



**The  
BROKEN BUDDHA 20 YEARS ON**

Reviews, Personal Communications and  
Blog Comments

**S. Dhammika**

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## Reviews, Personal Communications and Blog Comments.



When I published my book *The Broken Buddha* in 1990, I hoped it would stimulate debate and discussion amongst Western Buddhists about the course Western Buddhism should take, or not take. I received a few emails and letters about it but no more than a dozen, and somewhat disappointed, I left it at that and got on with my writing. Then in 2017, someone previously unknown to me, contact me and after saying how much he appreciated the book, told me that he had culled over a hundred assessments of and comments about the book from the internet, magazines, Buddhist newsletters and journals, and asked me if I would like to see them. I said I would and was quite surprised that the book had indeed triggered a great deal of debate, albeit quite unknown to me. Recently I thought it might be worthwhile to publish this material, so I have I added a few extracts from personal correspondence and the whole can be read below. Sometime in the future I will write a reply to my critics.

(1) I've been interested in getting hold of the book *The Broken Buddha* by Venerable Shravasti Dhammika for a while now and finally found a copy on eBay the other day which was delivered to my house this morning. I've heard it's a very controversial book that is quite destructive in regards to some of Buddhism's traditions, but I've also heard that it has built a large amount of support. Bhante Dhammika himself seems to express some regret for publishing it in the preface. I'm yet to start reading it so I'm not aware of the exact content, but I have a lot of respect for Bhante Dhammika, his book *Good Question Good Answer* was what introduced me to Buddhism in the first place. I am also a follower of his blog, and he has treated me with great generosity and kindness in our correspondences together. Has anyone here read it? What are your thoughts?

(2) After I read *'The Broken Buddha'* my relationship with the Theravada *as an institution / religious organization*, was changed. My formerly rose-coloured glasses were well and truly broken. I found myself unable to attend Theravadan religious gatherings for quite a while, but I did not ever consider giving up meditation practice or accepting guidance from the Pali canon. So it actually strengthened my conviction in the Teachings by making me see that they (Buddha's Teachings) are far greater than any one sect that might claim to best embody them (and does not *every* sect claim this?).

(3) I have met Ven. Dhammika a few times when he visited Melbourne. I don't think he wrote TBB out of bitterness, he is just what is termed a 'whistle blower' and every organization needs one, even Theravada Buddhism (the institution).

(4) Are you really that easily influenced by information at face value? When I read Dhammika's rant I chuckled through parts of it because I have also seen such and more in the wats, temples and vihāras I have lived in. What is truly distasteful to me is not what the content is pointing to but that a bhikkhu has stooped to such scandal.

(5) It is sad to read such importance given to this tabloid. It has been already said in this thread that this happens elsewhere in religion too. So I will only add that religion can be like a glass house, throw enough stones and you may well break something you like.

(6) Love this book. It really shouldn't offend you. If it does, then it's just the pride you have for a flawed institution which is being hurt. Westerners have not been exposed to a lot of the dirt in the Theravadin sangha, and because of this Dhammika does not have to present a "fair and balanced" evaluation of it. This book is *allowing* naive Westerners who do not have much first-hand experience dealing with the sangha to *have* that balanced view. If Dhammika forced himself to write about the positive qualities of the Theravadin Sangha just to seem balanced, it would have dulled the point of this earnest expression of genuine concern.

(7) Sociology on Theravada Buddhism in the United States generally concludes that there is a phenomenon of “parallel congregations”, with both Asian-immigrant and American-born groups sharing ritual space but not sharing practices: American-born practitioners tend to focus on meditation, while Asian-immigrants tend to focus on dana and festival-going, even though both groups may attend the same temple. Far from it being something they’re not aware of, it’s generally a salient difference and “just not my/our style”, to paraphrase the most common sort of response. While Asian-immigrants tend to treat monastics with great bodily respect, most American-born Theravadans tend to treat monastics the way they treat college professors. The criticisms of “*The Broken Buddha*” do not necessarily apply in the same way, if at all, in these new contexts; in short, the work is becoming outdated.

(8) It’s just another book and in my opinion heavily shaped by Ven. Dhammika’s own monastic experience. I’m sure that if the Ven. had stumbled into Wat Pa Barn Tard (for example) as a young man he would be writing very different books. What are our expectations of a living religion that is over 2500 years old and which has millions of adherents? Theravada Buddhism is what it is and as Mike points out it still seems to be producing benefit.

(9) For me, “*The Broken Buddha*” was an eye-opener. Before I read this book I had a very rosy, idealistic view of bhikkhus and monastic life. I thought all bhikkhus would be hard-working, serious meditators, and of course they would all follow the vinaya; the Buddha himself laid down those rules, why would a monk not follow them?! I thought monasteries were sincere, intense places, where laypeople and bhikkhus alike strove towards the cessation of suffering. When I got to know some actual real-life bhikkhus, they sensed this idealistic view in me and recommended I read some books that would challenge that view. They recommended I read that Phra Peter book “*Little Angels*”, where 10 out of the 12 novices are only in robes because it is a way for them to escape poverty. Only one of the novices had any inclination to actually become a bhikkhu when they reached 20. That startled me. I read that trashy book “*What the Buddha Never Taught*”, which while superficial, shallow and biased, did at least give me a little more

perspective on the failings of real-life bhikkhus. And of course *The Broken Buddha*, which was the biggest eye opener of all. Plus meeting real bhikkhus in a couple of monasteries here in New Zealand... one of them only meditates at morning and evening puja, he says he's no good at it, and will leave it for the next life. He said his aim in this life was to accumulate merit, and perhaps he would be able to meditate better in future rebirths. What!?! Like many people have been saying in this thread, *The Broken Buddha* does present a side of the sangha that some westerners are not aware of.

That is certainly true in my case, and I value this book for showing me that. However, I don't think I would advise other people read it, especially my friends and family. They don't know anything about Buddhism in the first place, and for them to read this book would leave them with an overwhelmingly negative view of the sangha. But for me - someone who is seriously considering going forth and who had an unrealistically idealised view of the sangha - it is very useful. I still intend to ordain, and the book has perhaps prepared me a little... made my eventual encounter with lazy bad monks less of a shock.

(10) The book stinks, in that it poorly reasoned. I have no problem with talking about the many and serious problems found in Theravadin countries. Having spent a brief time in Thailand in robes, I saw plenty of it. There is nothing surprising in what he says about all that. The problem is that his thesis is very poorly reasoned and has no balance.

(11) Regardless of its poor reasoning and balance, it was due. Even if to incite this discussion, to make people question their imagined stainless image of the Theravada, it was due. It is a book which seems to have incited some controversy and is worth respecting in that regard. If the accusations and concerns expressed were either baseless or already well-documented, this book wouldn't have made a blip. But it seems to have! "What holds attention determines action." - William James

(12) I should clarify that. Of course, my relationship with Theravadan Buddhism as a religious organization wasn't altered \*just\* by reading TBB. The book did, however, confirm and explain some of the

suspicious I already had (from careful observations in real life), and although I have not been to Asia, I have been to Temples where I could see some of those issues playing out right here in Australia. (No, I'm *not* going to give names and places, because that would be bordering on or might be taken as gossip etc., and I'm not going there!) Furthermore, I actually met with Ven. Dhammika a few times, and although I'm not a follower of his by any stretch, I did get to ask a few questions and sound him out a bit. Let's remember that he remains quite enthusiastic about the Buddha Dhamma, and the Pali Canon as the most authoritative version of the Teachings. I have to confess that apart from a few quite humorous bits (we all need a good laugh occasionally), I don't particularly *like* the book (*liking* something isn't the same as admitting that it might *serve some useful purpose* despite its unpleasantness), and I do agree that ideally it would only be read by those who, like most here, are already convinced enough about the Dhamma so as not to lose their conviction over one book. As I said, my conviction in the Dhamma was (ultimately) strengthened, not weakened, because I was able to separate the Buddha Dhamma out from the human organizations that attempt to represent it. The Dhamma is bigger than Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana or any 'Yana' you like. But I suppose that someone new to the Dhamma might get put off (Buddhism) by it.

(13) I was totally engrossed in this book and I believe S. Dhammika has done a great thing by documenting the real state of Theravada Buddhism in the present day. Buddhism faces a crisis in Asia and the growing Western community is in danger of repeating the mistakes of the past.

(14) The only thing I think the book is lacking is some perspective, which is indeed why it is a dangerous book to entrust to strangers. An uneducated reader, who isn't familiar with the way of life in Buddhist countries, might be tempted to think that this is either (1) an inherent failure of Buddhism or (2) an inherent failure of Asian culture. Neither of these is true. For example, he points out that Theravada laity never learn anything of morality-- but offering moral teachings to the lay world was never the primary intention of Buddhism, it's a culturally

Christian and Western ideal. It's *good* for lay people to learn, but only because we as Westerners or moderns can see the effects of that education when it's done right. The fact that S. Dhammika should have reminded us of is that every culture has its own failings which leave room for improvement and change for the better. It's natural to recognize failings like this, but we shouldn't try to blame them on anyone, only provide the impetus for change.

(15) He wrote his book in hopes that it would inspire progressive change, which would have been a pointless effort if there weren't good Buddhists in Asia. And together with that he emphasizes Mayahana and especially Vajrayana as a pure and inspiring example - though I can say - from my own knowledge (since here in Russia we've got only Vajrayana and a bit of Zen) - the situation in Tibetan tradition is worse than in Asian Theravada; and the same is true for such authentic territories as Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet

(16) I think the intention was somehow different. It seems like he felt hurt by tradition and circumstances and decided to "make a revenge". Otherwise, he would have mentioned positive sides of Theravada - but he didn't.

(17) I haven't a clue what his motivations are for writing this book. Certainly, a lot what he says is true and should be said, but as Zom points there is no balance in how he presented it, which could be very corrosive for some people's confidence in the Dhamma, and for that reason I think it is a very sadly horrible book.

(18) He wrote his book in hopes that it would inspire progressive change, which would have been a pointless effort if there weren't good Buddhists in Asia.

(19) I think Ven. Dhammika has actually said that he never intended to have it openly available for these very reasons but circulated it privately after writing it.

(20) His intentions might have been different, but he wrote in his book that his intentions were to inspire positive change by making people aware of a side of Buddhism that they weren't aware of. I think his written statement of his intentions published in his book takes priority as far as trying to decide what his intentions in writing the book were.

(21) He also wrote in his book that he didn't emphasize the positive because that was emphasized everywhere else and his book was about showing people a prominent reality that wasn't covered.

(22) I don't give a rat's tail as to what his intentions were or were not. It is simply an unskilful and somewhat destructive effort. It is one thing to offer a criticism of the Theravada as it manifests in a cultural context, but this bit is really way out of hand: it shows a significant lack on his part. The problem with this essay is that it is unbalanced and corrosive.

(23) Indeed. Read at your own risk. Having traveled a little through Theravada countries and being close friends with Theravada practitioners (as well as having seen the problems and excesses of Mahayana), the book didn't put me off Theravada. I think a perspective is important, as always.

(24) I have read Coleman's book (*The New Buddhism*) and agree, it's good. Not so much discussed here, IIRC. Not so negative as Batchelor or Dhammika, and that's nice. I don't think you'll get a lot from Dhammika's book having read Coleman and Batchelor, so there are probably better books for you at this stage. Two other books that are relevant to the discussion are both, oddly, called '*The Naked Buddha*'. One is a useful, positive, back-to-the-basics look at Buddhism by Howley. The other is more along the lines of Batchelor.

(25) I found the book engrossing

(26) A problem will not get fixed unless people are made aware of the problem and communicate about it. As with many things in life, hearing about a problem will make people feel uncomfortable. Some will take



a positive approach and push forward. Other people will try to make their discomfort go away by trying to shut down communication about the issue. One way of doing that is by labelling/censuring people who speak up. I think \*that\* is unskilful as it encourages a problem to continue to exist.

(28) The point several of us have made is that there's nothing remotely surprising in the book for anyone who has spent any time with real-life Buddhists. And the solutions offered don't sound particularly interesting. I know people have different inclinations, so if you find this book helpful, that's fine. But in my experience are many monks, nuns, and lay people in Asia and elsewhere that are simply getting on with living and teaching the Dhamma properly, which I think has much more impact.

(29) Very smelly bovine capriform. It is a badly done book, badly reasoned, and poorly balanced.

(30) What do members think of the part of the book in which he discusses the Pali canon, and says that there are parts of it that were developed by Theravada, and parts that were ignored, the latter of which became the basis for some of the Mahayana teachings? (Under "What Is Theravada?") He gives a couple of examples, I'll just mention one here: "For example, the Four Expressions of Sympathy (*sangha vatthuni*) are frequently mentioned by the Buddha, and could have important implications for a deeper understanding of love and compassion, particularly their social application. Mahayana used them to develop a whole philosophy of practical altruism, but they're given almost no attention in Theravada." He also discusses different versions of dependent origination taught by the Buddha, only one of which was developed into the concept we know as such today. I find this fascinating. Do readers here feel this is a fair representation of scriptural development? I found that part of the book fascinating because it shows how much of Asian Buddhism can be Asian rather than Buddhism. In other words, Buddhism could have been very different from it is now and still be as true/not true to the Pali Canon...it was just a matter of what particular cultures chose to become fixated

on. I started reading “*In the Buddha’s Words*” by Bhikkhu Bodhi shortly after I read “*The Broken Buddha*”. In his anthology of the Pali Canon Bodhi included a sutta that stated that giving dana to monks yielded the most kammic rewards. I saw the sutta where much of the corruption Dhammika described in his book started. Instead of one sutta among many, the Asian Sanghas over the centuries made that sutta prominent. The other example of selectivity in doctrine based on the Pali canon is the doctrine of dependent origination. Dhammika says: “There are two versions of this doctrine - one showing the arising of suffering, and the other showing the arising of liberation and freedom. The first of these ... features in virtually every book on Theravada... The second, and one would think the more important of the two, is virtually unknown, even by learned Theravadins... Carolyn Rhys Davis called this positive version of dependent origination an ‘oasis’ and asked, ‘How might it have altered the whole face of Buddhism in the West if that sequence had been made the illustration of the causal law!’ Indeed, how might it have altered the whole face of Theravada in Asia?” I find that this type of analysis raises tantalizing possibilities. It seems there’s a wealth of doctrine to be mined from overlooked segments of the canon that could do much to enrich our understanding and practice of Buddhism. This would make an exciting and rewarding project for scholars--really, a potentially great gift to mankind, or at least, Buddhist-kind.

