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Becoming a Student, Remaining a Student,  
Never Less than a Student:  
A Special Issue in Honor of Charles Hallisey

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# Becoming a Student, Remaining a Student, Never Less than a Student: A Special Issue in Honor of Charles Hallisey

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# Becoming a Student, Remaining a Student, Never Less than a Student

Karen Derris, Natalie Gummer, and Maria Heim

## **Abstract**

This Special Issue in honor of Charles Hallisey is edited by three friends and colleagues who began studying with him in the 1990's. We asked twenty-four contributors—drawn from Hallisey's students and colleagues—to reflect in short essays on how Charles Hallisey's work on “moral anthropology” has influenced their work in Buddhist ethics and literature. Hallisey's felicitations of two of his own teachers begin the collection, and an Afterword by Wendy Doniger completes it. We also include a consolidated transcript based on two interviews with Hallisey conducted by Natalie Gummer in the Summer and Fall of 2023. This introduction sets out some of the interventions of Hallisey's work in Buddhist ethics and the major themes of the contributors.

## Introduction

The early Pāli text, *The Questions of Milinda*, tells of an encounter between Milinda, a Greek king said to have reigned in Northwest India in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, and the Buddhist monk Nāgasena. What starts off as a debate in a public setting as King Milinda challenges Venerable Nāgasena on fundamental questions of Buddhist doctrine, softens in the course of their long exchange to a close teacher-student relationship. We catch this progression at the moment the king turns to the monk and asks to be considered his disciple. As he does so, he formally requests Nagasawa's tutelage while enumerating the qualities of an estimable teacher.

When a student is practicing rightly, the teacher should properly adhere to the twenty-five qualities of a teacher. What are the twenty-five qualities? Sir, a teacher should constantly and consistently look after and protect students; make known what is to be pursued and what is not to be pursued; point out negligence and carefulness; give opportunities for rest; and advise about illness. A teacher should instruct students about receiving and declining food, and about particular foods, and must share what he has received. A teacher consoles a student, saying, 'Don't worry, you will reach your goal.' When the student sets out to visit someone, the teacher advises about the particulars of the visit, the village, the monastery, and topics of conversation to be avoided. Though seeing a flaw, one should be patient. In all doings, a teacher should be thorough, complete, without secrets, and inclusive. A teacher fosters a mind that grows, reflecting on how one should develop in the arts, and how, once the mind has grown, deterioration can be prevented. Thinking about how to produce strength, a teacher fosters a mind with strength in the monastic

training and thoughts of friendliness. A teacher must not forsake a student in times of calamity; does not shirk obligations; and catches the faltering student with the Dhamma. These, sir, are the twenty-five qualities of a teacher. May you properly adhere to these qualities with respect to me. (*Milindapañha* 94, translated by Heim)

The contributors to this special issue in honor of Charles Hallisey will readily spot many of these qualities in him, and readers will see them celebrated in the pages that follow. The three editors, friends since working with Hallisey in graduate school in the 1990's, are grateful for the opportunity to guest-edit a special issue in the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* and the chance it gives us to expand in concrete terms many of these special qualities to which Charles Hallisey has adhered with respect to us.

We asked contributors to experiment with short-form writing to speak to how Hallisey's published work has shaped their own approach to "moral anthropology," an idea occurring frequently in Hallisey's scholarly practice.<sup>1</sup> Moral anthropology considers the capacities, resources, and limitations on moral agency and subjectivity in the situated contexts in which moral actors find themselves. Moral anthropology emphasizes the particular and the concrete over the general and abstract. Human beings in their lived particulars come into view and are explored in their creative, practical, and often flawed human nature. While the contributors to this special issue—just some of the many students and collaborators Hallisey has impacted in his career thus far—address the features and

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<sup>1</sup> Long before it was an academic discipline based on fieldwork and the study of culture, "anthropology" was considered in very broad compass as the systematic study of what it is to be human. In the context of ethics, we can see something of this wider sense, for example, in the title of Immanuel Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. This collection of lectures explores not so much the rational ethical theory for which Kant is famous, but rather the empirical side of ethics—what humans are actually like, what capacities we can have, how we work psychologically.

contours of these ideas in the essays that follow, we signal at the start some of the most significant of Hallisey's interventions in the field of Buddhist ethics as we see them.

Hallisey argues that formal systems of rationality are only one way to study ethics (though prior to Hallisey's intercessions, they dominated the field). To engage the concrete, pragmatic, and particular, he draws our notice to narrative ethics, most forcefully in his work with Anne Hansen in exploring how stories create ethical worlds, sort out moral problems, and fashion moral subjectivities ("Narrative, Sub-Ethics, and the Moral Life"). Hallisey and Hansen show how narratives enable sophisticated forms of moral knowledge and imagination; stories probe intention, transform sensibility, and forge analogical ties. Readers come to imagine themselves in the place of another, shifting perspective to a "sub-ethical recognition of the experience of another" that decenters self. This shift in perspective can become a precondition for moral subjectivity and agency (314). This now classic essay generated an important shift in the study of both Buddhist ethics and Buddhist literature; many of our contributors have expanded and developed its insights on how narrative and literary texts do ethical work.

Hallisey also developed conceptions of ethics from reading Paul Ricoeur—"how one aims to live well with and for others," together with Michel Foucault—in which the question of "how ought one to live" involves thinking about the "self's relationship to the self." To these formulations he introduces key Buddhist conceptions, as for example, the virtue of *satisampajañña*—a certain moral awareness and self-appraisal gleaned from learning from others and from life experience—to help us identify styles of moral creativity and begin to theorize how they work ("Between Intuition and Judgment"; see also contributors Aulino and McRae). Also drawing from Theravāda thought, Hallisey's identification and defense of a principled "particularist" approach to moral theory delivered a decisive



blow to the unexamined holism and felt need for global generalizations that characterized most work in Buddhist ethics at the time (“Ethical Particularism” and “A Response to Kevin Schilbrack”).

For Hallisey, these approaches to ethics apply as much to the ethics of scholarship as to scholarship on ethics. We, too, develop a certain moral awareness and self-appraisal as we learn from others—especially the Buddhist others whose lives and thought we study—and from life experience. The scholar, too, is remade through these ineluctably ethical encounters. Hallisey challenges us, in a field still dominated by norms of disinterested, objective knowledge production, to approach our studies with greater openness and vulnerability, and to attend to the particular circumstances in which we engage in the moral act of producing knowledge.

In this way, Hallisey’s work expands the scope and practice of Buddhist ethics to reflect on the ethics of scholarship and pedagogy, and it is these reflections that we wish to honor in some detail in what follows. Hallisey is the first to insist that his scholarly and pedagogical ethics were shaped by his teachers, whether those in the distant past—Patachara, Buddhaghosa, Gurulugomi, for example—or those in his own lifetime who, as he describes of Professor P.B. Meegaskumbara, went to “extraordinary efforts to create the conditions for others to do better themselves, to become better scholars” (“A Gift to the Future”). Those of us studying with Hallisey are keenly aware of our inheritance in this *parampara*, this teacher-to-student lineage. As Emily McRae notes in her contribution, we became the “grandstudents” of those who shaped him, namely, Professors G. D. Wijayawardhana, P. B. Meegaskumbara, John Ross Carter, Frank Reynolds, Wendy Doniger, and others. To demonstrate and honor some of this influence, and at Hallisey’s request, we include at the start of our collection Hallisey’s felicitations of two of these teachers. We cap the issue with the wise reflections of another, Wendy Doniger. Readers will notice

the echoes of these teachers' ethics of scholarship and pedagogy in the contributors' expressions of admiration and esteem for Hallisey's own.

### **Transgenerational Connections**

As Karen Derris shows in her contribution, a *parampara* forges temporal and transgenerational connections. In a *parampara*, we look to both the past and the present in an orientation of gratitude and care. Several of our contributors highlight the ways in which Hallisey's idea of the "care for the past" involves attention to the always present, but sometimes neglected local conditions bearing on the reception and interpretation of texts and ideas from the past. Buddhaghosa's engagement with *buddhava-cana* is one such instance of reception and interpretation; the medieval commentator Gurulogami's is another, and what we in our own time are doing with *buddhava-cana* and its commentators is yet another. Tradition and interpretation are always, as Hallisey puts it "dependent on local conditions for the production of meaning" ("Roads Taken and Not Taken" and discussed in Blackburn's contribution). Texts do not speak in any single way across the centuries; they land differently with different audiences whose hermeneutic horizons of possibilities create them anew. Thus, to understand the past we are engaged in a transgenerational conversation that requires us to attend to the local and historical contexts of meaning making, including our own. At the same time, no text or idea is ever exhausted by, or explained entirely in terms of, its historical conditions.

From Professor Wijayawardhana, Hallisey learned "a care and respect for what came from the past, a responsibility to pass it on as intact and as alive as possible" ("G. D. Wijayawardhana, an Appreciation"). In speaking of the Sasana, the Buddhist dispensation, Hallisey sees a "transgenerational project" in that "there is an onwardness in human care as it is received in time, recognized as having been given in the past,

and then subsequently given again, precisely because of the care received” (“The Care of the Past” 90). At the same time, Hallisey’s work urges us to expand the forms of literature and practice that we attend to within that transgenerational project. Indeed, his ongoing interest in literature as central to Buddhist moral anthropology has to do with the way texts both enable this giving to extend through time and preserve traditions that may have been pushed to the margins. To recognize the gift that one has received in institutions, teachings, and practices from the past, whether in the Buddhist Sasana, in marginalized voices, or in the academic traditions we share in, is to simultaneously acknowledge one’s role in caring for their future .

Janet Gyatso’s contribution pulls out most forcefully the ways Hallisey’s eyes look to the future, though several of our other contributors also appreciate his emphasis on “onwardness” and “listening and carrying on the conversation” (as Mrozik puts it; see also Davis and Otten). In some respects, the orientation to the future is the flipside of the care for the past. Our local and historically-situated conditions of meaning (that responsible scholarship in our time requires us to identify and attempt to render explicit) are shaping the future, whether we are aware of it or not. Hallisey’s work asks us to be aware of both our inheritance and our legacy (see “An Interview with Charles Hallisey” in this issue) and to attend critically to the ways in which we are embedded in ethically relevant relationships with the future through our work.

### **Communities of Friends**

One of Milinda’s twenty-five qualities of a good teacher is that teachers instill friendliness in their students. This quality of *mettā*—wanting others to be happy and flourish—is evident in the many pages that follow as the contributors recognize time and again how their scholarship has

flourished in and through the communities Hallisey has created. These communities cross the disciplinary lines and scholarly silos that otherwise often restrict conversation in the academy. Textual scholars profit from engaging anthropologists and *vice versa*; Womanists and scholars of Buddhist literature learn to read together in community; Theravāda ethics is enriched by engaging Shinran's extraordinary subjectivity, realized especially in collaboration with Dennis Hirota. Generations of Hallisey's students and colleagues continue to find unexpected alliances and shared sensibilities in these collaborations and others.

While a *parampara* can suggest a vertical relationship, in Hallisey's practice it more often develops into relationships of mutuality, friendship, and inclusivity (as noted by Derris, Mrozik, Harris). Melanie Harris describes how in his engagement with Womanist thinkers Hallisey insisted that "we move in a way of mutuality," where hierarchy gives way to friendship and reciprocity. She sees this foundation of friendship as creating the very conditions for "the opportunity to share and shape knowledge, to create epistemologies that would uproot and replant the very way we approach knowing" (Harris). We think that Harris has identified something vital here in the way communities of friends can change what and how one knows, conditioning the fundamental epistemological shifts we find in the work of both Hallisey and those who have worked with him. The challenge remains for scholars in the present and the future to continue to question and expand our sources and methods as we learn from the past and from one another.

For Hallisey, friends read together, and people who read together become friends. Alexis Brown supplies a tantalizing anecdote of Hallisey once remarking offhandedly that the fifth-century scholastic and commentator Buddhaghosa was "one of his very good friends." As Brown notes in her essay, this idea has multiple resonances. It calls to mind the ideal of the *kalyāṇamitta*, the "good friend" or mentor described by

Buddhaghosa (echoing the Buddha) as an essential condition for ethical and contemplative development. It evokes the Buddha's own striking claim that friendship is the "whole of the holy life." It collapses time in a *parampara*: we can study Buddhaghosa sitting side-by-side with him, as friends do. And, as Brown further develops the connection of good friends and good readers, reading practices grounded and forged in friendship help us to co-imagine new ways of seeing, to inhabit others' perspectives, and to overcome the boundaries of self. It is a beautiful gift to humanity that these very practices—Hallisey insists that they are *ethical* practices—also bring great pleasure and joy.

### Learning How to Read

Reading together with friends can become a practice of care for the future. Hallisey learned from Professor Wijayawardhana that "sensibility was essential to passing on—intact and alive—what came from the past" ("G. D. Wijayawardhana—An Appreciation"). Refining a literary and aesthetic sensibility forged in a community engaged in reading difficult material together keeps texts "intact and alive." To keep texts alive, Hallisey has always insisted that the beauty and pleasure of reading be at the forefront.

The literary scholars among our contributors suggest two simultaneous and not quite inconsistent impulses in Hallisey's pedagogy of pleasure with literary texts. On the one hand is a strong sense of inclusivity—as human beings we can all share in the beauty of a poem in the *Therīgāthā* or a story from the *Saddharmaratnavaliya*. On the other hand, one's pleasure will only increase when one prepares to be addressed by a text through deeper refinement and training in the distinctive literary conventions, theoretical knowledge, and practices of South Asian aesthetic traditions that hone the connoisseurship of a *sahṛdaya*, a sensitive reader. We learn from the brilliant Sanskrit literary theorist Dandin and the

literary community of his Sinhala interpreters how to appreciate the creative sophistication at work in the use of metaphor, polysemy, and other ornamental figures in Sanskrit, Pāli, and Sinhala texts. Hallisey shows us how texts themselves can guide us in how to read them. Reading with Hallisey invites “caring attention to textual details, as well as a welcoming disposition toward the range of responses it produces,” as Odeya Eshel puts it in a way that echoes what we learn from Chrystall, Scheible, Liyanage, Dachille, and Berkwitz.

As these readerly dispositions indicate, for Hallisey, the relationship between text and reader is fundamentally ethical. Reading compels us to realize our own moral incapacity—and paradoxically, to realize that we can only “discover our own road to moral capability” by recognizing that incapacity and the profound dependence on others that it entails (“Intuition and Judgment” 150–151). Among those others are the characters we meet in narratives: some may help us to recognize “the foibles of others against which one must always be on guard” (145), others may reveal to us aspects of ourselves that we may not be able to see without their help, while still others may show us our own inadequacy by exemplifying what moral capability looks like. In these ways, reading “reminds us” of our limitations as moral agents, and recognizing those limits “effects on us” transformations that help us “to become competent moral subjects” (“Intuition and Judgment” 150–151).

Hallisey’s insistence on the pleasure and beauty in reading together is conditioned by another value picked up by several of our contributors, namely, the “open-endedness of the ethical in culture and history” (“Between Intuition and Judgment” 142, noted by George). Buddhist literature can address us most directly when we stop limiting ourselves to what it might tell us about doctrine and history (as noted by Ven. Upali Sraman and Liyanage). The poems of Buddhist nuns in the *Therīgāthā* are permitted “to wear their Buddhist doctrine quite lightly” (*Therīgāthā*

xxvii; and noted by Mrozik, Scheible, and Dachille). Better to not know in advance what these texts will teach us or how they will prompt us to feel. Indeed, what makes a text into scripture is the reader's openness to receiving it, with a jolt of surprise, as "personal religious advice" ("The Surprise of Scripture," as noted in Hirota and Gummer).

This literary disposition toward open-endedness is supported by what Hallisey and Yigal Bronner call the "generative interplay between what is unfamiliar and what is familiar" (*Sensitive Reading* 151). For Hallisey, poetry is what happens when fixed patterns are anticipated and then interrupted with "delightful surprise," as we see occur again and again in his luminous translation of the *Therīgāthā* (xiv). But the interplay between the unfamiliar and the familiar has ethical and scholarly value beyond relishing poetry; we can read with expectation of what we may encounter gleaned from our training, but this must never close off the possibility of being confronted with difference and perhaps even discomfort. It is in the interstices and interaction of what is anticipated and what is unexpected, between and across different conceptual frames, that the possibilities for both doubt and fresh understanding are generated (McRae). Jonathan Spencer observes in reflecting on reading and talking about books with Hallisey that "a degree of dissonance, of not getting it, may turn out to be just as fruitful in its longer-term effect."

Finally, learning how to read requires taking seriously the theoretical resources our Buddhist, vernacular, and local sources have given us. The three editors were struck by Chamila Somirathna's anecdote about a feeling of inadequacy she felt at first meeting Hallisey at the University of Peradeniya concerning her felt lack of background on "theory." Hallisey's response? "He did not seem to believe me and simply asked me to read Martin Wickramasinghe's *Guttīla Geetaya*." He "did not seem to believe" her because he knew she was well-versed in Sinhala literary theory; but she had to come to see for herself through reading Wickramasinghe's

work the richness and vitality of the theoretical resources she already knew. Several other contributors join Somirathna and Hallisey in turning to Buddhist and local sources for their theoretical potential, thereby resisting the unequal structures of power that privilege the West as the sole source of theory and conceptual framing (Shulman, Mrozik, McRae, Hirota, Heim, Gummer).

King Milinda's lists of qualities of a teacher include specifying that a teacher "fosters a mind that grows, reflecting on how one should develop in the arts, and how, once the mind has grown, deterioration can be prevented." A teacher thinks "about how to produce strength." As Hallisey noticed as far back as his doctoral dissertation and as he has developed subsequently in his engagement with Dandin, the idea of a quality (*guṇa*) in such lists of virtues is relational: a teacher can be said to have these qualities only insofar as they are known through the impact they have on others; and as Milinda points out, the other here is the student towards whom these virtues are realized. As beneficiaries of a *parampara* with these qualities at its core, a *parampara* that is both vertically deep and horizontally wide, we hope that this collection helps imagine into being a future that further fosters these qualities and the relationships in which they are realized.

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## A Gift to the Future<sup>2</sup>

Charles Hallisey<sup>3</sup>

I first met Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura in the early months of 1983. Our teacher, the late G. D. Wijayawardhana, with whom I had just begun to study at the University of Colombo, was to be out of the country and he recommended to me that I use the time while he was away to go meet Professor Meegaskumbura in Peradeniya. I did as Professor Wijayawardhana suggested, but it was with no definite expectations of what meeting Professor Meegaskumbura would come to mean for me, for my life.

At our first meeting, Professor Meegaskumbura immediately began to teach me. He shared freely, speaking about *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, about its pleasures and its example waiting to be discovered in the style of its language. A copy of Ven. Dharmasena's text was pulled from a shelf and passages were read aloud, so that pleasures could be shared directly through specific examples.

Looking back, I can see that the relationship between Professor Meegaskumbura and myself was always, to use a current expression, intersectional. Professor Meegaskumbura and I were students of the same teacher, the same Gurutuma, although he, of course, was our teacher's

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<sup>2</sup> Previously published as Hallisey, Charles. "A Gift to the Future." *Lekhanawali: A Collection of Scholarly Articles of Emeritus Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: University of Peradeniya, 2020, pp. 32-34.

<sup>3</sup> University of Wisconsin-Madison (at the time of original publication).

most senior student and I had only known Professor Wijayawardhana a matter of months. Professor Meegaskumbura was also a teacher to me. The relationships of fellow student and of teacher always intersected with each other for me, each relationship inflected the other. Other relationships between us were added over the years, now the decades, each new relationship intersecting with all the others. Professor Meegaskumbura and I became friends, close friends. He became an Onkel, P.B. Onkel, to my children and just the mention of his name can bring a smile to their faces, even now that they are adults. We became collaborators, working together as members of collective projects with others, especially in the last decade on projects based in Jerusalem about Dandin and about sandesa literature in South Asia. Professor Meegaskumbura is a mentor to me as well as all of these other things.

Professor Meegaskumbura and I quickly became friends. Once we became friends, I did not need anyone to encourage me to go see him, on the contrary, I looked forward to any opportunity to meet, as I still do, even if there are oceans and continents between us. When we first met, Professor Meegaskumbura and his family were living in faculty housing on the Peradeniya campus and I began to visit him at his home on my visits to Kandy. One of the ways he made the campus house a home for his family was by “improving” the land around it in practical ways, especially by making a garden around it. Wild boars from the Hantana Hills above the house often made a mess of what had been planted in the garden. I remember on one visit, a mutual friend, on hearing of the boars’ destructive habits, recommended that Professor Meegaskumbura just get a gun and fix the problem once and for all. Professor Meegaskumbura’s gentle demurrer, kind to the friend as well as to the boars, has stayed a life lesson for me over the decades.

When we first met in early 1983, Professor Meegaskumbura had already started to build a house for his family away from campus, in lower

Peradeniya. I still cherish a photograph from that time of Professor Meegaskumbura on a visit to the house site for him to inspect the progress being made on the house foundations. At that time, he frequently hauled wood and steel I-beams on top of his very old black Peugeot sedan, and bags of cement in it. He was the embodiment of a bricoleur, the epitome of someone able to create something wonderful using whatever materials and means are available.

Years later, long after the house in lower Peradeniya was completed and his family was well settled in it, Professor Meegaskumbura built a number of “frog ponds” in the house garden. As I understand it, his son, Madhava, was a teenager and he had developed a fascination with zoology and especially with frogs. The ponds created the conditions for Madhava to pursue his youthful interests in serious ways, and Madhava eventually went on to get a PhD in Biology and to become a scholar internationally-recognized for what he has contributed to our knowledge of frogs. Madhava has gone on, but the frogs have stayed, and they are still one of the pleasures of visiting Professor Meegaskumbura’s home; the frog ponds are now surrounded by a luxuriant house garden filled with a variety of fruits and vegetables. The frogs still thrive throughout the neighborhood because of the frog ponds in Professor Meegaskumbura’s garden, adding their own beauties and maybe even helping with the control of diseases like dengue by eating mosquito eggs. The frog ponds may be in the yard of Professor Meegaskumbura’s house, but what they add to the world goes far beyond the boundaries of his yard; something tangible to the neighborhood, something intangible but nonetheless critical because of the ongoing decimation of frog species worldwide.

I can tell these three stories because of my relationship with Professor Meegaskumbura over the decades. I tell them here, as part of this volume bringing together some of his academic articles, because they can serve as examples to show us that the virtues of the whole person are

equally visible in the achievements of Professor Meegaskumbura as a scholar. Professor Megaskumbura improves whatever academic context he finds himself in, no matter how briefly, just as he planted a garden around his campus residence at Peradeniya, and he always does so with a care and concern for all around him. Moreover, he does all that he does with a keen sense of the ethics of scholarship in the fullest sense.

Professor Meegaskumbura is a bricoleur as a scholar too, able to create new knowledge and new insights with whatever materials and means are available. This ability and skill as a bricoleur is clearly evident in Professor Meegaskumbura's PhD dissertation, "Proto New Indo-Aryan Phonology: A Comparative Reconstruction of the Phonology of Parent Indo-Aryan Language Based on Sinhalese, Sindhi, Bengali, Oriya, Gujarati, Punjabi, Bhojpuri, and Hindi" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Pune, 1970), where he brings to bear the comparative method of historical linguistics ("the means") on the information found in R. L. Turner's *Comparative Dictionary of Indo-Aryan Languages* (the materials to provide detailed information on a poorly-understood stage of linguistic development structurally from the Middle Indo-Aryan Languages like Pali and the literary Prakrits to the New Indo-Aryan Languages like Sinhala and the other eight languages specified in his dissertation's title).

One of Professor Meegaskumbura's outstanding traits as a scholar is his extraordinary efforts to create conditions for others to do better themselves, to become better scholars. That is to say, he builds academic "frog ponds" for the benefit of others. This can be seen in his translations into Sinhala of scholarship originally published in English. It can also be seen in the many acknowledgements by other scholars, both Sri Lankan and foreign, of his assistance to them in a whole host of ways. These many acknowledgements show that Professor Meegaskumbura is an "expert's expert," a scholar that other scholars go to for assistance and inspiration.

The assistance that Professor Meegaskumbura gives is not only on points of information. Senior scholars approach Professor Meegaskumbura for guidance about how to think about topics better, for help on how to ask better questions about materials that they already know, and in their acknowledgements, they attest to coming away with a sense of new possibilities. In short, just as he did with the frog ponds in his house garden, Professor Meegaskumbura creates the conditions for others to know, conditions for them to pursue their own research interests better. As a scholar, Professor Meegaskumbura's contributions to knowledge are not to be measured only in his own publications, as impressive as they are, but also in what he made it possible for others to do as scholars. Professor Meegaskumbura's example in collaborative scholarship is also an invaluable reminder that scholarship is always a collective aspiration and a collaborative endeavor.

The essays found in this volume attest to the range of materials and topics to which Professor Meegaskumbura's scholarly attention has been given, always with erudition and care. He has written about "baby talk" as well as literary language; about classical texts as well as about folklore; about the earliest examples of Sinhala language and literature at Sigiriya as well as about Sinhala language and literature since Independence; about prose and drama as well as poetry in Sinhala. He has explored Sri Lanka's religious and cultural connections with Thailand, but also the island's literary and cultural connections to India. His knowledge of the Pali language and Pali literature is deep and nuanced.

The range of Professor Meegaskumbura's scholarly interests is, in short, remarkable, the range of things on which he has published is astounding. He has published the results of his research in a wide range of venues, from scholarly journals to felicitation volumes. Oftentimes, these publications are now difficult to access. But the value of publishing them together in this volume is more than an occasion to take the measure of

Professor Meegaskumbura as an outstanding scholar. The publication here of Professor Meegaskumbura's articles is to make these essays readily available to others in the future, to serve as basic conditions for their own original thinking and research, even as they also serve as models for exemplary scholarship in the future too.

The publication of these essays here, filled as they are with beauty and wonder, is a gift to the future, as their publication provides an opportunity for many, including those yet to come, to benefit from them in ways that may even go beyond Professor Meegaskumbura's own original intents in preparing them. Just like the frog ponds in his house garden.



## G. D. Wijayawardhana, an Appreciation<sup>4</sup>

Charles Hallisey<sup>5</sup>

If, as it is said, suffering is a teacher second only to the Buddha himself, then perhaps suffering does not teach us only about the silent pull of misery that colors this world. Perhaps, like the Buddha, suffering can also teach us about another aspect of the world, that aspect described in the words of the Pāli statement, “*Atthi loke silaguno, saccam, soceyy’ anudaya.*”—“There is in the world the quality of virtue, truth, purity, caring.”

It is out of a confidence that this is so that I write this appreciation of my teacher, G. D. Wijayawardhana, who passed away today after suffering for more than a decade from Parkinson’s Disease. This appreciation of him is from my perspective of him as my teacher; it is written in sadness. Professor Wijayawardhana’s deserved stature as a scholar is well-known in Sri Lanka. Indeed, I know that some of his colleagues and students spoke of his qualities as a person, teacher, and scholar in a special tribute to him published in *Divayina* on February 22, 2007, and I am sure that as news of his passing away spreads, others will add their own tributes and testimonies to theirs. I doubt that I could add much to what others have said and will say about him as a scholar, but I do want to share some memories of Professor Wijayawardhana’s life that do remind us of his excellence but

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<sup>4</sup> Previously published as Hallisey, Charles. “G.D. Wijayawardhana, an Appreciation.” *The Island*. Colombo, Sri Lanka March 15 2007 (Part 1) and March 16 2007 (Part 2).

<sup>5</sup> University of Wisconsin–Madison (at the time of original publication).

also of the truth that there is in the world the quality of virtue, truth, purity, and caring. These are qualities of humaneness that ornament the teacher and scholar, indeed ornament the world.

One of the stark realities of death, and indeed illness as well, is that we find ourselves in the position of being aware of suffering, having to watch it being endured by others, without being able to offer any real help. But, at a time like this, so marked by death and sorrow, it is important to remember that helplessness is not the only quality of human life; there is also the quality of helpfulness, and this is what is my first memory of Professor Wijayawardhana. It is the memory of a quiet statement made at the end of a first meeting: “If you come back, I can help you.”

I had been brought to his office in the Sinhala Department of the University of Colombo, then still in the old main building of the university. I was a graduate student at an American university with only the vaguest of ideas for a future direction for my PhD research. I had come to Sri Lanka in May, 1979 for a three month trip to meet different professors, with the idea of finding someone to help me with my research; this is a demand on time, energy, and learning that no one has a right to make, but it is one that foreign students and scholars routinely make on scholars in Sri Lanka, often without any self-consciousness about how much they are actually asking for and too little acknowledgement later on. I know that I didn't realize how much I was asking. All I knew was that I wanted to study Buddhist texts in Sri Lanka, and I had been going to different universities, trying to learn enough about people and campuses to help make a decision about where I would return to engage in a longer period of sustained research if I could secure a fellowship.

At that point, the notion of “centres of excellence” structured the allocation of resources in Sri Lanka's universities. I did not include the University of Colombo in my plans to visit centers of Buddhist Studies in

Sri Lanka. The “centres of excellence” were officially thought to be elsewhere. Colombo did not have a department in Buddhist Studies, as some other universities did. And I did not know then just how vibrant the Sinhala departments in Sri Lanka’s universities were as intellectual centers for the study of Buddhist culture, albeit the contours of the scholarship in them was different from the Buddhist Studies I was familiar with in the United States.

I also had no idea who Hemapala Wijayawardhana was. In fact, I had never even heard of him. Just before I left Sri Lanka in July, 1979, my undergraduate teacher, John Ross Carter, suggested that I accompany him on a personal visit to the University of Colombo. He was going to meet someone he had known from when he was doing his PhD research a decade earlier. I had no expectations for the visit, especially none that I would ever become Professor Wijayawardhana’s student.

My memory of Professor Wijayawardhana on that first meeting is as I would always find him over the next decades. He seemed simultaneously shy and attentive. Even now looking back, my memory colored today with the sadness of the news of his death, I can see that he exhibited those qualities of body and character that I came to know as distinctively his. He didn’t say a lot. He smiled a lot. Still, there was something about how he listened, with a great gentleness, that gave me a concrete if intuitive sense of his remarkable mind as well as a glimpse of his habits and qualities as a scholar.

Looking back, I can see that he could see what I was trying to tell him about what I wanted to do, even though I can also see, looking back, that I could not see it myself. I had told him that I wanted to read Sinhala books like *Butsarana*, *Amavatura*, *Pujavaliya*, and *Saddharmaratnavaliya*, although actually I didn’t know enough to name all of these books, not to mention all the other classics of Sinhala literature that he had the patience to introduce me to; later he would even be patient enough to read

*Kavyasekhara* with me, when I know that he found it inferior as poetry to *Kavsilumina*. At that first meeting, however, he didn't draw attention to my ignorance, didn't reject the vague and probably pompous rationales I made for my unclear purposes. Instead, he encouraged me to think that what I was trying to express would indeed be something worthwhile to do.

It was when I got up to leave that Professor Wijayawardhana quietly and gently said to me, "If you come back, I can help you." I did come back; he did help me. It turned out that this happened again and again. I can see, looking back, that Professor Wijayawardhana became my *Gurutuma* with that first simple comment, "If you come back, I can help you."

The world became a better place for me because I came to see it in terms of his help, and his help became part of the very structure, the woodwork, of not only my scholarly life, but of my life more generally. In 1990, I was offered a position at Harvard University. I wrote to him and described what my position would be, my sense of the prestige of the university, the opportunities it might give. I also said that Harvard was closer to where my mother lived and that my children and I would be able to see her more often, and this also was a reason to take the position. He wrote back and told me that he gave his blessings to my accepting the position at Harvard, but he also said that the reasons I gave for moving to Harvard that had to do with its prestige and resources were not important ones, but the reasons having to do with my mother were, and it was because of them that he thought it was worth going. I do not know the story, but I do believe that among the reasons for his move from Peradeniya to Colombo twenty years earlier were important ones about his own mother.

It was more than three years after that first fifteen-minute meeting that I came back for the first time. I came back under the auspices of the Fulbright program to do research for my PhD dissertation. I arrived on January 1, 1983. I had written to Professor Wijayawardhana and told

him that I would arrive on January 1 and that after finding a place to live, I would be in touch with him to make an appointment. He wrote back and told me to come on January 2, in the morning. When I came to his office on the ground floor of the old main building, which he shared with J.B. Dissanayake and others, he looked up and said, "So you have come." It was a greeting that I came to anticipate with deep pleasure, receiving it almost every time I met him, whether for an appointment made only a few days before or after years away. It was a part of his speech that was his, just like his habit of initiating a new turn in a conversation in English with the word, "right."

Professor Wijayawardhana began to help me right away; in fact we began to read *Butsarana* immediately on January 2. At first, my eyes could not read the Sinhala *aksaras* as fast as he read the pages out loud, translating at times, commenting at others, as we went along, me furiously writing down enough of what he was saying to be able to remember it later and fill it out more completely. Sometimes I asked questions. I may flatter myself, but I like to think that he was intrigued by my questions, that he found some of them unexpected and he liked answering them when they were not the kind of questions he expected. I know that they were simple questions, but if they were the best I could come up with, they were still sincere. I also know that he considered all my questions carefully and thoroughly, sometimes handing me a scrap of paper a week later on which were written, in his small and precise handwriting, further considerations and references to what he said earlier (one of the first tolls that the Parkinson's Disease exacted on him was the loss of his ability to write by hand; after he lost his ability to write, he began to type things more. It remains a source of sadness to find those scraps of paper stuck in books now with his handwritten notes, reminders of the slow assault Parkinson's made on him.). As I came to know him better, I came to recognize a particular facial expression as he searched his memory for what he himself had been taught, including texts which he had memorized. That facial

expression was quite different from the serious expression that was his when he explained something that he considered “his own opinion.” The first expression was a face that, for me, looked at truth and it implied and taught an important scholarly trait: a care and respect for what came from the past, a responsibility to pass it on as intact and as alive as possible. Interpretations came second to this primary responsibility, and he made it clear that he felt this responsibility should be assumed by me too. This is one of the greatest lessons he gave to me.

Professor Wijayawardhana made texts come alive for me, he was like someone who could breathe on an ember and make it burst into flame when he read a text. Most often, the texts came alive in the way he breathed as he read; in his pauses to breathe in, he did more than construe the syntax of the sentences. At times, weeks after we might have read something that included a simile of a flower, he would mention at the end of a meeting that that particular flower was now in bloom in this neighborhood or that, in Maradana or in Police Park, and that I should go and see it. This didn't happen often, of course, but it did happen enough that I began to see the beauty of texts like *Amavatura* and *Butsarana* as reflecting and participating in the beauty of the world itself. And the world itself became more beautiful to me as I came to see that it was and could be ornamented by Sinhala literature.

At times, he would say to himself, almost under his breath, after he read a sentence or a verse, “Very nice,” and read it again for his own pleasure; eventually I could see a little of what was giving him pleasure and I learned its theoretical basis when he read *Siyabaslakara* with me. Other times, he would mutter to himself a dismissal. “Pedantic” was a common expression during the year in London in 1989, while he was teaching at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, where we read Sri Rahula's *Kavyasekhara* together. He rarely explained his praises or dismissals, even when I asked why he said this or

that, but he did teach me by example that to read Buddhist texts as they should be read required a sense of literary excellence. He had a highly refined aesthetic sensibility for excellence in literature, as all who knew him know, and he also had a comparable sensibility for Hindustani classical music. And I learned from him that such a sensibility was essential to passing on—intact and alive—what came from the past. Printing presses and recording machines can pass on books and music, but it is only the hearts of *sahṛdayas* like Professor Wijayawardhana that can ensure that what is passed on is passed on as intact as possible and as alive as possible. He set a standard that I knew and know that I could never achieve.

As a scholar, Professor Wijayawardhana was among the most creative. His doctoral thesis which examines Sinhala texts like *Kavsilumina* and *Siyabaslakara* against the backdrop of Sanskrit literary culture was a quiet but complex challenge to the then-reigning stridencies of Martin Wickremesinghe who could only see the connections between Sinhala literary cultures and Sanskrit literary culture in negative terms. The brilliance of his essay “*Siya-Bas-Lakara* and a Theory of Suggestion,” published in the *University of Ceylon Review* in 1964, has not been matched by any subsequent scholar working on *Siyabaslakara*, displaying as it does a subtle knowledge of Sanskrit literary theory and an equally nuanced sense of Sri Lanka’s place in Sanskrit literary history; in my opinion, if this was the only thing that Professor Wijayawardhana had published in his life, his scholarly reputation would be secure.

Equally bold in its creativity was his decision to turn his abundant talents as a literary translator (most remembered perhaps for his translation of Pearl Buck’s novel *The Good Earth*, *Sarabhumi*) to translate Gurugomi’s twelfth-century text, *Amavatura*, into modern Sinhala: *Amavatura Vatman Basin*. I do not know if, even decades later, whether anyone has begun to explore the deep ramifications of that experiment, as singular perhaps as *Amavatura* is singular in the history of Sinhala literature.

Professor Wijayawardhana never explained to me why he made this translation, but I see it as another instance of his sense of responsibility to hand on what came from the past as alive as it was received.

Again I may flatter myself, but I like to think that Professor Wijayawardhana choose me as a student, as he did with other American scholars like James Gair, John Ross Carter, Anne Blackburn, Kevin Trainor, Stephen Berkwitz, Michael Inman, and others not only out of his sense of caring for people who could use his help, but as another sort of scholarly experiment, another response to his sense of responsibility to pass on something of what had come from the Sinhala past alive and intact. With us, unlike his Sinhala students, he seemed to be experimenting with creating a new history of effects for the Sinhala literature which he loved. I don't know if he really had this idea of experimenting or not, but it is how I have come to understand myself and what happened to me as his student. Sometimes I say to my students in the United States that Professor Wijayawardhana colonized my mind, and he made me come to understand that the Sinhala past which he received could be and should be part of the future for my great-grand-children and their friends, and not only to the future of those descended from those now living in Sri Lanka. I firmly believe that my great-grand-children will be better off if a past represented by *Kavsilumina* and *Amavatura* were to be available to them, intact and alive, in their world, just as I hope it will be for their Sinhala contemporaries.

Of course, not everyone can or wants to see this possibility. At some point in the two years I was in Sri Lanka as a Fulbright scholar in 1983 and 1984, I attended a reception held by the American embassy to celebrate American-Sri Lankan academic connections. I was the only Fulbright scholar in Colombo at the time, so the only one to attend. The then-head of the University Grants Commission was also present; I won't mention his name here. In his comments, he asked the American ambassador



why the United States sent students under the Fulbright program to study Sinhala literature. Sri Lanka didn't need anyone to come to study Sinhala literature—what good was it for Sri Lanka? He asked why the Fulbright program did not send people in computer or agricultural sciences. I think I would have been unnerved—or more unnerved—by such comments if I hadn't absorbed something of Professor Wijayawardhana's confidence in the naturalness and appropriateness of a foreigner studying Sinhala literature. Professor Wijayawardhana of course knew that I would bring no benefit to Sri Lanka, nothing like the then-needed knowledge of a specialist in computers or agricultural sciences, but he also was confident that Sinhala literature was a Good to be shared with men and women outside Sri Lanka, and he knew that this sharing had to be done by means of persons as well as by translations. I am filled with shame when I think how far short I have fallen from what Professor Wijayawardhana might have hoped for me in his experiment.

After I had been in Sri Lanka for a year in 1983, some official negotiations between the American and Sri Lanka governments resulted in my being refunded the tuition that I had paid to the University of Colombo, on the grounds that the treaty establishing the Fulbright program in the two countries said that tuitions were not to be paid by fellowship holders. I was non-plussed when I received this money, thinking that there was no reason for me to have it.

When I next saw Professor Wijayawardhana, I placed an envelope with the returned money on his desk in front of me and explained to him what had happened. I also said that I did not think that the money should come to me and that since he was teaching me so much and it was money meant for paying for education, that maybe he should take it. As soon as I saw his face, I knew that I had made a mistake. He was upset with me, and he flicked the envelope with his finger back across the table, saying, "I will not sell you my learning." Indeed, he never, not once, took money from

me, even though I made enormous demands on his time and energy. He did give enormously to me. And in this, I know that I am not alone, indeed his purity of heart was something that Professor Wijayawardhana was well known for, as everyone whom I told that I was his student reminded me; this reputation for his purity of heart started, I think, from the time when he chose to become a University lecturer in 1958, even though he had secured the highest marks on the civil service examinations in the country that year.

*“Atthi loke silaguno, saccam, soceyy’ anuddaya”*—“There is in the world the quality of virtue, truth, purity, caring.” Remembering just some of the life of Professor G. D. Wijayawardhana on the occasion of his death reminds me of the truth of this statement. And his life teaches us that the world is a better place because it is true.

May he be happy.

## Moral Creativity: Reading Thai Social Worlds with Charlie Hallisey

Felicity Aulino<sup>6</sup>

I have spent the last twenty years or so becoming an anthropologist, something I didn't know existed when I was an undergraduate student of Charles Hallisey. As I have lived in and sought to understand social worlds in Thailand, I have taken with me something of how Hallisey invites us to read texts, in that I try to allow the stories around me to unfold on their own terms. Indeed, this is often aided by Buddhist tales elucidated by textual scholars. For instance, stories and poems that Hallisey has shown to promote following traditional dictates as a means of soteriological and moral attainment resonate with and amplify narratives and practices that I have found circulating in contemporary Thai settings, demonstrating the relevance and importance of historical textual scholarship for ethnographic investigation. In this way, I have remained attentive to small details of everyday life in Thai communities, finding vital indicators of moral life in rote practices and quotidian habits: that is, of moral life in the thick of things.

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<sup>6</sup> University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Recently, I have turned my anthropological attention to Thai Neo-Pentecostal Churches.<sup>7</sup> In this short piece, I want to give a taste of such settings and of how what Hallisey calls the “moral creativity” of Theravadin Buddhist ethics can be a vital inroad to understanding Christian practice in Thailand as well. I draw on an essay in which Hallisey puts into play two different conceptions of ethics, asking “whether a particular virtue changes in its contours when it is associated with ethics construed as concerning how one lives with others and when it is associated with ethics construed with the self’s relation to the self” (“Between Intuition and Judgement” 143), and further, if such a virtue links with different “associated” virtues depending on one or the other ethical frame. Hallisey moves on to describe “moral creativity” as an implicit but otherwise unnamed key virtue in Theravadin lineages—essentially a kind of practical wisdom of playing with contextual relevance to outsmart others in service of ethical ends. Here I want to play with similar terms, showing how even in Christian settings, insights from Theravadin scholars remain a guide both for theorizing and for deciphering social storylines otherwise hidden in plain sight.

### **Night Church**

Neung takes the microphone with his left hand and with his right deftly moves its long chord away from his body, clearing way for casual

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<sup>7</sup> The majority of Thais are Buddhist. Christians make up less than 1% of the total population, with the highest density concentrated in the north, where professed Christians make up around 6% of the city and province of Chiang Mai. But Protestant missions are on the rise. These Thai Christian communities face a certain degree of stigma from Buddhists (even if arguably less so than in the past); consequently, they create fairly insular communities for their congregants who, more often than not, come to these groups with problems the church confidently professes it can solve.

movement as he greets the crowd. “I’ve missed you, brothers and sisters. Welcome, everyone, to worship God.”<sup>8</sup> He looks back to the electric guitar player to his left, then to the bassist and acoustic guitar to his right. He combs his hair back with a smile and returns his gaze to the crowd assembled before him. This is night church. The feel of the band’s performance is improvisational, and spontaneity is vitally important to these worshippers; but a closer look reveals some powerful choreography at play.

Neung turns to the drummer and gives a nod as the band strikes the first chords of their opening number. He presses his hands flat together around the microphone to *wai*, this traditional greeting of respect signaling here gratitude. Then he again adeptly moves more wire and the mic into his right hand, and he calls those seated to standing with a gentle lift of his left palm. The band starts to rock in earnest, and the backup singer nods, sways, claps, and throws an arm up and over her head to the beat, smiling wide. Neung brings the microphone back to his lips, and the band’s volume seems to lower slightly to make room for his rich voice. Clapping erupts from around the room, as more voices join in, singing in Thai, “We praise you, Lord Jesus!” Neung takes a quick look at his watch, sings another refrain of the chorus, and then raises his hand high again, as others in the audience raise their hands toward their heads, tilt their necks up, clench their eyes shut, or otherwise clap and sway in time.

