

Getting the best from your mind

by Piya Tan

The only source for our true happiness is our calm and clear mind. It is also the best source of creative ideas and guidance in life.

For me, I get some of my best inspirations very often upon waking up in the silence of dawn. As my mind awakens while the rest of my body is still not fully operative, some wonderful ideas for the Sutta translation notes and my weekly inspirational Dharma messages would come to me.

Reflecting on such beautiful ideas energize my mind, and at once I want to get up, and note down my ideas. It is vital that such wonderful ideas be recorded at once.

I notice that if I do not note down such subtle ideas (especially when they are subtle), they would usually be lost by noon! Or they soon get lost as the day's routine and business build up. Or, the negative attitudes of others hide these wonderful moments so that we forget them.

I also get a lot of wonderful ideas when I listen to people talking, especially on the Dharma. The more the speaker is inspired by the Dharma, the better ideas I get on how I could translate a Sutta better, or improve the Sutta notes, and so on. Or, it's just a happy peace inside me.

Very often, the ideas that arise are totally new. One of the happiest moments in my Dharma life is when various strands of the Dharma begin to fit together and form a beautiful whole picture, making me understand better some difficult or subtle point of the Dharma.

This is how I discovered the Buddha's guarantee that proper reflection on impermanence will bring us streamwinning in this life itself (Samyutta ch 25). Later I discovered that a few other practising monks have also been emphasizing the same idea, which gives me greater confidence to promote this wonderful good news.

The idea is to spend some quiet time with yourself, especially if your work or daily life involves meeting a lot of people, which means you may encounter a lot of negative ideas, many of which will unconsciously affect or influence your life.

Some would suggest that we read the lives of successful people. Somehow I cannot help feeling if we do that we cannot really be happier than their authors, no matter how many of them you read. My vision is simple: if you are an artist or musician, would you learn more from watching living artists and musicians, or from a living master himself? I leave the answer to you.

For me, that living master is the Buddha. The Buddha still lives as the Dharma. Each time I read a passage from the Suttas or hear the Dharma, it helps me know myself better, it motivates me to investigate my mind further, and it inspires me to communicate someone like you with this good news.

I'm like a child who likes to share, even give away, his toys, especially as I get better ones. See how a happy child forgives and forget things: they just move on, always looking forward to a new day.

When we understand the child in us, we become better adults. Forgiving others, letting go of a painful past, and looking forward each day anew. This is how the practising monks and nuns live: that is why they are happy.

We can be happy just like them, often even more so. As the Buddha says in Dhammapada 142, even if a person is well dressed (in layman clothing) but his mind is at peace, he is truly a monk.

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