(31) I think there are a lot of people on this forum who fall into that trap. ‘I’ve often thought about it as being similar to a Korean who only gets exposed to the best parts of Christianity and the shock they might get traveling to Europe, the US etc...I think only having the idealized vision of Buddhism from the texts untempered by the form Buddhism takes in the everyday world drives a lot of hostility towards Venerable Dhammikas book...or at least the refusal among western Buddhists on this forum to accept his message. The everyday reality of Buddhism versus the ideal in the text don’t have to threaten each other...look at the existence of devout Christians on our own side of the world. They coexist with lax Christians, corrupt Christians and Christians who are ignorant of their own religion too.

(32) I found that part of the book fascinating because it shows how much of Asian Buddhism can be Asian rather than Buddhism. This is the case with every religion, not just Buddhism.

(33) There is good and bad everywhere. The problem I have with the book is when the observations in it are taken as: 1. Something surprising; or 2. Implying that there are not plenty of good lay and monastic practitioners in Asia.

(34) My view is that this isn't a problem with the book, but one of the inspirations for it having been written. Like my hypothetical Korean Christian convert, Western Buddhists have only been exposed to the best texts and the best teachers. Not everyone has had the opportunity to travel and spend time in Asia. I think it is reasonable that some people would get a mistakenly idealized vision of every day Buddhism. In fact, Venerable Dhammika stated that one of the reasons why he wrote his book was that he was aware that only the good sides of Buddhism were being written about... giving people a lopsided picture. I believe Venerable Dhammika mentioned that he believed that to be the case. He also wrote that he didn't empathize that in his book because that side of the story is told almost exclusively. He wrote his book to tell the other side of the story. He wrote his book in hopes that it would inspire progressive change, which would have been a pointless effort if there weren't good Buddhists in Asia.

(35) I think Ven. Dhammika's criticisms of Buddhist monks is fair as they also fill/are supposed to fill the role that Christian clergy do of transmitting the Dhamma to the community. Christian monks never had that role. From what I read in the book, Christian monks don't make the same demands upon the community that Buddhist monks do either. One of the points that stuck at to me was that Venerable Dhammika didn't hold either the laypeople or the Sangha (in the book this was used to denote the monks only, at least by context) solely responsible. He wrote that the problems of both were due to lack of proper education and fear of reprisals for going against the status quo.

(36) Ven. Dhammika is quite right, the health of the Dhamma is dependent on sorting out issues with both lay people and ordained Sangha. This is not going to be easy.

(37) In his autobiography Bhante Gunaratana mentions how he was addicted to betel nuts (a mild stimulant) as were most monks back then and also had migraines. When he mentioned that he was going to try and practice meditation to help alleviate his migraines, other monks thought he was nuts (they did not meditate so saw no value in it). So this autobiography raises some of the issues found in *The Broken Buddha*, too. He of course, did overcome betel nuts and the migraines and became a scholar and practice-oriented famous monk.

(38) In a nutshell, the book is by a western born monk and is about criticisms of Theravada Buddhism as he saw it practiced in Asia (Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma primarily). Venerable S. Dhammika is still a monk. I was thinking about this book the other day. First, I was recalling what he wrote (and what I have observed in ethnic Buddhist communities in the US) that very few monks are interested in meditation. Some even dismiss it as napping, an activity for old people and discourage it. In his book Venerable Dhammika describes what he thinks a reformed order of Buddhist monks might look like. He includes many pie in the sky rules on his wish list (if there was such an order, I would support it).

(39) According to the Venerable S. Dhammika the Asian Theravada laity is only concerned with making merit. That is, ensuring a good rebirth for themselves by making donations to the monks. They grow up being taught that the maximum amount of merit is to be had by giving to monks, so few make donations or do volunteer work for others. The rest of the time, outside of holidays the laity is unconcerned about Buddhism. They do not read the suttas. They do not meditate. They are discouraged from doing so by the monks. They believe both things are not for ordinary people, but only for monks. Many monks are also unfamiliar with the suttas and do not meditate. In fact if a monk chooses to meditate they will not get any encouragement and even some discouragement as it makes other monks look bad. Many monks go into the Sangha as children, out of poverty and leave after they get a college education paid for by dana from the laity. The ones who stay experience a life time of being waited on hand and foot by the community. The monks become spoiled and narcissistic, caring only about their whims to use dana money to put up buildings and statues that people don't need and often when there is a lot of poverty in the

surrounding area. The monks often get big egos demanding huge amounts of respect and demanding to be catered to. Often the Buddhist community in Asia will sacrifice on essentials to their own families to give dana to monks who already have an excess of what they need or could want. This happens because of the aforementioned belief in merit making. For monks the most important thing is following the Vinaya, and most could care less about the Dhamma, even if they knew about it.

(40) Yes...I agree. Myself and my fellow foreign monk here at our temple have often felt somewhat ostracised by the other monks and novices because we stress the importance of meditation...and do our best to keep the Vinaya. The Thai monks and novices (who see the monks as an example to follow) often are lax with the Vinaya... not bothering to go out on alms-round, eating after mid-day.... They often have school groups come on Dhamma camps to stay for a few nights and days and are taught by the Thai monks. They only teach them morality... to be good and hope to go to heaven...and maybe scare them with images about hells. All religions teach us to be good, which gives the good results of a favourable rebirth, but only the Buddha's Dhamma teaches to escape Samsara and that requires understanding of the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path...and the practice of them. Because these monks do not practice themselves, they can hardly teach others what they do not know or believe. They only perfunctorily teach anything about meditation, including walking meditation which is taught like it is some fun little game since the monks themselves never do it anyway. A ten-day Vipassana retreat is a part of their teachers course, which as we know isn't even a real retreat but just a taster....and based upon this they then go out and teach it!!!! They know I want to teach the kids some real Dhamma, but am not encouraged or allowed, perhaps because the Thai monks will then get questioned upon things they themselves do not know. Although Anatta is meant to be at the heart of every Buddhist, Asians, including the monks, are still very much obsessed with 'face'. Many Thai monks think that because they are born into Buddhism they must automatically know more about it than any farang monk, and although we often get admiring comments from the Thai laity about our knowledge the same doesn't happen with the Thai monkhood. We foreigners have mostly changed from our

original religion we were brought up in to Buddhism so have done some study. Thais who convert to Christianity probably read the Bible, something I never did even though I was brought up as a Catholic.

(41) “Putting a price on the Dhamma” is somewhat related here and it is written by Ven. Dhammika. I agree with him that the Dhamma should not be for profit or for a fee. And this is one of the reasons I hope the Buddhist monastic tradition continues. There may be some corruption and bad monks, but how much more so if we start getting into married ministers with exorbitant salaries, Mercedes cars, Rolex watches and a tv show.

(42) This book, *The Broken Buddha*, although critical of much of what goes on in some Sanghas, could help provide some valuable information for some aspiring monks so that there are no unreasonable expectations.

(43) I am about 1/3 done with the book. So far, I think it is one of the most valuable books I read on Buddhism. It has forced me to re-evaluate my perspective on a number of people, books and practices. It has been very though provoking. I never would have come across this book on my own. This is one of the reasons why I read this board.

(44) I was fascinated to read that monastic began having heated disagreements, often leading to violence, about minutia (one shoulder covered with the robes versus both) and disputes about interpretation of the suttas, only a few centuries after the Buddha’s death. Also that such deep divisions over small, small rules still exist today. I used to think that the endless petty disputes I read on [talk.religion.buddhism](http://talk.religion.buddhism), various mailing lists and web boards was a major FAIL as far as people claiming to practice Buddhism went. Going by Venerable Dhammika’s book the kind of nonsense and bad behaviour I see on Buddhist forums is actually a time-honoured tradition.

(45) I don’t enjoy semantics, but in the interest of clarity that is not what scandal means. A simple google search reveals that Scandal simply means a publicized incident that brings about disgrace or offends the moral sensibilities of persons or society. That’s exactly what *The Broken Buddha* is all about. Yes, these things exist. Yes, moral corruption is widespread in the sangha at large. But just like in the world at large, there are still a lot of good people in robes. As Retro

has said, T.B.B is not a fair a balanced account and was never intended to be.

(46) When I first read the '*The Broken Buddha*' it shook up my (rather weak) faith at that time. In retrospect, I'm grateful that I read it, because it resulted in me going deeper into the Pali Tipitaka itself for guidance (which Ven. Dhammika recommends, by the way), and in a roundabout way, actually strengthened my faith. Yes, the Drum sounds a little out of tune. So we have to reconstruct the Drum, to the best of our ability, using the available materials. Enough of those (the Pali Tipitaka) seem to have survived the ravages of Time.

(47) I finally finished this book. I found two versions on the internet, one 60 pages and one 80 pages. The title above links to a PDF of the longer version. In a nutshell, the book is by a western born monk and is about criticisms of Theravada Buddhism as he saw it practiced in Asia (Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma primarily). Venerable S Dhammika is still a monk. His book includes two articles by Sri Lankans with similar criticisms, as well as many notes to other authors who had similar observations. The book also includes Venerable Dhammika's suggestions for a reformed Buddhism, some of which, he claims are being implemented by Mahayana influenced groups such as the "Western Buddhist Order" and "Friends of the Western Buddhist Order". Interestingly, Venerable Dhammika had praise for the IMS, Spirit Rock, a western group of Ajahn Cha followers and S.N. Goenka's meditation centers.

Anyone thinking of ordaining would do themselves a favor by reading this book and reading it in its entirety. Doing so will prepare them for a strong culture shock and alert them to problems they will need to navigate around to get what they want out of being ordained. A good overview of the message of the book can be had by reading 2 short articles in the appendix by other authors with similar criticisms. This book deserves a thorough review, but I will only mention some top points of what the author had to say. I can't emphasize enough that actually reading the entire book is very thought provoking.

According to the Venerable S. Dhammika, the Asian Theravada laity is only concerned with making merit. That is, ensuring a good rebirth for themselves by making donations to the monks. They grow up being

taught that the maximum amount of merit is to be had by giving to monks, so few make donations or do volunteer work for others. The rest of the time, outside of holidays the laity is unconcerned about Buddhism. They do not read the suttas. They do not meditate. They are discouraged from doing so by the monks. They believe both things are not for ordinary people, but only for monks. Many monks are also unfamiliar with the suttas and do not meditate. In fact, if a monk chooses to meditate they will not get any encouragement and even some discouragement as it makes other monks look bad. Many monks go into the Sangha as children, out of poverty and leave after they get a college education paid for by dana from the laity. The ones who stay experience a life time of being waited on hand and foot by the community. The monks become spoiled and narcissistic, caring only about their whims to use dana money to put up buildings and statues that people don't need and often when there is a lot of poverty in the surrounding area. The monks often get big egos demanding huge amounts of respect and demanding to be catered to.

Often the Buddhist community in Asia will sacrifice on essentials to their own families to give dana to monks who already have an excess of what they need or could want. This happens because of the aforementioned belief in merit making. For monks the most important thing is following the vinaya, and most could care less about the dhamma, even if they knew about it. Venerable S Dhammika does not fault the monks or laity for these problems. He mentioned that exceptional people have tried to turn things around, even if only for themselves, but both groups will reinforce the status quo out of fear of upsetting the other group. Venerable S Dhammika responds to the listing of names of exceptional people by stating that is exactly the point. There are so few people trying to be true to dhamma instead of the status quo that people \*can\* remember their names. As a brief aside, I was shocked to learn that there is a caste system in Sri Lanka and this extends to Buddhism. While westerners can join most orders, if you are Sri Lankan there are some orders you can't join if you are not a member of that caste. I also learned that Sri Lankan monks owned slaves. Slavery was abolished there in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as it was in the U.S., but people born into slavery had to remain slaves. Some



people continued to be slaves in Sri Lanka and in monasteries until the early 1900s.

One of the most interesting and I think the most important points Venerable S. Dhammika had to make was that he thinks Asian Theravada is in danger of dying out. The Dhamma isn't taught to most Asians, they don't get any spirituality or inspiration out of it. What they get is a religion to keep during the holidays and to make merit in as they begin to worry about future lives. The relationship between the people and the monks appears to be one way, with all of the giving coming from the people. In the meantime, Christianity is gaining in Asia quickly, much faster than Theravada is spreading in the West. Christian missionaries are doing charitable works for the people (something the Buddhist monks don't do) in addition to offering them the spirituality they aren't getting from the monks. That really hit home with me. I left the religion of my family as a teenager to become an atheist. The "clergy" I interfaced with cared only about tradition for tradition's sake, with no concern for meaning, let alone meaning relevant to contemporary life. They offered no spirituality, no inspiration and only made demands.

Having had that experience, I agree with the author that Theravada could be threatened by that situation. In any event, I think the book is worth reading and in its entirety. What I wrote isn't my opinion, I was explaining the opinions of the author. On the downsides of the book, it was published about 10 years ago so I have no idea if some of its points are out of date or not. The author does not back up his points with statistics (I don't think it would be possible), only anecdotal accounts. His views could only be his own as the result of an uncommonly bad experience. The reader, unless s/he lived in Asia for a long time, would have no way of knowing how accurate his points are. That, and there was some obvious writing errors which he didn't proof read out. All in all, a very powerful, education and thought provoking book.

(48) What I found that was most disconcerting about this book was that rather than the relationship between laity and monks being symbiotic, much of it seems to have become self-destructive through the institutionalization of merit-making. Another concern I saw was the inability for there to be a Buddhism that's not inextricably linked to

local customs, behaviours and sensibilities... with the Dhamma often taking a back-seat to these regional beliefs. It's certainly given me a thing or two to think about.

