

## Five Cycles

by Piya Tan

This month, according to the Chinese lunar calendar, was my 5<sup>th</sup> cycle, that is, the zodiac (the world system, if you like) has turned around five times. I am 60. I have a birthday wish. But first, the realities.

A few days before my birthday, the Firefly Mission (FFM) told me that they have to stop supporting our family with the monthly \$1200 stipend (which is the only regular support we get).

The reason for this is that donations have stopped coming in and that the FFM is about relief work, not Dharmaduta--which is fine with me, as nothing is permanent. I must thank all those pledgers, donors and supporters, and above all the FFM. There were times when the stipend came in months late, and I emailed them to expedite it. Little did I know there was really no money in the fund, and the FFM members themselves passed the hat around. May the merit of such kindness be theirs!

I'm a full-time Dharma worker with Ratna as wife, housewife, mother, secretary, and manager with two pre-secondary children. (She is the hardest-working person I know.) We are not rich but, I've never really had serious money problem because I do not make it a problem, thanks to the Dharma. Whatever extra funds my family and I have, we recycle them into our Dharma work. Our most costly commitment is the Minding Centre (TMC) whose rent is now \$2500 per month (excluding maintenance).

I'm saying all this because I know that there will be more full-time lay Dharma workers in the decades to come. We need to rethink our concept of dana so that the lay Buddhist ministry is more effective.

Currently I'm giving monthly meditation classes at BP and other places, and we have also rented out a small section of TMC. All this makes our Dharma-inspired financial commitment to TMC a bit lighter. We rather spend our time in Sutta and Dharma work than in fund-raising projects. Hopefully one day I can get some of my books published, which will be a double-sided benefit of spreading the Word and of self-financing our Dharmaduta work.

I had thought of closing TMC down earlier this year due to lack of funds, but Dharma-inspired people approached me advising me to continue running the TMC. Dharma-moved people came forward with pledges, often unasked.

The reasons for keeping TMC is simple: we value Sutta translation and study, the TMC courses and people-helping. We are not a large or colourful temple or centre, but the kind of learning and teaching that goes on at TMC is ground-breaking and can only happen in such a special place.

There are a few people who were not impressed with TMC because it is not big and has no big Buddha images. The point is there are so many other such places, where

they could go. The TMC is like the layman Vimalakirti's house (small outside, big inside).

The TMC is the office and workshop of the "Sutta Discovery" translation project. Its website makes Sutta translations freely available worldwide. We have feedback from monastics and lay Buddhists alike from beyond Singapore who are using the Sutta Discovery translation series: Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Malaysia, Puerto Rico, the UK, the USA, Serbia, South Africa, Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

We often have students from many foreign countries coming to the TMC, and it also caters for seekers and clients from many other religions or no religion. Through our "non-religious" services (especially counselling and meditation) we have just as many clients who are Bahais, Daoists, Muslims, Catholics, Methodists, evangelicals, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Sikhs, and others. We are deeply inspired to be able to reach out to non-Buddhists, planting in them a happy and deep respect for Buddhism while practising their own religion.

Above all, the TMC is a Bodhi-mandala (a circle of friends dedicated to awakening in this life) where those whose lives have been touched by the Dharma meet. We are mostly working-class people with a big dream: we are determined to make TMC a success, as if the future of Singapore Buddhism depends on it. Indeed, the great thing is that we *ARE* Singapore Buddhists. We meet not as Sinhala or, Myanmarese, or Thai, or Japanese, or Tibetan, or Chinese Buddhists, but simply as SINGAPORE Buddhists. Not many temples or centres in Singapore can do that ☺

There is nothing wrong in practising whatever kind of Buddhism you choose, but (as long as we are unawakened) we must remember our reality that is Singapore. This is a Dharma-hearted way of being united in the Three Jewels.

We at the TMC know that one day our descendents will stand up and say that TMC has worked for a Singapore Buddhism.

Sadhu always to your continued support.

May wherever you are be a place of joyful stillness.

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