

To the members of the
Adhithana Teaching Community

18, October 2021

Dear friends,

I am writing to urge you to do your best to attend the gathering of the Teaching Community in November. I am hoping that this event will help us to formulate more clearly the purpose and practice of our common task.

During these early years after Bhante's death, those who consider themselves his disciples in any sense face a vital but delicate task. Bhante has had by far the decisive influence in forming our Order and Community to this point and we must find a way to move forward from him. That evolution should be one that allows us to maintain a common language for and understanding of the Dharma whilst responding to our own unfolding experience and the ever changing times, and correcting what may be problems and errors in Bhante's teaching and approach. The more we are able to do so, the more we will remain an effective Sangha and the greater will be our capacity to communicate the Dharma throughout the world.

To some extent that evolution of our collective understanding and presentation of the Dharma is happening already. The problem is that it tends towards a loss of overall coherence, so one begins to hear Order members willing to say that they cannot recognise as Order members other Order members who follow different lines of Dharma teaching. In some ways this is simply inevitable and is likely to give rise both to splits and new and creative expressions. However, I think it would be helpful if a group of Bhante's disciples who are deeply imbued with his teaching were in active dialogue with each other about how we move forward. And this is the fundamental purpose of the Adhithana Teaching Community, as I see it.

In my understanding, what we need to do is engage, and try to get others to engage, very deeply with Bhante's own words, always seeking the mind behind the words, so that we enter into a kind of posthumous dialogue with him. He had a very strong vision, very broad and very deep, and that is what we are trying to immerse ourselves in. However, we cannot simply stop with Bhante. Already we know that there are some problems with his scholarship in a few areas and obviously we must find a way to correct that, without losing the point he was making: good Dharma can sometimes come from bad or outdated scholarship. There are also obvious ways in which Bhante's perspective is simply out of touch with contemporary developments: for instance, Bhante's idea of

science, until the very end of his life, was still rather Newtonian, as was the case for most intellectuals until very recently. And then there are ideas that are highly problematic and with which perhaps most Order members disagree: his approach to the relative spiritual aptitudes of men and women and his understanding of the family. It is not a question of simply cutting out whatever we disagree with but of coming to a dispassionate appraisal of what he says that allows us to find out whether or not there is anything in what he says, if not in the way he says it.

But there is more to it than correcting and updating. Bhante taught at a particular time a particular set of individuals. His teaching was a response to them at that time. No doubt much of that is timeless, for he had a unique gift for getting to the heart of the matter in very clear terms. However, many of us have been practising for many years and new issues and experiences inevitably arise. These require fresh responses, either by making explicit what is implicit in Bhante's teaching or by finding new teachings in our own collective experience. Of course, inspiration may come to us from sources outside the Order, so we need to work out how to evaluate these and to work them into our common body of teaching, if they prove useful, without losing what coherence we already share.

This is an enormous task. I believe that if a substantial number of effective practitioners, thinkers, and teachers, who all consider themselves faithful to Bhante as their teacher, are engaged together in facing it that will help the whole Order to address the same task more consciously and harmoniously. The point is not to try to tell others what they should practise and teach, that is not possible, even were it desirable. The aim is to establish a current within the larger community of careful reflection and discussion, exploration and experiment that can influence others, should they choose to be influenced.

How are we to do this? The best way would be for us all to live at Adhithana or elsewhere and engage together in that sort of process. Since that is unlikely to happen, certainly at present (though I think it should be a long term objective of Adhithana that such a community is formed). There is of course the Dharma Team at Adhithana, which forms a small core. But we need a larger and more varied pool of people to have the kind of dynamic that is necessary for real creative work. That of course is the thirty or more members of the Adhithana Teaching Community – and the numbers could grow. But we need to find ways to carry this task forward and that is the purpose of our November gathering.

During that gathering, I hope that we will be able to clarify together the vision of the Teaching Community and the programme it is executing, as well as to come up with ways in which we can engage with each other more regularly so that we begin to formulate more clearly how we go forward from Bhante, faithful to him, yet permitting creative evolution in response to new needs and circumstances.

I have recently been dipping a little into early Greek philosophy after nearly fifty years. What stands out for me is the way in which the major developments in philosophy and science, the two not being distinguished at that time, came in communities of individuals in strong contact with each other, what has been referred to as 'collaborative circles'. One thinks of Miletos, where philosophy and science began, of Croton, and above all of Athens, then Alexandria. Could such a collaborative circle gather around Adhithana, initially consisting of the Dharma Team and the Adhithana Teaching Community? If anything of that kind is to happen then we need to come together – and that is the purpose of our November meeting.

I hope to see you there.

Subhuti