

## **Buddhism is about patterns**

by Piya Tan

Buddhism is about observing patterns in our minds and in life, and to go on to discover why the pattern exists. The first clear undeniably pattern, whether we are religious or scientific-minded, no matter what religion we belong to, or to none, is that everything in the universe is impermanent.

Whatever is impermanent can never fully satisfy us, and if something is not fully satisfactory, it is simply unsatisfactory. In other words, we really have no control over it. In short, there is no unchanging entity, no eternal self or God. Everything is in a flux. Only impermanence is permanent, but that is just a way of talking.

Understanding impermanence is the open secret to understanding the Buddha's Teaching and the key to spiritual liberation in this life itself. It is simple as that. But in the centuries after the Buddha, many lost themselves in reinventing the Buddha wheel:

The Buddha has become a statue and bone relics.

The Dharma has become rituals, chants, and statistics.

The Sangha has become royalty and expert rule-benders of various degrees.

Buddhism has become externalized and commodified. Every temple and foreign mission is arguably about money first, and Buddhism is just an excuse. That is why political correctness is imperative; otherwise, it is bad for business. Buddhism is big business today: see how expensive some Buddhist ceremonies and books are.

(The Buddha knows that all this would happen: just look at the prophetic Suttas in the Samyutta Nikaya. He has left some internal safety devices, as is evident here.)

The point is that BUDDHISM IS SIMPLE. It is *a matter of mind*: of looking within and seeing impermanence. It is *the mind of the matter*: look around yourself, and you may notice how much we superimpose our preconceived notions and hopes onto what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think. We almost never try to see things as they really are.

We have stopped noticing patterns almost as soon as we left our childhood with all its wonderfully insatiable curiosities. Remember the first time you saw a rainbow or a starry heaven moonless and cloudless. (Do you remember how you felt the first time you met your loved one?) Maybe not, but try; anyway, it's never too late for little joys like these. They remind us of a greater happiness bigger than any notion of self or God.

It is easy to become megalomaniac, psychotic or violent if we strongly believe in a God-idea. It is easier to be selfless, mentally healthy and peaceful when we are truly *happy*.

The answer lies in living in the stillness of the present moment. It's all we can really do. Even to *speak* about it is to miss the point: in fact, we often talk too much and becoming deaf to others.

Notice that whatever we say is *always* about something past or something future. The *now* is gone the moment we talk about it.

In fact, you can't really say anything about the present moment. You will miss it if you do. You can only joyfully *live* it.

Scientific laws and rules may change, must change; but not the Dharma: *everything in the universe is impermanent*. That is why Buddha Dharma matters more to me than anything else. Look out for those patterns, and you will know what the Buddha is talking about.

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