious for breaking through the veil of illusion that is the myth of the car and our power [or slavery?] to it in this modern culture. And it brings to the forefront the broiling issues that are so barely covered under the surface of our society. It has come to the point were to not use money and to walk rather than drive — these small and simple things — really do go radically and directly go against the worldly stream in a way that can be deeply, immediately and profoundly felt. It calls our entire way of life and system of values into question, in a highly proactive but quiet, peaceful and non-aggressive way.

For me as a *bhikkhunī*, it is something that we are required to do in our monastic discipline, at least once a year barring illness; that is, to relinquish our lodging and to make such a walk. Most modern bhikkhunis believe that going at least the minimum distance in a car or by bus or plane meets the requirement; however again, I am happy to call this into question. Although some may say that this is simply a point of mundane practicality, I would agree and disagree. In its practicality and mundaneness, the walking practice can cut to the chase — into what is deep, sublime and profound, the world unveiled, without fabrication.

### *Principles of Alms-mendicancy, Equanimity and Non-rejection*

The large majority of the remaining points listed above relate to our livelihood as *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* — alms mendicants — in Buddhist monastic life. Related to our robes, our food and water, our lodging and our medicines, we understand according to the Buddha’s teaching that we, as monastics, are to practice equanimity and non-choosing, non-grasping and non-striving for personal worldly gain.

For the wandering, walking, homeless alms-mendicant, it is fully appropriate and blessed practice to deepen one's renunciation through accepting whatever is offered or not offered with equanimity. Such a *samana's* steps are truly light on the world.

And yet they may teach the Dhamma and the precepts and have profound impact upon those whose lives they come into contact with. And, in reality, in our modern Western Society, the vast majority of Buddhist monastics live in more settled monasteries where wise choices may be made and where people may be taught, instructed and guided in wise view, wise action and wise livelihood, both in their own lives and related to the monastic community. This is most important. Our monastic discipline does give good examples and precedents for not accepting too much and not accepting what is harmful to other human or non-human beings. In a position of authority in a monastery, we are seen as established and empowered social and religious leaders, and our example is respected. Thus, in settled and established monasteries, there is much scope for wise guidance that we can give to our monastic communities and lay communities, both verbally and by our living example.

Such Buddhist monasteries as Birkin Forest Monastery, Abhayagiri, Sravasti Abbey and Shasta Abbey offer such inspiring and uplifting examples. However, the vast majority of our ethnic Asian Buddhist monasteries in North America are far more following prevalent social norms than leading in this regard. These behaviors are regularly reported to cause doubt, grief and disappointment in the hearts of ecologically-minded new and convert Buddhists. The Southern Theravādan Buddhist communities alone account for nearly 300 such North American Buddhist monasteries.

Of course, to know what guidance and direction to give, and when it may be possible to do so, takes effort in wise and considerate reflection. But this is exactly what we are good at if our attention is turned to it, a skill we are certainly called to develop and share by the Buddha himself.

*Going Along with Social Norms vs. Moral Dread, Clear Comprehension e<sup>3</sup> Right Effort*

It has been seen by some as ironic that Buddhist monastics that seem to be so going against the stream of the social norm in Western Society, whether they are Western or Asian, due to Buddhist cultural principles of harmony, respectfulness and adaptation, regularly follow in what have become cumulatively harmful societal norms.

As may have been mentioned already, the precepts of our Buddhist Monastic Discipline in the Vinaya ask us to be conscientious related to waste put out from a Buddhist monastery. If we are to fully follow the monastic discipline, we are not to put out waste in such a way that we pollute the water, the earth or "the green." Nor are we to use fire beyond what is our medical need, especially if it means the harm and disturbance of other living beings. Our monastic human waste is to be dealt with very carefully and respectfully.