Someone entering at this point will become immediately part of the service, brought straight away into the postures of worship—standing, swaying, singing, reaching—both by the infectious rhythms of the band and the general ethos of the crowd. Neung is at the helm at the start, but he is definitely not alone in the lead. As is often the case at Sunday service as well, Maen, a senior church leader, provides crucial stage management. He is standing tonight off to the side next to the band, able to come into

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<sup>8</sup> All names have been changed; translation from Thai by author and Pattaraporn Tripiyaratana.

eyesight as necessary to consult or to cue. At times, he raises his arms in worship while simultaneously motioning, much like a conductor in front of an orchestra, and the band responds in turn, likewise calming as he brings his arms down in quick downward sweeps. Neung looks to him throughout the night, and they whisper to confer and nod from afar frequently.

The basics of this service is like those found in Pentecostal churches in other parts of the world; but relatively speaking, Thai services like this one are markedly more subdued than the fever-pitched worship observed and documented elsewhere. Pentecostals are for example known to fall down during or in the wake of intense worship, claiming the power of the Holy Spirit moving them. The felt spontaneity of such experiences, sometimes called being “slain in the spirit,” serves as evidence for worshippers that God is present and moving them. Not so in Thailand. In the churches in which I have worked, as with the other aspiring middle- and upper-class congregations in the city of Chiang Mai, no one was “slain in the spirit.” In part, the opportunity was not afforded to congregants in the same way as other places, where the intensity of the service commonly builds and is sustained for much longer periods of time.

Leaders work to modulate the soundscape of the Thai service in particular ways to achieve this dynamic yet relatively subdued atmosphere. The music never fully stops during church—that is, until everyone breaks into small study groups—but the volume and intensity fluctuates in more or less precise intervals. The third main segment of night church, preacher-led prayer, is a prime example of this soundscape modulation. When Chat, the live-in chief of staff for the church, takes the mic, he has notes on a piece of paper. His task is to lead group prayer for particular people, such as friends in the hospital. Prayer for a member gets nearly to a fever pitch, with the band playing at full tilt and Chat speaking in tongues into the mic, followed by the guitar echoing the sounds of his

glossolalia in a three-note pattern dta-dta-dta dta-dta-dta dta-dta-dta. But just 30 seconds after its start, this period is descending, Maen's arms coming down to position at his heart, giving way to Chat quietly voicing "Amen, amen" and looking back to his notes. Thirty seconds later, they are back to an almost frenetic pitch, Maen behind doing his prayer, in audible but not discernable speech, seemingly signaling that others can be voicing aloud too. This crescendo is ushered in with 30 seconds of sharply loud clapping from the middle of the room (making the clapper another key figure in the service). This clapping, present through every prayer in this segment as well as other high intensity parts of the service, is an audible cue for those lost in closed-eye worship, serving to add energy and passion to the moment but also to measure and limit the intervals. So again, 30 seconds later, a calm descends, and Chat is back to his cheat sheet.

### **Keeping it Cool: Karmic Questions (?), Christian Answers (?)**

Perhaps we might consider this modulation of sound and intensity as an iteration of a familiar Thai social value of even-temperedness. Thai social worlds generally favor placidity, with low-arousal emotional states preferable to excitement of all varieties and encouragement/admonishments to keep a "cool heart" (*jai yen*) frequent. Ill temper or other excessively emotive states are generally understood to affect experience negatively, and this includes potentially harming the emotional states of others as well as creating karmic burdens.

Elsewhere, I have depicted how even-temperedness can be seen as an indication of the widespread influence of Buddhist philosophy in contemporary Thai ethical norms (2019). Overall, this could be summarized in the general supposition that one should strive for—and the social world should support—actions and affects that minimize increases in karmic

burdens based on a local theory of mind and intersubjectivity. Restraint of high arousal emotions is in effect an acceptance of the passive elements of moral action (i.e., what you do affects others; in turn, your fate and your conditions are not all up to you nor your personal karma alone). Otherwise stated, even-temperedness is conducive for the alleviation of karma, individually and collectively.

Are Thai Christians accepting karma in their even-temperedness? One explicit answer is no; karma is explicitly denied here, and in fact is an oft-cited reason for conversion. Neung says he used to worry continuously about the ill karmic effects of his prior misdeeds, including actions taken in past lives. He felt burdened beyond what he could bear, due to causes he could not trace. "I lived in fear; I had no ability to change anything." He railed: "I felt, why is this so unfair? . . . I just wanted to fix it, make everything better. Why do I have no right to do anything about it [past misdeeds]?" He says he found no solace in Buddhist practice. He spoke to his mother about his concerns, but she too was powerless to help. Neung came then to find profound relief in God. He says, "I now know that every mistake can be forgiven and there is nothing . . . nothing that can stop us."

Perhaps this might suggest Thai Christians are simply maintaining a type of cultural etiquette in a new ethical framework. Here in night church, while the value of even-temperedness remains, a particular kind of individuated karmic logic is emphasized and then seemingly replaced by the Christian concept of original sin. Indeed, Neung's depiction of karma is a common one in Thai churches. Many Thai Christians described for me how they use to feel trapped by karma, and now feel relieved by God's grace. Karma may have various components and implications in Buddhist tradition, but in Christian church, it tends to be interpreted as an individual burden, which helps Thai Christians make sense of how and why they have moved away from it.



So here I return to the questions raised by differing ethical frames and what Hallisey calls the “moral creativity” of Theravadin Buddhist ethics. The virtue of even-temperedness may indeed change its contours when associated with Christian ethical frameworks, particularly in terms of the self’s relation to the self; but there may be more to appreciate when asking with other ethical frames in mind too. Karma—actions and their consequences across lifetimes—may be cast as individual in the church, but in other Thai settings it is more popularly understood to unfold in and through a confluence of factors, many of them shared with others. Indeed, forms of “sociokarma,” as Jonathan Walters writes, “serve to dislocate attachment to one’s own individual karma and its results” (29). Contemporary Thai practice at every turn reflects group and social aspects of karma, from encouragement to keep a cool heart to the implicit social contract keeping people’s behaviors within a particular range; from the connections physically made between bodies when conducting ritual acts (say, by touching the elbow of the elbow of the elbow of someone pouring holy waters, or holding a string that connects all participants in a temple ritual) to the intentional sharing of merit made through such acts, perhaps performed for someone not present or deceased. Chances are, Neung’s mother attempted some of this merit-making work on her son’s behalf as he struggled. Thus, another way to look at Neung’s actions, as well as those of his co-leaders, is in line with this karmically inflected shared fate, in which even-temperedness is how one ought to live with and for others.

In a social world in which what Hallisey names “moral creativity” circulates as a touchstone, karma may still further enrich our analyses. More than polite dictates stripped of soteriological consequence, the even-temperedness of Thai Christian churches can be understood to maintain moral significance, even if in tension with other explicit values. We can, as Hallisey encourages, “expect to see as moral those creative practices that encourage men and women to take full advantage of the contextual under-determination of moral situations as part of striving to

realize the Good” (151). This is a simple point with potentially profound consequence. Indeed, this feels particularly crucial when one ethical frame portends to transcend all others, a mode which seductively turns up in social analysis as well. Allow me to quickly walk through this provocation.

Reflecting “moral creativity,” Thais hold as virtuous those who can be flexible enough to intuit the right way to proceed, always depending on the specific coordinates of a given situation. Creating low arousal settings is traditionally understood as conducive to such flexibility. Further, it is important to note that the “right” way to act is all the more complicated in the multiple intersecting worlds of Thai cosmology: something might be absolutely right at one level of analysis, but illusory from another vantage, though also still correct.<sup>9</sup> Since an ordinary person can never fully know what they are encountering, even-temperedness can be important so as not to make unrecognizably bad situations worse.

In church, the modulated setting is not named or valued in this sense. In contrast to the contingent ethics of karma, what emerges in church settings is the ascendancy of one vantage over all others. Denying karma, in this limited sense of individualized burden, names something, though perhaps something different from the philosophical genealogy it claims to name. It is as if Thai Christians are doing the analytical work of naming a moral category in order to turn that category into something uncharacteristically static, ultimately to be transcended.

My point is not merely that “moral creativity” helps us see people as bricoleurs, actively shaping their ethical world view with a variety of cultural constructs. Rather, I want to emphasize the simultaneity of possibilities from which moral creativity draws in contemporary Thai

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<sup>9</sup> For more on these logics, their underlying ontological pluralities, and contrasts with Christian renderings, see Aulino 2022 and Premawardhana 2018.

practice and how we might appreciate and work with such multiplicity from the Theravadin tradition as well. One way to make this clear is through contrast with what some scholars call transcendence. Joel Robbins, following Dumont, takes transcendence as a universal aspect of human social life. Such a view assumes people will always move toward the whole, seeking and deferring to “the most encompassing level of value relevant to a given situation or problem” (175, referring to Dumont’s 1980 *Homo Hierarchicus*). This is discussed as a “drive” toward a “superior level” from which the importance of a given moment can be ascertained. Looking at karma in the church from this vantage, we might be assured that karma is replaced by original sin—as the Christians profess—with karmic ideas no longer necessary or relevant for church practice. Or we might see sociokarma as a bricoleur’s support for Christian practice, helping people move toward (the more encompassing level) of God together. So, what might an ethical appreciation of simultaneity change about these assessments?

What I want to suggest is that the possibility that anything could transcend all else is the main import from Christianity here, and assuming transcendence in ethical analysis could then obfuscate other working parameters. How can I say this speaking of a context where Buddhist dharmic law is understood itself as transcendent? I think because dharma and its karmic logics—across multiple worlds and overlapping timescapes—in Thai commonsense and practice reflects an inherent multiplicity. What we might call the transcendence of radical contingency feels a very different variety; as a value, it evades the sense of ethical and ontological certainty proclaimed in a monotheistic cast.

Nevertheless, lessons in transcendence may be emerging in church settings that draft off the affordances of simultaneous multiplicity and yet directly compete with such sensibilities in a subtle way. From the ordinary to the profound, church members trade in stories of their

experiences, learning to attend anew to the world inside and out. Likewise, other Christians are brought in from afar to circulate and facilitate “gifts of the Holy Spirit,” expanding people’s imaginations of what is possible and what is good. Learning builds over time. Neung described this: “I understand that those who still don’t have any experience like this have no idea what it’s like. [In the past,] I also didn’t understand others’ experiences as I do now. I used to ask them how, what it was like. When they told me, I didn’t understand them. It took some time to learn.” One thing is clear, Neung and his fellow parishioners are learning to decipher everything through a single god, to look (even if fully guided) to spontaneous revelations about the singularity, truth, and full responsibility of God in the world over all else. Perhaps other ethical ways of being are unlearned in the process; perhaps only time can tell. Morally creativity in turn suggests we, as interpreters, might do well to attend to this social drama from multiple registers, simultaneously.

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## The Ambiguity of Ethics

Emily McRae<sup>10</sup>

Charlie is one of the most influential teachers I've ever had, and I include in this evaluation all my teachers, even the ones who taught me to read (a category which, incidentally, includes Charlie). I met Charlie as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he was a professor in (what was then called) the Department of the Languages and Cultures of Asia, and I was a second year PhD student in the Department of Philosophy. I enrolled in Charlie's classes to learn Buddhist ethics while pursuing a PhD in a department that only offered Western, and almost entirely Anglo-American, philosophy. Once I became Charlie's student, it didn't take long before the question "What would Charlie think about this?" became a heuristic for evaluating every new writing project, a heuristic I still use nearly twenty years later. I learned so much from Charlie in the few years that he was my teacher, but in this short essay I want to focus on a particular inheritance: Charlie taught me how to think within, rather than against, ambiguity.

In "Between Intuition and Judgement: Moral Creativity in Theravāda Buddhist Ethics" (2010), Charlie discusses the ambiguities that exist within and between conceptual frameworks that interpret ethical life. Of course, there are multiple frames for the ethical—he uses the examples of "ethics as living well with and for others" (Ricoeur) and "ethics as self-

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cultivation” (Foucault). Other examples (that Charlie doesn’t mention) include the framework of morality versus prudence, moral action v. moral character, or altruism v. egoism. Charlie is interested in the ways that certain ethical concepts can only be understood between frameworks or on the periphery of frameworks, rather than squarely in one or the other. To this end, he presents two stories from the Theravadin Buddhist tradition: a story told by the 20<sup>th</sup> century Cambodian monk, Ind, and an excerpt from the jataka tale *Maha-ummagga*. The first story highlights the need for *satisampajañña*, or moral discernment, in our morally complicated world where people get distracted, make mistakes, and hurt others, intentionally or unintentionally. The second story features the “excessively wise” mother of a king, who alone can explain, in words and with a legal argument, an injustice that everyone intuited but no one could articulate. In different ways, both stories illustrate the built-in ambiguity of ethical concepts.

In the first story about *satisampajañña*, Ind highlights its moral features rather than focus on the more ontological or meditation-centric definition of *satisampajañña* as “an awareness of the way things are.” Charlie, following Ind, presents *satisampajañña*, as the “necessary self-critique one must cultivate to protect oneself from one’s own carelessness as well as a kind of prudence one must have because one must live with others, indeed depend on them for one’s well-being, but still be prudent enough to protect oneself from their carelessness” (144). This central ethical skill doesn’t fit primarily into Ricoeur’s frame or Foucault’s, but rather, by definition, requires both to be conceivable. To not have moral discernment is not only a failure to care for others (as the first framework would suggest) or a failure to care for one’s moral self (as the second would suggest), but, importantly, both. It is the inability to participate in moral adulthood altogether, to be “truly an innocent abroad in the ordinary world” (144).

In the second story, the *Maha-ummagga* jataka tale, the king's mother can do something no one else can: articulate an injustice that everyone feels but no one can explain. She does this by catching the perpetrator of the injustice in an equivocation that she later forces him to clarify, and, by exposing his linguistic sleight of hand, proves that he was in the wrong, as everyone already knew. Charlie suggests that the king's mother was exhibiting a nameless virtue, which he then must name: moral creativity. Such nameless virtues - apparent in this story, in Aristotle's list of virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (II.7), and elsewhere—show that “the necessity of language for the practice of the moral life can be overestimated, and relying exclusively on conceptual categories to describe the workings of moral cultures may similarly be misleading” (146). Or, more simply, “the moral cannot be reduced to language” (149).

In fact, many important aspects of moral life are nameless, or coming-to-be-named. As Charlie argues, our shared moral world is conceptually undetermined, and necessarily so, given that language and concepts, as dynamic as they are, simply can't keep up. We are always putting new language to morality. Although interpretative frameworks for ethics are necessary and insightful, none of our convenient ethical frameworks are fully up for the task of understanding moral life. There are always parts of the moral that fall outside the conceptual framework, like moral creativity, and ones are best understood between frameworks, like *satisampanjāṇṇa*.

It is undeniably true that to ask a question about morality requires having shared terms, with decently well-understood semantic ranges, so that the question can make sense to both the one who asks, and whoever may answer. But it is also true that our shared terms have built-in ambiguity, even within frameworks and certainly across them. The parts of morality that are nameless, as Charlie adeptly shows, are not, for that reason, less important, or harder to understand or recognize. Some emerging



moral terms are currently being named (think “sexual harassment” circa mid-1970s, or “compassion fatigue” circa the mid-1990s). Sometimes the same term can hold two meanings that are in direct opposition because the term has been radically repurposed (such as, “woke”). Some terms or dichotomies that are central to one framework (such as, culpable v. non-culpable) are only peripheral, at best, to another framework. Indeed, the meaning and, particularly, scope of the term “ethics” is itself contested: according to one frame it may make sense to say, “Ethics is broad, affecting everything we do as humans,” and according to another frame it may make equal sense to say, “It is a mistake to moralize what shouldn’t be moralized.”

For these reasons we can come to doubt “inherited vocabularies” of any ethical framework or tradition, and this doubt is only increased when we try to think between and across them. But we can’t alleviate these doubts with a stroke of the pen, by, say, bracketing the ambiguity, or by going smaller in scope, or more specialized or more technical. This is because the ambiguity is built into ethical life itself, it’s an inescapable part of living morally. And, like a good therapist, Charlie advises us to “let such doubts be and not resist them” (142). Things are more interesting that way, anyway.

Reflecting on the way Charlie thinks about ethical frameworks, I noticed a striking analogy between what I learned from him about working between and across ethical frameworks and what I learned from him about working between and across academic disciplines. Charlie often told us graduate students that we need to earn our disciplinary “union card.” You must show that you know the things you are supposed to know (a language, a canon, a vocabulary). A disciplinary framework determines norms about what are good questions and what aren’t, who is “brilliant” and who isn’t, what comment gets a collective eye roll or a collective head nod. It’s good to know these things. It is also good to locate yourself within

a discipline, to form a disciplinary identity, and to understand your lineage in order to know how you are related to others. At one conference early in my career, Charlie introduced me to my “cousins,” the people with whom I share intellectual grandparents.

But, of course, there are multiple disciplinary frameworks, which present, with equal certainty, other ways to define what’s smart, what’s interesting, who’s brilliant, what’s missing the point, and what decides what the point is in the first place. For those of us who have multiple disciplinary watering holes, we must gain facility in multiple frameworks; we must have multiple union cards. (Another piece of graduate-school-era advice from Charlie: You will be responsible for knowing more things if you work between and across disciplines, and there is no sense bemoaning that fact). A prerequisite to working between disciplines is knowing how to work within them. We can’t expose the blind spots of a framework without first seeing what that framework sees. And we can’t work with ambiguity without understanding the boundaries of conceptual clarity.

What is especially interesting to me is not the choice we make between disciplinary frameworks, or even the code-switching that is required to move between them, but what happens when we choose to *stay* between them. What happens when our intellectual watering holes are in a disciplinary no-man’s land? Sometimes our intellectual efforts are themselves nameless. I think Charlie’s article “Between Intuition and Judgment,” and much of his work, is a nameless intellectual effort, in the best possible sense. Since it requires multiple disciplinary and ethical frameworks to be conceivable, it is hard to classify, and that’s part of the beauty, and the fun, of thinking with Charlie.

Charlie shows the value of welcoming the ambiguity that is built into ethical frameworks. He shows us what we can learn when we don’t expect our conceptual frameworks to relieve our doubts, and what we can do when we start to see conceptual frameworks as generating *both* clarity

and ambiguity. Like ethical frameworks, disciplinary frameworks also generate both clarity and ambiguity. Charlie's work encourages me to wonder what happens when we no longer expect the boundaries of disciplines to remove doubts, when we don't rely on them to decide what is, say, "philosophy" or what counts as "Buddhist," and instead see them as the fertile ground of the concepts yet-to-be-named, as the place where we are likely to discover greater, more expansive interpretations of our world?

One thing that may happen is that we may discover unexpected dependencies between disciplines that study ethics. Just as different ethical frameworks are conceptually dependent on other frameworks, if only because of what they explicitly reject and mutually require (think, Kant and Hume, Laozi and Kongzi, or Charlie's example of Ricoeur and Foucault), perhaps disciplines are also only fully intelligible when situated in broader context of the disciplines they aren't. Certainly, a phrase I often heard in graduate school—"That's not philosophy"—requires, minimally, disciplines outside of philosophy to be sensible. The other phrase I often heard, often said with equal fervor as the first,—“I'm not philosopher!”—is another disciplinary interdependent assessment. A deeper acceptance of disciplinary ambiguity may also reveal ethical concepts that require not only multiple conceptual frameworks to be coherent, but also multiple disciplinary frameworks. Perhaps some ethical concepts can only be articulated in between Philosophy and Buddhist Studies, others only between Psychology and Religious Studies, and so on.

In my own case, one concept stands out as requiring the combined disciplinary efforts of Tibetan Buddhist Studies and Anglo-American Philosophy: gratitude. From Anglo-American philosophical ethics, I understand gratitude as the activity of thanking another for some benefit they've bestowed, with an attitude of appreciation and a sense of indebtedness. From Tibetan Buddhism, I have a sense of gratitude as the remembrance of your lineage, of the kindness of your teachers, and the kindness

of your teachers' teachers. The gratitude I have for Charlie makes the best sense between these: the appreciation I have for him, and the "thank you" I want to say to him, is only fully coherent within the recognition of being part of his lineage, of inheriting something precious and passing it on.

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## Understanding within a *Parampara*

Karen Derris <sup>11</sup>

Charles Hallisey's view into moral anthropology expands the study of Buddhist ethics by activities of understanding that draw upon diverse methods—including, of course, literary approaches to Buddhist texts, his primary field, as well as ethnography. In this brief essay, I want to highlight the centrality to these activities of the relationships of friendship that exist between teacher and student and among students studying side by side.

For me, this viewpoint emerges from Hallisey's own lineage of teacher-student relationships, which he traces in his foreword to John Ross Carter's *In the Company of Friends: Exploring Faith and Understanding with Buddhists and Christians*. From Carter, Hallisey's own teacher, Hallisey takes up the notion that learning always happens together with others, and above all in the special kind of friendship that develops between teacher and student. I want to name and explore this notion of a lineage—a *parampara*—that exists through time, passed on from teacher to student and shared among a group of peers.

A *parampara* offers a flexible notion of lineage focused on forming relationships. We have relationships that extend from the present, moving into the past and stretching into the future. A *parampara* is inclusive

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in the sense that those who share the present can become part of the *parampara* even if they aren't connected to the past. Those who share friendship in the present are drawn into the *parampara*: patriarchal hierarchical structures can thus be challenged by expanding the lineage beyond those sanctioned by the lineage in the past. Perhaps this gives us new ways of thinking about intellectual communities, communities of understanding. The present members of the lineage can bring marginalized past communities into the *parampara* while also learning from the scholars who are the future to our past—that is, those who by entering the lineage change its trajectory.

Before I turn to Hallisey's foreword to Carter's book, I want to explore the way that friendships in a *parampara* can give voice to marginalized communities and highlight the importance of their practices for our understanding of ethics. In his beautiful translation *Therīgatha: Poems of the First Buddhist Women*, Hallisey opens up the efforts of early Buddhist women to create a place for themselves in the sangha, one that supports their transformation of one another towards awakening, *nibbāna*. In doing so these women create a new *parampara* of and for women. And by choosing to create a new translation of the *Therīgāthā*, Hallisey is highlighting and giving voice to a *parampara* that centers the experience of women and their communities of understanding in Buddhist history.

One of the most compelling lines from the *Therīgāthā*, repeated in many of the nuns' poems, shines a clear light on the relational dimensions of a *parampara*: "I approached the nun, she seemed like someone I could trust."<sup>12</sup> This single, repeated line gives us a profound description of moral relationships: they require vulnerability, courage, and generosity. Trust emerges in a relationship when one person has the courage to acknowledge their powerlessness and the other has the generosity to offer the conditions that are needed by the powerless one. Trust is both an

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<sup>12</sup> Pāli: *sā bhikkhuniṃ upāgacchiṃ, yā me saddhāyikā ahu*. See, e.g., Hallisey *Therīgatha* 32–33.

opening of oneself and the ability to recognize those who will be sources of help. These poems by women, the earliest we have in Buddhist literary history, emphasize the particular relationships among women who had long been told to stay in the shadows. No place was made available to them in the Buddhist sangha until they requested their space and opportunity. The authors of these poems did not accept “no” for an answer and with courage made repeated requests. With the support of male members of the sangha, notably their relatives, they were finally successful under the leadership of Gotamī, Buddha’s mothering-mother (Derris 74–76; Walters).

Hallisey chose to translate this line identically throughout the poems in order both to echo the repetition of the line in the Pāli and to show the shared experience of women in their individual acts of leaving their home lives and all that demanded of them. They created a new moral experience for themselves by leaving behind the limited life allowed to women in their society. The lives and relationships expressed by these women in their poetry are nothing short of radical. In his notes, drawn from many Pāli sources, Hallisey provides the context and particular details of each poem’s author prior to joining the *bhikkhunī saṅgha*. These details reveal the intersectional social and economic conditions of these women. In some of the poems these cultural differences among women are explicitly named when a daughter pleads to leave home and join the Buddha’s female *saṅgha* in part because there she will be able to interact with women from different *varṇas* (Hallisey *Therīgāthā* 144–149, 170–171).

By illuminating the parampara formed by these women in the face of societal pressures and a strongly patriarchal monastic structure, Hallisey invites contemporary scholars of moral anthropology to become part of it. He offers us the vision of a community of understanding that rejects hierarchies oppressive to those on the margins. The nuns of the *Therīgāthā* might offer present-day women methods for critiquing

continued discrimination against women in male-dominated structures. Charlie's longstanding mentorship of women in Buddhist studies, many of whom have contributed to this special issue, likewise creates a *parampara*. We follow our teacher in transforming the field through our work, rejecting academic hierarchies and methodologies that marginalize particular materials, approaches, and voices. In particular, including our own voices and experiences in our scholarship draws us into the center of thought about Buddhism, rather than relegating us to the margins, unseen and unaccountable. We deepen opportunities for building understanding when we write from our first-person experiences with Buddhist texts and communities.

Among those first-person experiences, the friendships that develop between teachers and students within a *parampara* have particular significance, as any student of Charlie will understand deeply. I remember Charlie as a teacher saying repeatedly that we read better when we read with others, a practice he learned from his own teacher. In "That Other Practice that Guides Our Understanding," his foreword to Carter's book, Hallisey writes,

In this collection of essays, John Ross Carter makes a case by example that a capacity for friendship is also necessary to the formation of a competent scholar and that engaging *in the company of friends* in practices of interpretation and knowing is also key to the activity of understanding. In making his case, Carter also gives us insight into friendship as an aspect of the activity of understanding itself, an aspect that we have not given in our scholarly lives—unfortunately, for each and all of us—the collective self-reflection and self-conscious personal cultivation that it deserves. . . . [T]he notion of *In the Company of Friends*, which enchants me, says two things: friendship gives; but what it



gives is the occasion for thought, something to think about.  
(Hallisey “That Other Practice” xii–xiii)

In this passage we see Hallisey sitting alongside Carter, his teacher, in order to discern the role of friendship in “the formation of a competent scholar” and “the activity of understanding.” The study of ethics is best learned in the company of others, and those others should be seen as friends: friendship is the kind of relation that guides the activity of understanding. Both Hallisey and Carter have in mind a particular variety of friendship, as their examples make clear: it is the friendship that can—and, Hallisey and Carter suggest, should—develop between teacher and student. Hallisey uses Carter’s voice or writing to help us understand what characterizes that kind of friendship: an orientation towards understanding, as well as generosity on the part of the teacher and an answering gratitude on the part of the learner.

In Hallisey’s reflections on Carter’s meditations on Carter’s own relationship with his teacher in Sri Lanka, O. H. de A. Wijesekera, I discern the contours of a scholarly *parampara* grounded in friendship. This teacher-to-student *parampara* depends on close relationships among thinkers who sit side by side, reading and learning together. Relational hierarchies are not totally absent in these friendships, but they are also reciprocal: the student pays due respect to their teacher, and the teacher is open to learning from the student.

The *parampara* includes W.C. Smith and Frank Reynolds, as well as Wijesekera, and runs through Carter to Charlie and then to Charlie’s students, including myself and other authors of the essays in this special issue. And when a *parampara* takes textualized form, we find ourselves in a commentarial tradition. Commentary is an expression of lineage: the writers reflect upon the understanding they have been given from their teachers and express their gratitude, implicitly or explicitly, for what they have received (Hallisey “That Other Practice” xvii). I see Hallisey’s

“Foreword” to Carter’s book as an *aṭṭhakathā*, a commentarial text, and I imagine my essay as a *ṭīkā*, a sub-commentary, that aims to interpret Hallisey’s interpretation of Carter’s analysis of friendship across religious difference—Christian and Buddhist—as a method of tracing a *parampara*. I discern in that method additional steps toward articulating a Buddhist moral anthropology.

Even Hallisey’s commentarial voice resonates with the practice of sitting down beside a teacher to learn. For example, Hallisey highlights this quotation from Carter:

We begin afresh where we human beings have always begun—with the *particulars*, in the details, in the bedrock, of our individual experiences and personal realizations. Truth also lies in the particular—as it did in a study and a living room in a home on High Level Road just south of the Nugegoda intersection and north of the Gangodawila junction in Sri Lanka, as it does afresh today (Hallisey “That Other Practice” xvi, citing Carter 200).

As Hallisey goes on to interpret the significance of this passage for our understanding of the relationships between teachers and students, his words incorporate those of Carter to such an extent that their voices begin to merge:

This repeated evocation of Wijesekera’s home is a reminder that any truth that emerges in the activity of understanding always lies in particular relationships, in the relations between particular teachers and students and in the particular relations between friends. Because of these particular relationships of mutuality, the “bedrock of our individual experiences” is, and can only be, something that is shared with particular others. So much so, that one thing

that we come to know in friendship, that good friends (or in Pāli, *kalyāṇamitta*) teach us afresh again and again, is that the bedrock of our individual experiences and personal realizations lies not only within us, but also beyond us (Hallisey “That Other Practice” xvi).

We hear Carter’s voice in Hallisey’s words, yet that voice joins with Hallisey’s own as he adapts Carter’s phrases for new meanings and purposes—yet meanings and purposes that could not come into being without the particular teacher-student relationship that connects Charlie with John Ross Carter. Thus, Carter’s observation that the particulars are “the bedrock of our individual experiences and personal realizations” becomes the bedrock for Hallisey’s assertion that good friends “teach us afresh again and again” that “the bedrock of our individual experiences and personal realizations lies not only within us, but also beyond us.” Hallisey both tells us and shows us, through his commentarial style, that a *parampara* is not about owning ideas; it’s about creating ideas together, creating understanding together with generosity, gratitude, and humility. Perhaps we can claim this insight as another resource for remaking scholarship in the present moment, one just as radical as the way the nuns of the *Therīgāthā* created a new moral experience for themselves through their relationships with one another. A *parampara* foregrounds relationship, and friendship in particular, as the bedrock of understanding, and as necessary to the formation of a competent scholar.

A *parampara* enables relationships in which senior teachers can learn from those who come after them. A particular experience I had with Carter brought this point home to me. We were at a seminar on the moral person, hosted by Maria Heim at Amherst College. Carter was present for our presentations. At the dinner following the presentations, Carter leaned over to Donald Swearer and told him that we, at once scholars and mothers to young children, were amazing—that we were doing the same

work that Carter and Swearer did as young scholars, while also doing what their wives did for them in creating families and tending to those families. Carter saw the challenges that some of the young women in the *parampara* were facing, challenges he had not faced, and that was so affirming for me. So many institutions and other scholars did not really recognize that. And the next day, he was so eager to meet my young children and husband: Carter saw me, and wanted to see me, in my particularity.

A *parampara* also constitutes a community that is transformed by the entry of new members with new ideas and approaches. Most of us who have been part of Charlie's *parampara* have approached ethical questions through literary and historical approaches, but scholars like Felicity Aulino (see her *Rituals of Care: Karmic Politics in an Aging Thailand*) are infusing the lineage with the insights of ethnographic work and, from my perspective, illuminate how moral anthropology can change how I read texts.

Finally, a *parampara* enables the growth of an equitable community in which different members with different experiences need and contribute different kinds of mutual support. Like the relationships among the nuns of the *Therīgāthā*, these relationships demand vulnerability, courage, and generosity: "I approached the woman, she seemed like someone I could trust." This essay was made possible by such a relationship—by my long friendship with Natalie Gummer. I have found that in my present state, I compose best by speaking my ideas to my friends and colleagues. This essay emerged from the transcripts of many conversations with Natalie. She had the generosity to offer the conditions that I needed, refusing to let me give up on finishing the essay. Our voices merge in this essay. And the bedrock of our relationship of mutual care is our side-by-side, *ekadhamma* education with Charlie, our grateful participation in the *parampara* that he has made possible. Moral anthropology focuses on the specific acts of human beings in the particularities of their circumstances, not on abstract ideals: we, Karen and Natalie, have learned together, from

Charlie and the other members of this *parampara*, stretching back not only to Carter but also to the nuns of the *Therīgāthā*, how to take each other's hand and sit down beside each other in vulnerability, courage, and generosity.

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## Tracing the Pathways of *Buddha-sāsana*

Anne M. Blackburn<sup>13</sup>

Charlie Hallisey's rightly celebrated essay "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism" begins ("Roads Taken" 32) with the following epigraph from José Ortega y Gasset. "It does not matter whether one generation applauds the previous generation or hisses it—In either event, it carries the previous generation within itself." I have returned to these words repeatedly in recent weeks, struck by the felicity of Hallisey's choice of this epigraph to inaugurate his compelling reflections on the intergenerational and translocal scholarly projects that comprise both the internal history of Theravāda Buddhism and the academic fields of study focused on such Buddhist communities. One aspect of these intergenerational and translocal projects is what Hallisey has called "intercultural mimesis," a term coined to refer to a "productive 'elective affinity' between the positivist historiography of European Orientalism and Buddhist styles of self-representation" (42), but also more broadly to "occasions where it seems that aspects of a culture of a subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner" (33). Hallisey's concept of "intercultural mimesis" has been tremendously generative for several generations of scholars and it has certainly impacted my own thinking, especially in relation to earlier studies of Buddhist intellectual projects on Laṅkā (now Sri Lanka) during the eighteenth and nineteenth

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<sup>13</sup> Cornell University.

centuries. During that time the island's residents were impacted by Dutch and British colonial activities as well as other transregional processes (Blackburn *Textual Practice*, 2001; Blackburn *Locations*, 2010).

Yet while preparing this essay I have come to recognize that Charles Hallisey's invitation to attend to intergenerational and transregional 'elective affinities' has profoundly shaped my broader perspective as an historian of Buddhism, even when not focused specifically on colonial-era dynamics and histories. In "Roads Taken" (especially 36-39) (as well as related conversations in Chicago and elsewhere during my doctoral studies),<sup>14</sup> Charles Hallisey was the first to signal to me that the (still) too little-explored "vernacular" or "local literary language" sources are a productive focus for scholars of Theravāda Buddhism. Hitherto, scholars had primarily studied works composed in "classical" or "scriptural" languages such as Pāli and Sanskrit. And Hallisey was also the first to draw my attention to the central—but again at that time ignored or radically underestimated—role of interlinguistic commentary (including through translation and the preparation of anthologies) in the long history of Theravāda Buddhist communities. Charlie Hallisey's attention to the plurality of languages involved in Buddhist transmissions across time was signaled long before the "Roads Taken" essay by his own brilliant doctoral dissertation attending to the early second-millennium rise of Sinhala literature expressing devotion to Gotama Buddha. Hallisey creatively explored this change in the literary forms and affective character of Lankan Buddhist narrative writing by situating it within the contexts of both Pāli and Sanskrit literary and intellectual projects undertaken in premodern South Asia ("Devotion"). Taking this approach, and holding within his sights both local and translocal histories, the dissertation was in keeping with the doubled focus on transregional transmissions and local projects

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<sup>14</sup> I remain deeply grateful to Charlie Hallisey for his kindness and intellectual generosity, joining my dissertation committee as an external member at a time when he was still establishing both a family and a scholarly career.

that characterized a seminal essay earlier prepared by Hallisey with Frank Reynolds during Hallisey's doctoral work (Reynolds and Hallisey "Buddhist Religion").

Yet it was in "Roads Taken and Not Taken" that Hallisey articulated a new research agenda most fully. Here we see Charlie's proposal that expanding scholarly attention to a broader array of texts, genres, and languages was part of a much larger investigation into how it was that Theravāda Buddhism actually *had* a history, and indeed an impressive one traversing millennia. Hallisey writes:

What is it that maintains texts inside reality? What keeps some of them current while others disappear?

This question is the inverse of the one more commonly asked by students of Buddhism. We tend to assume that it is a given that texts should be preserved, especially in religious traditions as conservative as the Theravāda. But once we turn the question around and ask what conditions are necessary for the preservation of a text, a range of other historical questions immediately opens out. If the survival of any particular text is not self-explanatory, but in fact it is normally the case that texts fade in their significance as social change occurs, then we need to discover how those texts which do endure are maintained. In part, this will require us to look at the manner in which texts were circulated—the technology, practices, and institutions which made their survival possible—but especially the processes by which certain texts were singled out as worth preserving. Discovering answers to such questions will require investigations about the extent to which the production and survival of a text is both dependent and independent of the audiences which receive it. *In the course of*



*doing all this we will inevitably end up having to rethink our conceptualizations of Buddhism as a translocal tradition with a long and self-consciously distinct history but which is at the same time a tradition dependent on local conditions for the production of meaning.* This is one of the most pressing problems for a postorientalist study of Buddhism: theoretically, we will need to reconceptualize the Buddhist tradition in comparison with other transcultural phenomena, and practically, we will have to retrieve and reorganize our scholarly heritage in Buddhist Studies in the light of that reconceptualization (51-2, emphasis added).

This passage was in a sense an invitation for scholars to study the long premodern history of Theravāda Buddhism, rather than focusing our attention only on the origins of Gotama Buddha's *sāsana* and its colonial-era and later modern interpretations.

In relation to the passage quoted above from "Roads Taken" I would like to emphasize that studying the relationships that have obtained (and do still obtain) between the languages of *buddha-sāsana* in any particular location and temporal moment immediately brings us as researchers into Hallisey's nexus of the translocal and the local. Historically, the languages of Pāli and Sanskrit made it possible for Theravāda Buddhism to become a transregional phenomenon. Yet local literary languages were key to the localization of Buddhist teachings and institutions in any locale. That is, the opportunity for linguistic interplay between transregional and local literary languages was central to making *buddha-sāsana* manifest locally. This was not only in the rather straightforward sense of "translating" the *dharmma* for local reception. Rather, we can understand interlinguistic interplay as expanding the scope for what Hallisey calls "the local production of meaning" through acts like commentary, translation, and the creation of anthologies, as well as

experimentation with how certain poetic and affective registers may be experimentally embraced and carried from one language to another, or instead resisted. The fact that *buddha-sāsana* was sustained across time interlinguistically created additional avenues for interpretation and argumentation and it also allowed writers, preachers, and oral commentators to garner forms of power and authority by discreetly identifying themselves as those who helped maintain the viability and vitality of *buddha-sāsana* in their “here and now.”

In my remarks thus far, I have been moving between usage of the terms “Buddhism” and “*buddha-sāsana*.” Indeed, I have come to recognize that Charles Hallisey’s approaches to reading Buddhist texts within the context of “local production of meaning” has strongly shaped my own long-standing fascination with the idea of *buddha-sāsana*, as well as my experiments in trying to think and write about Buddhist history as the history of *buddha-sāsana* rather than the history of Buddhism. Concerns about anachronism may naturally shade such choices of nomenclature, but the value of *buddha-sāsana* as a key term for the organization of scholarly research exceeds a simple anti-anachronistic insurance. *Buddha-sāsana* is what we might call, drawing on Marcel Mauss, a “total social fact” (*Gift* 2016) that grows over time from the seed of any buddha’s teaching, and it both informs and is sustained by social institutions far exceeding what modern forms of knowledge identify as “religion.” As understood by followers of the Triple Gem (buddha, *dhamma*, and *saṅgha*) since at least the middle of the first millennium C.E., a buddha’s *sāsana* possesses a distinctive temporality, at once capacious, precarious, and replaceable. Gotama Buddha’s *sāsana* will last five thousand years, we are told, yet it will decline in increments, eventually leaving us with a buddha-less era to be followed eventually by the next transformative opportunity of Metteyya (Maitreya) Buddha’s *sāsana* (Nattier, *Future Time*).

Thinking historically with and about *buddha-sāsana* allows us to engage the research agenda that Charles Hallisey enunciated so powerfully in “Roads Taken.” The idea that one is acting as part of—and for the benefit of—*buddha-sāsana* has been, and remains, a key motivation for the expansion and protection of *buddha-dhamma* through space and time, including through the interlinguistic processes such as commentary, translation, and anthologization to which Hallisey has called our attention. The existence of *buddha-sāsana* is thus dependent on local projects; yet the locally specific textual engagements that allow *buddha-sāsana* to persist, and to persist in some forms rather than others, are infused with meaning and authoritative power on account of the very idea that caring for *buddha-sāsana* is both possible and praiseworthy. As Georges Coèdes and Charles Archaimbault put it memorably long ago:

C’est Buddhaghosa, pense-t-on, qui en accordant cinq mille ans au règne du Dharma aurait repoussé l’échéance *mais, en précisant les différentes phases de régression qu’il scandait en cinq périodes, il donna en fait à tous les religieux, pieux laïques, simples fidèles, la possibilité de constater par eux-mêmes le déclin inéluctable de la religion.* (*Trois Mondes* 1973, ix, emphasis added)

How the interplay of the local and the translocal proceeds in the history of Buddhism—or in the unfolding of *buddha-sāsana*—depends on a complex array of factors, including what has been carried—ideationally, institutionally, materially—from one location to another, but also on what is recognized at a given moment and a given locale as inviting, apposite, resonant. When we stop to think about the creative possibilities and play of resonance (what Hallisey has earlier referred to as “elective affinity”) that characterized individuals’ participation in *buddha-sāsana*, scholarly generalities about “Buddhism” or “Theravāda Buddhism” subside from

view. In their place, we are able to recognize particular interpretive projects that are *buddha-sāsana* being made to continue, as long as possible.

Exploring these projects is to undertake acts of historical investigation. Yet Hallisey has helped us envision a distinctive historical stance. When we study *buddha-sāsana* at the nexus of translocal and local histories, asking how and why textual traditions endure—including through efforts of creative alteration and rejoinder—and what has been allowed to slip away, it is necessary to cultivate our scholarly sensibilities. Charlie Hallisey has shown us that to participate in *buddha-sāsana* through textuality was an experience simultaneously bound up with affect, aesthetics, social power, and intellect. To the extent that we can begin to meet the texts that have endured with such an understanding, we too may participate not only in the study of Buddhism, but also in an intergenerational and transregional moral interlocution with Buddhist writers of the past.

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## My Engagement With Charles Hallisey's Future

Janet Gyatso<sup>15</sup>

A pivotal moment in my intellectual relationship with Charles Hallisey occurred sometime in the late 1990's. We were both part of an informal discussion group on the nature of Buddhist Studies. At some point he mentioned to me his disappointment and chagrin at the failure of a colleague of ours, at a certain event, to address the future implications and directions issuing from that person's Buddhological work. Charlie expressed astonishment at this absence. I slowly nodded my head in agreement, but inside I was thinking, really? Are we allowed to talk about the future? Should we be expecting other people to? Very interesting . . . seems right and good . . . I'm really glad Charlie thinks this . . .

You must realize that at that point in time (and it is still true today) Charlie was in my eyes a leading authority in the field of Buddhist Studies. Anything he said was worth my consideration. This was partly due to his facility in bringing to bear critical theory and post-orientalist thought on work in Buddhist Studies. That kind of theory—in broad strokes—was something that had already captured my own attention. I had actually been ruminating on my own about what we are doing and why in Buddhist Studies, ever since graduate school at Berkeley in the 70's, where I was

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<sup>15</sup> Harvard University.

once told sternly that my own investment in the subject matter was irrelevant, and I needed to keep to a strictly objective stance. To which I responded, “But that’s not even possible.” But in graduate school I had never even heard of critical theory or cultural studies or subaltern studies. Later during my years working at State University of New York at Stony Brook I became familiar with some critical theory especially in continental philosophy. But Charlie was among the first (and remains one of the few) who credibly and compellingly brings such perspectives to Buddhist Studies.

