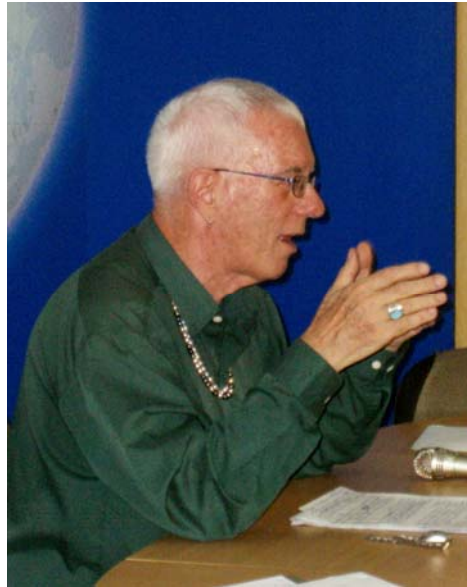


The World Buddhist University Sunday Forum

The Universal Curriculum : Applying Buddhist Teachings To the 21st Century



Date & Time : September 6, 2552(2009), 12.00-13.30 P.M.
Speaker ; Mr. Alan Oliver
Moderator Dr. Chris Stanford
Rapporteur Mrs. Suttinee Yavaprapas

On the First Sunday of the Month of September 2009 (6th September, B.E. 2552), Mr. Alan Oliver was the guest speaker of the Buddhist Forum on "*The Universal Curriculum : Applying Buddhist Teachings To the 21st Century*" Mr. Alan Oliver has been practicing with Buddhist teachings for the past 26 years. He entered Buddhist practice through the Zen tradition, but has gradually experienced a broadening and deepening of his practice that has taken him beyond the separate traditions into an appreciation of the here and now and how the teachings are essential to living in the modern world. Most recently, he worked for the WBU as a Project Manager for four years and has in the past presented talks at this Sunday Forum.

Alan is now associated with a Buddhist teacher in Ladakh, India, Vivek, who also briefly worked for the WBU. Alan is currently visiting Thailand after a two month stay in Ladakh where he assisted Vivek in starting a new non-profit called the international fellowship of Buddhist youth in Ladakh which will develop the Universal Curriculum. Undoubtedly, Alan's lecture, the universality of the Buddhist teachings as part of the world heritage, is a result of the past 26 years of his Buddhist practice cum the last four weeks of focus, thinking and concentration towards things around.

Vivek feels that we are in a crisis of human and environmental development. What he feels is the basis of his talk. There is a need to have an aggressive effort to combine the best knowledge of Buddhist teachings with the best technology we have in the present day. The best leadership development programs, the best books, the best songs and the best internet sites need to be brought together in an active integrated way of Buddhist teachings. We need to have in place the devotional side, the historical Buddhist side and the monastic traditions. We can also at the same time paradoxically do the opposite by looking at the core teachings to see what they have to say about leadership development, economic development, peace talks and negotiations, how we live and how we educate

our children. To really be authentic in today's world, we have to relate these Buddhist teachings clearly, boldly and freshly to the problems we are facing. Evolution sets things to happen. We have an opportunity here the evolutionary wisdom, the evolutionary consciousness and the evolutionary spirituality.

To integrate the Buddhist teachings into the world's system, we need to approach from a way of a philosophy life. The Buddha had his psychological questions under the Bodhi tree: "How do we create suffering in our life?" It was not a cosmological question like "Who is God? Who creates the universe?" There is a great concern about the compatibility of ancient wisdom and modern knowledge. Vivek's vision is to take the core teachings, understand them clearly, be able to articulate them clearly, integrate them with the best practices of modern leadership training project, development management education etc. He wants to do through a universal curriculum which would include the teachings actively integrated science, music, movies, good models of leadership development.

What is the universal nature of Buddhist teachings? Why are these different and why are they a world heritage? What is required to integrate them into the thinking? This is the most difficult part because when take on the study of Buddhism, we take on the study of a process. The Buddha came up with the thinking that is so modern. It fits in with quantum physics and psychology. Integrating mindfulness is very radically now with the cognitive therapy. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is a type of psychology. The process of thinking is key i.e. the conceptual versus the perceptual. We used to think conceptually as cognitive thinking. Perceptual thinking is a different order. When we are meditating, we are perceptually there. We are not generating concept. The perceptual is in the moment. The conceptual is in the past and in the future. The perceptual is let us being there with it. Let us experience the richness of the problems. That is neutral. Buddhism allows the neutral to predominate. The neutral state leads to people understanding. And deeper understanding leads to our actions.

It is difficult to clarify our conceptual thinking. We are dealing with the ego that goes back into early times with one cell animals. We are dealing with the reptilian mind based on the brain stem. It is a very basic receptor. We start getting the feelings.

The meditation will develop our observer mind. It is able to counteract the ego and its contraction, craving more and more. When we are undertaking the clarification of our conditioning, we are undertaking a very difficult test. Basically, if we are committed to study in Buddhism and integrate our mind, we are committed to revealing our brain which has been trained to separate things to small pieces. We shall finally bring all the small pieces back to the whole.

In Buddhism, it is not to trust our senses. We do not believe what we see. We should be open to new information to know what we never knew and we never knew it completely. The "don't know mind" is a phrase from the South Korean Zen Alan really likes. The true meaning of practicing Zen is to cut off all thinking and keep not-moving mind. There is only "I don't know." And we should always keep this "don't know mind." When this "don't know mind" becomes clear, then we will understand. We must keep the "don't know mind" always and everywhere. This is the true practice of Zen. In other words, the "don't know mind" is the mind that cuts off all thinking. When all thinking has been cut off, we become empty mind. This is before thinking. Our before thinking mind, all people's before thinking minds are the same. This is our substance and the substance of the whole universe becomes one. So the tree, the mountain, the cloud and we become one. The mind that becomes one with the universe is before thinking. Before thinking there are no words. "Same" and "Different" are opposite words; they are from the mind that separates all things. It is thus very important for us to cut off our thinking and our attachments to words.

All are interconnected. It is dependent origination. Everything we do affects everything else. We are part of the collective order. We have got to start redeveloping our manual to accommodate the Buddhist view rather than the Western modern view. It is not the paradox in the West, to choose one or the other. It is up to the boundary in between all the grey area that we have to sort through. We are looking for the middle way through these materials. In addition, the self is impermanent. In Christianity, the soul is permanent. Our personality dominates. We must educate and train people in terms of precepts. The first precept, "Thou shall not kill" enhances life. Actually, by living, we kill biopsies. We kill bacteria. We can't live without killing. But we can be very conscious of the grey area by our spiritually

experience i.e emptying ourselves. The Buddhist teaching is actually a very modern way of thinking. It is universal with the eightfold noble path.

In summary, the universal curriculum is first of all mindfulness. It focuses in concentration. Secondly, we should be hearing and processing information. We must think about it and consider it for the sake of right view and understanding. Thirdly, we integrate all with meditation and actions.

With that, we are ready to discover Buddha nature and the Dharma of Universal consciousness.

