

Sutta Study with Visu Teoh

A Teaching closest to my heart

I have never come across a teaching that comes closest to my heart, that strikes and touches me so deeply, than that of the Buddha's.

This is because the Buddha addresses the most fundamental question in life: the question of suffering and how to make an end of it.

Isn't that the question that should most preoccupy and concern us in life - how to make an end of suffering and attain a happiness that is true and lasting?

The Buddha describes his teaching as deep and profound, as hard to fathom, hard to see, and going against the stream.

Yet, without understanding it there can be no true liberation and awakening from our slumber of delusion.

Now there is no better way to plumb the vast reservoir and depth of the Buddha's teachings than to drink from its very source - the *suttas* or discourses that he gave to his monks, nuns, lay disciples, and the public in his 45 years of ministry from the time of his enlightenment at the young age of 35 till his great passing away (*parinibbāna*) at the age of 80.

Here we can listen directly to the Buddha speaking to us in his original language - Pali or a vernacular that is close to it. Here we have it from the Master's own mouth. We need not seek further. Here will all our questions on the Dhamma be answered. Here will our thirst for the knowledge that can set us free be quenched.

I am honoured to have been invited by the Hong Kong Insight Meditation Society to lead this fortnightly online sutta study class. I propose to select important, interesting, and inspiring discourses for us to study and ponder over.

We will look at discourses translated by the great Pāli translator Bhikkhu Bodhi. I will paste the Pāli after each paragraph of the English translation. In this way the student will also be able to gain familiarity with Pali terms and expressions. It is a great joy and delight to get to know the original Pali words that have been translated into English. Then you can exclaim, "Ah, so these are the exact words spoken by the Buddha in his own tongue." Students of Pali will also find the Pali original provided next to the English text very useful for their study of the language.

I will send out these sutta notes well before each class so that the student will be able to read and study them before we meet on zoom. I will also provide personal comments in my notes to give perspective and further food for thought. We will be looking at the thought-world of the Buddha; how he views the world; the question of rebirth and suffering; the law of *kamma* (action and results); *Nibbāna* - the ultimate goal of the spiritual life; who am I?; what constitutes this self?; what does the Buddha mean when he talked about nonself (*anatta*); what is *bhāvanā*, mental development?; what are the *jhānas*, meditative absorptions?; how can we live lightly and happily?; how can we apply the *Dhamma* (the Buddha's teaching) in our everyday life?; how can the Dhamma enrich and beautify our lives?; how can it lead us closer to *Nibbāna*, the end of suffering and the highest peace and happiness? There is much to study and explore. Surely we have an exciting, enriching, beneficial, fruitful, and fulfilling time ahead of us!

During each session, I propose to spend an hour presenting and discussing a *sutta*, then invite questions and further discussion for the next half hour and, if there is still interest and stamina, we can continue till the second hour. Thus, each session will last an hour-and-a-half or two hours.

I look forward to meeting you all on zoom. I look forward to many hours and sessions of interesting, inspiring, beneficial, fruitful, and fulfilling study and discussion of the Dhamma. May the Dhamma enrich and ennoble our lives. May it lead us to the highest peace and happiness of *Nibbāna*!

With mettā
Visu Teoh

Here is an excerpt from the discourses to get us started and whet our appetite for the Dhamma:

“Now a good report about that Master Gotama has circulated thus: ‘That Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One. Having realized by his own direct knowledge this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans, he makes it known to others. He teaches a Dhamma that is lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle, and lovely in the end, with the right meaning and phrasing; he reveals a spiritual life that is perfectly complete and pure.’ Now it is good to see such arahants.” *(From sutta No 5 of the Majjhima Nikāya, the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, a stock passage which is repeated in many other discourses.)*

Taṃ kho pana bhavantaṃ gotamaṃ evaṃ kalyāṇo kittisaddo abbhuggato: ‘itipi so bhagavā arahamaṃ sammāsambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā’ti. So imaṃ lokaṃ sadevakaṃ samāraṃ sabrahmaṃ sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiṃ paṇaṃ sadevamanussaṃ sayamaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedeti. So dhammaṃ deseti ādikalyāṇaṃ majjhakalyāṇaṃ pariyosānakalyāṇaṃ sātthaṃ sabyañjanaṃ, kevalaparipuṇṇaṃ parisuddhaṃ brahmacariyaṃ pakāseti. Sādhu kho pana tathārūpānaṃ arahataṃ dassanaṃ hoti”ti.

And here are some sayings from the Dhammapada extolling the virtues and qualities of the Dhamma.

The gift of Dhamma surpasses all gifts.
The taste of Dhamma surpasses all tastes.
The delight of Dhamma surpasses all delights.
The destruction of craving overcomes all suffering.

Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti,
Sabbarasaṃ dhammaraso jināti;
Sabbaratiṃ dhammarati jināti,
Taṇhakkhayaṃ sabbadukkhaṃ jināti. (D354)

The bhikkhu who dwells in the Dhamma,
who delights in the Dhamma,
who reflects on the Dhamma,
who recollects the Dhamma,
does not fall away from the sublime Dhamma.

Dhammārāmo dhammarato,
dhammaṃ anuvicintayaṃ;
dhammaṃ anussaraṃ bhikkhu,
saddhammā na parihāyati. (D364)

Better than reciting a hundred verses
comprising meaningless words
is one single word of Dhamma
which, having heard, brings peace.

Yo ca gāthā satam bhāse,
anattapadasamhitā;
Ekaṃ dhammapadam seyyo,
yaṃ sutvā upasammati. (D102)

She who imbibes the Dhamma lives happily
with a serene mind.
The wise person always delights in the Dhamma,
expounded by the Noble Ones.

Dhammapīti sukham seti,
vippasannena cetasā;
Ariyappavedite dhamme,
sadā ramati paṇḍito. (D79)

Music from a five-piece ensemble
cannot give as much delight
as that of a one-pointed mind
that clearly sees the Dhamma.
(*Kulla, Theragāthā 6.4*)

Pañcaṅgikena turiyena,
Na ratī hoti tādisī;
Yathā ekaggacittassa,
Sammā dhammaṃ vipassato”ti.

Visu’s biodata

Visu Teoh, born in Penang in 1953, is an ardent student of the Dhamma. He was a Buddhist monk for 17 years before he disrobed and returned to the lay life in 2003. He is married and continues to teach the Dhamma, leading meditation retreats in Europe and Asia. He and his wife Barbara are happy to spend their lives, immersed in the Dhamma and the joy and satisfaction it brings. Visu’s teachings can be accessed at his website www.visuteoh.net.