Charlie’s singling out of the future as a key horizon has remained particularly provocative for me. At roughly the same moment in the late 90’s when we were becoming colleagues, I had at last realized how certain interesting developments in academics connected to my work, in particular on autobiography in Tibet. But despite the many valuable perspectives that it offered for this project, I seethed at the ignorance and hubris of literary and critical theory that almost universally maintained that a sense of individuality, not to mention the writing of autobiography, was virtually unique to the modern West (*Apparitions of the Self*). I was trying to correct the record with my study of Jigme Lingpa’s autobiographical writings, to insist that there are various kinds of individual self-conceptions coming out of cultures and historical periods distant from the modern West, and that to study them would help us understand a broader range of possibilities of what it can mean to be human, or a self, or an individual human self. But I never would have thematized that aim as contributing to the future per se. Perhaps to the indefinite present of the thing I was engaged in called Buddhist Studies. But not “the future.”

The future? Who talks about the future in Buddhist Studies? We talk about the past. We have also started to talk about the present. But to take into account the future, what does it mean?

I guess it could mean the future of Buddhist Studies: to keep the future in mind can mean to make a contribution to the betterment of

Buddhist Studies; to serve as a model for new and better scholarship—in the future. However, that does not say much. What kind of improvement in Buddhist Studies? To what ends? To talk about that might touch on all kinds of issues, although I'm not certain that "future" per se is the salient category.

The future as a horizon seems more legible if we can think in terms of our impact on Buddhism. The future of Buddhism on planet Earth. Buddhism the religion. And the people and other creatures associated with it. This is getting close to that with which my early mentor warned me that Buddhist Studies was not supposed to be concerned. But certainly in recent years we as a field are starting to get an inkling of the impact that our work can—and does already—have on Buddhism. Buddhist communities, Buddhist institutions, Buddhist values, Buddhist individuals, the profile of Buddhist leaders in the world. One example might be the recent scholarship on *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, some of which suggests a path forward that would jibe with monastic legal history but still facilitate the growth of more female ordination, and thereby more female leadership, things for which many Buddhists around the world are clamoring. But of course such an intervention involves a slew of tricky questions. First of all, if a scholar does not identify as a Buddhist herself, what business is it of hers to suggest to Buddhists what they should do? (I have some ideas about that, but no space to explore here; suffice it to say that it is a bad premise to lean too much on identity). More critical perhaps is the question of what impact the historicist orientation of Buddhist Studies might have on, say, Buddhist narratives of the past? Which is "better" for the "future": people believing in an inspiring myth of heroic origins or people facing up to the hard truth of a history that may be ethically compromised? Ok, this topic is quickly getting out of hand, and beyond the purview of this essay, although surely the interface between the future of Buddhist communities and the academic field of Buddhist Studies needs further examination.



But in any case, I don't think the latter encompasses all of Charlie's gesture to the importance of the future. I take the injunction to be something more. Even more than being self-conscious of our work as speech acts, as serving to create things. And more than about owning the impacts of our work, or their effects on particular outcomes. I take it to be primarily about an orientation, an orientation to distinctly free possibility. About recognizing that our work holds the promise to address the future. Even if we don't have a clear idea of what that future will look like, or the people in it.

When I asked Charlie whether he himself had written about the future, he referred me to his introduction to his (truly transformative) translation of the great Buddhist women's classic, *Therīgāthā*. There he reflects on how he finds the experience of reading those poems to encourage us to be "free from ourselves and our usual places in the world." They point us to a deep truth that tomorrow will not necessarily be like today—that in fact freedom and profound change is possible (*Therigatha* ix).<sup>16</sup>

Charlie has pointed to the future frequently in our many conversations about Buddhist Studies, and scholarship more generally since that first one in the late '90s. Every time I hear him use the word, I can hear how fundamental a category it is for him. I hear a deep moral conviction in his voice, as well as the tenor of breath that accompanies it, as the word comes out of his mouth. I can tell it denotes something very very primary for him, as well as how much he means it for others. Every time I hear him use the word, I feel like I am called upon to drop everything and do an about-face; to turn outwards to some wide-open foggy—or shining—unknowable future. In short, I feel that my encounter with this category and

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<sup>16</sup> Hallisey told me orally that he was most deeply turned on to this important point by his deceased pastor Tim Stein of Faith Lutheran Church in Cambridge, MA.

its way of orienting me has affected me in very deep ways that I am not sure I can adequately describe or even name.

But perhaps I can say something at least of how it makes me think about causation, and the related question of agency. Orienting to the future makes me aware of the fact that what we do invariably impacts others—in big ways or small ways, for either good or for bad. And since we have such power, I think we are obliged to use it.

I especially feel we have a responsibility to future life on our planet. I feel I, and we, are obliged to work hard to proactively pass on whatever gifts we can to the future.

Most recently that conviction has led me to a new project that is indeed definitely directed at the future. This is a new book I am trying to write on animal ethics. The dedication of the book says it all: “Dedicated to Future Kin on Planet Earth.”

I am writing a book on animal ethics for the future. My current title is something like *Decentering the Human: A Buddhist Animal Ethics*. Or maybe *Being-With Animals on Planet Earth*. I’m still not sure whether to identify the book as “Buddhist.” It is definitely informed by fundamental Buddhist things like the doctrine/practice of interdependence, as well as basic Buddhist meditation theory. But it also departs from Buddhist ideas. I even raise doubts about whether human beings are truly the most ethical—or intelligent—or valuable beings on planet Earth, as Buddhism, as well as most other anthropocentric religions, massively assumes. I am starting to have serious doubts about that assumption and believe it needs revisiting. In this way, I might say that my project is about nudging Buddhism into a post-human future. (More on “nudging” in a moment.)

The point of the project is to try to get people to pay much closer attention to animals, both the many creatures in our everyday lives, and the plight of animals on the planet more generally. The latter is a brutal

tragedy. Tied as it is to our outsize human population and economic and production realities, it seems truly insurmountable without a MAJOR cultural shift across the globe, towards radical modesty and austerity. It is thus an impossible project. Is there any chance to tame the human craving for meat? Is there any possibility to ratchet back our hateful and greedy character?

Still, I am putting my vision out there. I am taking strength from Charlie's encouragement that we can address the future. My dedication is in fact directed towards a specific future that I will confess I am conjuring. I confess I believe that a major catastrophe—or a series of them—is inevitable in the next century or so. If we are lucky, small pockets of animals and humans may survive, scattered around the few remaining livable places on the planet. In my deepest of hearts, I see my writing as speaking to those small communities, who will have to reinvent society. With any luck they will have some historical memory. My book is meant to contribute to a newly conceived, radically different relationship between humans and the other animals on planet Earth. It is meant to think with the future.

My book studies how to notice the astounding intelligence and beauty of our animal kin, in a detailed phenomenology of attention and embodied knowledge. It explores the philosophical basis of humans' ethical responsibilities to animals, and the discrepancy between embodied commitment and mere intellectual assent. It provides specific practices to shore commitment and sharpen our powers of attention. It asks what might happen if we decenter the human as the highest value on planet Earth. What does our neighborhood look like? What do we do all day? How do we live with domesticated animals, and how do we foster wild animal life across our planet? How do we communicate with animals? What makes us all happy?

I can add here another, not entirely unrelated line of thought which I am also working on right now and which is also trained on the

future. It is more directly about the question of causation. I am especially pleased that this will be a collaborative project. A group of international scholars of Tibetan Studies has begun talking and writing about a generative concept called *dendrel* (*rten 'brel*; *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung gnas*). This word is the Tibetan translation of Sanskrit *pratīyasamutpāda*, normally translated “interdependent arising.” I have already written about *dendrel* to some extent in my 1998 book *Apparitions of the Self*. This normally Buddhist doctrinal term has taken on a variety of Tibetan colloquial or vernacular implications, religious and otherwise. We find it even used in terms of agricultural and nomadic ways of living. And so a group of Tibetophone and Anglophone friends—textual scholars, anthropologists, poets and novelists—has decided to reflect together on the concept as a collective. We are already on the program for a first panel at the AAS in 2024.

We will see where it goes. My intention is to reflect on *dendrel* as the basis of a philosophically informed life-style. It is widely understood as such in Tibetan communities. I will draw on what I have observed in Tibetan communities to develop the notion as a lesson for my own life. *Dendrel* is noticed when we remain alert to the shape and potential of the configurations that present themselves to us as we go through our lives. To recognize their significance and potential is to see these configurations—intersections of personal, material, social, psychological and many other kinds of circumstances—as karmically issuing from the past and simultaneously open to the future. It is an aesthetic perception, much more than an intellectual one. The synchronic configurations in front of us are on the move, in constant flux. They are not snapshots or freeze-frames on their way to a pre-determined future. Any of the diverse factors in the aggregate of our circumstances can nudge, or flip, or torque, or leverage the tenor and the direction in which situations unfold and evolve. Tibetan lore tells how historical individuals have failed to recognize and honor auspicious connections. But if the human subject—or animal subject; I argue in my book that animals are experts at assessing *dendrel*—can

appreciate the auspiciousness that connections disclose, they can move to amplify their propitious potentials skillfully. Masters of *dendrel* are masters of timing and of sizing up space. They are masters of pacing.

Thus, do I realize in the course of writing this essay that my work on *dendrel* is yet again about agency, and how we are poised forever on the brink of the future. I'm not sure if any of this is what Charlie has in mind when he invokes that horizon himself. Still, I'm indebted to him for the meaning it is having for me, and all the empowerment and encouragement that goes with it.

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## Learning to Listen and Continue the Conversation of Tradition

Susanne Mrozik<sup>17</sup>

Charles Hallisey writes in an essay on the comparative philosophy of religion that philosophers have “a responsibility to listen and to ‘continue the conversation’ of tradition, even when it leaves us confused and even when we are confident that our reflections have ‘discovered’ conceptual inadequacies within it” (“Local Achievement” 150). Listening and continuing the conversation of tradition is also an apt description of the work those of us engaged with Buddhist ethics do. In what follows I will consider how Hallisey’s reflections on our responsibility to listen and continue the conversation of tradition have shaped my engagement with Buddhist ethics and, more specifically, moral anthropology.

I begin with the aforementioned essay on the comparative philosophy of religion. The essay focuses on the twelfth-century Buddhist commentator and philosopher Gurulugomi (Guruḷugōmī). Gurulugomi is known for two Sinhala-language works: The *Dharmapradīpikā*, a commentary on the Pāli *Mahābodhivaṃsa*, and the *Amāvatura*, a devotional biography of the Buddha (“Local Achievement” 124). Hallisey’s analysis centers on a passage in the *Dharmapradīpikā*, regarding the relations between conventional and absolute truths. I will pass over the arguments

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<sup>17</sup> Mount Holyoke College.

regarding these two different ways of describing the world and instead turn to Hallisey's conclusion, where he remarks on the responsibility of philosophers to listen and continue the conversation of tradition. This observation has stayed with me these many years even when I had already forgotten who Gurulugomi was and what he said about conventional and absolute truths.

Taking a cue from Buddhaghosa, who describes the highest form of study as that "of the treasurer" ("Local Achievement" 150), Hallisey writes:

The image of philosophy "as of a treasurer" reminds us that our responsibilities are not only to ourselves, but to past and future generations, and it also reminds us that these responsibilities impress on us certain expectations for how we should approach our expanding intellectual inheritance. As we have learned with respect to those Western philosophical traditions which we already call "our own," we have a responsibility to listen and to "continue the conversation" of tradition, even when it leaves us confused and even when we are confident that our reflections have "discovered" conceptual inadequacies within it. ("Local Achievement" 150)

Citing Wilhelm Halbfass's critique of the Eurocentric privileging of Western philosophical traditions, Hallisey challenges those engaged in the comparative philosophy of religion to take seriously the resources non-Western traditions offer the field ("Local Achievement" 146-147). He asks them to imagine that what philosophers such as Gurulugomi say has a place in their futures (151). Listening and continuing the conversation of tradition requires that we do just that: imagine that what others have said has a place in our futures. This is how Hallisey has taught me to do Buddhist ethics.

The practice of listening and continuing conversations is evident throughout Hallisey's scholarship and teaching. His work on the *Therīgāthā* is an especially powerful example of how to continue a conversation so that it can have a place in others' futures. Those others are diverse, but certainly include the many Buddhist women today who aspire to an ordained life. Hallisey helps us imagine aspects of that life. He lifts up the relationships between ordained women, "bound together by shared experiences and relationships of care and intimacy with each other" (*Therīgāthā* xxix). He draws our attention to the friendships between groups of women and between female teachers and their female students (xxviii-xxix). As he has in so many works, Hallisey illuminates the centrality of affective bonds in Buddhist communities, a key insight for anyone interested in Buddhist ethics, as well as anyone considering ordination.

Hallisey's work on the *Therīgāthā* resonates with me not just because of my own ethnographic engagement with the affective worlds of Buddhist nuns and their female supporters, but because, as a feminist scholar, the practice of listening and continuing conversations has always been accompanied by the questions: Whose conversations are we listening to? Whose conversations are we continuing? I am grateful to Hallisey for making a place in our futures for the lifeworlds of these Buddhist women.

These questions are also at the forefront, for me, in Hallisey's engagement with Womanist scholars. From 2009 to 2011 there were a series of Womanist-Buddhist Consultations at Harvard Divinity School, the University of Georgia, and Texas Christian University. Scholars of Buddhism and scholars of Womanism read Buddhist texts together, inspired by a traditional Jewish style of communal study called *chavruta* (Hickey vii). Speaking of this experience, Hallisey writes:



I have often been surprised in reading Buddhist texts with Womanists—texts I thought I knew reasonably well, according to the conventional ways that we in Buddhist Studies typically interpret Buddhist texts—by the astute and cogent interpretations that Womanists offered. They came to important insights that I probably would not have come to on my own, or with colleagues with the same union card as mine. (“Womanist Resources” 74-75)

A good example of this is Tracey Hucks’s reimagining of the *Therīgāthā*’s Subhā as a Womanist ancestor: an ancestor—in hers and Alice Walker’s words—that “we didn’t even know we had” and who had arrived “just in time” (Walker qtd. in Hucks 43). The Womanist-Buddhist Consultations remind me that it is not just a question of *whose* conversations we are listening to and continuing; we also need to ask *who* is doing the work of listening and continuing these conversations. What kinds of futures do different conversation partners enable?

One of the most surprising and moving readings in recent years, comes from Hallisey’s student Karen Derris. In her extraordinary memoir *Storied Companions* Derris offers a new reading of the Buddha’s encounter with the four signs: the bodies of an old person, a sick person, a dead person, and a mendicant. Writing about the first three, Derris shifts our focus from that of the Buddha to the elderly, sick, and dying—those “whose impermanence is pronouncedly embodied” (13). That shift is a conceptual earthquake. Indeed, if this were a Buddhist story the gods would shout for joy and flowers would rain down from the sky. Derris asks us to *see* the elderly, sick, and dying. She restores to them their humanity and their agency. No longer mere props in the Buddha’s story, they have stories of their own to tell. And these stories become part of my students’ futures, notably those in my “Disability and Religion” course, many of whom have lived experiences with disability or chronic illness.

Derris’s memoir and my own increasing experience with physical limitations make me rethink my earlier research on Sanskrit Buddhist body discourses. Focused on gender and, in particular, women, I paid less attention to the many other living beings marginalized in Buddhist literature, including disabled human beings. Disabled human beings—like other marginalized beings—often appear in Buddhist literature to warn readers about the karmic consequences of immorality. They function as karmic scare tactics, denied any agency of their own. They appear, as Louise J. Lawrence writes of characters with sensory disabilities in the gospels, “‘everywhere’ and ‘nowhere’ “ (1). Disabled human beings are everywhere in Buddhist literature as constant reminders of the karmic consequences of immorality, but nowhere, to quote Lawrence:

... in that no meaningful identity, agency, or complexity is attributed to them beyond formulaic and flat character traits ... the characters are not important in themselves, but only as part of the larger plot or theological schema in which they feature. (1)

I now regret not paying more attention in my earlier work to the many disabled human beings who populate Buddhist literature. Toward the end of my career, I am still learning how to listen and continue the conversation of tradition in ways that open the conversation up to a greater diversity of living beings.

Hallisey taught us to be scholars *and* teachers. In recent years my engagement with moral anthropology has been largely confined to the classroom. Maria Heim and Anne Monius define moral anthropology as the study of “what human beings are actually like” (386); in other words, human beings and communities in their inevitable complexity and messiness. I appreciate Hallisey’s observation in his introduction to the *Therīgāthā* that these poems “wear their Buddhist doctrine quite lightly” (xxvii). He observes that the *Therīgāthā* generally does not explain “the

social suffering that befalls women and the poor as due to the karmic fruits of previous actions on their part” (xxx). Instead, their “undeserved suffering” is simply a feature of an unfair world (xxx). As soon as my students learn about karma, they want to use karma as an explanation for everything. Hallisey’s insight into the *Therīgāthā* helps me push back against their wish to make everything make sense, to make everything be fair.

Moral anthropology also creates space for my students to explore the fact of human imperfections. As observed by Heim, Buddhaghosa’s chapter on the “sublime abidings” (*brahmāvihāras*) provides extensive instructions on what to do if, instead of feeling *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*, the meditator feels resentment (*paṭigha*) (178-180). I ask my students to pay close attention to the passages on resentment because my students are more inclined to rush toward the “eureka” moment when the barriers are broken and meditators feel the sublime abidings equally for all living beings. My students learn that resentment is as worthy of attention as, for example, *mettā* if we want to know anything about Buddhist ethics—and perhaps ourselves.

Finally, I also have to counter my students’ inclination to snap judgments. Students are quick to dismiss outright lifeworlds that do not conform to their moral sensibilities. Here, I remember Hallisey’s advice that “we have a responsibility to listen and to ‘continue the conversation’ of tradition, even when it leaves us confused and even when we are confident that our reflections have ‘discovered’ conceptual inadequacies within it” (“Local Achievement” 150). For instance, students are sometimes disturbed by the social hierarchies we find in Buddhist texts and communities. Some of these hierarchies may need to be interrogated, but not without careful attention to how they actually play out in Buddhists’ lives. For example, however much students dislike the “Eight Revered Conditions” (*aṭṭhagarudhammā*) that subordinate *bhikkhunīs* to *bhikkhus*,

they learn that they have little negative impact on the everyday lives of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*, as argued by Nirmala Salgado (*Buddhist Nuns* 77-100; “Revered Conditions” *passim*). Paula Arai’s study of contemporary Japanese Sōtō Zen nuns demonstrates that monastic hierarchies might very well hold the key to realizing one’s own and others’ buddha nature (82-120).

My students approach Buddhist materials with the hope that they *will* have a place in their futures, that they will speak to their concerns and aspirations. But my students cannot continue the conversation of tradition until they have learned to listen to that tradition. That requires attention to the kinds of things moral anthropology attends to: “what human beings are actually like”; more specifically, “the attentive study of the way ethical experience and concerns are inscribed in everyday contexts and potentially all spheres of life” (Heim and Monius 386). For example, I recall a taxi ride with a Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī*. In the privacy of the taxi’s backseat, the *bhikkhunī* confided an experience she had with a Sri Lankan *bhikkhu* many years prior when she was still a *dasa sil*, or ten-precept, nun. The *bhikkhu* advised a group of *dasa sil* nuns to wear the white clothing of laity, who observe eight or ten precepts, rather than their orange Theravāda monastic robes. Apparently, the *bhikkhu* did not think nuns had the right to wear Theravāda monastic robes. If we want to know something about Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*, if we want to carry the conversation of that tradition forward, the most important information communicated in that taxi ride was not the fact that a *bhikkhu* advised nuns not to wear Theravāda monastic robes. He was hardly the first to do so. Nor did the nuns to whom he was speaking change their attire since they had already been authorized to wear monastic robes by their head monk. The most important information communicated to me was nonverbal: the *bhikkhunī*’s quiet chuckle over the silly belief that Sri Lankan nuns should not wear Theravāda monastic robes.

It is these details—whether ethnographic or textual—that Charlie Hallisey taught me to pay attention to. He taught me how to listen and continue the conversation of tradition so that it can have a place in my—and now—my students' futures.

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## Ethics Across Generations: The Structure of *Śrāddha*

Donald R. Davis, Jr.<sup>18</sup>

*Śrāddha* refers to an ancient and complex system of rituals honoring one's ancestors, especially in Hindu communities. The principal elements of a *śrāddha* are the feeding of Brahmins, who consume food offerings in place of a sacred fire (*āhavanīya*), and the offering of rice-balls (*piṇḍa*) to the ancestors (Kane 406, 481-82). These two acts ritually construct generations in the spatial and temporal senses, respectively. A spatial or horizontal connection is made with the Brahmin invitees and a temporal or vertical connection is made with three prior generations of ancestors.

By definition then, *śrāddha* is a transgenerational project in Hallisey's sense because the rite revolves around the obligations owed by later generations to earlier ones. For Hallisey, transgenerational projects are characterized by "onwardness," a shared caring for the past that pushes one to maintain actions and institutions across generations. In describing the Sasana, the Buddhist community and its textual canon, Hallisey writes:

Each generation benefits from the act of care for the Sasana that was done in the past, but the recognition of that care

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that was done, as it were, for oneself, generates a recognition of the onwardness within that act of care in the past, that a proper recognition of what was done for one in the past requires one to do something in the present for the sake of the future. (Hallisey 98)

The *śrāddha* operates in the same way. Attention to the rite in the past impels, perhaps even compels, similar attention in the present and future. In what follows, my reading of the classical sources on the subject will explore the ethical consequences of the commitment to *śrāddha*. I first describe the *śrāddha* rite as a technique for recognizing and constructing a “generation-unit” in Mannheim’s sense (379-82). I then examine what gets passed forward and suggest that transgenerational projects may promote a conservatism of act and purpose that envelops their ethical impact. In this way, care devolves into deference, constraint, and tradition.

The rules about who should be invited to an ancestral rite promote an aspirational ideal of the generation to which one should want to belong. It’s all the best people, from the point of view of an ethnocentric community centered around scores of common rituals. Those invited are seated as part of the rite and served various foodstuffs, along with other items (pastes, flowers, incense, etc.), depending on the particular rite. Invitees should include those of great learning, impeccable reputation, and Brahmin by caste of course; but, they should also be religious renunciates or strangers (neither friend nor kin), not too old, and ready to take on the subtle impurities arising from participating in a death-related rite (Kane 384-85). The list of 93 types of people not to be invited to an ancestral rite at *Laws of Manu* 3.150-166 (Olivelle 54-55) covers both Brahmins of suspicious character and pretty much everyone else. Of course, the texts provide many escape hatches for situations in which ideal Brahmins cannot be located or do not accept, but the point here is that the aspiration describes a group consisting of the “best” people from one’s own generation.



It is not the actually existing generation to which one belongs, but rather the group of one's local peers that one desires to represent "my generation." By performing the *śrāddha* rite, one publicly discharges a religious debt to the ancestors, thereby putting pressure on others to do the same. That pressure contributes to the "onwardness" inherent in the rite—it must go on.

In the paradigmatic monthly *śrāddha*, a man also offers balls of rice the size of small fruit to his deceased father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. These offerings nourish or feed the ethereal bodies of these ancestors until the death of the man himself, at which point he becomes an ancestor in need of nourishment and the great-grandfather permanently enters a divine state among the three deities of the ancestral rites, Vasu, Rudra, and Āditi. The ancestors comprise a group of three generations of patrilineal forefathers of a given person (offerings to male ancestors also occur). The rice-ball offerings ritually reenact a simultaneity between the generations of a family. Four generations are ritually present for the rite at the same time. The fact that the man's son and grandson may also observe the rite increases the transgenerational reach even further.

Through the ritual feeding of Brahmins, one forges a bond with an aspirational generation—those beyond the extended family, of roughly the same age, with whom one wants to be associated. A *śrāddha* enacts or performs that generation in the context of the rite. This semi-public piety also encourages, even pressures, attendees to do the same—to keep up their own *śrāddhas*. Likewise, through the ritual feeding of one's ancestors, a person instantiates a commitment to previous generations and sets a model to be passed on to their own descendants. In other words, this part of the rite recognizes, acknowledges, and maintains the co-existence of multiple generations across time.

In both ways, the generation functions as the way to experience community and time on an immediate human scale: “to replace such purely external units as hours, months, years, decades, etc., by a concept of measure operating *from within*.” (Mannheim 357, italics in the original). One can never experience one or many generations in full in daily life, but through the *śrāddha* one can simultaneously engage with generation units past and present. In this way, following Ortega y Gasset, “the decisive thing in the life of the generations is not that they follow each other but that they overlap or are, so to speak, spliced together” (59). For Ortega, the effect of the *śrāddha* on the invitees and the observers would be the key to the generational impact of the rite. The invitees should be “coevals” in Ortega’s sense, members of the same rough age and generation, but the observers will include “contemporaries,” members of a younger generation. The onwardness encoded in the ancestral rite pushes those contemporary, but younger, generations toward the preservation of the ritual habit.

But there is a problem with the idea of a generation—it’s too big. Even in a relatively small, homogeneous social situation, people of comparable age may not have common ideas or goals sufficient to form a community. Mannheim’s notion of “generation-unit,” therefore, captures better the experience of the generation as a local, limited group:

Whereas mere common “location” in a generation is of only potential significance, a generation as an actuality is constituted when similarly “located” contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding. Within this community of people with a common destiny there can then arise particular generation-units. (Mannheim 381)

In the ancestral rite imagined and described in classical texts, a group of three to nine Brahmin invitees join the performer and

potentially a family priest, while the performer's family observes. Though not a very large group, it nevertheless represents a deliberate generation-unit in which all present share a common worldview and commit to the goals and procedures of the rite. Groups of such scale function as the practical contexts for the experience of a generation. At this scale, homogeneity is possible and the diversity of a wider generation is easily ignored. This group carries forward the transgenerational project and each instance of its performance reproduces a similar generation-unit. The rite thus generates generations of personal scale. What, however, does this generation-unit pass onward?

The *śrāddha* faces inward—to the family and to the local Brahmin community. Its structure encodes the perpetuation of future generation-units of the same social composition. As such, the rite represents one of many conservative institutions in Hindu traditions (see Davis). The classical texts ignore the clear dissonance between ancestral rites and a theology of immediate or quick reincarnation, though the problem exercises both modern scholars and practitioners (see Sayers). The ancestral rites simply must be done, for they are part of the obligations set forth in the scriptures. Past practice justifies present obligation—a hallmark of conservative thought (Muller 7-9). What the practice of *śrāddha* carries across generations is a moving window of Hindu filial piety. Its temporal aspect binds a man to his ancestors and lays a similar expectation upon his son, grandson, and great-grandson. To this extent, it fulfills the dictum of Edmund Burke: “Society is indeed a contract. . . . As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born” (96). Genealogical generations are isolated for ritual attention in the *śrāddha*. Elsewhere, generations mix and overlap, but not in a family. There the dividing line—with unusual exceptions—follows biological lines. That isolation places the male family line at the moral center of this generation-unit. Past, present,

and future members of that line co-exist in the ritual space. The periodic recreation of the family's generations demands first a deference to tradition, to all the *śrāddhas* done before. Deference then transforms into the continued commitment to perform the rite and sustain the unique family line. The performance of the ancestral rite thus pressures a man to hold an unbroken family line in the highest esteem and to consider it the basic unit of moral life (not the individual himself nor a larger community).

The spatial aspect of *śrāddha* gathers a conclave meant to identify as Brahmins worthy to be invited (*nimantrita*) and fed (*bhojanīya*). The selection criteria for invitation and feeding read like the resume of the ideal Brahmin. The rite thereby intensifies an exclusive Brahmin identity of those in attendance. The fact that the ancestral rite is replicated in family after family creates a bond of similar experience and practice across a wider, synchronic generation-unit. Ortega (50-51) suggests that changing sentiments across generations will ensure changes in social life and structure, but his idea of a generation is too broad to account for radical differences within a single generation. For this reason, Mannheim's generation-unit captures better the contrivance necessary to experience a generation in daily life. The contrived generation-units in myriad *śrāddhas* promote ritual exclusivity, social hierarchy, and religious reputation. Things do not change because generational sentiments shift as Ortega thought; they stay the same "because the performers are the same," or of the same social type—*karṭṛsāmanyāt* as Jaimini says (Jha 56 at 1.3.2). Furthermore, the performer of the rite has a vested interest to impress, even show up, the Brahmin invitees. As Devaṇabhaṭṭa (13th cent. CE) states, "In order to establish his own superiority among equals, he should offer them both hard and soft foods of the highest quality" (353). The *śrāddha* should reinforce a strong sense of Brahminical superiority, with the performer himself at the head of the group. A key purpose of the rite, therefore, is for Brahmins of the same generation (*samāneṣu*) to ritually enact their sameness and their social status.

Through its temporal and spatial dimensions, therefore, the *śrāddha* promotes a form of conservative ethics (Muller 18). First, the rite begins in reverence for and deference to the past and to prior generations specifically. Second, it preserves a central institution of Brahmin identity, in spite of theological difficulties relating to reincarnation. Third, it privileges the family (*kula*) and the family line as the foundation of ethical judgment—what’s good for the family is good for the person and the community. Fourth, its habitual performance exerts pressure on contemporary and succeeding generations to continue the practice. Finally, it recognizes and makes visible an elite generation-unit composed of worthy Brahmins.

Each of these principles finds parallels in conservative traditions across cultures. Put together in this transgenerational project, we can observe how—and perhaps why—*śrāddha* has long been a centerpiece of Brahminical religious practice and intellectual history. Huge digests on the topic were produced throughout the medieval period in India, yielding to shorter, but more numerous, manuals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This transgenerational project certainly exemplifies the “onwardness” to which Hallisey draws attention, but the ethical implications of the type of care expected for the *śrāddha* lead to familiar conservative moral ideals of authority, tradition, hierarchy, and ethnocentrism. When we examine such projects, therefore, we must attend to the surprising forms that “caring for the past” may take.

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## On Pastness, Onwardness, and the Expectation Management of the Religious Historian

Willemien Otten<sup>19</sup>

### **From the Working Desk of the Religious Historian**

The interaction with the past is at times more like a struggle than an arm-chair exercise for the historian. The problem is worse, I contend, for the religious historian, given that religion is a topic that few people, academics included, find it possible to be indifferent about. And while it might have been possible for a historian of Christianity teaching in Europe, say, up till about three decades ago to presuppose if not a direct familiarity with the history of Western Christianity, then enough of an awareness of Western history for religious knowledge to be seen as organically embedded in it, the contemporary academy is an arena in which every veneer of reverence is routinely peeled off. Thus, as a historian of Christianity one can find oneself confronted with the view that Christianity is responsible for the agelong tradition of sexual repression in the West or that it never lived up to its pacifist ideals, as scholars may hold Christianity either directly responsible for having caused a perceived ill in contemporary

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society, as in the first case, or, in the case of pacifism, for not ending another one.<sup>20</sup>

With Charles Hallisey I share the desire to develop an attitude towards the religious past that is scholarly but that is not by definition dismissive of or clinically distant towards religion; neither does it seem necessary nor particularly advantageous to be a religious affiliate or institutional member. What Charles Hallisey and I have both tried to advocate, each in our own way, is that while it is crucially important to find a good way into the religion one studies –Buddhism for Hallisey, Christianity for myself–, in the end it comes down to one’s imagination whether or not one succeeds. The decision to rely on one’s imagination alone, of course outfitted with the aid of additional tools like language study, archival knowledge, philosophical sophistication, and the like, seems to unleash enormous intellectual freedom, even though such freedom does not make the exploration of the religious past any easier. If one can no longer hang one’s exegetical and interpretive work on reliable Archimedean points in religious history, whether these be institutional or doctrinal markers, one can easily become submerged in a vast ocean of material. Other than by grasping for flotsam to stay afloat, how can the interpreter avoid being thrown about on waves of textual material without the assurance that her navigating skills make much of a difference?

I have grappled with the question of how best to tackle the religious past in my recent article “Theology as Searchlight.” Among the various points I make about the Western Christian tradition I intended for one proposal to stand out, as I suggest that we trade in the fashionable

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<sup>20</sup> For a summary dismissal of Augustine as single-handedly responsible for all Western sexual repression, see Geoffrey R. Stone, *Sex and the Constitution. Sex, Religion, and Law from America’s Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (London/New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), 17-18. Although Philippe Buc’s book is learned and nuanced, the through-line is the intrinsic connection of Christianity and violence, see *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror: Christianity, Violence and the West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).



image of the religious archive for that of the concrete working desk of the religious historian. What attracted me to the image of the working desk is that it portrays the work of the religious historian as more delimited and less grandiose than the all too amorphous and unwieldy archive, reminiscent as it is of the vast ocean, and second, that it puts a subtle but unrelenting spotlight on the interpreter whose working desk it is. My idea is that the actual papers on her desk can serve as a reliable guide into her current thoughts, indicative as they are of a mind at work on an exciting intellectual project.

Meditating further on the image of the working desk, however, I have become worried that my new model is not entirely satisfactory, insofar as it seems to create a dilemma between fragmentation (too many unconnected, individual working desks) and amorphousness (the archive). I see as an appropriate move out of this dilemma for the religious historian to go vertical rather than horizontal. While my image of the working desk was initially conceived to rein in the religious archive as a vast expanse, is it not better—in order to eliminate the risk of unending fragmentation here—to treat one's interpretive ideas as belonging to a shared fount of wisdom? Far from returning to a 19th century typology of world religions (Buddhism vs. Christianity etc.), I advocate an intentional turn to the religion one studies whereby the ideas drawn from it are considered marked by their religious inheritance (let's say, the Christian eucharist) and the analytical categories through which one studies them (which may not, say, ritual) are not merely applied but used to put that religious inheritance in perspective. In this way analysis serves the goal of qualified integration (eucharist is a Christian ritual whose theological content and liturgical character distinguish it from eating rituals in other religious traditions). There would seem to be various advantages to this approach, not least that it would allow for the different working desks of religious historians to begin forming a discernible dynamic network. There are also various preconditions for it to work, among them that we

do not treat the adopted founts of wisdom as exclusive, eternal or static, which would preclude comparative analysis.

### **Going Vertical: Towards a New Profile of the Religious Historian**

As I see it, Charles Hallisey has made two crucial interventions in the direction of precisely this kind of verticalization. The first has to do with the reconceptualization of religious tradition as transgenerational lineage, which makes the connection between Buddhism as the religious tradition he studies and his individual interpreter's working desk more tangible and concrete. The second concerns the notion of onwardness, which Hallisey insightfully lays out for us as a carefully poised equilibrium of expectation and surprise. Thickening that point, I end with a brief conclusion.

#### *Transgenerational care*

In his article "The Care of the Past" in a volume on religion and memory, Charles Hallisey takes "a Theravāda Buddhist example of a transgenerational project, the Sasana or Buddhist dispensation, to trace one aspect of the place of time in religions, an aspect that might be called the onwardness that is part of pastness in religions" (90). Clearly pastness is somehow awakened or actualized here by onwardness, with the transgenerational project a kind of liaison between past and present that doubles as a source of movement, a segue that is as subtle as it is irreversible. Hallisey wants to connect past and present here through a transgenerational project that is more than a serial link but provides an anchor for the interpreter by lending depth or verticality. But in what does the transgenerational project actually consist? As Hallisey goes on to explain, a Sasana includes the totality of teaching and practice but also comprises buildings and material relics that are handed down by a Buddha to his followers: "In the case of

Theravāda Buddhist visions of the Sasana, there is an onwardness in human care as it is received in time, recognized as having been given in the past, and then subsequently given again, precisely because of the care received” (90).

There is, on my reading of Hallisey, an intrinsic dynamism to the Sasana that is not the product of imposition but through the idea of receiving care allows for vulnerability and even decay to become integrally meaningful to one’s historiographical vision (think of ruined temples), as we see Hallisey hopscotch from material relics to theological content in unforeseen ways. Precisely the aspects of vulnerability and decay, which Hallisey calls damage, make room for the category of help, which acts as a kind of transgenerational religious vector along which past, present, and future can become swept up in a collective, compassionate vision. Hallisey does not clearly separate care from help, it seems, but in borrowing Bernard Williams’ notion of a thick concept, as description opening up into a course of action and hence unfolding a moral anthropology (92-93), it seems that care is what we historically give or receive, while help is the overarching religious but also existential umbrella under which the care of various kinds is subsumed.

What greatly fascinates me in the idea of the Sasana seen “as a history of help given to us” is that it can be transferred to other traditions (97), and hence allows me to reflect on but not absolutize the tradition of Christianity, thereby widening the religious conversation without skewing it. The added counsel implicit in the Sasana of not separating material and dogmatic elements but integrating them in “the history of help given to us” invites the religious historian to be comprehensive rather than compartmentalizing in this conversation.

*Expectation and surprise*

For my second point, I take my cue from two publications, as I put Hallisey's article "The Surprise of Scripture's Advice" in conversation with the introduction to his book *Therigatha. Poems of the First Buddhist Women*. The article "The Surprise of Scripture's Advice" goes back to Hallisey's opening lecture for a conference I had organized on *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation*. As in "The Care of the Past," he shows himself not to be exclusively a scholar of Buddhism but engages in powerful comparison with Christian sources, drawing especially on Augustine's *Confessions*.

What is most striking about the article, aside from the impressive command of different literary genres, is the idea that, on the one hand, we ought to make scripture our own, but on the other hand, we need to keep it enough at bay so as to allow its message to come through as a surprise. This is nicely summarized in a passage from Augustine's *Confessions* that kicks off the article. We find Augustine in the garden in Milan where he converts under the command heard in an unknown children's song: Take up and read (*tolle, lege*)! An important scene in the history of Christianity, it is the first known case of someone who converts based on reading a text rather than hearing the gospel. But Hallisey does not dwell on the bibliomancy for which Augustine's conversion has become famous as we see him randomly open the Bible, but directs us to how Augustine models himself on St. Antony:

So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel,

he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him . . . .<sup>21</sup>

Following Brian Stock's *Augustine the Reader*, Hallisey emphasizes how Augustine had already been reading the letters of St. Paul before, but hearing the command "Take up and read" made him go back to them now with more purpose, a purpose which was amplified by (or anchored in, to stay with the language of verticality) the phrase that Antony heard the gospel being read "as if" spoken to him. The reference to Antony shows Augustine's experience of randomly opening scripture to be the result of a behavioral pattern established in advance *before* it was a reading experience. One might say that the generative *as if* aspect of scriptural advice is artfully (which is different from artificially) prepared so as to have a spontaneous effect on the protagonist. As Hallisey goes on to show through a comparison with Lobsang Gyatso's *Memoir of a Tibetan Lama* and Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, it is often the larger educational context that cultivates such patterns in us. They may not reach so deep as to make scripture a "stable virtual text," a concept that Hallisey draws from literary theory to point to the exact telling back of a story or text that has been heard (43), but when intimately trained in such pedagogy, even if for different goals, there is just enough familiarity that we can be conditioned to receive a scriptural text "as if" a surprise.

I turn now from Hallisey's elegant treatment of surprise in Augustine's reading of scripture, to his introduction to the *Therīgāthā*. Whereas in his article he evoked a fine web of connections between practice and reception, here he reveals a more structural methodological interest, no doubt related to his task as translator. Quoting T.S. Eliot about the contrast between fixity and flux, and "the unperceived evasion of monotony" as the very life of verse, Hallisey transposes the contrast between fixity and

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<sup>21</sup> "The Surprise of Scripture's Advice," 28 with reference to Augustine, *Confessions* VIII.12.29 (Pusey transl.).

flux into a tension between “expected pattern” and “delightful surprise” (xiv). I see this as a methodological rendering because of its generalizable quality. We are now no longer in Augustine’s unique reception-mode, reading scripture as awaiting a personal telegram. What matters instead is the way in which we—be it as translator or as religious historian—can detect and trace, as a precondition for keeping alive, that tension between expectation and surprise.

It is the methodological attention to balancing and keeping alive that tension that I see as the right way for the religious historian to gain deeper insight into a Sasana, including the Christian variant. The lasting meaning of surprise in Hallisey’s generalizable tension is neither that of a spark that lights up a text nor even that of an insight that lifts a text out of its familiar canon, but lies in the interpreter’s underlying willingness to embrace a disposition that receives its power from overcoming the resistance it encounters. To hone in on the crucial and consistent value of verticality, I want to push back a bit on the primacy of surprise, calling my contribution modestly one of expectation management. There may be more of a sting to its modest guise, however, swayed as I am by one of Nietzsche’s classics on my working desk, i.e., *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, whereby I read “life” as “religion.” Rather than favoring only critical history, surprisingly (in what is more of a counter surprise in the context of my contribution) Nietzsche leaves room for the monumental and antiquarian views of history as well. Simply put, not all historical texts contain delightful surprises that are just for the taking, as Antony and Augustine remain the exception rather than the rule. As a writer, therefore, the religious historian has to expertly navigate the tension between expectation and surprise and decide what material it is that needs to shine. That will often be material providing us with evident surprises but at times a painstaking analysis of traditional expectations, including their repetitive and rote character, may furnish us with deeper insight. It is in the proper finetuning of that deliberative process, more precisely, in the

calibration of suspense such that a surprise may be horizontally prepared and yet be vertically received, that one finds the true master of onwardness.

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# Smile to Suffering: The Impact of Charlie Hallisey's Work on Womanist Theology and Ethics

Melanie L. Harris<sup>22</sup>

Seeing you smile, I know immediately that you are dwelling in awareness. Keep this smile always blooming, the half-smile of a Buddha.—Thich Nhat Hanh<sup>23</sup>

## **First Noble Truth: Suffering is a Part of Life**

### *Finding Resonance and Feeling Renunciation*

For a trauma survivor, friendship offered on the journey is true grace. Smiles born from loving kindness can spark miracles. To know Charlie for many of us is to know his smile. Deep, present, and true, it is clear upon learning his story that his smile is also hard earned, a reflection of deep practice. A life of joy and hardship is its own teacher. As the Buddhist teaching goes, “no mud, no lotus” (Hanh *No Mud, No Lotus* 1). As a womanist scholar and woman of color scholar in the academy, I have known mud.

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<sup>22</sup> Wake Forest University School of Divinity.

<sup>23</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, <https://thichnhatanhquotecollective.com/2021/08/28/7441/>.



Much of it has been orchestrated by systemic racism, and institutional forms of white privilege and exclusivity flowing in the learning contexts where I have taught, fought, and served. As an early career scholar navigating the racial, gendered, class and cultural dynamics of being the one and only African American woman on a department faculty, I began in my third year of teaching to pursue my research trajectory with vigor and take better care of my suffering by leaning into contemplative practice, prayer, and meditation by way of the Christian mystic tradition. As a trained vocalist in sacred songs and African American spirituals I began my days with singing long soulful hums, similar in resonance to the Buddhist chant *om*. It wasn't until I was more formally introduced to Buddhist meditation and the practice of yoga, that I began to see the similarities and feel in my body the spiritual connections of soulful and sacred meditative sound. It is this experience of feeling the constant pressure of navigating daily microaggressions, and racially unconscious comments from students and colleagues that I began my exploration into Buddhism. There simply had to be something life giving, and soul saving for me in this practice, I thought to myself. There must be something in Buddhism that would connect me to my Native, Indigenous, and African ancestors while simultaneously creating a theoretical and practical weaving of an engaged ethical path that brings together the priorities of justice in womanist religious thought, with the passion of thought and faith life in theology and ethics.

Often, I have found that, in the words of Alice Walker, "in search of my mothers' gardens" I have found my own. While my own spiritual and theological roots rest in the black Christian mystical and spiritual tradition, the religious practice of my great-grandmother was more earth-honoring. A formerly enslaved black woman, she navigated life in the South pouring as much black love into the children she bore and racial pride into her grandchildren. While she never wrote a book or published an academic essay, her spiritual practice and wisdom of communing with

earth as a spiritual practice, and her recognition that human beings and all sentient beings, in the words of Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, “inter-are” were passed on through the “study” and practice of the spiritual life in the generations of my family.

