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# The Dhamma Is Immaculate

**M**any factors of modern living adversely influence and apply pressure against the practise of the Buddha's Doctrine. Due to such pressures, misinformation in the guise of Doctrinal interpretation has become rampant in the Buddhist community. As an example, even some learned Bhikkhus<sup>1</sup> are prone to consider community service of an economic nature on a higher level of priority than practising and preaching the Doctrine of the Supreme Buddha.

We must understand the harm to the continuance of Buddha's teaching by misinterpretations of the Doctrine to suit economic and social pressures of modern society. The furtherance

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<sup>1</sup> Bhikkhu – Buddhist Monk

of the Dispensation of the Buddha Gautama is facing distortion in this manner.

The Doctrine is complete and explicit. Therefore, it does not call for debate about words or syntax. The Supreme Buddha spoke the Doctrine. He was omniscient in that respect. One sojourning within a series of rebirths (*samsara*) ought not to be taking upon oneself the task of analyzing the words of the Buddha to find meanings that may fit in with socio-economic and political pressures of a changing world. Such an enterprise would certainly mislead speakers and listeners alike, and one would forfeit an opportunity to realize and live by the Doctrine with unabated confidence and faith.

I think that, in this twenty-sixth century of the era of the Buddha, His Dispensation has been constantly buffeted by the onslaught of degenerative factors in such a way as has never happened before. Such onslaught takes the form of numerous arguments based on misinformation that tries to change the primary concepts of the Buddha's Doctrine.

The basic synopsis of the Doctrine is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, namely: suffering, the origin of suffering, the extinction of suffering and the eightfold path leading to the extinction of suffering. If one deviates from the pursuit of that understanding and instead subjects the Doctrine to critical debate, that would defile the Buddha's Dispensation.

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**Question:**

**We see much of such debate in today's society. A question that is asked from me often as a Theravada Bhikkhu is: "Is it not the duty of a Bhikkhu to meet the challenges of degenerative factors and work in unison within the community of monks to uphold the Dispensation of Gautama<sup>2</sup> Buddha?"**

Firstly, a Bhikkhu must identify and recognize what his calling and duties are. All Bhikkhus become ordained to seek a cessation of suffering and attain the blissful state of Nibbana. That is why every Bhikkhu makes a solemn promise at the time of ordination as a monk, "to become free from all suffering and attain Nibbana" (*sabba dukkha nissarana nibbana sacchikaranattaya*).

A Bhikkhu ordained with that promise has no excuse to yield to socio-economic pressures and so abandon that set goal. The goal of being in the Dispensation is to realize the Four Noble Truths. The wayward person may abandon the original goal and become entwined in all manner of extraneous and mundane activities, and thus subscribe to defiling the Dispensation and distorting the doctrine to suit one's lifestyle.

For a Bhikkhu to work in unison in a community of monks he must develop the right view of a monk (*ditthi samaññagata*). In this context the right view of a monk is his application to the realization of the Doctrine.

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<sup>2</sup> Gautama – The name of Lord Buddha is Siddhartha Gautama. Gautama is the surname.

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The Supreme Buddha discoursed about a householder who becomes a monk (***Samyutta Nikaya: Kulaputta Sutta***). “Monks, if a householder in the past renounced lay life and became ordained as a monk in the Dispensation of a Buddha, if a householder in the future renounces lay life and becomes ordained as a monk in the Dispensation of a Buddha, if a householder in the present time renounces lay life and becomes ordained as a monk in the Dispensation of this Buddha, all those householders become ordained for the purpose of gaining insight to realize the Four Noble Truths.”

We learn from that discourse that the Supreme Buddha has established His Dispensation for no other reason than to realize the Four Noble Truths. It is clear that if Bhikkhus work in unison as a community of monks we could overcome religious frauds, religious conspiracies and religious strategies and uphold the Dispensation of the Doctrine.

**Question:**

**Another question asked from me is: “Bhikkhus of today’s society have a tendency to give priority to social service activities over the pursuit of spiritual development. Is there a compelling reason for this?”**

Today, some Bhikkhu are becoming lax in their effort to understand the Doctrine. They have not succeeded in gaining a

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basic knowledge of the Doctrine and through that an unwavering faith in it. So they tend to lean towards social service activities.

Sometimes, I wonder whether pressures of evangelists of other religions have had anything to do with this situation. Why I say this is because, as a rule, evangelists do not bring with them any substantial intellectual and spiritual message. So, in order to be visible and win popular support, they spend large sums of money for all sorts of popular projects. They open pre-schools, children's homes, homes for the aged, vocational training centres and charities. These are all activities of social service. Evangelists thus create a socially pleasing and beneficent atmosphere. Perhaps Bhikkhus take this as an example, and through similar activities change their objective to social service.

I think this can be a contributing factor to the speedy defilement of the Buddha's Dispensation. The message in the Buddha's Doctrine is different from popular expectations of society. It is something that goes against the grain of popular expectations.