(49) As I guessed this book has a lot in common with Harrison's *Naked Buddha* - he even quotes Harrison - but Dhammika is mostly concerned with Theravada in Theravadin countries, while Harrison is mostly concerned with Buddhism in the West. My response to *The Broken Buddha*? (1) It's very, very negative - too negative for enjoyable reading and surely too negative to be accurate: any system with that much against it would have fallen in a heap long ago. (2) Regretfully, I think there is a lot of truth in it. I think all these flaws do exist, though I doubt that they are as pervasive as claimed. I was lucky enough to visit Thailand and Cambodia for a few weeks late last year. It was my first real visit to a Theravadin country, and I was struck by the parallels between Buddhism as practised there and Christianity in mediaeval and renaissance Europe. (That is not a comparison that might come automatically to many people but in my day job I have specialised in very old music, so I have a better-than-usual knowledge of the culture of that period). Once you get out of Bangkok, you see hundreds of poor, basically subsistence-farming, villages each supporting a Wat - ditto Europe around 1400. The religious language is not the local language, so ordinary people do not understand the liturgy - ditto Europe around 1400. The Church/Wat is a (or the only) centre of education and learning, and maybe healing - ditto Europe around 1400. The Wat is usually the largest and richest building in the village - ditto Europe around 1400. Villagers spend an inordinate amount of their money supporting it - ditto Europe around 1400. The monastery is all-male - ditto Europe around 1400. The culture is male-dominated - ditto Europe around 1400. Boys enter the monasteries as novices before they are old enough to make an informed commitment - ditto Europe around 1400. ...and so on. With all that in mind, the distortions and abuses that Dhammika itemises come as no surprise because they are exactly the same distortions and abuses that one religious reformer after another attacked in Europe. I feel that monasticism per se has structural imperatives of its own, regardless of the religious doctrine on which it is centred. So perhaps the fate of monasticism in Europe can give us

some pointers to what is likely to happen to it in Theravadin countries - though the process is, IMO, likely to be much quicker this time because of the pressures from our post-monastic, post-feudal, post-authoritarian, almost-post-masculinist society. Local people can see a well-developed alternative, which wasn't true in Europe at the end of feudal times. Two final comments: I don't particularly like Dhammika's vision for a 'Buddhayana': I think it is fatally corrupted by reliance on the old model. I did enjoy my time in Thailand and Cambodia, and I did like and respect almost all the people I met there. My feeling was that Buddhism has produced a fundamentally *nicer* society than Christianity, in spite of any failings of the monastic system.

(50) On the subject of bowing and why I don't think it's very important. Firstly, just because it was around in the time of the Buddha, does not mean it is relevant today in all places and conditions. Mostly I've seen it mentioned before that bowing may help increase humility. While that may be true, I think there are plenty of other ways to gain greater benefit. In Ven. Dhammika's book, he mentions the story of the sick monk. Volunteering at a hospice may do more to foster humility, metta and compassion than countless bows or prostrations. Sitting on a cushion, and contemplating such things is good, but at what point do you get off your cushion and put your contemplation to use?

(51) When I first read it, I didn't like it. I felt it was too critical of Theravada and the Sangha. But after re-reading it and discussing it with him, I notice that he does mention it is not all monks and more importantly, he offers some solutions at the end. I also follow his blog and communicate regularly with him. He is well-versed in the Pali Canon and the Pali language. His books have also done much good, distributed throughout the world and many of them available online.

(52) To be frank I think Ven. Dhammika spends a lot of time bemoaning an inevitable situation. The Buddha Sasana was always going to decline and I think the deplorable behaviour of some Monks in Thailand and Sri Lanka mentioned in the book is just a reflection of this. I would say the Sasana has actually been in an upswing in the past

100 odd years. What with Buddhism coming to the West, an array of excellent and learned meditators and scholars, and the advent of the internet. But nevertheless, the solution offered by Ven. Dhammika to the problems he outlines is like applying a band aid to a wound the size of a fist - It's not the appropriate solution. Is there an appropriate solution? Well, in the short to mid-term it's for each and every one of us to practice the Noble Eightfold Path to the best of our abilities.

(53) I have a copy of the book. In fact, Ven. Dhammika generously gave it to me when I met him in Singapore in June/July. I had a nice chat with him. I've only read half of the book--got distracted by other stuff and never got round to finishing it. I more or less agree with what the others have said. Based on what I've read, it can be seen in Ven. Dhammika's arguments that he is speaking from a perspective of modern liberalism. As I'm sure you are aware, liberalism (generally speaking) asserts that free persons act according to their own inner mandates, critically reflect on their own ideals, and resist blindly following social customs--particularly customs that reinforce authoritarianism. Such an attitude permeates much of contemporary approaches to Buddhism. In fact, this attitude can be identified in many, many discussions here on DW and other forums. Ven. Dhammika comes from a cultural context that highly values such liberal social ideals. So it is not surprising that he gives emphasis to individual critical reflection and criticizes rigid traditionalism. His book certainly reveals some pressing issues facing Theravada Buddhism as it moves from traditional contexts to modern ones. While he does make some good arguments that might appeal to our contemporary sensibilities, I don't think that he is suggesting that traditional forms of Buddhism are 'inferior' or 'backward'. As I see it, he is just pointing out that the conditions enabling those forms of Buddhism are passing away (or at least changing). A new set of conditions are arising in contemporary times. Hence, Buddhism needs to adapt itself to these shifting conditions. If we read his arguments this way, the question of whether Buddhism is on the decline or on the rise, or if one form is inferior the other superior, becomes a moot point. It is rather a matter of how we recognise change and relate to it skilfully. Whether the solutions Ven. Dhammika offers would work or not, I cannot say. But he is at least

drawing attention to some pressing issues or ‘hindrances’ facing contemporary Buddhism. As in meditation practice, the recognition of hindrances is an important first step before dealing with them.

(54) I just finished reading *The Broken Buddha*, and I agree with what Ven. Dhammika has written. Personally, even as a lay person I have been disillusioned and put off by some of the cultural traditions, rituals and ceremonies that I’ve encountered over the years. I’ve long felt that Buddhism in the West would greatly benefit if it were freed from Asian cultural traditions and customs that are irrelevant to the actual Dhamma.

(55) I was first drawn to Tibetan Buddhism, but have since moved away due to that underlying rigidity. I still have a lot of respect for the Tibetans and their teachings, but it just wasn’t right for me. I will say though, that it’s not just that one Thai temple, there’s also a local Sri Lankan temple that is pretty much all Sri Lankan with almost no Westerners. This is the problem I’m talking about. Temples that serve one ethnic group and only cater to that culture. I’m not saying that it’s impossible to learn Dhamma at the ethnic temples, just that the way it’s presented can push people away. It doesn’t seem suited to the West and I would hope that one day it will be reformed.

(56) Venerable, I cannot thank you enough for the insight provided by your book ‘*The Broken Buddha*’. In fact, the unconceivably precious Buddhadhamma is brighter than commonly presented by Theravada. Also, the Dhamma is not supposed to lead to morbid (yet subtly veiled) aversion, but to joyful dispassion and truly compassionate liberation. You made it possible for me to see this, I’m deeply thankful!! Thank you for the insights on meat eating, LGBT issues and love too. And, of course, the musings. Your writings led me to a deeper understanding of the Teachings of the Great Hero of the World, and enriched my practice greatly. May you dwell in the Pure Abodes! May your happiness know no limits! May we all delight in sublime peace!

(57) There is a lot of good points in *Broken Buddha*. Buddhism in Thailand today, is a lot about culture and meaningless rituals. I also

believe that most people don't know so much about Buddhism and a lot of monks either. Somewhere, the words of Buddha have been lost.

(58) The main flaw in *The Broken Buddha* is that the Buddha himself recommended seclusion and a monk's life for attaining Nibbana. Monks would never get enlightened if they were out in the world running soup kitchens and the like. And if they didn't get enlightened, who would help the rest of us? The author seems to admire the engagement of the Mahayana Bodhisatta ideal, but there's a big difference between helping people and liberating them. Sayadaw U Pandita puts it this way: "If two people were stuck up to their necks in mud, would one be able to free the other?" The author seems to be talking mainly from a monk's perspective. A Theravadin lay person is free to practise in whatever way he sees fit. In theory, Thais could set up lay organizations and run soup kitchens if they wanted, but they choose to make merit because that's what they grew up with and that's one of the things the Buddha recommended for lay followers.

(58) I read S. Dhammika's critique and felt it to be spot-on. I recall the day when I first came to Thailand to Study Abhidhamma with Khun Sujin and was "young, dumb, and full of idealism" about the Dhamma in a place where it's been for such a long time. Those illusions were destroyed after not-so-long there. Thankfully! It is sad to see such a beautiful system corrupted, but that is par for the course in the Kali Yuga, no? Tibetan Buddhism is just as corrupt, though thankfully much of the transmission outside of Tibet is beginning to shed a lot of the ridiculousness that accrued to the Vajrayana over time. What is sadder is to know that the Theravada might well soon die, as there are no new sources of inspiration, and it is not taking seed in the West--the only place it could survive.

(59) On p.3 of *The Broken Buddha*, Ven. Dhammika says "...it is time to part company [with Theravada]. I must walk another path." And that path has taken him to the Buddha Dhamma Mandala Society in Singapore, where he is Spiritual Advisor. But how does a monk "part company" with Theravada? Aren't all monks part of a lineage and/or national Sangha, from which they derive legitimacy? The Buddha

Dhamma Mandala Society sounds like a Theravada organization and, hence, part of the Theravada Sangha of Singapore. If so, then Ven. Dhammika hasn't parted company, has he?

(60) I read the whole thing, including the idealistic and possibly naive recommendations in the last dozen pages. I think it's up to Theravadins, not to me, to comment on the validity or otherwise of the booklet, but if what he says is valid about

- the obsessive fastidiousness over the Vinaya
- the casuistry with which monastic precepts are subverted
- the self-indulgence and self-promotion of the clergy
- the institutionalized callousness of the monks at all levels
- the blatant violation of precepts re handling of money
- the grotesque and perverted interest in putrefaction, morbidity, etc.
- the general negativity of approach
- the inability to produce more than a handful of inspiring teachers
- the hostility to the arts and the aesthetic dimension
- the venal encouragement given to superstition, magic, mass-produced amulets, etc
- the absolute lack of interest in compassion,
- and the dismissive rationalization of compassionate outreach

Then the situation in places like Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma is worse than I thought, and I thought it was bad, but only to the extent that human beings generally fail to live up to ideals. If Ven. Dhammika is not grossly exaggerating, then not only is the Dhamma not being taught and observed in these countries, it is being systematically perverted, perhaps beyond the point of redemption. The relatively apathetic response of well-informed members of this forum suggests that Dhammika has, indeed, got it right. If that is the case then I would like to know where I can read a well-informed critique of his claims.

A couple of people have asked why he does not refer to the criticisms of Buddhadasa, but why should he? If Buddhadasa was saying similar things some time ago and nothing has changed, what is the point of bringing him up? Out of interest I had another look at *Keys to Natural Truth*, the only book I have by Buddhadasa, but could find nothing that suggested a critique of the monastic sangha in Thailand, just bland

statements about the sangha being the assembly of monks, comprising four levels (stream-enterers, once-returners, non-returners and arahants (p. 21). (I didn't finish the book, as it didn't appeal to me. Comments like the one about arahants only laughing when they laugh at compounded things, singing is really just like weeping, and "It has been calculated that a person has to be at least 15% mad in order to overcome his sense of shame and get up and dance" (p. 52) suggested to me that his reputation as a thinker is somewhat overrated. But that's all I've read other than Kamala Tiyavanich's hagiographic account of his life in *Sons of the Buddha*.)

In a little book of sermons one wouldn't expect to find anything too radical. However, in the long sermon on dhamma language and everyday language, Buddhadasa discusses: Buddha, dhamma, sangha, religion, work, sublime life, nibbana, path and fruit, Mara, world, birth, death, life, person, God, woeful states, heaven ambrosia, emptiness, stopping, light, darkness, kamma, refuge, heart of Buddhism, eating, sleeping, awake, play, angel, female and male, marriage, father and mother, friend, enemy, putridness, laughter, singing, dancing, blindness, walking nowhere and silence - an extensive list indeed, but does not include any reference to the word which was the reason for the Buddha's mission, a word which many in the West associate intimately with Buddhism, and that is "compassion". Nor is it discussed under any of the other headings. This would suggest that compassion in any other than an abstract, dispassionate form was not central to Buddhadasa's focus, in a sermon in which he comments on nearly every other concept of interest to Buddhists, and this would support Dhammika's contention that compassion is really of peripheral if any interest to Theravada.

Maybe Dhammika's contentions about compassion can be easily refuted by Theravadins, and I have heard these refutations, but if the Good Samaritan test were applied, how many Theravada monastics and how many Theravada laypeople would pass. I think Dhammika implies, from his experience, that more laypeople would do so than monks. But then, maybe the Good Samaritan was guilty of wrong view and wrong action in stopping to help. We all know where being a Good Samaritan can land you.



I'm sure that Dhammika has just compiled a collection of the worst things he's seen and, perhaps, his views on legalism vs compassion reflect his Christian background, in which pharisaism and hypocrisy are seen as seriously harmful, at least in the synoptic gospels. However, there's enough in the booklet that warrants a comprehensive refutation if it seriously distorts Theravada. Where can I find that refutation or has Dhammika's cry from the heart just been ignored?

(61) I think there is more correct in his work than incorrect...a sad state of affairs...but inevitable since we are over half-way to the end (5000 years) of this Buddha's period and on the slippery slope down. Luang Por Jaran predicted that Buddhism would disappear from Thailand, and maybe several Asian countries, within the next 200 years and find new life in the West. As the Buddha predicted that 'the sun will rise in the West and set in the East' or something similar. I think the great interest in Vipassana in Thailand nowadays is encouraging, but find the statements about there not being any more Arahants to be found...or even Sotapannas...to be a load of nonsense. The Buddha said that as long as there is the teaching and practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, there will be Sotapannas...and since these inevitably become Arahants within at most seven lives, there must also be Arahants.

(62) I read this book yesterday. I am glad that the author was able to get this off of his chest. It seems like these issues had been slowly building up and then suppressed for the past 25 years. Although negative, the book was very informative. I was not aware that "compassion" was not prioritized in Theravada. He makes some good points as to why Theravada is the least popular form of Buddhism in the west. Most westerners look to Buddhism as a philosophy/psychotherapy more than religious practice, so I don't see how Theravada would fit. I grew up 10 miles from the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies which was co-founded by Jack Kornfield. Even though he is a Theravada Buddhist the center focuses on all schools of Buddhism plus the Vedanta, and Krishnamurti teachings, bringing Buddhism into modern times which is where it should be.

(63) I have been to Thailand several times, and some other Asian countries, but my experiences in Thailand, the way Buddhism here is presented draw my attention to questions. Then, with this experiences and, as fabianfred suggested, ‘*just browsing websites*’ I actually come to the same kind of observations as S. Dhammika seems to do in *The Broken Buddha* (!)