This is why, when I first read Alice Walker’s essay, “The Only Reason You Want To Go to Heaven is because you have been driven out of your mind, (off your land and out of your lovers’ arms) clear seeing inherited religion and reclaiming the pagan self” (1), and learned of Walker’s own connection with earth spirituality and practice of Buddhist meditation, I was intrigued. How could the same genius who offered Christian womanist theologians and ethicists with whom I studied at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, the term “womanist” as a base from which to center their own voices and theological perspectives as they interrogated the patriarchy of the church, and critiqued the normative image of Jesus as “white and male,” be the same womanist who heard songs of trees as scripture and received peace from breathing in and out, in and out, in and out with sangha communities in Oakland? Was it possible for a black woman to be womanist, admittedly shaped by the love of a segregated black southern Christian church community, be earth honoring, and practice Buddhist meditation? In Alice Walker, I found a model asking the kind of questions I was asking and whose practice was pointing me towards the development of a kind of earth honoring, ethically based, Buddhist-Christianity that honored the lived reality, and spiritual activism of black women. As I began to explore Buddhist practice of meditation more deeply all the while holding onto the sounds and vibrations of my black Christian ancestors, and the earth honoring faith wisdom of my family I began to see my teachers emerge. Among them were black feminist women that I read closely and expected to learn from, bell hooks, Jan Willis, and Cheryl Giles. And there were others from whom I did not expect to learn from because in my imagination only black womanists or feminists could truly teach me about how to be, survive and thrive as a black

woman. Only by shedding this (false) assumption was I truly ready to receive the teaching from my first Buddhism teacher: Charles Hallisey.

## **Second Noble Truth: There Are Discernable Causes to Suffering**

### *Seeing The Illusion of Separation*

I first met Professor Hallisey's smile in 2009. I can say now that my suffering is less having known the Buddhas' smile in him, but I must admit it was hard for me to overcome my own racial biases at first. While the first of the four noble truths of Buddhism invites us to recognize that suffering is a part of life, the second invites us to understand and reflect on the fact that with wisdom there are discernable causes to suffering. Regarding racism, and many forms of oppression, one way to explain the cause of suffering is to understand that these logics rest on dualist frames (including but not excluding sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, classism, ableism, ageism, and militarism) and can be considered *outer sufferings*. They are sufferings that emerge from a lack of insight or understanding of impermanence and the reality that we *inter-are*. Based on the accepted reality of impermanence, these sufferings are in essence illusions, misperceptions of the truth embedded in the mind (but can be transformed) resisting the truth that all beings are interconnected.

At that time, I was caught in many dualisms, seemingly imprinted on my mind as a result of surviving years of racial trauma in the academy in a less than hospitable department. My experiences with most white male academics had been more than deeply unkind so to share my teaching strategies and reflections on transgressive pedagogy at the Wabash Center pre-tenure workshop of which he and I were a part (he was a member of the teaching faculty) felt like a risk. As if feeling the distinct breaths of the eight worldly winds, and all of the complexity between them, I remember noticing a strange awe and wonder came over me when I heard

Professor Hallisey teach. I asked myself, “how could a white male Harvard-trained professor of Buddhist Studies, teaching Harvard students have such an incredibly humble presence?” As my mother would say of him later upon hearing about my profundity at meeting such a mentor, “There is just something about Professor Hallisey . . . He’s a way maker. See what he has to say.” He was a man who loved his mother, cherished his family and activated the life of the mind through a deep compassion and commitment to excellence in teaching. Many of these points I resonated with. I too loved my mother. I too cherished my family and in fact had made many sacrifices in my career to be fully present to them. I too tried to bring a sense of compassion to the ethics classroom while creating a space of wholeness when teaching religion, anti-racism, and ethics. Professor Hallisey’s smile echoed a calm encouragement and hinted that there was something bigger than getting tenure; the opportunity to share and shape knowledge, to create epistemologies that would uproot and replant the very way we approach knowing, all the while being a part of the larger plan to be those who widen the study of the humanities and who use our access to power and platforms to do justice from within institutions. His was a revolutionary vision. His smile was a beacon into a deeper wisdom and as a mentor he was inviting us to be and teach with our full selves in the classroom. His joy of teaching was contagious. “How can I get one of these smiles?” I thought warmly to myself.

### **Third Noble Truth: There is Freedom From Suffering**

#### *Dismantling Hierarchy Through Mutual Friendship and Respect*

Confronting the fact that racism is rough was one of my first steps towards uncovering my smile and it was Professor Hallisey who helped me do this. As a mentor he walked alongside me and many others in that Wabash group to gain a sense of confidence in ourselves as teachers, scholars and

activists. He also taught me much about Buddhism. Professor Hallisey was my first real Buddhist teacher. Recognizing the importance of decentering himself and the perception of his power based on society's read of his social location, I was often struck by Professor Hallisey's insistence that we move in a way of mutuality. He wasn't interested in maintaining the normative hierarchical order of teacher-vs-student. He was genuinely interested in learning about womanism, what it is and what it might have to offer to Buddhist Studies. As we began working together on the Womanist Resources for Buddhist Studies projects, (Hallisey 73) the Compassion and Justice grants, articles for the *Journal of Buddhist-Christian Studies* and multiple interreligious gatherings honoring the work of womanist, and more recently black feminist bell hooks, what began as a quest for a smile, and revival of joy in teaching opened into something even more beautiful: a friendship that blossomed into a garden of new and ever evolving friendships. Friendship as a mode of mutual enhancing exchange then became a principal foundation of our work together over the years. I credit much of Professor Hallisey's humility, anti-racist commitments and genuine desire and courage to smile at suffering and teach others to do likewise for the rich experiences we have been able to share with so many.

### **The Fourth Noble Truth: There Is Freedom From Suffering**

#### *Friendship as Flower and Root*

Reflecting on the years of work we've done together, it is instructive to me that this gift of friendship woven through, across and beyond Christian and Buddhist thought, and weaving in the distinctions between Black liberation and womanist theologies as well as African indigenous and earth honoring faith traditions came about in part as the flower of another friendship root. It is the friendship inspired by the mutual respect that Martin Luther King Jr. and Thich Nhat Hanh shared. This friendship

served not only as a model of inter-being but also a model of what Buddhist-Christian and interfaith and interreligious dialogue can be. In 1964 King received the Nobel Peace Prize and in 1967, just a year before his assassination, it was King who recommended his dear friend Vietnamese Buddhist Monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh for the same award. When seen side by side, their words create a weaving of the same knowing, inter-being.

In a real sense all life is interrelated. All men [humans] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be . . . This is the inter-related structure of reality. (King 289)

Thich Nhat Hanh explains inter-being, in his book, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*: “. . . explaining the process of looking deeply, [mindfulness practice] can reveal a deeper truth.”

“Looking deeply” means observing something or someone with so much concentration that the distinction between observer and observed disappears. The result is insight into the true nature of the object. When we look into the heart of a flower, we see clouds, sunshine, minerals, time, the earth, and everything in the cosmos in it . . . . In fact the flower is made entirely of non-flower elements; it has no independent, individual existence. It “inter-is” with everything else in the universe . . . . When we see the nature of interbeing, barriers between ourselves and others are dissolved, and peace, love and understanding are possible. Whenever there is understanding, compassion is born. (Hanh 10)

Practicing compassion has the power to transform. It can alchemize racism and open hearts and minds to new freedom and joy. This has been my experience of learning from, leading with, and sharing friendship with Professor Hallisey. In fact, for me, our friendship has been the space through which to “practice” and live out the eightfold path. It has especially helped provide me with the mindful speech and action necessary to disrupt white supremacy with wisdom and to do so from and within the sacred halls of the religious academy. This work has the power to permeate the stone walls of our institutions and the cultures therein. Yes, it takes remarkable courage, skillful means, love, compassion and invites us to smile to suffering.

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## The Pleasures and Benefits of Reading with Good Friends

Alexis Brown<sup>24</sup>

Once, Professor Hallisey casually remarked that Buddhaghosa, the renowned Indian Buddhist scholar and commentator who lived during the fifth century, was one of his very good friends. At the time I didn't understand what he meant by this, and I still don't, though I have been thinking about it quite a lot ever since. Admittedly, I am not entirely sure that I heard him correctly, and even if I did, whether or not he was being serious. Yet, despite all of this uncertainty regarding an offhand comment, perhaps a joke, of which I was undoubtedly making far too much, this connection between good friends and good readers (the latter of which Buddhaghosa unquestionably is) has stuck with me over the years. It sparked my curiosity about what *more* we are doing when we read texts in the company (both real and imagined) of others, and how Buddhist literary practices like reading and writing commentary as well as translating, revising, and repurposing texts, are perhaps not merely intellectual activities but also spiritual activities. The Buddha is said to have referred to friendship as the whole of the holy life, and if we think about reading commentary as an opportunity to read with a good friend, we can begin to see how commentaries (and commentators) don't just make us better readers of

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<sup>24</sup> Harvard University.

root texts, they can also make us better readers of ourselves in the same way good friends make this possible (*Samyutta Nikāya* 45.2).

How can reading with good friends help us see ourselves more clearly (or to use a phrase often repeated by Hallisey “become less opaque to ourselves”), thus helping us become better versions of ourselves? We can begin by considering what constitutes a good friend. The term can denote a person whose friendship is particularly special due to the duration or intensity of the relationship (in other words, an old or a close friend). Alternatively, a good friend can be one who is good *for* us, because they make us better—which is to say wiser, kinder, more energetic in our pursuits, more mindful, virtuous, et cetera—simply by being in their company. This is the kind of friend to which the Pāli term *kalyāṇamitta* refers. A good friend can also be someone who “tells it like it is,” meaning we can rely on them to tell us what we need to hear rather than what we want or expect to hear, and this is also good *for* us. A similar sentiment is attributed to the Buddha; “If one finds a person who points out one’s faults and who reproves one, one should follow such a wise and sagacious counselor as one would a guide to hidden treasure” (*Dhammapada* 76). It is in these last two senses of a good friend that we can start to see how a commentator, even who we have never met, can indeed be a good friend because they are good *for* us. Reading with good friends—both literally in the sense of reading in the company of others who are proximate, and also figuratively through such literary practices as reading a text in light of another’s interpretations—allows us to see things in the text we might have otherwise missed and it can also reflect back to us aspects of ourselves that we previously could not see, perhaps because we were selectively blind or inattentive to them. In this way, commentaries do more than supplement root texts with explication and analysis. While we read, they reflect back to us our own shortcomings as readers, and make us more self-reflective about our own movements of mind, including our interpretive choices, assumptions, and value judgements.

Both indirectly through his professed friendship with Buddhaghosa, as well as directly through the kind of reading he has modeled in his courses and his scholarship, Hallisey shows us a few different ways that we too can benefit from reading with friends who are good for us. One, of course, is to read with more talented readers than ourselves, who can teach us some new moves. In the case of Buddhaghosa, reading texts in the light of his commentaries can of course help us understand the text upon which he is commenting, but it can also teach us how to be better readers in general by modeling what is possible when one engages with the text creatively and carefully. For example, Buddhaghosa shows us that it is possible to make an enormous amount of meaning out of the very small Pāli word “*me*” in the phrase “*evam me suttam*,” which occurs at the beginning of Pāli suttas (*Khuddakapāthāṭṭhakathā* 101-104). As Buddhaghosa helps us see, the enclitic pronoun “*me*” in this phrase can indicate, among other possibilities, that the teachings about to be related are based on a hearing that is “mine” and might differ from someone else’s interpretation, or that the hearings were specifically “for me,” a rendering which has powerful implications for how it is that scripture comes to be so *personal*, meaning so many different things to so many different people in such a deep way.<sup>25</sup> Reading with Buddhaghosa teaches us the possibilities, and pleasures, of a pedantic reading, and this particular example reminds us that interpretation is always a relational activity.

Another way Hallisey shows us the value of reading with good friends, evident in his translations of the *Therīgāthā* as well as his scholarship on translation and Buddhist literature more broadly, is that to read a good translation is to “co-imagine.” In other words, reading a translation is to share in someone else’s mental image of something, and therefore an opportunity to see through another’s eyes instead of through one’s own.

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<sup>25</sup> This idea and language follows closely that of W.C. Smith on the topic of scripture in *What Is Scripture?* and was a signpost in Hallisey’s course on scriptural interpretation at Harvard Divinity School in 2012.

Hallisey observes, “The *Therīgāthā*, like literature generally, can enable us to see things that we have not seen before and to imagine things that we have not dreamed before.” This insight can also be productively applied to commentary, translation, and other literary practices that occasion the opportunity for us to co-imagine the world with an other, thus escaping the limits of our own egos and the filters and blinders that shape our perceptions of reality. In addition to allowing us to see things in texts that we could not see before, co-imagining with another reader is therefore an opportunity for overcoming oneself, transcending oneself, and in the best cases, becoming better than one was, much as Hallisey notes of the power of narrative. Self-transcendence seems to me to be a very powerful side-effect of reading with the voice of another, and it has serious implications for how we understand the potential of commentary as more than just a writing practice or a reading practice, but also a spiritual practice on the path to liberation.

One final way that Hallisey teaches us the value of reading with good friends is in a literal, conventional way, though no less impactful because of that. In many of the courses he has taught, but most notably those he established for the purpose of reading Pāli texts in community, I have seen first-hand how reading with friends certainly allows us to learn more from one another, but of equal significance, it also affords the opportunity to multiply joy. Not only is reading Pāli with others a joyful activity, but delighting in the fact of the joy itself just adds joy to joy, and that is a very good thing. In many of his speeches and essays, my good friend Kurt Vonnegut gave the sage advice to stop what we are doing every now and again and appreciate a good thing, saying aloud; “If this isn’t nice, I don’t know what is.” In his own way, Hallisey embodied a similar attitude in our reading classes, declaring “Very nice!” after he encountered a beautiful turn of phrase in a text, allowing all of us to stop and appreciate it too. He also said this when a student offered up an alternative way of interpreting the text, especially delighting Hallisey when it was an unexpected

interpretation created by an innovative rendering of a compound or an ambiguous case ending. This was often followed by, “That was fun, let’s try it again,” highlighting the surplus that translation opens up and the double-pleasure of discovering that surplus with others.

Of course, I could have asked Professor Hallisey what he meant when he called Buddhaghosa his good friend, but that would have only diminished the interpretive possibilities, thus precluding me from the pleasures of thinking about what *more* his words could mean, an activity he himself taught me how to do, and one I believe Buddhaghosa taught him how to do. Besides, many literary theorists have already convincingly argued for the irrelevance of an author’s original intention, in which case what he meant is not as important as what he said. What he said allowed me to think about reading and literary practices in a new light, and it showed me the value in looking in two different directions while reading, neither of which were the direction I had previously thought to look. Namely, his comment invited me to look sideways to other texts, other readers, and other techniques, in order to understand the text before me in all of its richness. And as a good friend does, the remark allowed me to look inward while reading, reflecting on my own movements of mind in order to “become less opaque to myself,” and also to “glimpse a different potential” for myself, as he says in the introduction to his translation of the *Therīgāthā*.

In this essay, I have tried to include some of my favorite things Hallisey has said. Here is my favorite thing someone else once said about Hallisey: “If you ask him for directions to a particular place, he’ll draw you a map of the whole world.” It’s true, and those of us who have been fortunate to have him as our teacher are in the possession of this invaluable resource, a map that does not simply tell us what is out there but inspires the confidence to go see for ourselves. His map is, in its own way, a kind of commentary that allows us to co-imagine the world with him, to see it

as he sees it. Above all, Hallisey's remarks about Buddhaghosa invite us to consider the many different ways texts teach, form, and transform readers such that we can become better versions of ourselves, because as Hallisey often reminds us, "tomorrow doesn't have to be like today." Reading with good friends, we might say, is one way we can do what he urges us to do in the title of one of his articles: "Don't Stop Thinking about Tomorrow Together."

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## Woven By Me, Especially For You

Odeya Eshel<sup>26</sup>

### Introduction

The *Dakkhiṇāvibhanga-sutta*<sup>27</sup> analyzes the act of proper giving. This ethical teaching is framed within a story about Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, the Buddha's maternal aunt and stepmother, giving him a cloth that she made especially for him. The Buddha tells Gotamī to give it to the saṅgha, thus venerating both him and the saṅgha. Three times Gotamī asks to give it only to the Buddha, and three times he declines. The upfront message of the sutta is that collective offerings are superior to individual ones, and the frame story represents an exemplary model of this ethical principle: by taking the extreme case—refusing a present even from your own mother—collective offering is established as an ethical summit. The Buddha's behavior is meant to encourage readers to abandon their personal preferences for the sake of this supreme ideal. And yet, instead of being inspired by this moral austerity, some readers might be disturbed by the picture of a mother's gift repeatedly rejected.

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<sup>26</sup> The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

<sup>27</sup> MN 142. All abbreviations and page numbers follow the conventions of the Pali Text Society. All translations of the MN are taken from Bodhi and Ñānamoli (1995). Translations of the *Aṭṭhakathā* are my own, using the edition of the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyāna* (Vipassana Research Institute).

From an affective perspective, placing this doctrine amid an intimate, familial scene, is almost subversive to its message. The *nidāna*, that is, the narrative section at the beginning of a sutta which contextualizes the sutta's teaching, can also raise a simple ethical question: should a son so blatantly deny the wish of his mother, the one he owes the most to? The gap between the sutta's doctrine and the strong human impulse it suggests makes it hard to understand how one can learn a relevant ethical lesson resonating with her heart.

One valuable lesson I've learned from Charlie is careful listening, by which he means caring attention to textual details, as well as a welcoming disposition toward the range of responses such attention produces. Charlie has taught me that textual understanding is tied to self-understanding and that cultivating curiosity towards each eventually enriches both. Emotional attunement is a working tool in the art of reading scriptures, one that enables the reader to "join" with a text in the most human manner.

These ideas are considered in Hallisey's essay "The Surprise of Scripture's Advice," which examines the nature of personal relations towards scriptures. Focusing on some instances where readers received "personal religious advice," Hallisey describes the attitudes that make one experience a text "as if it is talking to him" (28). His underlying assumption is that a text is turned into scripture when it "not only can be applied to oneself, but is directed to oneself" (30). To explain this surprising phenomenon, he turns to the reader's role in this dynamic attributing it to his attuned mode and traditional practices of learning. But he also asks if these practices "are more associated with some texts than with others" (30) introducing a relational attitude towards scriptures that sees the text as a subject capable of having a personal bond with its readers.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hallisey's relational conceptualization is building upon the work of W.C. Smith.



Hallisey's approach encourages us to learn the text, the reader, and the relationship between the two. A sincere recognition of the text as a subject assumes it has intentions and a role in shaping the engagement with the reader. Reading scriptures in terms of relationship invites us to ask also how *scriptures* work to become meaningful for their readers. What are the responses it seeks to produce? And if this is truly a relationship between a reader and a scripture, what does the dialogue of this couple look like? The relational articulation can expand our methods of inquiry by taking any scripture, even a "personally" challenging one, and carefully observing the relationship it yields. The ethically troubled reader of the *Dakkhiṇāvibhanga-sutta*, for example, would address her embarrassment seriously asking if this emotion is an intended result of a thoughtfully constructed text. If one regards a text as personal, then any emotion it produces would prompt inquiry.

Before examining the specific response the *Dakkhiṇāvibhanga-sutta* generates, I wish to think a bit more about the nature of this relationship and its possible manifestations in light of another picture of Buddhist kinship.

### **Indeed, There are Others Being Reborn Here**

The *Acchariya-abbhuta-sutta* (MN 123) relates, among other wonders in the Buddha's biography, that at the moment of his descent from heaven into his mother's womb, a great light appeared in the world. So great was the light that it reached even to "those abysmal world interspaces of vacancy" (Bodhi & Ñāṇamoli 980) where utter darkness usually prevails. The beings residing in these cracks between the worlds, struck by the sudden light, perceived the sight of other beings and said: "So indeed, sir, there are other beings reborn here!" (980). The darkness, apparently, also meant extreme solitude.

When residing in utterly dark places, it is hard to see the face of another. Though framed as cosmological information, this picture can also be interpreted as a remark on the human condition. Dark times can prevent recognizing others who share an experience, it can avert a personal bond, and loneliness seems inevitable. Following this line of thought, the wonder of the Buddha's presence is his ability to make beings see the presence of others; he makes it obvious that even when one suffers, with the right lighting, she will see and be seen by other accessible beings. In this state, a relationship is produced.

This picture can help us better understand the different affinities a reader can have with a religious text according to Hallisey. For him, there are two ways of reading: The first is when a text is subordinated to the reader's skills as an interpreter and remains restricted to the intellectual domain. The second is when a person is also subordinated to the text, seeing it as valuable to the world in which it is received (33). While in the first way the text is perceived as an object in a one-sided relationship, in the second the reader and the text are both subjects participating in a reciprocal relationship. Though both are appreciated in traditional learning settings and often even employed together, it is only the second way of reading that can yield personal advice.

Without committing too much to the comparison, we can think of the first way of reading as beings in the darkness, governed by their solitude, not able to participate in a relationship. The *aṭṭhakathā* (the commentary to the Pāli canon) elaborates on this scene, describing the hell-beings as clinging to the bottom of the cosmic *Cakkavāla* mountains in search of food. As they draw near each other within arm's reach they think: "Here's food I can get" (Ps.iv.178). However, in their attempt to seize it, they fall into acidic water, dissolving in excruciating pain. In this relationship, other beings are perceived as objects, indeed as food, perhaps the ultimate example of a utilitarian attitude. Not to suggest this is

the future awaiting those who read scriptures in the first way, we recognize that, when dominated by this way of reading, the text remains an object of the reader's interpretation, to be consumed by his intellect. Though this mode of reading uncovers certain facets of the text, it conceals its other mode of being—that of an equal entity in a genuine and interpersonal dialogue, which is capable of “personally speaking” to the reader.

To continue this analogy, Hallisey's second mode of reading is the mutual recognition of other beings indeed as beings. The sutta describes how with the appearance of the light, all beings are perceived and immediately engaged with one another. The vocative in the hell-abiders' bewildered statement alludes to this communicative attitude: “Indeed, sir!” This mutual sight requires not only for the head to be lifted from one's own needs, but also an amount of empathy to encompass the other where he's at. In this sort of reading, the text turns from food to a subject, equally significant as the reader. It is important to note that the attunement of the reader should be understood together with the text's active effort to be heard. It is not only that the reader sees the text; for its part, the text too turns to the reader and creates a relationship. Much like the appearance of the Buddha's light, the mutual sight between readers and texts can also be described as an *acchariya-abbhuta*—a marvel beyond comprehension, a wonder not expected, or in Hallisey's words—a surprise.

### **The Blessed One Too has been Very Helpful**

The surprise from the text's ability to convey a personal message to a variety of readers is tied to the surprise of recognizing a subject speaking from within it. When reading scriptures as a relationship and seeing the “face” of the text, the reader also sees herself, thus feeling “as if” the text is speaking to her. If we genuinely want to appreciate scriptures as a

relationship, we should carefully listen to the conversation between the text and the reader and comprehend the subtleties of their dialogue. From this perspective, I want to offer that a careful reading of the *Dakkhiṇāvibhanga-sutta* shows how it sees its audience *where they are* and embodies the complex emotions connected with proper giving. While some readers can be inspired by the sutta's ideal principles, others can hear the personally challenging aspects entangled in this ethical deed.

The reader's uneasiness towards the Buddha's refusal to take the robe can be regarded as a tool to understand his teaching; one shouldn't ignore one's care for others, rather, the realization of the teaching should be derived exactly from this care. The sutta voices this rationale through Ānanda, a character who often works to confirm the reader's human reaction. Asking the Buddha to accept the cloth, he validates the doctrine's painful implications and the reader's possible controversial emotions. The Buddha's answer: "That is so, Ānanda. That is so!" (Bodhi & Ñāṇamoli 1103), strengthens this affirmation, asking the reader to listen to the teaching without dismissing the hardships it bears.

In his request Ānanda mentions the good things Gotamī has done for the Buddha and what he has done for her, exposing the generous history they share. This turns the generic picture of a lay follower visiting the Buddha to an intimate encounter between two persons with a rich shared past. This textual shift is also seen in the description of Gotamī, now depicted using five different epithets: "As his mother's sister, she was his nurse, his foster mother, the one who gave him milk. She suckled the Blessed One when his own mother died" (Bodhi & Ñāṇamoli 1102). Ānanda turns Gotamī from a name to a person, a mother, or more precisely, to the Buddha's *own* mother. Gotamī is revealed as a subject through this string of portrayals which encapsulates her affinity to the Buddha. The positive emotion towards Gotamī is not dismissed; rather, it is nurtured, even emphasized.

The *aṭṭhakathā* too doesn't diminish the heartache of this scene. Commenting on the term "She was his nurse" it says: "She made him grow. For when you weren't able to use your own hands and feet to perform their duties, it was her hand and feet that brought you up" (Ps.v.69). The commentator explains the work of child raising as extending oneself for the sake of another; a mother and her child as almost integrated bodies. The passage is phrased in the second person plural voice, addressing either the Buddha—by extending the voice of Ananda—or the reader.<sup>29</sup> The direct, even personal, tone of the text calls readers to imagine the Buddha as a helpless baby or also to remember their own mothers' beneficial deeds.

This voice is carried also in the next comment, elaborating what is meant by "his foster mother" the text specifies that "Having cleaned, fed, and provided drink a few times every day, she nourished you" (Ps.v.69). The enumeration of these mundane, yet demanding, acts seems like an effort to proclaim mothers' status as subjects and evoke gratitude not only for Gotamī but also for the reader's mother. The text becomes personal by speaking to its bothered readers (here even not "as if") saying: I see you. Do think of everything your mother has done for you, and with this in mind, engage with the doctrine.

There is more to say about the tie between ethics and emotions in this sutta. But what we can learn from this short reading, is that the complex emotions it generates are the meaningful results of a consciously crafted text. The reader's attuned mode reveals a voice patiently waiting to be heard, or perhaps it is this voice that yields the reader's openness to the text. Either way, this teaches us about the reciprocal aspect of this relationship, about the necessity of careful listening to all participants

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<sup>29</sup> I find it rhetorically significant that this comment and the one following it don't conclude with an *iti*, which is usually found when the *aṭṭhakathā* expands the words of a character in the sutta.

including ourselves, about the effort to see, and also the wonder of being seen.

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## Language and Ethics

Beatrice Chrystall<sup>30</sup>

This paper focuses on two aspects of what Charlie has taught me about language and about its relation to ethics.<sup>31</sup> To explore these aspects, I borrow an idea from Dandin, writing in his study of poetics, the *Kāvyaḍarśa*, “Mirror of Literature.” Dandin here analyzes the literary ornaments (*alaṃkāra*), which he defines as “the factors that make poetry pretty” (Bronner *Extreme Poetry* 214). The first of these ornaments, according to Dandin, is the *svabhāvokti*, the “description of the true nature of something” (Hallisey *Works and Persons* 725). In his analysis, Dandin insists that the “description of the true nature of something” “must reveal ‘the multifaceted nature of something’” (Hallisey *Beauty* 144). One of Charlie’s greatest gifts, and one of his greatest gifts to his students, is his ability to see and make clear “the multifaceted nature” of whatever he is considering.

Charlie’s gift is particularly revelatory in relation to the language of literary texts. His sensitivity and attentiveness to “the multifaceted

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<sup>30</sup> Harvard University.

<sup>31</sup> For the purposes of this reflection, I use “ethical” to include both Foucault’s understanding of ethics as “the self’s relation to the self” and Ricoeur’s vision of ethics as “how one aims to live well with and for others” (Hallisey *Intuition and Judgment* 142).

nature” of literary language reveal aspects of literary texts that his readers<sup>32</sup> might otherwise neglect. This paper focuses on two aspects of Hallisey’s treatment of literary language: the way the literary is intimately connected with and informed by other, nonliterary factors—political, religious, social, for example—and the multilayered nature of literary language in the sense of the possibilities afforded by polysemy and other literary effects present in the language. These aspects certainly enrich our understanding of the texts and of what they might have meant to the traditions that created and cherished them. This paper, however, focuses on how Hallisey’s unusual sensitivity to the multifacetedness of language can also have ethical implications for the readers of his publications, implications for their understanding of their own context and their potential ways of being within it.<sup>33</sup> It explores how both aspects of Hallisey’s approach to texts might affect the reader at an ethical level and also how—though they address different facets of the text—they might in fact reinforce each other in tending to effect a similar outcome in the reader. To

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, no one response or interpretation is assumed for every reader of Hallisey’s work. This paper is not intended to be exhaustive; it simply draws attention to possible avenues of response and interpretation that Hallisey’s work allows his readers. Necessarily, the possible responses are multiple.

<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, given the space constraints of this paper, it is not possible to address here the ethical implications for the reader of Hallisey’s work in relation to the participants in the historical context of the text’s creation and use. We cannot, of course, as observers of long-dead people, be said to be in a relationship with them in the sense of sharing a mutual engagement, which would necessarily engender explicit ethical relations between us and them. Nonetheless, I consider that the stance we take toward the historical people whose work we study, and how we view them as people in relation to ourselves, are indeed ethical issues, and it is our responsibility as observers to accord them as much as possible of their full humanity in our portrayals and our analyses of their work. It is one of the things I admire most about Charlie as a teacher that in his teaching he actively embraces that responsibility, draws attention to it, and always encourages his students to remember and honor it.



this end, I will go through potential ethical implications for Hallisey's reader of the two aspects individually, then indicate how I see them as complementary, as tending toward the same general orientation in the reader.

### **A Model: Narrative and Ethics**

Let us first, however, consider a potential model for how the two aspects of language might impact Hallisey's reader ethically. In "Narrative, Subethics, and the Moral Life," Hallisey and Anne Hansen—responding to Hansen's observation that Khmer refugees in the United States "used narrative in their ethical reflections about their own lives" (*Narrative* 321)—explored various ways that narrative might work to shape the reader's moral life. They focused on one story, that of Patachara that seemed to resonate particularly with the refugees and to have a transformative effect on their lives. In this story Patachara, a woman from the time of the Buddha, successively lost each member of her close family and eventually her sanity. However, through the compassionate intervention of the Buddha, she ultimately regained her sanity and attained freedom from her overwhelming grief. This story may have resonated particularly with the Khmer refugees because many of them had—like Patachara—lost multiple family members, during the brutal reign of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Hallisey and Hansen suggest that one of the most important things the story of Patachara allowed the refugees was to develop a sense of distance and detachment from their own lives. In the story, they conclude, the incident that brought about Patachara's liberation from suffering effected "a personal conversion by refiguring her experience into something distant from herself and allowing her to become detached from the story in which she herself is the main character" (322-323) and they suggest that "something analogous happens when a refugee tells Patachara's

story” (323). They propose that “a refiguration of our moral lives is achieved through narrative insofar as it enables us to cultivate a crucial distance from our own circumstances and gives us a way of seeing our lives with a degree of detachment.”<sup>34</sup> While this argument is particularly apt in relation to narrative, the idea of creating “a crucial distance from our own circumstances” and “a way of seeing our lives with a degree of detachment” also serves as a useful model for what Hallisey’s sensitivity to the multifacetedness of literary language can offer his readers.

Let us consider two aspects of Hallisey’s analysis in “Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Cultures,” a historical study of Sinhala literary cultures, and their possible implications for the reader.

### **Multiple Factors at Play in the Literary**

To help identify the values at play in those literary cultures, one approach Hallisey uses is to read closely “the portraits of literary figures found in various sources” (707). These include “extended portraits of poets found in literature itself and also briefer accounts found in historical works in both Pāli and Sinhala” (707), accounts which contain descriptions of “various kings and ministers as poets and authors” (ib.).

Hallisey’s sensitive readings of these portraits reveal “how literary practices interact with literary and nonliterary identities” (707). A prime example of such interaction—in this case, religious and political influences shaping the literary—is provided by the statement of intent made by the author of the *Siyabaslakara* (“Poetics of one’s own language,” as Hallisey translates it (691), the ninth-century Sinhala-language version of Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyādarśa*, a handbook for poets, and one of the most important

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. The authors are using the term “refiguration” here with reference to Ricoeur’s distinction of “different ways in which moral life is enabled by narrative” (308).

works for Sinhala literary traditions over many centuries. As Hallisey says, the author, a king,

. . . explained his motivation for writing the text in terms that echo aspirations to Buddhahood familiar in the Theravāda tradition; it is not unlikely that as a king, he may have been looking for a way to display his nature as a *bodhisattva*:

May even these simple words of mine be for the benefit of others, my words wherein I have shown at least some aspects of what animates . . . poetry, and ornaments of sound and sense. I have attempted to convey at least some aspects of this.

Noble people in this world make mental aspirations . . . with a delighted mind; they make an effort to see that even their bone marrow is of some benefit to the world of beings. (704)

That is, in writing this eminently literary text, the king is at the same time seeking to further his religious and political aspirations, themselves tightly connected, given the values of the Sinhala Buddhist tradition of the time.<sup>35</sup> It is Hallisey's sensitive reading of the passage that has revealed these extra layers of meaning.

Hallisey's analysis of the depictions of literary figures shows not only that "the interpenetration of the literary, the political, and the religious in the portraits of literati in Sinhala literary cultures" (715) was

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<sup>35</sup> As Hallisey notes, including a quotation from the *Siyabasalakara*, "By the tenth century it was being claimed that the Buddha had predicted that 'none but future Buddhas [*bosathu*; Skt. *bodhisattva*] would become kings of prosperous Lanka'" (702). One implication of this for kings is obviously that, to be considered a legitimate king, they must also be viewed as a *bodhisattva*.

extremely extensive, but also that the participants in that literary culture were themselves aware of it and indeed exploring it. He concludes that in these portraits, “we can see Sinhala literary cultures interpreting the relation between literature and other cultural concerns” (707).

Hallisey’s reader may well have already been aware that nonliterary factors, such as political or religious aspirations, can be expressed in the literary. However, Hallisey’s great sensitivity to literary language allows him to notice details indicating nonliterary factors at play that a less sensitive reader might miss. In this way, Hallisey is able to draw his reader’s attention to more layers of significance in a text than they might otherwise have noticed.

### **Ethical Implications of this Analysis for Hallisey’s Reader**

What ethical implications might Hallisey’s sensitivity to the multiplicity of factors at play in literary language have for the reader of his work? Hallisey’s reader gains through this aspect of his analysis a greater appreciation of and respect for the ways that historical persons, as authors of the texts, used the literary to navigate strategically within the social and political systems they found themselves in. This restores to the historical agents, in the reader’s understanding, their dignity as thinking participants in complex systems, a dignity that less nuanced historical accounts have often obscured. It not only leads the reader to hold the historical persons in higher esteem but can also affect in another way how the reader thinks about both the historical persons in themselves and also about themselves in relation to those historical persons. Seeing historical persons in this fuller, more multilayered way, and hence holding them in higher esteem, can lead the reader to be more conscious of the humanity they share with us modern observers, as humans equally trying to navigate within the conditions in which they find themselves. This greater

sense of shared humanity can work in both directions in the reader—toward the historical figures and toward themselves. Toward the historical figures, it can lead the reader to see them as continuous with us, as part of a larger human community stretching backward between us and them. Toward the reader themselves, it can lead the reader to feel a sense of commonality and distant community with those historical people.

In this way, Hallisey's multifaceted depiction can cause the reader to feel themselves part of a larger community than they were aware of before. It has expanded the circle of connection that the reader sees as the context within which they exist. This constitutes a subtle but meaningful shift in how the reader perceives themselves, providing the opportunity for the kind of distance from their prior ways of thinking and detachment from their own life that Hallisey and Hansen described in "Narrative and Ethics."

### **Multiple Layers of Meaning in Literary Language**

In "Works and Persons" Hallisey makes clear that some premodern Sinhala literary cultures "celebrated an ethos of complexity and difficulty" (733). This love of complexity is reflected in how greatly they valued the idea of there being "a host of secondary signs and significations that lay obscure in a poem" (738). He explains, "At the level of signification, there were meanings that awaited discovery through the inferences made by the reader" (ibid.). Hallisey shows that these hidden but implicit layers of meaning in literary language were conveyed by a variety of means, including, for example, the use of traditional aesthetic elements of the literary, such as poetic "ornaments" (*alaṅkāra*). He also explores what he calls the "occult" (740) significance of certain letter combinations or arrangements in the texts. For example, certain arrangements of letters were

understood to produce desired effects in the world, such as auspiciousness or long life.

All such features of the text imply that the surface meaning of words is not the only thing relevant to understanding the import of the text, rather there are multiple modes of literary meaning-making at play simultaneously, and the reader must be alert to them all or they will miss the full significance borne by the text. In order to be alert to these modes of literary meaning-making, the reader of the texts would need to have been highly trained in the demanding norms of those literary traditions, which precisely defined the textual mechanisms by which these effects might be achieved.<sup>36</sup> Clearly these literary traditions anticipated readers that were highly trained in diverse literary techniques.

Readers who are not so trained, including modern students coming to the texts without an extensive background in the study of these textual mechanisms, would not be able to notice, let alone appreciate, some of these textual effects. Not only is Hallisey well versed in these norms and so able to draw out aspects of the texts that modern readers who have not spent years studying them would not be able to appreciate. I suggest that his own unusual sensitivity and attentiveness to the possibility of polysemy in language make him particularly alert to the variety of ways that authors from these literary traditions imbued their texts with more meaning than is apparent at the surface level.

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<sup>36</sup> As Hallisey says, “The practice of difficulty was part of the technology that allowed a poet to use the sign system of literature—a system learned at the feet of teachers and through the study of the various handbooks for poets on grammar, prosody, and poetics, as well as lexical works. These works, ostensibly produced to make the sign system of poetry accessible to novices, also raised the standards of difficulty by practices of classification and standardization of literary forms that were acceptable” (737).

### **Ethical Implications of this Analysis for Hallisey's Reader**

Hallisey's analysis of the multilayeredness of the language in Sinhala literary texts causes the reader to marvel at the sophistication of the participants in these literary cultures, both writer and reader—at the sophistication of their understanding of what can be achieved with the expressive capacities of language and at their extraordinary skill in making use of these capacities to achieve their ends. Again, the reader is led to hold those historical figures—the authors capable of creating such texts and the readers capable of appreciating them—in higher esteem, and to think of them as not just sharing a common humanity with the reader, but as, in fact, having much to teach the reader. The reader, humbled, is brought to adopt a more modest stance toward themselves, recognizing that they could learn a lot from people who lived long ago, who had skills they do not, and eager to learn from Sinhala and other literary cultures about the manifold ways that language can be used.

From a different perspective, the reader's refined engagement with the literary texts, brought about by Hallisey's analysis, can also have an ongoing effect on their wider reading. This refined engagement brings the reader delight in the shifting of perspective at the moment of seeing other possible meanings and enjoyment in appreciating the interplay between those multiple meanings. This delight and enjoyment then encourage the reader, in subsequent reading of literary works, to hold themselves back from being satisfied with the initially apparent meaning of a text, to remind themselves to be open to the possibility of there being other layers of meaning implicit in the words. The gap thus generated between the initial perception of the face-value meaning of the words of the text and the subsequent recognition of additional layers of meaning does not only bring the reader pleasure. Experiencing this gap regularly trains the reader, as it were, to leave space for that gap, to stand back mentally at a

distance from the initial understanding of a text to allow space for any possible secondary understandings to become clear.

The reader's experience of shifting their vision—made habitual and hence engrained by the repeated experience of reading literature and perceiving the multifacetedness of its language—may also lead the reader to extend this awareness of the capacity of language to other, nonliterary contexts. That is, in a nonliterary situation, the reader may refrain from stopping at the surface-level interpretation of language to imaginatively inquire whether there might be other dimensions at play in the situation that they might not have noticed. The reader has thus learned to create a certain distance from their prior patterns of thought, which may permit them to see their life with some degree of detachment, as described by Hallisey and Hansen. Becoming used to occupying that previously unfamiliar space can encourage the reader to explore new ways of interpreting and hence relating to the world.

### **How are the Effects of the Multiplicity of Relevant Factors and the Multilayeredness of Meaning Complementary?**

Through an enhanced awareness of the multilayered nature of the language of literature, Hallisey's reader can be transformed into one who has come to see themselves, to some degree, as part of a larger human community trying to navigate their way through life with the tools at their disposal, wanting to learn more from other literary cultures about the manifold capacities of language, and benefiting from the learned habit of shifting their vision, of leaving space for words to have more import than they might superficially appear to have. These developments all have the capacity to generate in the reader a distance from their previous experience of life. In that distance, there is a space for new, richer, more nuanced understandings of their reality to open up to the reader. These are



eminently ethical effects, inasmuch as they concern the reader's sense of themselves, their understanding of the context they find themselves in and of the possibilities that re-envisioned context might allow them.

Having benefited incalculably from Charlie's capacity to see the multifaceted nature of things, I am profoundly grateful that I had the good fortune to come under the tutelage of a teacher who is truly—as the author of the *Siyabaslakara* described the one who suggested he compose it—”like a casket for the gems of the virtues (*guṇa*) of a poet” (708). Those gems have immeasurably illumined and beautified my life.

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## Learning “To See in Many Different Ways”

Kristin Scheible<sup>37</sup>

Reflecting on the didacticism of Buddhist literature, Charlie Hallisey once remarked:

The *Tuṅḍilovāda Sutta* frequently uses similes, although this is not simply another part of its literary style. As is well known, analogies, similes, and metaphors are a common feature of Theravadin homiletics. Indeed, analogy and simile were apparently considered very effective teaching tools, appropriate for even the dullest student. In the *Naṅgalīsa Jātaka*, for example, the Bodhisatta uses analogy as a teaching method of last resort with a dullard, thinking that “making comparisons and giving reasons, and the continuous practice of comparing and reasoning on his part will enable me to impart learning to him.” (Hallisey *Tuṅḍilovāda* 163)

I must be that dullest of students, as I am exceedingly drawn to—and transformed by—analogies, similes, and metaphors in my own reading, learning, writing, and teaching practice. Many of the most effective and vibrant ones were introduced to me by my teacher, Charlie Hallisey, and I hear him in my voice when I pass them along to my own students.

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<sup>37</sup> Reed College.

When I read, I recognize the role he has played in constructing me as a reader. I am aware that rhetorical devices in literature function something like street signs on the two-way street that is fluent reading, where meanings are brought into the traffic of interpretation from the directions both of the text and the reader (there is an example, albeit quotidian and inelegant, of how I reach for metaphors). Rhetorical strategies are structures for meaning making, whether embedded in our primary sources or constructed through our interpretive work as scholars.

In an eye-opening preface he recently wrote to prime readers for a multivocal retelling of the Buddha's life story, Hallisey considers the remarkable utility of an architectural metaphor once deployed by John Strong, the "belvedere." Hallisey explains that upon much consideration, he "came to see the aptness and generative power of this architectural term as a metaphor for Buddhist stories. Moreover, the metaphor helps us to become alert to what can happen to us when we 'enter' into the 'built' spaces that Buddhists stories are" (Hallisey 2023, xiv). In essence, Hallisey advocates for active, self-conscious reading practices:

If reading Buddhist stories is like looking out from inside a belvedere, then learning how to read Buddhist stories well is like trying out and sharing different ways of moving about and positioning oneself within a belvedere, making it possible to see in many different ways. (*Learning* xvi)

Hallisey has proffered his hermeneutical strategies and insights to countless students and readers. You might say he has ushered us to the beautiful views, helping us to see more clearly and appreciate more thoroughly the simultaneously expansive and intimate work of Buddhist literature. It is our good fortune to share that interpretive space, as collective reading opens the possibility of new and more various perspectives. Hallisey says:

If we are lucky, we may come to a belvedere [or Buddhist text] with someone else, someone who has brought us to it because of their own experience in it and with it. If we are still luckier, they share with us what they themselves have learned about how much there is to see, if only one tries to look from different angles and different positions. (*Learning* xv).

Hallisey walks that walk; he has intentionally sought out partners for both reading and writing, and some of his very valuable insights are interwoven with the voice of his co-readers/co-writers. Hallisey has teamed with Anne Hansen to reflect on another “probably well known,” work-like aspect of Buddhist narrative literature, explained with reference to movement toward new views:

As is probably well known, both experientially and theoretically, to all readers, through narrative we are able to imagine ourselves in the place of another. It might also be said that when, in reading, we leave aside our own social location, with its constitutive cares and perspectives, and enter imaginatively into the experience of a character in a narrative, we cultivate capabilities that are necessary to all moral agency. (Hallisey and Hansen 314)

They note that the act of reading narratives involves relating to characters, imagining their motivations and inclinations as similar to one’s own. And they advocate for the cultivation of a reading strategy of equal importance, the cultivation of “a sub-ethical capacity to recognize that the ‘thoughts, plans, ambitions and knowledge’ of others are also quite different from their own” (Hallisey and Hansen 314).

