

Buddhism is as easy as walking (a parable)

by Piya Tan

Buddhism as taught by the Buddha is as easy as walking. Watch how an infant learns to walk: he (or she) never gives up. It is in his (or her) nature to walk. He begins by crawling, then sitting up, then holding on some support, then wobbling on his strengthening legs, and finally he runs and jumps. It's always a joy to see such a natural development.

In Dharma terms, we are mostly still infants. Deep inside we have that wonderful innocence and a great drive to learn. Given a conducive environment, we would make those baby-like effort to crawl with the Dharma, to walk with it, and then to run with it. Above all, we learn that it is best to sit still with the Dharma.

Often, as it were, we get a person not familiar with baby-raising, who comes along and pushes a walking-stick to the baby. "Come on, use this stick, you can walk faster and farther with it!"

The baby is of course fascinated with the walking-stick; for, it has never seen one before. But the best it could do is to bite and taste it to see if it is edible or tasty. For, what does a baby need more than food for its growth and health.

Then another person comes along with an even more beautiful walking-stick, all decorated with shiny coloured paper, and streamers, and so on—a very attractive stick. The baby is even more fascinated, and chews up all the decorations, and salivates the whole stick.

Another person comes along with a strong metallic stick, studded with glittering half-precious stones. He pushes the stick to the now almost bored baby, and says, "Use this, and chant 'Stick, stick, stick!' Go on chanting, OK, don't stop!" The baby goes "Ga ga..."

Another, even cleverer person, comes with a walker (or, some say, a wheel-chair), and puts the baby on it, and pushes him around. The baby enjoys the rush of the wind and movements. Suddenly, he falls off the wheel-chair, and hurts himself. The man sheepishly steals away, leaving the crying baby behind.

The parents come along and look at the baby lovingly, and simply says: "Come, my dear!" And the baby quickly crawls to them. Over time, he walks, and then run into the loving parents' open arms.

A part of us is still like that baby who is curious about the sticks and the silly sounds that adults make to babies. But such babies tend sit in the same spot playing with the stick or listening to silly sounds or falling and hurting themselves. These babies never learn to walk.

The point is that we do not need all those sticks or silly sounds or complicated vehicles. All we need to do is stand on our own two feet, find some balance, and keep putting one foot before the other. Before long, we have learned to walk!

Of course, this is easier when we hear the Buddha's compassionate voice calling us, "Come."

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