

## Children who have seen the Buddha

*“What do you think Rahula? What is a mirror for?”*

*“ To reflect Sir.”*

*“Similarly, Rahula, before you say or do anything, reflect. Reflect if this thought, speech or action would be beneficial to others and yourself. If, when you reflect, you feel that it is not beneficial to others and to yourself, then refrain from saying and doing it. If you feel when you reflect that it is for the benefit of others and yourself, that such an action will not bring harm to another, that it is beneficial to others, then and only then should you perform this action. You should then perform this action again and again.”*

### ***Majjhima Nikaya***

*(The Buddha's advice to his seven-year old son, Rahula)*

The Buddha was especially tender and caring towards the needs of children. Each morning he examined each of the little ones in his Noble Order and ensured that their needs were met. The Buddha also used simple but eloquent every-day examples to teach the young. When one reflects on the children who had the good fortune to see the Buddha and benefit from His compassion and teachings, names such as Sopaka, Mattakundali, Kumara Kassapa, Ariya, Revata, Chatta Manavaka, Culla Pantaka etc. come to mind. While the most well known children who ordained, at a tender age, were the Buddha's own son Prince Rahula and Venerable Sariputta's little brother Revata, the text documents the Buddha's compassion to many other children.

Sopaka (the waif) was adopted by his uncle after the sudden death of his father. Life with his uncle, however, was not pleasant. A quarrel with his cousin seems to have settled little Sopaka's fate. His uncle bound his hands and feet and tied him to a corpse at the cemetery in the hope that the jackals would kill and eat him. As darkness descended the jackals surrounded the little child. Weeping with fear and grief little Sopaka called out for help. The Buddha, seeing seven-year-old Sopaka, was moved by the plight of the innocent child. Appearing before the grief stricken child the Buddha gave him comfort and strength. Later, Sopaka ordained under the Buddha and attained full Awakening.

Mattakundali was the only son of a very rich merchant named Adinnapubbaka. Even though he loved his son dearly Adinnapubbaka was exceptionally miserly. Adinnapubbaka made his son's earrings by flattening a gold disk himself in order to save the goldsmiths' fee. As he wore crude earrings that were made by his father he was known as Mattakundali (flattened earrings). When Mattakundali was sixteen he was stricken with jaundice. The miserly Adinnapubbaka, refused to take him to a physician until it was too late. Seeing that his child was dying and ashamed of visitors finding out his true wealth, Adinnapubbaka placed the child out on the terrace. The Buddha (with his super normal vision) saw Mattakundali and feeling compassion for the innocent youth's suffering visited him. Seeing the Buddha in all his radiance come to their home to visit

him resulted in a surge of joy, peace and confidence in the youth's heart. Mattakundali died shortly after and was reborn in a heavenly realm resulting from the positive thoughts that were in his mind at the time of death.

These are just two examples of the Buddha's compassion to children. In keeping with His teachings the Buddha's compassion to children was boundless and crossed all man made distinctions of caste, creed and wealth. Princes and nobles such as Prince Rahula and Revata ordained and lived side by side with destitutes such as Sopaka and Kumara Kassapa. Senior monks such as Venerable Sariputta, Maha Moggallana, Anuruddha and Ananda mentored the children and saw to their needs with compassion and tenderness.

One must not, however, presume that the children who saw the Buddha were restricted to just those who lived at the time of the Buddha. In the Parinibbana Sutta the Buddha said, "He who see the Dhamma sees me". All children who practice the Dhamma and let the qualities of the Buddha enter their heart and mind (citta) see the Buddha. When one takes refuge in the Buddha one opens one's citta to the noble qualities of the Buddha. One then strives to awaken one's own heart and mind by following the Buddha's example. Each time a child uses the Dhamma in his daily life he/she sees the Buddha.

It is difficult for modern day children to uphold Buddhist values in the face of opposing values and peer pressure. Western media promotes sense pleasures through explicit and sensuous TV programs and books. Children who do not have strong guidance fall prey to such influence. The children that study at the Manitoba Buddhists Vihara, Canada are encouraged to apply the Dhamma they have studied by sharing their thoughts, views and real life experiences. The following are excerpts from their writings. These writings illustrate modern day children who have seen the Buddha.

- **If I meet the Buddha**

If I meet the Buddha I would tell Him how happy I am to be a Buddhist and have the opportunity to learn and practice the Dhamma. Many of my fellow students in school do not have the Dhamma to support and uphold them at times of need. The values that I have learned at the temple have given me the guidance and strength I require to make the right decisions.

**Sohani (Age 14)**

(Written after a discussion on "What I would tell the Buddha if I met him").

- **Be a Leader, "Say no to Alcohol"**

Alcohol is a problem that plagues mankind. It wreaks havoc on families, friends, and relatives. It takes many forms, but is essentially the same in all. Alcohol causes suffering. Alcohol also causes delusion and is a destroyer of wisdom. Temptation to drink is an experience that is common to everyone. Unfortunately, resisting the temptation to drink is very difficult, especially for teenagers who have to put up with crushing peer pressure. The only way to resist the temptation of alcohol is

to be a leader not a follower. A follower will give in to temptation and drink, but a leader on the other hand is strong. A leader resists temptation and refuses to drink knowing that it is detrimental to his or her well being.