Ethical reading practices like those articulated in this groundbreaking essay have paved the way for other shared reading and writing

experiences opening up “new interpretive possibilities,” ones where the diversity in views is seen and appreciated. Having engaged in reading projects with Womanists, for example, Hallisey shares insights:

Womanism opens up a critically self-conscious space that helps us to reflect upon what we want to know and how we do know. What I have in mind is the lesson offered by Emily Townes, a Womanist ethicist, when she says, “Good writers teach me that there is a world in our eye, but it not the only one.” (*Womanist* 73)

Hallisey teamed with Yigal Bronner to celebrate the work of David Shulman in a must-read project for lovers of South Asian literature in translation (one that is freely shared as an Open Access text, true to the generous spirit driving the project). Translation is a particular form of reading and writing that engenders sharing with others, and the new readings that translations inspire illustrate the two-way street nature of sensitive reading. They write:

Translations, like all texts, are incomplete until they are absorbed and transformed in the thoughts and deeds of new readers. But in a way that would have delighted Borges, it is the originals that are incomplete until they are translated. In the end, it does not really matter which came first, as reading is always an intersubjective activity, a meeting of minds. (Bronner and Hallisey 8)

In his translation of the *Therīgāthā*, Hallisey ushers us through the built space of the text which by one mode of navigation is clearly and intentionally structured in clusters/cloisters determined by number of verses included in each poem. To modern or non-Buddhist aesthetic sensibilities, perhaps this structure seems an arbitrary architecture. Hallisey recommends suspending a perhaps natural tendency to read for historical

information about the first bhikkhunīs. He even downplays the didactic and exemplary function of the poems; while the dharma, teaching, is ever present, he recommends reading sensitively, attending to its affective and aesthetic impact. Hallisey primes us for the possible views we may experience:

The *Therīgāthā*, like literature generally, can enable us to see things that we have not seen before and to imagine things that we have not dreamed of before. When reading the poems of the *Therīgāthā*, we can experience a surprising pleasure from the clarity and truth of the epiphanies they can trigger, but perhaps more important, when we experience such epiphanies, the poems give us a chance to be free from ourselves and from our usual places in the world—at least free imaginatively—and to glimpse a different potential for ourselves in light of that epiphany. In our day-to-day lives, we may tend to assume all too often—and dread all too often—that tomorrow will be just like today, but in the pleasures that literature affords us, we may see immediately that tomorrow does not have to be like today. Such immediacy makes free. (*Therigatha ix*)

If, as readers, we allow ourselves to get lost in the space, to follow the views, maybe even read aloud, we bring new vitality and a shared vocality to the voice of the women who may have originally uttered the verse. We might read regardless of our gender or social location (“we leave aside our own social location, with its constitutive cares and perspectives”) and merge with the voices of many intervening readings. Not only is our reading a reactivation of the sentiments, experiences, thoughts, and articulations of women far removed from our life context, but within the poems themselves there is a layering of voices, a multivocality, many rooms, many views, all at once. Within the text itself there is a structural

multivocality—in several instances, nuns assume, relive, and retell the particularly poignant, heart-wrenching stories of Patachara and Kisagotami who children had died. When I read Patachara’s and Kisagotami’s stories of the loss of their children, recast through the voices of women who may have also lost their children, I enter into a reflective zone where the worst possible thing is past tense, and the catalyst for Awakening (“reading is always an intersubjective activity, a meeting of minds”). My proximate, chronically acute fear of losing my child (I have a son with cancer) lifts, as my voice lifts with theirs.

I am grateful that I have been well-primed by Charlie to read for the stories behind the stories and for the metaphors that move stories along, as if “trying out and sharing different ways of moving about and positioning oneself within a belvedere, making it possible to see in many different ways” (Hallisey *Learning* xvi). The more I read, the more that shared stories and metaphors catch my eye and my imagination, revealing a deep interconnectedness which textual scholars might formally attribute to intertextuality, my students might call plagiarism, but that I now see as brilliant and beautiful.

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## My Teacher as a Practitioner of Creative Close Reading

Liyanage Amarakeerthi<sup>38</sup>

Weeks before I sat down to write this essay, I was reading a certain book on South Asian narratives. Though I was reading it for pleasure, and not thinking to connect it with this piece, the title of the book lingered in my mind. For me sensitivity towards the “literary” and meticulous ways of paying attention to the “literary” have been the most important lessons I have learned from Professor Charles Hallisey. The “literary” or literariness as a mode of discourse or a way of sustaining a discourse, has been subjected to careful theoretical considerations with the advent of formalism, New Criticism, structuralism, and poststructuralism and so on (Widdowson *Literature*). And Sanskrit literary theory is quite meticulous in explaining the “literary.” Drawing on the many sources of both East and the West, Professor Hallisey highlights the literariness of South Asian texts, especially Sinhala ones, warning us of the poverty of scholarship that turns the literary works into mere containers of facts ignoring their beauty and pleasure, which are, more often than not, their primary functions. This sensitivity is extremely important when Sinhala/South Asian texts are read and studied because in those pre-modern literary cultures even the texts related to subjects such as history, medicine, art,

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architecture, archaeology, astrology and so on have inherent literary qualities demanding attention to their literariness in addition to their “content/facts.”

This respect for the nature of a text in a distant time and space is a moral position as well. The Sanskrit word for the connoisseur of literature is *sahr̥daya*, “co-hearted one” or “one with a heart equal to that of the poet.” The ideal reader is essentially similar to the author. For me this is an ethical position about reading, even though a reader’s being “similar” to the author is more of an idealist position than a real one. Professor Hallisey has been an exemplary practitioner of the ethics of reading closely with a heart similar to the author’s.

Prof. Charles Hallisey was my teacher when I was studying for my PhD (2000-4) at the University of Wisconsin. By the time he arrived at UW-Madison I had finished my MA (1998-2000) in the same department. My meeting with him represents one of key turning points in my life, and he has remained my mentor ever since. My life as a scholar in literature, a literary critic, and as a fiction writer has been influenced quite remarkably by the presence of Prof. Hallisey as a teacher, a mentor, and a friend. The presence of a great human being in one’s life cannot be explained in exact terms. A single definition cannot capture what he or she has meant to you over the years. But you know that the person’s presence has been a source of strength and wisdom in ways you cannot explain in exact terms. That has been the presence of Prof. Charles Hallisey in my life, even when he lives on the other side of the globe. Let me now return to the book that I was reading prior to beginning to write this essay.

*Sensitive Reading: The Pleasures of South Asian Literature in Translation* is an unusual book edited by Yigal Bronner and Charles Hallisey. It is an excellent book explaining how South Asian classical literature can be read in a way that does justice to the texts by attending to their many layers of meaning and making their power of signification to the time of reading.

As the contributors to the volume demonstrate well, South Asian classics, as any other classic, signify numerous new things when they are read in new contexts by new readers. Moreover, the book is about making the pleasure of reading South Asian classics relevant when we read them now in our times, especially when those texts are read in translation. In the book a renowned group of scholars closely reads a set of translated works by the eminent scholar in Sanskrit and Tamil, David Shulman.

Sensitive and close reading of literature is one of key lessons I have learned from Professor Charles Hallisey. “Close reading” is a concept associated with American New Critics, and, during the early decades of the twentieth century, they had developed “close reading” into a method of reading that pays attention to everything within a text, and how parts are related to each other and to the organic whole those parts add up to, and textual analysis, which was quite popular and, in many ways, useful. And it was quite “practical” in the sense that it could be “practiced” within classroom teaching, and there is no wonder that theoreticians of the British “Practical criticism” such also contributed to the popularizing of the method. Painstakingly attentive reading taught to us by the New Critics and the Practical Critics may be now long forgotten or absorbed into literary studies. But Professor Hallisey taught us at the University of Wisconsin how close reading can be practiced. In his hand, close reading, which can be rather mechanical in the hand of the unimaginative, turned into a form of creative close reading.

Hallisey’s method of creative close reading had been instructive for me in several ways. He has demonstrated numerous times by example how classical South Asian texts can be read closely, attending to explicit and implicit subtleties of them. I have seen this happen in nearly all of his classroom teachings. He is a superb teacher who produces wonderful readings of the text at hand almost like a theater actor in a workshop improvising on a piece of text without any prior interpretational planning.

When he teaches, it is difficult to predict where he would take us with the text. While it is true that any attentive textual scholar must read texts closely, scholars with close attention to the literary do not lose sight of special functions “the literary” perform in a text. For example, in investigating how kings and monks are represented in classical Sinhala literature, especially in genres such as praise-poems, Professor Hallisey pays close attention to literary and non-literary identities of those figures without valuing one form of identity over another. In those portrayals, “the literary” is marked by a quality of hyperbole, the primary quality of praise-poems (“Works and Persons” 707-10). Even in classroom teachings, he emphasizes the various workings of “the literary” by taking into account multiple possibilities. In that sense, his method is not a style of one-dimensional teaching aimed at dispensing factual information. For that very reason, students have to get used to the performativity of Professor Hallisey’s teaching. As soon as one is familiar with his teaching style, he or she knows by intuition that he would reveal the richness of the text in question. But one can never foresee the surprise and delight that he produces in his passionate act of reading. Unfortunately, as is the case with many good teachers, such classroom sessions have not been recorded. He hardly ever sits down to elaborate on those epiphany-like insights in writing. After all, such literary readings often happen in the performativity classroom teaching in the presence of a group of participants who take pleasure in the beauty of language, narratives, and wisdom.

From Professor Hallisey’s eagerness and skills to show the richness of literary works from distant times and places, I have learned many things. One such lesson is the art of resisting the tendency to reduce literary works to mere repositories of facts and information. This was a blessing for me when I was at UW-Madison. In those days nearly all doctoral dissertations related to Sri Lanka tended to be about Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. In such studies, literary works were often used to garner facts to make a political or historical point. The “point” was important, and

there is nothing wrong in studying the legacy of nationalism in Sri Lanka. But I did not want to go down that path. I wanted to study literature, even Sinhala literature, to focus on the “art” of it rather than the “facts” in it. This requires treating classical and modern Sinhala literature as refined arts that have elements comparable to literature from any other culture. Studying Sinhala literature as an art requires skills in teasing out what is unique to it in terms of content, forms, craftsmanship, and the aesthetic theories that undergird it. For example, the key rhetorical devices that signify the literariness in Sinhala are devices such as hyperbole, metaphor, simile, and rhyme that need to be recognized when they happen, and their contributions to the meaning need to be assessed. Professor Hallisey was always attentive to these elements. Thus, his teaching was exactly what I wanted. “What I wanted” was not exactly clear to me though I had studied two years of literary theory by the time I met Professor Hallisey. During the next years, his teaching and conversation made it clear to me that his literary sensibilities and skills in creative close reading were what I had to develop. But then, there was a problem: his way of reading literature and coming up with subtle, supple, and nuanced interpretations requires the skills in using language, in this case English, in a way a poet would use it. I did have some friends who could use English like poets and literary writers; I was not one of them.

I, however, learned from him that scholarly work on South Asian literature that reduces it to a depository of facts usable for popular South Asia topics such as nationalism, ethnic violence, religious conflicts, meditations, the realities of women in Buddhist cultures, and so on was somewhat problematic. In Professor Hallisey’s teaching, Buddhist literary classics were treated primarily as works of art. Having a good grasp of Sanskrit and South Asian literary theories helped him develop that approach. For me, however, his careful attention to literariness of those works has more to do with his swift literary mind more than anything else. Even when the author’s intention is didactic, it will always have many layers of meaning

if the text is substantially or consciously literary. Professor Hallisey was great at drawing attention to these layers.

In the introduction to his translation of *Therīgāthā* he treats the verses by early Buddhist nuns primarily as literature:

The *Therīgāthā* is not merely a collection of historical documents to be used as evidence of the needs, aspirations, and achievements of the first Buddhist women. It is an anthology of *poems*. The poems vary in quality as poetry, to be sure, but some of them deserve not only the adjectives “first” in a historical sense; they also deserve to be called “great” because some of them are great literature.

With his deep understanding of how Sinhala literary language works his reading and interpretation are so much richer even when he turns to literary materials for historical evidence. For example, when he comments on a *Girasandesaya* (Parrot’s Message) description of the monastery of Totagamuva in his seminal essay “Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture,” he demonstrates how such literary representations should be read. Let’s first read the *Girasandesaya* description translated by Hallisey:

In various places in that beautiful and luxurious monastery there are groups of learned men who have studied prosody [*sanda*; Skt. *chandas*], poetics [*lakara*]; Skt. *alaṅkāra*] and grammar [*viyaraṇa*; Skt. *vyākaraṇa*]. They sit as they please and recite poems and dramas composed in Sanskrit, Pali, Sinhala, and Tamil, maintaining the splendor [*siri*] of the best of old.

Commenting on this, Hallisey says, “Descriptions of this sort obviously tell us more about *what a literary culture at a particular time was ideally, not what it actually was*, and this is precisely their value for our understanding of what was involved in transforming Sinhala into a literary language” (693,

italics added). It is quite common in nationalist literary or cultural histories to take descriptions such as above as literal representation of what was there in those times. Even if all those genres mentioned in the quote above were not actually written, the claim that they were indicates that Sinhala had turned into a language capable of writing any literary genre.

Apart from reading literary sources with a rich understanding of the “literary” and of the complex phenomenological nature of literary works, Professor Hallisey has been, for me, the most prominent scholar in Buddhist Studies in the West to argue for the value of literature, especially modern literature, in understanding how Buddhism happens in the contemporary world. In his famous essay, “Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism” focusing on some lesser-known essays by Rhys Davis, Professor Hallisey makes a strong case for the importance of studying vernacular texts in understanding Buddhist societies. Hallisey shows that it is problematic to take ancient texts, such as those in Pāli, as the authoritative and “authentic” Theravāda Buddhism. The breadth of Theravāda Buddhism is convincingly shown in this essay. In addition to those Pāli texts to which Orientalist scholars paid so much attention and translated into European languages, there was a long commentarial tradition in languages such as Sinhala, and it was these commentaries that became the well-known classics of narrative literature. With their focus on “rationalist elements” of Buddhism and motivated to recover “true” Buddhism, early Orientalist scholars on Buddhism overlooked, Hallisey points out, many other important aspects of Buddhist cultures (45-47). Buddhist rituals and Buddhist narratives are two such aspects. The latter, the narratives, by extension, literature, has been a major theme that animated Professor Hallisey’s scholarly life.

He made the study of literature an essential part of the study of Buddhist cultures. And he has shown by example that Buddhist literature from ancient, medieval, or modern times can be read for pleasure. One of

the reasons that the Sinhala translation of his essay, published as a book, “Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture” became so popular among Sinhala scholars was the fact that he treats all the literary works discussed there as the works of art produced in literary cultures that had a rich understanding of what literature was. His treatment of the Sigiri verses demonstrates that sensibility. Written on the mirror wall of the palace complex of Sigiriya rock, those verses represent some of the earliest specimens of Sinhala literature. The few pages Professor Hallisey spends on the Sigiri Verses represent his nuanced approach to the poems:

Even if the evidence from Sīgiriya does not help us to specify exactly what cultural and social processes motivate the transformation of everyday Sinhala into a literary language, it is still worth pausing to explore the outlines of this literary culture and its practices, both because of *its own intrinsic interest* and because of how it can illuminate subsequent Sinhala literary cultures. (721, emphasis added)

Hallisey’s insistence in treating each literary culture as having intrinsic value is sustained throughout the entire piece. After making that claim, he translates a selection of Sigiriya verses to demonstrate the literary in them. He takes great care to appreciate the verses as poetry, translating them in a way that allows the poetry in them to be conveyed in English. Compared to previous translations of the Sigiriya verses, Hallisey’s are more poetic, and they are coeval with modern poetic sensibilities. Let’s compare one of his translations with one of Senrath Paranavitana:

Hail! The song of Digili-(pe)li Vajur

Having seen me, O Long-eyed ones, may you not become displeased in your mind, When your heart becomes hard, I disregard that, did any tenderness come into being (in your heart) I shall be gratified. (*Sigiri Graffiti* 186)



Here is Hallisey's translation of the same verse:

The Poem of Digilipeli Vajur

When you look at me,  
O long-eyed one,  
please don't turn away.

I won't notice

if your heart is hard.

If you feel anything for me

I shall be satisfied. ("Works and Persons" 725)

In addition to using those verses for making a historical argument, Hallisey makes their poetry shine forth without reducing them into textual facts. Arguably, the aesthetic appreciation of these poems is also a sort of "fact" in writing literary histories. Professor Hallisey's single most important contribution to Buddhist Studies and South Asian Literary Studies is to argue for the use of that "fact"—the literary fact in research. If we don't include the creative close reading of literary texts in our studies of culture, especially where texts abound, we are missing vital facts. This, for me, is the single most important legacy of Professor Hallisey's teaching and writing.

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## Making “the Water Useful in Another Way”: Reflections on Reading, Pedagogy, and Representation

Rae Dachille<sup>39</sup>

A cook in Colombo weeps as she tells the story of one of the first Buddhist women. The cook’s children are back home in the village. She only sees them every three months. My future teacher listens as the cook relates the plight of Patachara, a woman whose love transgressed social boundaries, a woman who has lost her children, her husband, her mind, and her reputation. He hears the tale of a woman running naked and deranged through the streets over a thousand years ago, shunned, mocked, banished from human society. Decades after hearing the cook’s rendering of Patachara’s story, my teacher relates to us how the Buddha “punctured through grief,” providing refuge for Patachara and ordaining her as one of the first Buddhist women. He tells us that there is no word in the English language for a parent who has lost a child.

It is October 2020. We listen to my teacher speak of Patachara not in a kitchen in Colombo or in a university classroom, but through our computers. My mother is in North Carolina, and I am in Arizona. We are unsure of when we will be able to travel again. The virtual poetry workshop is a

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<sup>39</sup> University of Arizona.

way to be together.<sup>40</sup> I am aware of my mother as my teacher speaks of Patachara's grief. I know that she is thinking of her sister's lifelong suffering at the loss of a son to suicide. I feel her thinking of that same sister's death to breast cancer in 2003. Too young, too much suffering. I see my mother reach for Patachara's hand.

“What is my responsibility for what happens to other people that I love?” my teacher asks. He speaks of how Patachara's story moves through people's lives, of how in the wake of the Cambodian genocide at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, survivors retold her story as a way of making sense of their devastation.<sup>41</sup> He tells us that one Buddhist commentator described the transformation of *therī*'s heart from one that was “soft like a mother's” to one that “became hard.” Does setting aside grief to attain freedom make you less or more like a mother? More or less moral?

My teacher shows us how the poems of the first Buddhist women are the voices of a community of women who have lost children and have borne “unnamable grief.” Patachara provides them with the guidance and kinship she herself so desperately needed. She supports them in finding freedom by first showing them it is possible. I see Paṭācārā take my mother's hand and whisper something to her.

Charles Hallisey's English translation of the *Therīgāthā* reveals a process of *listening from* the perspectives of diverse individuals across time, space, and subject position to better appreciate these songs that

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<sup>40</sup> The workshop was entitled “Poems of the First Buddhist Women as Vehicles for Reflection Today.” It was hosted by the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies and co-taught by Charles Hallisey and Georgia Kashnig from 10/5/2020-11/9/2020.

<sup>41</sup> In their jointly authored piece, Hallisey and Hansen draw upon Hansen's interviews of Cambodian refugees. Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen, “Narrative Sub-Ethics and the Moral Life: Some Evidence from Theravāda Buddhism,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* (1996): 305–27.

“wear their Buddhism lightly” (Hallisey *Therigatha*). The concept of *listening from* is something he learned from the Pāṇini, a Sanskrit grammarian—who lived in India sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries BCE—for whom “listening from is the disciplined encounter with usefulness, and that is what distinguishes how we listen to a teacher from how we listen to something that is merely entertaining” (Hallisey *It Not* 76). Hallisey *listens from* the cook and the Cambodian refugees. In approaching the task of translation, he also turns to twentieth-century Sinhala novelist Martin Wickremesinghe. In the 1950’s Wickremesinghe translated the *Therīgāthā* into Sinhala and incorporated his reading of Sinhala folk poetry to better understand the verses. Wickremesinghe describes how the suffering and oppression expressed by the folk poetry bringing into relief that the voices of the *Therīgāthā* were “cries of happiness . . . from the hearts of women even when they were oppressed by poverty itself, by the bill-collector called Life, and by the sadness that is the aftermath of gratifying the senses.”<sup>42</sup> *Listening from* Wickremesinghe, Hallisey highlights the manner in which the verses of the *Therīgāthā* decline to explain away injustice through traditional Buddhist frameworks such as karma. Hallisey is not alone in finding liberative potential in their frank representation of injustice. As he points out, the poems provided inspiration for reformers like Rahul Sankrityayan as well as for Dalit communities (Hallisey *Therigatha* xxxi). The poems elicit empathy through representing the attainment of liberation in the face of adversity.

Patachara’s own empathy is a guide. When Canda, hungry after years of homeless wandering, approached her, “she was sympathetic to me and Patachara made me go forth, she gave me advice and pointed me toward the highest goal” (Hallisey *Therigatha* xxxi, 71). Together, a group of up to five hundred nuns relay the fruits of Patachara’s advice to them,

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<sup>42</sup> Wickremesinghe cited in Hallisey, “It Not the Only One,” 78. See Martin Wickremesinghe, *Teri Gi in Krti Ekatva*, vol.8 (Dehiwala: Tisara, 1992), 215-216. Translation by Liyanage Amarakeethi and Charles Hallisey.

saying: “She pulled out the arrow that was hard for me to see, the one that I nourished in my heart, she expelled the grief for a son, the grief that had overwhelmed me” (Hallisey *Therigatha* 73). The capacity to relate to the pain of others and the wisdom to provide an alternative route to seeking relief are both born from Patachara’s own experience. Hallisey translates her account of her own liberation as follows: “While washing my feet I made the water useful in another way, by concentrating on it move from the higher ground down . . . Just as the lamp went out, my mind was free” (Hallisey *Therigatha* 67). Hallisey and Hansen point to the ways in which Buddhist commentators made sense of Patachara’s catharsis, a moment of liberation that occurs only after years of futile attempts to achieve freedom from suffering: “Finally, one day, as she washes her feet, pouring water on them three times and watching short, medium, and long rivulets of water form, she seizes on the rivulets as an object of meditation. Watching them, Patachara reflects that some people die in youth, others in middle age, and still others in old age—like her sons, husband, and parents” (Hallisey and Hansen *Narrative* 322). Hallisey and Hansen interpret Patachara’s ability to make the water “useful” to the Khmer refugees’ retellings of her story as means to “cultivate a critical distance from our own circumstances” (Hallisey and Hansen *Narrative* 323). Patachara’s students testify to the efficacy of her pedagogy in the third person, saying: “They heard her words, what Patachara taught, they washed their feet, sat off to one side, intent on calming the mind, they did what the Buddha taught” (Hallisey *Therigatha* 69).

The interpretive humility Hallisey exercises in his translation of the poems of the *therī* was informed by his experience of reading Buddhist texts with Womanist thinkers. Inspired to contemplate what it means for scholars of Buddhism to read “with justice in our eyes,” he proposes that we abandon the expectation that Buddhist sources should offer a complete and inviolate moral order. Instead, the reader should assume the responsibility “to make justice somehow an epistemological performance of

our own, and not shirk from acknowledging that the world is filled with self-centered people who exploit others” (Hallisey “Womanist Resources” 78). Reading *justly* in Hallisey’s estimation also requires acknowledging: “Buddhists who ‘take a different perspective’ as Buddhists who manage ‘to see justly’ as *Buddhists* (and not just as persons who, in the twentieth century, were exposed to Marxist or other ‘Western’ ideas), and who then critique—as *Buddhists*—Buddhist ideas and Buddhist society for what they contribute to perpetuating injustice in the world” (Hallisey “Womanist Resources” 79–80). As a graduate student in Hallisey’s “Religion in the Humanities” course in 2007 reading Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe* for the first time, I struggled to wrap my head around the concept “H2”—a mode of engaging Marx’s approach to history that leaves space for other kinds of critiques and projects to be enacted.<sup>43</sup> Hallisey asked us to provide some examples of how Buddhists present their own forms of H2. I thought back to another course I had taken with him in which we read an account of Yashodhara’s lament that had circulated at a time of political upheaval in Southeast Asian history. The account showed the potential of a morally complex detail in the Buddha’s life story—his abandonment of his wife, the mother of his child—to be used to express collective distress and to subvert a monolithic writing and reading of history. I could see how Yashodhara provides an opportunity to call out injustice, an opportunity that Buddhists have preserved and deployed in diverse ways over time.

Hallisey’s challenge to read *justly* continues to resonate and to shape how we face the task of translating and representing Buddhism in

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<sup>43</sup> Chakrabarty opposes H1 or “analytical” history with H2, a form of history “charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History.” He describes how “H2 beckons us to more affective narratives of human belonging where life forms, although porous to one another, do not seem exchangeable through a third term of equivalence such as abstract labor.” Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post-colonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 66 & 71.

our writing and teaching.<sup>44</sup> Back in the classroom in fall 2021, teaching a class on “Buddhism and Healing,” I began by telling the Buddha’s life story. This is usually a light-hearted moment in the course, before the stress of the semester sets in. A hand shoots up. The student asks me to clarify: so the Buddha was a rich guy that could have transformed his realization of the pervasiveness of human suffering into meaningful action by becoming a good ruler but instead chose to pursue his own agenda? In this moment, I struggle to answer the larger question: How will I address injustice in 2021? Have I been listening? Or to put it Hallisey’s terms, in teaching Buddhism, how do I avoid shirking “from acknowledging that the world is filled with self-centered people who exploit others”? I consider the tools my training has provided, weigh what is useful and what will not serve. Perhaps instead of beginning with the Buddha’s life story, I begin with the tale of Patachara. I can learn from the ingenuity she shows in “making the water useful in another way.”

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<sup>44</sup> For his observations on Buddhism and representation, see Charles Hallisey, “Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism,” in *Curators of the Buddha*, ed. Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31–62.



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## Moral and Literary Formations in Sri Lanka: A Brief Appreciation of Professor Charles Hallisey

Stephen C. Berkwitz<sup>45</sup>

Scholars of Sri Lankan Buddhism are indebted to Professor Charles Hallisey's keen interest in exploring and explicating the ways in which Buddhist literature affects how individuals and communities understand themselves and act in the world. Hallisey's wide-ranging interests in Buddhism and literature, however, have meant that his insights are not only applicable in Sri Lankan contexts. In reading his work, as well as works written by his students, one finds that his interests and insights can be applied more widely to texts and traditions across the Buddhist world. Even when he is writing specifically about Sri Lankan Buddhism, his observations are consistently relevant to scholars working in other areas. The present essay will focus mainly on his contributions to Sri Lankan Buddhist Studies, particularly how his correlating of the moral and literary spheres has shaped my own thinking and writing.

I am something of an "adoptee" who came to Cambridge to study Sinhala literature with Charlie as a student from the University of California, Santa Barbara due to his generous willingness to serve as an external PhD committee member for my dissertation. In the course of working with

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<sup>45</sup> Missouri State University.

Charlie, first as a graduate student and later as a professional colleague, my perspectives on scholarship in Buddhist Studies have enduringly changed for the better. His analyses of Sinhala literature take these works as an integral part of the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, reminding us that not only Pāli texts were used to shape Buddhist thought and practice. Hallisey has also encouraged us, more generally, to read Buddhist texts with an eye to discerning what they contribute to people's religious identity, thought, and practice.

### **Validating the Vernaculars**

Ever since his 1988 dissertation (Hallisey *Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka*), Hallisey has recognized that literatures composed in vernacular languages are important expressions of Buddhist thought and creativity. This innovative move to pay attention to vernacular Buddhist literature is still somewhat new for a field that traditionally privileges the so-called "classical" Buddhist languages of Pāli, Sanskrit, Classical Chinese, and Classical Tibetan. Yet Hallisey has shown that Sinhala represents a "Buddhist language" and that works composed in the vernacular deserve our attention and analysis. His work on this topic, pursued in collaboration with Sheldon Pollock's investigation of Sanskrit and the "Vernacular Millennium" (Pollock *Literary Cultures in History*; Pollock *Language of the Gods*), paved the way for understanding how Sinhala became a "literary language" capable of making a difference in the world (Hallisey "Works and Persons" 691). This insight sheds light on how Sinhala historical and poetic narratives were composed in imitation and in tension with the works and styles of other Pāli and Sanskrit texts (Berkwitz "Sinhala Buddhist Appropriations" 47-48).

Such efforts to take seriously the composition of texts in literary forms of the vernacular Sinhala language have opened up new corpora of

Buddhist literature for scholars to examine and interpret. The same can be said of other literary vernaculars such as Thai, Burmese, and Khmer, with which some of Charlie's students are likewise working. Rather than dismiss vernacular texts as somehow derivative or marginal in the field of Buddhist Studies, Hallisey has challenged us to read and consider them as important works that have frequently been invested with prestige in pre-modern periods (Hallisey "Works and Persons" 698). Sinhala works can be sites of creativity and innovation that both explain and enhance texts that were composed in other "classical" languages (Berkwitz *Buddhist History* 115-16). The numerous Sinhala works that appear during the second millennium are due in part to the composition of technical treatises for writing Sinhala poetry, including the *Siyabaslakara* ("Our Own Poetics"), *Sidatsaṅgarā* ("Compendium of Language and its Meaning"), and *Ēḷusaṅdāslakuṇa* ("The Character of Sinhala Metrics"). Hallisey has drawn our attention to two of these works in showing how they adapted Dandin's *Kāvyadarśa* ("Mirror of Literature") for the purpose of creating beautiful poetry and expanding the "expressive ecology" of Sinhala (Hallisey "Story of the Mirror" 155). The development of literary norms and conventions for Sinhala writing added value and beauty to the literary vernacular. It also reinforced and spurred further growth in Sinhala poetry and prose compositions, leading authors to demonstrate their expert skill in writing Sinhala texts up to at least the onset of the colonial period in Sri Lanka (Berkwitz *Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism* 48-49). By working to recognize literary vernaculars as important works in Buddhist literature, Hallisey has made such works more important and even necessary for scholarly consideration.

Despite this focus on vernacular Buddhist literature, Hallisey has consistently emphasized the multilingual context behind the composition and circulation of Buddhist texts in Sri Lanka and in other Asian lands. He has drawn our attention to the importance of the interaction between the local and translocal in the production of literature (Hallisey "Works and

Persons” 694). In this sense, literary vernaculars were not used in isolation, but rather they coexisted and were co-created with other languages in composing Buddhist texts. He has taught me to inquire into the relationships between languages and literatures, because in this way we can theorize more effectively about how texts were made and what they were meant to accomplish. My work on Buddhist *vaṃsas* (“histories” or sometimes “chronicles”) grew out of a careful analysis of Pāli and Sinhala versions of the *Thūpavaṃsa* (History of the Relic Shrine), and I continue to seek out insights from the continuities and disjunctions found in different versions of texts.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, Hallisey’s attention to the vernacular does not come at the expense of ignoring the “classical.” Instead, he recognizes how the moral and literary values of Sanskrit were consciously adopted into Sinhala literature (Hallisey “Works and Persons 697). Conversely, Sinhala adaptations of Sanskrit works could similarly reconfigure the knowledge and use of Sanskrit, effectively staking a claim for the ability of Sinhala to shape literary production (Hallisey “Story of the Mirror” 163).

### The Agency and Ethics of Texts

Aside from validating scholarship on vernacular Buddhist texts, Charlie also teaches us to read carefully and to be attentive to questions of agency and ethics in literature. No matter the tradition, language, or era in which his students work, we exhibit a deep appreciation for the various and often profound ways that Buddhist texts operate in the world. This means that instrumental interpretations of Buddhist texts as something akin to “tools” cannot by themselves suffice to speak to the creative and

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<sup>46</sup> My current translation and analysis of the fourteenth-century *Sinhala Bōdhivaṃśaya* is conditioned by my readings of the Pali *Mahābodhivaṃsa*. This research is in process but neatly illustrates the kind of multilingual studies that Charlie has encouraged me to do.

generative abilities of such works. Hallisey discusses this capacity in terms of a kind of reading whereby the reader is subordinated to the text and susceptible to certain effects through reading or otherwise encountering a text in a way that is relevant to the world in which they live (Hallisey “Scripture’s Advice” 33). This viewpoint appears in contrast to those that more commonly subordinate texts to the persons who read and interpret them in terms of their own interests and capacities. By attributing agency to Buddhist texts, Hallisey encourages us to consider how literature can effect change and transform its readers and listeners. He has described literature as “a profoundly generative social phenomenon” that can work to distinguish certain authors and connoisseurs from others (Hallisey “Works and Persons” 715). Complex literary texts that are composed with knowledge and skill can be delightful and edifying, giving rise to certain affective experiences that are the direct result of how they were composed (Hallisey “Works and Persons” 715).

Through such a lens, medieval Sinhala *vaṃsa* texts yield clues in their narratives that indicate how readers and listeners are expected to think, feel, and act as a result of encountering historical narratives. The language of vernacular histories from Sri Lanka is often intentionally evocative and prefigures how people encounter and respond to their narratives. Thus, when texts such as the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* recall what the Buddha and other virtuous agents did in the past, they also show how past actions shape the lives of people living in the present. Their narratives reveal how historical figures exhibited joy and gratitude upon learning how the Buddha had cared for them earlier, which is a reaction that models how contemporary readers and listeners should also respond to historical narratives (Berkwitz, *Buddhist History in the Vernacular* 246). By encountering *vaṃsas*, people are conditioned to experience morally productive emotions that transform how they think and act with respect to their newly obtained knowledge of how Buddhist history impacts them too.

Textual agency is also seen in the techniques that some literary works deploy to guide people in how to read and respond more effectively to them. In an analysis of the *Siyabaslakara*, Hallisey explains that the text “trains its readers to read” skillfully and attentively (Hallisey “Story of the Mirror” 154). From this perspective, literary texts are endowed with the power to effect changes in those who read them or listen to them read aloud. For Hallisey, Sinhala poetic works, which are usually modeled after Sanskrit literary works, were composed with a myriad of aesthetic and cultural effects in mind. They can give rise to new realities and make the world and the experience of the world more beautiful and delightful.

Additionally, for Hallisey, Buddhist literary practice is also an exercise in Buddhist ethics. Literary cultures, for him, produce both specific works and specific kinds of persons, keenly attuned to the aesthetic and moral sentiments of texts (Hallisey “Works and Persons” 712-13). Buddhist texts composed in Sinhala, Pāli, and other languages often make claims to be able to transform their readers, listeners, and writers into people who are more virtuous and skilled in receiving and responding to literature. In this sense, the agency of Buddhist literary texts includes efforts to expand one’s moral imagination and to promote ethical actions. For example, medieval Buddhist *vaṃsa* texts emphasize to readers how the Buddha sacrificed and cared for them, showing people how they have benefited from his foresight and compassion (Berkwitz *Buddhist History* 255, 264). Even though Buddhist *vaṃsas* are not poetic works, their literary qualities and potentialities enable their narratives to morally transform their audiences into people who feel grateful for having been cared for by the Buddha and other virtuous agents in the past. The knowledge and gratitude instilled by Buddhist historical literature conditions efforts to acknowledge the care and help one has received by performing ethical acts within a larger community of beings affected by what the Buddha previously did.

Hallisey helps us to recognize how Buddhist literature plays a critical role in the moral formation of persons. Whether one considers poetic verses or historical narratives, or other genres of writing and material objects, the expressive features of Buddhist cultures are not lifeless artifacts waiting to be discovered and interpreted by scholars. If we read just for historical information, we are liable to overlook a text's (or an object's) expressive, imaginative, and emotional content, as well as what it can accomplish aesthetically that enable us to see and imagine new things about ourselves and the world (Hallisey *Therigatha* viii-ix). As a teacher and mentor, Charlie does many of the same things for us that a literary work does for readers—he speaks to us in our own language, he shows us how to read, he expands our imagination, he makes us feel cared for, and he stimulates us to undertake ethical action that contributes to a community of learners. Thanks to Charlie, we can see new things and feel delight in Buddhist texts and traditions, and we can better understand and value our ethical relationships with others.

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## Vissakamma Worship and the Ethical Life of Buddhist Artisans in Thailand

Kenneth M. George<sup>47</sup>

### Prefatory Remarks

Among his many contributions to religious and Asian regional studies, Charles Hallisey's explorations of lived religion in the Theravāda Buddhist communities of Thailand and Sri Lanka remind us of the "open-endedness of the ethical in culture and history" (*Intuition and Judgment* 142). They also summon us to be mindful of large-scale historical processes that have shaped the lifeworlds, well-being, and ethical aims of Buddhists who dwell in those two countries or in other parts of the globe (*Buddhist Ethics*). Taking cue from Hallisey's moral anthropology, I offer here an exceptionally brief ethnographic and historical glimpse of Thai Buddhist artisans and their devotional worship of the demiurge Vissakamma. My observations are not mine alone. They turn importantly on insights shared by Anthony

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Lovenheim Irwin and Kirin Narayan during our collaborative research in Thailand, India, and the United Kingdom. In keeping with the celebratory and intellectual aims of this special journal issue, I will offer a few remarks regarding the ethical implications of Vissakamma worship for today's Thai Buddhist artisans.

### **The Renaissance of Vissakamma Worship**

“Vissakamma” is the Pāli appellation for Vishwakarma (Viśvakarman), the demiurge in the Hindu-Buddhist pantheon whose name means “All-Maker” or “Maker of the Universe.”<sup>48</sup> Earliest mention of this deity may be found in the Vedas, and he appears as a minor figure in the Hindu epic and puranic literatures of India where he is recalled for making emblematic weapons and marvelous palaces for the gods. Vissakamma plays a similar but somewhat more prominent role in the Jātaka and in other Buddhist narrative texts and lore. There he serves at the command of Sakka (Indra), king of the gods, who typically summons Vissakamma to make something for the Bodhisattva, the Buddha, or the custodians of the Buddha's relics—a hermitage, a bathing pond, a jeweled staircase, a pavilion, or a stupa, to give but a few examples. In Thailand he is known as Phra Witsanukam (as well as Wissanukam, Wisukam, and other variants); in Cambodia as Preah Pisnukar; and in Japan as Bishukatsuma. Although stories mentioning Vissakamma have circulated through much or most of the Buddhist world, visual representations of the god made prior to the Nineteenth century are relatively scarce and often difficult to identify in a confident way. Confounding, too, are lingering questions as to whether

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<sup>48</sup> For overviews of Vishwakarma and Vishwakarma worship in India, past and present, see Narayan and George (*Tools and God of Technology*).

“Vissakamma” is the name for a god, or more properly, a title bestowed upon any divine or worldly artisan with astonishing creative powers.

Evidence from Cambodia, India, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand suggests that the worship of Vishwakarma/Vissakamma through the centuries was a techno-religious practice peculiar to the workshops and on-site workspaces of artisanal families, communities, monastic orders, and guilds. For example, the *Yiqiejing yinyi* (“Pronunciation and Meaning in the Complete Buddhist Canon”), compiled by the Chinese monk Xuanying around 650 CE, ventures that “lots of craftspeople in the west [i.e., India] worship this deity” (Peter Kornicki, personal communication). The extent to which communities of Buddhist artisans sustained a tradition of Vissakamma worship over the next millennium is unclear.<sup>49</sup> It is hard, as well, to discern the degree of devotional interest in the god among the Hindu artisanal castes and communities of South and Southeast Asia during that same era. In 1884 George C. M. Birdwood would write that, “Vishwakarma, the omnificent, the architect of the gods, is little more than a name in the popular mythology of India” (78). Concerning the craft communities of late colonial Ceylon and India, A. K. Coomaraswamy would say that “there scarcely exists a formal cult of Vishwakarma” (*Silpa Sastras* 42).

The mid- and late Nineteenth century witnessed a pan-Asian renaissance of interest in Vissakamma, coincident with the rise of industrial capitalism and the global circulation of modern technologies and

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<sup>49</sup> There is some material evidence that royal construction projects involved Vissakamma worship. For example, Twelfth and Thirteenth century Khmer artifacts unearthed at Angkor include small bronze figures of Vissakamma. Ceremonial burial of these figurines at construction sites ostensibly brought cosmological protection to the royal structures. In Siam, the *chuang luang* (royal master builders) worked in service to the king and court. Until the ministerial reforms of the Nineteenth century, they peopled the Department of the King’s Personal Army. The directorial position of this department had as its “seal the image of [Witsanukam] . . . carrying a plumbline in one hand, a bunch of peacock feathers in the other, signifying craftsmanship and supervision” (Povatang 31).

sciences. It is during this time that Vissakamma becomes publicly enshrined as the patron god of arts and crafts. Kirin Narayan and I already have described elsewhere the rise of Vishwakarma worship in India (*Technophany*). I focus here on the god's renaissance in Thailand.

Hallisey (*Roads Taken*, 47-49) and Craig Reynolds (*Buddhist Cosmography*) call attention to the accelerating processes of reform in Buddhist thought, practice, and monastic order that took place in Siam as Western sciences, technology, and conceptions of religion made an ever deeper impression on the Siamese court in the Nineteenth century. King Mongkut (Rama IV, ruled 1851-1868), himself a monk prior to ascending to the throne, embraced modernization and technological innovation. I would argue that Mongkut's fascination with technology led him to bring Vissakamma (Witsanukam) into more public visibility, as when he added to the ceremonial name of Bangkok, the "City of Angels, City of Great Immortals," the further appellations, "Magnificent City of the Nine Gems, Seat of the King, City of Royal Palaces, Home of the Gods Incarnate, *Erected by Witsanukam at Sakka's Behest*" [italics mine]. Mongkut's successor, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, ruled 1873-1910), would further associate Vissakamma with the city's infrastructure, when he ordered the Department of Public Works to build the Witsanukam Narueman Bridge in 1901. (The name translates as "The Bridge Built by Witsanukam.")

Chulalongkorn's travels to England, Europe, and British India—and especially his European tour of 1897—deeply colored his cosmopolitan understanding of the world; his concern for Siam's modernity and civilizational progress, or *siliwai* (Povatang; Winichakul); and his interest not only in emerging technologies, but in social, political, and religious reform as well. I would hazard that his alert engagement with the West and India must have acquainted him with the burgeoning international Arts and Crafts Movement, and the way its precepts and ideals had come to inspire Gandhi and the anti-colonial and anti-industrial Swadeshi movement in

India (Brantlinger). Further still, it is hard to imagine that the Arts and Crafts Movement would have escaped the attention of Chulalongkorn's son, Vajiravudh (Rama VI, ruled 1910-1925), who studied at Oxford (1899-1901) during the heyday of the movement's influence as an instrument of social and anti-industrial reform. The reformist appeal of the movement and its writings—perhaps including Birdwood's *The Industrial Arts of India* and Coomaraswamy's early mention of Vishwakarma (*Sinhalese Art* 79; *Indian Craftsman* xv)—may have been key in spurring Vajiravudh to establish in 1913 Siam's first technical, craft, and art school as Bangkok's Poh Chang Academy of the Arts and Crafts, with Phra Witsanukam as its patron deity and “Utmost Teacher.”<sup>50</sup> Today, Phra Witsanukam—*Pho Khru* (“Father Guru”) as he is sometimes called—is the presiding deity worshipped at all of Thailand's technical, engineering, and arts-and-craft-based vocational institutes. So central is this deity, that each institute devotedly maintains and vigilantly guards the Phra Witsanukam statue it has erected as a protective icon for the school's well-being and identity (see figure 1). And central to the mission of each school is the rite of *khrop khru* (“covered by the guru”), the annual ritual of initiation and consecration that connects Thai artisans, technicians, master teachers, and their schools to their patron god, Phra Witsanukam (see Irwin, George, and Narayan, forthcoming).

