

Teacher Training

Friends use whatever skillful means are appropriate.

In teaching, we do not want the student to remain the student. This is where the whole teaching of the Buddha comes in. The teacher is always going to be the teacher and the student is always going to be a student unless, through the development of one's practice, the roles reverse and the student becomes their own teacher.

For instance, a high school math teacher has a few kids that are really, really interested in math. He's a really good teacher for them. After graduation from high school they go to university and really get some instruction under their belts... now they know a whole lot more math than their high school teacher.

Does what I've said so far describe normal teacher training? I don't think so. It's almost a sure thing that if you do teacher training on the internet then that relationship is never going to change. Even most teacher training taking place face-to-face isn't heading in this direction. Instead, the original teacher who sets up those courses is seen and highly regarded as a great big teacher and students pay high dollars for the course, yet they're not really trained as teachers. They just listen to what the other teacher said about teaching, but they never get thrown into it.

First, you listen to the teacher.

Then, you learn the chanting. You mull that over. You talk with other students and that kind of stuff. The way that you really learn the Dhamma though is by teaching it... Why? Because you're not just out on your own running your mouth the way that we would love to have it in the West, but rather, you're there being trained as a teacher through the act of teaching in front of your elders.

That was what Bhikku Buddhadāsa did with me... Long before I became a monk he already had me teaching. At Wat Suon Mokh it was just like how the Buddha put that duty on to Ānanda, just like how he put that duty on to Sāriputta, and on to Maha Moggallāna, and all the other monks, "now it's time for you to teach the Dhamma". There's also a sutta that says that there are five ways to learn the Dhamma and that the most important one is to become a teacher of the Dhamma.

Right... That was Bhikku Buddhadāsa, I remember that so well. I remember it was in the Spiritual Theater [at Wat Suon Mokh]. I remember the crowd. I remember that he and I were sitting there. Me, on a lower place, all dressed in white. He asked me to help him with the talk, that's what I was set up for. Now the talk he was going to give was on the four noble truths, and he starts it off... I explained what he just said and turned back to him and he says, "you take it from here".

There I was with Ajahn Po, Bhikku Buddhadāsa, and all these monks and Thai people and a whole bunch of Westerners were there, and he put me on the spot. In later times, Ajahn Po would put me on the spot like that, but I was ready for it. I mean that the first time was enough, yeah.

So when Ajahn Po asked me to give a talk on the seven factors of enlightenment at a retreat that I was visiting I was ready to go and in fact, to be honest with you, he said that in the evening for the talk that was going to be done at 7:30 in the morning and I just happened to have had the Majjhima Nikāya with me. That was the night that I basically memorized the Ānāpānasati Sutta so that I could give that talk on the relationship of practice and the culmination of the practices and the enlightenment factors.

So, this is the whole style of the teacher training is that it must be done in a way where the teachers are actually trained. Now I can go back to my childhood when I was living in South Carolina...

There was a school called Winthrop Training College and that was what, I don't know how many schools like that were around, or how many were in South Carolina... I do know that it didn't last long, that something happened in the sense that a teacher doesn't get teacher training so much as they get a lot of classroom studies and a lot of psychology, but it went through training school. The students did all the teaching.

Like for the 1st grade, they had first grade teachers in the classroom with them. So, the students would do the teaching, but the old masters were standing right there and that meant that you must be on your toes. You can't respond to the kids the way you want to in your heart. You have got to respond to them correctly because the teacher is standing right there.

So, this is the kind of thing that we need to do in a teacher training program. And obviously the easy way to do it. I mean, the Open Saṅgha Foundation is not going to do that kind of thing. But what we can do is set this up so that if people want to become, let us say, dedicate their lives to the Dhamma, whether they're going to be a layman or a monk or a nun.

But almost always what you hear is, is that all I want is to be a teacher. I want to be a Dhamma teacher.

With that, it goes back to the old Western idea of, well, you got to eat. So you have got to work to eat. And so, they begin to mix those two together... Charging these high prices for the Dhamma and even higher prices to do a teacher training program where the teachers are not trained in that program.

The right way to do it is to help these students who are coming to Open Saṅgha Foundation with that kind of point of view and help them get into a wat where they will have an abbot that has been a monk for 20 years, who is really going to be doing the training.

That is, in fact, what's happened to Cat here on the island... He's at Wat Pah Saeng Tham and the abbot there is marvelous. Cat can see that this guy has something. One of the things that Cat has said is that the ajahn doesn't have any problems of his own, so he's there to help the people who come to the wat with their problems.

I assume that if Cat stays there for a few months, he's going to be put into the teacher's position. Ajahn is going to say you take it from here, Cat and Cat's going to say...

