

A new Paradigm for Buddhist Education

by Deepal Sooriyaarachchi - FCIM (UK) MBA (Sri J.) - Chartered Marketeer

Every year on the 1st of November we commemorate the establishment of the Buddhist Academy down Maliban Street in Colombo, which later became Ananda College our Alma Mater. The key figure in this historic endeavour is none other than Col Henry Steel Olcott. It is to pay gratitude to him that every year we organize the Olcott Oration.

At this moment I want to pay gratitude to a few distinguished Anandians who have significantly influenced my life and who contributed immensely to make who I am today. Firstly Col Rajapaksha during my school days. Then once I started my work life Dr Anandatissa De Alwis and later Mr Chandra Jayaratne, Mr D C Ranatunga and Mr Asoka De Lanarolle whom I consider my mentors.

The first break in my work life was given also by another Anandian Mr Patrick Amarasinghe. I also recall with gratitude Mr Lionel Gunaskeara the Master in Charge of Police cadetting who perhaps supported most to make me a prefect, as the first student to become a prefect having joined Ananda to do A/Ls.

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Born in 1832 into a pious Presbyterian household in Orange, New Jersey. After a short stint at what is now New York University, Olcott went west toward the frontier in search of youthful adventures. In Ohio, at the age of twenty, he became a convert to spiritualism. Soon he was championing a host of other causes, including antislavery, agricultural reform, women's rights, cremation, and temperance. He worked for a time as an experimental fanner, served a stint in the Army, and even worked as an investigator on the special commission charged with scrutinizing President Lincoln's assassination. But he eventually returned to New York City, where he supported himself as a journalist and insurance lawyer. In 1874, while covering reports of spirits materializing at a farmhouse in Chittenden, Vermont, he struck up a friendship with Russian occultist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. One year later, he and Blavatsky co-founded the Theosophical Society, an organization that would soon play a major role in introducing Americans to the ancient wisdom of the East.

It is this connection that brought him to Sri Lanka. He must be a man with amazing capabilities, to have come all the way to this part of the world, and achieved so much! Even today it takes almost a day to come to Colombo from New York!

His arrival in Sri Lanka and the work he commenced is linked with the revival of Buddhist Assertiveness in Sri Lanka.

It is also interesting to note another aspect of his Buddhist activities as reported in *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* by Stephen Prothero ...

I quote;

“DESPITE CLAIMS THAT Olcott initiated the Sinhalese Buddhist Revival, his connection with the movement was, as he himself recognized, neither as originator (credit Mohottivatte Gunananda) nor as culminator (credit Anagarika Dharmapala) but as organizer and articulator. It was Olcott who agitated for Buddhist civil rights, and who gave the revival its organizational shape by founding voluntary associations, publishing and distributing tracts, and, perhaps most important, establishing schools. It was he who articulated most eloquently the "Protestant Buddhism" synthesis. The most Protestant of all early "Protestant Buddhists," Olcott was a culture broker with one foot planted in traditional Sinhalese Buddhism and the other in liberal American Protestantism. By creatively combining these two sources, along with other influences such as theosophy, academic Orientalism, and metropolitan gentility, he helped to craft a new form of Buddhism that thrives today not only in Sri Lanka but also in the United States.”

Un quote.

The period and the contributions made by the efforts of Olcott and the other Buddhist leaders are beautifully summed up in the play written by Mr Bandu Kodikara as appeared in the Anandaya of 1978.

I quote;

“In 1841 Govenor Sir Colin reported that the education given in the temples of Ceylon was comparable to the education given in any European Country. Subsequently in 1848 Pirvena Education was banned. In its stead public schools were started. G H S Blaney a missionary who was in Ceylon from 1815 to 1825, appealed to the Governor, Do not force Buddhist Children to become Christians. Instead I will start English Schools. Then our purpose will be served automatically. If you can't make them Christians at least make them bad Buddhists was the guiding principle.....

The English Schools were founded, The souls of the children who joined them were saved from the inferno which awaited them. But did they become useful, patriotic citizens? What were they taught?

They knew the exact date when princess Victoria lost her first milk tooth, But they did not know who Dutugemunu was.

