

Learning From Others

by Piya Tan

Singapore Buddhism is now going through an important phase in its religious history. We are learning from various foreign Buddhists and other religions.

Although Buddhism is a global religion, we still have communal Buddhism, such as Chinese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, Myanmar Buddhism, Sinhalese Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, academic Buddhism and so on, and each of these groups have their own sub-groups: for example, there is a Chief High of the Siam Nikaya here, a Chief High Priest of the Amarapura Nikaya in Malaysia; and there are different sects of Tibetan Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, etc, etc,

It is useful for us to learn how Buddhism came to these countries—China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, etc. In fact, this is what happened in all these countries. There was a phase in their Buddhist history when they all were learning from foreign Buddhists. Then the Dharma grew on their own soil.

For Singapore, this may well take another generation. This Singaporeanization of Buddhism will occur at a faster rate than the “old” Buddhist countries due to globalization and the Singapore genius (esp the ability and willingness to learn fast).

Singaporeanization of Buddhism is a natural part of our maturation as a Buddhist community. We cannot remain too long in the adolescence of being “foreign” Buddhists. Then we will be disunited into I-pods of Singaporeans becoming Thai Buddhists, Sinhalese Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists, Japanese Buddhists, etc.

What is Singapore Buddhism? It simply means the presence of the True Dharma right here. It means the easy availability of experienced local teachers of the Dharma, of meditation, and of the Suttas, especially lay teachers. And there is a close networking amongst the various temples and groups, especially the youths.

Singapore Buddhists has the resources and know-how to set up its own International Buddhist University (IBU, which by the way means “mother” in Malay). Education is vital for educating our young Buddhists and ourselves so that we are not misguided and exploited by money monastics and false teachings.

In this way, Buddhism can focus on what it really is in the first place, that is, a teaching brings healing, peace and happiness to anyone who needs it.

At least, this is the vision of the Minding Centre. You are witness to this, and I am confident that the future will be our witness, too.

“...There are lay disciples who are accomplished...bearers of the Dharma,...correctly trained and walking the path of the Dharma, who will pass on what they have gained from their own teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyze it, make it clear; until they shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma in all its wonder.” (Mahaparinibbana Sutta, D 2:106).

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