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<sup>50</sup> Poh Chang is today incorporated as part of Rajamangala University of Technology Ratanakosin.



Phra Witsanukam, the palladium at Chiang Rai Vocational College, Chiang Rai, Thailand. Photograph by the author, 2019.

### ***Khrop Khru*, Phra Wisanukam, and Artisanal Ethics**

Each craft and technical academy in Thailand performs *khrop khru* as part of their yearly *wai khru* (“teacher-respecting”) ceremonies that usher new students into spiritual and vocational craft lineages. At the heart of *khrop khru* is a haptic gesture: The master teacher, who by virtue of previous ritual observance embodies Phra Witsanukam’s divine power and protection, places his hands over those of the student, whose own hand wields a tool or instrument emblematic of a craft to be learned. The teacher then guides the covered hand of the initiate in making a tool-bearing motion emblematic of craft practice. It is with Phra Witsanukam’s assent and help that creative knowledge, skill, and imagination flow to the student in *khrop khru*. Without the blessings obtained from the god via *khrop khru*, artisans and technicians fear they might encounter mishap or misfortune in their work and livelihood. Empowered and divinely protected through *khrop khru*, the initiated now belong to craft and ritual “lineages,” joining each with their guiding master teacher, with their master’s vocational ancestor-gurus, and with Phra Witsanukam. The craft-and-ritual lineages, I should emphasize, do not stand apart from the training institutes. There is no devotional cult of Witsanukam outside of these school-associated lineages.

A look at some of the ethico-affective attachments and trajectories of these artisan-technician devotees has the potential to expand our understanding of lived religion in Theravāda Buddhism and of religious ethics more broadly. As I have argued elsewhere (*No Ethics* 51), ethical striving is often worked out in encounter and dwelling with material things, something surely familiar to these Thai Buddhist trade professionals in their working lives. Anthony Lovenheim Irwin has taken the point further in his study of religious construction, fabrication, and touch in Thai Buddhist communities (*Busted Finger*). Seeing the “crafting of things [as] crucial to



the work through which ethical values are articulated and reified” (55), Irwin aims to enrich our understanding of what a lived Thai Buddhism is.

Mastery of technical or craft skills and putting that mastery to use for those around them, surely should count as an important ethical venture for the artisan-technicians who have trained at the academies. The exercise of care, expertise, and judgment in their daily work may be a way for them to accrue merit. As one professor explained to us in the course of our fieldwork, for those who have undergone *khrop khru*, their many lives of exemplary meritorious work may eventuate in their rebirth as Phra Witsanukam, for the god is not an eternal or deathless divine being, but rather a cosmic station through which one may pass on the path to enlightenment. Auspiciously reborn as Phra Witsanukam, the artisan-technician would be called upon by Sakka to assist the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas of the future. In this way, today’s artisan-technicians are poised to enter into what Hallisey might call “the expanding biographies of the Buddha” (*Expanding Biographies*).

As a rite of consecration and initiation, *khrop khru* is a starting point, a ritualized occasion in which students begin to acquire the techno-affective dispositions that will shape their capacities and aims as artisans and technicians. No less important than the lineal ties forged with master teachers and Phra Witsanukam are the ethico-affective ties between lineal consociates who go through *khrop khru* together. Dwelling together in a consecrated vocational lifeworld, they will be present for and with one another as their artisanal or technical skills deepen and find purposive creative expression.

The Buddhist lore around Vissakamma depicts him as a faithful royal retainer, always ready to do Sakka’s bidding. He fulfills Sakka’s summons and instructions without complaint, and in veneration of the Buddha or Buddha-to-be. Is it a surprise then, that those who graduate from the technical and vocational academies established by royal decree might

show ethico-political attachments to the Thai king and court? We should not expect Witsanukam devotees to work in political lockstep. But neither should we ignore how many of the devotees harbor royalist leanings as part of their ethical dispositions, or how some Thai artisan-technicians of the past and present have provided “muscle” for pro-monarchy and anti-leftist cadres, like the Red Gaur of the 1970s.

### Closing Remarks

The creation of the Thai technical, craft, and vocational institutes since the time of Rama VI has been part of the society-wide reforms taken up in the mid-Nineteenth century in the name of modernization and *siliwai*. The aim appears to have been to recruit and train a skilled artisanal and technical workforce that could drive industrial and infrastructural modernization, and yet retain—beneath the divine patronage of Phra Witsanukam—ties to the Buddhist foundations of the Siamese/Thai court and society. One effect was to draw Vissakamma worship out of the exclusive confines of the traditional workshop and royal architectural ministries, and to give it nurture in an expanding workforce. In principle, Phra Witsanukam might be worshiped by a broad public. His devotees and their ethico-religious dispositions continue to remain tethered, however, to specialized acts of material fabrication, underscoring our need to tie our study of religious ethics to questions of material religion.

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## Reflections on my Experience of Reading Vinaya Texts with Prof. Charlie Hallisey

Upali Sraman<sup>51</sup>

“If you are here only to accumulate information about Buddhism,” said Professor Hallisey on the first day of an *Introduction to Buddhist Scriptures* class at Harvard, “you will have to be careful, because by the end of the semester, you will have accumulated so much information that the building where you stay might collapse.” As many students laughed imagining the implausible scenario of how the weight of information gathered from a class might collapse an entire building, it became clear within the first ten minutes of the lecture that this was a different kind of a Buddhism course than the ones many of us had attended before. Prof. Hallisey also stated in the same lecture that those of us with no prior background in Buddhism might have an advantage over those of us who have studied Buddhism for some time, because, he warned, the latter would have to be prepared to unlearn many things. At that time, I had lived as a Buddhist monk for more than ten years and I even had a master’s degree in Buddhist Studies from Sri Lanka. I realized I was clearly in the second group and things I had to unlearn were many. My mind, however, was focused on the statement “*only to accumulate information about Buddhism.*”

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It is important to note here that Prof. Hallisey does not state that accumulating information about Buddhism is inherently bad, but he points out, doing only that is not sufficient. As students engaging Buddhist texts, ideas, practices, communities, or places, we can ask ourselves, are we only accumulating information about Buddhism? If we do not study for information, what more can we do to make our engagement fruitful? I find myself returning to these questions as I reflect on my doctoral research on discipline (*vinaya*) as a way of life, on my teaching of Buddhism in academic and non-academic settings, and on my own relationship with Buddhism.

Prof. Hallisey's statement has important implications in three ways as it requires us to pay attention to: (i) the attitudes with which we approach and relate to Buddhism on a personal level, (ii) the pedagogical choices we make and the goals we have in the context of teaching Buddhism, and (iii) what we look for in our research on Buddhist texts, ideas, practices, places, and communities. As students of Buddhism, we might find ourselves grappling with the first two of these aspects, i.e., our own relationship with Buddhism and our pedagogical choices at various times. How we express our relationship with Buddhism and design our courses might also depend on the social, cultural, and institutional settings wherein we work. Within the limited space of this essay, I reflect on the impact of Prof. Hallisey's statement on my doctoral research based on *Vinaya* texts.

One place where we can begin to think about the study of Buddhism as involving more than accumulating information is in a distinction that Prof. Hallisey makes regarding scripture as being different from text. In his classes, Prof. Hallisey describes how scripture "works" with the analogy of a telegram. For instance, we hear about death and see obituaries in newspapers all the time, but in a telegram a message like "mother is dead, come home" addressed to a specific person is direct, precise, and

affects the reader immediately. Similarly, we all read the same scriptural texts but there are moments when the message in a religious text affects us profoundly. In addition to being direct, there is an immediacy in the moment such a text becomes scripture eliciting emotional, moral and spiritual reactions. In his essay titled “*Surprise of Scripture’s Advice*,” following Wilfred Cantwell Smith (18) who states, “scripture is a human activity,” and William Graham (5) who defines scripture as “a relational concept,” Hallisey invites us to reflect on the attitudes to oneself and the practices of reading or listening that allow one to receive the advice of a religious text in a transformative way.

It is important for scholars in Buddhist studies, Hallisey encourages, to reflect on the implications of making such a distinction between text and scripture. Within the vast number of canonical texts regarded as *buddhavacana* (words of the Buddha), how can we understand and explain the ways in which texts become scripture? Hallisey draws our attention to Graham’s following statement to understand the distinction of the study of text and scripture,

The study of a text as a document focuses on the historical background and the origin and growth of the text. The study of a text as scripture, on the other hand, focuses on its contextual meaning, interpretation, and use—that is, the ongoing role the text has played in a tradition, not only in formal exegesis, but in every sector of life. (Graham 5)

Based on this distinction, Hallisey observes that we have some understanding of “how texts become scripture communally” and “how textual communities formed around scriptures but,” he continues, “scholarship has, as yet, had relatively little to say about the activities or the subjectivities in which a text becomes a scripture personally” (Hallisey “*Scripture’s Advice*” 31).

These observations have encouraged me to reflect on the role Vinaya texts played in Buddhist traditions, “not only in formal exegesis, but in every sector of life,” in Graham’s words. The use of Vinaya texts such as the *Pātimokkha/Prātimokṣa* and *Kammavācā/Karmavācanā*, by monastic communities in rituals can perhaps shed some light on what Hallisey refers to as “how texts become scripture communally,” but a question that we have not fully explored in Buddhist Studies is “how do Vinaya texts become scripture personally?” and further, “can the Vinaya texts work as scripture on those outside of the framework of a monastic community?” I find raising these questions itself generative as it helps us to focus our attention on the relationship between person and text, and how Vinaya works as scripture, even if we are not yet able to answer these questions fully.

In the contemporary academic study of Buddhism in Euro-American institutions, Vinaya texts have mostly been regarded either as legal documents for Buddhist monastics or as sources to understand the socio-historical conditions of Buddhist monasteries in ancient India. Also, some of the prescriptive rules from the Vinaya texts have been taken to explain Buddhist perspectives on various contemporary issues related to euthanasia (Keown), restorative justice (Loy), environmental ethics (Sahni, Lee), and so on. These various endeavors have definitely helped us understand some aspects of the history of Buddhist monasticism and Buddhist ethics. However, the focus in most of these studies has been primarily on the rules and precepts in the Vinaya texts. The narratives that occupy the bulk of Vinaya texts have often been regarded as background, and hence, subordinate to the rules. In addition to the prescriptive rules, the Vinaya texts contain elaborate stories that portray the complicated nature of human relationships grappling with intricate moral issues. Notwithstanding their historical significance to understand Buddhist monasticism, these stories have great literary value as they can also enthuse ethical reflection.



In order to understand the complex layers of meanings in Vinaya texts and the ethical life they present, I find it useful to make a threefold distinction: (i) *vinaya* (with lower case v and italicized) referring to a way of life, (ii) Vinaya (with upper case V, not italicized) as referring to texts including rules (*sikṣāpada*) and narratives, and (iii) *vinaya-karma* as referring to rituals performed by monks on every fortnight and other auspicious occasions. As Hallisey encourages us to think about how “the activities or the subjectivities in which a text becomes a scripture personally,” I feel it is important for us to contemplate on other little explored question such as: what role does *vinaya* (discipline), understood in the sense of a system of moral training, play in the formation of ethical individuals? These distinctions help us avoid conflating *vinaya* (discipline) solely with *śikṣāpada* (rules). The rules and precepts help to live a life of *vinaya*, but *vinaya* also encompasses a wide variety of norms and customs of behavior.

Within the Vinaya texts, the expression *vinayasampanna* (meaning “a person endowed with *vinaya*”) is used in one instance to describe a lay woman named Viśākhā (Dutt 53). Based on the attributes of Viśākhā, we see that *vinaya* incorporates a wide variety of ethical qualities, values and habits that are embodied by a person and are expressed through their gestures and manners of comportment. A *vinayasampanna* person moves around with a great degree of embodied self-awareness, an attitude of care, and knowledge of the important customs and norms of behavior (*ācāra*) according to the role they occupy in the society. As a way of life, *vinaya* refers to an embodied discipline involving such qualities of self-awareness in bodily movements, humility and attitudes of care while interacting with others, moderation in the way one consumes food and drink and so on. Such ideals of *vinaya* in the larger South Asian society are adapted effectively in Buddhist monastic training where norms and rituals that are specifically important for the monastic context were developed. The Buddha is referred to as the ultimate embodiment of what it means to live a life of *vinaya*. In order to understand how Vinaya/*vinaya*

works, we must take into consideration the conditions within which Vinaya is studied and taught as a monastic subject and *vinaya* is cultivated as a way of life.

The fact that the study of Vinaya/*vinaya* involves more than rules can be gleaned from a Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya text titled *Śayanāśanavastu* (Chapter on beds and seats) which I translated for my dissertation and had the privilege of reading closely with Prof. Hallisey. A passage in this text states,

The discourses (*sūtra*) and philosophical outlines (*māṭṛkā*) have been established by the Blessed One among deities and humans. Sūtras or discourses [are taught] among the nāgas; *māṭṛkās* among the deities. Vinaya, however, is deep, illuminates what is deep, hard to perceive, hard to realise, with many intentions, and involving language/activities of the world. Because it is deep, with many intentions, and involving the language/activities of the world,<sup>52</sup> monks are not enthusiastic to read the Vinaya. It is only natural, therefore, that the Buddha speaks extensively regarding any factor that causes the degeneration of the *śāsana*. (Gnoli 44)

The text then provides an elaborate list of benefits, including embodied qualities, ethical transformation, respectful treatment from others and so on, that a student of Vinaya/*vinaya* enjoys. Instead of dismissing such self-referential passages as if they are nothing more than a promotional sales pitch, Prof. Hallisey encouraged me to understand how they not only

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<sup>52</sup> The Sanskrit version of this phrase has *lokāṣarapratisaṃyukta* meaning involving letters/language of the world. The Tibetan translation states *'jig rten gyi spyod pa dang mthun pa* ('dul ba (*Vinaya*). In *Bka' gyur. Vol 3215b*) which translated back into Sanskrit would mean *\*lokācārapratisaṃyukta*. I have retained both these aspects as they are crucial to the practice of *vinaya* as a way of life.

point out the complexity of the study of Vinaya and the practice of *vinaya*, but also highlight what we must take into consideration as we study Vinaya texts. This passage in particular points out the semantic and the pragmatic aspects that make study of Vinaya/*vinaya* difficult. For instance, Vinaya/*vinaya* is not only deep semantically, it also illuminates what is deep in terms of the reader's behavioral patterns and one's relationship to oneself and others. As students we must not only read the Vinaya as documents, we need also to be open to what our engagement with Vinaya/*vinaya* can illuminate in us. Describing the subject of Vinaya to be "with many intentions" and "involving language/activities of the world," the text also points out the study of Vinaya requires the students to pay attention to their everyday lived experiences. How do we read a subject or set of texts that claim to be with many intentions involving the language/activities of the world? In order to understand this, we need to study the texts not merely as documents to accumulate information, but also "allow them to open up before us and lead us" as Hallisey elsewhere encourages us to do ("Womanist Resources" 75).

The study of Vinaya texts and *vinaya-karma* rituals can be done by following existing philological and ethnographic methods. However, our study of Vinaya texts and Buddhists who organize their life and practices inspired by these texts will be more fruitful if we understand how texts, rituals, and everyday activities and interactions help to cultivate embodied *vinaya*. Such engagement might also help us understand the kind of subjectivities, embodied qualities, and ethical sensibilities that Vinaya/*vinaya* help to shape within a monastic training. This would then help us see the possibilities of how our own lives can be enriched by *vinaya* or what *vinaya* might look like for a person outside of the monastic context.

In conclusion, Prof. Hallisey's encouragement to do more than accumulate information when studying Buddhism has two key aspects. First, we must recognize the limitations of focusing solely on

accumulating information. The foremost limitation is that we might be led to think of the texts or subjects of study as something coming from a distant time, place, or culture and have nothing to do with us. We might also have the temptation to make generalizations about Buddhism that may not be applicable across time and place. Second, we must recognize the texts, ideas, and practices as products of specific time in history, but we must also see them as capable of transcending that temporal distance and speaking to us directly. The “more,” therefore, helps me to be open to many possibilities, what the above Vinaya passage refers to as “the many intentions” within the texts and what they can reveal about us.

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## Opening a Space for Thinking: Shin Buddhist Moral Reflection

Dennis Hirota<sup>53</sup>

### **Introduction**

Since the mid-nineteenth century, when Japan was opened to missionary activity by the Christian West, Shin Buddhists have felt pressed to articulate a reasoned account of ethical thought in their tradition. American Protestant missionaries in particular presented a direct challenge. The Congregational missionary M. L. Gordon (1843-1900), for example, criticized Japanese Buddhism as having “only a very inadequate idea of sin,” one that, with “no Law-giver and Judge,” trivializes the weight of misdeeds (Gordon 95). Such criticisms were underpinned by deeper metaphysical critiques, but the quest to formulate a coherent theory of the moral resources in Shin teachings continues to this day among Shin academics.

Charles Hallisey has deftly sketched the prevalent intellectual trends resulting from interactions between the colonial West and Buddhist Asia under the rubrics of colonialism, modernity, and globalization. He describes the hallmark of modernity’s vision of human nature as determined by “ideas about the individual as a free and discrete agent who .

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. . . is able to transcend the constraints of inherited conditions.” Further, he notes that this understanding of the human as “a self-creating and self-governing individual . . . gives ethics a special pride of place in modernity’s vision of a person.” (“Buddhist Ethics” 315).

Although Japan was never colonized by the West, the tensions evident in the encounter between American Christians and Japanese Buddhists are illuminated by Hallisey’s discussions. I recall an unexpected visit from Hallisey in Kyoto well over thirty years ago. After a brief view of a National Treasure gate at the Honganji and the tiny quarters of the translation center at Ryukoku University, he asked about Shin writings treating ethical issues. I hesitated, because of the frequent criticism of the meagerness of relevant materials, but offered a translation of *Tannishō*. He surprised me with his reply: “This is exactly what I was looking for.”

Hallisey’s account of what he saw in *Tannishō* and has come to see through his long engagement with Shinran and with Shin Buddhists both in Japan and the U. S. is a contribution yet keenly anticipated. But already, through his various efforts to build “interpretive bridges” between contemporary academic discussion and still vital Buddhist traditions of Asia in order “to think with Buddhist resources,” Hallisey has opened up spaces for considering the ethos of Buddhist paths—the ambience of dwelling in the world with others—including that of Shin Buddhists.

### **Release from Theory**

Hallisey’s attention to the concrete and particular in the moral life of religious engagement provides a broad framework within which to approach Shinran’s articulation of the Pure Land Buddhist path. Regarding the reading of scriptural texts, for example, Hallisey speaks of an “as if” quality, to read *as if* what is being read is spoken directly to oneself. One

reads “with an expectation to come to know the meaning of [one’s] own life.” In place of a theoretical emphasis on doctrine or abstract universalism, Hallisey speaks of reading that requires a fundamental “moral formation,” for “one must come to see oneself in need of urgent help” (“Scripture’s Advice” 35).

Against the backdrop of Hallisey’s analysis, Shinran’s spoken reflections leap from the page:

When I consider deeply the Vow of Amida, which arose from five kalpas of profound thought, I realize that it was entirely for the sake of myself alone! Then how I am filled with gratitude for the Primal Vow, in which Amida resolved to save me, though I am burdened with such heavy karma. (*Tannishō* 43)

Here, and in the following, Shinran precisely rejects what Hallisey has identified as cardinal concerns of modernity with the individual as subject and agent and the ethical as guiding principles in the good life:

I know nothing of what is good or evil. . . . For a foolish being possessed of afflicting passions, in this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are lies and gibberish, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu alone is true and real. (*Tannishō* 44)

Further, in stark contrast to notions of the person as “able to transcend the constraints of inherited conditions,” Shinran states: “If the karmic cause so prompts us, we will commit any kind of act.” Here, Shinran identifies in particular with those socially shunned because their livelihoods were considered to violate Buddhist precepts, “those who make their living drawing nets or fishing . . . and those who sustain their lives hunting beasts or taking fowl” (*Tannishō* 34). But more generally, he understands the human condition as such that “Maddened beyond control



by afflicting passions, we do things we should not and say things we should not and think things we should not” (Shinran 547).

### Currents of Moral Reflection in Shinran

In Shinran, two broad streams of awareness arise together and interact in moral reflection. One is the self-awareness of the limitations of our perceptions and judgments in unenlightened life, rooted as they are in clinging to self. His words in *Tannishō*, §3:

It is impossible for us, who are possessed of afflicting passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever. Sorrowing at this, Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the attainment of Buddhahood by the person who is evil (*akunin jōbutsu*). (*Tannishō* 24)

Shinran may be understood to avoid adherence to moral theory as prone to attachment to the unenlightened self and its powers to determine and fulfill acts that will lead to awakening. He terms this “calculative thinking” (*hakarai*), a mode of thought and perception that he identifies as the fundamental obstacle to genuine engagement with the Buddhist path.

The second current of moral thought in Shinran is his conception of “naturalness” or “becoming-so-of-itself” (*jinen*). It is the dynamic of reality or wisdom-compassion itself. It functions from beyond self or conceivability as a wellspring of awareness and conduct, undermining the motive force of calculative thinking and emerging where such designing has fallen away. *Tannishō* expresses Shinran’s thought: “Even when we are evil, if we revere the power of the Vow all the more deeply, gentleheartedness and forbearance will surely arise in us through its spontaneous working (*jinen*)” (*Tannishō* 40).

### ***Crabcakes, with Kokoro***

Anyone who has attended Hallisey's courses on moral anthropology in recent years has encountered *Crabcakes*, James Alan McPherson's memoir of his latter years, including stays in Japan and his relationships with Japanese friends. Hallisey has suggested that Shin Buddhist perspectives, specifically as set forth by a professor of Western philosophy, Kanamatsu Kenryō, in his book *Naturalness*, was a seminal influence on McPherson's work.

In *Crabcakes*, McPherson speaks of religious attitudes in daily life, particularly as a binding or "neighboring" communal force (as he defines and uses "*religio*"). He mentions incidental visits to Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines in Japan and even writings of a "new religion" recommended by an acquaintance, but nowhere discusses Japanese Buddhism per se (Lafcadio Hearn is quoted on causation, and Zen appears as a visit to an American Zen center). Nevertheless, Hallisey's insight appears cogent. It no doubt involves the recurrent use of the Japanese term "*shizen na kimochi*" (most frequently simply romanized, and occasionally used together with its translation, "natural feeling"), which is cognate, at least in English, with fundamental terms in Kanamatsu's exposition, "pure feeling" and "naturalness (*jinen*)."

Neither Shin Buddhism nor Kanamatsu's book is mentioned in *Crabcakes*, and it is no longer possible to inquire of the author. Here, however, I simply suggest another, somewhat circuitous, route by which to corroborate Hallisey's discernment of Shin spirituality at work in McPherson's memoir. This is the influence of Natsume Sōseki's novel *Kokoro*. McPherson does mention of Sōseki and also *Kokoro* in *Crabcakes*. The basic structural similarity of the two works is conspicuous, for the latter half of

both consists of a lengthy confessional narrative—a personal “letter”—intended as a message of apology and explanation.

McPherson refers dozens of times in his “letter” to “*shizen na kimochi*” and “the *naturalness*, the *shizen*,” seeking to articulate “the naturalness of the processes, the deep flow of life impulses” (167) he feels at work in relationships with Japanese acquaintances. He sought in Japan to come to terms with the psychological constraints he experienced as a person of color in America. He states, for example,

After too many personal experiences of willful distortion, gestures grounded in human impulses, in *shizen na kimochi*, begin to lose their purity of motive and begin to be perverted by calculations, second thoughts, self-protective censorings . . . . This practiced discrepancy or distortion, between the inside and the outside, . . . is in large part responsible for the comic black face, the smiling image, that is so popular in the West. (193)

McPherson speaks of himself as *sacer* (“outsider,” “banished”), which “suggests the desolation which comes from the absence of feeling fellowship and connection. I have felt this these many years” (128). He no doubt responded to the themes of loneliness and alienation in *Kokoro*, in which the main character states, “loneliness is the price we have to pay for being born in this modern age, so full of . . . our own egotistical selves” (*Kokoro* 30).

### Sōseki’s “Naturalness”

It has taken me two additional years to find my way into *kokoro*, into the heart of the matter, into its essence.  
(McPherson 149)

Several times in the long “letter” half of *Kokoro*, Sōseki employs an expression close in significance to McPherson’s use of *shizen na kimochi*, the somewhat unusual phrase, “*watakushi no shizen*” (“my naturalness,” or perhaps, “naturalness that emerges in me”). At a crucial point in the narrative, for example, the central character explains, “I soon overcame the impulse of *my natural self* [lit. my naturalness, or the naturalness in me] to be true to K. I only wish I had been given another such opportunity to ask K’s forgiveness.”<sup>54</sup> Here, we see the confluence of apologetic self-awareness of one’s calculative thoughts together with the working of naturalness from beyond the self.

In a lecture to elite high school students in Tokyo late in 1913, several months before the newspaper serialization of *Kokoro* began, Sōseki took up the theme “Imitation and Independence” (*Mohō to Dokuritsu*). He urged his audience—the future leaders of the nation—to cultivate a resilient independence and not merely imitate Western modernity. His single example of such independence drawn from Japanese history was Shinran. Sōseki points to Shinran’s abandonment of traditional monastic precepts, based on his embrace of the Pure Land Buddhist path. For his transgressions, Shinran was defrocked and banished from the capital.

Shinran’s “independence” is not the modern self-willed embrace of nonconventional values. Rather, it arises from his sensitivity to the latent motivations and potential capriciousness of one’s own thoughts and actions, even in moral judgment or religious practice, and the opening such awareness affords as the arising of naturalness. The main character of *Kokoro* states, in what might be a novelistic translation of Shinran’s words: “Under normal conditions, everybody is more or less good, or, at least, ordinary. But tempt them, and they may suddenly change” (61).

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<sup>54</sup> The translation of McClellan, p. 225. More literally: “My naturalness was brought utterly to a halt then and there. The sad thing is that it never revived” (*Sōseki zenshū* 6: 262).

Near the close of his lecture, distinct from direct reference to Shinran, Sōseki states:

Suppose person has committed murder or a heinous crime recognized by all in society as wrong . . . . But suppose further that the person is able describe with precision his thoughts and motives—the workings of his mind—just as they had occurred, hiding nothing and omitting nothing. And suppose that in this way the person is able to communicate vividly to another exactly what had transpired. Then, by virtue of his description, the person would be able to attain Buddhahood (*jōbutsu*). His crime would be absolved. Of course, for having violated the law, he would still face punishment or execution, but he would have been purified. (Sōseki *Dokuritsu* 165-166)

Sōseki here speaks as a novelist, and it is difficult to ascertain the significance of his use of Buddhist terminology. I suspect, however, that he is expressing his understanding of Shinran's words in *Tannishō*, §3, quoted before.

*Kokoro*, with its confessional letter as centerpiece and climax, appears cast in Sōseki's mode of narrative absolution for grave offense. Although McPherson would not have had access to Sōseki's lecture, his memoir appears to follow this pattern, while at the same time celebrating, even in apology, instances of the emergence of naturalness. Hopefully it may be possible in the future to determine whether McPherson was, in fact, familiar with Kanamatsu's *Naturalness*, subtitled in reprint: "A Shin Buddhist Classic." If so, Hallisey may have uncovered in *Crabcakes* something of an American Shin classic.

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## Toward a Hermeneutics of Incapacity

Natalie Gummer<sup>55</sup>

As a student of Charles Hallisey and a reader of his work, I discern what we might call a hermeneutics of incapacity as a pivotal theme in his thought, one that illuminates the conjunction of his interests in narrative, scripture, and literature with his work in moral anthropology. Charlie explores how literature *works*, which is to insist that its significance lies not simply in the meaning of its words, but in the relationships it actively shapes with readers. And Charlie is especially interested in relationships in which a work of literature reveals to us, through various literary and rhetorical techniques, our own moral incapacity (see “Intuition and Judgment” 150–151). This revelation is the beginning, not the end, of the reading relationship, for it transforms us, orienting us toward the work of literature as a teacher that reveals things about us and our world that we cannot see or know without its guidance. What I am calling a hermeneutics of incapacity names this orientation toward reading as a moral practice in which readers “define themselves in terms of what they lack,” and come to a work with “a jaundiced eye on their own abilities and propensities” (“Scripture’s Advice” 37). Yet somewhat paradoxically, it may be through an encounter with literature that the reader’s eye opens to their own incapacity.

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<sup>55</sup> Beloit College.

In Hallisey's writings, this doubleness—incapacity as an experience of self that we both learn from and bring to the practice of reading (not necessarily in that order—this may be a chicken-or-egg question<sup>56</sup>)—drives the process of interpretation. Readers come to see themselves as lacking in relationship to the moral vision the text, and reading from that sense of lack opens the reader to receiving the text as “personal religious advice” (Hallisey “Scripture’s Advice”). Put differently, engaging a literary work through a hermeneutics of incapacity entails learning to see oneself anew through the lens (or in the mirror) provided by the work. In this way, delight in the pleasure and beauty of literature may emerge alongside, or indeed from, the challenge of recognizing one’s own incapacity, complicating and enriching our study of Buddhist poetics.

In his publications and teaching, Hallisey reveals how a hermeneutics of incapacity functions in Theravāda literature (e.g., “Intuition and Judgment,” Hallisey and Hansen “Narrative, Sub-Ethics, and the Moral Life”), but also in early Christianity and modern Tibet (“Scripture’s Advice”) and in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism (as noted by Hirota in this issue). Indeed, recognizing this relational doubleness illuminates a wide swath of Buddhist literature and associated normative reading practices. Mahāyāna sūtras, which fairly glow in this light, make for powerful examples. I’ll identify some of the strategies they employ to encourage a hermeneutics of incapacity in their readers and consider what is at stake in taking this interpretive orientation toward a text. Thereafter, I will ask what we, as scholars of Buddhist literature and ethics, might have to learn from this hermeneutics of incapacity.

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<sup>56</sup> Hallisey notes in “Scripture’s Advice” that “cultivating a probative attitude towards oneself. . . is key to how one receives a text” (35). At the same time, in “Intuition and Judgment,” he writes with regard to a particular story, that “the structure of the narrative reminds us that we. . . [are] incapable” and that “our own road to moral capability. . . can only begin” with this recognition (150). Chicken or egg?



One set of strategies, which I know best from the *Lotus Sūtra*, aims to induce in readers/listeners an experience of themselves as incapable of understanding the Buddha's teachings, yet to frame this experience as a significant step toward developing capability. This experience of incapacity is contrasted repeatedly in the sūtra with the arrogance and ignorance of those who mistakenly imagine that they do understand. This theme frames the second chapter, "Skillful Strategies" (*upāyakauśalya*), which opens with the Buddha's avowal that his "enigmatic speech" (*saṃdhābhāṣya*) is "difficult to understand" (*durvijñeya*) because he illuminates the dharma through skillful strategies. Then follows the famous scene in which, after the appropriately mystified Śāriputra begs the Buddha to explain what he means, five thousand "arrogant" (*ābhimānika*) members of the Buddha's assembly depart in a huff. The Buddha bids them good riddance before (sort of) explaining his skillful strategies in his enigmatic way (see Wogihara and Tsuchida 29–33, 36). Here, as elsewhere in the sūtra (see Gummer "Speech Acts" 201–209), recognizing incapacity is not a barrier to understanding, but rather the very condition that enables the reader's advancement. What is more, by the account of the sūtra, that advancement takes place not through comprehension, but rather through the model reader's ecstatic response.<sup>57</sup>

The *Teaching of Vimalakīrti* exercises less overtly self-referential narrative strategies to foster the sense of incapacity in readers, especially through identification and disidentification with various figures in the story. In the third chapter of the Sanskrit sūtra, we meet, one by one, all the disciples and bodhisattvas who, despite the directive of the Buddha, are exceedingly reluctant to visit the ostensibly ill householder Vimalakīrti. Each narrates a past encounter that has left him leery of engaging in

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<sup>57</sup> As modeled, for instance, by Śāriputra at the beginning of Chapter 3, when his confusion and doubt give way and he is suddenly "pleased, enraptured, transported by joy, thrilled, full of delight" (*tuṣṭa udagra āttamanāḥ pramuditaḥ prītiśaumanasya* (Wogihara and Tsuchida 59.1–2).

dialogue with Vimalakīrti: the householder’s brilliant eloquence (*pratibhāna*) has left them at a loss for words (*niṣpratibhāna*). This sequence of anecdotes builds up to Mañjuśrī’s ultimate acquiescence to the Buddha’s request, and encourages most, if not all, readers to identify not with the inscrutable brilliance of Vimalakīrti, but with those he has left speechless and confused. Vimalakīrti’s apparent subversion of both moral norms (his preference for hanging out with degenerates) and hierarchies (the superiority of his wisdom and skill to those of accomplished disciples and bodhisattvas) contributes to this confusion. The normative position prepared for the reader—one that continues throughout the sūtra—is one of incapacity vis-à-vis the exemplar Vimalakīrti, upon whose potent words their transformation explicitly depends. And once again, normative affect rather than normative understanding shapes their position—here, perhaps more awe (*āścarya*, *adbhuta*) than joy—in the face of Vimalakīrti’s dazzling display of wit.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, as I’ve argued elsewhere (e.g., “Sacrificial Sūtras”), both sūtras frame the encounter with their own words in distinctly ritual—indeed, self-sacrificial—terms. Their potent speech “completely cooks” (*pari-pac*) audiences, invoking the ancient South Asian practices of transformation through sacrifice in which Buddhism is so deeply embedded. Indeed, the *Teaching of Vimalakīrti* calls itself the “great dharma sacrifice” (*mahādharmayajña*—see Takahashi 115 [XI.9]). According to the *Lotus*, “reading” (including hearing, memorizing, uttering, and so forth) such speech enacts a powerful ritual. For the receptive reader, the sūtras tell us, this ritual erases past negative karma, infuses body, speech, and mind with essence-of-buddha, predicts the reader’s future buddhahood, and obviates the need to undergo the bodily self-sacrifices undertaken by the bodhisattva. Yet the sūtras also assert that these ritual goals cannot be

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<sup>58</sup> See Takahashi 20–44 for chapter 3; *āścarya* and *adbhuta* occur fairly frequently throughout the sūtra (as do terms expressing joy); see Takahashi 29 (III.31) for a representative example.

attained unless the reader recognizes their own incapacity vis-à-vis the text, and advocate the readerly practices of *kṣānti*, “active patience,” and *dānti/dama*, “self-subjection”—forms of readerly self-sacrifice, if you will (Gummer “Speech Acts” 204, 207). These terms name a hermeneutics of incapacity in Buddhist—and ritual—terms. To approach reading through a hermeneutics of incapacity, then, is to cultivate an openness to being transformed by the encounter with the text through a recognition of one’s own inability (to know, to speak, to act, in accord with the dharma).

So, while modern reading practices may incline us to interpret these normative texts as repositories of doctrine, by their own account, they aim primarily to provoke affective experiences (confusion, awe, joy) and ritual-aesthetic transformations. Of course, particular readers will respond quite differently to these sūtras’ provocations—they might well resist or reject them. But Hallisey’s attunement to the realization of incapacity through reading practices helps us to understand how and why the sūtras’ strategies do the rhetorical work of destabilizing the reader’s sense of comprehension and command, prompting us to read ourselves through the lens of the sūtra and find ourselves wanting. In Hallisey’s words,

we then discover that our own road to moral capability, the practices we ourselves will have to engage in to become capable of living well for others as well as living well with others, can only begin with our own personal recognition that we are incapable of doing what is necessary and will need help from others in order to become competent moral subjects. (“Intuition and Judgment” 150–151)

Charlie’s work and teaching makes visible this orientation toward reading as an experiential realization of incapacity and a practice of moral self-fashioning. As students of Buddhism, we need a hermeneutics of incapacity in our interpretive toolbox if we are to understand how reading (some) Buddhist literature operates as a moral practice—even as a ritual of

transformation. That knowledge transforms our comprehension of what Buddhist literature is and does. Yet as academics who have inherited modern assumptions and practices about texts and how to read them—assumptions and practices that highlight and cultivate the reader’s capacities for objectivity and critique of the text—many of us will be predisposed to look with suspicion, if not repugnance, at an approach to reading that seemingly encourages us to relinquish those capacities.

What, if anything, do scholars have to learn from a hermeneutics of incapacity? Here are three suggestions:

### **How to Balance Critique with Self-critique**

Attend to what repels us in such practices, and why. A hermeneutics of incapacity is not, as secular scholars might tend to assume, inherently uncritical or passive. It does, however, frame reading as a practice of self-critique that is “embedded in larger complexes of moral self-fashioning” (Hallisey “Intuition and Judgment” 151). We should “turn the critical gaze upon ourselves, to leave open the possibility that we may be remade through an encounter with the other” (Mahmood 37)—including textual others. A propensity to approach reading from a position of incapacity, perhaps even of need, renders us open to hearing the ways in which the text challenges our assumptions—our arrogance and ignorance—and to seeing ourselves through the lens it provides. That’s not a revelation that requires us to stop thinking critically. We just need to be at least as critical of ourselves as we are of the text that we are reading.

### **How to Recognize and Experience the Work of the Text**

A hermeneutics of incapacity attunes us to the agency of the text and the ways it cues potential affective experiences and ritual transformations

through the reading relationship. Those aren't just features of Mahāyāna sūtras, even if the sūtras are unusually explicit about their experiential, relational, transformative purpose. If we want to understand what a text is and how it works, we should at least imagine ourselves undergoing those experiences and transformations before we get up and walk out, assuming that we have nothing to learn from them.

### **How to Value and Cultivate Uncertainty and Doubt About Our Own Moral Capacity**

As we continue to grapple with the legacies of Orientalism, Euro-American universalism, and white supremacy that have shaped the field of Buddhist studies, we can learn from a hermeneutics of incapacity the need to cultivate a greater openness to understanding ourselves differently and conducting our reading practices differently in relation to the people and materials we study. Perhaps we should even think about what self-sacrifice—de-selfing, perhaps<sup>59</sup>—might mean in the ethics of scholarship. Our individual and collective moral refashioning is at stake.

I want to end by underscoring that nothing of what we have to learn from a hermeneutics of incapacity requires that we engage in “constructive” or “theological” approaches to Buddhism (not that there's a thing wrong with doing so). The supposed either/or between “secular” “historical” approaches and “theological” approaches is a red herring, an artifact of the field's misleading normative categories—and, dangerously, it perpetuates Euro-American universalism by rendering the “secular” study of religion impervious to the critiques that their so-called “objects” of study might offer. As a thought experiment, we need only classify Buddhist texts as “philosophical” rather than “religious” (and maybe move

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<sup>59</sup> I borrow this term from *Crabcakes* (McPherson 112), a transformative book that I learned about from Charlie.

them to Greece) to find that suddenly it's academically acceptable for us to assume that they have something to teach us. That's another thing I learned from Charlie.

Actually, when I think of all I've learned from him, I'm at a loss for words.

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## *Mamāyana*: Reaching Out to the Particular and the Potentials of Scholarship

Eviatar Shulman<sup>60</sup>

Charlie Hallisey has easily been the greatest influence on my scholarship in Buddhist Studies, rivalled only by my doctoral supervisors. He has become a mentor for me not only as a scholar, but no less as a human being, and especially in pointing out the relation between the two. For him, or at least as I understand him, scholarship is a way to become a better person. Although I have not had the privilege to study with Charlie directly, the exchanges with him over the past fifteen years have done much more than provide me with a variety of insights and understandings regarding the nature of Buddhism and the people who make it what it is. More important than that is how, between the words and ideas, he has taught me to become aware of the way my academic pursuits will be improved by paying attention to the manner in which I conduct them; this means that scholarship is by its nature a moral act that must be carried out with care. The care through which he conducts his own studies, with which he talks and tells stories, with which he reads and observes, continues to be a great inspiration for me.

I wish to focus here on what to me is Charlie's most important work of scholarship, which has left an indelible impact on my heart/mind:

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<sup>60</sup> The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



his doctoral dissertation on “Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka,” submitted to the University of Chicago in May 1988. This work contains more than seeds of what became Hallisey’s more influential publications, such as his mature and confident thinking in the articles on “Ethical Particularism,” “Roads Taken,” “Narrative,” or “Works and Persons,” all papers that make crucial contributions to the discipline. Although some of my own publications have engaged with themes that come up in the latter two papers, here I will orient my discussion toward the thread that became “Ethical Particularism” and the ensuing “Response.” In these works, Hallisey calls for a particularistic and highly contextualized approach to Buddhist ethics, which is sensitive to personal negotiations and adaptations of different possible Buddhist ethical positions that elsewhere may be abstracted, thought out and generalized in comprehensive systems. Personal negotiation and context dominate the relation to any ethical position. In his dissertation, Hallisey shows how deep scholarship can reach into the real, living, and thriving world of particular people, observing them with true empathy—not only studying them, but learning *from* them.

The dissertation focuses on the concept of devotion, employing it to make a broader statement within the disciplines of religious studies and comparative religion. The compelling first chapter shapes a perspective on the life of religion with the concept of devotion at the center, making rich use of the available scholarship of the time. However, the discussion of devotion is used here as a tool to reach beyond and through the textual record to the life, emotions, and living perspectives of the people who constituted the Buddhist tradition in medieval Sri Lanka, with lasting relevance up to contemporary times. Thus, Hallisey seeks to understand and relate to the particular lives and perspectives of real people, or as he says early on: “This dissertation . . . develops an understanding of devotion with a focus on pragmatics, seeking to describe devotion as a strategy for relating religious systems to men and women in particular contexts” (5–

6). At least one of his aims is to integrate and weave together emotion and thought, or cognition and affect, and to bridge the gap between the grand religious system and the concrete experiences that define it.

In the dissertation, Hallisey speaks of the way discussions of religion incline toward the general or underlying system, which is abstracted from context, while at the same time analysis aspires to be capable of describing individuals' particular experiences in lived situations. Yet for Hallisey, these two opposing vectors of analysis toward perceiving and understanding the general or the particular are organically undistinguishable, because religion must be understood as a practical condition of human cognition, active in the workings of the mind that are felt in a fully personal way. Hallisey thus defines devotion as "meaning dominated by feeling," or "the sudden discovery of self-involvement, the sense of the engagement of the agent in a larger situation or process." The subjective character of devotion is thereby "caught up with *our* emotions" in a way that "emotions are thoughts somehow "felt" in flushes, pulses, "movements" of *our* livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, and skin. They are embodied thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension "I am involved" (55, citing Rosaldo; italics mine, underlining in the original).

Notice the use of the first-person possessive *our* in the last quotations. This is very much the point—the language of devotion is personal, drawing the subject into complete involvement. At the same time, we as scholars can reach out to the subjects of our intellectual inquiry and feel their concerns, at best even as our own. Here it seems that the strong distinction between the scholar and the religious subject, between us and the text, is collapsing. This is how one learns *from*, knowing that we too have livers and hearts, pulses, and movements, and that our thoughts too are conditioned by webs of language and culture, which make it difficult for us to be open enough to perceive the other and transform ourselves along

the way, to perform scholarship as a truly ethical activity, of the kind Hallisey seems to intuit and even to practice.

The second chapter of the dissertation is the heart of the study, in which Hallisey introduces the term *mamāyana*, which he draws from medieval Sinhala literature in order to refer to “the mental act of taking as mine,” or “considering ‘this is mine,’ ‘this belongs to me’” (132).<sup>61</sup> Simply, we can observe the dramatic difference between speaking of “the Buddha” and “Our Buddha” or “my Buddha,” who came here “even for me.” This is not only the world in which devotion works, but the one in which religion is a deeply personal fact, one in which there can be “a recognition that one has been a beneficiary of the actions of another” (135). *Mamāyana* is both an idea and a linguistic pattern (151), and later chapters in the dissertation show how it would be practically applied in “religion for ordinary people” (chapter 3), in practices of the recollection of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*, chapter 4) and in patterns of worship and ritual, *pūjā* (chapter 5). These are all expressions of, and ways of developing, *mamāyana*.