A school was born.

A school that would shake the foundation of the citadel of imperialism

A school that would inspire patriotism, and self confidence in the People

A school where the national struggles of our time would originate

A school where the culture of the nation would thrive..” end quote.

In the early stages efforts to teach oriental subjects such as Pali and Sanskrit, and to give pride to the Buddhist values had made a significant impact.

In the early stages we can see the Buddhist Education was very much a part of national

revival as well. I chose my topic for today's speech taking in to account the environment we live today, that changes that are happening around us, factors that influence us especially with the closer integration to the world and the media dominated value systems. I feel we need to go back and ask some fundamental questions about the Buddhist Education that was started.

During my days at Ananda about 36 years ago, I remember very vividly a point made by late Dr E W Adikaram when he gave an evening talk organized by "Ananda Situwili Samajaya". This was a set up to study and promote Dr Adikaram's thinking. He said " If Simply by being born to a Buddhist family makes a person a Buddhist then there can be Buddhist cats and dogs as well as Buddhist vegetables because they grow in Buddhist households. Same is true of the so called Buddhist Education. Simply because the teachers and students are Buddhists such a school doesn't become a Buddhist school or education provided there cannot be considered Buddhist education either". I must admit I remember it not for its insight but for its wittiness.. But I quote this statement as a prelude to today's discussion for its profound insights.

Prior to the arrival of the British, the centre of education was the temple and the teacher was the Buddhist monk. The place of worship as the centre of learning was not uncommon to us. In India the Brahmins were the teachers, one had to go to them to learn. Just as much as it was the Masters who taught in the East, in the West too, the church dominated the teachings. If not it had a significant influence or conflicts with what was taught to the people. I presume this probably had to do with power.

Let us first explore what can be considered Buddhist Education?

Is it a process that teaches the teachings of Buddha? The great Mahavihara and the Nalanda University could have been such places, But in the 19th century Pirivenas such as Vidyodaya established in 1873, taught Pali, Sanskrit, Classical Sinhalese, Ayurvedic Medicine, Astrological Mathematics, and Such oriental subjects.

During the British Rule they established English medium schools that taught subjects aligned to the British Curricula and there were vernacular medium schools that got step motherly treatment with hardly any support. To illustrate this situation, the late Anagarika Dharmapala had cited the following statistics in an article published in the 'Sinhala Bauddhyaya' on 9th October 1909.

"Out of a total revenue of Rs.35,582,849 for 1907 raised in Ceylon the sons of the soil only received for their moral, intellectual and industrial improvement the stupendous sum of Rs. 807,300!!"

The other Buddhist schools in the island are those established with the guidance of Colonel Henry Steel Olcott under the Buddhist Theosophical Society (BTS). He had modeled this exercise after Christian examples that he was familiar with. "As the Christians have their Society for the diffusion of Christian knowledge so this should be a society for the diffusion of Buddhist knowledge. Olcott also founded, again on the Christian model, Buddhist secondary schools and Sunday schools affiliated with the BTS thus initiating what would become a long and successful campaign for Western – Style Buddhist education in Ceylon. (Prothero, Stephen 'The White Buddhist: Henry Steel Olcott and the Sinhalese Buddhist Revival')

These schools have evolved to what they are today.

Let us examine the nature of Buddhist education today in such schools - like Ananda .

The students study for the government examinations -be it Year Five, O Level or A Level. Up to O Level one learns Buddhism as a subject, which generally covers the life of the Buddha, about 20 stanzas from the Dhamma pada, selected Suttas such as Mangala, Metta, Ratana, Parabhava, Sigalovada, Vyagga pajja, Vasala, and a few lessons on the Noble Eight Fold path. Unless you select Buddhist Studies as a subject in the Arts stream for A level, the study of Buddhism ends.

However, because one studies in a so-called Buddhist School, you observe Pansil the five precepts every morning and take part in the offering of Buddha Pooja collectively as a class perhaps once a month or once a term depending on the number of classes in the school. There will be a Sil programme for Vesak and Poson Poya along with some religious activities.