Most children are known to follow their parent's example. Thus, if their parents drink, the children are more likely to drink. The best way for parents to protect their children from alcohol is to set a good example by not drinking at all. The Buddha advised us not to drink for good reason. As Buddhists, our goal is to find the truth. Alcohol does not assist us in that quest. Instead, it hinders us. Alcohol destroys wisdom and creates delusion. This delusion blocks out the wisdom needed to find the truth. Alcohol numbs the senses and dulls the mind to the point where we are no longer in control of ourselves. Alcohol also causes heedlessness that results in the breaking of the other precepts that Buddhists follow.

### **Chamal (Age 16)**

(Written after a talk on the fifth precept and a story on “The death of a child by a drunk driver”)

#### ○ **Disassociate the Foolish**

In the beginning of grade seven I had a friend. She was very nice to everyone. Everybody trusted her and went to her for help. She was always there to help us. Then, slowly she began moving away from our group of friends. Whenever she was with us, she would be silent, staring at this other group which was very different to ours. This group loved to experiment with new things such as drugs, getting drunk on weekends, sleeping around with guys, and backstabbing their friends. She became very friendly with this group, so friendly that she began to do less things with us.

We were worried about her, so some of us went to talk to her. She answered, “Come on guys, they are really nice, you should give them a chance”. When we pointed out the fact that their values were different from ours she replied, “It’s not like I am gonna do half the things they do, come on, just give them a chance, they are so nice”. A little later she started to do more and more things with them. She went over to their houses almost every weekend and got drunk and did things that she normally would not have done with us. She would talk behind everyone’s back, continually backstabbing them, exactly like her new friends. She had hung around them so often that she had become one of them.

### **Nilupama (Age 14)**

(Written after a talk on the Mangala Sutta and a story on “Disassociation of bad friends”)

#### ○ **The Importance of Truth**

The Buddha explained the importance of truth to his little son Rahula in a simple discourse. The discourse is now called the Rahulavada Sutta. Rahula had just finished washing his father's feet when the Buddha explained to him that in the vessel his feet

were washed in, was a small insignificant amount of water left. Then he said, "Similarly, Rahula, insignificant is the character of those who are not ashamed of telling lies." Then he discarded the small amount of water and said, "Similarly discarded or set aside and not recognized is the character of those who are not ashamed of telling lies." The Buddha then overturned the vessel and said, "Similarly easily overturned is the character of those who are not ashamed of telling lies." Lastly the Buddha placed the vessel upright and showed the empty vessel to his son and said, "Rahula do you see this empty vessel that is void of water? Similarly, empty and void is the character of those who are not ashamed of telling lies." Dhamma means truth. We are all seekers of the Dhamma. That means we are all seekers of the truth. As seekers of the truth, we must ensure that we never tell lies.

### **Chayanika (Age 12)**

(Written after a talk on the fourth precept and a story on "A child who destroyed his future through lies to his parents").

#### ○ **The Brahma (God) in your Home**

As children it is our duty to respect and take care of our parents. They took care of us from the time we were born and they are always there when we need them. They have done much for us. The best way to repay them is by respecting them, listening to them and taking care of them when they are older.

The Lord Buddha told us to treat our parents like how others treat Brahma (God). He said that the qualities that are said to be in God – Loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity – are in our parents. Our parents help and comfort us when we are sick (compassion). They educate us and help us to succeed in the future by telling us the right path to take when we are in difficulty (loving kindness). They teach us manners and how to behave ourselves and how to stay away from trouble (loving kindness). When we get good marks and do well in school, they rejoice in our success (sympathetic joy). And finally when we grow up and get married, or leave home for our education they let go and allow children to move on (equanimity) while still being there for us when the need arises. As the qualities that are in God are in our parents the Buddha said that Brahma is in your home.

### **Charith (Age 17)**

(Written after a talk on the Brahma in your home and respect to parents.)

#### ○ **Good Fortune**

Every one of us wants to experience good fortune in our lives. When aspiring for good fortune, we often wish for wealth so that we may acquire lavish material possessions. We do this hoping that these possessions will somehow improve our well being. Ultimately when we aspire for good fortune we are aspiring for happiness and satisfaction.

In the Mangala Sutta the Buddha addresses the meaning of good fortune. However, The Buddha's description of good fortune is quite contradictory to the way we tend to think of it. The following lines from the Mangala Sutta sum up The Buddha's thoughts on the topic of good fortune: "A mind that, when touched by the ways of the world, is unshaken, sorrowless, dustless, secure: This is the highest good fortune." In these lines The Buddha is saying that the highest good fortune is acquired through the development of one's mind and not through craving and the attachment to the materialistic ways of the world, which are impermanent and sorrowful.

Modern world circumstances show us that this indeed is true. Even extremely wealthy businessmen and celebrities do not experience complete happiness and satisfaction as a result of their wealth and material possessions. Often we hear of these individuals meeting with unfortunate circumstances like lawsuits or committing substance abuse. At the same time we hear of rare people like Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa who have renounced their material possessions and devoted themselves to relieving the suffering of others. These people seem to have lived meaningful and fulfilling lives and continue to be respected and revered after death.

The Buddha's Mangala Sutta teaches us to redefine our perception of good fortune. It teaches us that to attain happiness and satisfaction we should aspire to developing our minds instead of developing our wealth.

### **Hasantha (Age 18)**

(Written after a talk on the Mangala Sutta)

When one reads the above writings one will realize that there are many children who have seen the Buddha. One can find them all over the world in every country in every city. Each time a child uses the Dhamma to uphold Buddhists values he/she sees the Buddha. Parents can enable children to see the Buddha by giving them a Buddhist upbringing and encouraging the practice of Buddhist values through example. Have your children seen the Buddha? Why not encourage them in the Dhamma so that they can see the Buddha?

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### ***Acknowledgements***

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