(64) Ven. Shravasti Dhammika has been a Theravada monk for over 30 years. He has trained in Sri Lanka, Burma, India, Laos and Thailand and is a great storehouse of knowledge of the Dhamma, both in study and in practice. Some time ago he produced a short book that addressed concerns he had about the stagnation and rigidity to be found in the institutions of Buddhism in Asia and increasingly in the west. This book is called *The Broken Buddha: Critical Reflections on Theravada and a Plea for a New Buddhism*. The purpose of the book is summarized as: “...these reflections will also attempt to show what Theravada really is, how it got like that and suggests ways of bringing it closer to the spirit of the Buddha’s teachings so that it can become relevant to a non-traditional environment.” The author begins the text with a quotation: “There is no law in history which guarantees that Buddhism will grow roots in the West or advance beyond its present infantile stage. But one would expect that it will grow more conscious of its own difficulties and Buddhists will awaken to the problems which Buddhism itself thrusts upon man as an essential part of its treasure. One would also hope that doubt should appear as the sign of a deeper conviction. Luis O. Gomez” This is an interesting quote because it points to the apparent gap between Buddhism as historically practiced and the sometimes wildly new expressions found in convert groups. The choice seems to have become so polarized that what we are left with is either stultifying rigidity or hedonistic abandon. It is as if no middle ground exists. Yet the middle ground is what most of us occupy. Just as the previous author mentioned here too is a dichotomy that has appeared not only between East and West but also between past and present. The latter duo is what is emphasized in this particular work. We are given a thorough history of Theravadin schools and developments, with points illustrated with stories from the Pali Canon as well as Mahayana texts such as the Vimalakirtinidesa Sutra. The breadth of background material is somewhat daunting but very

informative. He also relies on historians, philosophers and social scientists, particularly in the field of anthropology in the analysis. There are particulars about monastic life in South and South-east Asia that are given scrutiny. Institutional problems such as hypocrisy, boredom, lack of materials, exaggerated veneration and other excesses as well as selfishness, misogyny, sectarianism, wealth collection and hollow rituals are outlined. It is a fairly comprehensive catalogue of issues. But issues cannot be addressed until they are first acknowledged. A New Buddhism is proposed. The author writes: “It might appear from all that has been said that I would advocate throwing the old Buddha image with all its cracks, missing pieces and dents on to the scrap heap and leaving it at that. However, there might be another alternative. The metal the image is made from may be corroded and rusty but it is still of inestimable value. The image’s style might be at odds with modern tastes but a skilled sculptor could fashion a more contemporary and beautiful form. The old Buddha image needs to be melted down and cast again in a new mould.” Many of the issues discussed on this blog and elsewhere including issues of ethnic Buddhists and converts, levels of involvement in the Dharma from hobbyist to monastic, representation of women are presented. This new Buddhism which would encompass elements from most of the current representations of Buddhism is tentatively titled Buddhayana. I’ve just looked up a reference to this and here is a section of text from: Saddharmapundarika Sutra:

The stupid and those of little wit,  
Those tied to externals,  
And the proud cannot believe this Truth.  
But now I gladly and with boldness  
In the midst of (you) Bodhisattvas,  
Straightway put aside expediency  
And only proclaim the Supreme Way.  
It was as expedient means  
That I expounded a Three-Vehicle Law.  
Let all be free of doubt and perplexity.  
World-Honoured Ones, without exception,  
Teach this Way: the One Buddha-yana.  
(For) all Buddhas take the one vow:

‘The Buddha-way which I walk,  
I will universally cause all the living  
To attain this same Way with me.’  
Though Buddhas in future ages  
Proclaim hundreds, thousands, kotis,  
Of countless ways into the doctrine,  
In reality there is but the One-Vehicle.

It is not a description of one way that throws out everything including texts and commentaries but one that understands them more fully. Not one that seeks a destructive approach of sowing to salt the ground on which tradition stands, but one which clears the weeds and finds the seeds which were planted there and attends and nourishes them appropriately. This book brings to the fore, in an honest fashion, the author’s observations over decades of monastic practice. In some ways it parallels the author’s own spiritual path. He amply illustrates his points with personal stories as well as scholarly references. Some people will not like what he has to say. Others will conclude he has not gone far enough. I don’t necessarily agree with all of it but it certainly provides a great deal of food for thought.

(65) I had not yet had the opportunity to experience the reputed quiet seclusion of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS). So when a time slot opened I took it immediately with Ven. Aggacitta’s kind permission. Resembling a classic Japanese wood carving of a monastery, SBS sits safely perched on picturesque hill slopes. Its seclusion is well guarded by a steep and winding access road. The air is clear and clean. The view and vista of a distant, miniature Taiping and environs are breath-taking, a quiet reminder of both how close, yet far away samsara can be. My arrival corresponded to the equatorial early evening’s darkness. After paying respects to the venerable, there was the dusky trek to the topmost kuti. This would be a literal preamble to the gentle ‘fitness regime’ that is the norm at the centre. SBS has given a new meaning to the letters “IMP”. Any knowledgeable English speaker seeing this letter grouping immediately imagines a somewhat mischievous little creature whose delight is to wreak havoc for all around. Not so at this centre! The participants in the IMP program (also

known as IMPians; not imps) are anything but the ‘little rascals’ conjured up in the mind. The words that comprise the program’s acronym immediately set one straight about its intent and the motivation of those joining it. Introduction to Monkhood Program is a comprehensive and diverse two-week opportunity to examine and temporarily experience a form of monkhood. While not formally undergoing the higher ordination of a bhikkhu, participants undertake Eight Precepts and wear white robes. Under the auspices of the resident monks, they are guided through a tour, sampling many components of a monk’s life. This would include meditation, chanting, Vinaya study, a variety of discussions on topical studies and so on. Also mandatory is participation in the daily ritual of pindacara (alms round). The early morning trek up and down the steep hilly trail not only provides a modicum of healthy exercise but also vividly brings to life the sweet interdependence of the laity and the Sangha. My arrival also corresponded with the tail end of such a program with its new ‘record number’ of interested students. One of the topics on the docket for discussion, in my estimation, best exemplifies an important part of SBS’s ‘mission’. The subject of discussion was the as yet unpublished (I believe) book by S. Dhammika, *The Broken Buddha*. Each student was responsible not only to read the entire text but also to summarise and present one or more sections for the group at large in a round table forum. In this way, I benefited from the collective work of the participants and only needed to skim the book to acquire a good grasp of the book’s message. On a general level the book is a reasonably accurate, although one-sided, treatise on what has gone wrong with Theravada Buddhism. I say “one-sided” because the author uses a series of incidents under topical headings to illustrate a number of failings in present day Theravadism. There is no attempt at all to give a balanced ‘what’s working’ perspective in the piece. There is no dispute with any of the Buddha’s core teachings. The author only examines where and when ‘the rubber meets the road’ so to speak. Theravadin practice, as it manifests today, is generally woefully lacking in its integrity to the Buddha’s actual teachings. Ranging across topics such as, how a far too liberal interpretation of the Vinaya has fostered laxity, laziness and boredom in some monks in the Order, to the arrogance and entitlement which has been systematically bred into

the members of the Sangha; to how the qualities of charity and compassion for the poor and less fortunate have been suppressed or outright eliminated from the Theravadin mind set—the book paints a bleak picture of an ever more aloof Sangha and a servile and gullible laity. The essential upshot of the book is that ‘the deal’ between the Sangha and the lay supporters has been severely compromised or broken, if not abandoned altogether throughout the Theravadin family of countries. ‘The deal’ is this. Monks are to be honoured and freely supported for all the four requisites necessary for a comfortable and healthy lifestyle. In return monks are to:

1. conduct themselves, at all times, in accordance with a strict interpretation of the Vinaya
2. practise meditation diligently with a view to attaining the deepest possible experiential understanding of the Buddha’s teachings
3. study the suttas and other teachings of the Buddha
4. when ready and invited, speak and teach the Dhamma to the laity, via talks and meditation instruction, or any other way deemed appropriate by qualified senior monks, or
5. any combination of the above, always inclusive of (1).

Pride, one of the last fetters to go in the process of enlightenment, must be watched carefully lest it billows into a flash fire of idiotic and unbecoming behaviour. The realisation that all privilege and honour are only given to the monk as an ‘agent’ of the Buddha, not to the person himself in the robes, is a helpful antidote to this toxic pride. If this deal is followed as well as humanly possible, the Sasana will flourish. Everyone wins. The laity receives proper, suitable and inspirational Dhamma teaching with which to assail and lessen its suffering. The Order is maintained in strength, faithful to its initial structure and purpose, which the Buddha intended. Individual monks can live healthy and productive lives in service of the highest and noblest of undertakings—the quest for freedom and authenticity. Win, win, and win! Whether one agrees with the premise of *The Broken Buddha* completely or partially is not necessarily the point. The importance of its presence in the curriculum of the IMP is three-fold. Firstly, it serves as an educational wake-up call for the participants as they return to their lay lives. Evidently, there are monks who are not upholding their end

of the bargain between themselves and the laity. It behoves the laity to develop a more discerning and perceptive eye regarding the placement of their support. Their support is voluntary and they have a right to receive ‘value’ for their hard-earned donation. Respectfully holding the Sangha accountable to ‘the deal’ is not an unfair expectation. Moreover, I would say that is its obligation. If a monk or a vihara is not keeping up to its end of the deal, take the support elsewhere. At the end of each IMP, I believe a few more ‘discerners’ returned home with a clearer understanding of what a good monk is. Secondly, any IMPian who does decide to take up the robes will have a clear idea of what is expected and how he is to behave as a monk. Hopefully, he will shine as an example of one who truly lives “The Dhamma”. Thirdly, self-examination and self-awareness is at the heart of the process leading to liberation’s wisdom. Any book such as *The Broken Buddha* must foster a critical look into one’s own actions and ideals. Not a bad thing to do. In fact, it is an ongoing essential process if one is to avoid a paralysing complacency, which strangles any possibility of growth towards freedom. When my time at The Sanctuary drew to an end, I wended my way down the steep switch-backs to the valley below. I reflected on how important and precious places like SBS were to the preservation of the Sasana. I was slightly miffed by the bold one-sidedness of Dhammika’s book. I have seen many beautiful and inspiring things as a Theravadin monk. I have seen people’s difficult lives dramatically change through meditation practices taught by the Buddha. I have heard profoundly marvellous talks by some of the greatest teachers alive today. I have witnessed these same monks lead exemplary and pure lives, which inspire deep faith in their followers. The present forms of the Buddha Sasana may have some loose cannons and imperfections as do all human endeavours, but what works must be protected and discernment must weed out that which does not serve.

(66) Bhante S. Dhammika: *Broken Buddha. Plädoyer für einen neuen Buddhismus*. Berlin: Edition Steinrich 2012. Hardcover, 288 Seiten. ISBN 978-3-942085-12-0. EUR 1990.

Wenn jemand, der seit über 30 Jahren buddhistischer Mönch ist und jahrelang in Südostasien gelebt hat, die Theravada-Tradition einer eingehenden Kritik unterzieht, lässt dies aufhorchen. Denn hier spricht offensichtlich ein Insider, der weiß, wovon er redet. Ausgangspunkt

seiner Überlegungen ist der Vinaya, das Regelwerk für Ordinierte, das ihnen helfen soll, ein Leben der Entsagung und Meditation zu führen. Dieser Zweck wurde in den vergangenen Jahrhunderten in Südostasien jedoch in sein Gegenteil verkehrt: Fundamentale Regeln werden in der Realität missachtet oder umgedeutet (etwa das Verbot, Geld anzunehmen), unwichtige Regeln derart überbetont, dass sie einzig einem Zweck dienen: den sozialen Vorrang der Ordinierten vor den Laien zu sichern. So lassen sich Mönche in Thailand oder Burma etwa von Laien im Auto herumkutschieren (eigentlich verboten), legen aber sehr viel Wert darauf, nicht neben einer Frau im Auto zu sitzen. Das Verbot, Geld anzunehmen, wird etwa dadurch umgangen, dass das Geld eben in einem Umschlag überreicht oder mit einer Pinzette (!) angenommen wird, so dass der Bhikkhu das Geld ja nicht wirklich „berührt“. Andere Ordinierte halten sich gleich einen eigenen Buchhalter, der das Geld entgegen nimmt und anschließend mit dem Mönch die Konten durchgeht (S. 75). Das hatte sich der Buddha sicherlich anders vorgestellt! Da auch Meditation und soziales Engagement vernachlässigt werden, entsteht eine träge, arrogant-blaßierte Schicht von Ordinierten, die sich nur noch wenig von den hochnäsigen Brahmanen unterscheiden, die uns im Pali-Kanon immer wieder begegnen. Es sind dieselben Degenerationserscheinungen, die auch im christlichen Mönchsleben immer wieder aufgetaucht sind und uns etwa aus der Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters bekannt sind (oder aus Eugen Drewermanns „Klerikern“).

Weitere Kritikpunkte des Autors sind ein öder Ritualismus (Buddhastatuen mit Goldplättchen bekleben, Buddhastatuen zu waschen, wobei Frauen natürlich nichts zu suchen haben), mangelndes Mitgefühl, Realitätsfremdheit, eine kleinliche Sektiererei, die sich in jahrzehntelangen Streitigkeiten über solche Nichtigkeiten äußert, welche Schulter vom Ordensgewand bedeckt sein sollte und welche nicht, eine durchgängige Tendenz zur Negativität und Verachtung alles Ästhetischen, die sich in der Überbetonung von Ekel- und Leichenfeldbetrachtung zeigt, sowie eine seit Jahrhunderten andauernde geistige Sterilität, die schon bei Buddhaghosa einsetzt und darin gründet, dass nicht das ursprüngliche Buddhawort, sondern spätere Kommentare und Sub-Subkommentare studiert werden – und natürlich eine durchgängige Herabsetzung und Benachteiligung der



Frauen. Auch die Verquickung von Dhamma und Nationalismus erscheint dem Autor als kontraproduktiv; denn was sollen wir Westler davon halten, dass Burmesen, Singhalesen und Thais ihre nationale Spielart des Theravada (inklusive ihrer eigenen falschen Aussprache des Pali) für den einzig wahren Buddhismus halten? Seine radikale Kritik untermauert S. Dhammika mit zahlreichen anschaulichen Anekdoten und historischen Belegen, die einen teilweise kichern, teilweise aber auch fassungslos den Kopf schütteln lassen. Die widerlichste steht auf Seite 89, wo berichtet wird, dass einige Bhikkhus im (bettelarmen) Nordosten Thailands Bordellmanagern aus Bangkok dabei halfen, Prostituierte für ihre Bordelle zu rekrutieren, wofür die Ganoven sich mit großzügigen Spenden revanchieren. Den Mädchen wird erzählt, „dass ihr Schicksal, eine Prostituierte zu werden, auf ihr negatives Karma aus der Vergangenheit zurückzuführen sei. Sie könnten dieses negative Karma aber abbauen, wenn sie einen Teil ihres Verdienstes an das Kloster spenden würden, was viele auch tun.“ Über das Kamma, das diese „Bhikkhus“ sich damit schaffen, möchte man lieber nicht nachdenken.