My primary education was at Sri Palee College Horana, which was a more secular in that sense. We did not observe Pansil every day except during the three days we had Upasana or the morning assembly. We had a shrine much smaller than the Ananda Budu Medura. But in the scheme of big things it was similar in terms of syllabus and the broad activities. Somehow at Ananda you get a feel of Buddhist activities more than in other schools. For instance, Ananda Buddhist Society is a very prominent student body.

In order to move to my proposed new paradigm, I wish to summarize the present Buddhist education as a process where other subjects and a bit of Buddhism is taught in a Sinhala Buddhist atmosphere.

This perhaps is the result of the way we have been made to think about education. By far the purpose of education has become so narrow with employment as the ultimate objective. Even the universities are embroiled in the argument whether they should produce employable graduates or intellectuals when the real need is to develop Employable Intellectuals as suggested by Professor Dayantha Wijesekara at the recent OPA professional sessions.

By limiting Buddhist Education to a such a narrow confine haven't we missed on an opportunity in contributing to the greater development of the education of the mankind, by developing a set of youth who are broader in their thinking?

At this point let me interject a thought by Anagarika Dhammapala. " To understand the spirit of the holy teachings of the Thathagata, one should study the Pali Dharma. How is one to have faith in the wisdom of Buddha as the Supreme Master? We are asked to study at least one of the five Nikayas in completeness" (MBJ Vol 22, Feb 1914).

I certainly feel we have missed something big. We haven't had the opportunity of learning the Buddha's teaching in a way that is relevant, so that we can move beyond the ritualistic practice of it. Why do we freely recite the Five Precepts but not necessarily observe them! It means our faith is not that strong in the teachings of our Master. That is why we haven't been able to significantly influence the way we approach our affairs from a Buddhist Perspective. More importantly, we haven't created a thought leadership that influences other spheres of studies to benefit from the wisdom of the Teachings of The Tathagatha.

My effort today hence is to propose a slightly different paradigm that we may want to consider, as a new way of approaching Buddhist Education in a manner that suits the needs of the 21st century.

The new paradigm I propose is one where we approach the Teachings at four levels or four ways.

The proposed levels are

1. Philosophical
2. Prescriptive
3. Interpretative
4. Intra Personal

I also propose using these approaches to make a conscious effort to influence and integrate Dhamma to the core education programme. Such an effort will eventually result in a Buddhist Way of behaviour which goes beyond any ethno-religious boundaries.

Let me articulate what I mean by this.

Philosophical Level

Take the core teachings of the Buddha, Middle Path. If we had been reflecting on the essence of these teachings and the society and the planet, books like 'Small is B Line' and 'Sustainable Development' have failed to embrace and explore these philosophical aspects of Buddhism into a wider array of situations because our education system has not encouraged ... can make a significant contribution in many fields such as an attempt to do this.

Dhamma Is Integrated to the Education process and influence shaping the subject matter as well. such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eight Fold Path

...

or concepts like 'Triple Bottom Development' should have come from a Buddhist scholar from here.

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Take the teaching of the Buddha about the five Niyama Dhammas - the five cosmic orders

- * Utu Niyama, order of seasons
- * Bija Niyama, order of biological existence
- * Kamma Niyama, order of moral action
- * Dhamma Niyama, order of natural phenomena
- * Citta Niyama. order of mind or psychological order

Even if we accept this principle superficially, we will then subscribe to the view that there can be more than one reason for a situation.

Does our practices in Business, and the way we use our resources at private or at public level reflect that we have any belief in the law of kamma and its vipaka? Rather than taking the narrow view of attributing misery to past kamma taking responsibility to volitional actions can be of greater significance.

If we bring the concept of Samsara and Rebirth, our attitude towards using the resources of the earth can be different. Remember what Arahath Mahinda told the King Devanampiya Tissa. “ O king you are only the caretaker not the owner of this land”.

Because we did not integrate these teachings in to our education system these are confined to quotations. But we can certainly attribute the integration of these teachings to the technocrats of the past who developed the ancient Wapi – civilization. The weva is not a tank - it is a total eco system. It has taken into account the rights of all living beings, not only humans. The weva is not a tank that collects water and distributes but a living system that cares. This is what I mean by integrating the philosophical aspects of Buddhism to education. Because we were not fortunate enough to learn the Dhamma in a meaningful way as proposed by Anagarika Dharmapala we reduced our Buddhist Learning only as a part of the education system where the knowledge had to come from the West !

