

by Leela

All samsara's joys and riches resemble last night's dream.
 Once you have seen them to be trivial and futile,
 With all doubts settled, take up the genuine Dharma.
 Practice with diligence and without any pretence.
 [Extract from poem by the 17th Karmapa]



I used to live in Johannesburg and worked as attorney at a large law firm. My husband worked as engineer, and as a young professional couple with high ambition, we quickly attained material success. We got everything that society says brings you happiness: beautiful house, smart cars, money in the bank. We travelled and indulged in many worldly pleasures. But there was always a sense that something was not right: there was something missing. There was an inner emptiness (not the emptiness spoken of in Buddhism) that nothing seemed capable of filling, no matter how much you had, or how much you achieved.

Disillusioned by a material vision of life, which seemed shallow and meaningless, we decided to leave the rat race and move to Plettenberg Bay, where we could enjoy less quantity and more quality of life. When we moved here, I thought the locals were slow and stupid. Now I see them as kind and gentle, and I feel sorry for the city dwellers with their stressed and frantic pace of life and inability to slow down, being so caught up in relentless ambition and desire to get ahead (like we used to be). With all the modern time-saving devices, they seem to be running faster into their graves! They may have many luxuries, but they don't have the luxury of time. They haven't discovered the graciousness of living in the present moment. They haven't discovered the joy of simplicity.

Buddhism teaches you to simply be with what is, and to be happy and content with that. What a relief to realise you don't need all those other things. What a wonder to realise that happiness is possible in the here and now, and not 'when I achieve this, or what I get that'. The miracle of mindfulness teaches you how to be fully present in the present moment – the only moment that is real, and to abide in it brings the happiness you have always been seeking. Then you don't have to chase life anymore, you can enjoy it as-it-is.

The practice of Buddhism completely changed my way of living, from an emphasis on 'doing', to realising the importance of cultivating your 'being'. The quality of your being determines the quality of each moment, because everything we experience is a projection of our mental consciousness and depends on our karmic vision. If we practice cultivating positive mental states such as loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity, generosity, patience etc our projected vision of the world slowly becomes more positive, until one glorious day we will see the Pure Land all around us. Buddhism has given depth and meaning and spiritual richness to my life, and I am so grateful I discovered this Path. I still have a long way to go, but the journey gets better all the time. May the blessings of the Dharma reach all beings, so that we become better people and collectively help create a more enlightened society and Pure Land here on Earth.

Gate to the source of every perfect joy and benefit,
 May the teachings of the Buddha endure a long time.
 May all communities who hold the teachings and explain and practice them
 Flourish through engaging in the ten Dharma activities.
 [Extract from poem by the 17th Karmapa]



AN HISTORICAL REVIEW

19 April 2001: BLIA 1st Meeting of the 3rd Board of Directors, together with Grand Master Hsing Yun, Ven. Hui Li and other Venerated Elders of Fo Guang Shan. They are standing in front of the Main Temple, that was still in beginning stages of construction, when this photo was taken.