The first time it happens, but then he'll make it through.

This is the way that teachers are trained, and I could see that in the West that because of the language problem that the Thai monks who come to the West are there for the Thai people and they don't care whether the monk learns English or not, right?

Anyway, so I would imagine that if you had let us say, just somewhat as an example, the abbot of that wat would be very kindly looking towards a Westerner who would come hang out, maybe move in and soon.

“We're going to set up our meditation class once a week so that the Westerner can start teaching the Dhamma to the community.”

After a few months, we'll do a weekend retreat or two.

So this is the way that we would get it started at sort of a grassroots level, but the point is, you can't take a teacher's training program and then start teaching the Dhamma if the training program is not set up correctly. Paying money for it means that the teacher cannot teach generosity because he's charging you money for what he's giving you... This is a business deal. In order to teach generosity, you have to be generous to people. That's how we teach the generosity, by being generous.

And so this moving into the wat, like the example with Cat here on the island, is that he is extraordinarily in a state of gratitude for the generosity that he's getting from the abbot.

Pietro was thinking about doing this and one of the things that Cat said to Pietro is, is that once you move into a wat, you don't need money because the Thai people are going to take care of your bodily needs.

You've got housing and you've got a master teacher there. Now most one of the things that's really amazing is that in order to be an abbot of a wat in Thailand, the monk has to have been a monk for 20 years.

That means that he was in training as a teacher for 20 years.

Then in fact, the label of ajahn doesn't come until one's been a monk for 10 years, and the word ajahn then means that he's ready to start teaching.

Why? Because he's been thrown into teaching repeatedly.

So any teacher program that we're talking about setting up via Open Sangha Foundation (OSF) is not going to be the school itself. It's going to be much more like going to be the HR department of a university.

OK, to get people connected... that's the whole point of OSF.

So that people can find teachers, so that students can find other students to make friends with, and so that the students can find wats to go to. This is why Cat and Pietro both are doing so much work getting the names of wats. We've gotten more than about 300 compiled so that people can get in touch with these places and go visit them. That's one of the reasons to have Google Maps. So you can say, “Oh well, there's a wat only about a 20 minute drive from here.”

Getting people involved with real Dhamma people rather than the Westerners who are out making it a business, that's the danger of Western Buddhism. This is shaking out into another business model. The teachings are becoming heavily commoditized.

Samsara light.

Like, just let me stay a slave... but make it comfortable.

Which is sad, but it's also funny.

Alright. And so this is the kind of relationship that we need... We don't want to keep a client a client. We want them to come up to the level of the teacher. This is where the word, "kalyāṇa-mitta" comes in. That we become spiritual friends. I don't have Ajahn Po up on the pedestal anymore. I know his foibles. He's a human being. He just happens to be an extraordinarily happy human being and he can manage things quite well within the realm of the human being.

The guru must hide all of their faults because he doesn't want to disappoint all of their followers.

These are continuing ongoing kinds of things, but one of the things that you can see within the model of psychotherapy, and I see this in Buddhism in the West, is that we come, we pay you, and we expect to get results, right? Then the business deal is over.

This is exactly what happens with retreats in the sense that there is no relationship much with the teacher, not a real relationship. I mean, the attendees have maybe an hour or so before they begin their retreat, and then they have only a few minutes a day with the teacher, *if they're lucky*, they get 15 minutes. Normally, they'll get 15 minutes with another student.

Then they pay for the course and then when the course is over, they leave. The 10-day retreat is over. The business deal is finished. There's nothing left to it. Any enduring relationship is the relationship of a repeat customer.

The businesses know that that Kleenex wouldn't sell a lot of Kleenexes if they only sold one box of Kleenex to the customer. No. They want him to buy a box of Kleenex every week. So, this is the whole idea of that repetitive business or that repetitive practice.

Leave the world... To go to what? So that we can spend the time that it takes to practice over and over and repeatedly. Why? Because we've got two major problems.

One is, is that we're fighting with both the DNA that we were born with, the instinct which is a self-preservation instinct basically. And so, in our society, almost everything that happens becomes a survival issue... I remember a 7th grade spelling test became a survival issue for me. Having bullies walk down the hall could be a survival issue, and that's because of our DNA. But the worst part of it is, is that society, then everybody in the society is in that survival mode.

And so that's propagated in the form of education. Which goes with instincts. So we live a life of instinct, and the education that we get is from other people who live instinctively.

And so here's all of that deep training for our whole lives. Being trained by instinctively driven people and also we've got our own instincts and so to come out of that requires us to practice.

