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Preface

The path of Buddhist learning has been difficult for me for much of the way. My early Buddhist awareness started in Malacca (Melaka), Malaysia, when my parents, worried that I might be converted to Christianity (my brother was already converted by our eldest aunt), encouraged me to learn Buddhism in a local Buddhist temple.

This was in the 1960s when I was in my early teens. At that time, it was extremely rare to find a local teacher, monastic or lay, who was proficient in Buddhism, much less who taught Buddhism in English. My first contact with early Buddhism was through the Venerable Ananda Mangala Thera. Although he was a very unorthodox Sinhalese monk,¹ to say the least, I benefitted enough from his teachings to be inspired to spend 20 years as a Thai Theravada monk.

The five years of monastic tutelage (*nissaya*) in Wat Srakes Rajavaramahavihara in Bangkok, a leading monastery in Pali learning, was very beneficial for my monastic training. However, I first had to learn Thai, and then sat for the 3-year Nak Tham ecclesiastical examinations.

I am profoundly grateful to all the warm and wise teachers of Wat Srakes who taught me Dharma, Vinaya, Pali and meditation. Waen Noigun, then a Chulalongkorn University undergraduate, was my personal Thai tutor, and from whom, too, I learned much about Thai culture. During the short time (over a year) I spent at the Mahachulalongkorn University (for monks), I made many erudite and morally virtuous teachers, such as the venerable Than Chaokun Prayudh, regarded as Thailand's greatest living Buddhist philosopher.

My deepest respects, of course, remains with my venerable preceptor, HE Somdet Phra Vanarat (Poon Punṇasiri, the late 17th Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Order), and the abbot of Wat Srakes, the Venerable Chaokhun Debgunabhorn (Kaew Upasena, now Somdet Phra Budhajahn). In 1979, I was privileged to be able to practise two months of Vipassana meditation with the venerable Mahasi Sayadaw in Tidorp, Hogezoom, Burgh-Haamstede, in the Netherlands.

Soon after I left the monastic order, I spent over a year with the University of California at Berkeley as a visiting scholar on the invitation and sponsorship of Professor Lewis Lancaster. This was another very important period of education, where I experienced a sort of "cutting-edge" learning that spanned ancient religions, modern religious developments, and of course, Buddhist Studies with some of the leading Buddhism scholars. I also witnessed the beginnings of the digitization of the Tripitaka and was initiated into the use of the internet.

After inviting my family and I to move to Singapore from Malaysia to continue Dharma work, Lim Soon Kiat, along with Lim Hong Choo and Lim Hong Geok, provided unstinting and warm family-like support, even after we have settled down here. Their generosity is an important foundation, not only for our Dharma work and Sutta translation, but also of the future of our two young sons.

Through this exciting journey of places and the spirit, I was able to build up a large library of Buddhist scriptures, books and related materials. All this prove to be invaluable in my current Dharma work and translating of the Pali Canon and teaching it—and in the producing of this series of Sutta Discovery translations.

Acknowledgements

The Sutta Discovery (SD) series started with the National University of Singapore Buddhist Society weekly Sutta Study Group (SSG) classes in February 2002, and the Buddhist Fellowship in February

¹ See Piyasilo, *Charisma in Buddhism*, 1992: 20-43, http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/charisma6.pdf.

2003 on the invitation of Angie Monksfield. Since then, a new volume of translations and essays (A4 size, comb-bound, averaging 180 pages) has been published every three months.

These photocopied SD volumes serve as study texts in the Buddhist Fellowship classes (every Tuesday, since 2003) and the Minding Centre (every Wednesday, since 2006). By January 2010, a total of 33 SD volumes were completed. By 2030, life, time and health permitting, over 100 SD volumes have been projected, with annotated suttas of the whole of the Dīgha Nikāya and Majjhima Nikāya, and most of the Sāmyutta and Aṅguttara Nikāya, and selections from the Khuddaka Nikāya.

In April 2009, after discussions with Rene Cho and Kelvin Chin of the Firefly Mission, we formed the Sutta Discovery Support Group (SDSG) as a result of their keen enthusiasm. A very important part of the SDSG is the website department, which works on setting up and maintaining the Dharmafarer website (<http://dharmafarer.org>) for the Sutta translations and my other works, and the Minding Centre website (<http://themindingcentre.org>) for classes, courses and meditation therapy. Deidre Foo, Tok Meng Haw and Daren Han have selflessly, sometimes against overwhelming odds, worked together with amazing fellowship, with my wife, Ratna Lim, a total novice to IT, as their understudy but a very quick learner. Together, they have contributed to the success of these websites.