Zum Schluss plädiert der Autor leidenschaftlich für die Utopie eines erneuerten, lebendigen „Buddhayana“, der ein echter Sangha im Sinne des Buddha wäre. Er findet dabei warme Worte für die FWBO, den Mahayana- und den tibetischen Buddhismus, den er in vielen Dingen nachahmenswert findet – was vielleicht etwas zu naiv ist, da auch unter den Mahayana-Anhängern nicht alles Gold ist, was glänzt. Man kann sicher sein, dass der Ehrwürdige S. Dhammika sich mit diesem Buch viel Ärger einhandeln wird. Aber da seine Schrift weder persönliche Gehässigkeit noch Eitelkeit erkennen lässt, sondern vielmehr von aufrichtiger Sorge um die Bewahrung des Dhamma motiviert ist, braucht ihn das nicht zu kümmern. Den Buddhisten im Westen führt es einmal mehr vor Augen, dass der asiatische Buddhismus, tel qu’il est, voller Missstände und Degenerationserscheinungen ist, die hier im Westen großen Schaden anrichten können.

(67) Jede noch so wertvolle spirituelle Tradition läuft Gefahr, im Laufe der Zeit von rein kulturell bedingten Strukturen überwuchert zu werden und die eigentliche Lehre ins Hintertreffen geraten zu lassen. So erging es dem Christentum, dem Judentum, dem Islam und auch etlichen hinduistischen Strömungen. Bhante S. Dhammika, selbst lange Jahre

buddhistischer Mönch in der Theravada-Tradition, zeigt in seinem neuen Buch auf, dass dieses Phänomen auch vor dem Buddhismus nicht Halt macht.

Aus eigener Erfahrung schöpfend beschreibt er die Irrwege, auf die sich der Buddhismus in Südostasien gemacht hat, die Verkrustungen, die den spirituellen Inhalt überdecken und eine Lehre der Befreiung in einen geistlosen Formalismus verwandeln. Teils ist das amüsant, wenn Bhante S. Dhammika von der wortwörtlichen und nicht hinterfragten Befolgung aus dem 1. Jahrhundert stammender Regeln und Moralvorstellungen berichtet, teils ist es erschütternd, wenn er die Auswüchse dieses Systems schildert, das sich in unglaublicher Heuchelei selbst erhielt und weiter erhält. Trotz aller Kritik ist dieses Buch jedoch nicht einfach die "Abrechnung" eines Enttäuschten oder gar Verbitterten. Man spürt beim Lesen, dass nur jemand, der den Kern seiner Tradition wahrhaftig liebt, diese Dinge fundiert und differenziert ansprechen kann, ja, ansprechen muss. Dhammikas Buch ist - obwohl es sich hauptsächlich auf den Theravada-Buddhismus bezieht - ein traditionsübergreifender Appell für einen freien Buddhismus, der eine Umgebung für den einzelnen Praktizierenden schafft, in der die Verwirklichung Buddhas Lehren möglich ist. Seine Vorschläge für diesen neuen Buddhismus, der sich in Asien, aber vor allem auch im Westen entfalten könnte, sind durchdacht und praktikabel. Die Ausbildung, die ihm für Ordinierte als auch für Laienlehrer vorschwebt, ist "liberal, kritisch, breit gefächert und durchdrungen vom Geist des Dhamma" und hebt praktische Belange wie die Meditation und das soziale Engagement ("tätiges Mitgefühl") in den Vordergrund. Folgerichtig nennt er seinen Weg nicht mehr Theravada (wörtlich: "Die Sichtweise der älteren Mönche"), sondern Buddhayana - der Weg des Buddha. Eine wahre Reformationsschrift also, die den Blick zurück aufs Wesentliche lenkt und dabei manche Missverständnisse und romantischen Klischees, die wir Westler in Bezug auf Asien und seine Religionen haben, aufdeckt. Ein wertvolles und wichtiges Buch, das dank der Edition Steinrich nun auch in einer überaus gelungenen deutschen Version erhältlich ist.

(68) Mit Freude (und auch leichtem Erschrecken) habe ich das Buch gelesen. Ich praktiziere seit langem auf dem Theravadapfad und habe

dort so etwas wie eine spirituelle Heimat gefunden. Der Autor ist ein australischer Mönch, der den Hauptteil schon 2001 geschrieben hat. Das Buch erschien 2006 und hat nun endlich Dank der engagierten “edition steinrich” den deutschsprachigen Bereich erreicht. Aus meiner Sicht stößt Bhante S. Dhammika eine längst überfällige Debatte (m.E. schulübergreifend!) an: Wo vermischen sich alte Traditionen, Riten - die historisch bestimmt ihren Sinn hatten, hoffentlich;-) - zu Dogmen, die gerade wenn Menschen aus anderen Kulturkreisen aufeinander treffen - absurd anmuten können. Der Leser studiere als Beispiel die Anforderungen an einen Besuch in einem westlichen Theravadakloster (S.96) und frage sich dann selbst, warum man Z.B. einem Mönch nicht die Hand schütteln darf? Ich vermute, diese Frage wird noch relativ leicht zu beantworten sein. Das Buch liefert jedoch Stoff für viele weitere Auseinandersetzungen. Der Autor schreibt aus meiner Sicht freundlich und bestimmt - aber es ist zu merken, dass sich zu diesem Thema viel angestaut hat. Manchmal ist der “Unsinn” kaum zu ertragen. Ich bin gespannt, wie die eher konservative Seite der Buddhisten, gerade auch im Theravada - auf dieses Werk reagiert. Mir gefällt der Wunsch von Frau Richard aus dem Vorwort: “wir wünschen uns das Buch als einen Beitrag für eine auch traditionsübergreifend zu führende Auseinandersetzung, wie der Buddhismus im 21. Jahrhundert aussehen könnte”. Mögen alle Lebewesen Glück erfahren!

(69) I’ve found a very impressive article about this problem by Ven. S. Dhammika, “*The Broken Buddha*”. Although it presents personal experiences and possibly often reports like this are made sensationalistic, I like this specific one because I feel that Ven. Dhammika didn’t lock his heart and didn’t make more about it than it should be done for the strengthening of a process of improvement in the situation. It’s online available and has about 90 pages – [Gottfried Helms](#)

### (70) From **Sangha Theravada Pilipias**

A few years ago, I presented some ideas to a group of friends who were interested in spreading the Buddhadhamma in the country. We wanted to understand and practice a kind of Buddhism that would be relevant

to the modern times yet was the type that was as close to the original as possible. Theravada appealed to us but we understood that even in the Theravada tradition, there was a lot of cultural baggage that were not essential. Among the books we discussed was Ven. S. Dhammika's "*The Broken Buddha: Critical Reflections on Theravada & a Plea for a New Buddhism.*" I presented a position paper based on my study of other Theravada monks & lay leaders which the group agreed to adopt. Unfortunately, the original manuscript as well as the soft copy was lost. I have reconstructed that position paper based on some old notes. I am presenting these points together with my personal opinions now. I apologize to the original authors of some of the statements posted here. I have also lost the sources of these ideas.

Part 1 – A situationer.

The seeds of the Buddhadhamma has long been planted in the Philippines. Buddhist teachings & practices have been established not just in traditional Buddhist temples and centers, but also in non-sectarian meditation centers offering Zen or Vipassana courses. The number of Theravada 'enthusiasts' are very few but the numbers are growing. There is no Theravada center or sangha in the country but there are already efforts to introduce Theravada in the country. We have to be careful about the kind of Theravada Buddhism we want to introduce into the country since this will set a precedent. It is easier to have a fresh start then to import something that needs to be reformed later on with great effort. By this I mean that we should be able to distinguish literalist or fundamentalist interpretations of 'Theravada' and Theravada that is in line with the original teachings of the Buddha. It does not mean that just because a particular branch is imported from a traditional Buddhist country, it has to stay that way. For example, Ajahn Chah was once quoted as describing Thai Buddhism as a large & ancient tree that bears small & bitter fruits. We should continue reading what monks like Dhammika, Chah, Buddhadosa, Punnaji and others have written about traditional Theravada.

Part 2 – What type of Buddhism do we want?

Some suggestions from Ven. Dhammika in his book "*The Broken Buddha*":

- All monks & nuns will receive full education in Buddhism, Buddhist history, psychology & philosophy BEFORE their ordination to ensure that they are qualified to teach & represent the Bhikku sangha
- Physical disciplines such as yoga would form an integral part of training
- Monks & nuns shall abide by the parajikka (Vinaya) rules SUITED TO modern monastic living
- Monks & nuns would normally wear clothes but where necessary or expedient, they might wear ORDINARY clothes

(71) This book should be REQUIRED READING for anyone thinking of ordaining in Thailand! If I had read it before I ordained I would have saved myself a lot of time and hassles. I can't speak for other monasteries, but the one I was ordained in was great from the outside and at a distance – all smiles and graciousness – and completely rotten on the inside and at close quarters – sloth, smoking, no Dhamma guidance at all, just empty chanting and rituals, and being looked down upon by smug monks who think they are just Oh so superior! Yes, I had high expectations. But shouldn't I have had? We are talking about the third of the Triple Gem aren't we? Yes, it's more important to look to yourself rather than others. But isn't the whole point of the Sangha that it's supposed to offer mutual support, guidance and inspiration? I could have got more of that staying at home! Dhammika is right. Asian Buddhism needs a dramatic overhaul and this is unlikely to happen without honestly looking at the problems.

(72) Mt. Adams Zen Buddhist Temple.

*The Broken Buddha* by Ven. Bhante Dhammika.

*The Broken Buddha* is an eye opening book filled with insights into Theravada Buddhism. While the author points out many of the interesting elements of the ethno-specific practices, he does so with a sense of profound reverence for the Dharma and all its followers. Many of the recorded events are thought provoking as they allow us to see into a wide range of Buddhist practices and also glimpse into our own "stuff" as human beings. The book is available at our temple – contact us if you would like to obtain a copy.

(73) *The Broken Buddha, Critical Reflections on Theravada and a Plea for a New Buddhism*, by S. Dhammika.

As Buddha says, “Do not believe in anything you read or hear, even if it is said by your master. But after you can prove it is correct or benefits for all beings then you have to accept it.” That is exactly what the book wants the readers to do. Either you take it as the truth or objectively observe on it, you have your own free will to decide. This book is good to build up a critical thinking on the old traditions of Theravada, which has never been questioned before. It does not intend to discriminate against the Theravada because the writer also mentioned the possibility of critics to Mahayana and Vajrayana as well. Being realistic and objective, he only tried to give critics based on his own observation as Theravadin monk. He believes, others would do better in commenting Mahayana and Vajrayana.

(74) There’s an interesting essay called “*The Broken Buddha*”, by well-known scholar S. Dhammika, that is in much the same vein as what you’re reading; a lot of clucking and fussing about monks who aren’t serious about their vocation, or who join for a brief period, then leave, rituals that have become ossified and meaningless, etc. He has an interesting section on how Mahayana picked up on certain of the Buddha’s teachings and developed a whole doctrine, where Theravada focussed on other things. Anyway, here’s an interesting excerpt: *Asian Theravadins expect you to follow their traditions and not question them. You can point out that certain practices or ideas are not in the Tipitaka or are even contrary to it but it will make no difference. Right or wrong, inane or practical, that’s how it has always been done and that’s what you must do. In 1996 I traveled in Europe for the first time thus giving me the opportunity to see how Theravada was understood and practiced there. Theravada in Asia might be hidebound and fossilized I thought, but at least Westerners will have been able to separate the fruit from the peel, the gift from the wrapping, the Buddha from ‘the thick uneven crust’ surrounding him. To my astonishment and despair, I found that this was not so. Most groups, centers and monasteries I visited adhered to such practices with even more tenacity than in Asia. I finally had to admit that this is Theravada and*

*reluctantly and with some sadness decided that I could not be a part of it any longer. I decided that I did not have to align myself with any school. Now I follow the Buddha's teachings to the best of my understanding and to the best of my ability.*

He says some very similar things to Buddhadasa. I find these screeds to be interesting and thought-provoking. I thought the part I bolded might be helpful to some of our members who wonder if or when they have to decide on a “school”.

(75) An even more thoroughgoing (and, for me, harrowing) discussion of the widespread corruption endemic to Buddhdom is presented in *The Broken Buddha*, a short book by the Bhikkhu Ven. Shravasti Dhammika. In this work, Ven. Dhammika presents a wide-ranging critique of the Theravada Buddhist establishment, with special emphasis on the Sangha. In particular, Ven. Dhammika describes the Sangha as (1) uninterested and even hostile toward the idea of putting Buddhist values such as metta and karuna into practice (treating them as meditation objects, not as values that inspire compassionate action toward others), (2) obsessed with ritual and outward displays of religious affiliation, (3) generally uninterested in inner spiritual development and the practices that lead to it (e.g. meditation, scriptural study), (4) arbitrarily fixated on absolute adherence to certain Vinaya rules while simply ignoring or circumventing other rules deemed inconvenient, (5) unable or unwilling to address the urgent economic, social, and political problems that predominantly Theravadin countries face, and (6) overwhelmed with lazy, selfish and greedy monks who have little or no interest in their own spiritual development or the spiritual development of others. This is not an exhaustive list of the problems Ven. Dhammika finds eating away at the Sasana, but it is more than enough to give us an idea of just how little Buddhdom has in common with the values, teachings, and spirit embodied by the Buddha and his arahant followers that we find in the Pali canon.