Since we did not make an effort to play our part the way we should have, we continue to import knowledge almost in all fields.

The second opportunity is to integrate the teachings of the Buddha in a prescriptive manner.

Prescriptive Level

There are many Suttas where the Buddha prescribes certain ways things should be done. This is one area where the Teachings are being at least widely discussed. The best examples are Sigalovada Sutta, Parabhava Sutta and Mangala Sutta. But our discussions of these too stay mostly within the direct meaning of these teachings. For instance the teaching –

“ Ekena bhoge bhunjeyya-dvihi kamman payojaye -Cattuttam ca nidhapeyya, apadasu bhavissati” meaning “ Let him divide the income into four portions. One to be used for daily expenses, two for the progress of the business and the last to be deposited carefully for use in the future and in case of emergency.

We have uttered these and remembered these to pass the O/L Buddhism paper. But were we taught how to build an effective personal financial model based on this? Have we discussed in school the underlying principles? Have we been able to take this to the level of national planning? "Now it is too late", one might say.

The duties and obligations between the six stakeholders of life given in Sigalovada Sutta itself is a social treaty. The duties and obligations given in the relationship between the master and the servant is a blueprint for a comprehensive labour management policy if only we extend our imagination and integrate the teaching.

In the Vyaggapajja Sutta, the Buddha teaches how one can earn and protect what one earns. In this he uses a phrase to describe what is the way to earn-“uttana viriyadhigatha, bahubala paricita, sedavakkhitta, dhammika, dhamma laddha etc.

This teaches dignity of labour which is something we do not teach in our education system. Then we would try to do decent businesses than “deals” that hardly adds true economic value.

Take the example of four extremes under which one should not take decisions given in the Sigalovada Sutta-Canda, Dosa Bhaya, Moha (partiality, enmity, fear and stupidity or in the absence of proper information).

Take the simple seven-step instructions given by the Buddha to a student to fight drowsiness:

1. Ignore the thought of drowsiness
2. Reflect on the Dhamma (or the subject he is learning)
3. Recite
4. Pull both ear lobes and rub your limbs with hand
5. Get up, wash your eyes, look around and visualize light
6. Walk up and down
7. If all these fail, then go to sleep with the determination to wake up at a particular time.

Though we hear Kalama Sutta being quoted have we really built on the practice of maintaining an objective and inquisitive mind when seeking answers to problems. In many instances how dogmatic are we?

In order to keep within the scope of this paper, I will not continue giving examples of such descriptive instructions given by the Buddha. Our education system should highlight them and incorporate them in a manner that makes sense to the student and we need to extend these to wider applications such as management of organizations and the affairs of the country.

Next in the proposed new paradigm is the Interpretative Level.

Interpretative Level

Here what I propose is to explore the possibility of taking many a teaching of the Buddha that are not necessarily descriptive, but can be interpreted in a way that can guide and apply in our affairs. Let me illustrate this with a few examples.

We come across the five hindrances in the context of the realizing of nibbana. These five conditions supposed to block the realization hence called ni-varana. But a closer examination of the five will show us that the same tendencies very much contribute to the non-achievement of personal goals. For easy communication I have coined an acronym called RAPID to explain this.

Restlessness - Uddachcha kukkuchcha

Aversion - Vyapada

Procrastination - Thina midda

Indulgence - Kaama chanda

Doubt – Vici kichcha

Taking the teachings given in the Dhamma on how to overcome these five hindrances, I have provided a methodology of '5Rs' – that is to Realize, Re Commit, Re start, have Reminders and Right Company. The last – Right Company is the vital ingredient to have.

In fact, I talk to students using this model on 'How to fail exams!' citing my own personal experience. Actually I discovered this when I heard a preaching by late venerable Heenatiyana Dhammaloka Thero at the Vajiraramaya when he explained the meaning of the 10th and 11th stanzas of Dhammapada

- citta vagga.

