

How Buddhism might be propagated – ‘suffering is universal’

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A long time ago, I read the *Upanisa sutta* (*Upanisa Sutta*) where the Buddha said, “In dependence on ‘Suffering’ arises ‘Faith’”. With more than 7.5 billion humans in the world (2018), there’s a lot of suffering going on and a lot of potential for faith to arise. But, in my opinion people need to realise they are suffering to develop faith in a way out. And they also need to understand *why* they suffer in order to realise the way. Many people are unaware that they are suffering at all. These people are unlikely to feel the need to change. The Buddha considered whether such people would be able to understand what he’d realised and it was only the words “There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the Dhamma”(*Ayatana Sutta*) that persuaded him to try and teach others. Often those that feel suffering think it is because they don’t have enough money to buy something or something they have has broken – usually it is something material or even a relationship. But the Buddha said that the “Cause of suffering is ‘craving’(*Ayatana Sutta*) This makes complete sense to me if we think of it as “I want things to be different to the way they are”. If we are not satisfied with things as they are, we suffer. It seems so blatantly obvious that it’s almost crazy to even discuss it.

I think for Buddhism to spread to other places and for people to adopt Buddhism as their religion, philosophy or their way of life, they must realise where their suffering comes from. Indeed, for Buddhism to continue in the places it exists now; the people in those places need to *know* they are suffering, otherwise it is just a label people use to describe their religion whilst they seek pleasure in the materialistic world around them.

The stress of modern life is increasingly pushing people to search for a way to reduce it. Numerous studies and modern medical practitioner recommendations have all contributed to a shift towards ‘mindfulness’ and ‘meditation’ being tools to combat the effects of ‘stress’ and ‘depression’ (Andrew M. Seaman). I believe we need to provide places where people can ‘relax’, meditate and calm their minds and in this way with a little guidance they might realise where their suffering comes from and how it can be managed and eventually be left behind. These places need people who can speak the language of the people who visit. The language of Dhamma will speak to their hearts and minds, but it must first pass through their ears in

words they understand. So, it is important to have teachers who can communicate in the language of people who visit the places. They need to understand the language of visitors, but also be familiar with their cultures too. Westerners may have some resistance to rites and ritual and bowing and chanting may not be suitable for them. Adapting the way the Dhamma is presented to them in line with their culture, will allow them to practice without feeling self-conscious or mentally resistant to it.

All the countries surrounding the Mekong region have places for people to practice. The teachers in these places should work together and share their experiences so that the teachings are consistent and applicable to the visitors.

Once we are content to be ‘who we are’, ‘where we are’ and ‘with what we have’, then suffering will have no hold on us.

References

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