(76) **Die Lehrreden der Mittleren Sammlung.** Die Frage war: warum ist Buddhas Lehre derzeit so wenig verbreitet? Es liegt daran, dass die hier bekannten Repräsentanten von Buddhismus aus Asien die dortigen Traditionen von Buddhismus übermitteln und nicht die Lehre des

historischen Buddha. Zudem kann man bei deren Präsentation in der Öffentlichkeit in der Regel überhaupt nicht glauben, dass bei diesen Buddhisten Autoritätsgläubigkeit (gegenüber buddhistischer Obrigkeit) oder das Anhaften an Theorien, Dogmen, Ritualen und dem Ich-Glaube (vgl. Lehrrede Nr. 9 Mittlere Sammlung Übersetzer Kurt Schmidt) bewältigt ist. Das sind überwiegend Männer, die mit Ehrwürdiger, Eure Heiligkeit, der Wertvolle, etc. angeredet werden, Verbeugungen und Geschenke einfordern, also ein echtes Mittelalterspektakel veranstalten. Ein Beispiel? Selbst der angesehene Dalai Lama degradiert die Buddhisten, die sich nach den von Buddha gehaltenen Lehrreden orientieren, als minderwertig im Verhältnis zum tibetischen Buddhismus (etwa in „die Lehren des tibetischen Buddhismus“ S. 23 f.) und folgt damit dem traditionellen tibetischen Dogma. Naheliegender, dass die gut überlieferten Lehrreden der mittleren Sammlung des historischen Buddha nicht Teil der tibetischen Lehrunterweisungen und damit in der Regel dort unbekannt sind. Weiter verweist der Dalai Lama auf eine Vielzahl unterschiedlicher buddhistischer Theorien zum Studium, er gibt Einweihungen in „Geheimlehren“ und hält Rituale ab. Die Buddha Lehrreden wurden in der heute sogenannten Theravada-Tradition des Buddhismus überliefert. Leider ist der Mönchsorden dieser Tradition ungeheuer stark mit seinem eigenen Verhaltenskodex beschäftigt (vgl. etwa *The Broken Buddha* von Bhante S. Dhammika oder Aussagen von Ajahn Chah und Buddhadasa). Wenn man die Buddha Lehrreden betrachtet, müssen es nicht alle überlieferten Lehrreden zur Kenntnis sein, weil sie sich vielfach ähneln und wiederholen. Die ersten 50 der mittleren Sammlung dürften vermutlich reichen. Das hat Kurt Schmidt als Übersetzer der mittleren Sammlung der Lehrreden ins Deutsche hervorragend dargestellt (Titel: *Buddhas Reden: Majjhimanikaya. Die Sammlung der mittleren Lehrreden des Pali Kanons*). Dort liest man die gedanklich einfach zu rekapitulierende Lehre. Buddha wollte gerade nicht, dass man Tag und Nacht Wörter studiert. Ihm ging es um das Erleben und die bedachte Wahrnehmung unserer Wirklichkeit. Kurz vor seinem Ableben wurde Buddha gefragt, wie es mit der buddhistischen Gemeinde weitergehen soll. Buddha erwiderte: „Was erwartet denn die Gemeinde von mir? Ich habe die Lehre verkündet, ohne ein Geheimnis zurückzubehalten. Nie hatte ich den



Hintergedanken, dass ich die Gemeinde leiten wolle oder dass die Gemeinde auf mich angewiesen sein solle. Ich bin jetzt alt und gebrechlich und werde bald sterben. Dann suchet eure Rettung und Zuflucht in euch selbst und in der Lehre und nirgends sonst!”

(77) Jede noch so wertvolle spirituelle Tradition läuft Gefahr, im Laufe der Zeit von rein kulturell bedingten Strukturen überwuchert zu werden und die eigentliche Lehre ins Hintertreffen geraten zu lassen. So erging es dem Christentum, dem Judentum, dem Islam und auch etlichen hinduistischen Strömungen. Bhante S. Dhammika, selbst lange Jahre buddhistischer Mönch in der Theravada-Tradition, zeigt in seinem neuen Buch auf, dass dieses Phänomen auch vor dem Buddhismus nicht Halt macht. Aus eigener Erfahrung schöpfend beschreibt er die Irrwege, auf die sich der Buddhismus in Südostasien gemacht hat, die Verkrustungen, die den spirituellen Inhalt überdecken und eine Lehre der Befreiung in einen geistlosen Formalismus verwandeln. Teils ist das amüsan, wenn Bhante S. Dhammika von der wortwörtlichen und nicht hinterfragten Befolgung aus dem 1. Jahrhundert stammender Regeln und Moralvorstellungen berichtet, teils ist es erschütternd, wenn er die Auswüchse dieses Systems schildert, das sich in unglaublicher Heuchelei selbst erhielt und weiter erhält.

(78) I had previously described myself as a Theravadin who was also a Secular Buddhist. Happy to announce, I have chopped away the Theravadin part. Now I am just a plain Buddhist (no school). It is because my sister on a recent trip to Thailand saw monks travelling business class, and I consider that outrageous. The Theravadin Forum on the internet which I belong to, was grossly antagonistic to me for daring to ask about it. I attend a small monastery in Calcutta. When I asked the abbot there, what is the method of conducting funeral in the Buddhist way (should my mother pass away) he described it, but went to great lengths to detail how much he expected to be spent on alms to Bhikkhus who attend the funeral. Now this is standard procedure in Hinduism. I fled from it to Buddhism to find same here also. I have nothing against alms. I give a reasonable amount, every time I visit the monastery. But I was quite annoyed by his detailing how much the Bhikkhus would expect in case my mother died. Strangely, both of these incidents happened within 24 hours of each other and although

causally unrelated they are meaningfully related. Imagine my surprise when I found on the internet a book by an ex Theravadin monk Venerable Shravasti Dhammika detailing exactly what I was complaining about. His blog is at <http://sdhammika.blogspot.com> Here is the pdf link to his book "*The Broken Buddha*". It makes very interesting reading and exposes the way in which the Sangha works (which annoyed me enough to say goodbye to Theravada. I first said goodbye and then discovered this book) <http://www.buddhistische-gesellschaft-berlin.de/downloads/brokenbuddhanew.pdf> Now I am a full time "plain" Buddhist not reined in by selfish beliefs of the clergy of any school. My belief in Buddha remains untainted and my pursuit of Dhamma continues with full gusto. As far as belief in divinity goes, I remain an agnostic as I have through my life but believe that there was a Creator / prime cause.

(79) Trotz aller Kritik ist dieses Buch jedoch nicht einfach die „Abrechnung“ eines Enttäuschten oder gar Verbitterten. Man spürt beim Lesen, dass nur jemand, der den Kern seiner Tradition wahrhaftig liebt, diese Dinge fundiert und differenziert ansprechen kann, ja, ansprechen muss. Dhammikas Buch ist – obwohl es sich hauptsächlich auf den Theravada-Buddhismus bezieht – ein traditionsübergreifender Appell für einen freien Buddhismus, der eine Umgebung für den einzelnen Praktizierenden schafft, in der die Verwirklichung Buddhas Lehren möglich ist. Seine Vorschläge für diesen neuen Buddhismus, der sich in Asien, aber vor allem auch im Westen entfalten könnte, sind durchdacht und praktikabel. Die Ausbildung, die ihm für Ordinierte als auch für Laienlehrer vorschwebt, ist „liberal, kritisch, breit gefächert und durchdrungen vom Geist des Dhamma“ und hebt praktische Belange wie die Meditation und das soziale Engagement („tätiges Mitgefühl“) in den Vordergrund. Folgerichtig nennt er seinen Weg nicht mehr Theravada (wörtlich: „Die Sichtweise der älteren Mönche“), sondern Buddhayana – der Weg des Buddha. Eine wahre Reformationsschrift also, die den Blick zurück aufs Wesentliche lenkt und dabei manche Missverständnisse und romantischen Klischees, die wir Westler in Bezug auf Asien und seine Religionen haben, aufdeckt. Ein wertvolles und wichtiges Buch, das dank der Edition Steinrich nun auch in einer überaus gelungenen deutschen Version erhältlich ist.

(80) Thanks for calling my attention to “*The Broken Buddha*.” I spent the day reading it. It was informative and fascinating.

(81) DDW: Es ist in der Tat so, dass körperliches Arbeiten in einem Zen-Kloster eine erstaunlich große Rolle spielt, was übrigens seine in China liegenden historischen Ursachen hat. Nurwährend der Sesshin, der Perioden intensiver Zazen-Praxis, ist das anders. Wenn ich aber bedenke, zu welchen Verfallserscheinungen das Nicht-Arbeiten der Mönche in den Theravada-Ländern weithin geführt hat, wie es Bhante Dhammika in seinem kürzlich erschienenen Buch *Broken Buddha* schildert, bin ich doch recht froh darüber, dass wir uns auch recht tatkräftig körperlich betätigen

(82) *Broken Buddha: Critical Reflections on Theravada and a Plea for a New Buddhism* by Ven. S. Dhammika.

*The Broken Buddha* offers a new and refreshing point of view about the Theravada tradition. Ven. Dhammika critiques the lack of positive development of the practices, attitudes, and behaviour of a monastic community that has existed for over 2000 years. The issues of Theravada Buddhism explored in this book include topics such as the Vinaya, ritual, the role of women, asceticism, sectarianism and ethnocentricity. The purpose of this book, that may be considered controversial by many in the Buddhist community, is summed up by Ven. Dhammika: “My only hope is that *The Broken Buddha* will provoke wide-ranging, thoughtful and realistic discussion amongst Western Buddhists about the future of the Triple Gem in the West.”

(83) Thank you Bo for the links (Prof. Gombrich and *The Broken Buddha*) I have to admit that before the bhikkhuni ordination, I haven't had a clue about how dogmatic the Venerables can be. Now, I am reading Bhante Dhammika's book and my idealized version of the Theravadin monk-hood is fading away completely. Last year I had the chance to visit Thailand during an important Buddhist event and talking to one of the young girls that was taking care of our group I said (half

seriously) that maybe if I fall in love with Thailand, I will get reborn there and meeting Buddhism earlier than in the present life, I might have the chance to ordain and “live the holy life”. How naive on behalf of me. Another Asian Buddhist warned me about the lame state Buddhism is in at home, and told me it is best for me not to live there. I might admit that in my “fantasies” the monks were more concerned with the Dhamma than with the anachronistic details of the Vinaya. I liked Ajahn Brahm and Ajahn Sujato right from the start, but now my esteem for them is even greater, for speaking out loud for this so much needed reform in Theravada Buddhism.

As Prof. Gombrich outlined in his address, in its current form Theravada is not doing much good at home (and reading Bhante Dhammika’s testimony enforces my conclusion). That being the case, it has no chance to take solid roots in the Western World. And considering the invasion of the radical Evangelical Christians and their success in converting the poor uneducated folks, it might be doomed even at home. Well, not yet in Thailand... but there are also other factors that might be considered, like the interest of the youth in western culture, over traditional one.

On the other hand, the interest in the western world is a sincere spiritual one, even if most of the times it is not easy to reach by oneself the core, the real heart-wood of the Buddha’s teachings, and often one gets stuck to a certain peculiar ideas and practices sprinkled with Buddhist terms by charismatic gurus.

The reform is clearly needed for the survival of the sasana. There are bhikkhus, and bhikkhunis who are speaking clear for this. But is there anything that the laity can do to support and accelerate the process? I wonder if lay scholars like Prof. Gombrich could start such a movement to put a little pressure upon the conservatory Sangha. I know in the Buddha’s time it was not unusual for the laity to complain and demand change in the behavior of the monks. Some of the rules were given by the Buddha in this way. Isn’t it?

(84) Last year’s bhikkhuni ordination and subsequent ostracising of Ajahn Brahm from the Thai Forest Sangha, created a lot of waves in the world of Buddhism. The ripple effect of the ordination spread rapidly to the furthest corners of the globe. I was reminded of this only

recently when I stumbled upon another bhikkhuni ordination piece (replete with inaccuracies) in Ursache & Wirkung, a relatively obscure German new age publication... Around that, time calls for a renewal, a return to the roots, towards a new *Western Theravada* could be widely heard. Such calls were of course nothing new. Calls for a renewal had been raised in many online discussions, in fact 10 years before Venerable Dhammika had made exactly **that** call in his book '*The Broken Buddha*'. And the idea is still gaining momentum, since the theme has cropped up again in a keynote address by Richard Gombrich (Oxford Centre of Buddhist Studies) at the International Conference on the Dissemination of Theravada Buddhism last year in Bangkok. His address makes excellent reading as it systematically slices through many the 'unpleasant truths' associated with traditional Theravadin Buddhism, it's self-absorption, lack of social action, it's tolerance of state-sanctioned killing including the death penalty and it's lack of equality for women.

(85) *Violence-enabling Mechanisms in Buddhism*, Brian Daizen  
Victoria, pp.172-3

Isn't Buddhist-endorsed violence an oxymoron? For example, the famous Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki asserted: "Whatever form Buddhism takes in different countries where it flourishes, it is a religion of compassion, and in its varied history it has never been found engaged in warlike activities." In response to assertions of this nature, the Theravāda monk, Ven. S. Dhammika noted: "Even a cursory acquaintance with Asian history will show that this claim is baseless." Dhammika then gave two examples in Buddhist history that clearly show an early connection between Buddhism and warfare. The first example described King Anawarhta (1044-77) monarch who made the Theravāda school of Buddhism the state religion of Burma. Dhammika described how the king, following his conversion, acquired his first set of Pali-inscribed, Buddhist scriptures. "The nearest copy was in the neighbouring kingdom of Thaton that was invaded, its capital sacked and the scriptures triumphantly brought to Pagan on the backs of a train of elephants. The king of Thaton and his family lived out their remaining days as slaves in a monastery. To get relics to enshrine in the numerous stupas he was building, Anawarhta then invaded Prome,

stripped its temples of their gold, broke open its stupas and carted everything off to Pagan again. The next victim was Arakhan that possessed the revered Mahamuni image that the king was determined to get to glorify his capital. This time the battles were inconclusive, and the king had to be content with some less sacred images and relics. After this Anawrahta turned his pious and belligerent eyes to Nanchao where the Tooth Relic was enshrined. The king of Nanchao managed to avert disaster with an unexpectedly impressive show of arms and by buying off Anawrahta with a jade Buddha image that had come into contact with the Relic. All of Anawrahta's campaigns were opposed militarily and must have resulted in a great deal of bloodshed although no figures are given in the ancient records. The clerics who recorded these events were only interested in the number of monks Anawrahta fed and the number of monasteries he built, not in how many people he slaughtered. However, what is clear is that these wars qualify to be called religious wars." The second example Dhammika cited is far better known. It concerns the story of Prince Duttagāmani as recounted in the Mahāvamsa, an early history of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In the second century BCE, a line of non-Buddhist Tamils had ruled Sri Lanka for some seventy-six years. However, in 101 BCE Prince Duttagāmani started a campaign to overthrow them and make himself king. From the very beginning Duttāgamani and his supporters saw their struggle as a crusade designed to "bring glory to the religion." Monks accompanied the troops into battle because "the sight of the monks is both a blessing and a protection for us." Monks were also encouraged to disrobe and join the fighting and thousands are recorded as having done so. To ensure victory, Duttagāmani attached a relic of the Buddha to his spear. He claimed that by doing so his was not a struggle for his own advantage but for the promotion of Buddhism. However, following his victory it is said that Duttagāmani regretted the large number of enemy he had been killed. Although probably an exaggeration, the Mahāvamsa claims that as many as one million Tamils were slaughtered. Deeply disturbed, Duttagāmani was relieved when, as the following passage details, eight senior priests assured him that he had made very little bad kamma (Skt, karma) since nearly all his victims were non-Buddhists and, as such, were no more than animals. "Only one and a half human beings have been slain here by

thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto the (three) refuges, the other had taken unto himself the five precepts. Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, *not more to be esteemed than beasts*. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from the heart, O ruler of men.” (Italics mine)

(86) Dear Bhante, I recently spent 18 months living at a Thai monastery. I left feeling rather disillusioned. I'm glad you wrote this book. It connects with some of what upset me at the monastery. It also puts my mind at ease to know some of these issues are out in the open and (hopefully) being discussed. So thank you and Saddhu!