Specifically, Hallisey’s discussion of devotion hinges on the unique combination of honorifics and possessives used in Sinhala Buddhism—as in *apē budhunvahamsē*, “our noble Lord Buddha” and numerous related articulations. In these texts, the Buddha moves to become not only our Lord or king, but is treated as one’s mother and father (105). Hallisey shows how the Sinhalese is distinguished by its patterns of language, which makes “regular use of complex combinations of honorific nouns, suffixes, and verbs to refer to figures of authority” (70), whether humans such as kings and monks or objects such as relics and books. These patterns of language reveal what happens in people’s hearts and minds, not as a general and theoretical view of language but by placing the speaker (or

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<sup>61</sup> *Mamāyana* seems to play at the same time on the association of a *vehicle* (*yāna*), as in *Mahāyāna*, or of the *path* (*ayana*), as in *Rāmāyaṇa*.

thinker) in personal relation to these people and objects, so that they become our Buddha, our monks, our great Bodhi tree, our relics, our teacher and Lord. Hallisey traces the use of these terms in Pāli commentarial literature, bolstered and brought to full expression in the medieval Sinhala texts. Quoting the *Pūjāvaliya* he speaks of “my noble Lord Buddha . . . He taught and secured this true dharma for even me; he became enlightened for even me; he is a support for even me . . .” (80). Within this linguistic context, every articulation becomes a performative speech act that has persuasive power, drawing the practitioner to adopt the ideas embedded within the language.

Revealing how “attention to pragmatics alters the way that code and context are related” (63), Hallisey demonstrates his insistence that code and language must be fine-tuned to the degree that they help us connect all the way to embodied pulses and modes of being in the world. Yet here already he warns us that the dichotomies that are often paired, such as “general and particular, system and historical conditioning, text and context, religion and religions” do not easily map onto each other, and that in allowing the first member of each pair to dominate the latter we pay a heavy price. Instead, Hallisey employs pragmatics as a mediating method that helps us approach “the mechanisms and processes by which particular cultural—and religious—representations are selected and shared by individuals within particular social and historical contexts” (64).

With this Hallisey maintains balance on the fine thread between the particular and the general (emphasized in Schilbrack’s response to “Ethical Particularism”)—the general is a part of, and not more than, the conditioning that generates the particular, certain ideas that exist only within the structuring of concrete experiences. The general can be abstracted and taken as a religious system, but in fact only exists in real life in particularized forms, which for Hallisey stubbornly speak of self-involvement. There is, indeed, no common religious experience to be found,

no experience of “devotion.” The general can be seen as the inclination within the particular to be what it is, what allows a specific religious experience to take shape within a completely embodied situation, while drawing from deep-seated cultural values. Or in this case that focuses on language, language is seen as what makes the particular experience possible and coherent. Given that Hallisey, as he clarified in his “Response” to Schilbrack, is interested in the general only in the manner in which it would help us understand the particular, and that he is suspicious of the tendency of the general to override the particular and occlude it from our vision, we should ask what academic discourse, which often trades in generalities, aims to achieve.

The answer, also stated in Hallisey’s “Response,” is that our goal can be that of learning *from* the particular, here, broadly, the Buddhist tradition and the lives lived within it, and not only *about* it, that is to move beyond it while seeking the general, supposedly deeper point. This, for me, is a dramatically important distinction that calls for a serious update of many academic practices, and one we should be able to listen to and apply at the start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, when information is so freely available and it is no longer enough to be a professor who can navigate a densely packed library. Rather, after serious study and reflection, we should be able *to do* something with our scholarship, as suggested in the “Response,” to change as human beings and help effect change. As Hallisey once said during a class he gave at the Hebrew University in response to a question by a student whether he is a practitioner—Buddhist practice is simply the attempt to be a better person.

I remember the very turn of the road in Colombo in which Charlie introduced me to the idea of *mamāyana*. It has made room for me as a scholar to seek out the real experiences of the people that constituted the tradition, and to try to learn from them. Reading his dissertation again toward the writing of these words of gratitude, I have the strange

sensation that many of my thoughts were actually his. However, I still feel that I am far away from the ideal that Charlie communicates and embodies, of being so finely attuned to the heartfelt realities of real people who live in history and language.

Hallisey has the ability to listen to the particular, to see the many, perhaps the endless, dimensions in which people, texts, and practices exist, and to use generalization as a tool, which he continues to refine and to imbue with rich emotional and cognitive significance. He seems to know very deeply that what comes together in a living heart is always an instance that transcends that vast web of theoretical determinations. This, for me, is what makes Charlie Hallisey such a great gift to each of us personally, and to the discipline at large.

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## Traces a Teacher Leaves: *Nissaraṇādhyāsa*, A Looking Glass to Visualize Humanities

Chamila Somirathna<sup>62</sup>

The very first meeting I had with Prof. Hallisey was at the Peradeniya University Sinhala Department when I was an Assistant Lecturer there. I raised a concern that was important to me at the time: When learning Sinhala in Sri Lankan universities we were not adequately exposed to “theoretical” knowledge. He did not seem to believe me and simply asked me to read Martin Wickramasinghe’s *Guttīla Geetaya*. That day I started reading the *Guttīla Geetaya* in Peradeniya University’s main library. Reading the first few pages, I suddenly understood something important about myself and the power imbalances between intellectual communities in different parts of the world. Today, I can invoke many theories to explain my “third-world” student concern that I wasn’t exposed to sufficient “theoretical knowledge.” That first conversation with Prof. Hallisey and my subsequent study of the *Guttīla Geetaya* taught me to pay attention to these power imbalances and the ways in which certain types of knowledge are privileged over others. I thought I didn’t have access to “theoretical” knowledge, but Prof. Hallisey taught me that I did. I began to study the works of local intellectuals and their theories and concepts—theories and

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<sup>62</sup> University of Kelaniya.



concepts that did not necessarily look like theories and concepts according to Western standards.

I have had the great fortune to work closely with Prof. Hallisey in his capacity as supervisor of my Masters and PhD research. He continues to cultivate in me the habit of attending to the local and the particular. Consequently, I make it a conscious practice to draw on local theories and concepts in my work. The very first day I began my Masters work with Prof. Hallisey, we spent more than one hour reading the first poem of the *Siyabaslakara* together. I quickly realized that “theoretical” knowledge can take the form of metaphors, similes, and many other forms. Studying with Prof. Hallisey opened up new ways of understanding “theoretical” knowledge and taught me to read Sinhala literature with fresh eyes. As Prof. Hallisey himself has said regarding his own early experiences of Sinhala Studies in Sri Lanka, “Sinhala Departments had their own interesting way of reading Buddhist literature!”

Prof. Hallisey inspired me to re-read with fresh eyes and renewed respect for the Sinhala-language authors of different historical periods. As I write this tribute to Prof. Hallisey, my thoughts roam over my own academic history. In my mind, I meet past teachers again; I re-learn my lessons; I re-read the literary texts previously assigned; I sit again in my favorite literature classes. Now, I want to go back to those classes where my younger self just sat without paying serious attention to the lessons. I very much want to listen again to my past teachers’ words, which I hadn’t listened to carefully. I want to re-read some of those texts which I ignored, thinking them to be just “average” or “ordinary.” I wonder how I would experience those past lessons if I could listen to them now with everything I have learned since then. Prof. Hallisey was the strongest inspiration for this intellectual as well as ethical inner transformation.

Once in a draft paper, I critiqued a renowned humanities scholar. Prof. Hallisey read the draft and asked me: “Can you tell this to her while

having coffee with her in a cafe?” I realized that I could not do so. The issue was not so much what I said, but the manner in which I said it. I was so ashamed. I had written about one single problematic point in the author’s work but had ignored the rest of her influential work. I realized that the “real me” would never say such words. I wondered who is this “other me” who wrote this critique? What happens to a person’s moral beliefs and practices when s/he changes her role from normal human being to academic critic? What was I trying to gain by criticizing her in that manner? Prof. Hallisey’s question echoes in my ear whenever I discuss another scholar’s work, inviting me to re-think the purpose of my critique. His question helps me avoid being *adhimāna* (arrogant). Thus, Prof. Hallisey’s teaching methods instilled in me a respect for scholars and knowledge, which I believe is important in creating intellectual community.

Prof. Hallisey’s approach to intellectual community invites us to recollect the *humanity* in the humanities. As Martha Nussbaum says, humanities and the arts have the capacity to activate and refine the capacity in humans to see the world through another person’s eyes (*Not for Profit* 96). By attending to the local and the particular, Prof. Hallisey is temporarily able to leave his “American” self behind and gaze upon the world with the eyes of the literary “other.” Learning becomes an active journey for a “truth” that is always multiple and expressed in a variety of local forms.

A concept in Sinhalese Buddhist literature captures Prof. Hallisey’s work as a scholar and teacher. That concept is *nissaraṇādhyaśa*. Dictionaries understand this concept in Buddhist terms as the objective of attaining *nibbāna* or leaving all worldly comfort to realize the noble truth (Carter 337; Clough 298).<sup>63</sup> Among the present-day Sinhala community *nissaraṇādhyaśa* has a broader meaning. It is not just about one’s own *nibbāna*, but

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<sup>63</sup> Ediriweera Sarachchandra uses the term “*paramārtha gavēśī*” to explain *nissaranadhyasa* in *Sinhala Gemi Natakaya* (27).

about the welfare of all beings. A story can illustrate this broader meaning: Once in a previous life, Gautama Buddha had the opportunity to attain *nibbāna* and become an *arhat* merely from hearing four lines of a Buddhist poem. He refused to do so. Instead, he chose the longer and more difficult path to Buddhahood so that he could teach people the truth and enable them to attain *nibbana* too. The twelfth-century Sinhala classical prose text *Saddharma Ratnāvaliya* (*Garland of Dharma Gems*) recounts the story as follows:

Incalculable numbers of years ago in the time of Dipankara Buddha, our Lord Buddha, who is the teacher of all the three worlds, had the necessary merits to attain *arhat* status and end all his suffering in *samsara* by merely listening to a four-line poem. But, with sympathy for all beings, he thought it was not appropriate for someone like him to attain *nibbāna* alone, leaving his fellow beings behind, “like eating a plate of rice alone in a time of famine while everybody else is watching”. . . . And he wished to attain the status of Buddha in a future life in order to accompany those other beings to the city of *nibbāna*.” (*Saddharma Ratnāvaliya*, 1)<sup>64</sup>

Today, the concept *nissaraṇādhyāsa* has come to mean doing a particular act without expecting material benefit, but only for the benefit of

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<sup>64</sup> “. . . අප තිලෝගුරු බුදු රජාණන් වහන්සේ, මෙතැනට සාරාසංඛ්‍යා කප් ලක්ෂයකින් යට දීපංකර නම් බුදුන් සමයෙහි සිටු පදෙන් යුත් ගාථා මාත්‍රයක් අසා, සච්ච කෙලෙස් නසා ගෙවා ඵරහන් වන්නට නිසි පින් කම් ඇතත් සියල්ලවුන් කෙරෙහි කළ කරුණාවෙන්, “සායෙහි ලද බතක් බොහෝ දෙනා බල බලා සිටිය දී තනි ව වැද හිඳ කන්නා සේ” නුවණ නමැති පදුරු නැති ව, කුසල් නැමැති නැව් නට කල්හි සසර නැමැති මුහුදු ගැලී දුක් ගන්නා මද දෙනෙකු නො ව, සුවිසි අසංඛ්‍යායක් සත්ත්වයන් ඇරලා තනි ව නිවන් දැක්ම අප වැන්නවුන්ට තරම් නොවත්, මම ද මේ ති ලෝ ගුරු බුදු රජාණන් වහන්සේ මෙන් බුදු ව, සසර නමැති සයුරින් ඔවුන් ගොඩ ලන පිණිස සාරාසංඛ්‍යා කප්ලක්ෂයක් මුළුල්ලෙහි මා විසින් කම් සේව ඉදි කරන ලද නුවණ නැමැති රුවල් පදුරු ඇති, සමාධි නැමැති කුඹක් ඇති, සත්තිස් බෝධි පාක්ෂික ධර්ම නමැති මහ නැවට නංවා, දේශනා නමැති හස්තයෙන් පැදගෙන නිවන් පුර නැමැති පරතෙරට පමුණුවමි’ යන අදහසින් බුදු බව පතා . . .”

others. Rev. Dharmasena, the author of the *Saddharma Ratnāvaliya* actually introduces the concept of *nissaraṇādhyaśa* by implying that he himself is an example of *nissaraṇādhyaśa*. Why? Because he has composed his text in Sinhala, making it accessible to those who do not know Sanskrit or Pāli, thereby enabling them to learn what is necessary to attain *nibbāna*.<sup>65</sup>

If there is a person who lacks the necessary knowledge, yet is willing to be meritorious, and if they are given the necessary advice on attaining *nibbāna* and are willing to learn/know the sermons and engage in meritorious acts to attain *nibbāna*, for the development of such good humans (*satpuruśa*), this *Saddharma Ratnavali* is composed” (2).<sup>66</sup>

Rev. Dharmasena attends to his local context. He writes for the sake of his local audience, who need knowledge in a language that they can understand. Rev. Dharmasena, skilled in Pāli and Sanskrit, could have written in these languages for his own spiritual development towards *nibbāna*. But he took the difficult task of producing a text for his local community, for the benefit of others—for other *satpuruśas*— who, like him are searching for the truth.

Perhaps, we can think of intellectual community and the humanities, more broadly, as a community of *satpuruśas*. That is, a community of people who embody the virtue of *nissaraṇādhyaśa*, working to make knowledge available to others. Like Nussbaum, these scholars understand

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<sup>65</sup> Classical Sinhala literary texts help us not only to understand this term but also to contextualize it along the lines of literature, arts, religion, and humanities. The first few paragraphs of almost all the classical Sinhala texts explain the objective of writing the text, who invited writing it, author/s sometimes, the target readership, methods followed in writing the text etc.

<sup>66</sup> “යම් කෙනෙක් නුවණ මද වන් කුසලවිජන්දය ඇති ව ධර්මාභියෝගයට උපදෙස් ලදින් බණ දැන පින් කමැ හැසිර නිවන් සාදා ගනින් නම් එ සේ වූ සත් පුරුෂයන්ට වැඩ සඳහා සද්ධර්මරත්නාවලිය නම් වූ ප්‍රබන්ධයක් කරමිහ.”

knowledge-production as being in the service of humanity. Prof. Hallisey taught me to take seriously the knowledge embedded in classical Sinhala Buddhist texts. He taught me that these texts have something to teach us relevant to our lives today. He offers a broad vision of the humanities as a community of scholars committed to the flourishing of others. This vision of the humanities requires taking seriously the literature of these others, attending to the local and particular. I am grateful to Prof. Hallisey for bringing Sinhala literature alive for me and inviting me to participate in creating this broad vision of the humanities.

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## Reading with Charlie<sup>67</sup>

Jonathan Spencer<sup>68</sup>

I come to this symposium from a less obvious direction than most other contributors. Although I have occasionally published on and around Buddhism in Sri Lanka, I would make no claims for myself as a scholar of “Buddhist Studies.” The same is perhaps true for another potential link, I do not think of myself as a participant in the field known as the anthropology of ethics. I am not a student of Charles Hallisey, nor a colleague. Although Charlie and I have committed to quite fanciful joint collaborative ventures, the outcomes have been oddly intangible in conventional academic terms.

I am an anthropologist of Sri Lanka who has most often written about the island’s politics and the ways in which history, or what passes for history, haunts its politics. I first met Charles Hallisey in Colombo in late 1983. He has no memory of this meeting at all. I next met him in London in the autumn of 1989. Charlie walked into a room at the LSE, where I was working that year, in the company of his Sinhala guru, Professor

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<sup>67</sup> In his luminous keynote at the memorial event for Steve Collins, Charlie made a useful distinction between “Collins”, the writer who he would discuss, and “Steve”, his friend. In that spirit, more or less all that follows is about “Charlie.” <https://bpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/voices.uchicago.edu/dist/0/1457/files/2018/12/hallisey-1wpgdrk.mp3>, accessed 29 June 2023.

<sup>68</sup> University of Edinburgh.

Wijayawardhana, with whom he was spending the academic year at SOAS. We have been friends ever since. This short piece is a reflection on what, if anything, of Hallisey's intellectual project can be gleaned from my memories of our friendship.

An obvious point of departure in answering this question is reading. A lot of what we talk about together is what we have been reading, or what we want to read, or what we don't want to read. No visit to Cambridge is complete without a trip to the bookstores. Often, Charlie waits for me at the till with a bunch of covertly purchased books he thinks I need to read; packing for the airport can be especially fraught, as books are taken down off shelves and thrust into my overweight hand baggage. What follows is loosely structured around some of the things we've read together, and around some of the things I've learned from reading Charlie's work, and from talking about reading with Charlie.

***Jewels of the Doctrine, Translated by Ranjini Obeyesekere (1991)***

In the spring of 1990, Charlie and I, with David Gellner, organized an informal seminar series at the LSE on "The Anthropology of Buddhism." Partly this was an immediate reaction to a brief flourishing of interest in and around London—we included Gustaaf Houtman, Maria Phylactou, Sophie Day, and various PhD students writing up their projects.<sup>69</sup> Mostly, though, it was organized in honor of Gananath and Ranjini Obeyesekere, who were academic visitors at the LSE that year. Stories were very much on our minds. In the shadow of the literary turn in anthropology, and mildly obsessed with Benjamin's essay on "The Storyteller," I had been thinking about ways in which anthropology could make better use of

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<sup>69</sup> The fruits of the seminar can be found in a Special Issue edited by David Gellner (1990).

narrative structure, while Charlie was already at work on the ideas that saw light in his essay on ethical particularism.

Ranjini opens her beautiful Introduction to her translation of the *Saddharma Ratnavaliya* with a remembered scene from her childhood. It is of visits to her grandfather in his village in the hills. In the evenings. He would read aloud from the *Saddharma Ratnavaliya* and the Jatakas. The children would gather round to listen. “That,” Ranjini says, “was how we learned to be Buddhists” (R. Obeyesekere 1991: x). A similar point lies at the heart of Gananath Obeyesekere’s great essay on Buddhist conscience (1987), in which he argues that the substitution of modernist abstraction for the particularity of these classic Buddhist stories might explain the apparent loss of conscience among his countrymen in the turn to political violence in the 1980s.

In his essay on “Ethical Particularism” Charlie deepens and expands the argument:

Through close attention to the moral life of others, as it is made immediately available to us in stories, we come to develop a sense of judgment that allows our own moral decisions to be acutely sensitive to the context in which they are made—so much so that we begin not only to appreciate the possibility that some general truths are evident before us in a particular case, allowing us to recognize a *prima facie* duty as such, but also that we begin to feel comfortable with the possibility that precisely those features which might count in favor of a given action in one context may count against it in another (Hallisey 1996: 42).

All true and illuminating of course. But I want to return to a small detail in Ranjini’s description: not everyone is paying attention. Some of the children get bored and wander off into the kitchen to see what’s



happening with dinner. Others just fall asleep. I am reminded of old villagers in the Sri Lankan village where I lived in the early 1980s who were unembarrassed at snoozing through a *bana*, confident that it was sufficiently meritorious simply to be in the presence of the teaching. I sometimes feel the same edification at work in the presence of an appropriately Buddhist atmosphere, when I wake up and find myself, seemingly by accident, in a seminar of high, and frankly baffling, textual erudition.

### **The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film, Michael Ondaatje (2002)**

In 2000 Michael Ondaatje published a book of conversations with the great film editor Walter Murch. The two had met on the set of *The English Patient*, Anthony Minghella's adaptation of Ondaatje's prize-winning novel, and the book is mostly made up of Ondaatje's prompts and Murch's reflections on moments in his illustrious career, editing *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*. I loved the book and asked Charlie if he had read it. He had, and he told me a story. Charlie, with Janet Gyatso, went to a reading by Ondaatje to promote the book in Madison. *The Conversations*, while a fascinating book in its own right, has none of the obvious pull of Ondaatje's novels, and the audience at the reading was sparse. At the end, as the small crowd dispersed, Charlie and Janet found themselves more or less alone with the author. (I remain jealous to this day.) They talked easily. Ondaatje told them how he became fascinated with the craft of film-making while watching Minghella and his crew every day through the shoot. In particular, he was struck by the way in which Minghella, in adapting his novel, had dismantled its superficially dissonant structure of juxtapositions and *non sequitur* transitions from scene to scene, smoothing them out into a far more conventional thriller narrative. (This is not quite how he has put in more public accounts of the filming.) Apparently impressed by this feat,

Ondaatje then wrote a novel, *Anil's Ghost*, which moved between his more familiar *modus operandi* of employing an intensely visual logic to propel the reader from scene to scene, and something much more linear and thriller-like. A writer who seems to think in images becomes more conventionally literary through an encounter with a film director whose sensibility is itself deeply literary.

Here is one way of thinking about influence. In *The Conversations*, Ondaatje (2002: 40) approvingly quotes Miles Davis: "I listen to what I can leave out" and he has often cited Davis and other musicians (Fats Waller, Ray Charles) as key influences on his writing.<sup>70</sup> But what does it mean to aspire to write like Miles Davis? It can mean literally to employ the rhythm of a phrase or chorus by Davis to shape the sequence of words. But it can also mean something less straightforward, the attempt to use Davis's musical sensibility to shape—or better, to discipline—what we do with words. In that respect, the outcome of decades of conversation between an anthropologist and a historian of Buddhism, is nothing as tangible as a suite of anthropological articles on ethical particularism, or the straightforward importing into Buddhist studies of arguments originally made in an anthropological context. Instead, the fruit of our gadfly conversations is apparent in much more intangible ways, in traces of another sensibility which may help open up a new perspective, or just as often, avoid an old and tired one.

This may give a clue to how we think about conversations between anthropology and Buddhist Studies (or literary history, or Indology). What we learn from one may be what we need to leave out of the other. Our conversations don't have to converge, and one disciplinary context doesn't supply a ready-made template which can be adopted in the other. As in Ondaatje's non-linear narratives, a degree of dissonance, of not

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<sup>70</sup> Steve Collins (2020: liii) also turned to Miles Davis as an inspiration in comments on the wisdom of saying nothing (on Early Buddhism) when there was nothing to say.

getting it, may turn out to be just as fruitful in its longer-term effect. Trading books with Charlie has helped teach me what to leave out.

**The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault. Alexander Nehamas, 1998.**

Scholars of Buddhism are not always noted for their compassionate approach to reviewing the works of their peers, just as Christian theologians can be less than saintly colleagues: it's almost a cliché to discover the disconnect between the thing studied and the person studying. This brings me to the most awkward and potentially embarrassing part of my piece.

Charlie gave me Nehamas's beautiful *Art of Living*, very deliberately and carefully, at some point around 2000. I read it during a summer vacation on the island of South Uist in the far west of Scotland and adapted the title for my inaugural lecture as a full professor in Edinburgh in early 2002. The book is a fleshed-out version of a set of distinguished lectures in the classics, presented by a philosopher rather than a classicist. (In that respect it embodies something of what we could now call the Miles Davis principle.) Nehamas's book examines the proposition that the study of philosophy may, in some cases at least, inform the living of a life. It does this through reflections on the writing and life of Socrates, Montaigne, Nietzsche, and in a final magnificent chapter, Foucault. In my inaugural lecture, I adapted Nehamas's argument about philosophy to apply to anthropologists, using three examples of anthropologists I had known and loved, each of whom, it could be argued, had used their anthropological commitment as a resource in crafting a distinctive, and occasionally exemplary, life.

Nehamas himself offers a rather more specific account of what interests him in these lives: these are people whose writing reveals a

distinctive character (what I have just called a sensibility, or what we might call a set of dispositions); that character is singular and in some sense coherent; and it is revealed in idiosyncrasies of style as much as idiosyncrasies of content. Finally, this distinctive character is not a given, a self-evident property of all humans; in Nehamas's cases, it is something that has had to be made. That labor of making might constitute something we call the philosophical—or anthropological, or even academic—life. The distinctiveness of a particular version of this might be thought of in terms of voice. Many of the writers Charlie and I have shared with most enthusiasm—from Veena Das to Marilynne Robinson to Geoff Dyer, and far beyond—have unmistakably individual, self-made voices. As, of course, does Charlie himself. Nehamas sums up this part of his framing as follows: “These are people we remember for themselves, people we can admire even if we reject many of their views, much in the way that accept, admire, and even love our friends despite their weaknesses and faults” (Nehamas 1998: 5). Often when I write, I can hear Charlie's voice in the background—yacking on, as he puts it—even when the thing I am writing of is seemingly far from his concerns.

In their Preface to Tessa Bartholomeusz's posthumous *In Defence of Dharma*, Damien Keown and Charles Prebish (2002: xvii-xviii) describe a scene at an AAR meeting, where they are watching Charlie and Tessa sharing lunch at an adjacent table: “As they talked and laughed through their meal, one could not help but notice the professional camaraderie, mutual respect, and joy of intellectual sharing.” I suspect we all want to be sitting at that table.

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## Checking the Impulse to Abstraction

Maria Heim<sup>71</sup>

For me one of Charlie Hallisey's most useful interventions is his guiding us to think about the value of the particular. In one formulation of this, he puts to use the Theravāda distinction between conventional and absolute teachings, particularly as it is articulated by the medieval Sri Lankan author Gurulugomi ("In Defense of Rather Fragile and Local Achievement"). Unlike Mahayana conceptions of the "two truths" doctrine that posits a hierarchy of absolute and conventional *truth*, the Theravāda tradition (here Gurulugomi closely follows Buddhaghosa) sees these as two different, but equally true registers of the Buddha's teachings, likened to two different languages. The more abstract "furthest-sense" (*paramattha*) register is used for audiences and contexts engaged in certain kinds of questions (such as dismantling the notion of the self), while the conventional use of language is useful in others (such as discussing karma and the moral responsibility of persons). Neither is truer, because the distinction is about the Buddha's teachings, and nothing the Buddha taught is short on truth. In this conception, the two registers of teachings are not ranked, and can be understood within a larger framework that finds pragmatic value in both. The distinction and the deployment of each register is also highly context-sensitive, and they encourage us to be highly context-

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<sup>71</sup>Amherst College.

sensitive as well in thinking about both grounding and motivating ethical action and the development of moral dispositions.

Hallisey is, of course, always interested in what we can learn from Buddhist teachings to take into our own thought, and he suggests in this article that these ideas can help us sort out the relationship of theory and practice as well as suggest models for education and character formation. I quote the following two passages, that in his article comprise a single paragraph, at length.

Two important consequences follow if we use a model of education to structure our vision of the meeting of practice and theory. First, the example of conventional teaching and absolute teaching suggests that different theories, although distinguished by the degree to which they are abstract and distanced from practice, can function as alternative and overlapping rhetorical strategies within an educational context. Both, depending on the audience, can be used to ground and to motivate actions that are felt to bring about the success of a community or of its individual members. This would apply as well to practical theory. Second, within the model of education, there will be occasions when theories which are distant from practice—and which in other circumstances would be valuable as action guides—must be checked so that they do not become obstacles to education. Parents and teachers are well aware of the many instances in which an objectively accurate explanation prevents complete understanding at a later date. But for those who are in a position to understand it, then a more accurate, if recondite, account can be given.

Both absolute and conventional teachings offer theories about practice, and both can offer formal reflection on it. But from a pragmatic

point of view—and perhaps the pragmatic point of view should always be foregrounded in education—they may be closer or further away from practice, and successful teachers know when to “check” the more abstract, recondite, technical, and objective accounts of practice. Students can learn about stars in the more abstract and technical register as celestial bodies made of certain formulas of hydrogen and helium that produce light and heat from nuclear activity inside their cores, as well as, perhaps more usefully in other contexts, learning about them as exploding balls of burning gas just like our sun.

Hallisey goes on:

Checking the impulse to abstraction which is inherent in theory will also be necessary in those circumstances where analogical predication is employed to cultivate dispositions and to motivate practice. Thus it appears necessary for anyone theorizing—especially theorizing in a way that is intended to be universal, disengaged, and an absolute conception of the world—to acknowledge the achievement of local perspectives in the process of education and consequently to accept the necessity of defending these local perspectives which at the same time appear rather fragile and imperfect before the competition of theoretical reflection. (144-145)

This movement suggests that sometimes the more abstract and disengaged account has to be curbed to make way for the particular, the local, the analogical, and the more immediate modes of theorizing that can actually, in certain contexts and to certain purposes, do a better job of making sense of practice and of ourselves as moral persons. An unexamined disposition to favor the more abstract and objective account, if left unchecked, may trammel the local perspective that can sometimes do a



better job with the vital work of understanding. There is sometimes a necessity, Hallisey says, to check it.

What Hallisey has done here, and indeed elsewhere in his work on ethical particularism, is show how the inclination toward particularism present in the Theravāda sources can be defended in formal terms, and can often yield a more complex—and profoundly true—moral anthropology, one that attends to human differences and the messy circumstances in which we humans must always make our way.

One of the lurking perils in this project from the perspective of comparative philosophy is that insisting on the local and the particular as we read Buddhist and Indian materials can align all too conveniently with the Eurocentrism of philosophy that has long presumed that only Western man (“man” taken advisedly) is capable of rising up out of the local and the particular, and thinking in universalist, objective, and abstract terms; this discourse, explicitly articulated by Kant and Hegel, remains central to the modern discipline in ways that continue to dominate the teaching and practice of philosophy. Philosophers in Western contexts sometimes still readily agree that of course India (and the rest of the premodern non-West) was only ever able to think ethically in ways bounded by their contexts, be they cultural, religious, or any definition you prefer of the “local.” What I think Hallisey has done is to show that even as Buddhist thinkers are quite capable of thinking in universalist, objective, disengaged, and abstract terms, they also have principled ways of thinking formally about the value of the particular. He does this in this article by working with the Buddhist distinctions between absolute and conventional teachings, as well as between *pariyāya* (thick and contextual teachings) and *nippariyāya* (thin and noncontextual teachings), and *nītattha* (statements directly stating their meaning) and *neyyattha* (statements requiring further interpretation). With these kinds of distinctions, Buddhists have provided meta-analyses of thought, textual interpretation, and theory in ways that have

direct bearing on how they considered matters of moral anthropology through literature, narrative, and dialogic encounters, as well as through lists and matrices.

Elsewhere we see Hallisey engage Womanist thinkers as allies in the project of checking the impulse to abstraction. He cites Emilie Townes urging her readers “to concentrate on particularities rather than universals. . . . For it is in . . . taking seriously my particularity—not as a form of essentialism, but as epistemology—where I can meet and greet others” (Townes 2 as quoted in Hallisey 81). Townes’ predisposition for an epistemology of the particular suggests a style of knowing that must be actively and perhaps even defiantly chosen when it competes with the general and the universal. It is an epistemology that resonates with Theravāda sources, because she too spots that particularity need not have any connection to essentialism. Indeed, it is a vital resource for resisting it.

Finally, Hallisey takes this eye for the particular, which is also an aesthetic sensibility, into his style of reading literary texts. The nuns writing the poems he translates in the *Therīgāthā* are conveying ideas and sentiments that lift off the page for us two millennia later, and thus speak across space and time, if not universally. But they do so from their specific, particular, and indeed, singular circumstances, and the more we know of their circumstances the more reach they have. Hallisey realizes this in his translation choice to include in footnotes the commentarial elaboration that fills in the particular context, circumstances, and individuality of each woman. By making ready use of the commentarial material that fills in each woman’s narrative, we gain a deeper involvement.

This is some of what Charlie has given me.

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## An Afterword for Charlie Hallisey

Wendy Doniger<sup>72</sup>

I suspect that I may have known Charlie Hallisey longer than anyone else in this group that produced this volume on the occasion of his felicitation. He came to Chicago as a student, in 1980, just two years after I joined the faculty, in 1978. He graduated in 1988, with a PhD dissertation on “Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka.” But it was Frank Reynolds, not I, who trained Charlie, and not just academically, in the history of religions and in the history of Buddhism, but in the great example that Frank set, and Charlie followed, of embodying the Buddhist virtues of compassion and patience and generosity in every relationship with a student or colleague or any other living creature. And as I, unlike Charlie, was entirely innocent of the field of religious studies before I came to Chicago (I was just a Sanskritist), I trotted along behind Charlie as Frank taught us both what the great issues were in religious studies, and indeed taught us how to teach, more generally, as well as how to live, more generally. And so I have always regarded Charlie Hallisey as a colleague rather than a student. More than that; as our life paths re-joined in recent years, he has also been my teacher in many ways, in the compassionate advice he has given me in difficult times, and simply by the example that he himself sets in his life and in his work.

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<sup>72</sup> University of Chicago.

Although the accidents of the academic establishment kept Charlie Hallisey from being an official Doktorvater, it is quite clear from this remarkable volume that many of the finest scholars of Buddhism in our day regard him as their teacher in every important sense of the word. Some actually mention him by name in this capacity: Felicity Aulino speaks of “Reading Thai Social Worlds with Charlie Hallisey”; Melanie Harris, “Smile to Suffering: The Impact of Charlie Hallisey’s work on Womanist Theology and Ethics”; Jonathan Spencer, “Reading with Charlie”; Upali Sraman, “Reflections on my Experience of Reading Vinaya Texts with Prof. Charles Hallisey”; and finally, Janet Gyatso’s all-embracing and rather enigmatic title, “My Engagement With Charles Hallisey’s Future.” Others simply call him “my teacher” or “a teacher”: Amarakeerthi Liyanage, “My Teacher as a Practitioner of Creative Close Reading”; Chamila Somirathna, “Traces a Teacher Leaves: *Nissaraṇādhyāsa*: A Looking Glass to Visualize Humanities.” Alexis Brown writes of “The Pleasures and Benefits of Reading with Good Friends” (and we know who one of those friends is). Other titles refer more obliquely to the author’s debt to Charlie: Rae Dachille, “Making ‘the Water Useful in Another Way’: Reflections on Reading, Pedagogy, and Representation”; Don Davis, “Ethics Across Generations: The Structure of *Śrāddha*”; Karen Derris, “Understanding within a *Parampara*”; Odeya Eshel, “Woven By Me, Especially For You”; and Kristin Scheible, “Learning ‘to See in Many Different Ways.’”

But more broadly speaking, every single one of these papers, from students and colleagues, refers very clearly to the unusual human as well as intellectual qualities of Charlie Hallisey. He has had many students over the years, teaching first at the University of Pennsylvania and Swarthmore (1979), then at Loyola University of Chicago (1985-1991), then at Harvard (1991-2001), then at Madison (2000-2008) and Amherst (2002-2003), and finally back at Harvard, from 2007 to the present.

His magnum opus is his translation, published in 2015, of the *Therigatha: the Poems of the First Buddhist Women*.<sup>73</sup> Beautifully, simply, elegantly translated, with useful but never intrusive notes, it is as readable as a Robert Frost poem, in a prose style that lets the big ideas of the text come through loud and clear even to a reader otherwise innocent of things Buddhist. (Of course, the scholarship is there, too, for the more sophisticated Indological reader.) And then there are also many, many articles, several of which have inspired other important work, his own and that of others. Many of them have particularly wonderful titles; among my favorites are (beginning with the most recent and going back in time), “Seeing Shadows in the Shade,”<sup>74</sup> “May It Always Be About Adding Beauty to Beauty,”<sup>75</sup> “Transmitting Texts, Changing the World, Moving Hearts: Translation in Buddhist Asia,”<sup>76</sup> “A Gift to the Future,”<sup>77</sup> “Ethics and the Subject of

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<sup>86</sup> “Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism,” in *Curators of the Buddha*, edited by Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31-62.

Gurulugomi,”<sup>87</sup> and “Nibbanasutta: An Allegedly Non-Canonical Sutta on Nibbana as a Great City,”<sup>88</sup>

But Hallisey’s influence may have been most profound in his presence at the many workshops and conferences which he organized or advised, far too numerous to mention here, occasions on which he not only presented his own work but responded so generously and eruditely to the work of his colleagues that he changed the whole course of the projects that they had presented. He has moved through the world of scholarship quietly and effectively, challenging and changing and encouraging students and colleagues, always a force for good. I am so grateful to have been in that world for these past four decades and counting, and I hope that Charlie Hallisey will continue his good works there for many more.

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<sup>87</sup> “In Defense of Rather Fragile and Local Achievement: Some Reflections on the Work of *Gurulugomi*” in *Religion and Practical Reason*, edited by David Tracy and Frank Reynolds (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 121-162.

<sup>88</sup> “Nibbanasutta: An Allegedly Non-Canonical Sutta on Nibbana as a Great City,” *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, Vol. XVIII (1993), 97-130 (a slightly revised and corrected version of “The Sutta on Nibbana as a Great City”).



## Turning Our Inheritance into Our Legacy: An Interview with Charles Hallisey<sup>89</sup>

Interview conducted, transcribed, and edited by Natalie Gummer<sup>90</sup>

**Natalie Gummer:** In “Ethical Particularism,” you wrote that “attempting to put our most basic interpretive assumptions into the form of a question can give us a chance to consider whether some of the questions we ask inadvertently cause us to misconstrue or ignore some of the very material that we hope to understand” (34). Would you be willing to identify for us some current “basic interpretive assumptions” that deserve to be put into the form of a question, and to say a little about why those questions might be important for the field?

**Charles Hallisey:** Let me answer that question autobiographically and historically. The “Ethical Particularism” article you could say is part of a trajectory where it’s midway towards talking about moral anthropology rather than ethics. And part of it was the voice of Kevin Shilbrack’s response, which makes the essay better, because it really should have been called “Ethical Pluralism and Ethical Particularism in Theravāda Buddhism.” The historian in me says again that it makes no sense to take a massive human movement over many centuries and many places and try to reduce it to one kind of ethical theory, and we should expect of

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<sup>89</sup> This interview has been edited to integrate transcripts from two conversations conducted in May and December of 2023.

<sup>90</sup> Beloit College.

Theravāda Buddhism, like we do of Europe, or anywhere, that those listening to those traditions will see a variety of things that can be described in a metaethical way. But eventually I said that I don't do Buddhist ethics—for a while I said I was interested in the contours of the moral person, then in moral anthropology—because one of the problems for the study of Buddhist ethics was that, basically, when you're looking at Buddhist ethics, you're assuming that the moral person stays the same and all the moral person is doing is looking for guidance on how to make a decision. And that's the problem: that's only a portion of our moral lives, when we are actually making decisions. There are other kinds of things—and this is part of relationality—like the sense that other people have a claim on you to such a degree that you are not making a decision. You just have to do something. And this was the importance in Buddhist moral discourse of saying that the mother for her only child is the ideal person. The mother for her only child is not making decisions; she's just driven. She has to do something. So to think of agency, which is connected to decision-making, as being the foundation of the moral life is too limited. It didn't make sense to my life.

Once I decided that I needed to understand things about Buddhist ethics, I needed to learn how to talk like and listen to ethicists, I spent some time basically doing ethnography among ethicists, where I learned about moral realism, moral irrealism, Cornell realism (which as far as I could tell was a Reagan Democrat), and so forth. Then I saw that there is a value to having these terms—deontological, consequentialist, virtue ethics. They help us to see things that are in the shadows, perhaps. The theory of ethical particularism is basically the idea that you're not looking for guidance on how to make a decision, that part of the contour of the moral person is a kind of intuition: you know what to do, and the claim on you is not coming from something about yourself, from your making a decision. You could decide not to follow the intuition, but you're not deciding what to do.

Now I can say that I first learned this from Kenneth Morgan, one of my undergraduate teachers. He was giving a story that was actually a message, but he gave it in a particular local situation. Colgate had a lot of fraternities at the time. (I'm very proud of the fact that I never stepped foot in a fraternity house for the four years I was at Colgate.) Morgan said there were these DKE men who were drunk, and they were driving, and the man who was driving was very drunk, and he smashed into a tree. The car crashed, the door flew open, and he fell out. And it just so happened that there was an abandoned well right next to where the door opened, and this drunk DKE man fell into the well, and the other drunk DKE man jumped into the well and saved him—held him up above water until other people could figure out how to get him out. And the moral of this story was that even a drunk DKE man knows what is right. So that is moral realism, the point of it being that when you're not able to make a decision because you're intoxicated, you do what's right. The story of falling into a well is also in Mencius. Basically, in moral realism, compassion belongs to the universe—it doesn't belong to my decision-making. It belongs to the universe; this is a compassionate world.

There's a great testimony, ethnographically, to moral realism in a history book. It's an assemblage of diaries that were kept in Leningrad during the Second World War, during the siege of Leningrad. The title of the book is *Leningrad 1941-1942* (Yarov 2017). The city leaders understood, *We're in a very unusual situation. The German armies have surrounded us; no one can get us food; there are only limited days left. Keep diaries so that people know what we're going through.* What you see is that food is being rationed and people are continually stealing food from each other. But people are also giving food to each other. Someone has a ration card and a bowl of soup; he puts it on the table, goes to get a spoon, and some hungry child comes and starts eating the soup. He doesn't stop the child from eating the soup; he just watches the child. Where did that come from? It's not in his self-interest. These are people who are doing terrible things, but they're also

doing these extraordinary things all over the place. And *that* is what human beings really are. And we want to understand: where does that come from—that they can do that? We're essentially and intrinsically bad *and also good*. My own sense of moral anthropology is that we have to be able to have an account of the bad things we do as well as these extraordinary things that are outside the realm of decision-making.

Let me share one other anecdote from *Leningrad in 1942*. People felt that they were licensed to interfere in each other's lives. In one incident, it's winter, and in Leningrad, I imagine that that winter, when there's no fuel to heat anything, is miserable. Someone is pulling a sled where another family member is too weak from hunger to sit up and keeps falling off of the sled. Someone is watching this, and when the person has fallen off the sled a number of times, they throw the person back onto the sled and scream in the person's ear: either sit up or die. It's not really a decision. In terms of morality, we want to know about how we make decisions, but it may be in this other realm that a lot of things that will help us really lie. So in the theory of ethical particularism, one of the contours of the moral person is an intuition about what is right and what is wrong. When people act on it, later on they'll treat it as a decision and try to give a reason why, but actually in the moment there's no decision-making. In some sense, lots of cognitive science points to this, as well.

But the problem is when we try to explain everything with one theory: *the only thing that's working is ethical particularism, the only thing that's working is deontology; the only thing that's working is virtue ethics*. That's just not how it is. People are shifting among different kinds of things. When you say, *how do I get better at something, and why do I get better*, then you're in virtue ethics. And we need virtue ethics. Here's a story that probably some of you have heard me refer to before. A feature of my childhood was that my father, before Federal Express, worked for a pharmacist who made medicines for thoroughbred horses. When they were sick and they

needed to have the medicine get there overnight, he would drive the medicine from New York, say, to Baltimore. It might be that because of that, I learned a lot about horse racing and betting. So there are three ways to bet: one is to bet to win, in which you put all your money on a horse to come in first place; another is to bet to place, in which you bet the horse will come in first or second; or you bet to show, in which it will come in first, second, or third. So I say, when it comes to moral anthropology, we should always want to bet to show. We have a tendency to bet to win. It's like it has to be *this*—it's either *this* or it's nothing. So we say it's *this*, and then we immediately start to think of counterexamples. But I say, no, let's stop that. Yes, there's agency, and agency comes with decision-making, but then there's subjectivity, and that's also part of how we live morally. There's also something about relationality. There's also something about imperfection—imperfection as a source of really good stuff. So that's just the general benefit of ethical pluralism.

There's a great anecdote about Paul Farmer when he was in Haiti trying to arrange for health care (Kidder 2003). He was speaking to a woman who had tuberculosis about the causes of her illness and she conveyed her appreciative understanding of it coming from germs. The next year Farmer is back and he's following up on the conversation and she's saying something very different; sorcery was the reason why she had caught tuberculosis. And Farmer says to her, *What you said last year isn't what you're saying now*. She looked at him and said, "Honey, are you incapable of complexity?"

That kind of consistency is important in some spheres, but in other spheres it's not. Let me just say on ethical particularism and intuition that you can start to rely on intuition; you can start to feel when it is that you're deceiving yourself, because we do that all the time. But we should protect the reliance on intuition because the best parts of life come from being open to those moments.