One of my mentors in monastic life, the Vice President of the Council of Thai Bhikkhus in the USA, the Venerable Ajahn Maha Prasert Kavissaro, recommended we

specifically mention the following point. In Vinaya, related to our monastics’ use of the restroom, we are required to leave the toilet area as clean as or cleaner than when we entered. This precept is also extended to our use of monastic lodgings and furnishings, as well as other public and private spaces in the monastery and to the places where we may camp in the wilderness while traveling or living as hermits. Additionally, unless invited by our hosts to do otherwise, this practice also extends to our behavior when visiting public places and lay homes outside the monastery. The basic principle is the same in each location such that no one following the monastic into a space they have used should, finding it dirtied, feel disappointed in the training of that monastic and thus have harm caused to their faith in the Buddha, his Teaching or the Sangha of Holy Ones by the disrespect such heedlessness can engender. Additionally, for the acting monastics themselves, patterns of leaving behind unresolved mess are considered emblematic of deepening ones entrenchment in Samsara. In addition they run directly counter the Buddhist teachings on gratitude and respect. The training in always leaving what is contacted and used in either equally clean or cleaner condition is considered to be a righteous act of gratitude and respect—the kind that is emblematic of those who are progressing along the Path of purity, unbinding, freedom and peace.

In order to fully follow these precepts, we must call for intelligent design in our monasteries and in our social infrastructure. This technology is available. We should understand that, as this relates to our individual and communal welfare, it is something that we have the obligation and the call to do. It is important for those persons in social planning to be informed of what the Buddha’s wisdom is related to this important matter and to be supported in moral integrity in terms of doing what is for our long-term welfare that informed choices can be made.

Although the karma of leaders and followers is different, and we may perceive ourselves to be peaceful followers of an already established social system, following in what is systemically harmful does not clear us from involvement in the consequences. Rather the opposite is true. This becomes all the more so when others see us as teachers and leaders by our example; and as monastics, representatives of the enlightened livelihood and wisdom of the Buddha.

## **Conclusion**

In relation to the question of *Bad Practices Hidden or Justified by Ideology in Buddhism*, we have reviewed the main questions and issues put forth by Insight Forum and our monastic peers and advisors, both those related to fundamental doctrinal views and intentions that inform the vast gamut of our thoughts and actions, as well as the practical details and particulars cited above.

Although the Buddha’s teaching may rightly be seen as very high, deep and profound; tending to what is super-mundane, peaceful and beyond the world; we also find that the profound teaching of the Middle Way and the Buddhist Path of Practice relates directly to the practical issues of our worldly lives—to the mundane and to the material—even at the grossest and most elemental level. This holds true from the level of our

views and intentions through to our livelihood and all of our efforts, and their wise application, both in lay and monastic life.

The moral and spiritual qualities commended by the Buddha: *samvega* — urgency, *hiri-ottappa* — a recognition of the harm that we have done and the wish to not further perpetuate it, and the Fourth Noble Truth of the Path of Practice, including Right View of cause and effect, Right Intention, Right Action, Right Effort and Right Mindfulness in the teachings of *sati-sampajañña* — mindfulness and full awareness, all clearly stand out as highly relevant and appropriate teachings to be focused upon, worked with and taught during this time related to all relevant aspects of life, particularly the environmental crises.

Whatever our faults, we should bring the light of awareness to shine upon them, review them rightly according to the Buddhist teaching, and work proactively to reduce and eliminate them. Whatever our strengths and wholesome, wise and skillful resources, we should urgently and dedicatedly do everything in our power to develop and establish them. With joy and gladness for the goodness and effectiveness of this path, with clarity and steady dedication, we must do this as if our very lives and livelihood depend upon it, as this is the truth of the matter — not only for ourselves but for all living beings.

*May we be well and happy, peaceful and at ease. May no harm come to us; may no danger come to us. May all beings be free from all suffering. May we not be parted from the good fortune we have attained. All beings are the owners of their actions, heirs to their actions, companions to their actions, dependent on their actions. Whatever we do, for good or for evil, to that will we fall heir.*

**Evam.**