(87) From Philosophische Schnipsel.

Der Dalai Lama trägt 'ne Rolex!!!!eins!elf!!! Was für ein Wahnsinn. Ich muß ehrlich gestehen, daß mir das noch nicht aufgefallen ist. Wahrscheinlich, weil es mir sch...egal ist, weil es immer noch nichts über ihn aussagt. An etlichen Kommentaren über den Dalai Lama fällt auf, daß ihm vorgeworfen wird, nicht perfekt zu sein. Bei jedem anderen Menschen wird über den einen oder anderen Fehler hinweggesehen, er ist halt auch nur ein Mensch. Aber viele Gegner oder Kritiker des Dalai Lama werfen ihm auf eine geradezu lachhafte Art vor, nicht einem buddhistischen Ideal zu entsprechen – oder genauer, nicht dem zu entsprechen, was sie für das buddhistische Ideal halten. Ebenso ist es einfach absurd, dem Dalai Lama daraus einen Vorwurf zu konstruieren, was die Esoterik-Begeisterten aus seiner Lehre machen. Sicherlich hat sich der Tibetische Buddhismus durch die Vermischung mit dem Bön teilweise erheblich von der ursprünglichen Lehre entfernt, wie sie sich im Pali-Kanon darstellt, doch wwas ist da schlimm dran? Es ist lediglich eine Variante des Buddhismus, so wie es auch zahllose Versionen des Christentums gibt. Zahlenmäßig stellt der tibetische Buddhismus nur eine kleine Sekte innerhalb aller buddhistischen Schulen dar. Warum die die Esoterik-Begeisterten so für den Dalai Lama schwärmen wird mir wahrscheinlich immer verschlossen bleiben. Daß die Kritiker sich so an ihm festbeissen hinterläßt bei mir manchmal das Gefühl, daß sie seinen Fans beweisen müssen, daß sie die Schlauren sind, die seine Fehler aufdecken. Wirklich ernst nehmen

kann ich beide Gruppen nicht. Und wer da glaubt, der Theravada, so wie er heute in Asien gelebt wird, sei näher an der ursprünglichen Lehre des Buddha dran, dem möchte ich "*The Broken Buddha*" von Ven. S. Dhammika empfehlen. Die Abhandlung ist gut geeignet, die letzten Illusionen zu verlieren und zu erkennen, daß das buddhistische Ideal nie in Gänze erreichbar ist – eben weil es nur von Menschen interpretiert und gelebt wird.

(88) Interesting you mention a book by Ven. Shravasti Dhammika; I've been reading his blog Dhamma Musings for a while. He had a very cool post in December <http://sdhammika.blogspot.com/2009/12/buddhist-minimalism.html> about a new temple in Singapore, one that was designed with modern architecture that reflected the here and now rather than the then and gone. I agree that the "old" Buddha needs to be melted down and "recast," but so many view this as requiring throwing out the teachings, the core Dhamma. It's not that simple.

(89) I read *The Broken Buddha* when it first came out. I loved it and felt it was a breath of fresh air. It cut through the rubbish. I spent six years as a Buddhist prison chaplain in a maximum security prison. The prisoners used to love what they called 'Buddhism without the Bullshit' they wanted to cut to the chase of the important essence. *The Broken Buddha* helps in that task.

(90) Hi Bhante, this topics last post was sometime back. Only just read your book. I actually know of many of the problems you mentioned about the Thai Sangha, plain for all to see... But what an eye opener on the Sri Lankan establishment. Well if you take a better look at the Tibetan Vajrayana practices, they are so infused with culture, that it's almost overtaken the Buddhist practices. For all the noted Theravadin faults, greater are those of Tibetan Vajrayana. Although the monks are much more sociable, their practices of elevating the Monks and venerating them are cultural practices. The mainstream Mahayana establishment is, I think, the most faithful to the Vinaya. One would never find the Venerable Cheng Yen asking for full prostrations (for the followers benefit, of course) or Pujas for her long life or proclaiming to be emanations (Tulkus). The truth is for all to see.



(91) I am getting ordained as a Theravada monk soon in Thailand, having spent two months as a novice and living in Thailand for nearly twenty years now. I agree with much of your book. Presuming that the Tibetan monks have a different set of rules for their vinaya from the 227 of the Pattimokha... I would say they are still very worthy as monks and probably not committing any 'sins' by creating bad karma for themselves just because their rules are different. How do you still remain as a Theravada monk....do you use your wisdom to decide which rules are archaic and can safely be ignored since they are mere rituals, or do you still abide by the full 227 others expect you to...?

(92)I laughed and I thought I should not I wanted to cry but I feel nothing sad aboutI feel for the regrets but I should not.

In Singapore we see monks from Thailand on the streets. They come here for various reasons but few are here to do what a monk is supposed to do. It is widely known that every Thai must be a monk for a short time. Many, me included, do not know the reason for such "national service". It does not matter to me what tradition they follow. They are to me just a person wearing a piece of yellow cloth (I commented in the same way in an earlier posting on a Thai monk with a cigar). I have not for a single moment regarded them as a member of the Sangha. Their transgressions are no different from any other. I know little of monks in other countries such as Sri Lanka and Burma. While it is sad it is also not surprising to read that even monks are so ignorant as to adhere to rules and forget rationale or logic the rules are created for. Not surprising at all. We read of such an attitude in comments posted by a reader in this blog.

(93) I empathize with you Ven. Sir in calling for the creation of new tradition complete with proper governance and administration. It must be appalling for you to see these people continue to sully the name of the Lord Buddha. And you want a Body and a System of governance to right this wrong.

(94) Many things cross my mind while reading your book from page to page. At one point I wonder how you must be at a cross road when you practice the Six Sets of Six and bearing so much on the faults and flaws

of some while writing this book. At another point I thought one should maintain equanimity so as to avoid defilements.

(95) I have to be frank to say I have highly mixed feelings and incline to think of the worst considering the way you propose to start Buddhayana. My fear is coming from a few considerations. 1) Power and Corruption – even in highly regulated Singapore Government, we saw a Minister (of Housing and Development) taking bribes and took his own life upon being discovered. 2) Media and spotlight - If any one of the Mahasabha transgresses or just rumoured to have transgressed, the media will amplify the matter so much that it will sully the name many times over the erroneous monks you pointed out in your book. 3) Oppositions and Chaos - If Buddhayana deride other tradition, it may lead to oppositions and the worst scenario is not unlike the red and yellow chaos in the streets of Thailand today.

(96) Yes there are faults and flaws and I see it as such too. We are aware of it and there is where we should stop. I suggest we do not bear our mind on the faults of others but instead on the benefits of Buddhayana. We can start Buddhayana right here and right now quietly, without differentiating from others or substantiating the need in a book. By co-existing with the others, albeit if they are right or wrong, Buddhayana may have a chance to develop and grow. Given time it may grow into a widely accepted new tradition like the way all other traditions started and exist until today peacefully.

(97) If only some insider priest had similarly written a *'The Broken God'* to expose the paedophile priests many victims would have been saved and the Catholic Church would not be driven to the brink today. In a bid to save Buddhism from rotting to extinction, Bhante stuck his neck out to produce *'The Broken Buddha'* knowing that he will be ostracised for it. As a 'simple monk' this is the best he can do. Those who treasure Buddha's teachings should be grateful.

(98) As far as I can tell, Ven Dhammika is one of the most published authors on all things Dharma and Buddhist. The clear majority of his publications are informative, inspirational and also well researched. If

this single publication, “*The Broken Buddha*” is critical of certain aspects of Theravada Buddhism (and you don’t necessarily have to be a Dharma expert to reach a similar conclusion), then it is only fair and reasonable for him to shine a light on those unhelpful aspects of Theravada Buddhism as he sees them. For Ven. Dhammika not to have published this critique (especially of Theravada), I believe would have been a lost opportunity for all of us Dharma farers to re evaluate and possibly do our part to reform this venerable “tradition of The Elders” where necessary. Here’s cheers to many more publications by Ven. S. Dhammika, well said Bhante, Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu.

(99) Hello Ven. Dhammika, I was delighted to hear that you and my “adopted” son Manish Kumar were able to Skype. I have known him for four years, and I can confirm his integrity and passion for Bodh Gaya. I’ve been discussing his thesis with him, and have learned so much that I didn’t know about Bodh Gaya. Fascinating! He had sent me a pdf of your book, *The Broken Buddha*, and I read it obsessively over a couple of days. It spoke to me on a myriad of levels. Most directly, I could relate it to my own experience --I have been a student of Lama Surya Das, an American Dzogchen teacher, for the last 17 years, and took my monastic vows almost three years ago (and gave back the vows and disrobe two months ago). While you speak with fondness towards Tibetan Buddhism, I have found many of the same issues there that you found in Theravada. In my experience, it seems there is a strange transmutation that sometimes arises when spiritual awareness arises along the power over others. I started a small sangha in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1999. Then in 2008, I quit my full-time job and devoted my life to it. It organically became more “Buddhayana” (in what I think is your meaning) than anything else, as I tried to concentrate on the core of the teachings without getting lost in the trappings. That is hard to do, as I’m sure you know better than I. We now have around 200 people coming each Sunday, along with two daily meditation sessions and 12 or so groups that meet weekly in specific traditions like Korean Zen, etc. (if it’s of any interest, you can check out the website: [templebuddhistcenter.org](http://templebuddhistcenter.org)). I am very interested in getting to know more about your mission of Buddhayana. I am on sabbatical in India for four months, having gotten overwhelmed with

what ended up being a seven-days-a-week schedule trying to give every Dharma talk, see everyone needing spiritual counseling, organize fundraising, etc. (most of this pain was self-inflicted due to my Type-A tendencies...) But I'm very passionate about the goodness that can be created by more people studying and practicing the Buddha's teachings. Thanks so much for any guidance you might have.

All the best,

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(100) I am a Theravada monk in Sri Lanka and I agree with every word of this book. I've visited Thailand and it's even worse there. The monks have lied to me, cheated me out of a significant amount of money and when I found out about monasteries laundering money from criminal gangs, I was driven off. There's an even more direct book about Na Uyana monastery called *The Naked Monk and his Burning Robes*. Having met the chief villain—the monk of that story, I find it quite believable. The problem is the seniority system. Any idiot who ordains early in life and is insensitive and selfish enough to stick it out for 20-30 years will find himself in charge of a monastery. Since there are only an average of 5–6 monks per monastery, he becomes a petty dictator who is absolutely unaccountable for his actions. “Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This is why I feel I have to withdraw from the Theravada sangha. There is no compassion. Even if you object verbally, they will do it anyway just because that's the way it is always done. There is no room for individual feelings or expression—what to speak of creativity. As a lifelong creative artist, I feel suffocated in the Theravada tradition. I will remain a monk but keep my independence, thank you very much.

(101) His story about the tea with milk that he makes a mountain out of, exhibits a failure to understand the basics of the Dhammavinaya. There are some western monks who fail to get real apprenticeship training from a teacher in Asia, just connect the dots themselves, and never step out of their euro-paradigm. Here Dhammika condemns a monk who is adhering meticulously to the Vinaya and sees a tremendous burden placed on a layperson to have to walk down the hill to get black tea for the monk to drink (even though the monk never asked for it)... not appreciating the restraint of the monk, the

opportunity for merit for the layperson, the training in supporting monks in the Vinaya the layperson is getting, the opportunity for future good karma for the layperson in knowing how to host the monks properly, and the development of skill and observation on the layman's part. Instead, Dhammika complacently drinks his milk-tea in violation of the monk's rules, attacks the monk respectful of the Vinaya as "fussy," fails to realize his idiocy even years later, and finally broadcasts it all in a book defamatory of the Buddha (who set down the rules), Dhammavinaya, and the Sangha of those practicing straightforwardly. This episode is enough to tell me this monk has completely missed the boat. It might be worth a cursory look to confirm for yourself. That way you'll know how much weight to give any of the teachings by Ven. Dhammika.

(102) I tried to read "*The Broken Buddha*", Dhammika is complaining that Theravada scriptures are dry and boring. But the same can I say about his own writing: complaining and complaining, and citing criminal cases of monks. I just stopped reading. If Theravada is so bad don't become a monk. He wrote that in Thailand people just give to the monks but don't practice meditation. That is wrong. Just take Suan Mokkh monastery. Half of the month is reserved for Thai practitioners. What happens to Theravada happens to all religions. After sometime they become an empty shell. So create your own path.

(103) I agree that Ven. Dhammika does a bit overboard in his work. However, everyone needs a good dose of reality when it comes to the contemporary Sangha, or even the ancient Sangha. The bar is set way too low in terms of what is respectable and worthy of veneration. People will devote themselves fully based on hearsay and assumption and that tends to be an excuse to be a lazy practitioner and/or devotee. If nothing else, Ven. D challenges the reader to question the value of reputation and that seemingly inherent nobility that so many grant those in the yellow robe without question. I think every practitioner should read this book at least once, let half of it go out the other ear, but heed the call for becoming a responsible listener/reader who does not follow blindly.

(104) I think Ven. Dhammika's criticisms are superficial, focusing on things that, as outrageous as they may seem, aren't at all important. Possibly his book was intended to divert attention from real issues of religious choice and practice – the real existential problem which needs to be solved first, before issues like monks counting cash at night can be tackled. (105) I am shocked at how offended people are that this man had the courage to speak out against what he saw, after training as a Bhikkhu for nearly half a century. Have any of you trained in robes for 43 years of life? That's how long he has been a Bhikkhu: since 1976. 43 years this year! How many people who have criticized this man have ever been alive for 43 years, let alone trained in robes for 43 years? Perhaps you are older, but it sounds like the words of young men (and I emphasise the "men" part).

