

Be a Dharma Heir!

by Piya Tan

The secret to awakening in the Buddha Dharma is through right listening. The word for a true disciple is “saavaka” which means “listener.”

When we first listen to the voice of the Dharma spoken by so many teachers, we seem to hear a different thing from each speaker: every teacher his teaching. The confusion is not in the teacher but in our shopping for teachers. Instead, we should listen for the healing patterns in the music of the Dharma. Listen to the Dharma, not the teacher.

When a famous foreign monastic or speaker comes to town, our ancient good karma draws us to listen to them. How many such speakers we have listened to, but are we any nearer to awakening? Many listen but do not hear.

The ancient monks have a way of listening to the Dharma: they do not merely look up in admiration at the Buddha’s status and achievements, but with downcast eyes, they listen to his message with full mental focus. They listen and they hear.

The wisest saints of the Buddha’s time, like Saariputta and Citta the householder, declare that it is “not through faith” that they are awakened by the Buddha, but by their own wisdom in the Dharma, listening to the Buddha. With wise listening comes wise faith and wise seeing.

We spend hours reading Dharma books and looking at the Internet, and yet we are not fully awakened. We stop too long when we count the mile-stones of our journey, and worry about missing mile-stones and signposts. We should simply move on and not worry about what are missing in our lives.

This journey begins with closing our eyes and looking into the inner space of true awakening. And when we open our eyes again, we begin to see the treasures in our lives, they have been there all the time. Now we have the eyes to really see and enjoy them.

The maps for our journey are the ancient Suttas. Those who read the Suttas like newspapers and then cast them away like old news will never find their way in life. Every Sutta has a line, or paragraph, or passage, that stands out above the rest of the forest of words, reaching deep into our minds, turning it around in the right direction towards the city of Nirvana.

The greater our defilements the more boring we find such passages. It is like the hasty traveller who looked at the forest and missed the path for the trees. Such repetitive passages of the Suttas tire the eyes because the words often look the same. Only in carefully listening to them that our hearts brighten and light the path before us. As we advance on the Dharma path, the beautiful silence becomes ever clearer, and we are more sure of the way.

We still have the Sutta maps with us, giving clear instructions and inspiring stories on how to prepare for the journey, which direction to take, what to do when in difficulty, how to travel safely, and so on. Of course, if we have a guide, all these are expedited. The journey is surer, and we will be able to reach our destination more quickly.

All we need to do is carefully listen to the guide as he explains the map, and to journey together. It is all right to be slow on this journey, so long as we do not stop too long.

Having gone slightly ahead of others, we can see behind us some of those who are uncertain of directions, or have lost their way. Out of compassion, we should show them the Sutta maps again and again, so that they are back on track. It is fun when we joyfully and safely travel together in the right direction.

Won't you join me to listen to the Buddha's voice in the Suttas, and show his Sutta maps to other travellers? Do not look at your lacks, then you will fail even before starting. We look for love and things in the world, but the true treasure lies within us, in the Dharma.

Listen to your inner goodness and the blessings that you have which many others do not. There are so many others who are suffering more than ourselves. Seeing the pains of others, we realize ours are much less, and lessening. We only need to stretch a joyful guiding hand.

Join me in this journey and learn to read the maps rightly. Let us be guides unto others; help me teach others to read the Sutta maps so that they, too, can make their own journey. Join me in this wonderful inward journey.

Let us together be Dharma heirs.

To download: The Great Commission (V 1.11-16) [From Yasa to the sending of the first missionaries], go to <http://pali.house.googlepages.com/vinayapitaka> and click V 1.11-16.

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