The meaning of the two stanzas are:

Whatever (harm) an enemy may do to an enemy, or hater to a hater, an ill –directed mind can do one far greater harm.

What neither mother, nor father, nor any other relative can do, a well directed mind does and thereby elevates one.

Having heard these at a time when I had failed my exams, I realized the nexus between what was taught in the two stanzas and the five hindrances.

Let me give another example.

Buddha proclaims four types of happiness to a house holder. They are:

- * Happiness of possession (Atthi sukha)
- * Happiness of enjoyment (Bhoga sukha)
- * Happiness of debtlessness or Free of Debt (Anana sukha)
- * Happiness of blamelessness (Anavajja sukha)

If we define these as the dimensions of true success, then they can be expanded to form a whole new doctrine on how to seek happiness and to balance life. See the close inter-dependent nature of these four. The first talks of not only of the economic success but a sense of abundance - the feeling that “I have”, the second enjoyment is the joy of using what you have. When the two are taken together it illustrates the need to set the life style first so that it will guide what you want and how much you need to earn, to maintain that.

Then comes the third point, being free from debt. Isn't it directly linked to the first two points? Invariably one loses the fourth happiness of blamelessness when the previous three are not there.

Reflect on how much we can build on this in guiding ourselves to manage the affairs not only at our personal lives but even our business by using these teachings. Doesn't this very clearly define what Success of a householder is? Doesn't this give a blue print as to

how we can do our personal financial management. If followed cannot one be successful as well as happy.

Take the concept of Paaramita. These have been translated by scholars as Ten Perfections in the effort to become a Buddha. A Bodhisattva supposed to fulfill paaramitas in samsara at three levels -Parami, Upa parami and Paramatta parami meaning; that the bodhisattva will sacrifice his belongings, parts of the body and even his life as the paarami's advance. We have conveniently attributed these only to Bodhisattvas forgetting that we also have to be Bodhisattvas in some form since one can reach Enlightenment only through one of the three Bodhi stages -Samma Sambuddha, Pacceka Buddha or an Arhat.

If we aspire to realize Enlightenment then we should at least aim to become an Arahat one day. Therefore, we too have to fulfill our paaramitas in some form. I invite you to look at them as ten positive responses to different situations in life.

The ten paramitas are:

- * Dana - Generosity
- * Seela - Morality
- * Nekkamma - Renunciation
- * Panna - Wisdom
- * Viriya - Energy
- * Shaanthi - Patience
- * Sachcha - Truthfulness
- * Adittaana - Determination
- * Metta - Loving Kindness
- * Upekka - Equanimity

These ten attributes or qualities can be brought into focus in many a moment in life but only if we remember that the life situation in a given moment is a good opportunity to practice one of the paaramis.

Take Determination of the Buddha

“Unrelentingly indeed did I struggle and I resolved; let only my skin sinews and bones remain, let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, yet there shall be no ceasing of energy till I have attained whatever can be won by mental strength, mental energy and mental effort.”

This he said to himself when he sat down under the asatu tree where he reached Enlightenment. If we reflect upon this strong determination and if our education system guides us to develop such strong determination in face of adversity, what a difference can it make? We haven't, but in USA they have done so much work on understanding how to improve determination and face adversity. They even talk of an AQ like IQ.

My earnest request to you is to reflect on the Ten Perfections in the light of interpreting it to mean a way to approach life not as a story of a hero, only to say sadhu sadhu.

The Buddha's simile of Lotus Ponds is such a crucial teaching that has relevance to the education system only if we interpret and integrate. Buddha said

I saw beings with little dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities, and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt seeing fear in blame and in the other world.

Just as in a pond of blue and red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it. And some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rest on the water's surface. And some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rise out of the water and stand clear un wetted by it (ariya pariyesana sutta MN26)

Think of this example alone. Doesn't it resemble a classroom? Yet we continue to teach as if they are all of the same level of understanding grouping them in to large classes with no regard to the students' capacity or their liking and their ability. If we apply this principle to sports then there will never be world class sportsmen. No wonder it is easier to have world class athletes and sportsmen rather than world class intellectuals! In sports the teaching is personalized by the coach but this does not happen in the class room. This was acceptable when the only model we knew was the production line of a factory. But should we continue with the same model when ICT offers opportunity for students to learn at their own speed and in own way?