In late 2009, the SD publication project was launched to publish the whole SD series, beginning with volume 1, in book form, hopefully releasing 1-3 volumes each year, depending on funds.

Numerous people have contributed to the success of the SD series. Due to space constraint, I can only mention those regular supporters and the latest donors, but always remembering with gratitude so many who are not mentioned. Of special mention is Yeoh Teck Hwee, for his regular contributions towards the photocopying and binding of the SD volumes. It was Heiny Tan who proposed that we make the SD translations available online. On Rohit Tyagi's suggestion, we used Googlepages while it was feasible. Damodaran Prabakaran is the generous sponsor of our internet broadband, which gives us easy access to our dedicated Sutta websites, selflessly sponsored by Ng Yee Kong of the Firefly Mission.

Amongst those who have given valuable assistance in locating research materials, even at short notice, are Liu Yunchang (University of the West, USA), Heiny Tan, Elvina Melissa, Ng Kim Leong (who also donated the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism), and Xu Jianbin.

Clement Tan (Malaysia) merits special mention for his diligent checking the translations against the original Pali. Others like David Sugiman have been very helpful as regular proof-readers of the translations. The refreshingly attractive cover designs (SD 1-3) have been designed by Veron Lien.

The Singapore Buddhist Youth Mission has been making annual donations to the SD project since 2008, thanks to Chan Jer Luang's kind recommendation. Dr Ang Beng Choo and Lim Sek Chong have been very supportive of our Dharma work and our family. Grateful thanks also go to the numerous students and well wishers who have been attending the various Sutta classes at the Buddhist Fellowship, the Singapore Buddhist Mission, the Poh Ming Tse (especially William Chua Geok Eng, Chia Quee Khee and Vincent Chua), and other centres and groups, who have all generously donated towards the Sutta translation project.

Amongst the many others who have fervently supported the Minding Centre and the Sutta translation and publication projects are Elgie Goh, Andrew Lee, Lee Teng Yong, Jerry Ong,² Tan Kah Tee, Tay Chuan Seng, Vijaya Bhaskaran, Dr Henry Yeo, and Amala Chew. Lester Tay, too, merits mention for being a very exemplary and caring Buddhist, ever ready to assist in various dedicated tasks such providing us with transport and helping to keep our computers in good working condition. Marcus Kam has been mindfully diligent and generous in supporting our Dharma work. I also recall Teo Yew Thong with joyful appreciation for initiating the BF Youths into the SD study. Tan Hung Khoon (Malaysia) and Loh Sai Yin have been not only regular students of our classes, but are good examples of those moved to inspire others to Sutta study.

Rajendra Aggarwal of Simla has dutifully and generously sent me whatever books published or printed in India that I need in exchange for the Sutta Discovery volumes.

² Jerry also donated towards the cost of printing "Simple Joys," Piya's 60th birthday commemorative book: download from <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/?cat=3>.

Dr Lim Kean Chin and his wife, Dr Kok Mun Foong, have contributed to the cost of printing 1500 copies of SD volume 1. We are also grateful for the many other generous donations which will go to the publication of SD volumes 2, and subsequent volumes.

A number of learned monks, especially Bhante Sujato (Australia), Bhante Aggacitta (Malaysia) and Bhante Dhammavuddho (Malaysia) have been very supportive of the SD translation work. In this connection, it is with great and joyful significance that recently, Bhante Aggacitta in a Youtube video spoke of his priority to “give weight to early Buddhism” over traditional teachings.³ Various forest monastic centres, especially those in Sri Lanka, Germany and Canada, who are using the SD translations, too, have given us positive feedback. These are important spiritual support and endorsement for this project.

It is rare that a family can be so single-mindedly supportive of Dharma work: for that I am grateful to my wife, Ratna Lim, the most industrious and loving person I know, and my two sons, Chai Leng and Chai Seng, who are beginning to ask interesting questions about life.

Our willingness to learn from others, even those vastly different in opinion from us, will only be advantageous to our educational and spiritual development, but most of all we must learn from the Suttas. May our Dharma-moved compassion and Dharma-inspired wisdom bring us closer to self-awakening, and transmute our community and society into the divine abodes.

All this I do as a support for my mind so that it is adorned with a calm clarity in my daily life, and the attaining of streamwinning in this life itself. May you, too, see your own remarkable goodness and attain spiritual liberation here and now.

Piya Tan
“Pali House”
February 2010

³ “The changing vision and adaptation” (29 Jan 2010): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L60BDi2NbOI>.