

23rd Oct 2008

Dear Fireflies of the Dharma,

THE GREAT COMMISSION

We are all Dharma missionaries in some way. All my life as a monk, and now as a full time lay missionary, I have been inspired by the Buddha's "Great Commission" given in the Vinaya (V 1:21), where he instructs the first 60 monks (which also refers to us now) to "go forth" for the good of the many.

"Go forth" has many levels of meaning and commitment.

The best of those "gone forth" are of course the true monastics who are studying, practising, and realizing the Dharma in some way, and teaching it. We benefit greatly from the teachings and presence of such practitioners who have gone forth.

GOING FORTH (first method)

The second level of "going forth" are those who try their best to have some Dharma grounding, and then go way out to help the poor, needy, ignorant and those in fear. I know many of you are working in distant places, in the dangerous borderlands, where the rebels and army are more friendly to you than the "evangelists" who are trying to continue to colonize the lives of our fellow Asians, and to make them forsake their rich ancient culture.

Sometimes, we are even threatened that we are "invading" their territory (familiar colonial language). Please be strong and remember that we are simply working with our fellow brothers and sisters in our global Buddhist family.

GOING FORTH (second method)

Then we need to "go forth" from our perceived negative emotions, uncertainties and inabilities. Working in a group, especially as a mission, put us into a special challenging situation where Mara will test us in every way. Sometimes we see the weaknesses, even mistakes, of others. This is not the occasion for blame, but a time to forgive, to help compassionately.

For we all have our ignorance and mistakes in turn. It is great environment to grow in, when we know it is all right to make mistakes, as there will be those who will give us a kind hand, healing word, and the right directions.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

One of the most wonderful feeling about working with FFM is that we can feel that we are never alone. You may not appreciate this until you try doing full time translating of the Suttas: I have to work alone. Often even my wife, Ratna, is unable to help me. Sometimes I have Sutta and Dharma questions that even the monastics I approach are not sure how to answer. But I always find the answers in the Suttas and my meditations. That way I feel I am not alone, since I am very joyful in my Dharma work.

Each of us have a special blessing. For me one of the greatest blessings are those who humbly uninvited go about preparing meals for us, cleaning up after that, arranging the furniture, driving us around, welcoming us at gatherings. This is the gift of hospitality, time and effort.

There are so many ways of working for the Dharma. We will know our blessings when the challenges come.

Do not say I cannot do it: rather ask, how best can I do this for the Dharma. For, every time we go forth, someone's life out there becomes a bit better.

Let us go forth more often and farther afield. Fill the world with Fireflies.

Piya Tan