And so that's the time to practice again is right now to come out of our instincts, to come out of our survival mode, to come out of our territorial mode, to come out of our materialism mode. To come out of our going along to getting along mode.

Yet we're trained that way, and the way that we're trained in our society is, "ohhh, you gotta eat." So you gotta work. You gotta work to eat. And yet I know millions of people on the planet Earth, literally millions of people who do not work and they eat.

Your dad was a carpenter, you got to be a carpenter. Well, in my case, my dad was a pipefitter, a meter reader, and also a furnace installer. Because he was a furnace installer, that's where I got my first transformer. And off I go into electrical because he was very much involved with the electrical stuff. Wiring houses for thermostats and all of that kind of stuff. So... We do basically live in a nepotic world, right? And that politics is one of those and big money is another one. Teachers. How about cops? Yeah, cops have families of cops. My grandfather was a cop kind of thing... You know? That's so, yeah, we do what we know...

Which means that we do what we're trained to do and what we're trained to do is by people who were ignorantly trained also going way back into the past.

Feedback and so on and one of the things that we can say that we can do is to come out of that instinctively herding that we do what we're told to do in order to stay in the herd.

And this is one of the reasons why Westerners have so much trouble with their families. And that is, "ohhh, don't go do something that we don't know how to do. You got to go do something we know all about.

That the parents are uncomfortable when a student, when their child, takes on something that they don't understand.

So that that's part of that herding instinct, which means now that that instinct that we're born with and raised with that raising then makes it even more pressurized.

And so This is why we have to remember the crisis right now, because those instincts and those old memories of all that we've been trained keep coming right back up to the surface over and over again. And so we have to be, we have to remember to be here now. We have to remember that this present moment is all that we really have and that we can then, when we get pretty good at that, we can start communicating that to other people, to our friends. This is where that the teacher role comes in. But a teacher role is not going to be a teacher role for long. What we're really teaching is friendship and so the teacher is not necessarily such a teacher. He's a friend, right? And yet in our our system, it's always been separated. The example that I'd use here now is in military situations. It's always the aristocracy who put on the armor because they can afford it. They become the centurions. They become the officers. The overseers, the officers of the troops and the troops, the one who have the grunts are the ones who have to do all the work. An example of that then would be that the ship's captain, he doesn't work. He's got the he's got the. I mean, he's got the Boilermakers, he's got the Gunners, he's got the deckhands and all of that, and they're the ones who do the work of the ship.

But the Admiral? He's got nothing to do except stand around making sure that everybody else is working. So this two tiered system of officers and enlisted, in fact they don't enlist often, they're drafted. But if they keep that two tiered system.

Mother and Child Boss, employee. Officer.

Yeah, all of that is a 2-tiered system and in Buddhism in the West, that system remains.

The teacher and the student.

The doctor and the patient.

The psychotherapist and the client.

The politician and the voter is all this duality that is built into our system and what we need to come back to is the integration of those two. And this is where the the concept comes in is that when someone is new to Buddhism the teacher's job is to bring that student up to his level, right?

Rather than, rather than keep him one down.

This is one example of that would be when Buddhādāsa was getting really old. He would talk about everybody be a Buddhādāsa. Your job is to be a Buddhādāsa, don't go suck up to Bhikku Buddhādāsa.

Be one. Be him.

Be here.

Then we come out of that one down position.

Become your own boss. Be on top of the world.

Well, how can that be taught by someone who wants himself to be on top of your world?

It can't. It's not possible.

So this is where real teacher training is. Is the real teacher training is the training for the teacher to impart to the student that the student is really a teacher. He's really going to become as high as he thinks his guru is now. In one of the disadvantages that our culture has is that we take and place people at very, very high levels like they're very special.

And so this idea of elevating the teacher and having great respect for the teacher is the problem. Rather than recognizing that this teacher has something marvelous to offer... Let's take it.

This is the idea then, of that mural that's on the side of the building there at Wat Suon Mokkh that is in the Egyptian style, where he's handing out the eye of the Dhamma. That one guy is sitting there with a basket full of eyes, but he's giving them away. And so you have one guy who is bowing in gratitude. "Thank you... I've got the eye." Another one is screwing the eye on. You can see that it's working. A third guy is just receiving his eye. And then up in the top corner, you have a whole mass of stick figures running away. They don't want the eye of the Dhamma.

Why are they running away? It is because they don't see themselves as one with a Dhamma eye...

Anyway, we're in the process of just about finishing up with the idea of what a teacher's job in the Dhamma is... it is to bring the student out of the position of being a student into becoming his own guru, to be his own star. This is what real teacher training is, to teach the student how to be his own guru. How to be his own boss. How to not need another teacher.