



NDM: Today in the west there is a new sort of “Proclaim-Your-Attainments” American form of Buddhism emerging, mostly of householders that charge money for the dhamma. One of the ring leaders of this PYA movement who also claims to be an arahant, (but is married and a householder) says: “I believe that when Western dharma teachers can earn a moderate, middle-class income by dharma teaching alone, the dharma will have truly arrived in the West.”

What do you think is going on here?

Ajahn Brahmali: I think what is going on is that people have no real concept of the importance of the monastic Sangha. The monastic Sangha was instituted by the Buddha because it was the best way of achieving results on the Buddhist path. The monastic life takes more commitment to Buddhism than lay life, and when it is well lived (and this is an important proviso) it will therefore give faster and more abundant results. Moreover, the monastic life is closer to the ideal of awakening than lay life. That is, if you really have no attachments or interest in sensual pleasures, this mental state is outwardly quite naturally expressed through the monastic life. The

more advanced you are on the path, the more likely it is that you will incline towards monasticism. (This is not to say that all monastics are spiritually advanced, because one may become a monastic for all sorts of reasons. In fact, only a tiny percentage of monastics will have made good progress on the spiritual path.)

I don't think it is necessarily wrong to make money from teaching Buddhism, as long as one does so in an ethical manner. But money often tends to corrupt, and it is difficult to teach with the purest of intentions if you know that your livelihood depends on people paying you. In AN 4:50 the Buddha says that accepting money is a stain on ascetics and monks. (The text says gold and silver, which includes money in the idiom of the time.) At SN 42:11 the Buddha says that by accepting money you also consent to sensual pleasures.

In addition to the above, there is something very powerful and beautiful about offering the Buddhist teachings for free. These teachings are truly priceless, and it is a shame to put a price on something so precious. Moreover, when you offer something for free you are engaging in an act of generosity. Sharing the Dharma out of the goodness of one's heart has a powerful positive effect on one's mind and the potential of propelling you forward on the path. Teaching the Dharma can be great source of happiness when done with the right intention. The effect on the recipient is obviously also very important. When they feel inspired by good teachings, they will often want to support the teacher in return. This gives another opportunity for doing an act of generosity, which has a similar effect of moving one's practice forward. In other words, when the Dharma is given for free it can give rise to a powerful virtuous circle that is hugely beneficial for both the teacher and the student. By charging for the Dharma we risk destroying this beautiful potential.

In sum, we should be careful with discarding these ancient ideals, because they have a profound purpose on the spiritual path. Yes, Buddhism needs

to adapt as it arrives in the West, but we have to be very careful not to throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water. It seems to me that Buddhism will have truly arrived in the West when a well-practicing monastic Sangha is properly established, not when lay Dharma teachers "can earn a moderate, middle-class income by dharma teaching alone."

NDM: Some western teachers in the US are creating a "neo Buddhism", a non-dual Buddhism that they say is more scientific, like psychology, not so religious or spiritual, or meditative, where you charge the client by the hour in an office like setting. A new teacher-student model, based upon ongoing, one-on-one consultations on skype video, in person and so on.

They say: "We also support the emergence of a new kind of spirituality, one not entrenched in dogmatism, but which is responsive to the latest findings in physics, biology, neuroscience, psychology, and ecology."

What's your view on this?

Ajahn Brahmali: I think we need a bit of humility. I suspect most societies tend to think of themselves as the apex of civilisation, and we are probably no different. No doubt our culture is advanced in many respects, not least in its technological prowess. Our scientific understanding of the world is equally quite impressive, at least by historical standards. But is it necessarily the case that our scientific understanding of the mind is more profound than the insights of someone with deep meditation? Do we know more about the mind than the Buddha? Hubris is always dangerous, and it is the sort of thing that will cause us to throw out things of real value.

My point is that we should certainly use the tools of modern science, but at the same time we need to remember their limitations. In particular, the science of the mind is still very immature, and many of the leading scientists and philosophers in this area readily admit how little they actually understand, especially in regard to consciousness. In the light of this, is it really wise to throw out certain ancient Buddhist teachings, such as those on rebirth? There can be no doubt that the Buddha actually taught rebirth; this idea is just too integrated into the suttas as a whole. If we were to dismiss rebirth, we would be saying that the Buddha got it wrong. But if we find the Buddha's teachings to be insightful and powerful aids in our life, perhaps we need to give the Buddha the benefit of the doubt. This is what confidence, *saddhā*, is all about. We need to seriously consider the possibility that the Buddha saw deeper into the nature of existence than even our most advanced scientific knowledge.

END OF INTERVIEW