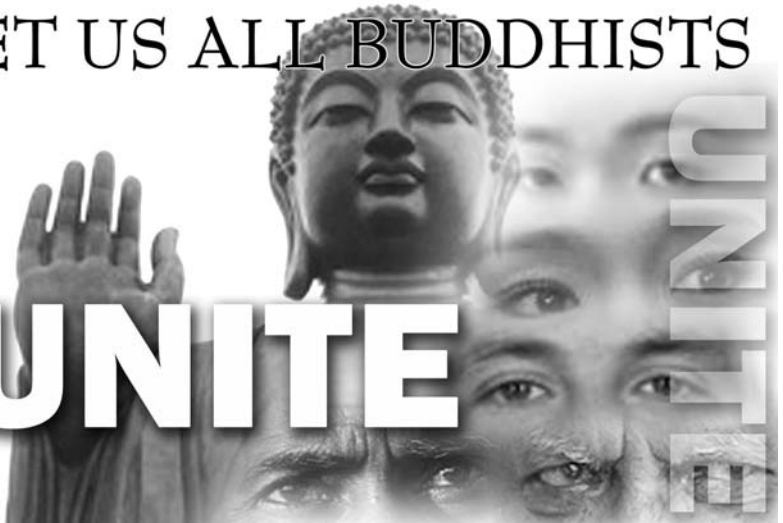


# LET US ALL BUDDHISTS

# UNITE



This is the message contained in the Unity Song composed and set to music by Ven. Madawela Punnaji of the Mahavihara in Toronto, a Sri Lankan monk living in Canada for almost three decades.

I am quoting the song in full from a Canadian publication. It is written about the Buddhist clergy in Canada, detailing their experiences and views on the work, and also their views on the status of Buddhism in the country. It is written by a Sri Lankan Buddhist scholar at the University of Toronto, Prof. Suwanda Sugunasiri.

This is the song.

Buddha with his chief disciple  
Sariputta Great  
And all the saints who came  
Thereafter  
Rolled the Dhamma wheel

So let's roll the wheel  
Beat the Deathless Drum  
Let us all Buddhists unite  
To roll the Dhamma wheel

Ethnic pride and prejudice  
Is what divides Buddhists  
Rituals and dogmas, too  
Divide Buddhists to sects

True Buddhists give up  
Pride and prejudices  
Let us all Buddhists unite  
To roll the Dhamma wheel

I have left out the chorus for obvious reasons.

One may pose the question, what is all this about?  
And also what is so special about it ?

Like in Australia, Canada also has Buddhist temples and clergy from various countries, representing many ethnic groups living there. The first Buddhist temple to

be established in the country was Japanese, somewhere around 1900. Thereafter Chinese, Korean, and Tibetan temples have come up in a number of places. A Sri Lankan temple was established about thirty years ago.

This means that there are practically all the different Buddhist traditions - represented in Canada. Theravada, Mahayana, Zen etc.

However, all the Buddhist groups in Canada have come together under one umbrella, called the Buddhist Council of Canada. It organized the first Buddhist Congress in 1989 with representatives from all over Canada.. They have also celebrated Wesak together.

This contrasts with the situation we experience in Australia. Sri Lankan Buddhists living in Australia, both clergy and laymen, have been calling for international conventions of Buddhists and even had one if I remember right. But they don't seem to see eye to eye with their fellow Buddhists around. I remember Sri Lankan monks in a temple being temporarily rendered homeless because their temple was in the process of being built or renovated. The monks had to take up residence in a Vietnam temple. This is how the chief monk announced this over the Melbourne Sinhala radio.

'Although it belongs to a different religion, we moved temporarily to a Vietnam temple because they invited us in.'

What is this different religion he was speaking about?

They too are Buddhists. The only difference is that they follow a different tradition. How can any one in his right mind call that a different religion? Any way this is what the monk said.

Without struggling to find an explanation myself, I have a wonderful quotation I picked up from the same book. This is the Korean monk, Samu Sunim from the Zen Buddhist temple in Toronto. He says this.

'Mahayana Buddhists don't necessarily understand Theravada Buddhists. And Theravada Buddhist Bhikkhus think they are the real monks. If they do real work, I mean, we would respect them, but they think that

they are some kind of superior beings just by virtue of being ordained and they don't necessarily observe the 250 rules, some of which are obsolete in a sense.'

I don't think one can find a more telling indictment than that. Ven. Punnaji's song provides the answer as to why that type of thinking or feeling arises in any one.

'Ethnic pride and prejudice  
Is what divides Buddhists  
Rituals and dogmas too  
Divide Buddhists to sects.'

There we have another Sri Lankan

monk offering some advice to our Melbourne chief monk.

We have been used to different sects and groups operating in our motherland. But aren't we in a different situation now? Aren't our monks too focused on Buddhists of all shapes and colours? Not thinking only of the select few that gathered in the village temple back home.

Maybe it is time that Buddhist laymen as well started thinking of Buddhists in general living all over the country, not limiting our loving kindness to our own kith and kin.

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