Baptism In Early Buddhism

by Piya Tan

My Buddhist life began with traditional Daoist Buddhism in Malacca, but it is a very colourful Peranakan version, worshipping Shakra, the Seven Sisters and so on. Then as a monk, I was seriously into Theravada, but this was before Ajahns Sumedho, Brahm, Sujato and other students of Ajahn Chah came out to preach. Apparently I was 20 years too early, but Ajahn Sujato quipped that he was 20 years too late: we could have been colleagues in robes.

Interestingly, both Ajahn Sumedho and Brahm have karmic links with Wat Srakes in Bangkok, famous for its Thai Pali scholarship. I met Ajahn Sumedho there, and became Ajahn Brahm's translator before his ordination there. (Yes he is ordained in Wat Srakes where I was trained. Then he returned to his Dharma teacher, Ajahn Chah. In his wisdom, Ajahn Chah I think wants to make sure that the city scholar monks do not lose touch with the forest monks.

As a monk 30 years ago, I had to learn Thai first before learning Pali. This was before the age of the internet, PC and cell phone. My five years in Thailand benefits me to this day. But with the majority of Mahayana influenced Buddhist communities in Malaysia and Singapore, I decided to study more of Mahayana and Tantrayana.

I have run weeklong residential courses teaching the Diamond Sutra, the Heart Sutra, the Lotus Sutra, the Amitabha Sutra, the Sixth Patriarch Sutra, the Tibetan Book of The Dead, and so on. These sutras have deep philosophy and colourful imageries and stories. In due course, I realize that philosophy and stories are interesting, even entertaining--in fact, I notice that Buddhist crowds love to be entertained--so I gave up public teaching and returned to the Pali Suttas.

This return to the early texts is simply refreshing, and it started in 2000, which is a good year. Ajahn Brahm came into the minds of Singapore Buddhists, Angie Monksfields took over the BF which organized the Buddhist Global Conference. And my meeting Ajahn Brahm (whose first words to me was that he is grateful for my being his 'chaperon' during his Wat Srakes years), and Ajahn Sujato (he actually asked me to see him) whose mother, I learned, lives in Malaysia (where I came from), another karmic link.

I'm forever grateful for the NUSBS for their interest and enthusiasm in the Pali Suttas, which re-initiated me into the Pali Suttas. And the BF for giving me personal space to do what I enjoy most: teach the Suttas I have specially translated for Singaporeans and anyone interested.

Recently, I met an amazing Tibetan Buddhist practitioner and lay leader who is a keen and intelligent student in my Sutta classes and courses. As a Tantra practitioner, he says that he should not forget the true Buddhist roots, which is early Buddhism. (Another Tibetan lay leader I met did not impress me: he went around shaking peoples' hands like campaigning for an election, but refused or was unable to return the anjali commonly used by Buddhists!)

This coming holidays, do greet your Christian friends "Merry Christmas," but NOT your Buddhist colleagues. (I have yet to meet Christians who wish one another Happy Vesak in May). This is not a matter of political correctness, but we have to heal ourselves of the subtle conditionings of the Pinkerton Syndrome, and learn more about our true selves so that we will be truly liberated.

In this coming Sutta Study we will see how the Buddha gently guides a very religious brahmin to the true meaning of prayer, sacrifice and spiritual liberation. You will also learn how the Buddha speaks of the true "baptism" (nahata), which is an ancient belief and practice in India.

Sundarika Bharadvaja Sutta (Sn 3.4)
(Who is truly worthy of offerings?)

To download the Sundarika Bharadvaja Sutta (Sn 3.4), click here:

http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com/Sn3.4_Sundarika_Bharadvaja_S_sd22.2.pdf

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Then go to "Khuddaka Nikaya Page" and click on the Sutta.

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