To return to assumptions we should put into the form of a question, one question I've been thinking a lot about this last term came up in a class I taught on the museum as a Buddhist institution. In that course, one of the things that I returned to is something that my friend Naveeda Khan has at the beginning of her book, *Muslim Becoming*. She tells this anecdote about when she was in Lahore doing her doctoral dissertation work. Her roommate was another American scholar and out of the frustration of doing her research in Lahore, decided to abandon it and to leave Pakistan, and was trying to persuade Naveeda Khan to leave, as well. She said that there was no point for Naveeda to be doing the research that she was doing in Lahore, because the people that she was talking to didn't really know Islam. The person said to Naveeda, *You know more about the Quran than they do*. But Naveeda raised the question, *What does knowing Islam look like?* So I rephrased it as, *What does knowing Buddhism look like?*

When I was a graduate student, just because of the nature of the subfield of Theravāda studies, where you have close cooperation and friendships between ethnographers and textual scholars, the idea of *what does knowing Buddhism look like* spans across textual studies and ethnographic studies. That has expanded in all kinds of really excellent ways. But the one area that I would say we're still not able to get at, thinking about Naveeda Khan's book, is *what does Buddhist becoming look like?* How do we study people who are trying to become something when they're not sure what they want to become? That's what Naveeda's whole book is about—people arguing about how Pakistan is an Islamic state, but no one knows what that is. But the idea is that they want to become something that has never existed before.

Our protocols of scholarship are pretty good at helping us to see what it means to *be* Buddhist—Buddhist being—but the idea of Buddhist *becoming*, where people want to do stuff that hasn't been done before under different circumstances—we're not so good at exploring that. Putting

it into a question: *What are Buddhists becoming? And what does knowing Buddhist becoming look like?* One of the things that I find quite engaging is it's not possible to just observe that. In order to know it, in some sense you're participating in it, too. It's like getting a joke: you can't just observe a joke, and not laugh. If you don't laugh or you don't find it funny, then you haven't got it. So what are the sites where people draw on Buddhist pasts to create different kinds of futures? Can we catch glimpses of that happening? This is part of my interest in the museum. People are teaching meditation in museums now, and not just in art museums, but in natural history museums. What is going on in these places? This is one of the places where we police what people are doing now, in which we say, *That's not really Buddhism*. This goes back to the old question of Wilfred Cantwell Smith: *Can a non-Muslim create a new Muslim thought?* And his answer is definitely yes. But when you have it in the question like that, you start to see your assumptions. You say, *no, you have to say that you're a Muslim to create a new Muslim thought*, or even just *What counts as a new Muslim thought?* So the most general question, the one that we should always be asking, would be, *What does knowing Buddhism look like?* And then a contemporary question would be, *What does knowing Buddhist becoming look like?* That's something that deserves to be put into the form of a question.

**NG:** What should Buddhist studies stop doing?

**CH:** What Buddhist studies should stop doing is making comments on the historical connections between the Buddhist world and the Islamic world without careful self-reflection and self-awareness about it. There's a kind of implicit unconscious disposition to accept and repeat anti-Islamic, Islamophobic attitudes in Buddhist history that we just state as if they're facts when they're not. We routinely trace the end of Buddhism in South Asia to the coming of Islam to South Asia and then we project on to it our own prejudices about Islam and violence. There are all kinds of very

complicated aspects to that history, but one example would be the transition of Sindh, that area of South Asia that was a heartland of the Buddhist world, to becoming a central Islamic realm. That happened relatively rapidly and without the kind of violence that we associate with the coming of Islam. We project wrong explanations that are really just prejudices, and deny ourselves the chance to understand how it was that Buddhism operated as part of a much larger world system that then was transformed with the coming of Islam into Asia. We tend to see it in terms of Samuel Huntington's rubric of the "clash of civilizations," and so we're not able to understand, say, how it was that in the realm of the Mongols, some of them converted to Buddhism and some of them converted to Islam. We don't know how they made that choice. Similarly, in Southeast Asian history where you had a shared Hindu-Buddhist culture across mainland and insular Southeast Asia, mainland Southeast Asia became Theravāda Buddhist and insular Southeast Asia became Muslim at around the same time. We don't know how those choices were made. Because we see things only in terms of clashes, we don't see all the interpenetration, the cooperation, the *learning from* that was happening.

A much larger kind of issue, if we get over our own indifference or hostility to things in the Islamic world, is the curiosity that we see among Muslims, an intense interest ethnographically in other kinds of religious communities. The encyclopedia of Rashīd al-Dīn from Iran—people can reconstruct which Tibetan sources he had access to. He gives his own biography of the Buddha, and the illustrations in his encyclopedia are pretty accurate of Himalayan Buddhist life. There doesn't seem to be anything comparable on the Buddhist side of this ethnographic interest in human difference. So it's a historical question: why was it unnecessary in the Buddhist world, and thought valuable and necessary in the Islamic world? If we got over our own contemporary prejudices about Islam, we could do better histories of Buddhism as a world system in Asia and also see how close Islam and the Buddhist world were before the whole middle period.



Part of the problem is that it's very difficult to study middle period India, because Islam is just completely erased from how we conceptualize India, which is part of contemporary problems, too.

So we should stop isolating ourselves on the grounds of understanding Buddhism on Buddhist terms only. If we could get better at seeing adequate training for people in Buddhist studies as being connected outside of the field itself, that would be a boon for all of us. We should try to expand what we think of as the place of the study of Buddhism in modern university.

I also think that we should stop thinking that we know what the study of Buddhist texts actually is. The history of the field was dominated by textual studies, but that's been over for a long time. And what people actually do today when they study texts isn't what people in the past were doing when they studied texts. Before people think that they know what you're doing when you're studying Mahāyāna sūtras, they actually have to look at what you're doing when you study Mahāyāna sūtras and not say, *oh, she's just someone else who's doing textual studies in the way that has always been dominant*. Because you're not doing what people used to do—even if you quote, rightly, Paul Mus.

**NG:** Your work stands at the intersection of several different areas of study—it's something that's quite distinctive of your scholarship. You do moral anthropology and poetics; you study the nature of religious texts; you engage with womanist scholarship; you do social history, and so on. It's a really broad range, and these different areas are always coming together in your work. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about whether and how these different areas are mutually informing in your thinking. I know that's sort of like asking you to tease them apart only to put them back together again—I'm trying to get at the importance of that

multiplicity in the way that you approach your work. Or are there questions, or texts, or practices, or problems that motivate those intersections in your work?

**CH:** When I think about how it happened, I couldn't say it was intentional to do that. I feel really, really fortunate that when I was a graduate student, for people in the subfield of Theravāda studies, cooperation between textualists and ethnographers was just a given. This is one way in which Frank Reynolds was important in my life. Frank had two *paramparas*: one was in religious studies, history of religions, and the other was students who were in anthropology. And there was a kind of close comfort of people of who were textualists with ethnographers—friendships between people, people reading each other's work. That phrase—*moral anthropology is about the way people really are*—that's trying to respond to the demands of what ethnographers were doing. So Frank was bringing about the future of Theravāda studies: people who were textualists were constantly alert to what anthropologists were doing, and vice versa.

This cooperation expands into history as well. My own interest in social history oftentimes is about trying to do historical work informed by anthropological expectations—social history and cultural history, as well as the *Annales* school and *mentalités*, which is historical anthropology. I think that what happened in this interaction between textualists and anthropologists was an awareness that the insights and challenges that one presented to the other were really powerful and transformative. The easy example is Charles Keyes doing the survey of Buddhist temple libraries in Thailand and finding out that no library had the whole Pali canon, and the parts that they had weren't the same. So then to just ask the question: What does it mean to say that the Pali canon is the foundation of Theravāda Buddhism? That is a question I think only textualists could answer, but it generated a whole new sense of the social history of the text and the anthropological engagement with texts, and so on.

As Buddhist studies has thankfully expanded in terms of things that people pay attention to, the sustained interaction between people doing their own thing in this or that place is becoming harder and harder. It still can happen—friendship becomes a spark for it. Someone becomes friends with someone else and they get interested in what that person is interested in, and oftentimes I think for someone outside of their interactions it's hard to know, *What do you two do together?* In Jonathan Spencer's essay, basically he's asking, *What do we do together?* And he says, *We just give each other books.* And you might say, *That's it?* And I'd say, *Yeah, but it's like having an anthropologist dwelling inside of my brain.*

I met my teacher in Sri Lanka, Professor Wijayawardhana, because of John Ross Carter. Carter and I were in Sri Lanka at the same time. I was at his house and he had an appointment with Professor Wijayawardhana that afternoon and he said, *I'm going to see someone—why don't you come with me?* I'd never heard of him and I saw myself in a subfield of religious studies, in Buddhist studies. And this was a person in a Sinhala literature department, not in Buddhist studies. There was a separate department of Buddhist studies. Most of the time, Carter was talking to him, but at a certain point he asked me: *What are you interested in?* I tried to say things. Looking back, I'm sure I was doing the best I could, but it had to be very pompous. And he was the way that he always was: he listened very, very carefully and was very quiet. At the end, he just said to me: *If you come back, I can help you.* That moment was transformative for me professionally, because I found out that there was an alternative way of studying Buddhism in Sri Lanka that was going on in the Sinhala language departments. There were Buddhist studies departments that were just very similar to what was in Europe and North America. But what was going on in the Sinhala language department was something I had never imagined. He basically led me by the hand on that. But his interest was in *alaṃkāraśāstra*. That's what he was a great specialist in; he was a great, great scholar of *alaṃkāra* and the reception of *alaṃkāra* in Sri Lanka. I wasn't interested in that. He

was helping me to read Buddhist texts. I was reading these great narrative collections of Sinhala literature, but I wasn't interested in *alaṃkāra*. I was studying devotion to the Buddha in these medieval Sinhala texts. I can't really say how I got into that particular topic, but I remember very clearly my first Sinhala teacher at the University of Pennsylvania, Balasuriya Kiribanda. He was getting a PhD in demography, but he loved classical Sinhala literature and knew it very, very well. I had told him what I was interested in and he said: *If you're interested in that, then you should read books like Amāvatura and Butsaraṇa*. So those are the things I did, and he began to help me to learn how to read that kind of language. So I'm terrible at spoken Sinhala because he was happy to go to reading this kind of classical Sinhala.

But the focus on *mamāyana* in these texts came about accidentally. It was because of an offhand comment of Professor Mahind Palihawadana's. Mahinda Palihawadana had come to Colgate to teach. At that time, the way the Colgate system worked, we had a special study term in January, where unusual things were being taught. Carter had studied with Palihawadana, who was a fellow at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard that year—this would have been in 1972. That also, I would say, tilted my life, because I had never seen a single human being like Palihawadana. I thought everyone in Sri Lanka was like Palihawadana, and when I got there I realized everyone thought he was unusual, and hardly anyone was like him. He's a very deep thinker.

When I went to Colombo to do my dissertation research I knew I was going to work with Professor Wijayawardhana. But I went out to Maharagama, where Palihawadana lived, and he said, *What's your dissertation about?* So I told him, and he said, *I wouldn't be interested in any of that*. And he said, *If I wanted to know about mamāyana, I would just go down the end of the street and listen to a monk*. And I had never heard the word *mamāyana*, and my whole dissertation became about *mamāyana*. Palihawadana was

just dismissing it—I loved the way he said, *I wouldn't be interested in any of that*. He was a student of Dr. Adikaram and that was a very special, intensely self disciplined, puritanical, modernist Buddhist movement. I was very comfortable with people inside of that movement. Palihawadana was like that—that's what I mean, that he was a great thinker. Palihawadana, who was a lifelong vegetarian, had never tasted meat; he was raised as a vegetarian and was very proud of it, and he was a president of the Vegetarian Society of Sri Lanka. After the July riots in 1983, he published this op-ed piece in which the headline was, *Now the whole world sees what kind of Buddhists we are*. And the first line was, *Lots of us are very proud of being vegetarian*. And the next sentence was, *Hitler was a vegetarian*. And it went on from there. So anyway, it was the tilting of everything. All of my professional life was really tilted by having another education in the universities in Sri Lanka.

One last thing to say on that. A number of years ago in Sri Lanka, after Professor Wijayawardhana had died, I became aware that almost everyone I knew was a lot older than me—like twenty years older. So I said, *I have to meet some younger people*. I had some opportunities to meet with younger temporary lecturers in the universities, and went out of my way to take advantage of the opportunity to meet them. I was so struck by their commitments to being academics, even working under really terrible circumstances. But there was one time when I was in a room with a bunch of people and I realized that all the other people were actors or actresses in plays or television shows, or had written novels, or published poetry, or written plays, or were directors of performances, or were musicians—everyone was publicly creative, and the only one who wasn't was me. That was just part of the world of the Sinhala department of Colombo; that's what it was like. People were intensely cultured in terms of all the arts. Professor Wijayawardhana had a radio show of North Indian classical music. He was a real connoisseur of music, and knew all kinds of things. You needed to be a whole person to be a scholar.

**NG:** Can I introduce a new question related to the topics you've already been addressing? Our field is arguably characterized by quite distinct and often insular cultural approaches to the study of Buddhism, and still by the dominance of American and European models of scholarship. As someone who's worked extensively with international scholars over many years, including the period you've been talking about but quite beyond that as well, how do you think conversing about the study of Buddhism across cultural boundaries might be important to the future of the field?

**CH:** It's not just a question of the importance of it, but also recognizing the realities of these possibilities. We may talk quite a lot about wanting to change, to have a more international approach to the study of Asia, the study of Africa, Latin America, but it's hard for us to recognize that it will only be pieties on our part if we don't recognize the inequalities of the world. Those of us here need to develop ways of redirecting resources and also establishing friendships across those inequalities as a way of trying to help out across those inequalities. In Carter's book, he says that friendship is a way of knowing, and it checks your propensity to make statements that are not true of human beings—to say, well, *they* would do it because *they* are so different than us. It's not just changing the inequalities in the world; it's making friends with people, being comfortable in universities in other parts of the world.

I have a curiosity about connections in the life of scholarship. Reading the essays in the festschrift, everyone's connected to each other—like you and Karen and Maria. These practices of friendship are part of academic life and we don't know how to acknowledge them except in the statements we put in the acknowledgements. You just say *thanks for that*—but, no it's actually quite essential to everything that's being done here: how to conceptualize it, how to articulate it, how say to other people, *Don't forget about that*. That line of Wilfred Smith's, that he wouldn't trust anyone who studied Islam who doesn't have Muslim friends, I think is an

incredibly insightful and simple statement, and that's part of internationalizing Buddhist studies, too. How do we feel comfortable making friends with people? In the friendship class, I kept on referring to the feral quality of friendship—people making friends with people they're not supposed to make friends with.

My little mantra in Buddhist studies is that I don't only want to learn about Buddhism; I want to learn from Buddhism. Part of the inequality was that if I said I want to learn from Buddhism, people would take it as something about my personal commitments, religiously. I'm not talking about that. It made a big impact on me one time when Dipesh Chakrabarty was speaking in Cambridge. Because he and I were friends, I drove him to where he was speaking to all the PhD students in the Boston universities who had Indian passports. And he made a statement that I was really quite struck by, in which he said, *As an Indian, I would never give up what I've learned from Marx*. And I realized that I could truthfully say, *As an American, I would never give up what I've learned from Buddhaghosa*. But people wouldn't understand it in the same way. There has to be institutional change. That has begun to happen, but places like Amherst, Harvard, all the places that we teach have to change how we think about what it is that we do.

The great Indian scholar J. L. Mehta was teaching at Harvard Divinity School when I was a student there, and he was a specialist on Heidegger. When you speak to Heideggerian specialists, they say, *Well, he's a great scholar of Heidegger who happens to be Indian*. But it's a strange thing not to say, *He is a great Indian thinker who happens to specialize in Heidegger*. One of the things that I began to think a lot about, after being with Professor Wijayawardhana, was that when I began to think about Aristotle as "my tradition," I became part of that tradition by education—there's no other reason for it. I had a high school teacher who was just incredible to me, Miss Sullivan. One of the things that she said to me I think about quite

often when I'm quoting Aristotle. She would say, *Remember the Greeks!* They have good stuff; they're good to think with. They're not the only ones who have good stuff, but the idea of loyalty to a tradition is that you become part of a tradition by education, and not only by political economies. Education is the best way we have for changing political economies.

I had another great teacher, Ronald Inden. One of his own statements—very utopian, but very sincerely held—was *I believe in a liberatory social science*. That's about the possibilities of changing the unequal world that we live in. You could say that Ronald Inden knew the line from my introduction to the *Therigatha*, that we're always afraid that tomorrow will be like today, but in the pleasures of literature we see a possibility, and the pleasure of that possibility makes free. Through my whole life, education has made free; I'm not condemned. I see that when I look at universities in Sri Lanka today. There was a strike by the faculty in the state universities of Sri Lanka a number of years ago. I was so entranced by this slogan that I internalized to make it my own: *Let's turn our inheritance into our legacy*. Education is free in Sri Lanka, so people get to go to university as an inheritance of being a citizen of the country. All of us as workers in education have the responsibility to turn our inheritance into our legacy.

And the fact of the matter is—this is very important—if I talk in Sri Lanka about the stuff that here I'm supposed to know about, of everyone in the room I know the *least*. But I'm talking. Professor Meegaskumbura was a good friend of mine and also a student of Professor Wijayawardhana. After one of my talks, he said to me, *That was pretty good for you*. The linguist J. B. Disanayaka, once said after one of my talks, *The great thing about listening to you is that you remind us that in the most basic things, there's stuff that's interesting to think about*. I said, *Well, I have a place in the world. I can remind people of the most basic things*. But compared to what they can do, there's just no chance of even aspiring to it.



I'm mystified sometimes when I look back on my decision to apply for scholarships to do my doctoral dissertation in Sri Lanka. My decision on where to locate myself was based on that two-minute conversation between me and Professor Wijayawardhana. It was simply the way he said to me, *If you come back I can help you*. On the face of it, there wasn't any reason to think that it was plausible. He wasn't a scholar of Buddhism in any kind of officially recognized way, and I don't think he himself would have said, *I'm in Buddhist studies*. But it was like that refrain in the *Therīgāthā* where people talk about seeing a nun and say, *She seemed like someone I could trust*. I did trust him. In these Sinhala departments, they were talking about things that I was familiar with, but in a different kind of way. They were talking about Buddhism in ways I had never heard before. At first it seemed that they had different answers to the same questions that I had, but in learning how to hold up my end of the conversation, I began to realize that they had different questions than I had. It wasn't that they had different answers; it's that they had completely different questions. It's like that truism about comparative religion: it's not that different religions have different answers to the same questions—they have different questions that they're asking. That's one of the problems for Buddhist studies internationally. I think that we don't realize that as we study the things that we've inherited from the past or observe around us, it's not just that people have different answers to similar questions, but that people are asking completely different questions. And we're so pre-primitive about that that we're not able even to recognize what their questions are. And when we catch a glimpse of them, often-times I think we misconstrue them into certain ready-at-hand categories that we have. And that quickly goes into judgmental ideas—that they're not critical or something.

What would it mean to be comfortable in more than one location where people are doing Buddhist studies? One book that I've never gotten away from over decades is Dan Sperber's *Rethinking Symbolism*. He has the

really powerful idea that human beings can learn how to speak more than one language, but they always only have one system of etiquette. So what happens when you go to a different culture and become at home in a different system of etiquette is that you hybridize—you internalize it, and your own system of etiquette becomes hybridized by this other thing that has entered into you. It's not like where you picked it up from—it is totally internal to you—but it also is different than what you came with. I think that all academic subfields have their own systems of etiquette. What would it mean for people to be comfortable in more than one location? It's not the same thing as learning different languages: when I'm in Germany, I talk this way, when I'm in Japan I talk that way. Rather when you have just one system of etiquette that you're carrying around with you, you're both at home and not at home no matter where you are. In order to “internationalize” Buddhist studies, we have to acknowledge and address the just incredible institutional inequalities that exist, but that alone is not enough. We'll also need to become comfortable in the different settings that we move into, where you say, *What they're doing here is just totally amazing—I want to learn how to do more of what they're doing here. How can I?* And a system of etiquette is always going to include a sense of morality as well; for me, etiquette is window into moral anthropology. The idea of internationalizing Buddhist studies I think is to feel at home with what people are doing in different places according to local needs and local aspirations—local becoming, the things that are happening there.

**NG:** You've drawn attention to the ways that aging changes our experiences, and surely this is true of our academic work, as well. So I'm wondering if you have any secrets of the man of seventy—perhaps especially as they're relevant to your ongoing scholarly agenda, but not necessarily confined to that at all.

**CH:** My recent experience of reading the essays in the festschrift gave me the sense of my just being another reader of “Hallisey.” And one of the striking things that I appreciated in quite a number of the essays, and in particular Eviatar Shulman’s, which went back to my dissertation, was that they’re pulling out stuff about which I think, *I could have written that this morning*. So I have a kind of curiosity about the persistence of certain things that have remained with me that I want to think about—in spite of being intensely aware that I’m really different because I’ve aged. I feel that I think of things differently than I did before but then I look at something and I say, *Oh, you were thinking about that then*. Sometimes I say in classes, *I really only have one idea; I just say it in different ways*. I thought I was making a joke, but it actually is true. I only have one idea and I just have been saying it in different ways. When the academic discussions of late style first came on to the scene—this is a long time ago, 20 years ago—I remember talking about my interest in it with Maria, and Maria saying to me, *You are too young to have late style*. But I do feel that I have an appreciation about the things that don’t make such great sense. It’s not only that I tolerate those things—I actually find it wondrous and beautiful at times. But then there’s a certain drive for consistency and systematicity that I also find pretty interesting—people driving for a comprehensive systematicity as a choice. I just find myself held by the particulars of things. You say, *But that doesn’t make any sense*. I say, *yeah, but look at it—it’s still pretty amazing, it’s so beautiful*.

If I look back on my professional life and its connection to my personal life, one of the huge changes was the birth of my sons, Sean and Stephen. I can’t see it as accidental that although I started writing a dissertation about devotion to the Buddha, by the time I finished writing it, what was emerging was a focus on ethics and the relationality between parents and children—the spontaneity of relations and the unsettling of things. So there are lots of things I say in my writings where you can see me trying to make sense of what was happening to me as a parent. The whole turn

to the ethics—what prompted that was that Sean and Stephen were born, and just how much Sinhala literature was speaking to me as a parent, in ways that I thought that no one else could know. My experience was so idiosyncratic that no one else could know this.

My father died when I was very young. When my sons were born, it was the first time in my life that I felt I had some knowledge of my father as an adult. But I wasn't sure. And then I read—it was in *Amāvatura* by Guruḷugomi—the story of the king Ajātaśatru, who murders his father. The day that he finds out that he's been successful in killing his father, some messengers come to say that he has a son who has been born. The messenger who goes in first says, *Sire, your child has been born*. And he's so filled with love for the child that he realizes, *Oh! This is how my father felt about me! I made a mistake—bring him to me*. And then they say, *Sire, your father is dead*. He goes to his mother and asks, *Did my father love me?* And she says to him, *Your father loved you so much that he sucked the pus out of your fingers*. And what that means is to be a parent is to do the disgusting for your children and not to flinch.

It came into my mind that my father must have felt like this about me. I read that story about Ajātaśatru and thought, *How could this person in medieval Sri Lanka know?* I had this question and the next day I got in the mail a letter from my mother in which she said that my father had taken out a life insurance policy on me when I was an infant to pay for my funeral, which was a working-class thing to do at the time. And so she said, *You need money now—cash this in. It won't be a lot, but you can use it*. What was most precious to me was the old-fashioned Xerox. The paper was black and white. My father was very deferential to the world of learning because he didn't have very much, so when he was answering the questions, he was very, very precise. One of the questions was, *Has the applicant changed weight in the last six months?* My father, who had very good handwriting, wrote, *He has doubled his weight*. And then in someone else's handwriting

was written, *Normal weight gain for an infant*. And then I knew my father loved me, that he was proud of me. But I thought, *How could this person Gurulugomi tell this story, which is not in the Pāli? How would he know this? What kind of world would this be in which I would learn Sinhala so I could read this story?* Sean and Stephen were born before I had finished my dissertation. Once, after feeding them in the middle of the night, I couldn't go back to sleep and started reading that story—and all of a sudden, it was just what I needed to read.

One of the things that I'm aware of in terms of aging now is the aging that happens to you relationally, because of what happens to other people as you're aging. Something really close to hand in terms of family stuff is the birth of my four granddaughters. In public gatherings where people are very pessimistic about the climate crisis and so on, my reaction is, *I don't have the luxury to be pessimistic, because I have granddaughters*. I'm also aware of how, as I get older, other people age in time, too, and their vulnerabilities and losses become part of my own. Aging makes you more vulnerable to other people's vulnerabilities. In the collection of essays, I really appreciate when people are referring to my own teachers. There's a way in which they're not in the past tense even though they've passed away.

I wrote an essay on the occasion of my mother turning ninety called "The Secret of a Woman of Ninety." It's really about my inability to understand her experience. It was an allusion to an older essay, "Clio," by a French thinker, Charles Peguy, who talks about the secret of the man of forty (Aronowicz). In the essay—both Peguy's essay and my essay—you think differently according to the age that you're at. One of the things in the Peguy essay is that no one can tell the secret of the man of forty to anyone younger—no one can. The secret of the man of forty is that no one is happy. But the brilliance of Peguy's essay is that this man of forty has a child that he believes will be happy. He knows one thing, yet believes in a future that is not based on the past that he knows. That's the point of the

essay. In “The Secret of a Woman of Ninety,” I was so struck by how, in celebrations for my mother when she turned ninety, that my mother was not really interested in dwelling on her past, but she was really interested in what comes next. She just wanted to talk to her grandchildren about their future. So how does this work, that when you’re aware that you don’t have a lot of future, you care more about the future, you’re so invested in the future? This goes back to the quote from Ronald Inden, *I believe in a liberatory social science*: Liberation belongs to the future, but I want to help it come about. And that’s me as a whole person. So our scholarship should be about *I want to bring about a future as best as I’m able*.

You’ll remember that we read “The Secret of the Man of Forty” in *The Social History of Medieval Indian Buddhism*, a memorable course for everyone who was in it, including me. Whole forests of Quebec were cut down for that course. In my own mind, the circumstances were that I was expecting to go to the University of Washington, and I had in my mind, *Right, I have one semester to teach you what I want you to know*. And I would say, in terms of a sense of the effect of aging on me, that if I were in a similar kind of circumstance now, I don’t think that I would feel the urgency to do that. I would want you to tell me what you’re going to get up to when I’m not here. Then, I felt like *I have things I really feel the need to tell you before I go*, and now I would say, *Tell me what you’re going to get up to when I’m not here*. I want to try to help people do whatever they’re going to get up to—encourage them to think about this or that. But it’s a strange reversal of what’s urgent.

**NG:** You’ve recently been focusing a lot on poetics in your work. Could you talk about the relationship between poetics and ethics for you?

**CH:** The interest in poetics—it’s a consequence of people I met and became friends with, when people became teachers for me or people became

students with me and enlarged me in ways that I wasn't anticipating. I studied *Siyabaslakara* with Professor Wijayawardhana long ago, but I had never studied Dandin. It happened by accident, through friendship. Narayana Rao was my friend and colleague in Wisconsin. When David Shulman came to see Narayana Rao, we met and became friends, and David invited me to come to Israel to be part of his own project. It was just an accident of who I met. And then through David I became friends with Yigal Bronner. The way I put it to myself is *what was an accident became a choice*. The people I met in Israel taught me how to read Dandin and think with Dandin. And once I began to understand how Dandin was thinking, I was so amazed at what he was actually understanding. Here's a simple way, an abstract way, of putting the big lesson of Dandin. He's not thinking structurally; he's thinking modularly. Nothing is good or bad on its own; it's only good or bad according to what it's next to. There's a line from Miles Davis: *There are no mistakes in jazz—the only thing that matters is the note you play next*. Dandin understands that and sees that at the heart of literature. Literature is about the use of language in this modular way.

Part of the happiness of writing about the place of Dandin in Sri Lankan scholarship is that a lot of the thinking and the design of it was done by Professor Meegaskumbara and myself. When you read it, you'll see there's a great celebration of our teacher, Professor Wijayawardhana in it, and in particular of his unpublished PhD dissertation. I had a copy of it. It's also very moving to me that Professor Meegaskumbara gave to me a copy of one of the main texts in Sinhala, the *Siyabaslakara*, which is a translation of *Dandin* into Sinhala that belonged to Professor Wijayawardhana, and I recognized his hand markings in it.

The Sinhala writers who received Dandin understood his modular thinking extremely well. Some earlier Sinhala scholars saw the way that they were treating Dandin as slavish imitation. Professor Wijayawardhana did not. He understood that they were thinking Dandin's thoughts, and

there are places where you can say they're out-Dandin-ing Dandin. The author of *Siyabaslakara* out-Dandins Dandin. It looks like a translation, but it's more like a mirror image of what Dandin's doing that's showing *we're better*.

This was a big lesson, a gift, from Professor Wijayawardhana to me as an American. The United States is a big country, and we tend not to care a lot about any of the places outside of the United States except if they're causing us problems or if they're of use to us. When I was living in Colombo, the United States invaded Granada, which I didn't really pay much attention to. When I was coming home that day, all these little grade school children who were learning English in school would meet me on the street and say, *Uncle, what do you think about Granada?* Till one who was a little bit older said to me, *This is what happens in this world: big countries invade little countries and no one stops them.* And so that's why all the kids in Sri Lanka were studying about Granada, because we were expecting India to invade Sri Lanka at that time and no one would stop India. But what Professor Wijayawardhana and others gave me to understand was, *This is a little place, but we're great. We have things here that no place else has; we're as large as any other place.* That came back to me reading *Siyabaslakara* again so many years after first reading it with professor Wijayawardhana. When you're reading the Sanskrit next to the Sinhala you see, *Oh, that's really good.*

But the main thing is learning to think like Dandin. Dandin saw that in something that was a mistake, there was a possibility of something exceptionally beautiful, and it depended on what came next—not what came before, but what came next. You had to figure out what came next in order to transform the past. When I came of age as a graduate student, a student of Ronald Inden, it was post-Orientalism all the way. I'm still an unrepentant Saidian. But the most important line to me in *Orientalism* is at the end where Said says, in effect, *Was it ever a good idea to divide up humans into different cultures, even though reality presents itself as such? And once*



having done so, how are we going to survive the consequences? So the issue is, we have to figure out how to survive the consequences of what has happened. And here's the incredible thing. I'm not going to blame people—reality presented itself as such. But Dandin says we can survive, because we can change the past by what we do next.

Dandin also gave me a way to understand myself. Dandin says at one point: *In science, people make factual descriptions, and we make factual descriptions in poetry, too. What's the difference?* And then he illustrates different kinds of factual descriptions: one where you're giving a factual description of a species of something, a *jāti*; another where you're giving a factual description of an action, *kriya*. But the third—I'll give you the example: *My eyes close, my body relaxes, my hair stands on end—this must be my beloved*. The term for it is *guṇa*. There are facts in the world that we only know relationally, because we love someone else. It's like the title of Martha Nussbaum's book, *Love's Knowledge*. A scholarship that is not able to make those factual descriptions will always be deficient. We are not so bad at *jāti*, species, although we can get better. We can get a lot better at *kriya*, actions. But we don't know how in scholarship to get at the excellence that is only known through the pleasure of what is in front of us. Pleasure should be a part of scholarship.

I've also come to appreciate, over the last few years in particular, being with classical poetics in Buddhist Sri Lanka and in particular with Dandin, how important hyperbole, exaggeration, is. Dandin is very plain that everything that's literary has some degree of *atīśayokti*, over-the-top talk in it. And the example he gives is so wonderful. It's the description of women going out to meet their beloved on a full moon night. They're dressed in white saris and they've put white jasmine flowers in their hair and because it's summer they put sandalwood paste on their faces. And when they step out into the moonlight, he says, they disappear. It's an image you can never see in the real world, but with your mind's eye you

know exactly how it is. So you have this appreciation of when you're able to step into that spot of the over-the-top talk, the *atīśayokti*, the hyperbole. There's this other space of perception and possibility and the change is how you perceive everything else. I think there's something analogous in terms of ethics there, too. There's this other space within the realm of ethics that is only encountered in hyperbole and excess. You encounter a real possibility that's spoken about in this unreal way, and that aspect of human ethics and morality—that's one of the places where bringing together ethics and poetics very close to each other changes how we think about what's possible in the realm of ethics. You have this engagement with what is possible in very discrete ways. You can't turn away from it, but at the same time you say, *Is this really possible?* It's the most foundational way in which the sphere of poetics and the sphere of ethics are right next to each other and perfuming each other. That space I think really drives quite a lot of the most powerful ethical thinking—we always get into it in these hyperbolic ways.

One massive example I've been held by for decades now is Levinas. You could say that Levinas's whole thing about the power of the accusation of the face is totally hyperbolic: *I'm responsible for all the suffering of the world*. Even the way that he speaks about it in these mythic terms—it happened in a past that never was a present—locates it in the realm of hyperbolic imagination. Levinas is very good at talking about it in a kind of negative way, of me being held hostage by the demands of other people, but the inverse is also the case, in which you know you find yourself the beneficiary of this hyperbolic generosity of the universe.

I just finished teaching this class on friendship in Theravāda Buddhism, and one of the things I found myself repeating in theological terms was that the formless dharma takes form and enters into the world. What does the formless dharma look like when it enters into the world? It looks like a friend. Totally hyperbolic.

Poetry gets you used to just how insightful these hyperbolic statements are: they show us about human possibilities. There's a reason why people spoke about ethics in terms of poetics in South Asia historically, using the same vocabulary all the time. I think we can learn a lot from just that historical fact—thinking about ethics in terms of how people think about poetics. And where do you begin to think about poetics? Maybe with the value of hyperbole—making demonstrably false statements to get at true things. It's not just a matter of speaking; it is a way of perceiving possibility. It reminds us that living in a different kind of abundance is possible.

**NG:** What possibilities do you see for the future of the study of Buddhist ethics if we approach it through moral anthropology?

**CH:** There are two senses to the word anthropology. One sense would be anthropology as ethnography—what is it that people are doing? Then the other would be the sense of a philosophical anthropology. I tend to privilege that one. In the shift to moral anthropology, you can see a concern on my own part with the human conditions for certain human possibilities.

I remember reading the story of Ajātaśatru with Veena Das. She wanted to talk to me about when Vaidehi is imprisoned in the story. The Buddha comes to her in prison to teach the Visualization Sūtra and she says, *If I have a son like Ajātaśatru, I don't want to live in this world anymore.* Veena was asking, *How is it humanly possible to say "I don't want to live in this world anymore"?* It's not the same thing as saying I want to die; it's saying, *I can't accept this world the way it is. I don't want to accept it.* Thinking about moral anthropology gives you a space to ask those kinds of questions, and it's different than saying, *How do I make a decision to do this or do that?* or *How do I form myself into this kind of person?* And you could say that that question of Vaidehi, when the Buddha comes and teaches her how to

visualize Amitābha, that's a story of hyperbole—complete hyperbole. The Buddha just comes and says, *You don't have to live in this world anymore, and here's how*. Some might say, *Oh, that's just a particular kind of inheritance that some Buddhists have*. But I say no, we should look at it as a human story and not just as a Buddhist story. That's the old mantra that I got from Kenneth Morgan of not wanting only to learn *about* but also to learn *from*. Some people may say, *Oh, that's what led me to convert to Pure Land Buddhism*, but that's not the only possible reaction to this story.

**NG:** Could you say a little more about turning our inheritance into legacy? How would you articulate that for yourself?

**CH:** I was really fortunate, when I was a student, that my teachers introduced me to a particular way of studying things from the heritages of the Buddhist world. In the first course that I took on Buddhism, with Mahinda Palihawadana, we read hardly anything from Buddhist texts. Instead we read Meister Eckhart and Palihawadana commented on it. When I look back and ask what he was doing, I think he was saying to us, *I'm not really interested in your attraction to exotic things, and I'm not really interested in you being proud of yourself for being able to say words that other people don't know how to pronounce. I'm interested in things that are true and exploring those things, and that's what I want to do with you*.

John Ross Carter came to Harvard Divinity School some years ago, a few years before he died and met with the graduate students in the Master's program here. He asked the question, *When you're studying Buddhism, what are you studying?* I was his student; I knew the answer. The answer is that you're studying yourself. Yes, of course you're studying all kinds of other things, but they have to do with something that is relevant to you in some ways—and not treating that as if it was theology. It was just what you should expect of yourself.

I can put it in other ways. I love the word play of Heidegger—*verstehen* is *vorstehen*: to understand something is to see it in your own future, to stand before it. So you don't understand something unless you see it as merging into your own future. In terms of having an inheritance in studying religion, I think I was just lucky that the people that first introduced me to the pleasures of studying things from the Buddhist world were not only concerned about, let's say, area studies. They were good at area studies, but they also said, *there's something else that's going on here*. It's not only the things that people shared with me, but also a certain way of engaging them. That's part of the inheritance I got. In terms of legacy, it's worth thinking about these things; it's good to hand these things on. Life is better if we can think about these things a bit better than we do.

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## Response

Charles Hallisey<sup>91</sup>

As a college student half a century ago, I took an unforgettable class taught by Kenneth Morgan at Colgate University. It was called “Religious Experience,” and it was the last course that Mr. Morgan, as I called him then, taught before he retired. The course did have a special feel to it, partly an *apologia pro vita sua*, but more an intentional effort to share some of the best of that life. We read or, more accurately, Mr. Morgan guided our reading of what were clearly a few of his favorite religious texts: the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Bhagavad Gita* (in Swami Nikhilananda’s translation; Mr. Morgan always called his friend “Swami Nick” in class), the *Analects* of Confucius and Brother Lawrence’s *The Practice of the Presence of God* were some of the texts we read. I tried to keep up with Mr. Morgan as he explored these texts as answers to questions that he brought to them. They were impossibly big questions like “What is the most important thing for a human being to know?” and “How can . . . knowledge and trust be found?”, the latter question was one that Mr. Morgan had himself put to Gandhi in the 1930s (Morgan 17-18).

As part of my course work for that class, I submitted a term paper on an impossibly big question of my own: “What is faith?” (I am sure that my question owed much to Mr. Morgan’s own question about how to find knowledge of and trust in what some called “God”). After Mr. Morgan

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returned my paper, I went to see him in his office at Chapel House to talk about it and I remember very vividly a comment of his as we were saying goodbye: “This is something that you can think about for the rest of your life.”

Mr. Morgan’s comment worked on me; it still works on me. What it seemed to point to was more than the topic of my paper or the subject of our conversation. It made me want to continue to be a student and especially to become a student of religious persons. Later it assumed a central place among the things that gave me the idea of becoming an academic (Martin Duberman’s *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, a gift received from a close friend about the same time, also worked on me, still works on me in resonant ways about what is worth striving for in the life of an academic). I was twenty years old, and I hadn’t imagined that there could be things worth thinking about for one’s whole life, and I hadn’t dreamed that there were “rooms” where there were people exploring those things together. I immediately felt that I wanted to find where those rooms were, and I wanted to try to find a way to get into them. Mr. Morgan’s comment made me want to think about important things (“What is the most important thing for a human being to know?”) but also to explore and to talk about those things with others, indeed, to learn from those things “in the company of friends” (Carter).

Initially I expected to learn about such things, how to explore them and learn from them, from those who were “officially” and “institutionally” teachers to me. Teachers like Kenneth Morgan and John Ross Carter at Colgate, Morgan at the end of his life as a teacher institutionally, Carter at the beginning of his. They were followed by other teachers at different graduate schools, teachers who became constant presences in my thinking, sustaining the very conditions for what I think about and how I think. So many come to mind as I begin to remember, filled as I am with gratitude and appreciation towards them, too many even to try to



name them all, but I can't help but name Frank Reynolds, Ronald Inden, and especially G. D. Wijayawardhana.

The many rooms which I eventually discovered where there were people exploring things worth thinking about for a whole life were of all sorts, university classrooms and seminar rooms, of course, but also living rooms, dining rooms, and backyards and even the back seats of taxis on the way to the airport, as happily happened with Gananath Obeyesekere on the occasions when he was visiting his son then living in Chicago. And the people that I found in those rooms were of all sorts too, university professors, of course, but also students, colleagues, and neighbors, and, above all, friends. Reading the individual essays in this issue of the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* reminds me just how much I have been given by everyone in these many rooms, how much I have learned from others. These essays and everything they represent highlight for me another truth in that old academic cliché, “we stand on the shoulders of giants:” any progress one makes in understanding and appreciating important things depends not only on those before us, but also on those in whose company we explore them, think about them, and learn from them.

Mr. Morgan's comment, “this is something that you can think about for the rest of your life,” has proven true for my life. I am still trying to understand what faith is. Today, I tend to articulate my thoughts about the question “What is faith?” around a polestar: faith is an openness to tomorrow. Part of that openness to tomorrow is a sense that tomorrow doesn't have to be like today. Once, when the late Timothy Stein, a much-missed friend, and I were together in one of those rooms of exploration and shared talk, he said, “We are always afraid that tomorrow will be like today, but tomorrow doesn't have to be like today, and in fact, won't be like today.” Tim Stein's insight worked on me, still works on me.

Where does such a knowledge and trust that “tomorrow doesn't have to be like today” come from? What does it look like when it comes? I

have long been moved by how eloquently Wilfred Cantwell Smith spoke to this question, but also tentatively. Notice especially how often the word “some” comes up: “somehow,” “in some fashion,” “in some sense:”

We are somehow aware, if only through imaginative vision or sensibility or our special capacity for hope, not only of what is but also of what ought to be. We have sensed that the *status quo* (nowadays the *fluxus quo*) is not the final truth about humans or the world. We have felt, to take one example, that social justice and concord, personal righteousness, health and joy stand over against the current observable condition of strife, loneliness, wickedness, poverty, and sorrow not as fancy against truth, wishful and irrational dreaming against reality, but in some fashion *vice versa*—as a norm by which the present imperfect world is judged, in some sense a truth in relation to which empirical actuality is in some sense an error. (Smith 2)

I think that that what both Stein and Smith are talking about here is germane to any exploration of moral anthropology. What is it about humans that makes it possible for us to be moral, what is involved in our lives as moral persons? As the essays here so richly demonstrate, there is a lot to explore, a lot to consider, a lot to think about when asking such impossibly big questions. They also demonstrate that the asking of such impossibly big questions always entails the study of concrete examples in history and culture, studies in which there is respect for the brute reality of particulars, studies always undertaken “in the company of friends.”

Reading these essays, in all their variety, teaches me once again that there seems to be something constitutively intermediate to all of our explorations of moral anthropology, intermediate between the general and the particular, intermediate between agency and structure, intermediate between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, in short, intermediate

between the road taken and the destination aimed for. Indeed, recognizing this constitutive intermediacy makes it seem probable that the path taken may be of greater interest than the destination, to adapt the point made by Tzvetan Todorov about the study of Literature (Todorov, vii, 1). This may be why so many of these essays share a concern with how we read. Why should thinking about how we read and what happens to a person reading be so relevant to exploring the contours of a moral person? Might it be something about the felt immediacy of intermediacy that is key to both?

I think there is also a felt immediacy of intermediacy to friendship, which so many of these essays explore. What they have to say is very moving and engaging, and they remind us that our friendships are always with particular persons, persons with names, and that these friendships are also central to our moral lives at their best. This too is something worth thinking about for the rest of our lives.

One of the names that comes up in these essays is “Charlie,” one of my names. Reading what is said about this “Charlie,” I am reminded of something that Siri Mangala says in his super-commentary on the *Mangala Sutta*, composed in Pāli in northern Thailand in the sixteenth century: friendship (*paṭisanthāra*) is like a cloth put on a chair, covering up its holes, making it usable and comfortable and covering up all the things wrong with it (*Mangalatthadīpani* II.207). In short, this cloth makes the chair better than it actually is, and this is what our teachers and friends can do for us. The editors of this special issue, Karen Derris, Natalie Gummer, and Maria Heim, as well as all of the authors of essays have certainly done this for me here, and not for the first time either. I am very grateful to them all.

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