The path to Nibbana is very different to the existing mind-set of a householder's life. Living beings as a rule do not fear the recurring round of rebirths. So, they desire to sojourn in *samsara* by continuing the process of perpetual wandering. What the Doctrine teaches is a way to end the suffering of *samsara*.

Some Bhikkhus are not sufficiently motivated to speak the Doctrine. "The Doctrine is too deep to understand," they say. "It is

not a necessity. Before speaking the Doctrine, people must be made free from hunger. They must live comfortably,” they further say.

Such are the arguments one hears in favour of Bhikkhus preferring to do social service rather than speak the Dhamma. In a way, it would seem sufficient if Bhikkhus do only social services. However, that could easily reduce society to thinking that it is unnecessary to speak the Dhamma or talk about the Four Noble Truths.

Hence, we can see clearly that the answer to this dilemma facing a Bhikkhu is to give second place to social service activity and give first place to the teaching of the Four Noble Truths.

**Question:**

**When you look among the Buddhist public, a majority would prefer to pursue a good worldly life rather than tread the path to Nibbana. Because of that, is not more appropriate and timely to speak only of those parts of the Dhamma that help towards a good life, rather than the topic of Nibbana?**

Surely, there is nothing wrong about speaking of matters that promote a good, clean worldly life. But let us look closely. Our communities have financial and banking institutions that offer specialist economic advice. They discuss many ways of how to spend and how to save money. So, it will be redundant for

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Bhikkhus to talk about financial and economic matters as a part of the Dhamma discourse. Then, there is public awareness of alcoholism and its adverse effects. The public also know from educational programs the health risks of smoking. Besides, in most countries today, all cigarette packs are labelled with a warning that smoking is injurious to health.

We also know that while people keep discussing these mundane matters over and over again, their lives are really fraught with a different kind of calamity. There is an intrinsic isolation in life. In the case of many people, when age and decay of body overwhelm the good life lived in past years of good health, prosperity and good physical attributes, they die in despair, not knowing what future rebirth they may be propelled into. No one will ever know where they go.

However, if the Buddha's message was understood well about how beings sojourn in the round of rebirths those lives may not end in despair. A person with knowledge of the Dhamma will cultivate and develop inherent qualities of merit.

It would be a mistake to think that people only need things that enhance worldly life. Thinking so would make Dhamma degenerate to the level where society ignores the teachings of the Dhamma.

That is not what we should be doing. The Doctrine guides us to achieve a state of supreme realization by understanding the

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Four Noble Truths and becoming a Noble Disciple (*arya savaka*). If we lower the stature of the Doctrine by adulterating it with our whims rather than raising the level of understanding among the Buddhist public that would contribute largely to the decline of the Buddha's Dispensation. We must take measures to prevent that decline.

**Question:**

**What has the Supreme Buddha said of the position of a Bhikkhu still in the grasp of the layman's life he renounced?**

The Supreme Buddha illustrated the case of the Bhikkhu who has not been able to give up the former lay life, in the discourse of the simile of the floating log (*Darukkhandhopama Sutta*<sup>3</sup>). He said to the Bhikkhus: "Supposing a log is floating away in the river Ganges, and supposing people haul it to the shore for their use, would that log of wood reach the ocean?"

"No, Venerable Sir," replied the monks. The Buddha said that what hampered the passage of that log to the ocean was the people hauling it ashore and using it. A Bhikkhu ordained as a monk must not lose sight of his objective of realizing Nibbana through the understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

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<sup>3</sup> Darukkhandopama Sutta – This sutta can be seen in the fourth book of Samutta Nikaya in Tripitaka.

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If a Bhikkhu forsakes that objective to fulfil social needs and delights to achieve temporary gain of praise or fame he will be so retracted into his former lay life that he will close his path to Nibbana.

In that simile, the Supreme Buddha compares the floating log to the progress of the monk. The river flows to the ocean, just as the Eightfold Noble Path leads to Nibbana. A Bhikkhu who should be treading the Eightfold Noble Path will become side-tracked when caught up in the grasp of laymen's socio-economic needs. To avoid being thus grasped, and the consequent actions, one must always be mindful about the Buddha's Dispensation and the reason why one renounced lay life and became a Bhikkhu.

**Question:**

**What should be the duty of a Bhikkhu in the Dispensation of the Buddha Gautama?**

The primary duty of a Bhikkhu is safeguarding and upholding the Dispensation. The Dispensation explains in detail how to understand the Four Noble Truths and achieve a cessation of the suffering of *samsara*, the process of perpetual wandering in a series of rebirths.

If a Bhikkhu delivers that cardinal message along the way as he travels the path of the Dhamma that is his duty. There is no

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other. When a Bhikkhu performs that sacred duty he becomes a person who upholds the Buddha's Dispensation.

People who obstruct the fulfilment of that duty – be they Buddhist or otherwise – contribute to the defilement and deterioration of the Buddha Gautama's Dispensation.