Take the different ways and methods the Buddha used to teach his students – taking in to account the orientations of learning. Remember the incident of Chulla Panthaka, the young monk who realized the Dhamma by rubbing a white cloth facing the sun. If we bring all these and link them to the teaching methods we would have evolved a more holistic and more effective teaching methodology that we could have exported to the world!

Take the four sublime states of being – Metta , Karuna, Muditha, Upekkha (Loving Kindness, Compassion, Unselfish Joy, and Equanimity). Explore how these qualities can be used as a basis for a strong interpersonal relationship frame work. Apply these principles in to People Management concepts in organizations. Explore why they shouldn't be the qualities of a good leader. Such deeper exploration will show us the power these teaching have when interpreted with a focus.

The final stage of the proposed new paradigm is the Intra Personal level.

Intra Personal Level

This level is how to integrate the teachings of the Buddha in the ultimate personal development domain. Being a Buddhist means learning to be happy, discovering the path to happiness and moving in the direction of final liberation or Enlightenment.

Nibbana is departure from craving. It is a supra mundane state that can be attained in this life itself. It is also explained as extinction of passions but not a state of nothingness. It is an eternal blissful state of relief that results from the complete eradication of the passions. Metaphysically, Nibbana is the extinction of suffering. Psychologically, it is the elimination of egoism. Ethically, it is the eradication of lust, hatred and ignorance. (Narada -Dhammapada translation)

At this level, we are invited to explore the question, 'Who am I? and to find answers we have to read the book-which is oneself'?

At this level the most important thing is developing the ability to become mindful and alert, and have “yoniso manasikara”. Mindfulness is the ability to become aware of the thoughts and feelings that arise in the mind here and now. This is done by leveraging the mind as a faculty similar to the other five faculties.

In Zen Buddhism they emphasize the significance of mindfulness in day to day life saying ; Zenna in activity is thousand times better than Zenna in sitting. (Zenna means sitting in meditation)

This is different to our view of meditation. We generally consider meditation as some activity meant only for those who are in a hermitage and we tend to approach meditation or development of the mind as something separated from day to day living. This is a misconception. Mindfulness is needed more by us -the busy householders even than the hermits. We may not be able to develop the mind to reach such deep absorptions known as Dhyanas . But if we learn to practice mindfulness by integrating it to our daily practices, we can move from reacting to stimuli to 'responding to them after becoming aware'. Then shouldn't this become part of the total educational curriculum? Shouldn't short periods every day be devoted to develop mindfulness by learning to be silent and observe what goes on here and now? I have proposed that this should be developed even as an executive capability. Why it is called a capability or a skill is because it is there in everyone at some level but can be developed by systematic practice.

Unless one is mindful one is not Heedful. Our Motto invites us to be heedful. Appamado Amata Padam. Why? Because Pamado Maccuno Padam.

Heedfulness is the path to deathlessness

Heedlessness is the path to death

The heedful do not die,

The heedless are like unto the dead.

Conclusion

I am neither a Buddhist scholar a Educationist. Yet my effort was to propose this new paradigm for Buddhist Education where we find ways to integrate the teaching of the Buddha in four ways namely at Philosophical, Prescriptive, Interpretative and Intra Personal levels. If this is done, I believe we will be able to bring about a transformation of the total education system. We will be able to present new fields of knowledge and insights that can serve mankind. We will be able once again to dominate the sphere of knowledge and regain the place we deserve in the world.

Let us test this concept through debate and exploration by scholars from different disciplines. Then only can some of these concepts be understood and their relevance identified. Following such a study in depth we need to explore how such new insights can be made an integral part of our

education system. Should we expose our students to the teachings of Buddha in this way- if so how do we do it -These are questions we need to find answers.

My sincere belief is that had we attempted this kind of an exercise to integrate the teachings of the Buddha to the learning and evolution of a new knowledge base we could have developed a strong position to influence the world order and make it a better place to live than what it is today.