(106) Calling him ungrateful, saying he wanted the adulation of Asians...I see none of that in this man's book. I see a powerful, internal critique of a religious institution that he is an elder in. correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't the Thai Forest Tradition come into existence in the first place because its founders had nearly exactly the same evaluation of Theravada that this man has presented here? A full century and more ago, from local Thai born and raised in the tradition? Think about that, before you slander this brave Bhikkhu for the love he has shown for Dhamma. I know he has challenged your view, but the Buddha stressed that we strive for disenchantment, and he has certainly done that.

(107) The most intelligent and brave Bhikkhus and monks I have met are those who level criticism squarely at the traditions they have lived in and been dedicated to for decades as ordained monks. The ones with the dimmest vision, are the ones who strike out at those who question enchanted narratives. I do not think there is a single misplaced word in this book, and I think it expressed deep conviction, generosity, faith, and love.

(108) When I first read it, I didn't like it. I felt it was too critical of Theravada and the Sangha. But after re-reading it and discussing it with him, I notice that he does mention it is not all monks and more importantly, he offers some solutions at the end. I also follow his blog

and communicate regularly with him. He is well-versed in the Pali Canon and the Pali language. His books have also done much good, distributed throughout the world and many of them available online.

(109) I am about 1/3 done with the book. So far, I think it is one of the most valuable books I read on Buddhism. It has forced me to re-evaluate my perspective on a number of people, books and practices. It has been very though provoking. I never would have come across this book on my own. This is one of the reasons why I read this board.

(110) I was fascinated to read that monastics began having heated disagreements, often leading to violence, about minutia (one shoulder covered with the robes versus both) and disputes about interpretation of the suttas, only a few centuries after the Buddha's death. Also that such deep divisions over small, small rules still exist today. I used to think that the endless petty disputes I read on [talk / religion / Buddhism](#) / various mailing lists and web boards, was a major FAIL as far as people claiming to practice Buddhism went. Going by Venerable Dhammika's book, the kind of nonsense and bad behaviour I see on Buddhist forums is actually a time honoured tradition.

(111) This is the kind of 'chick-lit' you would expect a 12 year old to write; not someone even remotely acquainted with the most basics of logical fallacies. Theravadin monks even risk their lives to save the lives of animals. All in all, I would say the guy is a bitter malcontent and if he had gone to a Tibetan monastery he would come out again, empty-handed, disillusioned, and with far more than 80 pages to whine about!

(112) From my experience this is mostly true. The prevailing view in Sri Lanka that I witnessed was that lay people felt that meditation was for monks. A lay person's practice was almost entirely concerned with making merit. There are lay people in Sri Lanka that meditate and take an interest in learning about the Buddha's teachings, and fortunately in recent years this demographic is increasing. Regarding the sect that only allows the highest caste (and white folks) to ordain - The Siam Nikaya - They do not have a good reputation amongst the educated

laity. That's not to say that all Siam Nikaya monks are bad eggs, but that a high standard of vinaya is not followed and meditation is practiced by very few. It's no great loss for those Sri Lankans not of the highest caste because those who are serious about Dhamma would probably seek out monasteries with good reputations. Monasteries with good reputations for meditation and learning in Sri Lanka are almost exclusively of the Ramanna and Amarapura Nikayas.

(113) I think there are a lot of people on this forum who fall into that trap. 'I've often thought about it as being similar to a Korean who only gets exposed to the best parts of Christianity and the shock they might get traveling to Europe, the US etc... I think only having the idealized vision of Buddhism from the texts untempered by the form Buddhism takes in the everyday world drives a lot of hostility towards Venerable Dhammika's book...or at least the refusal among western Buddhists on this forum to accept his message. The everyday reality of Buddhism versus the ideal in the text don't have to threaten each other... look at the existence of devout Christians on our own side of the world. They coexist with lax Christians, corrupt Christians and Christians who are ignorant of their own religion too.

(114) I found that part of the book fascinating because it shows how much of Asian Buddhism can be Asian rather than Buddhism. In other words, Buddhism could have been very different from it is now and still be as true/not true to the Pali Canon...it was just a matter of what particular cultures chose to become fixated on. I started reading "*In the Buddhas Words*" by Bhikkhu Bodhi shortly after I read "*The Broken Buddha*". In his anthology of the Pali Canon Bodhi included a sutta that stated that giving dana to monks yielded the most kammic rewards. I saw the sutta where much of the corruption Dhammika described in his book started. Instead of one sutta among many, the Asian Sanghas over the centuries made that sutta prominent.

(115) His intentions might have been different, but he wrote in his book that his intentions were to inspire positive change by making people aware of a side of Buddhism that they weren't aware of. I think his written statement of his intentions published in his book takes priority



as far as trying to decide what his intentions in writing the book were. He also wrote in his book that he didn't emphasize the positive because that was emphasized everywhere else and his book was about showing people a prominent reality that wasn't covered.

(116) Westerners have not been exposed to a lot of the dirt in the Theravadin sangha, and because of this Dhammika does not have to present a "fair and balanced" evaluation of it. This book is *allowing* naive Westerners who do not have much first-hand experience dealing with the sangha to *have* that balanced view. If Dhammika forced himself to write about the positive qualities of the Theravadin Sangha just to seem balanced, it would have dulled the point of this earnest expression of genuine concern.

(117) I have been to Temples where I could see some of those issues playing out right here in Australia. (No, I'm *not* going to give names and places, because that would be bordering on or might be taken as gossip etc. and I'm not going there!) Furthermore, I actually met with Ven. Dhammika a few times, and although I'm not a follower of his by any stretch, I did get to ask a few questions and sound him out a bit. Let's remember that he remains quite enthusiastic about the Buddha Dhamma, and the Pali Canon as the most authoritative version of the Teachings. I have to confess that apart from a few quite humorous bits (we all need a good laugh occasionally), I don't particularly *like* the book (*liking* something isn't the same as admitting that it might *serve some useful purpose* despite it's unpleasantness), and I do agree that ideally it would only be read by those who, like most here, are already convinced enough about the Dhamma so as not to lose their conviction over one book. As I said, my conviction in the Dhamma was (ultimately) strengthened, not weakened, because I was able to separate the Buddha Dhamma out from the human organizations that attempt to represent it. The Dhamma is bigger than Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana or any 'Yana' you like. But I suppose that someone new to the Dhamma might get put off (Buddhism) by it.

(118) Sorry to recycle this ancient thread but I've only just read this book, and it made a big impression on me. I've discussed it with my

old Professor who is an expert on this subject and he told me to read Justin McDaniel's books on monastic education for a more optimistic outlook. We both agreed that Ven. Dhammika is clueless on the role of magic and the supernatural in Buddhism, and my old Professor also thought that he was rather naive and optimistic in his expectations. Even so, all his criticisms are valid. Interestingly, these are criticisms that any educated Westerner could make. Partly this is due to our Christian background which emphasizes humility and service, and partly due to our exposure to other varieties of Buddhism, but mainly it is due to our scientific culture. Of course it doesn't go all one way, in respect of the supernatural we Westerners are infantile in our understanding. It may be that centuries of science and logic has gifted up with a sharper mindset but distanced us from these very subtle things. What is clear is that Western monks have an extremely important role to play in the future because if it somehow possible to apply the insights of our modern civilization to the Dhamma, without sacrificing the magical, then the results would be truly wonderful.

(119) I found the book quite interesting. I guess after almost 30 years travelling in Asia such things are pretty much what I have seen for myself: although I must say it seems rare that others see it. I remember when I knew the monk Phra Yantra quite well. He was a very friendly monk who I personally liked but I never had any delusions about his supposed 'arahant' status. I even liked it that I had some reflected shine due to my knowing him. He was so popular that on holidays one of his temples in Kanchanaburi attracted so many pilgrims that the traffic jams built for up to 20 kms. away...then when the sex scandal broke his supporters and the majority of Thailand were in absolute hate against the women who accused him. It took about 2 years before it became clear that they were telling the truth. I was never surprised because he was simply a monk with no special status (IMHO) from what he said to me and from what I could see of his understanding. But for some Buddhist it was like he had taken away their faith in the Dhamma. The phrase in the book about "one month in Kandabodha, 6 months in the mental institution" is one I haven't heard for a long time, but I think it is good the writer mentions it. So many new Buddhist have very unrealistic desires for attainments that can really screw them up

badly. When I was staying at the Godwin Samaratne's meditation center near Kandy he told me how one of his main jobs is visiting the various mental institutions in the area to counsel the inmates who were there after doing intensive meditation courses. Some of them would shake in fear simply at seeing his white anagarika uniform - which reminded them of their time at the center apparently. Which is worse: the ones who deludedly thinks they have made some special progress, or the despairing ones who think they can't make progress? Both of which we see the author mentions in his book. Anyway I think it can help the over confident, the one who wants attainments, to see some of the more obvious pitfalls.

(120) '*The Broken Buddha*' is a *book*, and it's neither a scandal, nor is it scandalous. '*Controversial*' might be a more fitting term. But really, many of the issues Ven. Dhammika raises are quite common knowledge nowadays. What would be scandalous, would be if he encouraged readers to abandon Buddhism on the basis of these problems - but he does no such thing, and in my case I will disclose that this book spurred me to delve more deeply into, and rely on, **the Pali Canon as the ultimate authority** in matters of doctrine, with individual teachers' primary role now being to help me understand and interpret it for myself. The end result of reading his book, has been a strengthening and deepening of my conviction in the Buddha Dhamma.

(121) I read this the first time over two years ago when I had first moved to the monastery. This was a time for me when a lot of the expectations, ideals, and preconceived notions I had about monks and monasticism were being broken down and replaced by reality, and I found this book to be extremely valuable. While I don't really consider myself a Theravadin (personally I like Suttavadin), I'm not quite sure I'd jump at the Buddhayana either. I've never been to any of the Buddhist countries, but I've seen a lot of what he speaks about right here in America, with both westerners and cultural Buddhists. Bhikkhu Jayasara

(122) *Broken Buddha* was one of the things that saved me and my faith at a period when I was thoroughly crushed after staying at monasteries and wats in Asia. It should be compulsory reading for every serious

Buddhist. The whole Buddhayana thing is a pretty minor part of the book, and I'm not sure if it's supposed to be literal, maybe more just Bhante Dhammika's vision and way of saying 'Here's what we could do differently, and how', rather than simply criticizing.

There is something irksome about a top-down concept though. I dislike using such terminology, but I think there's much to be said about coming face to face with, and integrating the 'shadow' side of our faith. And the whole picture *Broken Buddha* paints does that very well. I hope such reflections do provide impetus for a 'bottom-up' change...After all, it all starts with suffering...

(123) I really liked the book when I first read it because it raises so many difficult topics that tend to be overlooked by virtually all religious traditions. Reading it will help you confront reality and abandon the idealized picture of the Buddhism and Theravada you had in your mind - something that probably never existed in the real world even back in the Buddha's day.

I didn't really like the Buddhayana part. If you give it a name, you objectify the unobjectifiable, you create an identity, and each identity is bound to become rigid at some point in time, which would mean confrontation with Theravada, Mahayana and any other competing Buddhist identities out there. I think it is bound to eventually lead to what Ven. Shravasti Dhammika wanted to avoid in the first place. So yeah, overall a great thought-provoking book with great observations and ideas, but also some flawed and apparently not well thought-out suggestions near the end.

(124) It can be heart-breaking to immerse oneself into the Dhamma, and have this joy and saddha in the Triple Gem, and yet have that faith challenged by some of the bad acts, and bad actors, in some of the wats. I wish I had been less idealistic before going to live in Thailand 7 years ago; this book warned me, but I didn't listen well and it did not fully prepare me for what I lived and experienced in the wats, at times. So much good I have found in Thailand, but some really bad stuff, too.

(125) Strangely, I never had this problem. I started my journey by turning up to my local Thai Wat. While it was the inspiration of the ordained and lay people that propelled me into the Dhamma, it was

immediately apparent that there is a wide range of levels of dedication and practice among the lay and ordained community. The disconcerting things that one can come across in Asia, such as seeing monks selling amulets on the streets in Bangkok, was then rather unsurprising. I never finished the book, since I didn't find it particularly interesting, for the reasons I've explained above. In fact, I was surprised to find later that the Venerable was still in robes, given the bitter tone of the book! It seems that the book can be helpful for dispelling romantic notions of how Buddhism plays out in Buddhist-oriented societies. However, I do hope that it does not put off people from seeking the genuinely excellent support that may be available close to them, and the amazing things one can find in Asia.

(126) I have to admit *The Broken Buddha* was an eye-opener for me too. I had mostly been exposed to the purer part of the Buddhism, and I needed this to gain a more balanced perspective. In fact, even the "purer" part of Buddhism is often not as true to the Buddha's teachings as some of us would like. I am thinking of such things as the proliferation of wrong view, but also the hierarchical structures that have taken the place of the early decentralised and democratic model. At the same time, I agree with you that the creation of a new form of Buddhism, a Buddhayana, is not the right answer. Every time we create something new, we also create new divisions and new arguments. There is only one authority that has the ability to unite, and that is the word of the Buddha. So what we really need to do is to heed that word. If we did this fully, most of the corruption of Buddhism would vanish. How do we get more people, especially monastics, to take the word of the Buddha seriously? I think education is the critical issue. Just understanding where to find the word of the Buddha and then reading it should make a massive difference. This is one of the great things about Sutta Central: it has mainly been established for this purpose. Bhikkhu Brahmli

(127) I can only agree with everything Ven Brahmali says here. The thing is, there are plenty of vital, dynamic, powerful things going on in Buddhism; it's just that none of them are happening in the traditional institutions. Of course, you can never ask too much of institutions, but surely we might expect them to perform some basic functions like

provide a competent education in Buddhist fundamentals: but even that is absent. I don't think there's a complete answer to this. But to confirm, putting my energy into SC is indeed at least partially a response to this need, an attempt to raise the fundamental level of Buddhist education. It would be nice if Buddhists knew something about what the Buddha taught. Of course, this is only one project. We also need examples of positive and vital Buddhist institutions, like the BSWA. We need ground roots organizations. We need challenges and people bold enough to try something completely new. We need diversity, engagement, and equality: and we also need contemplation and wisdom. Oh, and a little common sense now and then doesn't hurt either. Bhikkhu Sujato.